

THE SITUATION IN RUMANIA

BY

LADISLAS FRITZ

In the last week of January Rumania passed through a serious internal crisis. Until 1919 that country counted as a new State in the European family of political communities. *Then, thanks to the Paris Peace Treaties, her fantastic Daco-Rumanian dreams were realized, and Rumania's new life began as a State which was not the result of a long process of organic evolution. In a country like this upheavals were to be expected. The coup d'etat of 6th September following on the Vienna Award of 30th August last put an end to the dictatorship of King Carol II, and forced Rumania to enter new paths. Legionist Rumania resolved herself into a peculiar dualistic form of State, and an extremely curious kind of government arose in which the Legionist movement, represented by the Iron Guard organization, exerted an influence on politics without being entrusted wholly with the executive power of the State. Officially General Antonescu, himself an avowed adherent of legionist principles, was Prime Minister and Leader. He had control of the army and was supported by a section of the population. On the other hand, the Iron Guard, which had been split into factions by internal strife, demanded and obtained a share in the government of the country through the person of the Deputy Premier, Horia Sima. This was the organization of the first Legionist Rumanian State, in which for four and a half months the Iron Guard strove with passionate determination to achieve its sole aim: exclusive possession of the executive power. The equilibrium maintained by General Antonescu, backed by the army, and Horia Sima, backed by the Iron Guard (maintained that is to say, by two separate factors not organically connected) was upset, and for three days (January 21—23) a spiritually disunited Rumania was threatened with total anarchy.*

After the assassination of Herr Döring, a major of the German General Staff, the General Manager of the Rumanian State Railways was shot. Thereupon General Antonescu dismissed his Minister of the Interior, who placed himself at the head of one of the Iron Guard factions, and for three days street fighting that amounted to a civil war took place all over Rumania. These riots were inspired by Party-egoism and by low instincts finding an outlet in robbery that were psycho-pathological in nature. The mob, which all over Rumania committed acts of gross vandalism, was fired by the worst mass instincts. As General Antonescu said in one of his proclamations: "The Legionist movement ended in anarchy." The whole world, appalled, read in the press, or heard over the wireless, that the short rule of the Iron Guard had turned Rumania into *a sink of corruption, with added horrors of murder, robbery, and looting*. This was not merely the attempt of a small group to upset order; it was the movement of an organization embracing the whole of Rumania to seize control of the executive power, *and the result of that movement was that several thousands were killed and incalculable material damage done. An attempt on the life of General Antonescu himself was made twice.*

ANTONESCU'S DRAMATIC PROCLAMATION.

The most faithful picture of the civil war that raged in Rumania on January 21, 22, and 23 is reflected in the proclamations, Press statements, and decrees issued by General Antonescu during and immediately after those three critical days. Here special mention will be made of the proclamation issued at noon on 25th January, in which General Antonescu told the people of Rumania the bloody events of the preceding days, accusing the Iron Guard of a degree of ingratitude unparalleled in history. "*Rumanians*", — so began the proclamation, — "*we have again gone through days of upheaval, horror and disgrace. My children, for whose sake I gave up my career, for whom I have suffered, for whom I paved the way to the coup d'etat of 6th September, with whom I shared the government of the country, found no better way of showing their loyalty to myself and their nation, which had faith in*

*the power of ideals, than by firing at me and attempting to upset order in the State. I do not believe that any more crying acts of ingratitude have ever defiled the pages of history. Close to the Prime Ministry, in the building nearest to it, in the headquarters of the Guard, with the aid of M. Petrovicescu, former Minister of the Interior, head of the State Police, to whom I had entrusted the security of the State, cannon, machine-guns and rifles were stored, and a plot was hatched to put me out of the way in the dead of night. When that plot failed, I was attacked in broad daylight. The streets of the capital were blocked by carts and cars abandoned by the workmen who had been forced to join the strike, factories were either closed down or set on fire, houses, whole parts of the town, were destroyed, people were robbed and murdered. The capital and many other towns in the country lived through hours of horror and civil war. All my efforts to quell the rebels were of no avail. The waves of hatred swept through the streets. I was obliged to send for the army. I, who engineered the *coup d'état* of 6th September without shedding one drop of blood; I, who suffered more than anyone else at the time of the Jilava atrocities, because I did not want to stain my hands with blood, but was determined that though the criminals would have to be earnestly punished, perhaps even put to death, it should be done by a public trial; I who have always punished every crime and injustice and shall continue to do so: I was forced to order my soldiers to fire on their Rumanian brethren, Rumanians, You will have to be told the whole truth. On the occasion of the raid on the Prime Ministry, when two private soldiers were killed and an officer was severely wounded, not a hair of the head of any of the rebels was injured. The band of six hundred ruffians, men, even women and one twelve-year-old child, all recruited from the lowest dregs of the population, that turned machine-guns on the soldiers, escaped without a scratch. The soldiers did no more than appeal to the rebels and use threats to induce them to disperse. In the Calea Dorobanților the rebels captured a soldier, soaked him with petroleum and burnt him before the horrified eyes of his comrades. The same thing took place on the Dâmbovița Embankment. In other places the soldiers, who even then did*

not use their arms, were stripped naked and mocked, while cries of "Dogs!" "Cowards!" were shouted at the officers, just as in an anarchist revolution. The soldiers were fired at from the roofs and windows of houses. The army was forced to fire on the mob when one after another the soldiers were brought down by the rebels' bullets. Those scoundrels who, using the Legionist movement as a cloak, would destroy the country to serve foreign aims, deserve no better fate than the ruffians who, following their lead, met their death in the streets. *The greatest blame attaches to those (and they deserve the severest punishment) who persuaded the mob to join a mad movement breathing anarchy and hatred, to those who cheated their followers and led them to their death, abandoning them to their fate when fighting began.*"

The first official report of the number of killed and wounded, which was issued on 29th January, begins its enumeration of data with the following words: *"The rebels staged a terrible massacre; they had no regard for the most elementary principles of humanity, and their lust for blood was insatiable."*

With draconic severity General Antonescu has instituted measures for the protection of public order that are unprecedented even in the Rumanian legal system, although, as we know, no country in Europe ever passed so many laws for the defence of the State as did Rumania. The ruthless mercilessness of the new Defence of the Realm Edict (*decret-lege*) issued at the beginning of February shows the terrible difficulties with which General Antonescu has to contend. The Decree makes a whole series of criminal acts punishable with death; illegal entry into private houses is punishable by a sentence of hard labour for life, and members of any secret society may be sentenced to from 10 to 25 years years penal servitude. From a number of its paragraphs it may be seen that the Edict is directed solely against the Iron Guard, and that its one object is to prevent that body organizing in the future. The courts must pass sentence within 24 hours and there is no appeal against their sentences.

On 27th January General Antonescu formed a new Cabinet, in which he kept the Prime Minister's and the Foreign Minister's portfolios for himself. The rest of his Ministers are

army officers and departmental men, and there is practically not a single politician among them. Together with Antonescu himself, there are 12 generals in the new Cabinet, which reports from various sources state will remain in office only until the internal situation is cleared up. *Our first impression of Antonescu's present Government is that it is merely a stepping-stone towards a military dictatorship.* His proclamation, issued when the new Cabinet was formed, definitely emphasises that his "*Government, which rests on a military foundation, represents unity and discipline.*" As regards that Government's foreign policy, the same proclamation states that "Rumania marches without hesitation on the side of the Axis Powers." Great Britain has since broken off diplomatic relations with Rumania.

With the formation of this Government the first Rumanian Legionist State, in which the system of administration was based on the co-operation of Antonescu and Horia Sima, was superseded by the second Legionist State, which — as announced by General Antonescu in his proclamation of 24th January — is to be organized by the Leader himself according to his own ideas. "*I shall prove*" — said General Antonescu in that proclamation — "*that the leaders of the Legionists did not deserve to be obeyed blindly.* Many of them, who obtained high political positions by no other means than shameless impudence, were not qualified to fill them; they did not behave correctly, and were wholly lacking in all humane feelings. Because of such" — went on General Antonescu — "I was unable to achieve unity between the young and the old; it was in vain that I issued proclamations during the five months of my administration, all my efforts to create a brotherly spirit among the brethren were of no avail" General Antonescu's proclamation closed with the following words: "*In the future a real Legion will be formed under my personal and immediate leadership.*"

In the statement to the Press made by General Antonescu on 2nd February a passage which says that "*when work and discipline have been fully restored in the country, political reorganization will begin*", would seem to indicate that he is thinking of some form of resurrection of the old political Parties. It is not impossible that he will try to create a new

United Party, but neither is it impossible that he will inaugurate political organization with the collaboration of the old politicians. The "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" of 26th January does not believe that General Antonescu will be successful in reorganizing the Iron Guard and in creating a new United Party, for *that would be the fourth United Party in Rumania within two years' time.*

Rumania is still in a fluid state. The task of straightening out the confusion caused by the short spell of civil war and the work of purification is not finished yet, and is causing General Antonescu's Government no little worry. Tranquillity and stable order have not yet been achieved. Rumania is still far from a state of peace, for now that General Antonescu and the Iron Guard have completely parted company the section of the Iron Guard that suffered defeat continues to organize.

OSZK

Országos Széchényi Könyvtár