

# “HUNGARY WILL CONTINUE TO BE A STRONGHOLD OF PARLIAMENTARISM“

BY

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The revolutions which resulted from the Great War in most of the belligerent States subverted the forms of life which — being as they were the products of historical development — had appeared to be unalterable at least for a considerable period. Ideals reflecting the very souls and the destinies of individual peoples were in an instant relegated to the lumber-room and supplanted by new tendencies. Thrones collapsed and dynasties were driven into exile; and what had for centuries been revered as truth and honour suddenly became a lie and a symbol of infamy.

What has this world conflagration left Hungary?

Deprived of three-fourths of its territory and 67% of its population, the thousand-year-old Kingdom of St. Stephen was cut into pieces. And today, after twenty years, when we survey the period that has passed since the horrible turn in history and contemplate the spiritual crisis through which the Hungarians left in Dismembered Hungary have passed, — though without losing their faith or the force of their spirit and their genius or their unswerving belief in a better future —, we cannot but ask ourselves what is the cause and what the miraculous power that has enabled the Hungarian nation despite the horrors through which it has passed to continue unceasingly the historical mission devolving upon it in the Valley of the Danube?

The answer is an extremely simple one. The constitutional machinery which enabled the Hungarians to defy the ordeals of ten centuries of history and to maintain unbroken the

national character which had rendered Europe such services, is still actively at work and has ensured the continuation of our national existence despite the catastrophe inflicted by the Treaty of Trianon. It is the triumph of the Hungarian Constitution and of Hungarian Parliamentarism. Is it not remarkable that today, when mighty peoples have discarded democratic forms of government and donned the armour-plate of dictatorship, a nation numbering only nine million souls should — after the brief but bitter aberrations of a few months of sovietism — have resolutely and consciously have returned to the temporarily abandoned Constitution of its forbears because it realised that that Constitution symbolised the great historical truth of its own life and development? The mighty force of our Hungarian public law gives life and being to that truth, the energy of which radiates and diffuses its power in a manner which is maybe at first sight incomprehensible to the sons of other countries.

Without a thorough familiarity with the conception of the Holy Crown of Hungary no foreigner can realise completely the mystic force radiating from the fact of legal continuity. What is the real essence of that conception? The higher ideal and political power uniting king and nation by means of that perfect harmony of rights and duties which sprang from the fertile womb of stormy centuries and has at all times proved strong enough to guide Hungary through the labyrinths of multifarious crises. Already in the thirteenth century, in the days of King Andrew II., — almost at the same time as the Great Charter of England —, there was issued in Hungary a Golden Bull which first adjusted in written law the relation between the legitimate king and the free nation and thereby became the basis and source of that Constitution which to the Hungarians has at all times proved an unfailing support and stay. But the Hungarian Constitution, as a consequence of the almost preternatural significance of the conception of the Holy Crown, does not consist exclusively of written laws, but also of unwritten traditions of just as binding force; and it is this circumstance

above all that lends such electricity and so invincible a force to the Hungarian Constitution. The historical law system of Hungary was subjected to its first severe test during the century and a half of Turkish occupation, when three different masters owned the dismembered country; the spirit of the Constitution still continued to unite the dismembered parts; and when the day of liberation came, and the Turks were driven out of Hungary, the parts of the country which had been severed from one another once more united and the life of the community of earlier days continued without a hitch and without any upheaval at all.

It was the ardour inspired by the fire of their ancient Constitution that made the Hungarian Estates at the Pozsony Diet utter the historically famous „*Vitam et sanguinem*” — the promise of support given to Queen Maria Theresa in her hour of need during the Seven Years War, — words which then resounded throughout Europe and which the military prowess of General Hadik echoed as he swept victoriously right up to the gates of Berlin. It was the fame of this Constitution that brought Montesquieu, one of the greatest intellects of the eighteenth century, to Pozsony. — The theory of this eminent French political philosopher and writer regarding the separation of the State powers was responsible for the legal system still in force unchanged in parliamentary countries. The development of this fundamental system was no doubt due very largely also to the experience gained by Montesquieu at Pozsony, where the parliament consisting of two chambers (houses) had — like that of England — been functioning already for a considerable period.

This brief historical retrospect was necessary in order to enable us to understand the situation of present day Hungary and her unflinching devotion to her constitutional institutions. Without this historical survey we should be unable to understand why even today, when Great Powers have broken with the traditions of parliamentarism and dictatorial endeavours still appear to be making headway, this small country with its population of only some nine



million souls has the courage and the will, not only to maintain intact and preserve, but also to develop further in the democratic spirit its constitutional machinery. For that is what is happening today in Hungary, where personal liberty, the right of individual initiative, equality in respect of civil rights and the complete independence of religious and intellectual life of the State have always been regarded as the highest privileges and the unassailable moral possessions of man.

With the three constitutional Bills destined to raise the whole political life of Hungary to a fresh and more modern level higher than any yet attained, we have already dealt briefly in these columns. The first of these Bills, that dealing with the expansion of the Regent's prerogatives, was early in the year incorporated in Hungarian law; the second, that dealing with the extension of the sphere of authority of the Upper House, was passed and became law during the autumn session of Parliament. Both Acts form harmonious complements of the Hungarian legal system previously in force, the only object served by them being the maintenance and safeguarding of the principle of a balance of forces in constitutional life. This is fully in keeping with the progressive conservative tendency so far represented by the Governments, standing on a national basis, which for that very reason has at all times possessed the power and the feeling of security essential to enable them to advance rapidly in the direction of democratic progress — of the stabilisation of the political rights of the working masses.

For the latter result is what is aimed at by the third and last of the constitutional Bills, — that relating to the introduction of secret ballot as the general system of suffrage. In Hungary there is really no need for an extension of the suffrage, seeing that in that country practically one-third of the population are entitled to express their will respecting the questions of government and of policy. This is undoubtedly a large proportion in keeping with even the most exacting democratic postulates. Under such circumstances

it is a matter of vast importance that the secrecy of the ballot is to be secured everywhere. The Bill — presented to Parliament by the Government on December 30th — puts an end to political struggles reaching back for decades.

Hereby the series of constitutional laws is made complete; and the Bill is the crowning achievement of the work done with a common goodwill and a community of purpose by Government and Opposition, by majority and minority alike. For more than a year the spirit of "*Treuga Dei*" has controlled the destinies of the inner political life of Hungary. During this period the whole Opposition has shown a praiseworthy unselfishness in laying down the arms of severe criticism and has more than once sacrificed its popularity for the purpose of achieving the great object of realising the system of general secret ballot and thereby enhancing the strength and power of resistance of the edifice of Hungarian constitutionalism. That was the real object; and that will continue to be the ultimate ideal in view. That is why — a circumstance of unmeasurable importance under present conditions — all the constructive elements of our Hungarian national life have united above all to show their respect for the principle of Hungarian parliamentarism. This moment is of importance today, not only because it too enables the Hungarian nation to show the great nations of the West that it is not prepared to abandon its mission in the Valley of the Danube, which it is desirous of continuing and to perform with the aid of the spell of its constitutional force, but also because it proves that it desires to break once for all with the unconstitutional experiments — which were certainly insignificant and of no real importance — which were undertaken in the not very distant past and have left traces on the present too. The only reason why mention has been made of these phenomena — which with their confused ideologies have shown their heads occasionally in the country — is that still greater light may be thrown on the firm and unflinching devotion of the Hungarian people as a whole to the idea and the institutions of constitutionalism.

An eminent member of the political life of France — Senator Lémery — recently published in a Paris journal an article the title of which has been put at the head of this article. We thank the Senator for having advanced us his confidence in the maintenance and survival of Hungarian parliamentarism; but he surely would not have done so had he not been familiar with our history and with the individuality of the Hungarian people. In any case we shall do our best not to disappoint in this connection the Europe which favours freedom of thought.

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"I am convinced that it would be a far better defence of the State to satisfy the nationalities in our internal policy and create a friendly atmosphere with our neighbours in our foreign policy; the more so as we are dependent on the latter economically. The present political situation is the clearest proof that Government has not fulfilled its obligations towards the minorities. We cannot but admit that the present international unrest affects us above all and that the internal arrangements of this State are the subject of international discussion. Government, must also realize that the complaints of the minorities are heard beyond our own frontiers; the world is not deaf. Government must realise the urgency of a solution of the minority question that would meet the exigencies of the European situation and the demands of democracy and justice. Promises we have had in plenty, but promises are not enough. We ask for acts, especially in connection with the demands of the Hungarian minority. The quicker they are done, the sooner may we expect a relaxation of the international tension." (From a speech delivered by M. Nicholas Pajor, Hungarian Senator, in the Czecho-Slovak Senate on 9th December.)

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