

ANSWER TO A REFUGEE CZECH "SPOKESMAN"

BY

ANDREW BAJCSY-ZSILINSZKY

Today, while the political life and Press of Switzerland, Sweden, Finland, Turkey and Hungary are flooded with declarations insisting upon the independence, equality of rights, free development and right of self-determination, and showing the greatness of the human mission, of the so-called small peoples, — the urgency of the insistence increasing in intensity as we approach the end of the war —, while the conscience of practically the whole of humanity is being stirred *to draft intelligent and well-intentioned plans and to prepare the way for the reconciliation of peoples and minds indispensable to an honest and just re-adjustment of the world* —, the refugee Czech Government continues (a procedure in which it remains to all intents and purposes in isolation) to sing the old refrain of paltry, mean and trivial hatred and denunciation, particularly against Hungary and the Hungarians. Indeed, it can scarcely be said that it is continuing where it formerly left off; for it has in reality never for a moment ceased to blazon this blatant, preposterous anti-Magyar propaganda reminding us so vividly of the swollen-cheeked zeal and musical standard of the traditional provincial Bohemian brass-bands.

We Hungarians are not the only people to remind the leaders of our bad neighbours (bad neighbours of ours for centuries) who have fled abroad to evade all responsibility, of the truth that the better conscience of humanity is not likely to estimate this paltry, spiteful propagandism based chiefly on lies and perversions than did Lloyd George in Chapter II. of his "The Truth about the Peace Treaties" — a work published in 1938, — to which I shall return later on.

I must confess that I feel rather ashamed at having

to refer — before quoting one or two passages from the book written by the old Lion of Wales, Prime Minister of Great Britain during the first Great War — to the words of an insignificant and anonymous personage (one of the "spokesmen" of the Foreign Ministry of the "refugee" Czech Government) whose sole claim to have his words echoed and answered in the Hungarian Press is that those words *so typically reflect the attitude shown towards and the arguments employed against Hungary by Czech policy.*

Quite recently this "spokesman" delivered an address concerning the importance of the Czechoslovak-Soviet treaty in the course of which he *found time also to treat Hungary* to the usual censure and fatherly advice. The part of this address — broadcast by the B. B. C. — of particular interest to us was that relating to Hungary. The "spokesman" first of all explained that the peace to be concluded must rest on general moral principles, for which reason it would be a fundamental mistake *to allow the aggressive States to retain the booty grabbed by them,* — meaning, of course, to allow Hungary to retain possession of the territories *received by the Budapest Governments as gifts* from Germany and Italy in return for their loyal services to Fascism and National Socialism, as well as of the territories forcibly occupied by those Governments.

All this talk about "gifts" was very effectually answered by Premier Kállay too in the speech made by him during the debate on the Appropriation Bill. Czech propaganda describes as such a "gift" received in return for loyal services also the narrow strip of frontier territory inhabited by Magyars which Hungary occupied in terms of the first Vienna Award. That propaganda would suggest that this decision was *the only title* of Hungary to the possession of this territory, — thereby making the frontier-line determined by the Treaty of Trianon appear in the guise of some unalterable "*res judicata*", whereas Hungary's claim to this territory is *a claim based on a thousand years of history, the Hungarian title dating back a thousand years being rooted, not merely in ten centuries of possession, but also in the higher political, geographical and economic*

logic and indivisibility symbolized by the ring of the Carpathians.

But, ready as the "spokesman" of the Czech refugees may be to ignore statistical data and the facts of history and at the same time to forget that in the territory in question *a title to possession of a thousand years' standing faces a claim based upon twenty years' occupation*, he will probably devote more attention to this question, if we reproduce for his benefit certain points made by Lloyd George in the work already referred to which do not show any particular variance from the Vienna Award and *prior to the determination of that Award* seriously undermined — at least in principle — the authority of the Trianon frontiers. We find *Lloyd George* writing, *inter alia*, that "when the time came to discuss the frontiers of Slovakia, in connection with which the demand put forward by the Czechoslovak Government involved the incorporation of a large number of Magyars, Dr. Beneš said that "it was for reasons of principle that the demand for the Danube frontier had been put forward. Slovakia was a Danubian State. In the days of the invasion of the Magyars *the whole of Pannonia was occupied by the Slovaks*. The Magyars drove the Slovaks into the hills and, clearing the right bank of the Danube of them, came into contact with the Germanic peoples. The Slovaks remained, however, on the left bank of the Danube, where they were more or less Magyarized. In the villages of the northern districts the lower classes of the population are Slovaks; only the upper classes have been artificially transformed into Magyars."

"I asked" — continues Lloyd George — "what was the proportion of Slovak inhabitants in the Danubian regions. Dr. Beneš replied that "by obtaining possession of this territory the Czecho-Slovak State would incorporate roughly 350.000 Magyars (a statement which was later shown to be an underestimation) . . ."

"... Dr. Beneš then submitted an audacious and indefensible proposal. He requested that Czecho-Slovakia should be connected with Yugoslavia by a corridor. The scheme could be realized — he said — by marking out a narrow strip of territory to be placed under Czech or

Yugoslav control or under the control of the League of Nations which would enable adequate traffic to be ensured.

"The questions I put to Dr. Beneš showed that *I was seriously averse to the incorporation of this territory inhabited by Germans and Magyars. It meant turning our backs on those principles which the Allies had proclaimed during the course of the War. Dr. Beneš adduced historical — though primarily economic — arguments in support of his demands. His proposals were so disconcerting that I asked General Smuts, when he visited Budapest to inquire into the Béla Kun affair, to go on to Prague to investigate the possible effects of the proposals and then to report to me. The inquiries made by him on the spot raised serious doubts in his mind as to the justifiability and fairness of the proposals by means of which the Czechs desired to extent the territory of their State as far as the Danube, regardless of the racial composition of the population. On the occasion of his visit to President Masaryk Smuts most decidedly expressed his doubts and misgivings. He explained to the President the grave undesirability of incorporating in the Czecho-Slovak State the very considerable number of pure Magyar inhabitants living to the north of the Danube. According to Smuts's report President Masaryk declared he was quite willing to renounce his claims relating to the Magyar territories and to withdraw the Czech frontier-line northwards, leaving the whole of this ethnologically Magyar territory in the possession of Hungary, but that on the other hand he made it a condition that Czecho-Slovakia should receive a small area of Hungarian territory on the other bank of the Danube, opposite Pozsony. General Smuts most decidedly demanded that the Czechs should agree to this exchange, explaining his reasons as follows: — "The incorporation of a few million Germans in the north of Bohemia and of some 4—500.000 Magyars in addition in the south, will confront the young State with a serious problem, apart from involving also a grave outrage on the nationality principle."*

"When the Big Four discussed this proposal, Dr. Beneš declared that President Masaryk had been completely

misunderstood and that he had never agreed to this proposal. Of the many misfortunes that overtook Austria in the days of her catastrophe the worst was that Czecho-Slovakia was represented at the Peace Conference, not by her wise leader, President Masaryk, but by *an impulsive, well-meaning but less sagacious and very short-sighted politician who was unable to understand the truth of the saying "grasp all, lose all"*. But the Allies were particularly anxious to please the Czechs. The Czechs had rendered considerable service to the cause of the Allies by starting the disruption of the Austrian army which hastened the process of disintegration and undermined its strategic value. The result was that *the Allies recognized the polyglot and incoherent Czecho-Slovak State and approved the incorporation in this State of many hundreds of thousands of protesting Magyars and of several million furious Germans. And, the greater their indignation, the less the consideration shown for them by the Czech State. That was the origin of the present unrest.*"

This frank confession on the part of Lloyd George — a confession by no means flattering to Dr. Beneš which is so effectually supported by the opinion of General Smuts based upon personal experience — is evidently not particularly calculated to confirm the implicit faith of the London Czech "spokesman" in the force and immutability of *the claim based upon the Treaty of Trianon*.

But it is quite unnecessary to go so far back as the book by Lloyd George which appeared in 1938; for we find the same attitude — naturally expressed in far more general terms — in the latest Message to Congress of the President of the United States of North America.

Quite recently President Roosevelt made the following statement respecting the 1918 peace treaties:

"The result was a peace which in reality was no peace at all. That is the error which we do not wish to commit again in the present War."

And in a later passage of the Message the President made the following declaration: — "In the second place I desire a legislative measure rendering possible a reconsideration of the war treaties which *shall preclude all*

excessive gain and prevent any one obtaining profits to which he is not entitled."

The President was evidently thinking of war profits; but what applies to individuals, applies to States too: therefore, this fundamental principle is nevertheless an answer to those *political aspirations and endeavours which would fain, with the aid of the method of the least possible risk and the greatest possible obtrusion and readiness to serve which on a previous occasion proved so successful, once more attempt on a strictly business basis to spoil the efforts to be made in the immediate future to achieve a straightforward reconciliation of the peoples of Central Europe and an agreement between those peoples in keeping with their real political and intellectual significance and their value.*

This traditional Czech spirit and method — that of the least possible risk and the extortion of the greatest possible profit — is familiar to us from the first Great War, when, apart from shirking all risk as members of the Austro-Hungarian Army, the Czechs at the same time (this being admitted by Beneš himself in his Memoirs) painfully organized the Czecho-Slovak Legion; with the exception of a few small formations engaged in Italy in what was really auxiliary service, resorting to complicated methods of organization, training and officiousness, *they succeeded in temporizing in France until the Armistice, practically without having even been near the fighting line.* Take the present War too: all we need do is to contrast the surrender of Bohemia, almost without firing a single shot, with the heroic defiance of our kinsmen, the Finns, if we would estimate at its proper value the self-respect of the "Czecho-Slovaks" now once more riding the high horse. These "Czecho-Slovaks" once more indulge in the belief that without running any risks — and with hollow and transparent machinations — they will be again able for the second time to master all the contingencies and exploit every conjuncture of the War... They forget that a terrible moral and political responsibility devolves upon this pettifogging egoism on the part of Dr. Beneš and his associates also for having contributed very largely to

provoke the second Great War by the foolish, paltry action of the Little Entente in thwarting and frustrating all efforts to implement a straightforward reconciliation and agreement between the peoples of the Danubian Basin...

Our Czech "spokesman" at the same time offers Hungary sage advice relative to "internal renaissance" and "democratization". Not quite a hundred years ago, in 1849, when Austria and Russia combined forces to overthrow the efforts of Kossuth and Görgei to achieve Hungarian independence — a struggle in which large numbers of the sons of Poland very effectually supported their sister-nation, the Magyars, the youth of Vienna having also contributed a Legion of their own to fight shoulder to shoulder with the Magyars —, the contribution of Bohemia towards the grand effort of the Magyars to achieve liberty, independence and democracy, was, not a legion of auxiliaries to further the achievement of that object, but — the bulk of the so-called "Bach hussars", the willing henchmen of imperial absolutism who distinguished themselves by abject obsequiousness to their superiors and by extreme brutality in their treatment of the unfortunate Magyar people which had been downtrodden and left at their mercy. And during the half-century of the Dual Monarchy too the principal agent and chief beneficiary of the Vienna centralism of this system was the manufacturing industry of Bohemia, another section of the Czech people having simultaneously worked surreptitiously like so many woodworms fretting and undermining the structure of the Monarchy. *Then, while the revolutionary movement of Beneš and his associates (a movement working cautiously and without running any risks which eventually triumphed) contributed effectually — as revealed also by the words of Lloyd George — to undermine the Dual Monarchy which was actually in many respects suffering from debility, in the first Great War there were still far more Czech than Magyar generals holding the highest military offices in the Monarchy. And the chief gentleman-usher in attendance on our great sovereign, Francis Joseph I., bore the name, not of Nagy, but of Nepalek...*

I have no desire to hurt the feelings of the good,

industrious Czech people, which during the reigns of the kings of our House of Árpád was for centuries our ally and in many respects really shared our destiny. But the brutal and petty egoism and malevolence still for some inexplicable reason actuating Czech leaders of all descriptions — whether "refugees" or not — to adopt a hostile attitude towards the Magyars, who have suffered far more than their own people, exempts the Hungarian chronicler taking part in the events of these times of trial from the obligation of *politesse*. And the son of that Magyar people which, while it has never been capable of any kind of hatred or spite, is all the more jealous of its own dignity, cannot refrain from voicing the truth so bitter to our Czech neighbours at the present juncture, — the truth that *the whole course of Czech history is one long record of blind irresolution and vacillation between obsequious submission to the mighty — to superior force — on the one hand and a periodical fantastic megalomania*. A representative of this megalomania was Ottocar II., who after a decade of predatory warfare was finally overthrown, on the plain watered by the Morava, by the Hungarian king, Ladislas "the Cumanian". Another representative of this same megalomania was the equally capable George of Podébrady, whose dreams were shattered by King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary. In the same category we must place Dr. Beneš too, who refuses to realize that *no machinations whatsoever will ever make Prague the centre of the Valley of the Danube, and that the leadership of the free Danubian peoples cannot possibly be entrusted to a people utterly unfitted for the task, — that Czech people which, though undoubtedly in many respects of great value and of high deserts, has during the greater part of its tragical history been in the service of other, greater peoples — sometimes by compulsion, at other times voluntarily and of its own accord — and whose political capabilities have in the course of its history developed in the direction of a paltry, narrow-minded egoism devoid of all higher political conceptions*.

So these Czech — or, if you prefer, Czecho-Slovak — "spokesmen" should leave the question of Hungarian

democracy to the Hungarians. In any case it is an easy matter to guess that to them Hungarian democracy means some sort of *Hungarian minimalism* — in the spirit of the collapse of Hungary ensuing in 1918 to the accompaniment of democratic catchwords. Did these men suspect that true Hungarian democracy means, *not the renunciation of Hungary's historical claims, but on the contrary an enhanced unification of the millions of Hungarians in the service of those claims and the objects incidental to those claims*, they would immediately cease propagating Hungarian democracy. We Members of the Hungarian Opposition are at variance with our Government; and, as is the case in other countries too, there is plenty of room for improvement and reform (we need only think of the Beveridge Plan or the most recent Five Points submitted by President Roosevelt); yes, we have plenty of demands to make respecting the *acceleration of the reform work, social development, a more perfect national self-government and the further democratization of the country. But every respectable and self-respecting Hungarian, whether a Member of the Government Party or of the Opposition* — and this fact must sooner or later be taken cognizance of everywhere in the world, by friend and by foe alike — *stands for historical Hungary, for a maintenance intact of the conceptions and the territory of that Hungary. And the further democratization which we demand cannot but serve to enhance the enthusiastic and unswerving loyalty of the whole Hungarian nation to its own thousand-year-old traditions.* This nation is not prepared to renounce the mission appointed for it by Fate, — a mission meaning *the rule of equity and humanity in the Middle Danube Basin, in the very heart of Europe.* It must not be thought that we regard as perfect our internal machinery; what inspires us is *a spirit of honest self-knowledge which tells us that, though there is abundance of room for improvement at home, in our blood and our nerve-system there lives a spirit of liberty, of self-government, of an ability to govern, of racial tolerance and of humanity. Therefore we have — and must have — a mission to perform and a role of importance to play in the work of re-adjusting this unfor-*

tunate European world of ours labouring amid the symptoms of the inner and outer anarchy of spiritual insanity. I would like to conclude by referring to a point of historical philosophy revealed to me by my knowledge of Central European history. One of the differences between Bohemia and Hungary is that as a consequence of the historical conditions of many centuries the Czech people has learned better than the Hungarians the art of adjusting itself to more powerful factors, and has proved able to extract from exceptionally unfavourable conditions of settlement and other circumstances benefits quite out of proportion to the virtual power which it has at all times represented. Hungary and the Hungarian nation on the contrary have for at least 400 years, in the course of which they have made immeasurable sacrifices of life and other values, failed to obtain results in any way proportionate to their real and virtual power. During these centuries Hungary proved unable to exploit her position or deploy her forces; though it is equally true that she did not fritter them away. That was how she remained in Central Europe the country of unexploited and unexhausted vast inner energies. It would be a grave mistake if the great inner, virtual power of the Magyars enhanced by the central position of their country were left out of account by those — whoever they may be — upon whom the duty of re-adjusting the world devolves.