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KING FERDINAND OF RUMANIA

BY

ZSOMBOR DE SZASZ

XI. THE MEETING IN ARAD¹

On October 31 the revolution broke out in Hungary and Count Michael Károlyi formed a government composed of Radicals and Socialists. On November 14 the king renounced the exercise of the royal power, and two days later Hungary was declared a republic.

Previously, on November 3, an armistice had been concluded in Padua between the Allied Powers and the Monarchy which had left the whole territory of Hungary untouched. The Károlyi Government, however, maintained that the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy having ceased to exist, an Austro-Hungarian delegation was not entitled to make binding agreements for Hungary, and on November 7 they concluded in Belgrade another much less favourable armistice, in terms of which half of Transylvania south of the river Maros and the entire Banat was open to Allied occupation, although, in accordance with the regulations of the Hague Convention, "the civil administration was left in the hands of the existing government."

The opening of the frontiers to foreign occupation was a grievous shock for the Hungarians, whose territories, except for a narrow strip of land in the north which the Russians had held for a few weeks, had remained uninvaded during the whole of the war.

The attitude of the Rumanians was characteristic and significant.

Maniu wished the Transylvanian Rumanians to be represented in Belgrade, but his delegate was prevented by

¹ See previous articles under the same title in former numbers of this review.

illness from taking part in the negotiations, even had he been allowed to do so, and the armistice was concluded without the accession of the Rumanians. It was, — writes S. Stoica — a very prejudicial affair for the Rumanians, because it maintained the Hungarian administration in Transylvania, thereby exposing the Rumanian population to "Hungarian terrorism and vandalism", and left the impression that the line of demarcation was to form the definitive frontier of Rumania.²

If, in the autumn of 1918, there was uncertainty concerning the future frontiers, it was shared, not only by the uninitiated Rumanians, but also by the foremost statesmen of Hungary.

In October Brătianu, having been re-appointed Prime Minister, secretly communicated to the Rumanian leaders the Bucharest Treaty of 1916, so that they should know what to expect from the future peace conference.

About the same time this treaty reached also Budapest. The venerable Professor B. Jancsó, who during the occupation of the Central Powers had been pursuing historical researches in Bucharest, acquired a copy of it in the early days of October and, realising its extreme importance, travelled with it to Budapest at once, taking with him also a proposal for the solution of the ominous Transylvanian situation: this was, to concentrate Hungarian troops on the Rumanian frontier of Transylvania and to start negotiations concerning the revival of the old constitution, based on the "union of the three nations", Magyars, Székelys and Saxons, with the Rumanians added as the fourth.

Professor Jancsó submitted the treaty to the Prime Minister, Dr. Wekerle, and to Count Tisza. Neither of them believed in its authenticity, so strong was the belief in the necessity of maintaining intact the Hungarian State.⁸

By then a general state of disorder and confusion began to prevail.

² S. Stoica: *Juliu Maniu*, p. 120.

³ I. Gagyí: *Jancsó Benedek Bukarestben*, in the *Jancsó Benedek emlékkönyv*, pp. 45—46. — *Jancsó B. A román irredentista mozgalmak története*, p. 455.

During the last days of October Hungarian National Councils and Military Councils were being formed by the Radicals and Social Democrats, first in Budapest and then all over the country. The example was followed by the creation of similar Rumanian and Saxon Councils in the counties and towns of Transylvania.

The Hungarians did not show themselves hostile to the Rumanian organisations which, though they stressed the right of self-determination, made no mention of separatistic tendencies and constantly expressed the desire of maintaining internal order side by side with the Hungarian National Councils. I Pelle, a Rumanian lawyer of Nagyvárad, in an open letter addressed to the President of the Rumanian National Council, declared that " he would follow them as long as their struggle remained that of the Rumanians of Transylvania, regardless of their kinsfolk beyond the mountains".

For the rest, the Rumanian declarations and formulas were often couched in such ambiguous language as to admit of any interpretation. The curious oath taken by the members of the Rumanian National Guard was worded as follows: "In cognizance of the duty laid upon me by the present historical times, I swear by God Almighty to remain faithful to the united Rumanian nation and shall not lift my hand against my Rumanian brother of whatever part the country he may be".

Miron Christea, Bishop of Karánsebes, later Metropolitan Primate of Rumania, who at the time of the outbreak of the war with Rumania had so volubly protested his loyalty to the Hungarian State and the dynasty, forbade his clergy to pray for the ruler, bidding them to substitute for his name that of the Great National Council. Later in November, all the Rumanian Greek Orthodox and Uniate Bishops issued a declaration to the effect that they "stood on the social and Christian principle of self-determination", that they joined the Great Rumanian National Council, and intended to work with it for the realisation of the national aspirations.⁵

⁴ B. Jancsó: op. cit. p. 458.

⁵ I. Clopotel: *Revoluția din 1918* pp. 59—74.

Meanwhile the Rumanian leaders were not idle; the Executive Committee of the National Council, which had its seat in Arad, discussed from day to day the question of what was to be done next. On November 9 they decided, on the proposal of L. Goldis, to demand from the Hungarian Government the transfer to the Rumanian National Council of the executive power in those regions of Hungary — twenty-six counties in all — in which the Rumanians were more or less in a majority. If the Hungarian Government complied with this request, ran the communication, "we shall be able to guarantee the miantenance of public order and the security, otherwise we shall make known to our people, to the country at large and to the entire world, that we have been prevented from exercising our right of self-determination, that we shall abstain from all cooperation with the Hungarian authorities and that we accept no responsibility for anything that may occur, but lay that responsibiliy wholly on the shoulders of the Hungarian National Council."⁶

The Hungarian Government did not reject point-blank this proposal, with its veiled sophisms and open threats, whose tone was almost that of an ultimatum and which, if complied with, would have been equivalent to an immediate dismemberment of the State, but proposed instead a discussion, which the Rumanians accepted. By this act the Károlyi Government recognised a revolutionary group issued from a minority of the subjects of the Hungarian State as equal with itself, the legal government of the State. From a sovereign body it was an impossible concession, an aberration only to be explained by the revolutionary times.

A Hungarian delegation was appointed to treat with the Rumanians. Its members were Oscar Jászi, a radical, who acted as chairman; D. Abrahám, also a radical, and D. Bokányi, a socialist; these three were members of the Hungarian National Council; Professor S. Apáthy, Professor B. Somló and the socialist A. Vincze, of the Hungarian National Council of Transylvania; the Saxon Dr. E. Neugeboren and the Suabian Dr. Strigl of the German National Council joined the delegation, wish was accompanied by several experts.

⁶ *I. Clopoşel: Revoluția din 1918*, p. 80.

The members of the Rumanian delegation were J. Maniu, L. Goldis, S. Pop-Csicsó, J. Erdélyi and G. Crişan, all members of the Rumanian National Council; and three Rumanian socialists,, John Flueraş, Jos. Jumenea and Enea Grapini.

The two outstanding members of the meeting were the Rumanian Juliu Maniu who was still in Vienna but due to arrive at any moment, and Oscar Jászi, the Minister of Nationalities in the Károlyi Administration, who reached Arad in the morning of November 13.⁷

"Hungarian public opinion" — writes Professor Jancsó — "viewed Jászi's journey with great confidence, mainly because he was the founder of the nationalities policy of the new political system. Also because, by reason of his past, he was regarded as the most suitable person for negotiating with the Rumanians, since it was no secret that of all the Hungarian politicians who had taken up a stand in this question his standpoint was most closely in harmony with theirs. Furthermore, he was bound to them by a certain spiritual and intellectual affinity, if only because he condemned the nationality policy of past Hungarian governments with the same biassed ruthlessness as they; nor did he lack that instinctive hatred of the Magyar race, and the Magyar spirit which was an innate characteristic of the politicians of non-Magyar nationality".⁸ Jászi was of Jewish origin.

At 11 a. m. of November 13 the two delegations met. After a short opening speech by Jászi, L. Goldis, to the greater glory of the principle of self-determination, protested against the participation in the discussions of the members of the Hungarian and Saxon National Councils of Transylvania. Then came the usual complaints concerning Hungarian terrorism, after which Jászi was at last allowed to deliver his proposals.

He started by declaring that the Hungarian Government aimed at finding a temporary solution until the Peace Con-

⁷ The chief sources of the Arad meeting are to be found in the "Recollections of my Negotiations with the Rumanian National Committee" by O. Jászi (in Hungarian) and in *J. Clopoşel* *Revoluţia din 1918*, pp. 81—99.

⁸ B. Jancsó: *A román irredentista mozgalmak története*, p. 463.

ference had fixed the definitive frontiers. "We, "— he said, —" subscribe to the Wilsonian principle of self-determination of the peoples and we unreservedly offer this right to the Rumanians. But at the same time we claim the same right for the other peoples of the country. We are not prepared to recognise a system under which the oppression of one people will be followed by that of another. You demand to have the executive power conferred on you over a territory inhabited by 2,900.000 Rumanians and 3,900.000 non-Rumanians. This is a negation of the right of self-determination. What we want is an organisation in which the autonomies of Magyars, Rumanians and Saxons exist harmoniously side by side."

The solution proposed by the Hungarian Government was to form self-governing national blocs on the pattern of the Swiss *Eidgenossenschaften*, with a central legislative organ and a central government for the handling of matters of common interest.

The details of Jászi's speech, of which Clopoșel's book and Jászi's *Memoirs* give divergent versions, have no particular interest for us. But the concluding sentence, in which the discrepancy between the two versions is most obvious, may be quoted for curiosity's sake.

According to his own recollection, Jászi finished his speech as follows: "I advised the Rumanian leaders not to stretch the cord to breaking-point, lest there should be a repetition of the sad spectacle witnessed in Belgrade, where the Allied Generals were not a whit better than the sword-rattling Hindenburgs and Ludendorffs. I drew their attention to the terrible social and economic situation of Central Europe and pointed out that the spirit of inhumanity and injustice only serves to strengthen those currents which, by destroying the framework of the existing States, would deliver the whole of Europe to the dictatorship of the Soldiers's and Workmen's Councils."

According to Clopoșel the concluding sentences ran thus: "The conclusion of the future peace rests in the hands not of the Fochs and other generals who, as we saw in Belgrade, no wise differ from the warlike Hindenburgs and Ludendorffs,

but of the Soldiers' and Workmen's Councils. In the face of the promises made by some of the Powers to Czech and other imperialisms, the Soviet Republic will remain neutral. It is the latter who will decide the peace and not the Powers of Czech and other imperialisms, the Soviet Republic will remain neutral. It is the latter who will decide the peace and not the imperialists with their sword."

Jászi was followed by Bokányi, the Hungarian socialist, who spoke in a markedly sharp and inimical tone. He said that the Hungarian workmen would support Jászi's proposals with all the weight of the Internationale.

Seeing that Maniu had not yet arrived, the Rumanian delegates begged for the suspension of the discussions, and the next meeting was fixed for the 15th., two days hence. In the mean time two other Rumanians, Aurel Lázár and Aurel Vlad arrived and joined their own delegation.

The 15th. proved a critical day for the Rumanians.

In the early morning of that day they gathered in the house of Pop-Csicső to deliberate over the answer to be given to Jászi. Of this meeting we have a description from the pen of Victor Hotaran, a member of the Soldiers' Council.

"In the morning of November 16 I went to the house of M. Pop-Csicső, where we received Jászi's message that Maniu was still in Budapest but that he, Jászi, must leave and that he begged for an answer by 10 o'clock.

"The news evidently depressed Goldis and Pop-Csicső very much. They retired to the next room to prepare their answer. I remained outside with Colonel Brândușa. Soon Goldis appeared with a piece of paper in his hand and to our question he replied that he was going to take the answer to Jászi.

"We have accepted Jászi's proposal', he said, in some confusion.

"I was thunderstruck.

* Jászi's Recollections were first printed in December 1921 in the Hungarian paper *Napkelet*, which appeared in Kolozsvár when that town was already under Rumanian domination. Cloptel's work was published in 1926.

"'How can that be?' I asked. 'Yesterday we decided otherwise!'

"Goldiș tried to convince me that Jászi's proposal was subject to the decision of the Peace Conference, that we must protect the Rumanians from the fury of the Magyars, etc.

"I was terribly upset. I saw the danger which threatened. If we Rumanians, now we were free, chose of our own will to remain under the Hungarian yoke, we were lost: the union would never materialise. I attacked him insolently. Brândușa supported me with force. At last Goldiș ceded.

"'Well,' he asked thoughtfully, — 'what shall we do?'

"I took pen and paper and standing by a table wrote an answer in which we refused Jászi's proposal and laid all the responsibility on the Hungarian Government. A few minutes later Goldiș came into the room and he consented to revise their decision. We sat down to discuss the matter. Ten o'clock was near and Jászi sent for his answer.

At the decisive moment Maniu arrived as a *deus ex machina*. He had refused to use the special train which the Hungarian Government had placed at his disposal and had come by an ordinary train. He decided in favour of a refusal, the situation was saved. We flung the gauntlet, and the fate of Hungary was sealed."¹⁰

In the reply drawn up under such circumstances, the Rumanians declared that they regarded Jászi's proposals as a refusal of the Rumanian demands on the part of the Hungarian Government. "The Rumanian nation of Transylvania claims complete independence and will not allow this right to be obscured by provisional measures... They recognise the right of the Peace Conference(!!) to fix the definitive frontiers of the State demanded by the Rumanian nation and undertake to guarantee the Wilsonian principles concerning the minorities of the country and to secure the free development of each of these peoples."

¹⁰ "Cum a fost împiedicat d. Goldiș să hotărască menținerea Ardealului în granițele Ungariei", article in the *Cuvântul*, December 10, 1926. A similar tale is told by Dr. John Erdélyi, subsequently Rumanian Minister in Budapest, in an interview granted to the Rumanian paper *Patria* December 15, 1926.

The reply was presented at the morning conference. The Rumanian standpoint was now clear enough. After a few remarks by Jászi, the Rumanian A. Vlad and the Transylvanian Magyar A. Vincze spoke in succession. They were followed by the Hungarian socialist Bokányi, who once again sharply questioned the historic right to Transylvania set up by the Rumanians, and the legitimacy of their pretensions. Then came Maniu's turn.

"The Rumanians", he said, "demand their own sovereign State. They demand that their national State and national sovereignty shall be realised everywhere in Hungary and Transylvania where Rumanians live. Transylvania and the limitrophe Rumanian regions of Hungary form a unitary Rumanian territory which we regard as a Rumanian State, while securing, of course, the complete national, political and cultural freedom of the other peoples. We do not wish to change from oppressed into oppressors, but we cannot allow the dismemberment of the Rumanian territories. The question is simple: as a sovereign nation, we demand all the attributes of sovereignty."

Professor Apáthy spoke after Maniu and was followed by Dr. Neugeboren who expressed the belief that the Rumanian demands meant "the death of the Hungarian nation."

Jászi did not throw up the sponge at once. He again submitted the offer of the Hungarian Government, arranged in eleven points: a seat for the Rumanian delegate in the Hungarian Government, carrying out of the Nationalities Law, etc.

The offer was refused.

Thereupon Jászi acknowledged the failure of the conference and — as we learn from Rumanian sources — "asked stupidly, wringing his hands", what was the ultimate demand of the Rumanians?"

"Complete separation", was Maniu's reply.

Jászi left the room and immediately travelled back to Budapest.

In the background, forgotten by the Rumanians, loomed

the Belgrade armistice, providing for a demarcation-line and a Hungarian administration. But when E. Garami, one of Károlyi's Ministers, mentioned this to I. Erdélyi, the Rumanian Minister in Budapest, this astute diplomat's answer was: „My dear Minister, are you really so naive as to imagine that we shall respect it for a moment?”

(To be continued.)

OSZK
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