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THE "JOURNAL OF CENTRAL EUROPEAN AFFAIRS"

BY

ZSOMBOR DE SZÁSZ

In the spring of the current year a new political review was started in the United States under the title of "*Journal of Central European Affairs*". The first two numbers, of April and of July, are now in our hands. According to the Editor's statement, this review is subsidised by two prominent American Universities, Colorado and Harvard, and the editorial board consists of the Professors of three educational institutes of similarly high standing. The Editor's Note says: "The policy of the Editors is to encourage free and divergent expressions of opinion so long as moderate statement and sound scholarship underlie these honest opinions and conclusions. Under no circumstances, however, will personal, racial, or national polemics be considered for publication."

All this augured well.

Some natural misgivings arose in us, however, when we saw that one of the consulting Editors was Professor Seton-Watson, who is only too well known in Hungary, and that the leading articles of the first and second numbers were written, respectively, by ex-President Beneš and the Hungarian *émigré* Professor Oscar Jászi; that most of the other articles emanated from the pen of Czechoslovak writers, while one contribution concerning Hungarian affairs and entitled "Ordeal in Transylvania", was by a writer who, whether from fear or shame we know not, withheld his real name and signed himself "Transylvanus".

All this was not very promising; we seemed to breathe the air of the defunct Little Entente.

Apart from this, the articles have a decided interest for students of Central European affairs. Mr. J. Hanc's "Last Mile of Appeasement", which deals with the last phases of

Czechoslovakia's independence, Professor O. Odložilik's essay on the "Dawn of the Small Nations", the bibliographic article on "Ukrainian Sociology" by the well-known Professor Roucek, all in the first number, Mr. D. Tomašić's "Struggle for Power in Yugoslavia", which narrates the preliminaries of Croatian independence, although from a hostile angle, and Mr. Leo Wollenborg's article on Italy's role in the Triple Alliance, are all well worth reading. And more interesting than all of these are the above-mentioned articles by ex-President Beneš and Professor Jászi, both of which deal with the prospective readjustment of Central Europe after the present world war. With these we hope to deal in a subsequent article.

Our own interest was naturally enough centred on Transylvanus's article, "Ordeal in Transylvania".

We must confess to being somewhat startled, both by the title and by the introductory sentences. We suspected, of course, that the article would deal with the reannexation of the northern part of Transylvania to Hungary. But what has a scholarly article to do with so pompous a word as "ordeal"? In the first lines of the text the author writes: "... Rumania was *robbed* for the third time in her history of her eastern province", and further: "... what she (Rumania) might have saved from the exaction of the *usurper* ..." (the italics are mine in each case). Can such expressions really be regarded as "moderate statement and sound scholarship"? Do they not rather recall the style of the most blatant propaganda? Would Transylvanus write in a similar strain now that the Soviet Union is an ally of the United States?

We told ourselves that even though the style might not be all it should be, the text would probably present incontrovertible facts and figures which would make clear to us wherein lay Transylvania's terrible ordeal. But as we read on, we were startled by the following statement: "... Hungary was and is the beneficiary, while Rumania was and is indubitably the loser. The immediate victims are 'the thirty millions of Rumanians losing many of their vital rights and passing under the domination of the masters that speak a foreign tongue'."

True, the last part of this sentence is a quotation from

the Christian Science Monitor, but it is evident that Transylvanus accepted without hesitation the statement that by the Vienna award *thirty million Rumanians* had lost their rights and passed under the terrible domination of their former masters, the Hungarians who, it must be admitted, speak Hungarian and not Rumanian. Thirty million Rumanians in the northern half of Transylvania alone! To the best of our knowledge, Rumania even at the time of her largest territorial expansion embraced no more than thirteen million inhabitants of Rumanian tongue.

After these introductory lines Transylvanus settles down in earnest to blacken Hungary's and Transylvania's past and present — the former even more than the latter.

The first part of the article begins with the well-worn catchword that Hungary is the land of "feudalism", — feudalism in this case meaning, naturally, not the medieval system of common law, which never existed in Hungary, but the "exploitation of the peasantry" by the "large landowners and millionaires . . . living in luxury and pomp unequalled anywhere in Western Europe; nor has the peasant class that bears the yoke of servitude a counterpart in any other civilised State".

This is sheer propaganda, recognizable as such by the absence of dignified and sober impartiality. Nobody, least of all the writer of these lines, will take it upon himself to deny that the situation of the agrarian proletariat of Transylvania — not of the peasantry in general — is far from enviable and much in need of amelioration. But for many centuries it was far better than that of the peasants in the provinces of the old Rumanian kingdom; and at present it is at least no worse. Rumania was the only country in Europe where the peasants revolted against their landlords as late as the twentieth century.

Transylvanus talks of "the Rumanian feudal helots" being "freed from serfdom ninety years ago after a great revolution", but he omits to mention that the liberation of these same "feudal helots" was accomplished in 1848 by their own "feudal" barons who that very year had fought a magnificent struggle for liberty and social reforms against Austrian despotism, a struggle in which the Rumanians had

sided with the oppressors. The Rumanian peasants of Transylvania, no less than the Hungarians, received freehold land through the generosity of their Hungarian landlords and became the owners of their farms. Their national pride and racial consciousness dates from this time. "After the liberation of the serfs in Transylvania" said M. Grofşoreanu, a Transylvanian Rumanian member of the Rumanian Chamber, in 1924, "the Rumanian peasantry took a great stride forward. They had land and healthy homes; they were culturally and economically, as the villages were financially, in a much better position than those of the Regat". Even at the present day, Transylvanus can offer these peasants of the Rumanian kingdom nothing better than the hope of a better future. In Rumania, he says, quoting his *Christian Science Monitor*, "the administration was not good; civil officials were far from exemplary; confusion abounded; graft was common, bribery an ordinary practice; partizanship was a curse. But in spite of all those sad defects, little men made progress. They lifted up their heads, and though sighing, *dared hope for better things.*"

Transylvanus wishes to convey the false idea that the peasant risings of 1437, 1514 and 1784 were the revolt of the Rumanian peasantry against the "Hungarian latifundiary nobles", that is, not merely an agrarian, but also a national rebellion.

This is completely misleading.

These risings were not a revolt of *Rumanian* peasants against their *Hungarian* landlords, but of the serfs of whatever nationality — Magyars and Székelys no less than Rumanians — against landlords in general, who might just as easily be Székelys or Saxons, or even Rumanians. During the period which lay between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries the idea of nationality did not enter into them; that was a product of the late eighteenth century. Rumanian national consciousness developed, as national consciousness did elsewhere in Europe, in the course of the nineteenth century.

In this connection Transylvanus mentions the "union of the three nations", presenting it, according to his wont, in a completely false light.

The question of the *unio trium nationum*, the Magyars, Székelys and Saxons, is not so simple as he would make out when he says that it was formed "for the exploitation of the other races".

Transylvania as a State was founded by the Magyars and the Székelys, to whom in the thirteenth century a third people was added, the Saxon settlers. The two former were the nobles, the latter the free burghers, and they made up the three Estates of the country. Each people had extensive territorial self-government and was independent of the other two. They were called the three *nationes*.

The peasant revolt of 1436—37 broke out on Hungarian territory, and the Magyar nobles, unable to cope with it, appealed for help to the other two nations, the Székelys and the Saxons; the rebellion was crushed by their common efforts, after which the three nations assembled in Kápolna and there made a covenant which in 1459 was set down in writing and was subsequently renewed again and again. In this document the nations pledged themselves to remain loyal to the king; to defend their liberties and privileges by their united efforts; if oppressed by the voyvode, to address a common protest to the crown, and finally, to defend themselves by concerted action against all enemies, external and internal.

This act of union was a kind of "*contrat social*", between the three nations, "a sacred agreement to preserve the unity of the nation", as Prince Gabriel Bethlen put it. The victory over the peasants had merely furnished the occasion for the codification of a few principles on which the constitutional organisation of the country could be built up; and the declaration of mutual defence against "internal enemies" was a natural result of the strained relations, obtaining in those days everywhere in Europe, between serfs and landlords, and the defensive alliance against "external enemies" was made necessary by the Turkish menace.

The fact that the Rumanian people had no part in this union was a natural outcome of their historical past and of their actual cultural situation. As later immigrants into the country or, as Rumanian historians maintain, as the conquered and subjugated early inhabitants, they were serfs,

without a political organisation of their own, and with a very low social and cultural standard. But their position was no worse than that of the Hungarian serfs. They could be ennobled, and many of them were, in fact, raised into the ranks of the Hungarian nobility. It was not as a separate race that they lacked the rights and the liberties of the three nations; it was simply that, belonging as they did to the class of the serfs, they bore those burdens and duties of villeinage which were common to all serfs, not only in Transylvania but everywhere in Europe.

Nowhere does Transylvanus betray his partizanship more openly than in the lines relating to the Uniate or Greek Catholic Church of the Transylvanian Rumanians.

He starts with the assertion that as a consequence of the Vienna Award the unfortunate Rumanians "must return to a régime that has a long record of religious intolerance". He is safe in saying this, because very few of his American readers can be expected to know the facts. The fact is, that he is determined to find fault with the conversion of the Transylvanian Rumanians to the Greek Catholic faith. What connection is there between religious tolerance and the facts to which he objects, namely, that the Uniate Church was founded as late as the beginning of the eighteenth century and that only a "fraction" of the Rumanians joined that "schismatic sect"? (As a matter of fact about half of the Transylvanian Rumanians belong to the Uniate Church, and the Uniate Rumanians represent 39.1 per cent. of the population in the reannexed territory as against 11.8 per cent. of the Orthodox.)

Another "essential fact" concerning the conversion mentioned by Transylvanus as proof of the religious intolerance of the Hungarians is that "the founding of the Church, far from being an indication of freedom, is the most eloquent proof of oppression".

Leaving aside the question whether freedom is or is not the aim usually set themselves by the founders of religions, the facts concerning the beginnings of the Uniate Church in Transylvania are briefly as follows:

When, at the end of the seventeenth century, the independent Transylvanian Principality came to an end and

the Catholic Habsburgs came to rule over the country, the emperors started an intensive anti-Hungarian and anti-Protestant campaign with the object of turning the Principality into a Roman Catholic country and its inhabitants into loyal supporters of Habsburg rule. As there seemed little hope of attaining this object by the re-Catholicization of the Protestants alone, the Jesuits decided to win over to the Roman Catholic Church the Orthodox Rumanians of the country. The union was an anti-Hungarian and an anti-Protestant weapon, but it was not the instrument of an oppressive policy. "Indeed", writes Transylvanus himself, "the Uniate Church has as its *raison d'être* not the motives found at the basis of all new creeds, but the necessity of securing recognition by the State of the belief of its communicants as a first step towards their *attaining political and economic equality*". But can the Hungarians be held responsible for the fact that the conversion of the Rumanians was inspired by materialistic rather than by religious motives? In any case there is no denying that great advantages accrued from it. Transylvanus is prevented by lack of space — and perhaps also by other considerations — from dwelling on the enormous spiritual and national value of the Uniate Church to the entire Rumanian people. He omits to mention the immense cultural incentive derived from the connection with Rome and Western Europe in general, and the far-reaching political significance which the invention by Uniate students of the theory of the Daco-Roman origin had for the national development of the Rumanian nation.

Transylvanus, being a Transylvanian, is sure to know Rumanian and can, if he will, read in the original text Canon Augustine Bunea's valuable book "*Autonomia bisericască*", published in 1903, in which he will find the following lines: The Uniate Church "opened to the Rumanians not only all the Roman Catholic schools of Transylvania and Hungary, but also those of Vienna and of Rome; a cultural class came into being whose efforts awakened in the people a consciousness of its lofty origin and a sense of its human dignity, which caused it to demand the abolition of the Transylvanian system of the three united nations and four accepted religions... These advantages alone sufficed to

elevate the moral standard of our people . . . The Rumanians realised that by going over to Rome, by subjecting themselves to the laws which secured the existence of Catholicism in Transylvania, and by appealing to the protection of Vienna, they could afford to await a better future."

As regards religious intolerance in Transylvania — it would be easy to cite instances, not from the times of the religious wars, nor from the period of Hungarian or Habsburg domination in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but from the days of the Rumanian régime in the twentieth century.

On May 7, 1924, a mass meeting of Greek Catholic clergy and laymen was held at Szatmár, and a manifesto was issued, signed by a hundred members, protesting against Orthodox propaganda and persecution. It was pointed out that these had destroyed not only internal peace but also the country's prestige abroad. A religious war even more destructive than the world war was tearing the country to pieces. Misstatements, corruption, lies, promises impossible of fulfilment, with the resulting demoralisation and vulgarisation of the people — these were the weapons used in the struggle to force men to leave Rome and join the Orthodox Church.

The concluding sentence of the Manifesto runs thus:

"We demand that this propaganda shall cease. We demand that the spiritual calm of the Greek Catholics be left undisturbed, and that this work of hatred and discord on the part of Orthodoxy shall not be supported by the State, but shall be suppressed as an action endangering the interests of the country and our race.

"We have no acceptable reason for abandoning our creed . . . and therefore solemnly declare that we shall unswervingly adhere to the Church of our forefathers, to Rome the Eternal, and that we are prepared to defend our faith even at the sacrifice of our lives."

Is not this "a most eloquent proof of oppression", though not on the side Transylvanus would have us believe?

He dismisses in a few lines the complicated language question which is the central problem of the nationality struggles. He only touches on it in order to be able to drag into prominence the tragic death of the Saxon Pastor L.

Roth, who, by a most regrettable blunder, was executed by the Hungarian revolutionaries in 1849. Needless to say, the details of his death, as given by Transylvanus, are wholly inaccurate.

If the important questions of the agrarian situation, the historical significance of the Uniate Church, and the language problem of a territory in which three separate languages are spoken, are dismissed in a few lines, all the greater emphasis is laid on the ethnic situation.

"There is", says Transylvanus, "general agreement on the ethnic aspect", by which he means that no one contests the incontestable fact of the numerical preponderance of the Rumanians in the population of Transylvania. He quotes Professor Ph. E. Mosely, who in an article which appeared last year stated that "*since 1918* the Hungarian claim to Transylvania has perforce rested on historical, geographic, strategic and economic — and not ethnic — arguments, for Rumania's ethnic claim to the region is certainly stronger now than it was in 1918". That may well be, considering the wholesale expulsion and forced emigration of the Hungarian inhabitants. But Professor Mosely's statement to the effect that Hungary's *désintéressement* in the ethnic side of the question dates only from 1918 is erroneous; Hungary's claim to Transylvania was never based on ethnic grounds, as is proved by the fact that in 1919 the Hungarian Peace Delegation proposed that a plébiscite should be held in Transylvania, in the conviction that not all Rumanian votes would be based on racial sentiment but many on historical, cultural and traditional motives.

It is curious to observe how even statistical figures become hazy and inaccurate in Transylvanus's handling.

He states that the Rumanians "have *always* constituted the majority" of Transylvania's population. This is not so. They were not in a majority until the beginning of the eighteenth century, at which time the Phanariote rule began in the two Principalities, causing the oppressed inhabitants to escape in large numbers to Transylvania, where they swelled to an unnatural degree the percentage of the Rumanian population. Transylvanus quotes unverifiable figures concerning the increase of the Rumanians in Tran-

sylvania, without giving us the corresponding figures in regard to the other nationalities or the entire population, so that there is no possibility of estimating their relative strength, and the reader must blindly accept his statement that the figures represent what he means them to represent, — a Rumanian majority in the population. Can this be taken seriously?

It is, however, unquestionable that in 1919, that is, about the time when Transylvania was annexed by the Rumanians, the Rumanian inhabitants of the country represented about 53 per cent. of the entire population, so that a majority of 4 per cent. formed the ethnic basis of the Rumanian claim.

As regards the numbers and the racial distribution of the population in the ceded territories, we have the figures of the Rumanian Census of 1930, revised on the basis of current vital statistics; neither version is reliable. Transylvanus quotes the following figures:

Rumanians:	1,171.000	(49.07 per cent)
Magyars:	910.692	(38.16 per cent)

The figures of the Hungarian review *Magyar Kisebbség* published in Rumanian Transylvania, are as follows:

Rumanians:	1,166.434	(48.70 per cent)
Magyars:	1,107.170	(42.10 per cent)

The difference is immaterial.

Against attacks such as that of Transylvania we are defenceless. His article is pure propaganda — and not very elevated propaganda at that. How can we make our truth prevail against it? The questions he has raised are too big to be answered in the limited space the Journal would place at our disposal, even supposing that we were admitted to its columns, which is by no means certain. For what we should write would needs have to be polemical, and the Editorial Note tells us that "under no circumstances will . . . racial or national polemics be considered for publication".

It is our misfortune that the Journal of Central European Affairs will be read by a far wider circle than the Danubian Review can at present hope to reach. Our only hope must lie in the knowledge that too overt propaganda is apt to overleap itself.