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HUNGARIAN PUBLIC OPINION AND PEACEFUL REVISION

by

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The British Co-ordinating Committee of the Peaceful Change movement has expressed the wish that the various national groups should ascertain the opinion of the public in their respective countries on the question of Peaceful Change, that is to say, should ascertain what public opinion thought of a peaceful solution of the political, economic, cultural and social aspects of international questions.

What is public opinion? The spontaneous, unorganized and freely reacting opinion concerning a certain problem of the moment entertained by some stratum, rarely by the whole, of society, and a readiness to act thereon. Some stratum of society, or society as a whole, is shocked by a certain fact, grows indignant and demands redress or sanctions, or *vice versa* approves of something, waxes enthusiastic over it and urges its materialization.

When we seek to discover the attitude of Hungarian public opinion towards the Peaceful Change movement, we are interested solely in the spontaneous manifestation of public opinion, in the instinctive judgment formed in the soul of the nation on the question of changes in the present international situation. That the press or certain social organizations crystallize into consciousness the amorphous manifestations of feeling and will arising spontaneously in the national soul and present them to public opinion in a more organized form, must be regarded merely as a secondary phenomenon; for the real roots of public judgment lie deep in the soul of the nation.

Most of what we call public opinion in evidence respecting some actual question of politics, economics or culture is shaped by certain strata of society interested in the problem. Where, however, Peaceful Change is concerned the whole population of Hungary is affected. In the former instance the diverse nature of the interests of the various social strata leads to conflicting opinions, and more than one "public opinion" may exist. But in respect of the question of an honest peace the *whole* nation as one single social and historical unit is deeply concerned, since it is a question that affects every stratum of the population. In this

case public opinion does not represent one section of society but stands automatically for the whole nation. Hungary, which has been deprived of three-fourths of her territory and two-thirds of her population, and has been despoiled and dismembered, longs for a peaceful arrangement that would ensure her people better conditions of life, — in a word for a Peaceful Change. On this subject public opinion is unanimous; for since two decades the most natural instincts of self-preservation and self-expression have been repressed and Hungary's historical and national unity of a thousand years' standing rent asunder.

What do we mean by *nation* when we speak of its "public opinion"? In the first place nation is not a biological term, even if the word *natio* does also refer to a common racial origin (every nation is Europe is more or less a racial mixture), but a spiritual and historical principle. A man becomes a member of a nation by virtue of a sense of historical identity with that nation, by sharing the same standard of values crystallized by tradition throughout many centuries and by a consciousness of a common cultural history. The sufferings of the national community are his sufferings; the welfare of the country his joy; and for the good of his country he would sacrifice everything, even his life. The spiritual essence of a national community, then, is a peculiar capital of tradition prized by all and considered sacred by every son of the nation, who clings closely to it. This national capital of tradition — like some power transcending the individual — automatically influences and directs public opinion and the attitude it takes. What is in conformity with that capital of tradition is of value; what runs contrary to it, is valueless. When the individual voices his opinion concerning the vital interests of the nation, he does so under the inspiration of a national tradition thousands of years old and in its name.

As regards most questions, public opinion fluctuates rapidly. One day its interest is aroused to the point of excitement; next day excitement subsides, and the third day the matter in question may be well out of focus — forgotten. But there

is no trace of this capricious fluctuation in the Hungarian soul towards the ever present problem of the readjustment of Hungary's tragic lot. For two decades this burning problem has agitated us and will continue to do so until a solution has been found. As a problem it is not a matter of diverse private opinions, but of public opinion in the literal sense of the word; for its roots lie in the vital interests and instinctive ambitions of the national community as a whole. In such a case, where it is directed towards an effort to effect changes in the international position of the country, public opinion is not a mere process of mental judgment, but one savouring strongly of will: here public opinion is not merely subjective conviction but a permanent, objective frame of mind.

Public opinion is wont to crystallize into pithy, emotional slogans. In connection with Hungary's future the slogan of Hungarian public opinion is "Revision of the cruel Peace Treaties!" In substance this means the same as "Peaceful Change", namely a peaceful amendment, on a commonsense basis, of the peace edicts conceived in blind hatred and the intoxication of victory. This is no mere instinctive and emotional demand of the Hungarian nation, but a programme justified by logic and reason. The demand for revision is no tactical manoeuvre inspired by artificial propaganda, but a spiritual need deeply rooted in the soul of the nation, a demand also that is in harmony with the fundamental principles of international law and international ethics.

II.

What arguments has Hungarian public opinion to offer in support of its persevering endeavour to obtain a peaceful revision of the present tragic situation and of its firm conviction that no permanent order can be established in the Danube Valley until that revision takes place? When on behalf of a united Hungarian public opinion I attempt to answer this question, I shall endeavour to be completely objective. I shall do my best to put myself in the place of the nations surrounding Hungary, to understand their frame of mind and their interests. I wish to avoid giving the slightest cause for offence, on the principle that new political and economic arrangements in the Danube Valley are possible only if a peaceful agreement is arrived at among all the nations living there. Historical destiny compels us to live here together; together, therefore, we must create the possibilities of peaceful co-existence in a spirit of mutual conciliation.

Of all the Peace Treaties concluding the world war that of Trianon was the most cruel and most unjust. No other country lost so much in territory and population as did Hungary. Of the area of pre-war Hungary, Czecho-Slovakia, Serbia, Austria, and Rumania received 62,000, 63,000, 4,000, and 103,000 square kilometres respectively, while only 93,000 square kilometres remained to Hungary. Germany lost 13% of her previous area, Bulgaria 8%, and Hungary 72% of her thousand-year-old country. From Germany the Peace Treaty wrested 10% of her inhabitants, from Bul-

garia 8%, and from Hungary 64%; and this was done in a manner driving three and a half million Hungarians under alien rule, a million and a half of those Hungarians living in compact blocks along the new frontiers of Dismembered Hungary. The Peace Conference, which refused to treat with the Hungarian delegation, satisfied every demand of the adjacent countries for a share of Hungary's territory in an extremely unilateral manner and, without asking the inhabitants of those regions what their wishes were, drew artificial frontiers diametrically opposed to Wilson's famous principle of self-determination, which was accepted as a basis of the peace negotiations by the Peace Conference and postulated that nations and countries cannot be transferred from one State to another like so many objects or stones in some game. Without any plebiscite, millions of Hungarians living in a large coherent territory along the present frontier of Hungary were driven under alien dominion. All the territories detached had for a thousand years been part of the ideal geographical and economic unit known as the Kingdom of Hungary. From a nationality point of view the Peace Treaties have created a worse state of affairs than that existing before. Pre-war Hungary is accused of having oppressed her minorities. But had she done so, how could they have preserved their racial and linguistic characteristics throughout the centuries? How could they have enjoyed the right to maintain schools and autonomous denominations which fostered their national consciousness without let or hindrance? The States battered on the territories wrested from Hungary present a much more kaleidoscopic appearance from a nationality point of view than Hungary ever did. In Czecho-Slovakia, for instance, the Czechs, the staple element of the State, form (even according to their own statistics) merely 48% of the population of the Republic.

Hungary is still in a disarmed condition. True, it was promised in the Peace Treaties that the victorious Powers would likewise disarm. Instead, however, of doing so they are arming frantically. Hungary's neighbours, too, who allied to form the Little Entente in order to manacle Hungary, are doing the same. Their superiority in armaments is a constant incentive to them to interfere in Hungary's affairs.

Hungarian public opinion is being kept in a constant ferment of unrest by the way the adjacent States treat their Hungarian minorities. The Peace Treaties made the territorial expansion of the Succession States conditional on their undertaking to protect the rights of the minorities. The Succession States have gravely infringed the provisions of the Minority Treaties. Hungarians, especially officials, have been expelled by thousands from those countries on the pretext that they are not citizens of the Succession States. This has resulted in little Hungary's being forced to shoulder an annual budgetary burden of 80 million pengő, which sum is paid out in pensions to these refugee officials. Most of the Hungarian schools in the Little Entente countries have been closed or confiscated, and the children of Hungarian parents are prevented by

a system of name analysis from attending the few Hungarian schools left. Under the guise of Land Reform the estates of the Hungarian landowners have been appropriated by the State at a ridiculously inadequate price, and the lands belonging to the minority Churches confiscated. Not only are Hungarians refused employment in the civil service, they are also being driven out of private undertakings and ruined economically by being deprived of the *sine qua non* of economic life. In vain do the oppressed Hungarians apply to the League of Nations, whose duty it should be to see that minority rights are respected: that institution has merely submerged minority proceedings in an ocean of formalities.

The situation of the Danube Valley States is intolerable, not only from a political but also from an economic point of view. The pre-war economic unity of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy has been broken up and seven States eye each other askance over the debris. Instead of a natural exchange of commodities, each State strives to become self-sufficient. The agrarian countries are feverishly bent on promoting industries, and the industrial countries of pre-war times are trying to make wheat grow on their barren hills. Every attempt to effect a rational economic readjustment in the Danube Valley — the Danubian Agrarian Bloc, an Austro-German Customs Union, the Austro-Hungarian Economic Union, Tardieu's plan, etc — has proved a failure. The way to economic readjustment is always blocked by political considerations. In return for a restoration of normal economic life the States of the Little Entente make political demands that would involve Hungary's abandoning her national aspirations and giving up all thought of peaceful territorial revision, the possibility of which is guaranteed in Article 19 of the League Covenant. Nothing but rational political peace and mutual understanding among the nations will ever ensure the tranquil economic development of the Danube Valley, which is impossible amidst the alarms of war caused by the mad race in armaments.

Hungarian public opinion — the public opinion of the country most sorely visited after the war — longs for a peaceful compromise with the neighbouring States and a redress of the wrongs done to Hungary after the war. Hungarian public opinion in desiring revision desires peace and on this point is in harmony with an international public opinion in the process of formation which has come to realize the truth of the axiom that no peace treaty is everlasting. Many modifications have already been made in the Peace Treaties concluding the great war. German reparations were cancelled in Lausanne. Despite the provisions of the Treaties, the occupying forces evacuated the left bank of the Rhine in 1929. The right bank, though a neutral zone, was organized from a military point of view by Germany. The military equality of Germany and of Austria has been recognized. Wilson, Lloyd George and Briand themselves admitted that the delineation of the Hungarian frontiers was arbitrary. Article 19 of the League Covenant does not allow of the interpreta-

tion that the new territorial arrangements are sacred and everlasting. It provides the possibility of examining international conditions the maintenance of which endangers the peace of the world. A revision of the Treaty of Trianon would be in the interest not of Hungary alone but also of Europe as a whole.

The public opinion formed in Hungary since the conclusion of the war, as well as Hungary's official attitude, has always striven even under the most difficult circumstances to maintain and promote peace. It has honestly endeavoured to find an honourable *modus vivendi*. The Pact with Italy and Austria is also a means to this end, and it is open to other States to join it in the interests of economic prosperity and political stability in Central Europe. The non-exclusive character of the Rome Protocol corresponds with Hungary's fundamental principle that she refuses to enter into any kind of military alliance, even though most European States, especially her neighbours, have made open or secret military pacts that seriously menace the peace of Europe. This is one of the chief guarantees of Hungary's peaceful intentions. However oppressed by her military inequality, she does not violate the Peace Treaties by arbitrarily repudiating this provision, as other countries have. She is content to await the time when the world's conscience awakes and grants her the same rights as other countries enjoy. Every country in Europe is free to increase its armaments at will; Hungary and Bulgaria alone are deprived of that right.

In the years following the conclusion of the war Hungary has always, even in the most difficult situation, chosen the path of peace. Twice when her crowned monarch attempted to return she yielded to the pressure brought to bear on her by the surrounding States, and at the expense of her sovereignty and her interests, refused to allow the King to occupy his throne. At the critical time of the Marseilles murders, when she was innocently and unfairly accused of having had a hand in the preparations for them, Hungary did all in her power to avoid a conflict. Now that a certain lapse of time allows of events being viewed from a historical perspective, the present Prime Minister of Yugoslavia himself has stated that the accusation was unfounded.

A country so cruelly and unjustly punished as Hungary was by the peace edict of Trianon would have every excuse to pursue a policy of revenge and bitterness, even if it meant an alliance with the very Devil himself. Hungary, however, as is proved by indisputable facts, has always adhered to a policy of moderation and remained true to a higher legal and ethical standard in order to promote and maintain European peace. Were other countries to make such heavy sacrifices in the interests of peace and show so many signs of moderation and self-immolation, it would not be hard for the "Peaceful Change" movement to achieve one of its aims — a mutual political understanding among the nations of the Danube Valley bringing economic and cultural prosperity in its train.