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HUNGARIAN AMERICANS AND THE MOTHER COUNTRY:
RELATIONS WITH HUNGARY
THROUGH THE TWENTIETH CENTURY²

The relationship between Hungarian-Americans and the mother country has never been free of problems and conflicts even in periods when Hungary had a reasonably representative government. This applies equally to the pre-World War I period, the interwar years, as well as to the period since the collapse of communism. Not even the rise of various democratic parliamentary governments, headed by such freely elected prime ministers as József Antall, Péter Boross, Gyula Horn, Viktor Orbán, and Péter Medgyessy altered the picture. Even during these periods a number of Hungarian-Americans felt either disregarded, or unable to agree with many of the policies of their mother country's governments.³

¹ In Hungarian the author publishes under the name "Várdy Béla".

² A shorter version of this paper was presented at the Twenty-Fifth Annual Conference of the American Hungarian Educators' Association, Budapest, Hungary, in the spring of 1999. This study is based to a large degree the author's book, *Magyarok az Újvilágban. Az észak-amerikai magyarság rendhagyó története [Hungarians in the New World. An Unorthodox History of Hungarians of North America]*. Budapest: A Magyar Nyelv és Kultúra Nemzetközi Társasága, 2000), chs. 25-26, 30-35. Because of unexpected publication delays, it has been slightly updated.

³ For the post-communist period, see GYULA BORBÁNDI, *Emigráció és Magyarország. Nyugati Magyarok a változás éveiben, 1985-1995*. Basel-Budapest: Európai Protestáns Magyar Szabadegyetem, 1996, pp. 344-401; BÉLA VÁRDY and ÁGNES HUSZÁR VÁRDY, "A hazai és a nyugati magyarság viszonyának alakulása a rendszerváltás után, nyugati szemszögből nézve," in *Korunk* (Kolozsvár-Cluj), Third Series, vol. 7, no. 12, December, 1996, pp. 84-105; BÉLA VÁRDY and ÁGNES HUSZÁR VÁRDY, "Észrevételek a hazai és a nyugati magyarság viszonyának alakulására a rendszerváltást követő években," Part I, in *Itt-Ott* (Ada, Ohio), vol. 30, no. 1 (128), Spring 1977, pp. 38-46; and Part I, in *Itt-Ott* (Ada, Ohio), vol. 30, no. 2 (129), Fall 1977, pp. 36-44; and

If this was so during periods of stable democratic, or at least moderately representative governments, how much more was this true when Hungary's political structure was authoritarian and unrepresentative of the views of the expatriates — be these political or economic immigrants. This was certainly true for the five decades between the start of World War II and the collapse of communism: a period that witnessed the destruction of Hungary's traditional civic society by both the old and the new order (1941-1948), the rise of Stalinist dictatorship (1948-1953), the temporary thaw and the anti-Soviet Revolution of 1956 (1953-1956), the period of retributions (1957-1963), the launching of Kádár's liberalization policies (1963-1970), the regime's transformation into the widely praised "goulash communism" (1970s-1980s), and finally the collapse of the whole communist system (1989) and the rise of a democratically elected government (1990). To a lesser degree, the immigrants' displeasure had surfaced even during such reasonably lawful periods as the Age of Dualism (1867-1918) and the interwar years (1918-1941).⁴

The Dualist Period

During the Age of Dualism, the wrath of the immigrants was directed partially against the Habsburgs, who were generally viewed as bulwarks to Hungary's national independence and political freedom; and partially against the country's semi-feudal landowners, who were rightfully regarded as the exploiters of the Hungarian peasant masses, and the primary causes of their migration across the sea in search for a better way of life.

During this same period, the Hungarian Government appeared to care very little about Hungarian-Americans, although there were some efforts to stem the tide of mass emigration. Many politicians paid lip service to the negative effects of this exodus,

BÉLA VÁRDY, "Rendszerváltás nyolc éves késéssel. Magyar-magyar viszony az 1990-es években," in *Valóság* (Budapest), vol. 42, no. 5, May 1999, pp. 60-75; reprinted in a shorter form in *A XXXVIII. Magyar Találkozó Krónikája*, ed. GYULA NÁDAS. Cleveland, Ohio: Árpád Könyvkiadó Vállalat, 1999, pp. 41-59.

⁴ Although the war in Europe took place between September 1939 and April 1945, Hungary did not join the war until June 1941.

but Hungary's agrarian elite appeared to be more concerned with the adverse economic impact of this emigration upon their own class position, than with its implications for the future of the nation as a whole.

Because of this rising concern, in 1905 the Hungarian Government initiated the so-called "Hungarian Action," which turned out to be a concerted effort to retain the emigrants' affection and attachment to the mother country, with the ultimate goal of their repatriation.⁵ The Hungarian Government undertook to subsidize clergymen of various denominations, as well as teachers and journalists, in return for the latter's efforts to perpetuate Hungarian national consciousness among the immigrants. In light of the defeat in World War I and the resulting dismemberment of the Habsburg Empire, and therein of Historic Hungary, this action produced very few positive results. Three-fourths of the immigrants ultimately stayed in America, and their offspring became rapidly Americanized. Some of this Americanization, by the way, was the result of the officially championed Americanization movement during the latter part of World War I and the early 1920s.⁶

The decision to remain in America, however, did not alter the immigrants' attachment to the mother country. In point of fact, in light of their decision to stay, the emotional content of their patriotic attachment increased significantly. It manifested itself in various ways, but most importantly in their effort to help the

⁵ Concerning the "American Action", see, PAULA K. BENKART, *Religion, Family, and Community among Hungarians Migrating to American Cities, 1880-1930*. Baltimore, Maryland: Ph.D. Dissertation, The Johns Hopkins University, 1975, pp. 59-101; PAULA K. BENKART, "Hungarians," in *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, ed. STEPHAN THERNSTROM, et al. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980, pp. 468-669; BÉLA VASSADY, "The 'Homeland Cause' as Stimulant to Ethnic Unity: The Hungarian-American Response to Károlyi's 1914 American Tour," in *Journal of American Ethnic History*, vol. 2, no. 1, Fall 1982, pp. 41-42; STEVEN BÉLA VÁRDY, *The Hungarian-Americans*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985, pp. 87-88; and JULIANNA PUSKÁS, *Kivándorló magyarok az Egyesült Államokban, 1880-1940*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1982, pp. 260-269.

⁶ Concerning the "Americanization Movement," see ROBERT E. PARK, *The Immigrant Press and its Control*. New York: Harper, 1992; reprinted by Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, 1970, pp. 430-32; GEORGE BÁRÁNY, "The Magyars," in *The Immigrants' Influence on Wilson's Peace Policies*, ed. JOSEPH P. O'GRADY. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967, pp. 140-172; PUSKÁS, *Kivándorló magyarok az Egyesült Államokban*, pp. 303-312; and VÁRDY, *The Hungarian-Americans*, pp. 88-91.

mother country amidst the miseries that have been hoisted upon it by the postwar treaties.

Interwar Period

Although few of the immigrants believed that the restoration of the old order in 1920 was an ideal solution for Hungary, a huge majority of them still preferred the Horthy-regime over Béla Kun (1886-1939) and his radical Bolsheviks of 1919. Moreover, whatever dislike they may have had for interwar Hungary's "neo-Baroque society,"⁷ this antipathy was more than counterbalanced by their hurt nationalism and by their simultaneous determination to support Hungary's struggle for territorial revisionism.

At the very same time and for the same reason, Hungary's politicians and national leaders also discovered their brethren across the sea. They recognized the depth of the expatriates' emotional attachment to their former homeland, and they hoped to channel this attachment in a way that would aid Hungary's economic and political interests. To this end they initiated a whole barrage of propaganda activities. These included the sending of a stream of prominent Hungarian visitors to the United States to reaffirm emotional contacts with the immigrants, and the mobilization of various patriotic Hungarian-American organizations against the Treaty of Trianon, and in favor of territorial revisions.⁸

The only segment of the Hungarian-American community that persisted in its opposition to the Horthy-regime consisted of those avowed leftists and communists who had lost out in 1919, and then emigrated to the United States or Canada. Those among them who were unable to gain appointments at institutions of higher learning or other centers of intellectual endeavor congregated around the communist daily *Új Előre* (1922-1937) and its successors in New York,⁹ and the equally communist weekly *Kanadai Magyar*

⁷ This term, in reference to the Horthy-regime, was first coined and used by GYULA SZEKFŰ in his *Három nemzedék és ami utána következik*. Budapest: Király Magyar Egyetemi Nyomda, 1934, p. 410.

⁸ Concerning this mobilization, see JENŐ PIVÁNY, *Egy amerikai kiküldetés története*. Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Szövetség, 1943, pp. 95-96; and PUSKÁS, *Kivándorló magyarok az Egyesült Államokban*, p. 326.

⁹ This communist paper was originally founded as *Előre* (1905-1921). During the

Munkás [Canadian Hungarian Worker] (1929-1964) in Toronto.¹⁰

On the eve of World War II, the majority of the Hungarian-Americans were enthusiastic in their supported Hungary's reacquisition of some of the lost territories from Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia. This was all the more so as these territorial revisions were justifiable ethnically, linguistically, as well as historically. Hungarian-Americans were solid in their support of Hungary's territorial gains, even though they disapproved of their homeland's consequent military alliance with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.

At the same time there were also those — the communists, crypto-communists, and various left leaning liberals — who were convinced that not even ethnically and the linguistically justifiable territorial gains could validate Hungary's position within the Axis camp. This naturally resulted in a bitter controversy between the two expatriate camps. They resorted to bitter political wranglings and name callings, labeling each other "fascists" and "communists," respectively. During the height of this controversy, the two main combatants were the "Movement for Independent Hungary" [MIH] headed by Tibor Eckhardt, and the "American Federation of Democratic Hungarians" [AFDH] headed by Ruzstem Vámbéry — the former representing the "nationalist" majority, and the latter the "internationalist" minority.¹¹

height of the Red Scare it was shut down and the refounded as *Új Előre* (1921-1937). In 1937 it collapsed because of lack of support, but then was refounded once more as a crypto-communist United Front paper, named in rapid succession *Amerikai Magyar Világ* (1937-1938), *Amerikai Magyar Jövő* (1938-1952), and the finally the still existing *Amerikai Magyar Szó* (1952-). See JÓZSEF KOVÁCS, *A szocialista magyar irodalom dokumentumai az amerikai magyar sajtóban, 1920-1945*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1977, pp. 19-41.

¹⁰ Concerning the *Kanadai Magyar Munkás* and the activities of those who congregated around it, see CARMELA PATRIAS, *Patriots and Proletarians: Politicizing Hungarian Immigrants in Interwar Canada*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994, pp. 149-166. For related issues, see NÁNDOR F. DREISZIGER, "In Search of a Hungarian-Canadian Lobby: 1927-1951," in *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, vol. 12, no. 3, 1980, pp. 81-97; NÁNDOR F. DREISZIGER, "Mission Impossible: Secret Plans for a Hungarian Government-in-Exile in Canada during World War II", in *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, vol. 30, no. 2, 1988, pp. 245-262; and NÁNDOR F. DREISZIGER, et al., *Struggle and Hope. The Hungarian-Canadian Experience*. Toronto: McClellan and Stewart Ltd., 1982, pp. 125-128.

¹¹ On the activities of Hungarian-Americans during World War II, see BÉLA VÁRDY, "Az amerikai magyarság a második világháború viharaiban," in *Valóság* (Budapest),

The MIH was founded in 1941 by the former leader of the Smallholders' Party, Tibor Eckhardt (1888-1972), who "defected" to the United States with the tacit approval of the Hungarian Government for the purposes of becoming Hungary's spokesman in the West. His organization enjoyed the secret financial support of the Horthy-regime, as well as the full backing of the recently resurrected American Hungarian Federation. It also had the sympathy and support of the broad segment of the Hungarian-American community, which — although anti-Hitler and anti-German — believed in the justness and fairness of Hungary's revisionist gains, and felt that their mother country was but a pawn in the hands of Nazi Germany. On top of this all, Eckhardt and the MIH was also aided by the effective lobbying activities of Archduke Otto von Habsburg (b.1912) on behalf of Hungary. Archduke Otto had established a close working relationship with President Franklin D. Roosevelt (r.1933-1945) immediately after his coming to the United States in 1940, and he kept Eckhardt and the Hungarian Government up to date on developments with respect to Hungary. For a brief moment of history there was even a hope that with Roosevelt's help Otto may be able to reestablish the former Habsburg Empire in the form of a Central European Confederation.¹² In point of fact, in early 1943 there was even an attempt to establish a so-called "Habsburg Legion" through the inclusion of all emigré Austrians and Hungarians in the United States.¹³

The rival AFDH was under the leadership of Rusztem Vámbéry (1872-1948), a noted legal scholar with leftist sympathies, who

vol. 42, no. 1, January 1999, pp. 63-74; and STEVEN BÉLA VÁRDY, "Hungarian-Americans during World War II: Their Role in Defending Hungary's Interests," in *Ideology, Politics and Diplomacy in East Central Europe*, ed. M. B. B. BISKUPSKI. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2003), pp. 120-146.

¹² On Archduke Otto von Habsburg's activities in the United States during World War II, see BÉLA VÁRDY, "Az amerikai magyar emigráció és Habsburg Ottó viszony a második világháború alatt és után," in *Valóság*, vol. 41, no. 7, July 1998, pp. 37-48; and STEVEN BÉLA VÁRDY, "Archduke Otto von Habsburg and American Hungarian Emigrés during and after World War II," in *East European Quarterly*, vol. 36, no. 4 (January 2003), pp. 441-463.

¹³ Concerning the Habsburg Legion, see the personal reminiscences of the noted poet, GYÖRGY FALUDY, in his *Jegyzetek az esőerdőből*. Budapest: Magyar Világ Kiadó, 1991, p. 15. (Co-authored with ERIC JOHNSON).

was the son of the internationally known Orientalist, Árminus Vámbéry (1832-1913). Ruzstem Vámbéry enlisted the support of a whole spectrum of fellow leftist liberals, whose ranks included the prominent sociologist Oscar Jászi (1875-1957), the Dracula film star Béla Lugosi (1883-1956), and the artist-photographer László Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946). But his supporters also included the communist agitators and undereducated proletariat who congregated around the *Új Előre* and its successor, the *Amerikai Magyar Jövő*, under the editorship of János Gyetvai [Nagy] (1898-1967). Vámbéry likewise had the sympathy and support of the London-based Count Mihály Károlyi (1875-1955), who by the early forties had become completely enamored with Stalin and the Soviet Union, and was known widely as the "Red Count."¹⁴

Hungary's impossible position as Nazi Germany's "unwilling satellite" made this rivalry into a rather unequal match.¹⁵ Eckhardt's past as a former member of the so-called *Ébredő Magyarok* [Awakening Hungarians] and the *Fajvédő Párt* [Race-Protecting Party] in the early 1920s, soon pushed him out of the MIH's leadership. The defense of Hungary's national interests now reverted to the American Hungarian Federation under the *de facto* leadership of Professor Tibor Kerekes (1893-1969) of Georgetown University. The results, however, were anything but desirable. Towards the end of World War II, Hungary came under Soviet occupation. Its borders were pushed back to the clearly unjustifiable Trianon frontiers, and it also lost three additional villages to Slovakia. Moreover, by 1948 it had become a full-fledged Soviet satellite under the leadership of Hungary's "Little Stalin," Mátyás Rákosi (1898-1971).¹⁶

¹⁴ This view about Károlyi is clearly expressed in many contemporary Hungarian and Hungarian-American publications, including the one by the editor of the *Amerikai Magyar Népszava*, PAUL NADÁNYI, in his summary of Eckhardt's movement, *The "Free Hungary" Movement*, rev. ed. New York: The Amerikai Magyar Népszava, 1942. In this less than fully detached study Nadányi calls Károlyi the "Red Count" and refers to Ruzstem Vámbéry, who at that time was already teaching at the New York-based New School for Social Research, as the "Count's Jester," p. 53.

¹⁵ The term "unwilling satellite" was coined by the U. S. Ambassador to Hungary, JOHN FLOURNOY MONTGOMERY, in his *Hungary, the Unwilling Satellite*. New York: The Devin-Adair Company, 1947; reprinted by Vista Books in Morristown, New Jersey, 1993; translated and published in Hungarian as *Magyarország, a vonakodó csatlós*. Budapest: Zrínyi Kiadó, 1993.

¹⁶ In addition to the articles listed in notes 8 and 9, see also SÁNDOR SZILASSY, "Az

These results, however, had very little to do with Vámbéry's and the AFDH's activities, but very much with the outcome of the war. In point of fact, the AFDH had next to no support among mainline Hungarian-Americans, and it simply faded away toward the end of the war. Some of its leaders and spokesmen — such as Ruzstem Vámbéry, Mihály Károlyi, and János Gyetvai [Nagy] of the *Új Előre* and the *Amerikai Magyar Jövő* — repatriated to Hungary. Initially they were given important political and diplomatic posts. Vámbéry was appointed Hungary's Ambassador to the United States (1947-1948), Károlyi was named Hungarian Ambassador to France (1947-1949), while Gyetvai became Hungary's Ambassador to Turkey (1949-1950). In the course of time, however, they too became disenchanted with political developments in Hungary. Consequently, following the complete communist takeover and the resulting political purges, they either receded into the background (Gyetvai), or defected from their appointed posts, and asked for political asylum in the West: Vámbéry in the United States and Károlyi in France.¹⁷

World War II and the Cold War

During World War II, the official relationship between Hungary and the United States deteriorated progressively. In March 1941, Ambassador John F. Montgomery left the country, and on December 13, 1941 — under German pressure — Hungary declared war on the United States. This declaration, however, had never been sanctioned by the Hungarian Parliament, nor signed by Regent Horthy.¹⁸ Thus, President Roosevelt simply ignored it until June 2, 1942, when he finally acknowledged it to the U.S. Congress.

amerikai magyarság a második világháborúban," in *Új Látóhatár*, vol. 30, nos. 1-2, June 1979, pp. 138-143.

¹⁷ For a summary of United States-Hungarian relations during the interwar and war years, see MARK IMRE MAJOR, *American-Hungarian Relations, 1918-1944*. Astor, FL: Danubian Press, Inc., 1974.

¹⁸ These facts are emphasized by Ambassador Montgomery, according to whom this "declaration of war" took place as follows: "Bárdossy called up the [American] legation and informed them that a state of war existed, but he insisted that it was not a declaration of war. He was asked to put this statement in writing, but was reluctant to do so. Upon being informed that no attention would be paid a verbal

After the conclusion of the war, U.S.-Hungarian diplomatic relations were gradually restored. In January 1946, Arthur Schoenfeld was appointed United States Ambassador to Hungary, while Aladár Szegedy-Maszák (1903-1988) became Hungarian Ambassador to the United States. In 1947 the latter resigned and was replaced by Ruzstem Vámbéry, who also resigned in early 1948 because of Hungary's progressive takeover by the communists.

These developments, however, were paralleled by the simultaneous intensification of the Cold War between the two superpowers, and the gradual worsening of the relationship between Hungary and the United States. As a result, the United States, its Western allies, and everyone connected with the West came to be viewed in Hungary with suspicion, and also became possible targets for political persecution.¹⁹

By May 1947, when Hungary's coalition government headed by Ferenc Nagy (1903-1979) and the Smallholders Party was pushed out of power, most of the Hungarian state property that had been taken to Nazi Germany had been repatriated. But the Hungarian Government's repeated demands notwithstanding, the United States refused to repatriate Hungary's Holy Crown. Moreover, in light of the undermining of Hungary's constitutionally elected government, the United States also vetoed Hungary's membership in the UN, began to beam Western news broadcasts to Hungary via the Voice of America, and stopped all further restitutions to the country. In

statement, he sent a letter of confirmation. In this letter he reiterated that it was not to be regarded as a declaration of war, but that the Hungarian government considered a state of war existed between the two countries. Apparently Bárdossy realized that he could not get the consent either of parliament or the Regent to a formal declaration of war. When the first secretary of the legation, Mr. Travers, made his good-by call on the Regent, the latter said to him: 'Remember that this so-called declaration of war is not legal; not approved by the parliament, not signed by me.' Obviously, Hungary being forced by Hitler to declare war, Bárdossy took it upon himself to do so." Cf. MONTGOMERY, *Hungary, the Unwilling Satellite*, p. 153. See also IGNÁC ROMSICS, "A magyar hadüzenet amerikai fogadtatása," in *História* (Budapest), vol. 14., no. 2. (1992), pp. 15-16.

¹⁹ For recent assessments of the development of the Cold War, see EDWARD E. JUDGE and JOHN W. LANGDON, *A Hard and Bitter Peace: A Global History of the Cold War*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1996; RONALD E. POWASKI, *Cold War. The United States and the Soviet Union, 1917-1991*. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 65-307; and WESLEY M. BAGBY, *America's International Relations since World War I*. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999,

response to these measures, in 1948 the Hungarian Communist Government — under very strong Soviet pressure — undertook a number of anti-American measures. In the fall of 1948 it nationalized the joint Hungarian-American Oil Company [MAORT], and subsequently ordered the arrest (December 23, 1948) and conviction (February 8, 1949) of Cardinal Mindszenty, accusing him of collaboration with American interests.

A low point in U.S.-Hungarian relations was reached at the end of 1949 and early 1950, when the Hungarian Government nationalized the Standard Electric Company and arrested and convicted two American businessmen — Robert Vogeler and Edgar Sanders — for alleged spying and sabotage activities. This resulted, among others, in the closing down of the Hungarian Consulates in New York and Cleveland, and in terminating Hungary's Most Favored Nation status. This freeze in U.S.-Hungarian relations continued through the 1950s and 1960s — broken only momentarily by the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and the ephemeral rule of the Imre Nagy's revolutionary government at the end of October and early November.²⁰

Although the suppression of the Revolution was condemned by most of the world, United States-Hungarian diplomatic relations were not broken. At the same time the relationship between the two countries was lowered from the ambassadorial to the chargé level.²¹

The ice began to thaw in the mid-1960s, largely as a result of the policy of liberalization initiated by János Kádár (1912-1989) in 1963. In the same year the so-called Hungarian Question was

pp. 137-403. For relevant documents see: EDWARD H. JUDGE and JOHN W. LANGDON, eds., *The Cold War. A History through Documents*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999.

²⁰ Concerning the post-World War II developments in United States-Hungarian relations, see the following works: CHARLES GÁTI, *Hungary and the Soviet Bloc*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1986; CHARLES GÁTI, *Magyarország a Kreml árnyékában*. Budapest, 1990; MIKLÓS NAGY, ed., *Magyar külpolitika, 1956-1989. Történeti kronológia*. Budapest, 1993; LÁSZLÓ BORHI, ed., *Az Egyesült Államok és a szovjet zóna, 1945-1990. Kronológia*. Budapest, 1994.

²¹ Of the many works dealing with the prelude to the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, see especially: FERENC VÁLI, *Rift and Revolt in Hungary: Nationalism versus Communism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961.

also removed from the agenda of the United Nations, and in 1966 the official diplomatic relations between the two countries was raised once more to the ambassadorial level. The process stopped momentarily in 1967 because of the defection of János Radványi (b.1922),²² Hungary's representative to the UN, but then were resumed again in earnest in 1969. The climax of this improved relations was reached in 1978 with the return of the Holy Crown ("St. Stephen's Crown) and the granting of an MFN status to Hungary.²³

The Attitude of Hungarian-Americans Toward Hungary

The attitude of the Hungarian-Americans toward Hungary in the period after World War II pretty much followed this same path, although it was punctuated by the expatriates' desire to help the mother country in wake of the destructions wrought by the war. This is best exemplified by the establishment of the American Hungarian Relief, Inc., whose goal was to help rebuild Hungary, and in the meanwhile also to help to feed and cloth the millions of hungry and destitute Hungarians.

Although planned already in early part of 1944, the American Hungarian Relief, Inc. did not come into being until September 23 of that year, when it was officially chartered as a New York-based nonprofit charitable organization. Its founders included the leaders of all of the top Hungarian fraternal associations established at the end of the 19th century by the simple economic immigrants.²⁴ Their ranks, however, did not include the above-

²² On Radványi's defection, see his own assessment of American-Hungarian relations after 1956: *Hungary and the Superpowers: The 1956 Revolution and Realpolitik*. Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1972.

²³ For the best summary of the Holy Crown's trials and tribulations, see TIBOR GLANT, *A Szent Korona amerikai kalandja, 1945-1978*. Debrecen: Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, 1997; and TIBOR GLANT, "American Hungarian Relations and the Return of the Holy Crown," in *Hungary's Historical Legacies: Studies in Honor of Professor Steven Béla Várdy*, eds. DENNIS P. HUPCHICK and R. WILLIAM WEISBERGER. New York: East European Monographs, Columbia University Press, 2000, pp. 168-186.

²⁴ The original signers of the foundation charter of the American Hungarian Relief, Inc. included President János Bencze and Executive Secretary Kálmán Révész from the Verhovay Fraternal Association; President Ferenc Ujlaki, Executive Secretary György Borshy-Kerekes, and Treasurer Imre Király from the Hungarian Reformed

mentioned liberal intellectuals, who apparently were still under the illusion that feeding the dispossessed masses with ideology was more important than supplying them with food, clothing and other necessities of life. Subsequently the Board of Directors of the American Hungarian Relief, Inc. also came to include by a number of other prominent Hungarian ethnic leaders, all of whom were connected with traditional organizations that were members of the "patriotic" and anti-internationalist American Hungarian Federation.

In light of the above it should be evident to everyone that the lion's share of the relief work aimed at helping defeated and destroyed Hungary came from the organizations established by the oldtime economic immigrants and manned by them and their American-born children. The American Hungarian Relief, Inc. functioned for about eight years (1944-1952). By the end of 1949 it had collected and delivered \$1,216,000 dollar's worth of aid to Hungary and to the Hungarian refugees in various emigré camps in Germany. This included \$290,000 worth of medicines, \$279,000 worth of new clothing, food and tractors, and \$647,000 worth of used clothes, used shoes, and various personal items.²⁵

Initially much of this help went to Hungary, but after 1947, when the communist takeover began and U.S.-Hungary relations worsened, this aid was redirected to Hungarian emigré camps in Germany and Austria. At first much of this help was delivered via the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration [UNRRA].²⁶ Later, however, this work was carried out by a freight

Federation of America; President Péter Suta and Chancellor János Walkó from the Bridgeport Federation; Professor Tibor Kerekes from Georgetown University in his capacity as the Executive Secretary of the American Hungarian Federation; and the noted lawyer and legal expert Mór Cukor, representing the New York Hungarian associations.

²⁵ Concerning the activities and achievements of the American Hungarian Relief, Inc., see ARTHUR DOBOZY, "Az American Hungarian Relief, Inc. eddigi munkája," in *Emlékkönyv az Amerikai Magyar Szövetség 80. évfordulójára*, ed. ELEMÉR BAKÓ. Washington, D.C.: Az Amerikai Magyar Szövetség, 1988, pp. 56-58; and *Az Amerikai Magyar Népszava Aranyjubiléumi Albuma - Golden Jubilee Album*. New York: Az Amerikai Magyar Népszava, 1950, pp. 95-97.

²⁶ For the work of the UNRRA and other related organizations involved in helping post-World War II refugees, see GEORGE WOODBRIDGE, *UNRRA: The History of the*

company headed by Captain James G. Pedlow of the International Red Cross, and partially owned by the Hungarian Miklós Brack. This freight company undertook to ferry all of the collected goods to Hungary and then distribute them free of charge. They only charged for individual gift packages that were sent by Americans directly to their relatives in Hungary. Captain Pedlow, by the way, had already been involved in relief work for Hungary after World War I, much of it organized by the legendary Countess László Széchenyi, neé Gladys Vanderbilt (1886-1965).²⁷

In addition to sending aid to Hungary and to the Hungarian refugee camps in Germany, the American Hungarian Relief, Inc. was also involved in helping many of the refugees to emigrate to the United States. Based on the two Displaced Persons Laws of 1948 and 1950, the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952, and the Refugee Relief Act of 1953 about twenty-six-thousand Hungarian political emigrés settled in the United States.²⁸ The American Hungarian Relief, Inc. found sponsors for them, received them upon arrival, and supported them in their search for homes and employment.

All this required much time and effort, which were freely given by Hungarian Americans in their effort to help their brethren. They received very little in return. Official Hungarian politics by this time were fully under the control of the Soviet Union, and as such, all Americans of whatever origins were placed into the "capitalist-imperialist" category.

United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, 3 vols. New York: Columbia University Press, 1956; LOUISE W. HOLBORN, *The International Refugee Organization: A Special Agency of the United Nations. Its History and Work, 1946-1962*. London-New York-Toronto, 1956; WOLFGANG JACOBMEYER, *Vom Zwangsarbeiter zum Heimatlosen Ausländer. Die Displaced Persons in West Deutschland, 1945-1951*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985; and MARK WYMAN, *DP. Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945-1951*. Philadelphia: The Balch Institute; London-Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1989).

²⁷ Concerning Countess Széchenyi-Vanderbilt, see *A magyar társadalom lexikonja*. Budapest: MTL Kiadóvállalat, 1930, p. 534; JÁNOS JÓZSEF GUDENUS, *A magyarországi főnemesség XX. századi genealógiája*, 4 vols. Budapest: Natura — Tellér Kft. — Heraldika, 1990-1998, IV, p. 35; and ETELKA BAJI and LÁSZLÓ CSORBA, *Kastélyok és mágnások*. Budapest: HG & Társa Kiadó, 1994, p. 182.

²⁸ These four laws collectively permitted the immigration of nearly 600,000 displaced persons, of whom barely 4% were Hungarians. See REED UEDA, *Postwar Immigrant America*. Boston-New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992, pp. 170-171; and LEONARD

Nor did they receive much gratitude from the newcomers, who represented a totally different segment of Hungarian society than the older immigrants and their American born offspring. These two segments of the Hungarian-American community — the old-time economic immigrants and the post-World War II political immigrants — could never really mix.

During the immediate post-World War II years, there were still some minimal contacts between Hungary and Hungarian-Americans — basically those on the far left of the political spectrum. By 1948, however, these contacts have ceased altogether. Even some of the left-liberal members of the Hungarian diplomatic corps defected, including Ambassador Vámbéry and a number of his staff.

With the exception of the few days in late October and early November 1956, connected with the anti-Soviet Hungarian Revolution, this freeze in diplomatic relations remained in force right into the late 1960s. By then, however, Kádár's liberalization policies (1963) and the New Economic Mechanism (1968) began to have their impact upon this relationship. In 1969 this thaw had reached a point where even United States-Hungarian scholarly exchanges were initiated through the newly established New York-based International Research and Exchanges Board [IREX] and the Budapest-based Institute for Cultural Relations [*Kulturális Kapcsolatok Intézete*].²⁹ From then on the push to improve relations between the the two countries, as well as between Hungary and the Hungarian-American community, became a number one priority for the Hungarian Government. As mentioned above, this move had reached its climax with the Holy Crown's repatriation in 1978. This act improved United States-Hungarian relations significantly, but it also split the Hungarian-American community

DINNERSTEIN and DAVID M. REIMERS, *Ethnic Americans. A History of Immigration*, 3rd. ed. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988, pp. 218-219.

²⁹ The author of this study was among the first batch of American scholars to do research in Hungary based on this agreement between the IREX and the KKI. One of the results of his research was the birth of his interest in historiography, which ultimately resulted in the publication of three books and several dozen of articles on this topic. The books include: *Hungarian Historiography and the "Geistesgeschichte" School*. Cleveland: Árpád Academy, 1974; *Modern Hungarian Historiography*. New York: East European Monographs, Columbia University Press,

into two violently antagonistic camps. There were the “irreconcilables” who refused to have any contacts with communist Hungary and with any Hungarian who represented the homeland; and the “compromisers” who established intimate contacts with the Hungarian scholarly and artistic world, and also tried to support those members of the Hungarian intelligentsia who were working for changes at home, within the limitations imposed upon them by the communist regime. This emotional split within the Hungarian-American community did not begin to heal until two or three years after the collapse of communism.

The Collapse of Communism and its Impact

1989-1990 represents the *annus mirabilis* [year of miracles] in Hungarian history. During the 1980s the whole fabric of communist society, throughout the Soviet-dominated communist world, was coming apart at its seams. In Hungary the situation was made even worse by the fact that the achievements of “goulash communism” were to a large degree the result of Western loans, which — in conjunction with the regimes lax economic policies — fired up Hungarian economy during the 1970s and early 1980s. By the late 1980s, however, the situation had reached the point where even servicing the loans became a near-impossibility, and thus the whole system went into a tumble.³⁰

The collapse began with the exodus of the East Germans from Hungary in August and September of 1989, followed by the fall of the Berlin Wall in November, and the downfall of all other communist dictatorships in Central and Eastern Europe in late 1989 and early 1990. This process of collapse was capped by the dissolution of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991.

1976; and *Clio's Art in Hungary and in Hungarian-America*. New York: East European Monographs, Columbia University Press, 1985.

³⁰ Concerning the fall of communism, see: D. S. MASON, *Revolution and Transition in East Central Europe*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996, p. 41-189. Concerning Hungary's involvement in this collapse, see: *Lawful Revolution in Hungary, 1889-1994*, ed. BÉLA K. KIRÁLY and ANDRÁS BOZÓKI. New York: Social Science Monographs, Columbia University Press, 1995; RUDOLPH L. TÓKÉS, *Hungary's Negotiated Revolution: Economic Reform, Social Change, and Political Succession, 1957-1990*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. On Hungarian-American reaction to these changes, see the articles by Béla Várdy and Ágnes Huszár Várdy listed in note 3, above.

In the meanwhile, Hungarian elections ended the nearly half a century of communist rule and in May 1990 placed the first post-communist Hungarian government into power. Led by the “populist-nationalist” Hungarian Democratic Forum [MDF] under József Antall’s prime ministership (1990-1993), the new regime undertook to dismember most vestiges of communist domination and to restore Hungary to its pre-communist status.

The rise of a “populist-nationalist” government created a feeling of euphoria both in Hungary and abroad within Hungarian emigré and ethnic communities. Abroad, this euphoria affected both the “irreconcilables” and the “compromisers” — each expecting some recognition for their efforts during the previous two or three decades. Both groups felt that their past activities have contributed significantly to the collapse of communism in Hungary and thus were deserving of some form of recognition. The “irreconcilables” felt that their anti-communist propaganda was a major factor in the regime’s collapse, while the “compromisers” were convinced that their help to and close collaboration with Hungary’s dissident intellectuals was a more significant cause in undermining the regime from within.

Irrespective whether they were “irreconcilables” or “compromisers,” both groups wanted their past activities on behalf of a free and independent Hungary to be recognized by the new regime. With the exception of a very few who could not really “make it” in the United States, most of the emigrés were thinking not of material rewards, nor of appointed positions, but rather of some form of moral recognition. They also wanted their Hungarian citizenship to be restored in the same easy manner — by means of a law or a presidential decree — in which it had been taken away from them. Because of the unpreparedness of the new government, few of these expectations were fulfilled.

Given often amateurish performance of Hungary’s first post-communist government, the initial euphoria of 1990 soon turned into disappointment. By 1992 this disillusionment took hold of most of the population, as well as of the politically active members of the emigré communities throughout the world. By 1993 many Hungarians, as well as Hungarian-Americans began to question

the authenticity of political and social reforms and even the legitimacy of the new regime. At the same time, a number of those back home also developed some nostalgia for the period of “goulash communism”.³¹

This was the result of several undesirable and unexpected developments. The latter included the collapse of the social welfare safety net, and the appearance of raw capitalism, along with unemployment, the need to work harder, and the unavoidability of having to compete with the much more advanced Western industrial world. The shrewd and the well-connected were able to take advantage of this chaotic transition period to enrich themselves at the expense of the average worker. The result was the social and economic polarization of Hungarian society — a phenomenon that had been unknown under communism.³²

At the same time raw politics also intruded into the relationship among individual members of society. Men of ability were pushed aside by those in power simply because they had declined to join the ruling political party (MDF), while at the same time mediocre personalities were appointed to positions of importance merely for being party members.³³ Viewed from outside, these developments were particularly repulsive to the “compromisers,” because political power was now in the hands of those whom they had befriended earlier, for whom they had been labeled “communists” by the “irreconcilables,” and with whom they “had been dreaming about the beautiful future that would follow the collapse of communism”.³⁴

³¹ Some of this disappointment is clearly revealed in the interviews published by LÁSZLÓ GYÓRFFY in his *Tiroli muskátli magyar erkélyen*. Budapest: Mundus Magyar Egyetemi Kiadó, 1998.

³² All this is described in detail in VÁRDY, “Rendszerváltás — nyolc éves késéssel,” pp. 60-75.

³³ For moderately critical views on the Antall and his regime see: KATA BEKE, *Jézusmária! Győztünk*. Budapest: Belvárosi Könyvkiadó, 1993; and SÁNDOR RÉVÉSZ, *Antall József távolról, 1932-1993*. Budapest: Sík Kiadó, 1995. For more positive views see: *Az ismeretlen Antall József. Emlékezések, cikkek, interjúk, dokumentumok*. Budapest: Mundus Magyar Egyetemi Kiadó, 1998; és JÓZSEF DEBRECZENI, *A miniszterelnök. Antall József és a rendszerváltozás*. Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 1998.

³⁴ Quoted from the author’s printed circular written in early 1994 about his experiences in Hungary and Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia in the summer of 1993. This circular had been sent out to ninety-three persons in several countries.

Given that this disillusionment hit both competing factions, the ideological differences and long-standing animosity between the “irreconcilables” and the “compromisers” suddenly disappeared. Thus, unexpectedly they found themselves on the same side of the political fence, and now directed their anger and disappointment against the new regime.

The fall of the “populist-nationalist” MDF regime and the return of the reform communists in the form of a coalition between the ex-communist Socialist Party and the allegedly unpatriotic Alliance of Free Democrats [MSZP-SZDSZ] in 1994 forced most Hungarian Americans to reassess their position vis-a-vis the MDF and its supporters. In spite of their earlier disenchantment, they had to support the MDF, because from their perspective the alternative was even worse. Consequently, in the course of the next four years they lobbied hard for the return of a “more nationalist” political regime. They found their choice in the Alliance of Young Democrats - Hungarian Civic Party [Fidesz-MPP], which, under the leadership of the youthful Viktor Orbán (b.1963), had moved their ideological orientation in the direction of populist nationalism, and then emerged victorious in the elections of 1998. Supported by the Smallholders Party [FKGP] and the remnants of the MDF, the Fidesz-MPP established a government in Hungary, whose policies were much more in line with the needs and aspirations of the strongly anti-communist and at least moderately nationalist aspirations of the majority of Hungarian Americans.³⁵ The fall of the Orbán-government in 2002, and the return of the Socialist-Free Democratic coalition to power, pushed them into opposition again. Although also disenchanted with some of Orbán’s policies during the latter part of his tenure, the Fidesz-MDF coalition still represented the more desirable alternative between the two competing political forces in early 21st-century Hungary.

³⁵ The representative papers of the Hungarian-American press generally were overjoyed at Orbán’s election and the loss of power by the Socialist-Free Democratic coalition, although they did not always approve the new prime minister’s efforts to enlist the services of some of the main stalwarts of the defunct MDF regime. See for example ISTVÁN FÁY, “Alapkő. A szabadságharc évfordulójára,” in *Hadak Útján* (Calgary), September-October 1998, pp. 3-5.

While this attitude does not necessary represent the views of a great number of intellectuals connected with various institutions of higher learning in the United States — many of whom are more liberal in their outlook than the political immigrants in general — the majority of Hungarian Americans were generally supportive of the Orbán-government, and are rooting for its return to power in 2006. They generally favor its policies, applaud its achievements in domestic and foreign policy, and also hope that the Fidesz-lead coalition will return to power in 2006, and will remain the political force in Hungary far beyond that date.³⁶

All in all, while Hungarian Americans never had a problem-free relationship with the mother country, the majority of them feel closer to, and more willing to cooperate with a government that they perceive to be traditional and patriotic. In point of fact, it is the relative absence of traditionalism and patriotism in modern Hungarian society that is most disturbing to the members of the political emigration, not only in the United States, but also throughout the Western World.

³⁶ It is generally true that among intellectuals connected with universities and major periodicals, the percentage of those with leftists leanings is much greater than among the population in general. This is also true for Hungarian-Americans. The influence of these intellectuals upon the main body of the emigrés and ethnic communities, however, is generally minimal. Based on the elections of April 2006, their expectations were not fulfilled.