

## "BALANCE OF POWER"

BY

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**M**y thoughts are continually recurring to an article entitled "Integration or Disintegration" published in the September, 1943, issue of a prominent British periodical, "The Nineteenth Century and After". In this article the Editor of the periodical explains that in the future re-adjustment of Europe Great Britain must not forget the traditional fundamental principle which for centuries has guided her own foreign policy, — the idea of *the balance of power*. According to the writer this balance of power is the only principle suited to act as the basis upon which to build up the new, unitary system of collective security in force equally for all nations, both great and small, and to create some kind of new League of Nations more perfect than the older one.

I have not had an opportunity to read the article in question *in extenso*; my knowledge of that article being restricted to the abstracts quoted in the Hungarian Press. But it is not difficult, with the help of a little imagination, to re-construct the train of political thought underlying the article. And at the same time, through the medium of the thousand-years' perspective of Hungarian history, it is an easy matter to establish that from time immemorial *Hungarian policy has — we may safely say — been inseparably interwoven with the balance-of-power conception*. It is equally easy to establish that after the first Great War it was the spiritual union primarily of muddle-headed economic experts and weak statesmen that led to the drafting of those treaties of peace which sowed the seeds of the second Great War and cast the "balance-of-power" principle on the dust-heap for the sake of dominance of the victors hatched in some kind of incubator. Jacques Bainville, the clearest-headed and most gifted of modern French political thinkers, already in

1920 ridiculed the fatal mistakes made in the Paris treaties of peace and with accurate precision prophesied all that actually ensued two decades later. Bainville's book of prophecies — "*Les conséquences politiques de la paix*" —, this work of foresight unparalleled in political literature, in 1920 offered what was a veritable itinerary of the second Great War, — and that in the year in which Dr. Beneš drafted the silliest construction of world history, the Little Entente. In this book Bainville declared that nothing sillier or more stupid could be imagined than the idea of entrusting to the leadership of the small Czech people confined within the grip of a thousand-year-old pincer — a people which, we might add, in the vista of ten centuries had always been the more or less deferential, but at all times practically shrewd, servant of some other, greater people — the control of the Danube Valley, an area of immense importance.

Bainville died without obtaining a hearing of his glorious French nation: and Beneš is still alive. But I have no doubt that the dead Bainville will be just as effectually present at the peace negotiations to be held in the near future as will the great dead son of Hungary, Paul Teleki... I firmly believe that their spirits will be present there together to represent *a purer and profounder interpretation of European history* and those constructive principles and conceptions of political intelligence and those sound means of political interpretation which have during the centuries manifested themselves *unalterably* and independently of the generations living today in the history of the nations and States of Europe.

We Hungarians have nothing to fear from a renaissance of historical and political valuation of the completest, most general and most universal spirit imaginable. For it is only in respect of certain episodes of our history that we may — perhaps — be open to indictment. But, seeing that a nation lives, not in space only, but in time too, we are entitled to demand *that the totality of our nation's and our State's achievements in world history should be taken into account when Hungary's spiritual and political value is assessed, her mission and her place in Europe determined*

and due credit given her as a factor of significance in the work of planning and organizing the New Europe.

And, if *Hungaria Aeterna* is placed in a thousand-years' perspective of the kind, we shall have no difficulty in understanding the misgivings of the writer of the above article in "*The Nineteenth Century and After*" respecting the European balance of power. We shall find it an easy matter to appreciate those misgivings, because during the course of its thousand-years' history, for roughly 600 years after its establishment, in anticipation of England herself, the Hungarian State — here, in the very heart of Europe — was a superb embodiment and a full realization of the political conception of a European balance of power. As early as the reign of St. Stephen we find traces of this endeavour of Hungarian policy to act as a factor of equilibrium and balance — of this grand mission and role of paramount importance — manifested clearly and most pronouncedly, with a consistency remaining unchanged throughout the chaotic changes of centuries. And this mission and this role developed in our nation on the one hand a certain spirit of impartiality, and on the other hand an attitude which was never aggressive, but at all times strictly one of self-defence, towards other European political and military factors, whether in the West or the East, in the North or the South.

The true spirit of Hungarian history, the superb political capacity of our nation and the paramount European importance and indestructibility of the Hungarian State-idea, are perhaps reflected by the centuries of misfortune, disunion and national and political dismemberment even more strikingly, more clearly and more unmistakably than by the glorious history of the first six centuries — of the reigns of the kings of the House of Árpád, of the Angevins and the Hunyadys. During the century and a half of Turkish occupation *the Hungarian Kingdom* — the Western part of disintegrated Hungary — struggled with all the resources at its disposal against Ottoman imperialism. At the same time *the independent Principality of Transylvania*, to some extent secure against interference by Constantinople, showed a readiness — practically from century to century — to use every effort (during the course of seven splendid wars of

independence) to prevent the Kingdom of Hungary proper (the sadly reduced Western half of the country) then struggling against the Turks being absorbed by the German-Roman Empire. By virtue of the soundness of its thousand-year-old State-structure and of the power of its grand State-idea, *which survived intact* even in the days of the country's dismemberment, our nation proved here — in the very heart of Europe — its loyalty to the great "balance-of-power" conception, as well as *the inseparability of the Hungarian State-idea and that grand conception involving a sublime mission -- that of equilibrisation.*

We see, then, that the political conception of a balance of forces, far from being strange to us, may *without exaggeration* be said to have existed in Hungary from the very outset, *the kings of the House of Árpád, the Angevins and the Hunyadys, who strove to perpetuate the political inheritance of St. Stephen, having been the first to represent and realize this sublime conception of a European balance of power.*

For those who think in Hungarian and respect Hungarian political culture it is therefore an easy matter to understand and appreciate the conception of a European balance of power. All we have to do is to expand and modernize one of the leading principles of the traditional policy of the Hungarian nation and apply it to Europe and indeed to the whole world.

The really great thinkers of history must frequently have found themselves in a serious dilemma when inquiring into the riddle of the thousand-years' existence of the Magyar people. For they have had to find some sort of explanation, not only for the first six hundred years of its undisturbed maintenance of the Hungarian State, but also for the unbroken spiritual and political continuation of that State during a century and a half of dismemberment when the country was divided into three distinct parts. And surely there is no other explanation of the historical fact of the unity of the Kingdom of St. Stephen, of its political coherence and of the legal continuity established by *Werböczy* in his *Tripartitum*, than *the circumstance that, even in the days when it was split into three parts by dismemberment, this nation and this State never lost its consciousness of its unity and continued un-*

*changed (Transylvania against the forces assailing the country from the West, and the Kingdom of Hungary proper against attacks from the East) to perform its great historical mission as a factor of equilibrium, protecting the liberty, not only of the Magyars, but also of the other peoples living here.*

Consequently, if there is any nation capable of understanding the great conception of a European balance of power, taught by a long series of bitter struggles for existence during the ten centuries of its history to abhor every system of hegemony and to instinctively comprehend and appreciate the historical significance of that great conception, — the Hungarian nation must surely take precedence in this respect of all other European peoples, and in particular of other peoples of Central Europe with a less glorious past behind them and less experience in this field. And that nation is thus best able to understand and appreciate also the warning words of the Editor of "The Nineteenth Century and After" when he declares that a re-adjustment of the world and a new, universal collective world-order *must be based primarily on a natural and organic balance of power.*

If this natural, organic balance of forces can be brought into being as *primary basis* and is *not upset by some form of brutal hegemony*, then it can be employed as a basis (and it is the only basis suitable for the purpose) for building up a farreaching and perfect universal system of security ensuring all small and great nations alike possibilities of freely asserting their legitimate claims.

The solutions put into force in 1919 and 1920 — solutions of an imperfect character revealing political incapacity — rejected the older British conception of a balance of forces which Great Britain had for centuries advocated, and at the same time annihilated historical Hungary. It is not difficult to prophesy that the success or failure of the new adjustment of the world will depend upon *whether it is built up on the basis of a balance of natural and organic forces* — upon whether that basis is made the foundation of the capital edifice comprised in the treaties of peace and more particularly of the system destined eventually to control and guide the lives of all free nations?

It is indubitable that the first of the fatal consequences

of the first Great War to make its appearance was the shelving of the European balance-of-power principle. Disavowing Wilson, the *United States of North America* withdrew from Europe and indeed refused to become a Party to the Covenant of the League of Nations. Great Britain surrendered the direction of the affairs of our Continent to France; and France, left to her own resources, constructed for her protection a bulwark of defence in the form of a worthless, historically and politically deformed abortion — a paper alliance of paltry nations and States. Great Britain — as a consequence of the suggestion and determination of weak statesmen and a generation which shrunk from every kind of sacrifice — actually renounced the balance-of-power conception which had from time immemorial been the pivot of British policy and entrusted to France the care of the Continent; and France proved incapable of adequately assessing and appreciating the political significance of the balance-of-power conception. Instead, that country, caught in the snares of a literal interpretation of worthless treaties, followed the primitive course of allowing itself to be cajoled by the political and military superstition of a purely theoretical security . . . That led to the failure of the policy of "*some kind of hegemony*"; and now that the second Great War is approaching its end, the great question arises — how and on the basis of which principles shall the re-adjustment of Europe be effected? Now, if we take into account all the experiences of the past and of the present, the only — and the best — thing we can suggest is *a return to the balance-of-power policy.*

*What is the meaning of the term "balance" politically, historically and sociologically? It means a judicious harmony of real forces. That is, — in the first place, an automatic elimination of all attempts to manipulate the forces in the interest of the one-sided hegemony of any Power in the future, not only in Europe, but in the whole "indivisible" world; in the second place, the frustration of every conjunctural exploitation of a situation by any nation or country such as was the role played and the power assumed for two decades by Beneš's Czecho-Slovakia, — one of the main sources of the present disastrous situation in Europe; in the*

third place, a conscious and deliberate exploitation of all the forces and so-called "key positions" peculiarly calculated and predestined by Nature, geography and history to act as a means of politically, economically and spiritually equilibrizing the antagonistic forces of the Great Powers, — such as, for instance, Sweden, Finland and Hungary; in the fourth place, the replacement of a policy of thwarting by a benevolent and conscious policy of encouraging, the natural and voluntary rapprochement, co-operation and federation of nations and countries in keeping with the postulates of history, geography and living political, cultural and economic interests, — such as, for instance, the rapprochement between Magyardom and the Southern Slav peoples; and, in the fifth place, a timely elimination of the system of local alliances of a purely mechanical character formed for the purpose of plunder or of retaining plunder already obtained, — such as, for instance, the Little Entente of ill-starred memory. In a word, the elimination from among the fundamental principles underlying the adjustment of the world of all motives of retaliation or remuneration.

Or, to put the matter in other words, "balance" means the creation of a basis enabling the organic forces of human society — or, to be more precise, of European society — to as far as possible automatically take their natural places in the new system and form their natural connections for themselves. This basis would then form the foundation upon which to erect the supreme international law structure (some kind of new and more perfect League of Nations) in which only an insignificant role would be played by the idea or the means of compulsion, — which would not be merely a kind of independent power structure, but the completion of the re-adjustment of the world brought to its culmination gradually and organically on the foundations of a balance of power.

It is manifest that from a higher world-adjustment of the kind to be based upon balance it would be quite impossible to exclude the smaller nations and countries. Such exclusion would also involve ingratitude and would render the failure of that adjustment inevitable. How would it be possible, for instance, to ignore Switzerland when effecting

a re-adjustment of the world, — in view of the enormous services to the cause of the whole of mankind rendered by that small country, *which in consequence has risen veritably to the rank of a moral Great Power?* Particularly when we remember — a point so irrefutably stressed by Neergaard, the eminent Swiss professor of biology — that *the organic character and perfection of Switzerland's State and social system (which includes a most ingenious and wise elimination of the danger of disunion latent in the primitive system of numerical majorities)* is predestined to act in advance as an inspiration on those responsible for the re-adjustment of the world and offer them the guidance of the wonderful example it has set the world?

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