

REPATRIATION OF SZEKLEERS OF BUKOVINA

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Quite recently the Hungarian Government eliminated the last traces of an old historical tragedy by bringing back to the mother-country the Szeklers who in 1764, after the "Massacre of Mádéfalva", were forced to flee first to Moldavia and thence to Bukovina. The cause of their flight was that the blind instruments of the Emperor's wrath destroyed Mádéfalva and massacred the Szeklers, of whom only 2687 managed to make their escape across the Carpathians.

It was not, however, merely the intention to right a historical wrong that led the Hungarian Government to take this step. It was also the circumstance that after the second Vienna Award the situation of those Szeklers, living as a minority in Bukovina, had become intolerable. They were at the tether end of their endurance, and to escape oppression and all the major and minor torments to which they were exposed, they had begun to flee back in batches across the Carpathians to the mother-country. The desperate straits of these increasingly large swarms of refugees induced the Government, after much consideration, *to establish on 9th May last a Commission entrusted with the task of repatriating the Szeklers of Bukovina.*

These Szeklers had been living in five Bukovina villages. According to the Rumanian census taken in 1930, the nationality statistics of those villages were as follows:

	Total Population	Magyars	Rumanians	Germans	Jews
Hadikfalva	4.939	4.534	129	129	84
Istensegits	3.239	3.045	34	105	38
Andrásfalva	2.557	2.280	93	110	64
Józseffalva	1.163	543	560	40	18
Fogadjisten	885	153	633	29	19
Total	12.748	10.555	1.449	413	223

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These figures, however, did not show the real state of affairs, for the number of Szeklers in Bukovina was much greater than would appear from them. This minority group was a large demographic unit, but the difficulty of procuring a livelihood forced its members either to migrate from the settlements to other parts of the country or to emigrate.

The economic struction of the Szeklers of Bukovina was based on small holdings, ranging in extent from one to 30 yokes of land. There were no farms larger than 30 yokes. We find the following distribution of land among them:

holdings	from	0	to	1	yoke	499	owners
"	"	1	"	5	yokes	1.758	"
"	"	5	"	10	"	418	"
"	"	10	"	20	"	88	"
"	"	20	"	30	"	7	"

As we see, the largest number of farmers owned holdings of from 1 to 5 yokes. The only way to make a living on such small farms was by means of *intensive farming, by market-gardening and fruit-growing*. Produce was carted to the towns, especially to the market at Czernovitz. After the repatriation of the Szeklers those towns immediately began to suffer from a shortage of garden produce.

The Repatriation Commission which the Government established on 9th May under the direction of M. Nicholas Bonczos — the same M. Bonczos who as Government Commissioner for the flooded areas had rendered such signal services to the country and had shown himself a master-hand at solving problems of a practical nature — began its activity immediately, on 10th May. In seven weeks, by the 18th June, the following number of Szeklers had been settled in the places appointed for them in the "Bácska":

	2.921 families of Szeklers	containing	13.200 souls
	323 families of exservicemen	"	1.535 "
	18 families descendants of men killed in the last war	"	68 "
Total	3.262 families		14.803 souls

To understand the significance of these results the following facts should be borne in mind. First we must

remember that 13.200 people had to be brought home from a foreign land. Then about 1.600 had to be collected from every part of the country and sent to their new places of abode. Among those people were infants, children, and old persons, which, of course, made the task a more difficult one. Bearing this in mind, the five weeks seem a very short time, and that the work was accomplished in that short time *proves the efficiency of the Repatriation Commission and its organizations.*

The number of the Szeklers who had fled to Hungary by 10th May, on which date the Repatriation Commission began its work, was about 4.500. Thus the situation was that one-third of the Szeklers had come back of their own accord. Until they were settled they spent their days in a refugee labour camp. Then a more extensive repatriation by railway began. The first trainload of Szeklers from Bukovina arrived in the "Bácska" on 10th May. From that date trains arrived daily with returning Szeklers, *until in exactly 41 days the whole work of repatriation was completed.*

The following settlements were created in the "Bácska" by the repatriated Szeklers:

Name of Settlement.	Yokes of Land	Szeklers		Ex-Servicemen		Descendants of Men Killed in Action	
		Families.	Souls	Families.	Souls	Families.	Souls
Vajszka	2.399	= Settlements of exservicemen					
Bács-Vitézfalva	958						
Hadikszállás							
Hadikliget	788	52	210	—	—	—	—
Hadiklelke	1.700	11	61	1	6	—	—
Hadikmalom	—	26	98	3	5	—	—
Horthyvára	2.867	244	1.127	29	177	2	17
Hadikföldje	2.088	142	619	7	17	—	—
Hadikvára	2.060	169	726	8	42	1	4
Istenföldje	420	89	377	2	2	—	—
Istenkeze	844	16	61	5	21	—	—
Istenáldás	1.335	105	541	11	63	—	—
Andrásföldje	831	57	272	5	32	—	—
Bácsandrásfalva	1.691	181	827	16	22	2	9
(Unnamed settlement)	1.460	65	273	3	25	—	—
(Unnamed settlement)	517	24	105	2	10	—	—

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Bács-							
Józseffalva	4.188	150	746	27	61	—	—
Istenvára	—	138	593	—	—	—	—
Istenszeme	700	61	275	3	11	1	4
Andrásvára	1.415	127	548	5	14	3	14
Bácsandrás-							
szállás	1.573	123	597	7	19	1	3
Andráslelke	1.090	87	367	—	—	2	4
Istenhozott	775	55	288	6	17	—	—
Bácsistensegítség	2.675	287	1.222	26	125	—	—
Andrásháza	196	22	79	—	—	—	—
Istenvelünk	1.027	92	449	1	8	—	—
Hadikfalva	2.300	148	738	—	—	1	6
Hadikkisfalva	1.707	93	425	3	—	—	—
Hadikujfalva	1.189	305	1.330	5	25	1	4
Hadikvég	929	60	224	3	15	1	6
Total:	39.722	2.929	13.198	178	717	15	71

The most important problem in connection with the settlers was how to provide such a large number of people with a livelihood.

The basis of their livelihood is, of course, the possession of land, and realizing this the Government determined that none of them should be left without land. It was decided that in the first place every family should receive three yokes. To this minimum was then to be added one yoke for each member of the family living at home, whether in the ascending or descending line. This system takes the number of family members as the basis for the distribution of the land, on the principle that large families, especially where there are many children, should be provided with better prospects of a livelihood.

But the settlement of such a large number of people is not merely a mathematical problem. The Szeklers of Bukovina have been transplanted root and branch into entirely different surroundings from those in which they have hitherto lived. Here we see the truth of the Greek poet's words, that *only the sky changes over the wanderers' heads; their hearts remain the same*. Care had therefore to be taken that the whole form of life of the Szeklers of Bukovina should be transplanted to the mother country. The most important thing in this respect was to prevent repatriation disturbing the settler's established social order,

the basis of which undoubtedly was the differentiation into strata corresponding with the size of their former possessions of land. This it was proposed to maintain. To do so it was necessary to give more land in the new settlements to those who in Bukovina owned larger farms. The problem was solved by adding to the average amount given to each family extra land in proportion to the amount they had owned in Bukovina. In figures this worked out as follows: *the owners in Bukovina of farms ranging from 5 to 10 yokes received an extra 2 cadastral yokes; those who had owned from 10 to 20 yokes received an extra 4 cadastral yokes, and the owners of farms of from 20 to 30 yokes were given an extra 8 cadastral yokes. In this way the Repatriation Commission achieved its aim of enabling the Szeklers of Bukovina to feel at home in their new surroundings in the mother-country with comparatively little disturbance of their way of life.*

The Repatriation Commission was fully aware that the problems of the settlers had not all been solved by these grants of land. Even though the Commission had managed to place 18.000 cadastral yokes at their disposal instead of the 10.035 they had formerly owned, the new settlements still lacked the wherewithal to cultivate them. It must be remembered that apart from the barest necessities they had not been able to bring their moveable goods and chattels with them, the Rumanians refusing them permission to do so. With their bare hands, however willing, they could not have tilled the land. They brought no food with them either, so that for a considerable time the Commission had to supply them with provisions. Thus, besides settling them on the land, it was necessary to come to their assistance economically. Then again, it was not possible to establish them in private possession of their farms immediately, so that for the first agricultural year the land was tilled jointly and its produce distributed among them by the Commission. All these were problems that were hard to solve where 15.000 persons were concerned. *The chief problem was how to provide the settlers with adequate working capital and implements.* All the problems of detail faded into insignificance before the major task of putting these agricultural areas (the lots, that is to say, used for settlement purposes) in working order.

In the first place every family was given the quantity of bread cereals required for a year, as well as the quantity of maize produced on two yokes of land. Other agricultural produce (potatoes, beans, peas, etc.) was also distributed among them, and provisionally a sum of 30 pengő was given to each settler for the purchase of other necessaries. The Repatriation Commission, however, knew well that the most important thing was to provide the settlers with agricultural tools and implements and with loans to give them the working capital needed to set production going. To accomplish this task and solve all the minor problems the Commission drew up the following Estimates:

Expenditure

1. Food, wages, seed grain, agricultural implements, transport, medicine, legal costs, personal and material expenses	P.	1.446.357.37
2. Agricultural machines	..	640.000.—
3. Animals	..	250.000.—
4. Buildings	..	120.000.—
5. Working capital (100 pengő per head)	..	1.399.000.—
6. Loans for the purchase of moveable goods	..	400.000.—
7. Taxation	..	1.500.000.—
8. Unforeseen expenses	..	34.081.84

Total: P. 5.789.439.21

The sums figuring in almost all these items are to be devoted to setting the farms in working order. We see that provision has been made for the purchase of farming implements, animals and chattels, for building, and to supply working capital. *Here we would emphasize the point that the working capital received by the Szekler families is much more than at a glance it would appear to be according to the above Estimates, for it was doled out per capita, which meant that the larger the family, the more it got.* This corresponded to the system of land distribution, for, as we have seen, the amount of land granted increased with the number of persons in the family.

The sources from which the Repatriation Commission was able to draw were as follows:

Receipts

1. Rents received for part of the land handed over to the Repatriation Commission	P.	840.000.—
2. Sums accruing from the sale of wheat grown on the land jointly farmed	„	1.800.000.—
3. Sums accruing from the sale of maize	„	2.000.000.—
4. Sums accruing from the sale of other produce	„	179.000.—
5. Received from the Government	„	1.000.000.—
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Total:	P.	5.819.000.—

The above figures show that apart from the last item of 1.000.000 pengő the settlements were almost entirely self-supporting. The Repatriation Commission practically financed the great work of settlement from the sums received for the crops grown on the land granted for settlement purposes.

In order to obtain a clear and complete picture of the work of settlement done, a few details must be mentioned. In the first place it is important to point out that *the entire work was organized by a body consisting of 44 men*. This number was as small as the time at their disposal was short. Both things taken together are the best evidence of the splendid work done by the Repatriation Commission. But we must add a third point, namely, that the work was done very cheaply. All the expenses, including the legal costs of putting the settlers in possession of their holdings, did not average more than five pengő per yoke. In a word, the work was remarkable for its rapidity and its cheapness.

To complete the picture the following facts must be noted. It has already been said that the Szeklers were engaged chiefly in market-gardening in their old settlements. In Southern Hungary, on the other hand, they are at present growing cereals. But they still have leanings towards gardening, and they promise to turn their settlements into vegetable gardens in the course of a few years.

It is obvious that the new life of a people accustomed to live in a stabilized and organized community cannot be reorganized merely by providing them with land, working capital and agricultural implements. The communal life of the Szeklers of Bukovina was so highly organized as to form

a striking contrast to that of their neighbours. They were instinctively religious. *Religion for them was something that expressed and preserved their national character, as it so often does in the case of minorities far removed from their native land.* In the Bukovina settlements communal life was what preserved and helped to develop their cultural and spiritual assets. Their teachers and their schools — although it was scarcely possible to maintain Magyar schools under Rumanian rule — preserved practically unadulterated the spirit of Hungarian culture. With great wisdom the Hungarian Government from the very beginning of their transference to Hungarian soil provided that their communal life should be able to develop organically. Provision in being made for all their needs. The repatriation of these masses of people was welcomed with such enthusiasm by the whole country that teachers, infant-school teachers, Green Cross nurses, etc. flocked from all parts to offer their services. Schools have been opened in all the settlements, and besides schools, there are kindergartens that are almost over-crowded with little children. For babies crèches and day-nurseries have been established. Generally speaking the care of the young is the best organized branch of welfare work, and considering the large families of the Szeklers, it is one of the most important problems to be dealt with. Religious life has also been organized. The Szeklers were very sorry not to be able to bring their church-bells with them, but on Sundays the schoolrooms are turned into places of worship and altars carved with peasant *motifs* by themselves are set up, at which Capuchin friars celebrate Holy Mass. The great community of the Hungarian nation has taken the Szeklers to its bosom, and it may be affirmed now that they are an indivisible part thereof.

With the work of settlement processes have been started that will not be completed for some time yet. Such, for instance, is the process of redemption. The settlers do not receive their farms free and gratis. They will have to pay redemption for them; but the terms are very favourable, for the redemption price has been fixed at 40 times the net annual income of the land as determined by the Land Register according to the quality of the soil. Those who were

repatriated from a greater distance are to be allowed a 25% reduction of the redemption price, which must be paid within 45 years. What the Rumanian State owes them for their farms in Bukovina will be entered to their credit. The Hungarian Government hopes to come to an agreement by negotiations with Rumania concerning these claims.

This was how, after 177 years of bondage in a foreign land, the Szeklers of Bukovina returned to the mother-country. As we have seen, the Hungarian Government is doing all in its power to welcome back these people to the bosom of the nation.

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