

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE AFTERMATH

The wake of Trianon

The savage mutilation of Hungary caused by the dispositions of the Trianon Peace Treaty endangered the very survival of the country as a viable state-structure. The ravages of the war, the post-war revolutions and foreign occupations culminating in the geographical dismemberment of Hungary's territory and the savage reparation payments left Trianon Hungary a disaster area with virtually unsurpassable social, economical and political problems. The human and material losses were so enormous that reconstruction would have been difficult even within the original frontiers. But the country had been deprived of most of its material resources, mines, forests, sources of energy and access to the sea. The great international market and balanced economy of the Danubian Basin had been destroyed and its place was taken by a patchwork of states with rashly erected, economically irrational and geographically impossible frontiers.

The peoples of the region — comrades-in-arms for centuries — suddenly became mortal enemies, their emotions roused by panslav chauvinism and the arbitrary measures of the Trianon arrangements. Under these circumstances it was obviously futile to expect cooperation among the fragmented states. Whilst Germany managed to survive the war at the cost of only moderate territorial and demographic losses and Soviet Russia succeeded in consolidating both her territory and new social order, the small states of Central Europe were unable to unite in the face of German or Russian expansion.

Hungary's indefensible frontiers were ringed by a circle of hatred formed by the three succession states, allied under the name "The Little Entente" (Czechoslovakia, Rumania, Yugoslavia). Their alliance was motivated solely by their common hate of the Hungarians and their anxiety to prevent a revision of the frontiers. They gave

vent to their pathological hatred against the 3,5 millions of Magyars transferred to their rule under the dispositions of the Treaty. The succession states considered the territories given to them as conquered provinces, a glorious aggrandizement of their national territories in which the non-nationals, such as the Hungarians, constituted an undesirable foreign element. Indeed the presence of the autochthonous Hungarians in these newly constituted "national" states was an unpleasant memento of the composite character of Central Europe's demography and a possible danger to their shaky state-structures. Whilst the much publicized Hungarian "revisionism" was little more than emotional wishful thinking, there existed for the Little Entente states a real danger of an eventual destruction of their unnatural state-structures by internal or external tensions. This caused a constantly nagging state of anxiety in the minds of the Czechs, Rumanians and Serbs. Under the thin pretence of "countering Hungarian revisionism" they developed a frighteningly chauvinistic nationalism, more fanatical than Hitler's nazism. From the very first day of their occupation of the former Hungarian territories, the new rulers proceeded with the systematic destruction of the Hungarian ethnic minority, especially in the compact Magyar-inhabited areas contiguous with the Magyar area of Hungary along the entire Trianon frontier. They coerced many Magyars to leave their ancestral land and take refuge in Hungary, causing there an influx of 350.000 refugees thus increasing the immense burden upon Hungary's economy. The number of the remaining Hungarians was reduced by deportations, discrimination and economic starvation, harassment of all kinds culminating in actual massacres.

This ethnocide — occasionally degenerating into genocide — has been going on since 1919 when the first "Little Entente" troops began to move (illegally) onto Hungarian territory. This systematic extermination campaign remained relatively unknown, obscured by the skilful propaganda of the succession states and by the

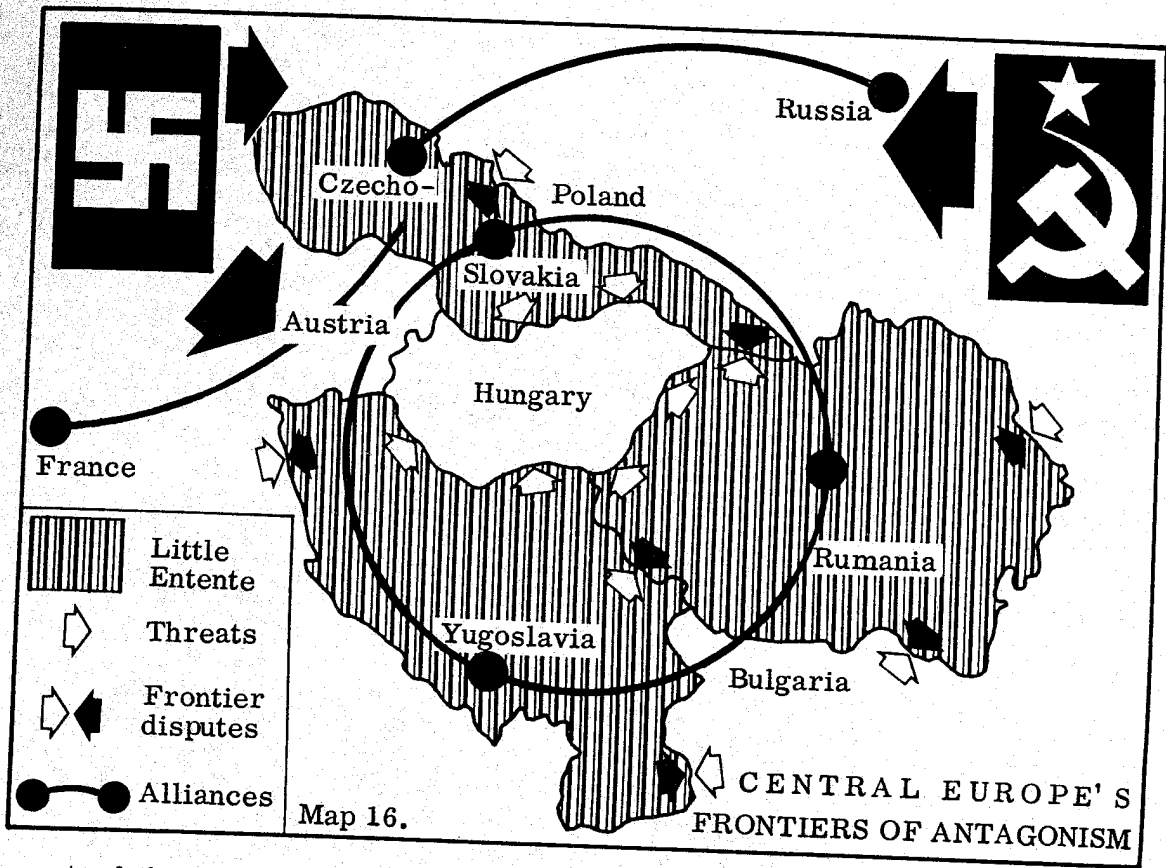
more conspicuous and turbulent events of the last decades.

During World War I the Allies proclaimed the "liberation of the nationalities" as their principal aim. The Trianon Treaty caused the worsening of the fate of some of these nationalities. Whilst the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy was structured as a multi-racial confederation where each nationality had its rightful place, the states created by Trianon were built on the chauvinistic principle of single-nation systems though they too included large segments of national minorities. In consequence, the succession states denied the right to exist to anyone not belonging to the ruling nationality in the state. Hence the systematic campaign against the national minorities, especially against the Hungarians.

Neither the Hungarians' frequent offers of cooperation, nor the legitimate complaints made at the League of Nations resulted in any amelioration of the situation. Occasional warning words by thinking statesmen — Allied as well as neutrals — fell on deaf ears. The 20th century has been an era of tension, aggression and conflicts of increasing magnitude in Central Europe. The darkening clouds of the gathering storm obscured the vision of the outside observers and the plight of the oppressed Magyars in the succession states remained largely ignored. Nor was it possible to create an atmosphere in which Hungary and her neighbours could discuss the peaceful rectification of the Trianon frontiers — an idea rejected in principle by the Little Entente. Thus the unjust conditions persist and the question of the 3.5 million Magyars in the succession states remains a permanent problem, unsolved till the present day. The new states created in 1920 under the pretext of "self-determination of the peoples of the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy" have become a vale of tears for some of the "peoples" whose fate had been cruelly determined for them.

Trianon — the source of Central-Europe's problems

The Hungarians were not the only victims of Trianon. This ill-advised rearrange-



ment of the frontiers has, paradoxically, harmed the very nations too who were meant to benefit by it.

The destruction of Central Europe's political unity has created a power vacuum in this "Marchland" region. The fragmentation of the states has prevented the formation of a strong buffer-zone between the rival eastern and western powers and there is little chance today that the present states of the region will ever reach a state of sincere cooperation.

For centuries the domination of these Marchlands has been the key to European supremacy. This is why the first World War was followed by the second one: frustrated in their attempts to extend their influence over the region, both Russia and Germany used the between-wars period to extend their influence over the countries of Central Europe. Both powers had suffered defeat at the end of World War I. It would have been opportune therefore to establish a strong independent zone here to hold both

powers at bay. Unfortunately, the Trianon Treaty had fragmented the area and had set the nations against each other, instead of uniting them.

Hitler's Germany was the first to move. Gradually Germany coerced the small nations into her camp: Austria (1938), Czecho-slovakia (1939), Rumania (1940), Yugoslavia/Croatia (1941), Hungary (1941) whilst the only state to resist, Poland was conquered in 1939. The other rival power, Soviet Russia, began its conquests by the occupation of eastern Poland in 1939 (in concert with Germany), followed by the annexation of the Baltic states (1940) and the attack on Finland (1939-40). When, after the initial German successes, the German-Russian conflict turned into a Russian advance, the Soviet extended its domination over most of Central Europe.

During World War II the western Allies renounced their original war aim: the protection of the small Central-European states and so it happened that, by the conc-

clusion of the war, the Soviet Union was able to complete the conquest of this region with the very help of the western powers who had so strongly condemned Germany for her aspirations of a similar nature. If it was in Europe's interest to refrain Germany in Central Europe, the same should apply to the Russian aspirations. The possession of Central Europe by either power upsets the delicate geopolitical balance of Europe. At the present, for instance, Western Europe cannot be defended any more without outside help. The possession of Central Europe has also enabled Russia to double her industrial potential. Furthermore, allowing the Soviet domination of the small nations has created a dangerous precedent: no small nation will ever feel secure again in the vicinity of a great power.

CONCLUSION.

The publication of this booklet has, as its principal aim, the dissemination of true information. Objective studies of Central European problems are rare, especially those which discuss the complexities of the geopolitical role of these countries.

We hope that the reader will realise that small nations relate to international politics according to their geopolitical situations. No nation is "reactionary" or "democratic" by nature: their attitudes depend

greatly on the political atmosphere in their region. It is senseless therefore to punish small nations for having tried to find survival in a temporary alliance with one or the other great power. Small nations cannot pursue policies independent from or contrary to the dominant powers of the region — especially at time of war. Still more senseless is to punish innocent members of the nation who had no power to influence their country's policy. This happened in Hungary in 1920 — and again in 1947: the country was found guilty of having been coerced into two wars in which no Hungarian had any interest. What is more, 3.5 million Hungarians were punished for the "sins" of their government — which had no other way to act anyhow.

Equal human rights have been — in theory — the birthright of every human being born on this planet. Still millions of human beings are denied equal human rights in Central Europe, only because their governments happened to fight on the losing side in the previous war. Their plight is not as well publicized as some other denials of human rights elsewhere. This is the second aim of this writing: to ask for understanding and compassion for the plight of the oppressed minorities in Central Europe and to hope that truth and justice will one day apply to the victors and the defeated alike.