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Carol I of Rumania (IV)

ZSOMBOR de SZASZ

Constructive Work in Transylvania nyvtár

LADISLAS SZENCZEI

Magyars and Jews in Slovakia

JOHN KARPATY

Independent Croatia Definitively Established

ALEXANDER BESENYŐ

Political Mosaic

Political Economy

BUDAPEST
V. ZRINYI-U. 1. III.

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CAROL I OF RUMANIA (IV.*)

BY

ZSOMBOR DE SZASZ

Rumania's reception into the Dual Alliance of Germany and Austria-Hungary was regarded as a most important event by the few Rumanians who at the time had knowledge of the fact. Before leaving Vienna, Brătianu said to the German Ambassador that it was a great honour for his country to be allowed to join the two great Empires as the third partner in their alliance. Nor was it a purely decorative benefit that Rumania derived from the convention. Baron von Saurma, the German Minister in Bucharest, had an opportunity to speak both with Brătianu, the Prime Minister, and D. Sturdza, the Foreign Minister, before the Treaty was signed, and was told by both that the alliance would be of inestimable advantage to Rumania: it would reinforce her independence by arresting the alarming advance of the Russian influence. Russia's efforts to sow dissension and to cast suspicion on the government for their endeavour to find support with the Central Powers were well-nigh intolerable, said the Foreign Minister. Russian agents flooded the country, newspapers were bought or new daily organs were founded for the purpose of furthering Russian aims. Members of the parliamentary opposition were bribed with unheard-of sums. It seemed as though Russia were making a last desperate effort to hinder Rumania's progress along the path of peace and internal consolidation.

This picture was by no means overdrawn. Panslavism and Russian expansion were not a chimera dwelling in the minds of the Rumanian Ministers, but a reality menacing the very existence of Rumania. This was the justification of those who had brought about the alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary.

* See previous articles under the same title in the January, February and April 1942 issues of this Review.

Yet this alliance was incapable of accomplishing all that was expected of it. Genuine collaboration with the Central Powers, and especially with Hungary, was out of the question; the mere idea of it was so unpopular that the Treaty had to be kept secret; more than this, when, thirty years later, at the outbreak of the first world war, the time came for its practical application, public opinion was so strongly opposed to it that it became impossible to enforce it. The basic cause of this strong opposition was the Rumanian irredentist movement, which since the middle of the nineteenth century had assumed such proportions that the desirability of the union of all the Rumanians loomed larger in men's minds than the Russian menace.

Up to 1859 and 1866 the central problem of Rumanian politics had been the union of the two Principalities; this was finally achieved, but it did not bring with it the union of all the Rumanians in a single State: those of Bukovina and Bessarabia, as well as the nearly three million Rumanian population of Transylvania, remained outside its frontiers. From the middle of the nineteenth century a movement had existed for the amalgamation of all these scattered racial fragments; but it was only after the union and the promotion of the united Provinces to the status of a kingdom that this clandestine irredentist movement became an openly avowed imperialistic policy.

The feeling was not equally strong in regard to each of these territories. The Rumanian element in Bukovina and in Bessarabia was scanty, and while the Bukovinian Rumanians were satisfied with their lot in Austria, those of Bessarabia were in no position to show their discontent under the autocratic Tsarist rule. The Transylvanian Rumanians, on the other hand, could freely complain of oppression and as freely plot for the union of Transylvania with the Rumanian Kingdom, which lent them its effective support. Both political parties, the Liberal as well as the Conservative, subscribed to the irredentist programme, while the *Liga culturală*, an important society originally formed for the promotion of cultural aims, became in actual fact a hot-bed of the most violent anti-Hungarian propaganda. It was in vain that King Carol dubbed the irredentist leaders

"wildly foolish people"; they had the masses well in hand and succeeded in creating throughout the country an atmosphere strongly hostile to a collaboration with the Dual Monarchy. The masses knew little of their kinsmen beyond the frontiers, and heard nothing of the sufferings of the Rumanians under the iron heel of Tsarist Russia; but they listened eagerly to the feigned sorrows of their Transylvanian brothers, under cover of which they carried on their assaults on the integrity of the Hungarian State. "Even had the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy committed no blunders", wrote von Jagow, the German Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs to Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg, "the clandestine irredentism of the Rumanians would have grown apace as a result of the political aggrandizement of Rumania. The antagonism between the Monarchy and the limitrophe national State is a natural consequence of the existing state of affairs."

That Russian diplomacy should fan the flame of Rumanian irredentism in order to envenom still further the relations between the two countries was no more than could be expected. In 1912 M. N. H. Hartwig, the Russian Minister in Belgrade, expressed to M. Filaliti, the Rumanian Minister, his conviction that Rumania acted against her own interests in remaining on the side of Austria-Hungary. Rumania, he opined, had only to reach out her hand in order to obtain Transylvania.

The gradual estrangement of Rumania and the increasing influence exercised by Russia on Balkan affairs, produced a natural reaction in the Monarchy's Balkan policy. By way of compensation for the loss of Rumania's friendship, an effort was made to draw Bulgaria within the orbit of the Triple Alliance. On the conclusion of the three Balkan wars in 1912—1913, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was the only Great Power which declared itself in favour of a revision of the Bucharest Treaty in Bulgaria's interest. Although this was, and remained to the end, a platonic declaration, the Rumanians regarded it as a hostile gesture. Recuperation of her vanquished foe and the rise of a "Greater" Bulgaria was what Rumania dreaded most.

The deterioration of the relations between Rumania and

the Monarchy as a result of the charges preferred against Hungary for oppression of the Transylvanian Rumanians was made no secret of in Rumania; the king and the Rumanian politicians spoke of it with the utmost freedom.

In June 1913 King Carol, in the course of a conversation with Herr von Waldthausen, the German Minister in Bucharest, expressed the opinion that the Hungarians were responsible for the blunders committed by the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in regard to Rumania, and that these blunders were responsible for the hostile attitude of Rumanian public opinion. He spoke in the same strain to Count Czernin, the Austro-Hungarian Minister, openly telling him that „in case of war the Rumanians will be unwilling to fight on Austria's side.” He hoped that there would be no war, but if it could not be avoided, then the situation would be grave. The army officers were against the Monarchy, and the younger generation clamoured for Transylvania.

On the other hand Poklevski, the newly-appointed Russian Minister in Bucharest, reported to St. Petersburg in January 1914 that he had met with the friendliest reception everywhere in the country; it was evident that a favourable change of sentiment had set in as regarded Russia.

The Rumanian people's inimical attitude towards the Triple Alliance was naturally no secret in Vienna; both Count Czernin and Count Berchtold, the Foreign Minister, were convinced that the Transylvanian question, that is, the alleged oppression of the Transylvanian Rumanians, was only a screen set up to hide the real purpose behind it, which was nothing less than the desertion of the alliance. Count Berchtold maintained that the "concessions" offered by Count Tisza to the Rumanians were by no means "insignificant"; in fact, they were so considerable that to go beyond them would be to overstep the bounds of possibility.

But whatever the explanation, the estrangement of the Rumanians was an undeniable fact. Before 1914 the mobilization plans of the Rumanian army had been directed against Russia; in the spring of that year they were altered so as to envisage a war against Austria-Hungary.

In June 1914, two weeks before the assassination of the Archduke Francis Ferdinand, Heir-Presumptive of the

Austrian and Hungarian thrones, the Tsar, accompanied by Sazonof, his Minister for Foreign Affairs, paid a State visit to King Carol. The main incidents of this visit have come to our knowledge through having been set down by Sazonof in a Memorandum prepared for the Tsar.

Sazanof had several long and intimate conversations with Ion Brătianu, who at this time was both Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs in Rumania. He asked him bluntly what would be Rumania's attitude were Russia to attack Austria-Hungary? Brătianu answered evasively, but Sazonof's conclusion was that "Rumania was bound by no treaty to stand by Austria-Hungary and to attack us, but she was going to side with the party which proved stronger and promised her greater advantages."

One afternoon the two statesmen made an excursion into the mountains in the neighbourhood of the Hungarian frontier, whence you could see Transylvania, that Promised Land. "The car halted for a moment, then slid over the frontier into Hungarian territory," wrote Sazonof, — "Probably the same thought was in both our minds — that this was Rumanian land, and that its inhabitants were awaiting their liberation. But we said nothing. The time had not yet come for open speech."

King Carol tried to convince Count Czernin that the Russian visit had been a simple act of politeness, but Count Czernin knew very well that it had been more than that. "There is no doubt," — he wrote to Vienna — "that the days of this visit form as many milestones in Rumania's and perhaps also the Monarchy's life... the encirclement of the Monarchy was pursued quite openly, in broad daylight, and with the utmost insolence."

Two weeks later Francis Ferdinand was shot in Serajevo.

The immediate impression created by the tragedy was that the Rumanian cause had suffered an irreparable loss. Francis Ferdinand was popular in certain circles, more especially among the Transylvanian Rumanians, as the promoter of a plan for a federated Austria in which the Rumanians would have had a certain autonomous-independence, somewhat like Bavaria in the German Empire.

They would have accepted this plan as a preliminary step towards complete separation, and saw their hopes in this respect frustrated by the Crown Prince's death.

The politicians of the kingdom, on the other hand, the Brătianus, Professor Iorga, Take Ionescu, had never accepted such a solution even as a temporary measure. Their solution was war with Austria-Hungary and the establishment of a Greater Rumania on the ruins of the dismembered Monarchy. If Rumania honoured her obligations as a partner in the Triple Alliance, she might attain the first solution; if she joined the Allies, the second road would be open to her. The Foreign Offices of the Central Powers were well aware of this.

A few weeks before the despatch of the ultimatum to Serbia, Francis Joseph wrote a letter to the Kaiser which contained the following passages: "The Panslav danger which threatens us from the side of Serbia is enhanced by the fact that Rumania, forgetful of her obligations as an ally, maintains close and friendly relations with that country and permits the same hateful propaganda against us as is carried on there. I do not wish to cast any doubt on the loyalty and good intentions of so old a friend as King Carol, but he himself recently gave expression to the fear that in view of the anti-Austro-Hungarian trend of public opinion in his country he would not be able to fulfil his obligations as an ally."

When finally the ultimatum was presented to Serbia, the Central Powers did their best to induce Rumania to enter the war on their side. Francis Joseph sent a personal telegram to King Carol in which he expressed the hope that the latter "would show appreciation of the motives which guided his decision"; while the German Government, after the declaration of war on Russia, summarily demanded of the Rumanian Government "the immediate mobilization of the Rumanian army and its advance against Russia."

There seemed, however, little prospect of these expectations being realised. Brătianu declared that "he would do everything in his power to carry out the obligations imposed by the alliance", but added the warning that "public opinion was starkly hostile to Austria".

A Crown Council was convoked for August 3 to decide the question of war or peace.

The king came to the Council accompanied by the Crown Prince. There were present, besides all the Cabinet Ministers, the Presidents of the two Chambers, two ex-Prime Ministers and three members of each of the two political parties of the land, the Liberals and the Conservatives.

King Carol read aloud, in a shaking voice, a comparatively brief memorandum enumerating the possibilities which confronted Rumania at this crisis.

Neutrality — said the Memorandum — would place Rumania in a humiliating position; the evidence of history has shown that neutral States are invariably assigned a secondary role and are left out of account at the peace negotiations. There remained the alternative of entering the war on the side of one or other of the belligerents. In the king's opinion there was no real Russophile sentiment to be found in the country; consequently there was only one possibility left — to join the Central Powers. "For thirty years Rumania's policy has followed that of the Triple Alliance, to which we are bound by a formal treaty. The fulfilment of one's treaty obligations is a matter of honour. Unquestionably," continued the king, "in a war everything depends upon the army; but there is little doubt that if we join the Triple Alliance we shall be on the winning side and shall receive the reward which is our due".

After the reading of the Memorandum the members of the Council spoke one by one.

Rossetti was in favour of neutrality. He was followed by Peter Carp, the only Germanophile member of the Council.

"Neutrality", — he said, — "is impossible both from a moral and a material standpoint. Rumania is bound by a treaty which she must honour if she is to maintain her position among civilised nations. And it would be useless for her to remain neutral, for sooner or later we should be occupied by one or other of the belligerent Powers." After a short pause he continued: "What is the meaning of the present war? In its ultimate issues it is a struggle between Germans and Slavs, and it is to the interest of our country

that the former should win; Russia's victory would mean the end of Rumania."

Carp's forcible speech made a deep impression on the Council, but its effect was soon nullified by the calm utterances of Marghiloman, who explained that no *casus foederis* had arisen for Rumania and that therefore she could afford to wait.

Lahovary and Take Ionescu also advocated an attitude of neutrality. Dissescu and Cantacuzino preferred to remain silent; so that the turn came for the Prime Minister to speak.

"The public opinion of the country, —" he said — "is strongly influenced by the fate of the Transylvanian Rumanians, but it is not wishful of going to war. For the present Rumania can do no better than to remain neutral, while public opinion is being prepared for cooperation with the Central Powers. The war will be a long one and there would be plenty of time to discuss matters later on."

At this point Carp interrupted:

"That is the policy of cowardice. You lack the necessary courage for shouldering the responsibility, and find it more convenient to withdraw behind the shelter of public opinion."

This started an altercation between the two statesmen, in the middle of which the door opened and a telegram was brought in and presented to the Prime Minister. It contained an official communication to the effect that Italy had declared for neutrality. The king made a gesture of resignation; he knew that he had lost his cause. The only one to stand by him was Peter Carp; all the other members of the Council were against him and in favour of neutrality.

At this dramatic moment Carp turned to him and said:

"Sire, I feel impelled to put it on record that after a long reign to which this country has owed its national development, Your Majesty stands, at this most difficult moment, abandoned by the parties and all their leaders."

The Prime Minister protested vehemently, declaring that the expression of one's opinion in the defence of the country's highest interests could not be regarded as disloyalty to the Throne.

The king interposed in a low and tremulous voice:

"Gentlemen, I feel myself bound to the Central Powers; but if you believe that henceforth Rumania should change the course of her external policy . . . I am ready to abdicate . . . My successor . . ." he pointed to the Crown Prince, "stands there." His eyes travelled round the circle, but there was no response to his words; the expression of the faces around him seemed tinged with a certain scepticism. He understood that he had lost the game.

Yet one more humiliation was in store for him.

Lahovary, turning to him, asked:

"Does not Your Majesty realise that by neglecting to divulge his intentions in good time, Berchtold treated Your Majesty as a vassal of Austria?"

This was too much. The king went purple, and turning upon Lahovary, said in a voice which shook with suppressed indignation:

"M. Lahovary, you must know that I would never tolerate being treated like a vassal!"

Lahovary only reiterated:

"I know, I know, Sire — nevertheless it looks . . ."

Mortun was the next to speak, after which the king put the question to each in turn: neutrality or no neutrality? Carp was the only one to vote against neutrality. All the rest were for it. The king, before closing the council, summed up the situation in a few broken words:

"The representatives of my country have almost unanimously voted for neutrality. As a constitutional ruler I subordinate my will to their decision."

He rose, shook hands with Carp and left the room, "a broken and saddened man," — as Queen Marie wrote in her *Mémoires*, — "denied by his people after a long life of hard work for his country."

Carp turned to Marghiloman. "The King will abdicate to-morrow," he said. But the king did not abdicate.

The interested Powers were notified of the Council's decision the following day. Berlin and Vienna were told by Brătianu that "as Rumania had neither been advised nor consulted in regard to the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum to Belgrade, no *casus foederis* existed", but neutrality on Rumania's part would mean a great advantage to Austria-

Hungary, since "several hundred miles of her frontiers would thereby be protected."

What could the Ballplatz do? A return telegram was despatched to the effect that the Foreign Office "appreciated the decision as an expression of the friendly relations obtaining between the two countries and regarded Rumania, in future as heretofore, as a member of the Alliance."

Kaiser Wilhelm's judgment came nearer the truth. His comment on hearing the Council's decision was: "a complete miscarriage both of German and of Austrian diplomacy."

To the Russian Minister in Bucharest, M. Poklevski Koziel, Brătianu explained that the concentration of a few troops on the Russian border was of no significance, in any case it did not denote an unfriendly attitude. "Rumania will never forget the good-will shown by the Tsar in 1913." Russia, on her side, noted with a certain amount of satisfaction that she was to be spared an attack on her southern frontier.

At the outbreak of the war the fiftieth anniversary was not far distant of the day when Charles of Hohenzollern had first set foot on Rumanian soil. He came to a country that was still only on the threshold of western civilization, held down by oriental suzerainty and the oppressive rule of Phanariotes and boyars, and determined to transform it into a well-governed State with an honest administration, based on the principles of nineteenth century democracy. An honest, simple, straightforward man with ascetic tastes, whose word was his bond, he was proud of the fact that he had not inherited his throne, but was a self-made king. He was a hard worker, and hoped, by dint of work, to win honour and the world's esteem for his adopted land.

Unfortunately, he found himself in surroundings where all appreciation was lacking for the things which he himself held high, — where, indeed, it was the opposite of all these things that was valued. He found that this land of his adoption was a land where the strong oppressed the weak, the boyar the peasant; where no man was bound by his word of honour, where public as well as private life was built on intrigues and corruption, and where everyone had two faces.

What Carol could achieve by his own efforts he

accomplished: out of two vassal Principalities he made a united "Rumania"; obtained her independence by force of arms, and raised her to the status of a kingdom. What he could not do was to make of the Rumanian people a European nation. "Rumanians, —" he once said, — "cannot govern themselves and will not let others govern them." He probably had in mind the class whose mission it was to lead the people, and which monopolised the government; the class of which *Constantin Steere*, one of Rumania's most eminent statesmen, wrote: "that corrupt and venal class devoid of all spiritual culture, and split into hostile factions, which for centuries past had made a practice of driving the Ruler from the throne, and which spends its time chasing after power in order to be able to despoil the State for its own benefit."

In this foreign world King Carol the Hohenzollern stood alone, isolated and friendless. There came a moment when it would have greatly pleased him to hurl the crown he had won at the feet of this ungrateful nation, which saw in him nothing better than one of the Phanariote Princes of the preceding centuries. But he held on and did his duty. It was not till the great war came that there was revealed in all its nakedness the tragic fact that for half a century King and People had lived in different worlds, never understanding one another. After fifty years the People discovered that their ruler was not a Rumanian and that his ideals were not theirs; while at the end of these same fifty years the King was driven to utter the bitter ejaculation: "I stand alone." Fifty years had to pass before the deep gulf was disclosed which lay between the king's honour and the aspirations of his people. After fifty years of honest endeavour for the good of his land, there came at last the poignant moment when the aged Monarch fell sobbing on his desk, while his trembling hands tried to tear from his own neck the Order "Pour le Mérite".

Queen Marie wrote sarcastically in her Memoirs: "Legend will have it that Uncle died of a broken heart. I do not know if hearts actually break, but it was certainly tragic that he should be at odds with his people at the last, and I really believe that this grief hastened his end."

King Carol's was one of the great tragedies of history.

It was the king's habit to jot down in his diary the outstanding occurrences of each day. The last pages contain the following entries:

August 4. All Europe is in arms. Bulgaria and Turkey on the side of the Triple Alliance. Sazonof has promised us Transylvania.

August 11. Weather fine. Brătianu tells me that public opinion in the whole of the country is against Hungary.

August 17. Spent all day in bed, in great pain. Japan has declared war on Germany. Enemies everywhere

September 4. At ten p. m. Waldhausen brought the Kaiser's telegram urging us to attack Russia.

September 10. Public opinion demands that we take Transylvania and the Bukovina. Everyone believes in the victory of France and Russia.

September 21. Again in bed all day. Suffered great pain all day and all night.

September 29. A dark day. Brătianu came at half past twelve. He said that in the case of a Russian victory Sazonof guarantees us the possession of the Rumanian territories of Hungary, and is willing to give us a written declaration to this effect. We shall have to convoke a Crown Council. Francis Joseph inquires after my health. He says the situation is very hopeful. I answered that here the situation was very grave.

October 5. Cold and rain. Pain and morphia. Czernin is anxious. The Russians have broken into Hungary. Public feeling here very war-like.

October 8. Snowing heavily; all the world white. At 12, Brătianu. He is full of plots and machinations.

October 9. Still snowing...

This is the last entry. On October 11, at dawn, King Carol died. Three months too late.