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A REVIEW DEVOTED TO RESEARCH INTO PROBLEMS OF THE
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Hungary's Position in International Affairs
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Czecho-Slovakia's Nationality Problems
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HUNGARY'S POSITION IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS*

EXPOSÉ OF M. KÁLMÁN KÁNYA

It is undeniable that there is a certain resemblance between the situation in evidence in the case of the Great Powers and that in evidence in the case of the countries of the Danube Basin. In the case of the Great Powers defects of the Treaty of Versailles are an element of disunion; while in the Danube Basin the Treaty of Trianon is exercising a decidedly disjunctive effect. In both cases intensive efforts are being made to bridge over the difficulties. In the case of the Danube Basin, however, it was only last year that the relevant negotiations assumed anything like a serious character; for previously the exaggerated sensitiveness of the Little Entente States had proved an unsurmountable obstacle. It was not until Hungary's international position had become stronger that the Little Entente States showed any inclination to adopt a more reasonable attitude towards that country or to employ a more conciliatory tone.

The negotiations at present being carried on with the Little Entente States have as their objects the improvement of the situation of the Hungarian minorities, the acknowledgment of the equality of rights of the Hungarians, and the drafting of declarations to be made reciprocally in the spirit of the Kellog Pact. The most important question at issue is naturally that relating to the minorities. That they would accord the large numbers of Hungarians subjected to their rule a proper treatment was an obligation undertaken by the Little Entente States under international treaties as a *sine qua non* in return for the cession of enormous areas of new territory. This postulate has not yet been carried into

* Speech made by Hungarian Foreign Minister on June 1st during Debate on Budget Estimates.

practical effect; that is why the minority problem is the pivotal question of the negotiations now being carried on.

In this connection I feel impelled to explain the difficulties confronting us at present; doing so in order to motivate the slowness — by many persons regarded as incomprehensible — with which these negotiations are proceeding. The most formidable of the difficulties in question are those — unfortunately very serious — differences of opinion between Hungary and her neighbours due to the provisions of the Treaty of Trianon. To bridge over these differences is naturally an extremely difficult — and an exceptionally delicate — task. The difficulty of the task is aggravated by the circumstance that the Little Entente was established solely as an anti-Hungarian formation and that this anti-Hungarian character of the Little Entente alliance is still in evidence today. The three States composing the Little Entente alliance have divergent views on very many fundamental problems; but they still profess the principle of co-operation in respect of dealings with Hungary. We on our part are not prepared to treat with the Little Entente as a block; while the other Party insists upon any separate agreements to be concluded with the three States of the Little Entente being in every respect identical. The obstacles in the way of uninterrupted negotiations arising in consequence may be seen at a glance when we review the respective situations of the three States — situations in many respect extremely different in character.

The respective international positions of the three States cannot by any means be described as identical. Czecho-Slovakia has so far utterly failed to bring about correct relations with her neighbours; indeed, the situation as between that country and its three neighbours is one of extreme tension. Yugoslavia has on the other hand created a more peaceful atmosphere on all of her frontiers alike; a circumstance in striking evidence in Hungary too, the relations between the latter country and Yugoslavia having during the last two years developed in a favourable direction and showing an improvement not in evidence in respect of the other two States of the Little Entente. Rumania too has succeeded, by abandoning her Russophile policy and by

strengthening the ties of friendship with Poland, in reinforcing her international position.

The situation of the Hungarian minority in Czecho-Slovakia is quite different from that of the Hungarian minority in Yugoslavia and more decidedly still from that of the Hungarian minority in Rumania. In Czecho-Slovakia the several minorities combined constitute the majority of the population; and their demands for their rights are increasing in force daily. In Rumania, although the Rumanians do indeed form the majority, we find the numerically strongest of the Hungarian minorities, that minority living there in compact blocks; and it is a generally known fact that the situation of that minority is far harder than that of any of the other Hungarian minorities living in Little Entente States. Another important divergence is seen when we remember that Czecho-Slovakia has never called in question the principle that the minority problem is the concern of international politics. Rumania, on the other hand, — despite the circumstance that she too is a signatory to the international minority-protection treaties — professes the principle that the minority question is an exclusively domestic matter in which other States have no right to interfere. In support of this thesis Rumania is very fond of arguing that the Rumanian people is so saturated with nationalistic sentiments that the Government is quite unable to fulfil the obligations undertaken by agreement with other States in respect of the minority question. It is no use our referring to the minority agreement concluded between Germany and Poland; and it is merely a waste of breath to refer to the circumstance that last year, when concluding their treaty of friendship, Italy and Yugoslavia found means to adjust the minority problem too.

From what has been said it is clear that formidable difficulties must obstruct any attempt to reduce to a common denominator the negotiations respecting the minority question carried on with three States so entirely diverging from one another in their situations and their conditions respectively. Yet the soundness of the view which regards the minority question as of decisive importance is being endorsed more and more completely daily by events; and I feel convinced that it must be evident to every one that that question has

assumed the dimensions of an international problem which cannot be shelved or ignored.

Not so very long ago our antagonists declared that the Hungarians were solely and exclusively responsible for disturbing the peace of the Danube Valley; today, on the other hand, there are large numbers of persons both in those countries with which we are on friendly terms and even in those which are on the other side, who lay the blame for the delay in restoring a state of tranquillity at the doors of the countries forming the Little Entente. In illustration I would cite one example only, — the conviction of an absolutely unbiassed critic. The French Deputy *Pezet*, Vice-President of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Chamber of Deputies, in a book entitled "*Fin de l'Autriche, Fin d'une Europe*" — though repudiating the total demand for revision formulated by Hungary — establishes the fact that one of the principal sources of all the troubles alike is the rigidity with which the Little Entente States refuse to agree to an equitable solution of the minority question. With your permission I will quote one or two relevant passages from M. Pezet's book:

"... The Little Entente States obstinately insist on observing an attitude of refusal and a lack of understanding in their dealings with Hungary: so far they have displayed an attitude of non-concession and non-agreement, clinging unswervingly to the rigid principle of *non possumus*. The policy of compulsion so far pursued by the Little Entente States in their treatment of their minorities has resulted from a belief that thereby they were bringing about national unity in their respective countries."

The attitude of postponement adopted in the "nationality" question by the Little Entente States has now — particularly in Czecho-Slovakia — resulted in a situation materially enhancing the unrest and in a grave crisis threatening to demolish the whole edifice of European peace.

I feel impelled to say a few words respecting this question, which has so often been discussed during the last few months.

As I have not the slightest intention to contribute myself to aggravate the situation, — although there are many state-

ments of importance which I ought to make in this connection —, I shall confine myself to stressing one or two significant moments which prove the anything but friendly attitude displayed towards Hungary by Czecho-Slovakia for some years past and the exceptional self-control shown by Hungary in return.

When, after the conclusion of the Great War, with the help of the Great Powers who were her friends, Czecho-Slovakia was formed as a State wherein the so-called "nationalities" constitute the majority of the population, very extensive Hungarian territories were allotted to that country. There were many people who hoped that that very circumstance would prevail upon the Czecho-Slovak Government to leave no stone unturned to conciliate Hungary and to lay the foundations of normal relations with that country at least in economic matters. The official policy of Czecho-Slovakia, however, took an entirely different direction; the official circles of that Republic apparently presumed that the exceptionally advantageous position of Czecho-Slovakia immediately after the War — a position resting exclusively on the power of the bayonet — could be maintained for a very considerable period. As a consequence of this presumption the Czechs treated the Hungarian question in a spirit of off-hand superiority. By establishing a close co-operation with Yugoslavia and Rumania Czecho-Slovakia aimed at playing the role of a Great Power and was but little concerned with the feeling towards her prevailing in Hungary. Whenever Hungary showed signs of any movement whatsoever she adopted a menacing attitude, repeatedly threatening that country with war. And Hungary was made the prime object of the very intensive propaganda instituted by the Czechs. Romances were written to show the alleged backwardness of the Hungarians and the continuous disaffection of that recalcitrant people; the result being that we were able to trace the hand of Prague in all the bitterest press campaigns against Hungary. And I need not waste your time in once more telling you how obstinately Prague refused to listen to the complaints filed by the Hungarian minority.

It goes without saying that a procedure of this kind — indulged in consistently for a very considerable period —

was not calculated to inspire among Hungarians any special sympathy for their Czecho-Slovak neighbours. But, when last year there ensued at last the possibility of negotiations with the Little Entente States, we readily agreed to open up discussions, suppressing our legitimate indignation at the events of the past. I believe that no more striking proof of our goodwill could possibly have been offered.

And now, when the Prague Government — as a consequence of the considerable unrest caused recently by the "nationality" question — found it expedient to order a partial mobilisation, — a mobilisation not confined to the frontiers separating Czecho-Slovakia from the German Empire, but extending also to the Czecho-Hungarian frontiers —, we received this procedure which cannot by any means be described as friendly, with the utmost composure, refraining from every action likely to still further aggravate the situation. We are determined to continue in the future too to follow this line of conduct, which we regard as the proper and only suitable procedure; but a *rapprochement* between the two States cannot possibly be furthered if Hungary only displays goodwill. Hungary will certainly not commit any breach of peace; but there are so many diverse "nationalities" in Czecho-Slovakia that it will be impossible to guess with certainty further developments until all doubt has been removed in respect of the extent of the concessions which the Prague Government is ready to offer to each and all of the disaffected non-Czech nationalities. It goes without saying that the same measure must be meted out to all nationalities alike.

Great Britain is of the opinion — and she has emphatically informed Prague of her conviction — that only by far-reaching concessions will it be possible to satisfactorily settle the nationality question. The conviction voiced by Hungary long ago, — the conviction, namely, that in the present situation the minority question is the pivotal problem upon which the maintenance of peace depends — has now been endorsed also by that Great Power which is displaying a continuously increasing interest in the Central European situation and the impartiality of which in this question will, I feel sure, not be doubted even by Prague. Future develop-

ments will depend upon whether the Prague Government will be able at long last to make up its mind to issue a Nationality Charter calculated to re-assure the numerically exceptionally strong minorities living in Czecho-Slovakia, or whether it will yield to the pressure of certain circles and allow itself to be plunged into foolhardy political speculations not in the very least calculated to serve the cause of peace? Upon the answer to this question depends the answer to the other question, — will the relief of the tension now in evidence prove lasting or not?

And now, in conclusion, I should like to summarise the gist of my *exposé* briefly as follows:

It would be self-delusion to refuse to see the serious difficulties — or indeed dangers — now in evidence in international life; but it would be just as great a mistake to fail to realise that all the Great Powers having a decisive voice in the question of peace and war are seriously determined in their desire for peace, and that they all without exception shrink from the very idea of war. Proudly and self-consciously we herewith declare that Hungary on her part has in every respect agreed to the open questions with which she is confronted — of which questions very many are unfortunately still unsettled — being adjusted by peaceful means. We have pursued this policy sincerely and with conviction, — if only because there is no single Hungarian question that cannot be included within the framework of a genuine peace policy. Our friendly connections with certain States are really in the service of the aims of genuine peace; that is why we foster those connections so consistently and with such sincere perseverance. That is why *Premier Imrédy* was able to point to the unshaken stability of Hungary's international policy so unequivocally and so decidedly as to preclude the possibility of any misunderstanding. The friendship between Hungary and Italy is as strong and as firm as ever; and it is a political old wives' tale to assert that Italy at the present moment shows less interest in Hungary than she did previously. Firm too are the connections between Hungary and Germany, which can never be undermined by any calumny. In our relations with Poland I would point to the intact and unchanged character of the sincere and

intimate friendship the fostering of which we have always regarded as an object of prime importance.

Of late many statements of a friendly character have been made by Czecho-Slovak and Rumanian statesmen. They have assured us that they desire to enter into relations of sincere friendship with Hungary. On behalf of my Government I beg to thank the Czecho-Slovak and Rumanian statesmen in question for their declarations and to add on my part that the goodwill of the Hungarian Government in respect of that issue is unchanged, that Government trusting that the statesmen of the two neighbouring countries will in the immediate future put their encouraging words of kindness into practice.

We have made our national defence policy also an instrument for the service of peace. The Hungarian nation is ready to make the greatest sacrifices for the development of its army. In this period of international unrest we cannot allow our country to remain defenceless and exposed to eventual attacks from without.

I would end my speech with the assurance born of conviction that, so long as the Great Powers continue their efforts to preserve peace, — provided all the States of the Danube Basin pursue just as sincere a peace policy as Hungary —, the catastrophe of a war will not visit this very sorely-tried part of the world.