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A.M.N. MÚZEUM HIRLAP OSZTÁLYA

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Dr. ANDREW FALL
MANAGING EDITOR

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BANQUET IN LONDON

BY

FRANCIS HERCZEG

The fires of war are still blazing; but the parasites who batten on destruction are beginning to creep out of their dens. What can the appearance of those men, popularly described as "the hyenas of the battlefield", mean? Is the end near? Or are they so impatient that they cannot wait till the day of plunder and a division of the spoils arrives? For them the world war is merely a gamble in which they hold no stakes, though determined to share in the winnings.

In the bucket-shop of war speculation the boldest and most cynical broker is perhaps Edward *Benes*. After the most woeful political bankruptcy ever known to history, in which he and his republic were swept away, he has turned up again and is seriously attempting to give the Allied Powers council and advice. What does this mean? Does he really believe that people have such bad memories? or does he count upon the commonsense judgment of the world having been upset by war-psychosis?

At the birth of the Paris Peace Treaties, which entrusted the maintenance of peace in Central Europe jointly to Czecho-Slovakia, Rumania and Yugoslavia, Benes played the rôle of a busy midwife. It will be remembered how the geographical, historical and ethnographical data on which the new Power system was based were falsified. *When they could make patriotic capital out of it, Benes and his accomplices themselves boasted of the trick with which they had improved their position in Trianon.* Their Power system was in fact like a pyramid set on its apex in mockery of all the natural laws of equilibrium.

The criterion of the value of any political system is the power of resistance its machinery is able to display in difficult circumstances. The three Trianon States collapsed,

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two of them in heaps of rubble, at the first breath of wind denoting the advent of changing conditions. A telephone message from Berlin was enough to do away with the Czecho-Slovak Republic and send its President flying. Without attempting to resist, Greater Rumania became Lesser Rumania the moment she was given to understand that this was the wish of the neighbouring Powers. And when the van of the German army approached the frontiers of Yugoslavia, that country split in two. During the twenty years of their existence these three States did not even attempt to accomplish the mission for which they had been created.

Not long ago the former President of the Czecho-Slovak Republic made a speech at a banquet in the Liberal Club, London. On reading what he said we are struck by the fantastic assurance with which he reckoned on the political ignorance of his audience. A few months ago the slogan adopted by public opinion in Western Europe was that the mistakes of the Paris Peace Treaties must not be repeated; *and now in London Beneš again recommended the Little Entente, that inverted pyramid, as an ideal war aim.*

An interesting fact is that he is less bitter against Germany than against Hungary, upon whom he would fain invoke the vengeance of the Allied Powers. The reason is that Germany *merely* put an end to the independent Czech Republic, while Hungary is a country that in given circumstances might be plundered. It will perhaps be worth while to examine more exhaustively the part of his speech dealing with Hungary. *His most serious accusation against this country is that it is ruled by a feudal aristocratic class.* We heard the same accusation from his lips in Trianon; but both there and in London he was careful not to cite the Hungarian code of laws in support of his statements. Yet if class-rule exist, there must be *some* trace of it in the laws of the country. Beneš, however, is content to trust the axiom that if something — even a lie — is repeated again and again, the average man will come to believe it. But it is curious that he should inveigh against Hungarian feudalism in England, the only country in Europe where there are still many romantic remains of aristocratic class-rule. The most casual observer of Hungarian life must see clearly that

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there has been no trace of class-rule in this country for a hundred years. And in the field of social provision the plundered and impoverished Hungarian State has made greater progress than the victors of the last war.

Another of Beneš's indictments is that Hungary joined the war with the same methods and for the same aim as Germany: the wish to destroy the pre-war States of Central Europe. This statement reveals a cynical contempt of the political maturity of his hearers; for every newspaper reader in London ought to know that when Hungary entered the war it was too late to destroy Czecho-Slovakia or Yugoslavia, since both of them had already ceased to exist. Bohemia was by that time a German Protectorate secure against any design to destroy her that Hungary may have cherished. Rumania, the third State of the Little Entente, is today Hungary's comrade-in-arms on the Russian front. Beneš is naturally as well aware of all this as we are; but he seems to have had great faith in the ignorance of his British audience.

Beneš went on to say that Hungary had violated the obligations voluntarily undertaken by her towards her neighbours. She had occupied considerable areas of their territories by violence. Did Hungary actually violate any obligation *voluntarily* undertaken? It is to be hoped that even Beneš does not regard the Trianon Edict, which Hungary was forced to accept and against which she has always protested, as a *voluntarily* undertaken obligation! The only other obligation was the treaty of perpetual friendship concluded with Yugoslavia. *This treaty was favourably received by Hungarian public opinion; for the Magyars to a certain extent sympathized with the brave Serb people, though their feelings were not reciprocated.* And now, how did matters stand as regards the treaty of perpetual friendship? Shortly after it had been ratified a peculiar situation arose: by means of a military *coup d'état* the Head of the Yugoslav State and the Government with whom Hungary had concluded the treaty, were driven away; at the same time all the political foundations upon which that friendship were to have rested were demolished; and on 10th April the Yugoslav State itself ceased to exist. All

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this was a domestic matter concerning Yugoslavia alone; it was none of Hungary's business; but by the elementary rules of logic, if one of the contracting Parties had ceased to exist, the other could neither honour nor violate the contract. *From the ruins of Yugoslavia two new States arose, Greek Oriental Serbia and Roman Catholic Croatia.* A state of guerilla warfare that still continues broke out between the two. To which of them was Hungary linked by ties of perpetual friendship? To Croatia, or to Serbia? The sympathies of the Hungarian people turned more towards the Croats, with whom for eight hundred years they had lived in a close and peaceful alliance probably without a parallel in the history of the world between peoples of different races. The ancient Magyar areas wrested from Hungary by Serbia in Trianon (areas in which the Serbs had always been in the minority) were left unclaimed and at the mercy of predatory bands of Chetniks. There was no organized executive power in those areas; and in these circumstances the Regent of Hungary did no more than his duty when he ordered the Hungarian army to place those unclaimed areas under the protection of the mother-country. Emphasis must be laid on the point that the Hungarian army did not advance beyond the thousand-year-old Hungarian frontiers and did not enter Serb or Croat territory.

At the London banquet Beneš raised the question: "Is Hungary to be allowed to keep the areas that she *stole* from her neighbours?" In one and the same speech Beneš accused the Magyars of arbitrarily *occupying* considerable areas and of *stealing* them. This is a gross confusion of terms; yet, judging by Edward Beneš's past as a statesman, one would have expected him to have a better knowledge of the legal definition of a crime. It would be interesting to know whether any of the members of the Liberal Club could refrain from smiling when Beneš set himself up as the champion of honesty and the defender of right, and whether in their hearts they did not ask what sort of sense of historical right could lead a man to invoke a system of oppression that lasted twenty years as a legal title to those areas and refuse to take cognizance of the thousand years during which the Magyars had lived, worked and shed

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their blood for Southern Hungary. *It is true that this was ignored also by the drafters of the Trianon Treaty; but the world now sees the consequences of that mistake.*

There is one passage in Beneš's speech that throws a vivid light on his involved mentality and audacity, — the one in which he says that Hungary and Germany must be educated afresh and must go through the same political and ethical revolution. In another place he reveals the aims of his educational programme for them. A régime of a socialist nature must be established in Hungary that would enable the Magyars to enter into new and close co-operation with their three neighbours, the Rumanians, Yugoslavs and Czecho-Slovaks, and would once and for all end the era of lamentable rivalry and territorial disputes. *Beneš's aim is quite clear: he would like to lop off as many Hungarian counties as he could make use of for "strategical" and "economic" purposes, and then put an end to all territorial disputes.* In a word, he would like to educate the Magyars not to feel themselves Magyars any longer.

It would be desirable that the London Liberals should be made to realize that it is the fond wish of the Magyars to live on peaceful, brotherly terms with the Czechs, Yugoslavs and Rumanians, but also that no amount of education and no kind of revolution would ever bring to the surface a section of the population ready to apathetically acquiesce in the dismemberment of the country. There is no such unprincipled section of the population in Hungary, and such probably does not exist in any country. Has Edward Beneš forgotten what the first act of the Hungarian Dictatorship of the Proletariate was as soon as it had organized its red army? Its first act was to drive the Czechs out of Upper Hungary; for in the heart of every Magyar there lives and will continue to live the determination to win back at the first opportunity every part of our ancient heritage wrested from us by force of arms or guile. Were this not so, we should not deserve to be called a nation. Our people have always been content with the soil bequeathed by their ancestors; *they have never wished to go beyond the natural boundaries of the Carpathians; but they have always regarded all alien occupation as illegal,*

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unjust and transitory. Even a hundred and fifty years of Turkish occupation was not able to root out national feeling.

But there is something that Beneš forgot to mention. He did not tell his audience that it was only under the protection and with the support of the Great Powers that the States of the Little Entente had been able to exist at all. What a piece of historical irony! For centuries, while the Magyars were in possession of the ridges of the Carpathians, the whole of Europe naturally expected Hungary to act as a bulwark against dangers from the East; but when for the time being the Czechs and Rumanians occupied the Hungarian frontier ranges, they considered it natural that Europe should protect them. *The difference between these two points of view entitles the Magyars to insist upon their being the nucleus of order and civilization in the Danube Valley.*

Beneš has already given proof of his power to harm Hungary. This is undeniable. But he has yet to prove to history that he can be of any use either to his own people or to Europe. The London banquet again witnesses to the fact that European civilization has no greater enemy than the type of adventurer who is out to make a profit from human suffering and the death of millions.

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