

**Regaining the Homeland: How Middle-Class Soldiers and  
Officers Came To Fight For Károlyi and Kun**

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## Abstract

I will employ the tool of comparative history to invoke the differences and similarities of the military under the Károlyi and Kun regimes; providing the loss of homeland/threat to sovereignty as the defining motivation that allowed these middle class soldiers to fight for both regimes. Theoretically I will draw upon both Theda Skocpol and Charles Tilly to establish three principal factors that validate the second part of my thesis; loss of the monopoly of violence by the state, multiple sovereignty in the separated territories, and the state losing its ability to be an effective coercive power over the soldiers.<sup>1</sup> Both the Tilly and Skocpol theories are directed to correctly identifying revolution, (which both the Károlyi and Kun governments used to gain power) the former arguing from the perspective of political-conflict in which ultimate sovereignty is sought, and the latter stressing the social aspects in a Marxian conception;<sup>2</sup> and allow me to explain the effect of the loss of clearly defined national boundaries undermining resistance to outside interference. I will also use Ferenc Eckhart and Miklos Lojko's theory of sovereignty of the Hungarian Holy Crown to explain the element of nationalism and patriotism expressed by soldiers and officers of the Hungarian Army.

My research will highlight the commonality of the demand placed on the state by the soldiers throughout both the Károlyi and Kun governments, and show how the level of

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<sup>1</sup> Skocpol, Theda. *States and Social Revolutions A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*, Cambridge University Press. Cambridge, 1979. Tilly, Charles. *From Mobilization to Revolution*, Addison Wesley, Reading. 1978.

<sup>2</sup> Skocpol, *States*, pgs. 6-16

commitment to these governments was directly measured by the level of success these governments attained in pursuit of the reclamation effort.

## Acknowledgments

Firstly I would like to praise God for the talent He has bestowed upon me, His continued guidance is the difference between disaster and success. There are several other people that were indispensable in the writing of this work; notably my lovely wife Dóra who has endured many sleepless nights while I typed away in the other room, enduring my moods, as difficult as I have been. Her listening skills gave me the confidence to strike out things not needed, or to keep things I felt nervous about. I have to thank my parents Jerry and Colleen Helmick, because I would not even be in the position to do something of this magnitude had they not encouraged me in getting a good education and to continue that education my entire life. My brother, Casey Helmick, for his support and good humor. My grandparents, Cathy and Tim Rutman, for always treating me like the son they never had, and believing in me even when others didn't. To my professors at the Virginia Military Institute, thank you for imbuing me with the necessary knowledge to operate at a graduate degree level. To my advisors, Professors Gerő and Casanova, thank you for the many revisions and advice. To Professor Lojko, the help you have given me for this paper has been immense, and it was very kind of you to take your time to help me develop my sovereignty argument. Finally, I would like to dedicate this work to the Hungarian officers and soldiers to whom it is written about, your legacy lives on.

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## Introduction

Following the signing of the Armistice at Padua in early November, a new era began for Hungarian soldiers who had been serving in the Austro-Hungarian Imperial Army, in which they were freed from obligation to the Emperor but forced to choose to either return home,<sup>3</sup> or to join the newly independent Hungarian Republic. With no real clear direction being given by the post-Hapsburg Hadik government and facing an ambiguous and dangerously lawless situation, many of the soldiers chose to return homeward; perhaps heeding the public statement of the new Minister of Defense, Béla Linder, who proclaimed “We want no armed forces! I never want to see another soldier again!”<sup>4</sup> This begs the question, then, why did soldiers of the middle and upper class fight for the primarily pacifist Károlyi and relatively bellicose Kun governments? This paper will argue that soldiers of the newly formed independent Hungarian military fought to regain their homeland; and when this goal became untenable, due to the military situation, gave up the fighting.

But this is to presuppose the outcome of our investigation, in which I would prefer to chronologically set forth the events. The Hadik government, quickly replaced following the

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<sup>3</sup> Not necessarily within the boundaries of the previous Kingdom of Hungary following the border revisions; an insulting and provocative prospect for men whom had just shed blood, sweat and tears for four years in its defense.

<sup>4</sup> Ignác Romsics. *The Dismantling of Historic Hungary The Peace Treaty of Trianon, 1920*, Columbia University Press. New York, 2002. pg. 62

White Aster revolution,<sup>5</sup> had its hands full politically and socially so that the military question was pushed aside for a short time. However, with the coming to power in November 1918 of Károlyi's semi-Socialist government, and the creation and consolidation of the newly formed nations surrounding the new Hungarian borders, the military question could no longer be delayed. As the Serbian, Romanian, and Czech forces surrounding the south, east and northern borders respectively were making territorial demands to the Allied Great Powers, the Károlyi government was desperately trying to solve all its dilemmas in the diplomatic arena. Unfortunately, this was unsuccessful due to the perception that Hungary had stood alongside Austria and Germany, and therefore was undesirable as a partner in mediation. Therefore Károlyi found that not only were Hungary's arguments going unheard; she would not even be given a place at the table of negotiation.

At this point, it became apparent that the necessity of a military, and one formed quickly, was a priority. In this situation, the only available forces already trained and prepared to defend the country's borders were the officers and soldiers of the former Imperial Army. Their expertise and know-how would be not only invaluable in training and preparing new recruits, but also in securing the frontier so that a sizeable force would have the time to form in an orderly fashion. Soldiers had an essential role in all aspects of both the Social Democratic republic, and the Soviet Republic that followed. Péter Pástor remarks that in "the end of April, the Rumanian Army was near Budapest. To stem the advance, class instinct merged with

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<sup>5</sup> Which swept Mihály Károlyi into power as first Prime Minister and then later President, also facing a daunting political and social challenge.

national pride and half the working population of Budapest enlisted in the newly formed Hungarian Red Army.”<sup>6</sup> Support for the military, and through it, support for the two regimes was accomplished through the military.

This recruitment continued under the Kun government, which unexpectedly seized power in March of 1919. The Vix Ultimatum requiring the Hungarian army and bureaucracy to retreat from the established Hungarian borders in both Upper Hungary (Slovakia) and Transylvania (to become part of the Kingdom of Romania) forced the decision of the Károlyi government to resign rather than capitulate, paving the way for Kun to declare the Soviet Republic of Hungary and to reject Allied demands. The Hungarian army recruitment and training was increased and for the first time offensive operations were conceived to take back areas of Hungary that had been seized during the Károlyi diplomatic failure. This further encouraged middle class officers and soldiers who were before undecided about their loyalty to join the cause, as it was seen as a proactive step towards achieving what for them was the ultimate goal, reestablishing their homeland within Hungarian borders and control.

This recruitment of middle class soldiers and officers was primarily done through an appeal to patriotism; but more importantly, by playing on the fears of these same soldiers that their homeland would be lost forever to Hungary through the machinations of the Czechs, Serbs and Romanians. It was hoped that these men could disregard their own political convictions to unite to protect the Hungarian national territory from foreign encroachment. For

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<sup>6</sup> Péter Pásztor, *Hungary Between Wilson and Lenin: The Hungarian Revolution of 1918-1919 and the Big Three*, (Columbia University Press. New York, 1976) pg. 150

the officers, another consideration that plays a part is the continuation of their careers, cut short by the dissolution of the former Imperial Army, but having the possibility of renewal under the new independent Hungarian army. These reasons have been dealt with in prior publications, but only in a broader examination as secondary factors or only to further the analysis of the justification of Admiral Horthy to allow these officers to continue careers after the fall of the Kun government. Noted Hungarian historians such as Ervin Liptai, Béla K. Király, and Maria Ormos have addressed the issue of the Hungarian military during this time period; but mostly in part of a larger context of the entire inter-war period, and also coupled with political, social, economic, and diplomatic considerations, which lead to the poverty of time spent addressing the issue of soldiers and officers motivations. Only Laszlo Fogarassy details a specific section of his book, *A Magyarországi Tanácsköztársaság katonai összeomlása*, (1988)<sup>7</sup> to addressing the correspondence and personal thoughts of officers and soldiers and their motivation to fight, and then only in the general context of correspondence, without analysis.

Most of the material I have used is not and cannot be considered to be new or revelatory, nor have most of the publications I have used for support been published in the last 15 years. The methodological way in which I will use them, however, is, in the manner in which I use it, a new approach. I will employ the tool of comparative history to invoke the differences and similarities of the military under the Károlyi and Kun regimes; providing the loss of homeland as the defining motivation that allowed these middle class soldiers to fight for both regimes, even though their political and military goals were executed differently.

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<sup>7</sup> The Military Collapse of the Hungarian Council Republic

Theoretically I will draw upon both Theda Skocpol and Charles Tilly to establish three principal factors that validate the second part of my thesis;<sup>8</sup> loss of the monopoly of violence by the state, multiple sovereignty in the separated territories, and the state losing its ability to be an effective coercive power over the soldiers.<sup>9</sup> Both the Tilly and Skocpol theories are directed to correctly identifying revolution, the former arguing from the perspective of political-conflict in which ultimate sovereignty is sought, and the latter stressing the social aspects in a Marxian conception;<sup>10</sup> and allow me to explain the smaller picture of motivation through the greater theory of the effect of the loss of clearly defined national boundaries undermining resistance to outside interference. My research will highlight the commonality of the demand placed on the state by the soldiers throughout both the Károlyi and Kun governments, and show how the level of commitment to these governments was directly measured by the level of success these governments attained in pursuit of the reclamation effort.

The first chapter will establish the theoretical background, bringing the importance of sovereignty and the maintenance of national territory to the foreground. A definition of sovereignty, how it is applied, and to what purpose it affects the struggle for existence of the state will be expanded upon. The theoretical aspect of the effect of the Holy Crown of saint Stephen, its particular importance for Hungarian sovereignty, and the motivation it provided for former Austro-Hungarian soldiers to in turn fight for the newly established Hungarian Republic

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<sup>8</sup> The reluctance to continue fighting for the Károlyi and Kun governments when the military situation was no longer conducive to the recapture of the homeland.

<sup>9</sup> Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*, (Cambridge University Press. Cambridge, 1979) Tilly, Charles. *From Mobilization to Revolution*, (Addison Wesley, Reading. 1978)

<sup>10</sup> Skocpol, *States*, p. 6-16

will also be treated. Its importance cannot be overstated; as an anchoring factor in the minds of Hungarian soldiers, and a patriotic symbol that carried enormous amounts of respect and admiration. The motivation and indoctrination of the soldiers critically plays a role in understanding the desire to continue fighting another series of battles after four long years of war.

The second chapter will explore the theoretical aspect of the relationship of the state and the soldiers serving it; thereby setting up an expectation of what is expected and what benchmarks must be achieved to secure the loyalty of the armed forces. Attention will be paid to the psychological aspect of the national cleavage, the loss of homeland to foreign entities, and the responsibilities of the state to reassert its sovereignty in these areas in exchange for the soldier's loyalty. A section will be devoted to the effect of the changing of the former system of governance and adjustment of the soldier's and their families to life outside the boundaries of their former state, along with the constant shifting of borders and an ever-changing peace agreement.

The third chapter, followed by the complementing fourth, will address the empirical study of the Károlyi regime and the subsequent Kun takeover, revealing their intentions, Károlyi's execution of negotiations, the issue of Army politics, and the choices to either defend or capitulate. Legitimate rule will be reviewed, and whether the soldiers were willing to secure this legitimacy. Particular attention will be paid to the lack of military success in holding onto remaining Hungarian territory, and how this undermined the regime in the eyes of the military

over time will deal with the emergence of the Kun government, and its abrupt shift to an aggressive foreign policy, driven by its communist ideological world-view, solely in its effect on military policy. Sections will address the setting aside of politics by the middle class soldiers to pursue reconquest of lost territory, preparation for the repatriation of that territory and the military campaign waged to secure it, and finally the decisions taken to choose where to strike and against whom.

The fifth chapter will discuss the effects of the victory in Upper Hungary/Slovakia, the prospect for continued campaigning, and the capitulation to the Clemenceau ultimatum, leading to the demoralization of the armed forces and the eventual collapse against the Romanians on the eastern front. The psychology of defeat in victory, disillusionment with the Communist government and a reluctance to give in to indoctrination, and the subsequent lack of loyalty will be examined, as well as the acquiescence in the total loss of former Hungarian territories and acceptance of foreign state control. The conclusion will focus on casting light once more onto the motivation of middle class soldiers, who under adverse conditions accepted the control of governments whom politically could not normally count on their allegiance. It will also give insight into the further careers of the primary source soldiers and officers whom were involved; giving the reader an idea of what their post-revolutionary careers were.

# Chapter 1

## Theoretical Framework

“In war as in life, it is often necessary when some cherished scheme has failed, to take up the best alternative open, and if so, it is folly not to work for it with all your might.”<sup>11</sup>

Winston Churchill

Sovereignty is the key principle in which every state is measured; the level of sovereignty that it achieves both internally over its own population and externally in relation to other states is not only indicative of the future success of the state but also whether or not it even survives. Sovereignty is in and of itself an historical study, and through the methodology of comparative history, I plan to analyze the reasoning of middle-class Hungarian soldiers in their fight to regain lost territory in the former Kingdom of Hungary, during the Károlyi and Kun regimes. To begin this analysis however, some normative definitions of sovereignty, and the manner in which I will employ comparative history as a methodological tool must be elaborated; thereby creating a structure for the reader to refer to as we explore my findings.

First, I will deal with the theoretical aspects of sovereignty in its defining characteristics of the state, the need for, maintenance of, and pursuit of which defines the state and its goals. Then I will apply this theory specifically to the empirical case of the Republic of Hungary itself following the provisional armistice in late 1918, and how the military formulated its goals in regard to sovereignty. Finally I will bring together the methodology of comparative analysis, in which I will show that the Hungarian middle-class soldiers were aware of sovereignty as a

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<sup>11</sup> Winston Churchill as quoted in: Roy Jenkins, *Churchill, A Biography*, (New York, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2001)



mechanism of abstention from politics and were able to avoid identifying themselves with the regime, while still supporting its aims, to advance their professional careers.

A normative definition of the state is also necessary to begin the study of sovereignty; its boundaries, its expectations and its responsibilities. Three definitions of the state will provide the framework that is sought, coming from the Montevideo Convention of 1948, Theda Skocpol and Charles Tilly. The Montevideo Convention requirements for a state are that it is a political entity that encompasses the most widely recognized criteria: permanent population, defined territory, government, and the capacity to enter into relations with other states.<sup>12</sup> To strengthen this definition somewhat, Theda Skocpol points out two further expectations of the state, when she argues that a “state normally performs two basic sets of tasks: It maintains order, and it competes with other actual or potential states.”<sup>13</sup> Charles Tilly rounds off the framework of definitions by claiming that the permanent population normally “pays taxes to it, [the state] provide men for its armies, feed its functionaries, honor its symbols, give time to its service, or yield other resources.”<sup>14</sup> These criteria are necessary for a state to function; when elements are missing or altered, the state itself can be in jeopardy, such as during times of revolution, civil war, or invasion.

Absolute sovereignty and the state are not always mutually interdependent; many states had at some point both gained and lost forms of sovereignty in the course of their existence,

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<sup>12</sup> Montevideo Convention of 1948

<sup>13</sup> Skocpol, *States*, p. 30

<sup>14</sup> Tilly, “Revolutions and Collective Action” in *Handbook of Political Science*, ed. Greenstein and Polsby, Vol. 3, *Macropolitical Theory*, p. 520-521

most notably in the struggle to establish the state.<sup>15</sup> It must also be mentioned that sovereignty is a two-part equation, as it must be established in both the internal territory and the external border areas. James Tully defines it as:

Sovereignty in this non-absolute sense means the authority of a culturally diverse people or association of peoples to govern themselves by their own laws and ways free from external subordination.<sup>16</sup>

Neither internal nor external sovereignty precede each other; they must be accomplished in tandem because the control of one is required to establish the other. Population must feel that their borders are secure in order to recognize the legitimacy of the state, while at the same time the state must be able to rely on absolute control of the populace to allow the use of armed force to protect and maintain the external border. To put this theory in another light, Csaba Gombár further enumerates that

Sovereignty is a qualified state of the supreme authority in a political system circumscribed by state boundaries, where the central authority is recognized not only internally but externally as well.<sup>17</sup>

How does the state accomplish these two parts of the ultimate goal of sovereignty? The theory that best functions in the explanation of these aims comes from Charles Tilly, whom Theda Skocpol quotes as describing the state as “basically organized coercion.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Examples in Central Europe abound, for example Poland, throughout its tumultuous history has gained or lost sovereignty multiple times in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century alone; the Kingdom of Romania grew and shrank during the exact time period being discussed, and Yugoslavia, and the countries contained within have gained and lost independence many times during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries also.

<sup>16</sup> James Tully in Hent Kalmo, Quentin Skinner *Sovereignty in Fragments*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010) p. 195

<sup>17</sup> Csaba Gombár, Elémer Hankiss, László Lengyel, Györgyi Varnai, *The Appeal of Sovereignty*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1998) p. 8

<sup>18</sup> Skocpol, *State and Social Revolutions*, p. 26 from Tilly, *From Mobilization*, p. 52

Skocpol has a slightly different view of the methods of state control, Marxian in context, but mutually beneficial with Tilly's coercion theory in regards to how sovereignty is directly tied to a regime's legitimacy for its populace. Skocpol therefore defines the legitimacy of the state as deriving from

The ebbing (of a regime's legitimacy) in the eyes of its own cadres and other politically powerful groups may figure as a mediating variable in an analysis of regime breakdown. But the basic causes will be found in the structure and capacities of state organizations, as these are conditioned by developments in the economy and class structure and also by developments in the international situation.<sup>19</sup>

Although Tilly and Skocpol primarily deal with revolutionary causes, I feel it is important to include their theories as both regimes discussed in the comparative methodology I use take place in the context of revolutions in Hungary, first through Károlyi replacing the old Dual Monarchy with quasi-Socialism, and then through Kun and the Communist takeover.

Therefore, if we are to activate these two theories as the basis for the primacy of sovereignty in the maintenance of the legitimacy of the state, we must decide with what tool the state secured the two forms of sovereignty. I will briefly treat what is needed to maintain internal sovereignty, but this naturally lies outside of the focus of this study because I have chosen to focus primarily on the military aspect of sovereignty, which in this case deals with the external threat first and foremost.<sup>20</sup>

Internal sovereignty is therefore dependent on the loyalty of the populace to the regime.

If that loyalty is questioned or challenged, then police and auxiliary forces within the state's

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 32

<sup>20</sup> Some excellent articles and books have been written about the use of the newly formed Red Guard within the Hungarian Communist regime, and their use within the internal situation between March and June 1919, which are included in the bibliography.

defined territory, perform the necessary task of providing uniform presence of rule of law. If the armed forces are necessary to maintain order within the contiguous borders, then the legitimacy of the government is called into question.<sup>21</sup> More importantly for this study, the tool used by the state to maintain external sovereignty is primarily the armed forces, and specifically, the Army. This is because external sovereignty is historically established through violence, against other peoples (or in the modern era against other states) that seek to challenge that sovereignty. Therefore, the Army's primary purpose is to execute the monopoly of violence<sup>22</sup> that the state controls, against the external threats faced by the state. Following this line of reasoning then leads to the necessary discussion of **how** this monopoly of violence is maintained against external foes. Stuart Hall asserts that

Sovereignty is also linked in complex ways with "territory." The attachment to land remains a powerful element in the complex of attitudes and feelings mobilized around sovereignty... Yet territory matters for the definition of sovereignty, partly because the senses of "belonging," sentiments of loyalty, are important constituents of being members of a state; but mainly because of the need to establish the boundaries to power and legal rule.<sup>23</sup>

Either the maintenance or the expansion of territory, therefore, is the primary method or means by which the Army is able to provide the external sovereignty that the state needs to gain legitimacy with its populace. David Held argues in the same publication that "the modern state places two distinctive elements of its history: [as important pillars] territoriality and

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<sup>21</sup> Michael Brown, *International Dimensions of Internal Conflicts*, (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1996) p. 1-29, Skocpol *States and Social Revolutions*, p. 5-28, Stathis N. Kalyvas *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006) p. 80

<sup>22</sup> Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*

<sup>23</sup> Stuart Hall in Gregor McLennan, David Held, Stuart Hall, *The Idea of the Modern State*, (Philadelphia, Open University Press, 1990) p. 18

violence.”<sup>24</sup> Without this “ultimate sovereignty,”<sup>25</sup> i.e. both external and internal sovereignty, the state ultimately faces revolution, civil war, or invasion.

Thus we emerge into a position in which we can discuss the specific circumstances of Hungary following the loss of the First World War, and the political and military events that led to the collapse of the Kun government in July of 1919 and the occupation of Budapest by the Romanian army. By establishing the motive, the background, it will allow us to better understand what could have caused middle-class soldiers in the Hungarian army to fight not only for the first revolutionary government, but also for the more extreme Communist one that followed. Before the circumstances of the time period in question are addressed, there needs to be some historical analysis of the specificity of the Hungarian historical claim of sovereignty, and how it is unique as compared to other European nations.

Many nations in Europe have emerged from the beginning of absolute monarchies along the path to plural democracies, primarily through the process of enfranchisement of larger and larger portions of its populace, and their inclusion in the political process that shapes each nation’s debates and issues. Following that path, governments and elites within these states have been cognizant of several political tools which allow them to control the pace and directions of these changes, and have used them accordingly. One of the major tools used in gathering further portions of the population into the fold of responsible voting constituencies that have a stake in political participation was the addition of military service as a successful

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 62

<sup>25</sup> Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, p. 202-209

prerequisite for voting privileges. By turning former subjects (under rule of the King) into citizens integrated into the political process, states created a large portion of the male populace with investment in the state system based on previous service.<sup>26</sup> Hungary, however, with her increasingly complex relationship to the Habsburg Monarchy, had a peculiar tradition that members of her noble class consistently played as a trump in opposition to the Dual Monarchy; the Holy Crown of Saint Stephen.

The issue of the Hungarian Crown, the meaning of which was different in each of Europe's surviving monarchies, is at best a contentious issue.<sup>27</sup> However, the special relationship that the noble class within Hungary had, with the so-called Holy Crown, approaching the late nineteenth century within the upper middle class, sets its meaning aside. A crown, as it was known to most Europeans during the eleventh through to the eighteenth centuries, was connected to a monarch, who in all likelihood derived his power from divine origins, and was king in both a physical and spiritual sense. The physical body was responsible, but the idea of kingship in absence of the body was also entirely relevant. As this relationship changed through the Enlightenment, Reformation, and the advancement of political thought throughout Europe, kings made the passage of their power hereditary, and thereby

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<sup>26</sup> This does not indicate necessarily political allegiance, but more an investment in the continuation of the state itself, and although it can be argued for example that Czechs, Poles, and Ruthenians had little or no stake in the continuation of the Habsburg Monarchy, Austrian-Germans, and Hungarians did. The difference between the two groups is that the first group had no real impact on the political processes in Franz Jozsef's Slav territory, as they lacked the status of "peoples of the state," while the place of the Austrian-Germans and Hungarians allowed them to create conditions in which some of their political demands could be met.

<sup>27</sup> Ferenc Eckhart, *A szentkorona eszme tortenete*, (Budapest, Attraktor Kiado, 1941), Zoltan Toth, *A Hartvik-legenda kritikajahoz (A szt. korona eredetkerdese)*, (Budapest, AKIF, 1942) Jozsef Deer, *A magyar kiralysag megalakulasa in A Magyar Tortenettudomanyi Intezet evkonyve*, (Budapest, Athenaeum, 1943)

transferred their personal divine sanctioned legitimacy to an extended umbrella under which all members of the royal dynasty could claim protection and right to rule. This was all descended from the romantic dynastic narrative that provided the legitimacy for a specific set of elite families to claim the right to compete for royal seigniorial control.

As early as the sixteenth century, however, Hungary began to see a change in the general European trend of associating the crown with the king himself.<sup>28</sup> There was historical precedent in this movement; the earliest kings of the Arpad dynasty (including Stephen, Géza, and even earlier) were elected from the original tribes that made up the Hungarian invaders of the Carpathian Basin, and therefore the choosing of the king was in all senses a decision by the elites of the Hungarians.<sup>29</sup> This was only reinforced after the death of the male line of the Arpad dynasty; resulting in the requirement of the coronation with the Holy Crown of Saint Stephen as the sole legitimizing factor that would satisfy the Hungarian noble elites. The Holy Crown itself, then, became the real source of power, which could be conferred upon a king, or taken away if he did not perform his duties to the state and neglected to satisfy the political demands of the noble class.

One of the privileges of the Hungarian Holy Crown was that all state land was vested in the Crown, rather than personal holdings of the King,<sup>30</sup> and therefore the meaning of Crown-

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<sup>28</sup> Eckhart, *A szentkorona*, pg. 72, 79, 81, 84-87, 102

<sup>29</sup> Even by factoring in post-pagan rational that every king chosen was chosen with the implicit consent of a benevolent Creator, it still indicates that to have a legitimate King of Hungary, the noble class is the instrument through which the will of God is proclaimed here on Earth.

<sup>30</sup> This theory was consolidated after the decline of royal power following the reign of the kings following Sigismund and Mátyás.

land, rather than being invested solely in the personal prestige of the King, became a matter of state investiture and gave each member of the political nation (i.e. the elites) a stake in its protection and maintenance. No longer in this sense was the King able to simply ransom or sell pieces of Crown territory without consequences;<sup>31</sup> especially with the division of Hungary into three parts following the invasion of the Ottomans. From the late sixteenth century until the late seventeenth century, the Habsburgs, as kings of Hungary, were expected to retake and reinstate all lost territory with the retained crown lands, as demanded by the noble class in their diet.<sup>32</sup> Their ability to do this further invested the nobles of the country in the service, both military and political, of the Habsburg monarchy, and created a strong bond that carried through till the early 1920s, when the last Habsburg was finally ejected from Hungarian national territory.

This is obviously what is meant when, from the late eighteenth century until the end of the First World War, the title of the ‘Lands of St. Stephen’s Crown’ were used to describe territory considered to be with the state sovereignty of Hungary. The Compromise of 1867, creating the Dual Monarchy, gave legality to this claim as an incentive to join with Austria.<sup>33</sup> By recognizing that the “Lands of the Hungarian Holy Crown constitute an onallo allam which is independent of all other countries,”<sup>34</sup> the Holy Crown became the ultimate arbitrator of the

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<sup>31</sup> Pál Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen, A History of Medieval Hungary 895-1526*, (London, I. B. Taurus, 2005) pg. 209-229, 298-322

<sup>32</sup> Eckhart, *A szentkorona*, pg. 222, 245

<sup>33</sup> Law XII of the 1867 Compromise, preamble, paragraphs 1, 18, 27. also known as the Settlement Law and using the phrase Holy Crown as a territorial reference.

<sup>34</sup> Preamble to the bill On the Austro-Hungarian Personal Union, 20 October 1918: Emma Ivanyi (ed.), *Magyar minisztertanacsi jegyzokonyvek az elso vilagaboru korabol 1914-1918*, (Budapest, 1960) pg. 516-17



sovereignty of state territory; it maintained itself as the symbol of Hungarian state power even as the former relationship with the Hapsburgs crumbled and the legitimacy of a Habsburgian king of Hungary was no longer possible. However, by falling back on the inalienable claim of the Holy Crown itself as a will and extension of territorial sovereignty, and the object to which Hungarian Army officers and middle-class soldiers would have identified with their ultimate political loyalty after the removal of the Habsburg Emperor, any new government that followed the collapse would have been able to lay a continued expectation of service to the Holy Crown regardless of the political affiliation of the government in question.<sup>35</sup> These officers and soldiers were not only concerned with their own homes and families; but also with their fidelity to the Holy Crown to which they had invested their military service and national allegiance.

Following the dissolution of the Habsburg lands, new states were created from the former union. The Republic of Hungary was to emerge from what was the Kingdom; now surrounded by three new neighbors, and one old but expanding one.<sup>36</sup> This created an entirely new situation for the Hungarian Army, as before it could count on the support and protection afforded by friendly neighbors to the west and north, with the only hostile borders to the east and south. The burden was heavy on the new Republic, still smarting from its derived

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<sup>35</sup> Károly Kmety, a professor of Hungarian Public Law in Budapest from 1902 to 1929, sent memos to Károlyi explaining that they had become trustees of the Holy Crown, as well as speaking in public lectures in support of the Kun regime because it “aimed at the preservation of the country’s territorial integrity” and calling the Revolutionary Directorate “the repository of the Holy Crown to which, by virtue of the declaration of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the rights as well as the obligations of the Holy Crown had been transferred” in Pál Halász, ‘A jogi gondolkodás alakulása a Magyar Tanácsköztársaságban’ *Jogtudományi Közöny*, 14, 1959, p. 59

<sup>36</sup> To the west the new Austrian First Republic, to the north the new Czechoslovakia, east the previous Kingdom of Romania, and the south the new Yugoslavia, comprising Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia all with borders next to Hungary

complicity in the direction and subsequent loss of the First World War. Because of the level of propaganda and the previous grievances felt by the Czechs, Romanians, and Serbs, Hungary's territorial sovereignty immediately came under attack as retribution for its former privileged status within the Monarchy. The unacceptable peace negotiations between the Entente and the victorious successor states on one side, and Hungary on the other, created a situation in which claims and counter-claims ran rampant. Ian Kershaw attributes the ensuing violence and struggle to

The absence of solidly established pluralist-democratic structures, values and mentalities; defeat in the First World War and a resultant profound sense of national humiliation....(because of) territorial losses, disputed territorial claims..... and also an ethnocultural basis of nationality, frequently going hand in hand with a culturally rooted mentality of ethnic superiority and an aggressive, internal-organic ideology of nationalism which gained definition by exclusion of ethnic minorities, often sharing the same territory.<sup>37</sup>

The challenge then, facing the new government, was to create an Army from the pieces of the now defunct Monarchical army, and to define the responsibility of the Army.

However, setting that task was no simple matter. As the negotiations dragged on, four successive defense ministers came and went, giving the Army no clear direction or even failing to establish the rules of engagement for their respective theaters. After having already experienced one revolution, another seemed to be imminent. James Defronzo, whose book *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, lays out some basic prerequisites for revolutionary potential, giving as a primary cause the

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<sup>37</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Wars and Political Violence in Twentieth Century Europe*, (Contemporary European History, Vol. 14, 1, 2005) p. 115

Crisis, which may be caused by a catastrophic defeat in war, [Károlyi White Aster revolution]...may deplete the state of loyal personnel, [lack of a professional army to serve the Károlyi government] legitimacy in the eyes of the public, and other resources. The state then becomes incapable of carrying out its normal functions and cannot cope effectively with an opposition revolutionary movement.<sup>38</sup>

Therein lies the basic fault of the Károlyi regime; that it could not normalize relations with neighboring successor states and provide a clear-cut orientation for the Army. Skocpol argues that “a state’s involvement in an international network of states is a basis for potential autonomy of action over and against groups and economic arrangements within its jurisdiction,”<sup>39</sup> and therefore must be established to gain ultimate sovereignty. This in turn created an Army which had its theoretical legs cut out from underneath it, because it was being denied its traditional role of defending state territory from aggression by the diplomatic and political circumstances facing the Károlyi government. Its subsequent lack of support in the Communist takeover was absolutely not a politically motivated reorientation of the Army to Communist rhetoric; instead it was the build-up of four months of frustration of not being able to reacquire the lost territories to the north, east, south and west that were under occupation.

One of the causes of the Kun takeover then can be attributed to an Army desperate to regain its traditional role in the state, and provide protection for the state sovereign territory. Another major factor that gave impetus to the regime change was the step-up in the aggressiveness of the demands challenging Hungarian territorial sovereignty; mainly the Vix

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<sup>38</sup> James Defronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, (Boulder, Westview Press, 2011) p.10-11

<sup>39</sup> Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, p. 31

Ultimatum.<sup>40</sup> This ultimatum was driven and sustained by the neighboring Czech and Romanian governments as a legitimate acquirement of former Hungarian national territory through Entente pressure. Julian Casanova explains that when a regime cannot provide the proper amount of security, that “multiple sovereignty emerge[s]: there were two governments, and hence two different polities each composed of and supported by various groups and classes.”<sup>41</sup> Michael Brown interprets this type of internal conflict as being important because “it often affects and involves neighboring states...neighboring states are not always the innocent victims of turmoil in their regions. In some cases neighboring states are responsible for sparking internal conflict.”<sup>42</sup> This perfectly describes the Vix note, which did so much to create the Kun regime. Kun was able to mobilize the support of the Army for one simple reason; he promised them the chance to take back the former territories then under occupation as rightful Hungarian possessions. He did this through an appeal to their patriotism, nationalism and preyed on their fear of what might happen to their homeland otherwise.

By appealing to their nationalist instinct and their natural desire to regain former Hungarian territory, and not attempting to politically convert and create a Party army, Bela Kun was able to score a major victory in the Slovak theater; had he instead insisted on a communist revolutionary army, it is doubtful how many middle-class soldiers would have been willing to

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<sup>40</sup> The Vix Ultimatum required the Hungarian army and bureaucracy to retreat from the established Hungarian borders in both Upper Hungary (Slovakia) and Transylvania (to become part of the Kingdom of Romania), given by Colonel Vix of the French Army as liaison for the Entente Powers in Budapest to the government of Mihály Károlyi, and ultimately leading to the resignation of said government.

<sup>41</sup> Julian Casanova, *Civil Wars, Revolutions, and Counterrevolutions in Finland, Spain, and Greece (1918-1949) A Comparative Analysis*, (International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society, Vol. 13, 2, 2000) p.525

<sup>42</sup> Brown, *International Dimensions*, p. 2-8

fight according to Party principles. As I will show in subsequent chapters, many of the officers and soldiers in the divisions from Transylvania and other regions under occupation even supposed there to be two enemies, Bolshevism and the enemy without.<sup>43</sup> Once Kun could no longer provide effective monopoly of violence within the state, the front quickly fell apart. Soldiers saw their primary motivation of effective resistance taken away by the political, economic, and social upheaval in Budapest, and lost heart when the hard-fought victories in Slovakia were simply annulled with the Entente-enforced withdrawal. Coupled with the multiple sovereignty experienced by their families within the captured territories, which led to the suffering they experienced at the hands of the new occupation forces, and the bleak outlook in regaining their part of the homeland, the Kun government lost its power of coercion over the Army, and effectively surrendered the remaining state territory to the invading successor states. This signaled the end of Hungarian state sovereignty.

Comparative history in the context of the two revolutions in 1918-1919 in Hungary is an excellent way to gain a better perspective of the reasons why middle-class soldiers fought for two left-wing governments. Skocpol argues that “when it is successfully employed, comparative historical analysis serves as an ideal strategy for mediating between theory and history.”<sup>44</sup> By utilizing this tool, the reader is able to easily see the comparison and the contrast in reaction to both regimes and then placing this into the context of the question asked by this writer, to see why essentially apolitical or right-wing sympathetic soldiers and officers so

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<sup>43</sup> József Breit, *A Magyarországi 1918/1919 évi Forradalmi Mozgalmak és a VörösHabarú Torténete I Resz* (Archival)

<sup>44</sup> Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, p.39-40

faithfully served these two regimes. That sovereignty of state territory is a basis for the power and prestige of a state is unquestioned; but the manner and method in which it is accomplished is a question that ultimately must be resolved by firm and resolute soldiers and officers who are determined to protect, and in some cases expand said territory.

## Chapter 2

### Dissolution: Is home still home?

#### A. Where do we go from here?

As we explore the issue of the loss of sizeable portions of former Hungarian territory following the First World War, historian Sándor Szakály raises an interesting query about a set of integral actors whose participation significantly affected both the process and the outcome of the peace treaty process.

The historian exploring the Hungarian revolutions and counter-revolutions following World War I is bound to face sooner or later the question of: Who were the soldiers, and the military leaders, who participated in revolutions and counterrevolutions? Who were the commanders, the officers who organized, commanded the armies of the liberal democratic People's Republic and then the Soviet Republic?<sup>45</sup>

Indeed, who were these individuals who chose to fight for the borders of Hungary? It was not a popular decision to do so; having just ended four long years of war within Europe the vast majority of men returning from the front could not have been enthused at the idea of fighting former comrades in arms from the Austro-Hungarian Imperial army. What motivations led them to once again serve on battlefields in which the method of warfare would be even more vicious as it involved control of contested ethnic disputed homelands? In what way could career soldiers, middle-class in economic and political ideals, place their trust in socialist and

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<sup>45</sup> Sándor Szakály, *War and Society in East Central Europe Vol. XX Revolutions and Interventions in Hungary and its neighbor states 1918-1919*, ed. Peter Pástor, (Columbia University Press, New York, 1988) p. 169

communist governing forces? What price were they willing to pay to defend those borders that existed in their minds?

November 1918 was a time in which many Western European soldiers fondly remember the laying down of arms on the Western Front, and the cessation of hostilities. The further east that the historian looks within Europe, however, the more likely that hostilities did not cease, but only changed form from open warfare to revolution, counter-revolution, and border clashes that lasted well into the middle of the 1920s. One of the biggest territorial/population shifts occurred in the former Habsburg Monarchy; one of the three multi-national empires that had encompassed European/Eurasian continent from the Alps to the Pacific Ocean.<sup>46</sup> However, this is premature to suppose, as Ignác Romsics argues

What was not predestined, however, was the manner of the collapse and the precise form of the new order; these were determined by the outcome of World War I, the strategic interests of the victorious Great Powers and conditions inside a country [Hungary, T.H.] that was in the grips of revolutions and counterrevolutions.<sup>47</sup>

As they streamed back from the eastern front in Russian territory, and also from the Piave on the western front in Italy, Hungarian soldiers of the Austro-Hungarian Imperial Army generally had three things in mind which they planned to accomplish; finding something to eat, to shed anything that reminded them of their misery in the army, and getting to their hometown or village as fast as possible.<sup>48</sup> These three goals were not as easily accomplished as one would

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<sup>46</sup> The three empires of course referring to the Habsburg Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the Romanov Russian dynasty, and the Hohenzollern German Empire.

<sup>47</sup> Ignác Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century*, (Corvina-Osiris Kiado, Budapest, 1999) p. 81

<sup>48</sup> Istvan I. Mócsy, *War and Society in East Central Europe Vol. XII The Effects of World War I*, (Brooklyn College Press, New York, 1986) p. 16



suppose for retreating soldiers. The countryside for the most part was stripped bare because of the subordination of foodstuffs for the war effort, leaving soldiers little choice but to steal or beg what remained. Shedding their army identity was not so simple as taking off the Kaiser's Rock, because there were other distinguishing characteristics that defined a soldier, setting them apart from civilians.<sup>49</sup> Yet, the retreat continued unabated because of the lack of other options. Certainly the Imperial Army was no longer functioning; its organizational structure was broken, and the basic services it formerly provided were no longer available.

Without a structural cohesion to hold onto, soldiers felt that they needed to fend for themselves, which consequently led to the increased amount of indiscipline and looting. Béla Bácsó, who was a First Lieutenant in 1918, and who was born and raised in Nagyszében, [present day Transylvanian part of Romania, T. H.] remarked in his *Family Remembrance* that

The retreat was chaotic at best, with all the soldiers streaming back across the former borders, and the poor civilian population nothing to give, many scenes of mutual distrust and the desire to just "move on" were expressed by both sides...Even though these men had given everything, they were expected to survive even longer without.<sup>50</sup>

This experience was important because the officers and non-commissioned officers whose job was to facilitate the return of the Hungarian military units were without recourse, without any

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<sup>49</sup> Kaiser's Rock was a nickname for the Imperial Army uniform, other defining characteristics included a short haircut, military bearing in demeanor, war wounds, discharge papers which were essential in case stopped by the police or army military police, soldier's ration cards, army-issued weapons, which of course soldiers were reluctant to give up as they provided protection and in case of foraging, intimidation. Also to shed an identity that one has acquired over a 4 year period is quite hard; loud noises causing a man to dive for a foxhole that isn't there, excessive drinking, and the preference to fraternize with other soldiers were hard habits to break.

<sup>50</sup> Béla Bácsó, *Csaladjanak iratoj*, [Family Remembrances] (Hadtörténelmi Levéltár, 1014. Budapest, Kapisztrán tér 2-4. , Archives)

vestige of control. The result of this exodus was chaotic conditions within the border areas of the Kingdom of Hungary, and also within the more central locations near Budapest.

The Hungarian Army ceased to be an effective fighting force within a few days after the armistice. Soldiers deserted their units by the thousands and flocked home from the fronts in total disarray. Peasant soldiers, excited by the news of the imminent land reform, hurried home to their villages. Others plunged into revolution in the major cities. Even if an army could have been raised, Hungary would have to face enemies on three sides.<sup>51</sup>

This in turn caused a mass discontent within the civilian population, whose aims were fairly simple, yet complicated at the same time; food, protection, and the maintenance of national borders. Ignác Romsics asserts that

To these criticisms of the government's domestic policies, from late November 1918 they added increasingly strident demands for armed intervention to defend first the country's historical borders and then its Hungarian-inhabited inner core. The membership of the most belligerent groups was made up partly of serving or reserve army officers.<sup>52</sup>

The pushing in of the borders of the former Monarchial area was a definite psychological shock to both the returning soldiers and the civilians alike, because it became more than just a national affront, but both a physical and emotional loss of home that could not be countered.

For them the dissolution of the Monarchy and the occupation of those areas of the country with large populations of non-Hungarian descent was more than just a psychological shock; at one fell swoop many had lost the entire former basis of their existence.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, p. 16

<sup>52</sup> Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century*, p. 96

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*

Having decided to avoid any more useless service, these soldiers and officers hoped to put the war behind them and to return in relative peace to their [hopefully] intact homeland. For those whose domicile was located on the peripheries of the Kingdom of Hungary, this proved to be an illusory concept.

## **B. What to do now that we made it home?**

### *I. THE NORTHERN FRONT*

As former soldiers and officials returned from the war fronts homewards, they slowly realized that the political and military situation within their local areas had begun shifting to an entirely different base of power. All along the northern, eastern, and southern border areas, minority<sup>54</sup> populations began to assert their independence and political weight. In the north, Slovaks were prodded by their Czech compatriots to declare themselves in union with the new Czech state comprised of historical Bohemia and Moravia; even though no Slovak state had existed before this time.<sup>55</sup> As inevitable conflict between Hungarian officials and new representatives of the Czech state became apparent, an appeal was made to the military armistice agreements agreed upon between the Hungarian representatives and the Entente officials in Padua, which

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<sup>54</sup> In actuality numerically Romanians, Slovaks, and Serbians were the majority, however, culturally, based on the Magyarization policy, they had been considered as a minority within the Hungarian nation

<sup>55</sup> Mócsy, *War and Society in East Central Europe Vol XII The Effects of World War I*, (Brooklyn College Press, New York, 1985) p. 23-26

had stipulated that Hungarian officials were to be left in charge of all formerly governed areas within the Lands of Saint Stephen.<sup>56</sup> Peter Pásztor remarks that

The Czechoslovaks were the first to embark on military intervention into the lands that were under Hungarian sovereignty... [this led to] Hungarians fear[ing] that their neighbors might use provocateurs to force disputed areas to be transferred into their own control.<sup>57</sup>

At this early stage, with intervention beginning in what were formerly the peripheries of the Hungarian kingdom, that appeal to Padua was directed towards the only legitimate power within the region, namely the Entente.

The only remaining choice, if the territorial integrity of the country was to be preserved, lay between resumption of hostilities against the Great Powers and their East Central European allies and a trust in the good will of the West.<sup>58</sup>

## II. THE SOUTHERN FRONT

The situation became even more pressing in the southern border area, because the Serb forces there had a sizeable presence of Entente French forces alongside themselves. Even with the restraint this would impose on territorial revisionism, [on the part of the Serbs, T.H.] the idea of revision alone led to the “retreat of the Hungarian population...even before the Serbian troops crossed the frontiers...the threat of violence reached everyone.”<sup>59</sup> The Entente forces were led by General Franchet d’Esperey,

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<sup>56</sup> Pásztor, *Hungary between Lenin and Wilson: The Hungarian Revolution of 1918-1919 and the Big Three*, (Columbia University Press, New York, 1976) Ch. 2

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, p. 65, 69

<sup>58</sup> Mócsy, *War and Society Vol. XII*, p. 16

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, p. 20

whose implicit orders from Paris were intended to be harsh to Hungary as a defeated nation from the Central Powers.

Several accounts of Hungarian officers in prisoner-of-war camps in France attest to the mood of the Entente captors. Janós Baldavari, a military police master sergeant, formerly of the Austro-Hungarian army, even remarked that “I would much rather be in the prisoner-of-war camp at the mercy of the French government, than to be in my homeland at the mercy of the French army!”<sup>60</sup> Even the new leader of the Socialist Government, Mihály Károlyi, also detained by the French authorities during the last months of the war, postulated that because of the Entente’s victor mentality, and because

The Serbian Army had occupied Ujvidek (Novi Sad) and was moving towards the centre of Hungary... The Czechs, likewise, were ready to seize the northern districts of the country, to which they considered themselves entitled. It was therefore in our interest to accept the Armistice, for if our neighbors did not keep to it the blame for its infringement would fall on them.<sup>61</sup>

Thousands of professional soldiers streaming back to the north and south borders met with retreating Hungarian officials, civilians, and crumbling social structures that were the only familiar manifestation of order they had known. The psychological crisis must have been immense; the slow disintegration from discipline and order into anarchy.

Yet, even having surveyed these areas, there remained a modicum of Entente influence

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<sup>60</sup> Janós Baldavari, “A Francia Hadifogságban,” [French Prisoner-of-war camp] Emlekirasa III [Memoirs, Third book], (Hadtörténelmi Levéltár, 1014. Budapest, Kapisztrán tér 2-4. , Archives, 1929-1964) p. 28

<sup>61</sup> Mihály Károlyi, *Memoirs of Mihály Károlyi, Faith Without Illusion*, (Jonathon Cape Publishers, London, 1956) p. 136

as a braking effect on the Serbs and Czechs/Slovaks; looking to the long eastern border, however, was a much riskier prospect.

### *III. THE EASTERN FRONT*

Long-standing disagreement between the Kingdom of Romania and the Kingdom of Hungary colored the border dispute; it is not within the scope of this work to go into great detail about it. Briefly outlining the scenario; after the capitulation of the Habsburg Monarchy in November 1918, the Kingdom of Romania decided to take advantage of the power vacuum within Transylvania to encourage the ethnic Romanians to declare at Alba Iulia on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1918 the union of Transylvania with the Kingdom of Romania. This was supported by the Entente, and a demarcation line was drawn allowing Romanian forces to advance to the line of the River Mureş.<sup>62</sup>

The situation was confusing and information was conflicting; as established in a conversation between a retired general and an officer recorded by Lieutenant General Albert Bartha, a Defense Minister both following Béla Linder<sup>63</sup> and again after the Second World War. In his memoirs *Kétszer szemben a kommunizmussal*, in which the general requests information from the officer who has returned to Budapest briefly from Transylvania

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<sup>62</sup> See Appendices 1 for map of demarcation line

<sup>63</sup> Of the previously mentioned famous “We want no more soldiers” comment

What is with the Romanians? Day in and day out there is bad news, but we are unsure of the provenance of the Romanian army bulletins, so what is the truth? Why do you care about this?, asked the officer. Because I am a Transylvanian, all of my relatives and relations live there, and we have no word of their predicament...<sup>64</sup>

In fact, as the Romanian Army moved forward to the original demarcation line, the official record shows that “No regular Hungarian units were guarding [the] Romanian borders, on November 13, 1918 in all of Transylvania only a few administrative military units were present.”<sup>65</sup>

Many of the former officers and enlisted men of the old Austro-Hungarian army distinctly knew what was at risk by allowing the advance of the Romanian army; as Lieutenant General (at that time Captain) Károly Kratochvil<sup>66</sup> argued

Franchet d’Esperey and the eastern Entente command gave the order to the Transylvanian-based Romanian army units to move forward to the Mureş demarcation line. The Hungarians must clear the area immediately within the demarcation zone around the Mureş; afterward the Romanian cavalry was able to advance without firing a shot...it must spell disaster for us that we give up without a fight...it will surely only be reclaimed violently.<sup>67</sup>

This foreknowledge created an atmosphere for officers and enlisted men that was conducive to inoculating resistance, which with their recently acquired skills during the First World War, would provide a pool of ready-made professionals for whatever new government took charge of the Hungarian national territory.

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<sup>64</sup> Albert Bartha, *Kétszer szemben a Kommunizmussal*, [Twice between Communism] Visszaemlékezések [Looking Back] (Hadtörténelmi Levéltár, 1014. Budapest, Kapisztrán tér 2-4, Archives, 1960) p. 4

<sup>65</sup> Mócsy, *War and Society XII*, p. 32

<sup>66</sup> Who will play a much more involved role later in the dialogue as the Colonel commanding the Székely Division defending the border in Transylvania.

<sup>67</sup> Károly Kratochvil, *Memoirs*, (Hadtörténelmi Levéltár, 1014. Budapest, Kapisztrán tér 2-4, Archives, 1920) p. 13-16

## **B. Ex-soldiers...New Sovereignty...Hungary's new (old) idea of territorial integrity and what it meant**

### *I. SOVEREIGNTY FOR SOLDIERS*

Pärtel Pirramäe argues in *Sovereignty in Fragments* that

In international politics ever since Westphalia, most states have lacked the power to realize their claim to external sovereignty...The concept of external sovereignty itself is a modern one, invented to distinguish the international dimension of sovereignty from domestic sovereignty or the supremacy over all other authorities with a certain territory.<sup>68</sup>

Sovereignty, a concept which has been argued by several historians<sup>69</sup> to have been foreign and alien to Hungarian soldiers following over three hundred years of occupation, was in reality a much more intimately familiar principle for them. Csaba Gombár asserts that “Throughout its modern history, Hungary was not a sovereign state, although it always possessed attributes of statehood within the given imperial framework.”<sup>70</sup> These attributes, namely the inviolableness of the Holy Crown of Saint Stephen, its “inalienability of territory,” the “king’s obligation to recover what had

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<sup>68</sup> Pärtel Pirramäe in Hent Kalmo, Quentin Skinner, *Sovereignty in Fragments*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010) p. 65

<sup>69</sup> Maria Ormos, *Hungary in the Age of the Two World Wars 1914-1945*, (Atlantic Research and Publications Inc., New Jersey, 2007), Peter Pastor, *Hungary between Wilson and Lenin: The Hungarian Revolution of 1918-1919 and the Big Three*, (Columbia University Press, New York, 1976), Béla K. Kiraly, *War and Society in East Central Europe Vol. VI*, (Brooklyn College Press, New York, 1982)

<sup>70</sup> Gombár, Hankiss, Lengyel, Varnai, *The Appeal*, p. 1



been (temporarily) alienated and reincorporate it with the rest of the *corona* territory,”  
was the mandate given to soldiers to maintain the integrity of that sovereign concept.<sup>71</sup>

Soldiers must in reality be intimately familiar with the concept of sovereignty, as it is their job to both defend state territory and possibly invade other state’s territory through the concept of just war. St. Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae* gives a definition of what justified war actually entails

For a just war (*bellum iustum*) three conditions had to be fulfilled: *recta auctoritas* (war must be waged by a legitimate authority) *iusta causa* (a material cause is needed, such as self defense, recovery of property, or punishment for injuries) and *recta intention* (the existence of a material cause must not be exploited for other aims such as conquest).<sup>72</sup>

Meeting these three principles had not been a priority for the Austro-Hungarian Imperial War council, and it had weighed heavily on the conscience of the Hungarian officers and enlisted men who had served in the First World War. There was a common mentality amongst the Hungarian officers that the Austrians had dragged their Hungarian counterparts on an immature adventure; and it proved to be in the consciousness of the government when it chose its form, the form of the new army, how it would be commanded and how the government would make its decisions.

## II. *SECURING SOVEREIGNTY*

How then could the newly formed army hope to gather together the force to repel the neighboring countries’ military incursion on its sovereign territory? James Defronzo claims that

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<sup>71</sup> Eckhart, *A szentkorona eszme tortenete*, (Budapest, Attraktor Kiado, 1941), p. 222 and 245

<sup>72</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, (London, 1964) in Kalmo, *Sovereignty*, p. 87

Regardless of class or ideological orientation, people sharing the same language and culture who perceive that their ethnic or national group has been the victim of exploitation by another group or country can join together in an effort to end their domination.<sup>73</sup>

The basis of the defense of sovereignty therefore, is not political or economic for soldiers, but instead a question of accomplishing the mission set before them, regardless of the political affiliation of the government giving them its orders. It is a long-standing tradition in the majority of democratic/free society states and most assuredly in dictatorships that soldiers serve the government that exists; democracy only works with civilian control of military forces, while dictatorships demand military subordination.

The biggest failure at the end of the First World War from a military perspective was the failure to capitalize on the availability of highly-trained professionals willing to serve in the new Hungarian Army. Maria Ormos asserts that costly

Cardinal errors were made. The disciplined units were not retained, and in the feverish demobilization the authorities failed to disarm soldiers being discharged...the mistrust was particularly damaging in the military field. Some members of the government were averse to the old officer's corps, and so deployment of the remaining units and the formation of new ones were put off for months, although there was an urgent need for legitimate defense of assigned demarcation lines and for internal security reasons.<sup>74</sup>

Willingness to secure sovereignty and the ability to form cohesive units and build new formations seemed to be kilometers apart. This was the crisis facing the new government, in which the pressing need to secure the very territory of the nation took precedence over all other government policy, based solely on urgency.

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<sup>73</sup> Defronzo, *Social Movements and Revolutions*, p. 15

<sup>74</sup> Ormos, *Hungary in the Age*, p. 23-25

### III. MONOPOLY OF VIOLENCE, WHO IS IN CHARGE HERE?

As mentioned before, Charles Tilly's principle of the legitimacy of government, namely that it have the monopoly over organized violence, [in plainer terms the control of the army and police] played a pivotal role throughout the time period of the two revolutions. By encroaching on perceived national sovereign territory, the governments of Romania, Czechoslovakia, and Serbia, and to some extent even the Entente, threatened this monopoly. Defronzo claims that a key component of any real revolution in which the state is threatened comes from the

Inability to resist foreign aggression [which T.H.] reduced the perceived legitimacy of the prerevolutionary regimes, which were also undermined by divisions within elite population segments regarding how best to deal with external threats.<sup>75</sup>

The Habsburg government had no answer for this dilemma, forcing its dissolution and disintegration, leaving the Hungarians to contemplate what their next step would need to be.

This atmosphere of uncertainty pervaded Budapest and the rest of the surrounding countryside. As anxious refugees and demobilized soldiers and officials waited in turmoil, revolutionary events were beginning to come to a head in the capital. Forces loyal to Mihály Károlyi started to make their move to seize power, thereby

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<sup>75</sup> Defronzo, *Social Movements*, p. 24

adding both to further instability of the political situation, but also the hope that with the political change, a new direction in terms of securing sovereignty would occur. This set the scene for the dramatic events that occurred in November 1918, and the subsequent White Aster Revolution.

## Chapter 3

### Enter the White (Aster) Knight: Karolyi's New Direction

#### **A. Familiar strains of the same song (Echoes of 48')**

##### *I. THE BEGINNING OF THE END*

As the war came to a close in October 1918/November 1918, some Hungarian officers were released from prisoner-of-war camps in France and Italy as part of prisoner exchanges and a show of good will for the armistice negotiations. Included among that contingent from France was a former parliamentarian named Mihály Károlyi, a well-known aristocrat who had been urging the Monarchy to sue for peace in the last years of the war.<sup>76</sup> Upon return to Hungary, Károlyi immediately went to work setting up a new political organization, named the National Council, officially established and quartered in the Astoria Hotel, on the night of the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October.<sup>77</sup> The National Council was a decidedly anti-Habsburg organization, and during the next few days, was able to come up with 12 points of contention that needed to be reconciled by the then sitting Hadik government, appointed by the Emperor.<sup>78</sup>

The Hadik government, already shaky in its support, called upon the police and army units stationed within the city to rally to the government, and oppose the new National Council. At this critical point in the White Aster Revolution, so-called

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<sup>76</sup> Károlyi, *Faith Without Illusion*, p. 96

<sup>77</sup> Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century*, p. 89

<sup>78</sup> Included among the 12 points were demands for the cessation of hostilities, declaration of Hungarian independence, wide-ranging democratic reforms and reconciliation with national minorities.

because the soldiers and revolutionaries wearing of White Aster flowers in their hats and lapels as a method of identification of each other, a demonstration of revolutionaries marched on the Chain Bridge<sup>79</sup>, and were fired upon by police, resulting in 3 deaths. This shattered any remaining confidence in the government's having the people's interest at heart; which according to Theda Skocpol is a basic prerequisite for loyalty from a populace who believes the government to be legitimate.

One ideal-typical view is that the state is the arena of legitimate authority embodied in the rules of the political game and in governmental leadership and policies. These are supported by some combination of normative consensus and majority preference of the members of society...(what matters in explaining the outbreak of revolution is) whether the existing governmental authorities lose their legitimacy.<sup>80</sup>

After the deaths at the Chain Bridge, soldiers supporting Károlyi and the National Council occupied many of the main public buildings necessary to the everyday governance of the country; food stores, railway stations, and telephone exchanges.<sup>81</sup> Imperial symbols were knocked down, and soldiers quickly switched sides.

At this point in the narrative, a comparison to 1848/49 is inevitable. Many of the same circumstances were present; namely Hungarian soldiers actively choosing to reject the Habsburg Monarchy in favor of loyalty to the Holy Crown of Saint Stephen and Hungarian statehood. As the events unfold, comparisons of 1848/49 will also be

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<sup>79</sup> Occurring on October 28<sup>th</sup>, the crowd was made up of workers, revolutionaries and off-duty soldiers, who wanted to demonstrate in front of the Royal Palace in Buda to remonstrate to the Archduke Joseph that the Hadik government was ineffective, the war must end, and Károlyi had their confidence. Actual army units from the front were present in Budapest, and were ordered outside of the city as there was a fear that they would mutiny and aid the demonstrators, and not unfounded concern and one that later proved to be truthful.

<sup>80</sup> Skocpol, *Explaining Social Revolutions*, p. 25

<sup>81</sup> Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century*, p. 90

made to the military situation facing the newly formed Hungarian Army along the borders of the periphery. In addition to the military situation being similar, the 12 point list of demands also mirrors Petőfi's 12 points in the 48' revolution; in both substance and scope. Soldiers themselves were aware of this, Dr. Gustáv Gratz writing in his German language memoirs that

There came the time of the first Hungarian Revolution,- [White Aster] the Regime of Count Michael Károlyi- I kept myself away from politics. With Károlyi I was personally sympathetic for him, because of the separation from the Habsburgs like before.<sup>82</sup> [Reference to 1848]

That parallels existed is not in question, but how similar was the military situation in reality?

## *II. SITUATION REPORT: WHERE DID THE KÁROLYI GOVERNMENT STAND?*

At the beginning of November, Károlyi had formed his cabinet and had begun staffing the major agencies of the state with personnel. The process of governance had begun; however, an immediate problem was before him that could not be put off for even one day. This was the clarification of the military situation in relation to the Entente representatives in Belgrade. Peter Pásztor argues that “an early meeting with Franchet d’ Esperey was desirable for the Hungarians. Its purpose would be to secure favorable demarcation lines from this Allied arbiter before the Romanians had a chance to do the same.”<sup>83</sup> Romsics emphasizes that

The government's first important action was to parley for a new military accord with General Franchet d’ Esperey, the French Commander of the Entente Armee d’ Orient in the Balkan theater, which was duly signed on 13<sup>th</sup> November. This was necessary because the general regarded the protocols of cease-fire that had been signed

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<sup>82</sup> Dr. Gustáv Gratz, *Visszaemlekesre, [Looking Back]* (Hadtörténelmi Levéltár, 1014. Budapest, Kapisztrán tér 2-4, Archives, 1922) p. 5

<sup>83</sup> Béla K. Kiraly, *War and Society in East Central Europe Vol. VI*, (Brooklyn College Press, New York, 1982) p. 260

at Padua as invalid, and his forces, having crossed the River Sava on 5<sup>th</sup> November, were poised to enter Hungary at the Croatian border.<sup>84</sup>

d'Esperey, meeting with Károlyi himself and his delegation in Belgrade, from the beginning had the upper hand in all the negotiations. He knew that Károlyi would have to accept any and all demands placed before him; as a defeated nation, Hungary not only was without a competent military defense but also in the eyes of the world was without any moral or just cause to fall back on. Even though the Entente forces knew that the newly formed Károlyi government was standing between a governed Hungary and an anarchic Hungary, in terms of public opinion their hands were tied in how to treat what was seen as an integral part of the aggressor state of Austria-Hungary. Leniency and sternness hung in the balance; on the one hand the argument for sternness coming down hard against Hungary as a violator of the *just war* tradition, on the other leniency in favor of a state's right to defend itself against aggression.

Therefore, if we want to make some historical sense of the just war tradition, we ought to conceive of the relationship between legitimate authority and the use of force as a two way street: not only does the justification of war require legitimate authority, but this authority has frequently been legitimized with reference to the violence and disorder that would ensue in its absence...many have implied that states and their governments derive their legitimacy from their ability to defend the political community against internal and external enemies...Thus a state has the authority to wage war to defend itself against its enemies.<sup>85</sup>

An 18 point demand was put forth by the French general, its substance almost entirely dealing with military points of contention.<sup>86</sup> This demand was a result of collaboration

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<sup>84</sup> Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century*, p. 91

<sup>85</sup> Jens Bartelson in Kalmo, Skinner, *Sovereignty in Fragments*, p. 82-84

<sup>86</sup> 18 point agreement highlights included: clearing troops from Transylvania and Banat east of the River Samos, south of the River Maros, out of Bacskai and Dráva on a line running Szeged-Baja-Pécs-Varasd, allowing a standing



of the French, Serbs, and Romanians, with a neutral Britain, US, and Italy not yet taking a stand one way or the other, as they waited for the contingents of all victorious Entente nations to arrive in Paris, set up shop, and take positions on post-war distribution of spoils.

The Entente forces meeting in Paris to decide the shape of the peace settlement were still in the infant stages of negotiation; consequently as events unfolded in Hungary, there was very little consensus amongst the victors as to what an Entente response would be regardless of the scenario. Károlyi knew this; his instructions to the Hungarian Army in the beginning reflect the need for caution, to avoid provoking an unnecessary recommencement of hostilities with any of the three forces arranged from north-east-south. In the beginning, Károlyi and his Interior Affairs/Minorities Minister without Portfolio, Oskar Jászi, believed that the most non-confrontational play to be made by the Hungarian government was to try and co-opt the national minorities within the periphery areas to allow their territory to remain within Hungary in return for greater autonomy within the Hungarian state system.

The Hungarians expressed the confidence that the great majority of the peoples living in the historical Hungarian state would prefer to remain there rather than be absorbed by their neighbors... [the] Czechs, who proceeded to incorporate the occupied territories without asking the population for their consent..., [Did so because] Slovakia had, before the tenth century, formed part of a 'Czechoslovak' state when it had been overrun by the Magyars.<sup>87</sup>

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Hungarian Army of only 6 Infantry divisions and 2 Cavalry divisions, and Entente forces must have free transit of the whole country as they please. Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century*, p. 91

<sup>87</sup> Ignác Romsics, *War and Society in East Central Europe Vol. XXXIII 20<sup>th</sup> Century Hungary and the Great Powers*, (Columbia University Press, New York, 1995) p. 84-88

As November waned, Károlyi found his political options to be steadily weakening, the need for Jászi's mission to reconcile minorities becoming a more and more desperate measure as the pressure from the Romanians and Czechs became more persistent and demanding.

## B. Failed Negotiations (Choosing Sides)

### *I. TRYING TO PICK UP ALL THE PIECES*

Jászi traveled to Transylvania for the express purpose of seeing if any bilateral agreement could be reached; events however, proved that this policy was impotent in the face of continued nationalistic pressure from the Kingdom of Romania, and to the same extent from the Czechs in the north and the Serbs in the south.<sup>88</sup> The failure of this first policy initiative emboldened many of the ex-officers who were on the fringe; there because of the reduction of the army and because they were without recourse to secure their homes in the face of pressure from the Czechs, Romanians, Serbs and the Entente forces pushing in the peripheries. They looked to Károlyi to create an immediate cohesive defense plan; unfortunately Romsics argues that they instead found that

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<sup>88</sup> In Slovakia, Milan Hodza made a preliminary agreement to hold the Slovak contingent within the Hungarian state system, but this agreement was quickly quashed and forgotten under pressure from Prague emanating from Masaryk and his newly formed Czech national government.

Károlyi and his advisors felt that any military resistance would scupper any chances Hungary might have at future peace conferences...no concerted effort was made [by the Hungarian government] to hold up the advancing forces of the hostile surrounding states, which in places were already infringing even the agreed demarcation lines.<sup>89</sup>

To former officers and soldiers, this was a betrayal both from without and within.

Albert Bártha argues in his memoirs that

I wanted to create a new task, in which my main point was to keep out the Czechs and Romanians at any cost... I am exceedingly sorry that the Entente decided to help the Romanians, and more help was given to the Czechs, but I refused to allow this situation to become a *fait accompli*, whatever it took to go successfully against the Czechs in the Vág valley, like what the Maroknyi team had always stood head to head against the Romanians in Transylvania, throwing back the bandits.<sup>90</sup>

Officers and officials quickly split into two camps, one supporting the government's decision to abandon resistance in hopes of appealing to the Entente's legal and moral conscience at a future peace treaty, and others who offered armed resistance and tried to create some form of local defense.

## II. *THE TWO SIDES (WHERE THE PIECES FELL)*

István Mócsy describes the second group, in both the Czech and Romanian theaters, who

In town after town, politicians of the old regime, county and local officials, or demobilized officers tried to mobilize the Hungarian population for resistance...[although] Károlyi and Jászi were more or less resigned to the loss of at best part of Transylvania, Hungarians, including the Székelys, still believed that resistance was possible. Organized resistance was at best sporadic (in northern Hungary) but Hungarians, including the Székelys, of eastern Hungary and Transylvania lost no time in establishing resistance organizations.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century*, p. 93

<sup>90</sup> Bártha, *Visszaemlékezések* [Looking Back] p. 41-42

<sup>91</sup> Mócsy, *War and Society Vol. XII*, p. 25, 30

This second group, made up of officers and soldiers from the areas under threat, saw their duty in much the same light as the soldiers called up in 1848/49. They keenly felt that if they did not take the initiative, then these areas would be lost possibly forever. This was especially true in Transylvania, the largest of the theaters of war, and the area that possessed the largest number of Hungarian occupants. The separation from the mother country was felt to be catastrophic, and the mood of the Hungarian inhabitants quickly turned dark; threatening to boil over quickly.

The Hungarian population of Transylvania interpreted the actions of the Romanians at Gyulafehérvár [Albia Iulia) as treason and open rebellion; consequently it demanded from Budapest some forceful action to repel the invaders and to secure sovereignty in Transylvania... Simultaneously, in many parts of Transylvania irregular military formations were also created, mostly from junior grade and non-commissioned officers.<sup>92</sup>

How did the Károlyi government deal with this potentially explosive situation, which threatened to completely unbalance their non-aggression policy? Stuck between continuing a policy which proved to be wildly unpopular with the ex-officers and soldiers living on the peripheries, and staying on track, the government chose to enact discipline as best it could. Károlyi made it clear, that although they had been

Encouraged by this attack, the ex-officers of the Austro-Hungarian Army, who had been waiting for the first opportunity to regain their past positions, started to organize illegal military detachments, which, needless to say, were dissolved when discovered.<sup>93</sup>

This deterred some of the men, unfortunately for Károlyi, the future would hold more challenges from this group as they formed more clandestinely in the western border

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<sup>92</sup> Mócsy, *War and Society Vol. XII*, p. 35-36

<sup>93</sup> Károlyi, *Faith Without Illusion*, p. 150

region of Hungary, within Vienna, and more importantly, in Szeged, under Entente protection. In fact, Ervin Liptai succinctly writes that “Most of the 8000 professional and reserve officers still in service felt uncertainty in the new bourgeois democratic state and saw little or no future before them.”<sup>94</sup>

The first group, however, composed of officers and soldiers more willing to follow the regime, came from the same socio-economic background. What made them willing to throw their lot in with the Károlyi government? Several factors contributed to this loyalty; chief among them being the desire to continue their military careers. Surely it must have been agony for these men to watch their homeland partitioned amongst neighbors, especially as they were sworn to defend it. Their personal suspicions must have also played on their minds, as pointed out by Lt. General Kamil Aggházy<sup>95</sup> in his letter to a fellow committee member of Károlyi’s National Independence Party, in which he states that

To keep the program in line with our initial aims, and to cooperate with our Social Democratic allies, while continuing to protect the peace, keep the worker’s rights, and generally maintain the government, we must move away from anything that is not in line with our values. János Hock, the President of the National Council, has indicated that we should replace anyone against this plan with the older members of the Károlyi Independence Party, so that we can move forward for Hungary.<sup>96</sup>

Even with guarded optimism, these officers and soldiers that followed their orders were still sympathetic to immediate action, but were also balancing this through their

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<sup>94</sup> Ervin Liptai in Petér Pásztor, *War and Society in East Central Europe Vol. XX Revolutions and Interventions in Hungary and its Neighbor States 1918-1919*, (Columbia University Press, New York, 1988) p. 27

<sup>95</sup> At that time only 25 years of age and a Captain in rank

<sup>96</sup> Kamil Aggházy, Letter dated February 1919, written from Dorottya street, V district, Budapest, (Hadtörténelmi Levéltár, 1014. Budapest, Kapisztrán tér 2-4, Archives, Personal Memoirs of Kamil Aggházy)

cognizant thoughts of the viable expectations that could be placed on a forming army that had yet to find its cohesion. Liptai describes them as

A smaller group of former professional officers [who] collaborated with the liberal democratic administration, partly because they were more susceptible to democracy on the basis of their education and personal experience; partly, too, because, considering Hungary's foreign and internal situation, they became convinced that from political and organizational points of view the international and domestic worker's movement was the only force that could be matched against foreign expansion.<sup>97</sup>

With these reluctant followers, Károlyi was able to begin the process of setting up a cadre that could then train the divisions allowed by the Entente agreement in Belgrade.

### III. A BLEAK CHRISTMAS (*COMMUNISM ON THE RADAR*)

As November turned into December, the demands of the Romanians, Czechs, and Serbs continued to present a challenge to the border demarcations. Károlyi was still playing for time, now as a way to mask the raising of National Guard units that would be capable of presenting a barrier from further incursions into Hungarian territory.<sup>98</sup> Albert Bartha was the new Minister of Defense; he boasted that while he was in this official capacity that "Not one Czech foot set down on Hungarian soil."<sup>99</sup> Within the National Council, members expressed the hope that after the end of December, the beginning of a new year might bring a more favorable situation for Hungary.

By the end of November/beginning of December, many of the former prisoners of war also began returning from the Russian camps where they had been held by the

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<sup>97</sup> Ervin Liptai, *A Magyar Köztársaság [The Hungarian People's Republic]* (Osiris Kiadó, Budapest, 1965) p. 82-88

<sup>98</sup> Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century*, p. 90

<sup>99</sup> Bartha, *Visszaemlékezések [Looking Back]* p. 42

new Bolshevik government. These returning soldiers were a very different type than had returned from the western front; in fact many of them were politically indoctrinated by Bolshevik propaganda and released for the intent purpose of covertly setting up a Communist party within Hungary. Prominent among these returning soldiers was a man named Béla Kun, a former reserve officer and in peacetime a journalist and agitator from Szilágycseh, [Lelei] Transylvania. His return signaled a more aggressive political direction in the creation of the Hungarian Communist party, officially on November 24, 1918.

Kun himself remarked that the war had done more to help the creation of conditions for a Communist party than any other single factor, saying that

In his opinion (Kun) the recently concluded war had created a number of useful psychological and administrative precedents which could greatly contribute toward the cohesion of a society in the process of building socialism. These were increased wartime governmental interference in the lives of individuals, regimented existence, and the development of a collectivist psychology among soldiers at the front.<sup>100</sup>

The ex-officers and soldiers who returned with Kun, had received their political indoctrination and experience of the Communist military fighting structure while fighting in the Soviet Union's civil war against the Whites and the Entente, and therefore were preparing to pass this information on when they had found a way to take control of the Army and the government. Tökés argues that the Communists, with their promises of active resistance against foreign aggression were "[even more] successful

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<sup>100</sup> Béla Kun in Rudolf L. Tökés, *Béla Kun and the Hungarian Soviet Republic*, (Pall Mall Press, New York, 1967) p. 138

in influencing the operations of the 20,000 strong non-commissioned officers and disabled veterans associations.”<sup>101</sup> Many of these 20,000 contingents were from the peripheries, and they proved to be more and more susceptible to Communist propaganda as the Károlyi government was less and less successful. Károlyi’s government felt this to be a threat; and subsequently after an incident involving the deaths of both policemen and civilians at the headquarters of Népsava, a Social Democratic newspaper, Kun and many of his Communist associates were imprisoned. A period without international pressure was to begin, starting in the middle of December and continuing through the end of February, which would allow the Army to start its training program.

### **C. Starting to Unravel**

Károlyi switched roles on the 11<sup>th</sup> of January, becoming the first President of the Republic, being replaced by Dénes Berinkey, the former Justice Minister. This role did not primarily change his function as the head of the government, and he was still the decision-maker in regards to future military policy. By this point, even some of his social measures were adopted; including the “modest lump sum settlement for their [soldiers] services,” that was paid for those soldiers who had fought at the front and not received their proper compensation.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid, p. 106

<sup>102</sup> Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century*. p. 94



On January 23, 1919, Károlyi and Berinkei made plain in a cabinet meeting that a new policy was going to be enacted for the military; namely that the policy of inactive non-resistance was going to be abandoned in favor of defensive preparations, to begin in Bihar County, one of the largest counties in Transylvania at the eastern front.<sup>103</sup> This did not authorize an offensive of any kind, especially as there were no reserves. But finally an active defense policy was to be enacted, in the hopes that the political benefits gained would buy more time for the regime. As Károlyi and his new Defense Minister, Sándor Festetics, planned a more active defense, there began the rumblings of discontent among soldiers who had subscribed to the more left-leaning aspects of the democratization of the army. Communist propaganda also played a part in the grumbling, influencing soldiers to set up Soldier's Councils on the model of the Soviet form that challenged officers and their commands.

The Soldier's Council was not new in the beginning of 1919, in fact, a representative [Imre Csernák] of it had accompanied Károlyi's delegation to Belgrade. However, the idea of the Soldier's Council was put in its place by the President of the Worker's Council, Dezsó Bokanyi, whom upon hearing Franchet d' Esperey's disgust at having such a leftist idea represented at the cease-fire negotiations, turned to Csernák and "told him that under the circumstances the Soldiers Council was an impossible

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<sup>103</sup> Kiraly, *War and Society Vol. VI*, p. 265

institution. Soldiers would have to remain soldiers, he acclaimed, and not become civilians as was maintained by ‘that idiot Linder.’<sup>104</sup>

After the return to Budapest, however, a head of the Soldier’s Council was appointed, József Pogány, and he began to challenge the previous Minister of Defense, Albert Bartha. His victory over Bartha was secure when in December officer’s disciplinary decisions were placed in the hands of popularly elected military tribunals.<sup>105</sup> This was a direct challenge to the structure of the Army, and Army organization and training suffered for it. Romsics remarks that

The striking aspect of the slowly building new army was also weakened by the fact that many locations the soldier’s councils turned against their commanding officers... Thus a dual power crisis developed over the command of the armed forces. The anarchy was compounded by a directive issued on 2 December which deprived commanding officers of the right to impose punitive disciplinary measures.<sup>106</sup>

As this crisis developed within the Army and the government, the Communist political movement was starting to grow bolder, the frontiers were again contracting in the face of further aggression within the eastern and northern theaters, and a second revolution seemed to inevitably loom over the horizon.

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<sup>104</sup> Pásztor, *Hungary between Lenin and Wilson*, p. 64

<sup>105</sup> Andrew C. Janos, William B. Slotnam, *Revolution in Perspective Essays on the Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919*, (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1971)

<sup>106</sup> Ignác Romsics, *The Dismantling of Historic Hungary The Peace Treaty of Trianon, 1920*, (Columbia University Press, New York, 2002) p. 63

## Chapter 4

### Exit the White (Aster) Knight: On Storms the Red Foot Soldier

#### A. Army Alliance: Is War-making or Politics more important?

In what way did Károlyi prepare the Army for the task it faced? Was the Army prepared to passively sit by while the sovereignty of the nation was challenged, while continuing to support the democratic government? How could politics take a front seat over war-making when the state faced such a dire military crisis?

#### *I. THE TRANSITION FROM PASSIVE TO FORCED ACTIVE*

As February slowly faded into March, the lull that had been afforded to the Hungarian Army was quickly coming under pressure from the international situation. The Entente forces in Serbia had decided to move forward with proposals put forth by both the Czechs and Romanians, a further attempt at territorial aggrandizement. This was accomplished in two ways, by direct representation to Entente military officials in Belgrade and Bucharest, and also through the services of Romanian, Czech, and

Western European Francophile observers whose position was secured within peace committee decisions by their “extensive” knowledge of the region.<sup>107</sup>

Many shrewd politicians and nationalists in the surrounding neighbor countries knew what was at stake by drawing out the process of territorial expansion; the Czechs for example realizing that

Any delay in occupation might have provided the necessary time for the anti-Hungarian sentiment of early November to subside and for the negotiation of a satisfactory agreement between Hungarian and Slovak.<sup>108</sup>

In Romania, a similar situation was to be found, as throughout the winter months, the Romanians were occupied with a two-front war, both pressuring the Hungarians and also being used by the Entente to maintain contact with the Whites fighting the Soviets in the Ukraine. This caused the Romanians to split their military forces, forcing them to be initially conservative in their drive within Transylvania, only slowly consolidating their position throughout the winter months and early 1919. Their 8-10,000 troops in Transylvania were insufficient even against a weakened and disorganized Hungarian Army based on simple logistics and communications problems, not to mention supply.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Laszlo Botos, *The Road to the Dictated Peace*, (Arpad Publishing Company, Cleveland, 1999) There were several so called ‘experts’ who were everything from cartographers, to journalists, to businessmen who had lived and worked in Central Europe that were able to worm their way into the proceedings deciding the boundaries and new borders being laid in the former Habsburg Empire.

<sup>108</sup> Mócsy, *War and Society Vol. XII*, p. 23

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*, p. 32

## II. SZÉKELY DIVISION: A TRANSYLVANIA STALWART

Colonel Károly Kratochvil, was a figure central to the defense in Transylvania, and a middle-class soldier. As leader of the Székely Division, he commanded the strongest and most committed Hungarian Army formation on any of the three fronts. As the year 1919 progressed into the month of February, the general concern about Romanian aggression and consolidation of territory to the east of Kolozsvár, [Cluj-Napoca] to which the Romanians had advanced, grew into an acute problem, with the freeing of Romanian troops from the eastern front against the Soviets.<sup>110</sup> In his memoirs, Col. Kratochvil remarks on being given command of troops with this front line area, establishing a line running along the Maros [Mures] River to the south, through Déva [Deva] north to Kolozsvár, ending in Nagybánya [Baia Mare] at the northern most part. His complaints were numerous, but perhaps most pressing, was that

The Romanian cavalry pushed forward without firing to the demarcation line. I was in command of the Transylvania sector, and alone [besides the Székely Division] I commanded the 21<sup>st</sup> Kolozsvár Regiment, who were untrained, without key equipment and unprepared to defend. I sent them to Nagyenyed, Torda, and other places along the Maros line.<sup>111</sup>

The Székely Division on the other hand, was prepared to defend its territory, being made up entirely of soldiers who had previously served in elite units within the

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<sup>110</sup> Up until March 1919, Romanian soldiers had been engaged in border clashes with advancing Soviet forces under the command of the Ukrainian Symon Petliura, after the defection of a key Ukrainian commander, Soviet forces were forced to withdraw from the Romanian border and deal with the new threat, which allowed Romanian soldiers to disengage from the eastern front and be shipped to Transylvania.

<sup>111</sup> Károly Kratochvil, *Memoirs*, p. 13

Habsburg army. They also, for the most part, were middle-class, artisans, shop-keepers, university students, and other tradesman, they were quite critical of anything to do with Communism. The Division had retained a good portion of its equipment from the Imperial Army; what it lacked it was able to obtain from General Mackensen's retreating army in late 1918. It also had something many other Hungarian formations did not have; esprit de corps and a dedicated, able commander.

The resolve of the Székely Division was not appreciated, however, by the government in Budapest. As the policy of passive non-resistance developed during the winter months of 1918, the increasingly war-like stance of its defensive positions undermined official policy. Col. Kratochvil, however, was not deterred.

In mid-January 1919, the Commander of the Székely Division resolved to make a stand regardless of orders from Budapest; consequently, between January and April, the front remained stabilized.<sup>112</sup>

Col. Kratochvil was even proactive, ordering "Székely units [to] cross(ed) the lines on missions responding to news or rumors of an impending Romanian atrocity or executions."<sup>113</sup> Although not dismissive of the Károlyi government, Kratochvil even showed personal sympathy for the thankless task of the government, the general consensus of this group of soldiers was the same as many of their contemporaries around the entire periphery of Hungary; that armed resistance was the only way to hold on to their territory. The Székely Division will again play a prominent role in the

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<sup>112</sup> Mócsy, *War and Society Vol. XII*, p. 36

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*

coming spring and summer months of 1919; as a bulwark against both the invading Romanian Army and surprisingly, against another perceived enemy.

### III. *DESPERATE TIMES CALL FOR DESPERATE MEASURES (ACTIVE RESISTANCE)*

At the beginning of March, the Károlyi government met and the consensus was reached that military action would have to be taken to discourage any more territorial losses. This decision was taken in consultation with Vilmos Böhm, the new Minister of Defense, a much more aggressive head of department. His inclusion into Károlyi's cabinet was a direct political attempt to bring in the Social Democrats, a party which Böhm was a member of and which was for the most part filled with staunch middle-class members, including the soldiers and officers who belonged to the party constituency. They were key to helping Károlyi govern, as they were the majority in the Parliament. Károlyi even went so far as to travel to the front line, in the hopes of stirring support amongst the soldiers there, and

On March 2, Károlyi inspected the troops [specifically the Székely Division] in Szátmárneméti [Satu Mare] and in an address declared- If Wilson's Principles do not materialize and, instead of a peace based on a mutual agreement, a dictated peace demanding territorial dismemberment is offered, I promise you, soldiers, I will never sign such peace terms!<sup>114</sup>

This was exactly what the soldiers and officers holding firm were desperate to hear, it breathed new life into a struggling government that was starting to crumble under

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<sup>114</sup> Kiraly, *War and Society Vol. VI*, p. 267

pressure. It appealed to their middle-class ideals, of a strong nation and a willingness to fight back against what they perceived to be national injustice. They were desperate to cling to a government that had embraced their way of life, their ideology, and that embodied their idea of the Hungarian nation. It was a temporary measure to be sure; the words most certainly would have to be followed by matching actions, but with the introduction of Böhm, and his working relationship with Pogány, the Army seemed to have a chance at organization, cooperation, and a real opportunity to secure the sovereignty of Hungarian territory.

The speech was followed by more proclamations from Károlyi, and private comments that reflected the seriousness of the situation. He freely admitted that

I had appointed William [Vilmos] Böhm, an excellent organizer, as Minister of War...The army, our main support in case of crisis...had to be built up from nothing. The four battalions permitted by the Armistice were naturally not sufficient for waging war.<sup>115</sup>

There upon, the task was to clandestinely create an army that **was** capable of waging war, and was capable of covering the three fronts in which threats resided. A quick analysis of the situation showed both positives and negatives in a military assessment. On the southern front, the Entente forces under General d' Esperey were poised on a line located adjacent to Szeged. At first, this could appear to the military observer as an absolute negative, as the Entente forces were easily the best supplied, most organized, and theoretically, the most powerful of the three armies. In reality it was much more a

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<sup>115</sup> Károlyi, *Faith Without Illusions*, p. 156, 159



positive for the Hungarian Army, as the presence of the French Entente forces there had acted as a leash on the Serbian Army's revisionist claims, effectively stabilizing the southern front and precariously maintaining the demarcation line. On the northern front, the Czechs had strong-armed the Slovaks into a union; but beyond consolidating connections between the two territories, the Czechs had been unable to launch large-scale offensive operations further south than Eperjes, mainly because

The Károlyi government considered these military moves (4000 m probe) totally illegal and, therefore, ordered a counterattack by its own troops and sent strong reinforcements to Pozsony [Bratislava] and Nyitra County. The promise of military resistance by Hungary forced Czechoslovakia to halt temporarily any further advance of its troops, while an alternative method was worked out.<sup>116</sup>

The greatest threat therefore was in Transylvania, because of the distance of front-line, the opponent unrestrained by Entente command, and the amount of area to be defended.

Preparations continued at pace, with Böhm preparing to mobilize military-age men in all the affected peripheral areas. Cadres were moved into positions behind the fronts to service the influx of incoming recruits; arms and munitions were searched for and organized, and orders were prepared for defense. Again the parallel to 1848/9 is strong; just as the Kossuth government had done, the appeal was to patriotism and defense of the homeland, and it resonated well with many men from the outer areas. Then something happened that again completely changed the entire military landscape. It occurred outside of Hungary, and once again the Entente military forces were able to force a decision that the Hungarian government was unprepared for. It began with the

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<sup>116</sup> Mócsy, *War and Society Vol. XII*, p. 22

arrival of the French Entente representative to Budapest, a Colonel Vix, and his instructions from Paris, an inescapable bombshell that burst the hopes of March and brought ominous forebodings.

## B. Advantage [N] Vixed

### *I. RESIGNATION OF THE KÁROLYI GOVERNMENT (COMMUNISM GETS IT CHANCE AT GOVERNANCE)*

On February 28<sup>th</sup>, 1919, the Allied demarcation committee came to a final decision regarding the positions to be taken for the eastern and northern theaters separating Czechoslovakia/Hungary and Romania/Hungary. It communicated this decision to the Entente representative bound for Hungary, a Colonel Ferdinand Vix. The line in the northern theater in actuality accorded most of the Czech's demands to the newly formed state; not to mention also giving areas that were clearly composed of a majority Hungarian populace, and without the slightest justification for Wilson's principle of self-determination.

Károlyi was later to remark that after meeting with Masaryk following the conclusion of the two revolutions, he as an example

Admitted to me that the Csallóköz [Veľký Žitný ostrov] and Komárom [Komárno] (inhabited entirely by Hungarians) had been thrust upon [the] Czechoslovakia by the Entente without having been asked for.<sup>117</sup>

This message however, was not conveyed to the Hungarians until March 19<sup>th</sup>, because of delays in travel, the necessary decoding of diplomatic cables, checking, rechecking and confirming the exact wording and direction the message needed to be communicated, and how firm the messenger needed to be. It also did not help matters any that the Allies themselves were divided over the message itself, how hard it should be pressed, the timeline, what punishment should be meted out if the demands were not complied with, or whether or not Hungary had any legitimate claim/counter-claim to the new demarcation lines and the areas lost thereafter.

Col. Vix himself was at odds with the note, finding the terms too harsh and the deadline of March 22<sup>nd</sup> too soon to realistically comply.<sup>118</sup> In fact, the only advice he could give was to have “asked [the] Hungarians to order their troops not to resist Romanian advances for the sake of avoiding bloodshed, and promised to call on the Romanians not to advance for the same reason.”<sup>119</sup> Both parties knew that to expect the Romanians to refrain from unleashing the dogs of war at that stage was a farce; by giving an inch, as the saying goes, the Romanians were primed to take the proverbial mile. Károlyi then decided to allow his new Defense Minister and his staff to make a

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<sup>117</sup> Károlyi, *Faith without Illusions*, p. 171

<sup>118</sup> Pásztor, *Hungary between Lenin and Wilson*, p. 86

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*

strategic assessment. Once this recommendation was prepared, he would convene his cabinet and make the critical decision.

## II. THE ARMY MAKES AN ASSESSMENT

Defense Minister Böhm and his two newly appointed military advisors, Colonel Aurél Stromfeld and Colonel Jenő Tombor, then, were tasked with coming up with a viable military threat assessment and response plan to the Vix Ultimatum. Peter Pásztor describes the scene in his *Hungary between Lenin and Wilson*, reporting

That same morning, after the Vix encounter, Defense Minister Böhm called on his two military advisors, Colonel [s] Stromfeld and Tombor. He asked them to prepare a map with new borders and to give their advice on how acceptable they were. Within a half-hour, they suggested the rejection of the Vix Ultimatum, claiming that the new borders would result in the complete economic, political, and military destruction of Hungary. At the same time Böhm was informed that, if the ultimatum were accepted, the crack Székely Division in Transylvania would refuse to follow orders.<sup>120</sup>

This assessment was given to President Károlyi, he then discussed it with his colleagues and made a frank call; his government was no longer able to provide a viable coalition with the Social Democrats that could make these demands presentable to the nation.

Unable to accept or decline the ultimatum, Károlyi made way for the Social Democrats, with their parliamentary majority, who in turn, made way for the recently released communists, who were willing to exercise the power of government. The Army was now faced with a choice; remain loyal to a government that no longer was confident enough to do its job, or join sides with a political party that many in the

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<sup>120</sup> Pásztor, *Hungary between Lenin and Wilson*, p. 139

military profession had negative feelings towards. Károlyi himself was resigned to let go of the reins of power, he did however state in his memoirs that

I could have rallied my own personal bodyguard; the officers were ready to fight (against the Communists) and the regiment of Széklers who, under General Kratochvil, were protecting our frontiers from the Romanians, would have been loyal to me.<sup>121</sup>

These were not the comments of a bitter cast-aside politician, but in reality were confirmed by Colonel Kratochvil in his own memoirs in which he remarked that “The Székely Division was just as willing to turn around and fight Kun Béla [Béla Kun] alone, without any help from the Romanians, because we are not Bolshevists, and we are just as much against Kun Béla as the Romanians.”<sup>122</sup> These were the serious reflections of a middle-class soldier, whose political ideology was so far from accepting Communism that he considered insubordination and rebellion. At that time, however, there was little that the Székely Division could do; they had their hands full retreating to the new line established along the railway line connecting Szatmárnémeti- Nagyvárad-Arad.<sup>123</sup>

The Army was therefore forced to make the decision to follow the change of government and faithfully serve the Kun-led Communist one. But the distrust was mutual on both sides; Kun and his functionaries were wary of the soldiers and officers that were retained, and in fact only retained them out of the necessity of having trained personnel.

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<sup>121</sup> Károlyi, *Faith without Illusions*, p. 155

<sup>122</sup> Kratochvil, *Memoirs*, p. 24

<sup>123</sup> See Appendice 2 for map

The functions of the police and gendarmerie were taken over by the Red Guard, comprised in part of demobilized soldiers and armed workers, in part of officers and servicemen kept on from old forces. As a result there were often grave suspicions about the loyalties of these units on the ground, which meant they could not always be relied upon to defend the dictatorship.<sup>124</sup>

The Army could rightly feel that its authority was being challenged; Kun as an indoctrinated Communist started to build a cadre of dedicated Communist-oriented officers, also making use of officers who had shown support for Social Democratic reforms, appealing to their leftist sensibilities. Kun was absolutely in this sense a hands-on man when it came to the creation of a leadership cadre for the Army; he continued the appointment of Böhm because of his Social Democratic background, allowed other advisors and officers who had shown aggressiveness in planning and daring in thought to maintain their positions also, and by the beginning of April, set himself the task of creating a Red Army.

At the beginning of April, in addition to his job as Commissar of Foreign Affairs, Kun also became part of the five-member *directoire* in charge of military operations. Thus he was directly involved in setting up the Hungarian Red Army, a task which, essential though it was, had been dragging on.<sup>125</sup>

### III. *RED AIMS*

Kun made it clear from the beginning what his plans were for the Army and for the direction of the nation; firmly based upon his conviction to spread the Communist revolution throughout Europe, he planned to use the Hungarian Red Army to regain lost territory and then to lead the vanguard of the proletarian revolution.

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<sup>124</sup>Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century*, p. 101

<sup>125</sup>György Borsányi, *The Life of a Communist Revolutionary Béla Kun*, (Columbia University Press, New York, 1993) p. 152-153

Like many faithful Communists of his time, he believed that if the Hungarian Soviet State survived, the example would be followed in the other nations of East Central Europe and soon the world would be engulfed in a great revolution.<sup>126</sup>

Kun made it even clearer for the non-Communist naysayers in a newspaper article he wrote for the Social Democratic *Népszava*, on March 30, 1919, in which he argued

To those who say that the dictatorship of the proleteriat in Hungary is but sheer gambling on the coming of world revolution, I have only this to ask: Which is the game of chance- to place ourselves firmly behind the international revolution of the proleteriat or to lay the country's fortunes on the altar of Wilsonian pacifism?<sup>127</sup>

His plans to form a Red Guard, as a cadre to instruct and indoctrinate the rest of the recruits he planned to bring into the Army, were however, not as simply carried through as he imagined. There was still the issue of the Soldier's Council, and the Army leadership that already existed.

Although the Soldier's Council was at first glance an organization that seemed to coincide with the principles of the Communist ideology of political control and organization of the military; however in true Communist form, any organization not directly controlled by the Communist party was deemed a threat and neutralized. It did not help that Pogány was a Social Democrat. Agitation began immediately to remove this rival, and on April 3rd, Tibor Szamuely and Béla Szántó, the Commissar for Military Affairs and the future Commander of the 6th Division of the Red Army instigated unruly soldiers to march in front of the commissariat building and demand the

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<sup>126</sup> Mócsy, *War and Society Vol. XII*, p. 28

<sup>127</sup> Béla Kun, "On the Unity of the Proleteriat," *Népszava* in Tökés, *Béla Kun and the Hungarian Soviet Republic*, p. 143

resignation of Pogány.<sup>128</sup> The Army of course welcomed this interference; it had been battling with the Soldier's Council for control over discipline and overall command, and made the compromise that control with political indoctrination was better than constantly being challenged by the Council.

### C. Recruitment for the Reds

The main reason, however, for the Army and within it the middle-class soldiers and officers to switch allegiance, lay in a far more simple reason than winning the conflict with the Soldier's Council; it ultimately came down to choosing a government with an aggressiveness and willingness to regain the country's sovereign territory. This should have been a group that was politically directly opposed to any partnership with Communism; instead they cautiously made a deal with the devil and embarked under its banner. For historians, it appears as an anomaly;

Somewhat more surprising was the participation in the Red Army of a significant number of officers and middle class refugees. They served in spite of their ideological antipathy to the regime, for, in it, they saw the replacement of a foreign policy based on pacifism with one of national resistance, even if Communist.<sup>129</sup>

To this end, the Communist were intelligent enough to combine the successful twin recruiting measures of patriotism and nationalism alongside their political propaganda; this caused a situation in which "not only the Communist workers but old officers and

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<sup>128</sup> Tökés, *Béla Kun and the Hungarian Soviet Republic*, p. 150

<sup>129</sup> Mócsy, *War and Society Vol. XII*, p. 98



soldiers, intellectuals and even some of the peasantry responded to the call of the Soviet posters crying To Arms! To Arms!”<sup>130</sup>

The reasons were similar for all classes of soldier; this is not to imply that only middle-class soldiers and officers were patriotic. Although the peasant class was more susceptible to Communist propaganda about land redistribution and equality for all economic classes, they too fought for patriotic and nationalist reasons.

They joined in large number; in fact a majority of the peasant soldiers who served in the Red Army were recruited from the ranks of the refugee peasants. It was a simple choice for them to join the Red Army, which promised to regain for them their last homes and their lands, lying often just behind the Romanian front lines.<sup>131</sup>

For these men, the difference between going home and living there within a Hungarian state and being uprooted and forced to find a new place within a much smaller Hungary, weakened and economically stunted, was the main motivation to fight for whoever was willing to lead them into battle. For many middle-class officers and soldiers, just like what Col. Kratochvil had said, both the Communist and the Romanians/Czechs were the enemies; this did not mean that the enemy of my enemy is my friend, but it was necessary, as Churchill said, to walk hand in hand with the Devil to cross the bridge.

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid, p. 89

<sup>131</sup> Ibid. p. 98

## Chapter 5

### The Implementation of an Aggressive Foreign Policy

#### A. Initial Success (A Weak link in the tightening chain)

As the Hungarian Army developed, it could only hope to become aggressive and branch outwards, aiming to regain some if not all of the lost and disputed territory. Where could it accomplish these aims? How, with its weak organization and relative inexperience could it hope to overwhelm any of its neighboring enemies? In what way was the decision shaped by the middle-class soldiers and officers who were in charge of creating the operational plans that would be executed?

#### *I. CONTINUING ORGANIZATION (ORIGIN OF BATTLE PLANS)*

“As Hungary’s army organization had been neglected, the [Hungarian] Soviet Republic had inherited a force of barely 40,000 men from the bourgeois democratic regime.”<sup>132</sup> While not a disaster, the order and organization of the army lacked the required efficiency to be an active force; moreover it could not hope to regain any lost territory under the Károlyi regime when its stated goal was only to prevent further encroachment. Its good fortune was to have the continued support of the middle-class soldiers and officers within its ranks; their ability to plan and coordinate unit movements and to clearly analyze strategy from their previous military experience were

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<sup>132</sup> Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century*, p. 105

sorely needed assets in the crucial planning stage. Kun therefore authorized Stromfeld, as Chief of Staff, to carry through the recruitment process nationwide. Stromfeld himself gives the orders through documents sent to Lieutenant Colonel Jenő Tombor, authorizing the call-up of “18 divisions and 3 Székeler Armies, which would enable a better chance at successfully repelling the Czechs and Romanians.”<sup>133</sup> This would not occur independently, there would be an attempt at an offensive somewhere to buy the time to arm, train, and deploy the needed soldiers effectively and to inspire more recruitment through the addition of military laurels and the chance to be part of a victorious army.

Kun’s new Red Army had the stated goal to regain territory, and therefore, Defense Minister Böhm and his subordinate Aurél Stromfeld [essentially his chief of staff] flowed along with this plan. At their proposed rate of recruitment and training, the fastest they could rush the necessary 200,000 troops into place was estimated in early April at being three to four months away, indicating that at full readiness, with the workers militia and regular army recruits, early July was to be the period of fruition.<sup>134</sup> This required an immense amount of confidence in the troops at hand; not only that they would be able to complete the task of an offensive, but that they would be able to

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<sup>133</sup> Aurél Stromfeld Orders to LTC Tombor, (Hadtörténelmi Levéltár, 1014. Budapest, Kapisztrán tér 2-4. , Archives) Stromfeld personal memoirs and papers, also mentioned in Botos, *The Road to Dictated Peace*, p. 232 The term Székeler Armies does not denote the size of the formation, as it normally would within a military connotation, it instead refers to their autonomy within the chain of command, and their level of attachment to the overall chain of command. Normally an Army would consist of between 2-4 divisions, in this case not.

<sup>134</sup> Romsics, *The Dismantling of Historic Hungary*, p. 97

sustain their gains once they inevitably ran out of steam. The working class soldiers were very optimistic, their bellies fired by all the Communist propaganda commanding them to carry the revolution to their brothers in neighboring nations; their middle-class counterparts on the other hand, were realistic enough to realize that the task ahead would be exceedingly difficult, and that reclaiming all the former territory lost would require a long term sacrifice.

Some of the middle class soldiers and officers voiced fears before the beginning of the offensive, others guarded optimism, while others chose to defect to the counter-revolutionary camp in either Vienna or Szeged. Capitan Bácsó, who we encountered before, chose to retreat to Vienna after the fall of the Károlyi regime, believing Communism to be a bigger evil than the foreign invasion of his country. Dr. Gustáv Gratz remained as an officer in the Red Army, but would only conduct staff work within Budapest, believing the offensive to be folly. Colonel Kratochvil, at the command of the Székler Division, and de facto theater commander in the east, remained incredulous about the regime change, but realized the threat inherent in the offensive to the north if the eastern theater was not held successfully, and as any good soldier would note, that any successful offensive there could turn to his advantage to the east, was guardedly optimistic. As the offensive would later develop, Colonel Stromfeld even had correspondence with Major Gyula Gömbös, a key counter-revolutionary figure,

seeking to justify his decision to join the Red Army by the success of the offensive and the obvious good it had accomplished.<sup>135</sup>

One of the first steps that Böhm took was to cut through all the Communist propaganda and place regular middle-class Army officers with training in key positions.<sup>136</sup> It was a task he had started during the Károlyi regime, he continued it during the Kun regime by convincing the governing military committee that any sort of cohesiveness would be impossible without it. He was able to do this by compromising; political commissars would accompany all formations, and critically, would accompany and sometimes take the place of army and division commanders, as was the case of Szántó and the 6<sup>th</sup> Division. Böhm and Stromfeld still kept overall control, but their political concessions were critical to the success of the spring offensive into the Slovak territory. Maria Ormos reasons that

Military organization was in the hands of an Army High Command headed by Böhm, who took on Aurél Stromfeld to be his chief of staff. Thanks to their actions, the enlistment of many young officers from the old army, and the initial enthusiasm of the Budapest workers, it was possible to send in a competent military force by May 9, to attack the Czechoslovak army, the weaker of the two invaders.<sup>137</sup>

The decision to attack the Czechs was a collaborative effort between the political military committee and the Army High Command, a thing unheard of in Communist military philosophy.

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<sup>135</sup> Bácsó, *Csaladjak iratoi [Writings for my family]*, Gratz, *Visszaemlekesre, [Looking Back]*, Kratochvil, *Memoirs and Papers*, Stromfeld, *Letter from Stromfeld to Gyula Gömbös, Szeged, June 27, 1919, Stromfeld Levelese [Stromfeld Letters]*, (Hadtörténelmi Levéltár, 1014. Budapest, Kapisztrán tér 2-4. , Archives)

<sup>136</sup> Ormos, *Hungary in the Age*, p. 32

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*, p. 48

## II. STEP TWO (WHAT OPTION DO WE TAKE?)

When the military committee met, Kun asked the Defense Minister and his Chief of Staff to give a critical assessment of where the Hungarians could realistically strike back, the response was unanimous from the High Command; into Slovakia. Josef Kalvoda writes that “Since the Romanians secured their positions in Hungary, the Czecho-Slovak front was the ‘weakest-link’ in the ‘capitalistic encirclement’ of the People’s (Soviet) Republic of Hungary led by Béla Kun.”<sup>138</sup> Munitions were built up, workers armed and sent to the northern theater led by Communist cadre, while regular army recruits were organized into companies, battalions, regiments, and eventually divisions, armed with rifles and machine guns, artillery, and mortars. While many of the regular army recruits were soldiers with training from the previous Austro-Hungarian army, the worker’s militia was comprised mostly of young and inexperienced men who had only worked in factories, and needed “considerable training and organizational work...to convert the worker’s willingness to fight into effective military units.”<sup>139</sup> When finally set up in position, the Hungarian Army strike force in the northern theater was composed of “73 battalions of infantry and 46 batteries of

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<sup>138</sup> Josef Kalvoda in Kiraly, *War and Society Vol. VI*, p. 287

<sup>139</sup> Borsányi, *The Life of a Communist*, p. 170

artillery. This force would face a combined Czech/Slovak force of 90 battalions of infantry and 32 batteries of artillery.”<sup>140</sup>

The first offensive was to commence on May 20<sup>th</sup>. Tökés reports that the government had a certain goal in mind, and that

To this end, the communists intensified preparations in two directions. First, Béla Szántó, Commander of the Hungarian Red Army, Sixth Division, with the help of Mátyás Rákosi, Ferenc Münnich, and Antonin Jannasak, initiated an offensive against the Czech lines defending the Slovak frontiers. The purpose of this attack was to occupy Eastern Slovakia and to establish a Soviet Republic there.<sup>141</sup>

This essentially, was a political goal carried out through military means. It did not sit well with those whose job it was to perform in the regular army. They firmly believed that the reason for fighting was “that the new boundaries would only be temporary and that return to their homelands, at the hand of a victorious army, was only a matter of time.”<sup>142</sup> Kun was of two minds when it came to starting the offensive, as an ardent Communist his first responsibility was to spread the revolution; but as a Hungarian he felt the pull to also secure territories that were lost from the state.<sup>143</sup>

Kun’s variance of emphasis reflected a dilemma faced by both the Communist cadres and the regular middle-class army officers alike; namely that if truly the goal was

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<sup>140</sup> Romsics, *The Dismantling of Historic Hungary*, p. 103 To break those numbers down into more sizeable military terminology, there are 3 battalions in a regiment, 3 regiments in a brigade, 3 brigades in a division, a total of 27 battalions in one division, therefore the Hungarians had slightly less than 3 divisions of infantry, the Czechs slightly more than 3, while the Hungarians had a slight advantage in artillery. Any differential in weapons was fairly negligible, as both sides were equipped with similar style from the Austro-Hungarian Army leftovers.

<sup>141</sup> Tökés, *Béla Kun*, p. 175

<sup>142</sup> Mócsy, *War and Society Vol. XII*, p. p. 14

<sup>143</sup> Kun, Personal Memoirs, as recorded in Tökés, *Béla Kun*, p.162-163

to spread Communist revolution, the two problems existed in their logic regarding the planned offensive. Problem one was definitely ideological, in that a fighter strictly following Communist doctrine should theoretically know no nationalism; all workers worldwide must unite and therefore the sovereignty of the state is irrelevant in the spreading of one political ideology. Problem two centered on the execution of that idea, which would mean the nullification of any and all nationalist and sovereign rights of Hungary over any territory returned, directly at variance with the intent and will of the middle-class officers. As the leader of the government was divided, so too would be the worker's militia and the regular army.

The offensive, on the other hand, was militarily wildly successful, and according to Kalvoda "The Czechoslovaks were taken by surprise; at times their retreat became a flight, especially when they ran out of munitions and supplies."<sup>144</sup> This was a stunning success for the Kun regime, and was only made possible by the continued cooperation of the Army High Command and the newly recruited worker's militia, controlled in part by Communist officers and in part by regular middle-class army commanders. The main reason for the good organization within the offensive, however, was undoubtedly due to the experience and the mentality of the middle-class soldiers and officers, who refrained from making political propaganda and instead focused on pushing forward into further territory. These officers and soldiers knew the hardships that had been faced by the populace; consequently they knew that the best way to bring the Hungarians who had been trapped outside back into their former daily existence was to allow them to regain their identity, not to force a new political system on them

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<sup>144</sup> Kalvoda in Kiraly, *War and Society Vol. VI*, p. 287



in their time of vulnerability. The political officers who accompanied them were a burden, but a burden that could be shouldered as long as the victories over the Czechs kept piling up, and as long as Hungarian sovereign territory was being returned to the lands of the Holy Crown of Saint Stephen.

Even though things were going well militarily, there was dissension within the ranks between the Communist and the regular middle-class soldiers. The regular army officers and Communist political officers almost from the start had a falling out, as their reasoning behind military strategy was at such far odds with each other that the end no longer was enough justification for the means. The military had made its case very plain through the battle plans created by Böhm and his principal advisors, Stromfeld and Tombor.[Also middle-class officers] A limited offensive, to test the strengths and weaknesses of the Czechs, combined with the effect an offensive would have on the Entente, was expected to be helpful at the negotiating table when the peace talks finally commenced. Getting the military committee and the Army High Command to agree on the actual scope of the plan, however, was a matter of contention. At the beginning of May, Tibor Hetes argues that

The government had reached a consensus in connection with the plan of the Northern Campaign. 1) Counterattack north-west towards Nyitra [Nitra] via Salgótarján. 2) Attack along the way of Miskolc-Kassa [Košice] to prevent Romanian-Czech link-up. Kun dislikes the first plan, Stromfeld doesn't like the second. Stromfeld believed that the plan was dangerous as it could force the Romanians to come to the aid of the Czechoslovaks. Böhm, on the other hand, opposed an attack from the direction of

Salgótarján, as he did not believe that the Red Army possessed adequate numbers of troops and firepower.<sup>145</sup>

Within their own ranks, the military officers whose mission it was to set the parameters of the offensive were widely divided, because many of them believed that the army was unprepared. This is hardly a conservative assessment, as the units had very little experience save for the middle-class veterans, and were not well-supplied consistently. Kun, however, was uninterested in this frank advice, and pressed for the offensive to move forward.

### *III. Overall military outlook: June 1, 1919*

These events did not occur alone, however, as on the other fronts, other circumstances prevailed besides victory. The offensive in the Northern theater was prompted by the advance of Romanian forces in April to the line set by the Vix Ultimatum; but because of the initial military success enjoyed by the Romanians, who easily possessed a numerical advantage because of the freeing of forces from their own eastern front,<sup>146</sup> they decided to push onward from the demarcation line set by the Entente and reach the Tisza river. Reinforcements were sent in the form of Red Army detachments of worker's militia but they were unable to prevent the taking of the cities of Nyiregyháza, Debrecen, and Békéscsaba, which were meant to be the next line of defense, causing the Hungarian army to have to fall back on the Tisza. The

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<sup>145</sup> Pásztor, *War and Society Vol. XX*, p. 57

<sup>146</sup> The Hungarians could boast of the Székely Division, 35 infantry battalions (about 1 and ½ divisions) 20 artillery batteries, 2 aircraft squadrons, "some cavalry" and 3 armored trains...Facing a Romanian Army with 64 infantry regiments (about 7 divisions) 28 cavalry companies, 192 artillery batteries, 3 aircraft squadrons, 2 engineering companies and 1 armored train.

Székely Division, engaged on the northern part of the front near Nyiregyháza, could not hold back the entire Romanian northern wing, the stronger of the two, and was encircled several times during its retreat. Its personnel, made up entirely of Transylvanians, a good portion of which had fought in the Austro-Hungarian army, were desperate to hold on to their homeland.

Their despair at retreating further added to the dilemma being faced by the middle-class soldiers and officers of the Red Army, because the main reason for fighting was slowly eroding before their eyes with each defeat. The worker's battalions sent to reinforce them were supposed to hold several bridgeheads across the Tisza to facilitate the Székely's escape; they were unable to do so and therefore the Kun government lost its best military formation before the final battle for Hungary had even begun. This created further mistrust and mutual accusations between the worker's militia/political officers and the middle-class soldiers and officers; the middle-class soldiers with their professional training had already felt themselves to be superior to the worker's militia, now their fears were confirmed. It was even secretly thought that the Székely Division was deliberately sacrificed; on the one hand to create an opportunity for the worker's militia to take all the glory in any military victory, on the other hand because the Communist government could not rely on them politically. Col. Kratochvil was to lament years later in his memoirs that had he had the right amount of regular, middle-class army soldiers and officers he requested, as opposed to the untrained but politically earnest workers he was sent, the military situation might have been saved.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Kratochvil, *Memoirs*, p. 27-30

This drive also allowed the Romanians to at first maintain contact with the Slovaks/Czechs on the pivot point of the city of Tokaj, from the end of April until the Northern campaign was launched by the Hungarians. Tokaj had been a key middle-class city where many upper middle-class officers were from; its loss was keenly felt by them and made the military objective all the more desirable to accomplish. Tokaj, as a famous wine producing area, was a bastion of the former middle-class identity in the Hungarian nation, and presented a visible target to pin the offensive to. This also of course presented the Hungarians with a military dilemma, in that now all three neighboring hostile armies were connected through a common front ranging from Tokaj in the north down to the city of Szeged in the south, an uninterrupted communication line between the Entente and the Romanians/Czechs. The main military aim became split by this situation into two parts; both a reclamation of the lost land in Slovakia and also the splitting of Romanian and Czech contact on the northeastern part of the northern and eastern theaters. Both were achieved by the end of the first week in June, after a little more than two weeks of fighting, a remarkable achievement for a state surrounded on three sides and critically short of trained army personnel. Thus Kun hoped to strengthen his bargaining position with the Entente, and thus he hoped to keep the allegiance of all the middle-class soldiers and officers who so far had rallied to his cause.

## B. French Intervention (Fait accompli)

When the Clemenceau note was delivered to the Kun government, it hit the Army High Command and the military committee alike as hard as any artillery shell that rained down in the military campaigns. The Hungarians were ordered by the military council of the Entente in the Clemenceau note, so-called because of the French Prime Minister's direct control of its wording, to withdraw from all gains in Slovak territory, to renounce the Slovak Soviet Republic that had been established, and to retreat 15 kilometers behind the original demarcation line set, or face the coordinated attack of French, Serbian, and Romanian forces in both the eastern and southern theaters. Kun had hoped to capitalize on what Martin Vietor described as "certain foreign policy factors [which] also affected the military situation favorably for Hungary...conflicts between Serbs and Romanians; between Yugoslavia and Italy."<sup>148</sup> Instead he drove them into military cooperation with his success; the fear that Hungary might actually regain what it had lost caused the neighbors to make up their differences for the time being and cooperate.

Kun's hand was forced, as was the resolve of his Army High Command, which recommended that the new Entente Ultimatum should be followed, with one caveat. Both Kun and Böhm agreed that the only viable way that a retreat could be foisted on the Hungarian public would occur with a guarantee of the withdrawal of not only Hungarian forces in the north, but that this withdrawal must also be accompanied by a simultaneous retreat of

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<sup>148</sup> Pásztor, *War and Society Vol. XX*, p. 443

Romanian forces occupying the line of the Tisza River in the eastern theater. And so, as Tökés recalls,

His [Kun] simultaneous call for retreat and international revolution satisfied neither the socialists nor the communist left. On June 21 the Revolutionary Governing Council, in compliance with Clemenceau's request for a 'cessation of hostilities' in northern Hungary and retreat from Slovakia, ordered the Hungarian Red Army to withdraw June 30<sup>th</sup> at the latest. The socialists, led by Böhm, Kunfi, and Erdelyi, concluded that the irresolute Kun was being forced to represent the interests of 'homicidal terrorists' and that his political ineptness would endanger the breathing spell gained by the retreat from Slovakia. They decided to organize an armed insurrection.<sup>149</sup>

Even then, as the situation was again involving a loss of sovereign territory for Hungary, the for support of the regime for the middle-class soldiers and officers was weakening, giving them cause to look for other means to accomplish their goals without a Communist government. Even though these guarantees were promised by the Entente, the idea proved to be illusory. The Romanians had no intention of retreating, to deflect any criticism of their decision they made their retreat contingent on the demobilization of the entire Hungarian Army, a demand that under no circumstance could be complied with by any Hungarian government. So Hungarian middle-class soldiers and officers, highly motivated and flush with victory, were unexpectedly asked to begin a retreat from territory that they had just purchased with blood, sweat and tears. This, ultimately, was the undoing of the support of the majority of the middle-class soldiers and officers for the Kun regime; it undoubtedly proved to be the downfall of the Hungarian Army at its most critical point.

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<sup>149</sup> Tökés, *Béla Kun*, p. 192

## Conclusions

As with any historical scenario, the reader should be careful when approaching the subject of historical development, as Béla Kiraly wrote, “Inevitability is a questionable assumption in history; while economic, social and other forces certainly dominate historical developments, they do not predetermine them.”<sup>150</sup> Why did a collapse of support occur? What motivated the Hungarian middle-class officers and soldiers to participate in the military of the two leftist governments in the first place? The collapse of support was not inevitable from the middle-class soldiers and officers for the Károlyi and Kun regimes; much less so was the guarantee of their support at all for either government. The factors that created a situation in which a social and economic middle-class group of soldiers could overcome their class prejudice and unite under the banner of first Socialism and then Communism were strong enough to bind these men to a cause they believed to be of a more dire importance than mere politics. Over 50% of the soldiers and officers who served in the Red Army were from the areas of the former Kingdom of Hungary that had been claimed by its neighbors; their need to reclaim their identity was so strong and so persistent they were willing to compromise their political values to do it. This is a statistic that should not be taken lightly when considering the mindset of these men.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Kiraly, *War and Society Vol. VI*, p. 16

<sup>151</sup> Szákály in Pásztor, *War and Society Vol. XX*, p. 172

The enormous job facing the governments that followed Habsburg rule in Hungary were difficult, and made more so by the relationships that developed with its neighbors due to its involvement on the side of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in the First World War. Károly Vigh succinctly describes the task that awaited Mihály Károlyi, the leader of the first revolutionary government,

The task which awaited Károlyi, new President of the Republic and its most prestigious personality, was to create the conditions for an independent state and defend the country against the attacking Czech and Romanian conquerors.<sup>152</sup>

His failure to do this can be attributed to a combination of international and domestic interference in his political program; he was unable to appease the pacifists that called for an end to war, unable to guarantee the safety of Hungarian citizens living within the affected territory on the periphery of his state, unwilling to compromise with counter-revolutionary radicals calling for a restoration of the monarchy and aggressive foreign policy, rebuffed and personally insulted by members of the Entente during armistice negotiations, tattered and torn and assaulted from all sides, it can hardly be said enough that his was an unenviable job. That he chose to stand and try to hold the line was admirable; that he was not the man to finish the task in hindsight is obvious.

And what of those citizens he could not protect? Many of them were either soldiers or the families of soldiers of the old Austro-Hungarian army, suddenly deprived of a homeland and an affiliation with a state entity that could no longer afford them its protection. They were tired of fighting, but knew that to give in to the aggressor in the form of the Entente or its

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<sup>152</sup> Károly Vigh in Kiraly, *War and Society Vol. VI*, p. 66



auxiliary forces would condemn them to a life outside their own country; they resolved for the most part to do what it took to challenge that fate. There was no inevitability about their future for these people; they reverently believed that Wilson's Principle of self-determination would be applied to all who sought its embrace, victor and vanquished alike. They were shocked at the treatment they received from neighbors and former friends, Transylvania in particular was the sight of petty revenge and the 'righting' of whatever slight, however small it may appear. These were systematic policy options exercised by the incoming Romanian, Serbian, Czech and Entente forces, calculated to create situation in which

the taking of hostages, random and nuisance arrests for brief periods of time, public flogging, internment of the officers of the old Austro-Hungarian Army, mass arrests of striking Hungarian workers; all served to create a climate in which organized resistance would be unthinkable.<sup>153</sup>

These people, especially the middle-class ones, were absolutely driven to despair; they felt their sense of belonging and worth to have washed away, and like a house without a steady foundation, this deeply unsettled them. They eventually became willing to do whatever it took to regain that identity, because without it their lives lost all meaning.

Károlyi could not offer an option aggressive enough for these soldiers; his refusal to bow to the Vix Ultimatum was bold, but not bold enough to start active resistance, and so he made way for Kun. This striking change in the political landscape was also unsettling for the soldiers and officers, but they tempered this uncertainty with the hope that the Communists would at least make a fighting attempt to gain back Hungarian sovereignty over the lost and disputed pieces of their own homeland. Kun had his own political agenda according to his

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<sup>153</sup> Mócsy, *War and Society Vol. XII*, p. 38

Communist doctrine, describing his alliance with the Social Democrats as “further [ing] the course of world revolution by the establishment of a Soviet Republic in Hungary.”<sup>154</sup> But he was shrewd enough to know that without the support of ordinary middle-class soldiers and officers, whose training was essential to the success of his military goals, that he could accomplish nothing. His open appeal to their nationalism and patriotism was cunning; but more cunning still was his preying on their fear, the fear that their own ‘small slice’ of the homeland would be lost forever. Kun was able to play to his base of hard left communist and yet still hold the carrot of reclaimed sovereignty in front of these middle-class soldiers, keeping them all marching for a short time to his tune.

Kun’s biggest mistake however, was giving into the demands of the Entente at the height of his success; not so much because of the loss of face, but more importantly because the tenuous grip he exerted over these trained professionals in his army absolutely depended on the continued success in regaining Hungarian territory. Without the carrot, Kun had no stick with which to beat these middle-class soldiers into following him any further; their contract had only one clause, and with the retreat, it was violated and became null and void. Tökés argues that

By the middle of July it had become painfully clear that the decision to retreat from Slovakia was a fatal strategic and tactical mistake. The withdrawal had irreparably damaged the national pride of the trade-union battalions, caused mass desertions from the Red Army, and induced the Czech Army- contrary to the provision of the Clemenceau note- to pursue the dejected Hungarian units.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Tökés, *Béla Kun*, p. 145

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid*, p. 200

Peter Gosztony writes that “as for the bulk of the officer corps, they entered into service in the Red Army guided by national sentiment.”<sup>156</sup> Once that sentiment no longer had a viable outlet to be performed in, the men within its service had no more incentive to perform.

Men like Minister of Defense Albert Bartha, Minister of Defense Vilmos Böhm, Captains József Breit, Kamil Aggházy, and Béla Bácsó, Colonels Aurél Stromfeld, Jenő Tombor, Dr. Gustáv Gratz, and Károly Kratochvil, and enlisted men such as Janos Baldavari, were all true patriots of whom much was asked. Their political affiliations ranged from conservative to socialist, their economic backgrounds mainly similar, ranging from lower to upper middle class, but they can neither be described as Communist nor as extremely right-wing. They chose in a time of hardship and doubt for their country to see their task through until completion so that they could safeguard a future for their fellow citizens whose part of the Hungarian sovereign space was at stake. Some historians have portrayed these men as heroes, sacrificing their own lives and fortune to stand up for their country regardless of the personal cost; others have portrayed them as opportunists, two-faced, back-stabbers and reluctant participants in events that were largely out of their control. The truth lies somewhere in between; and is not so easily defined as black and white.

Sandor Szákály very cleverly writes a good summary of the situation facing these men who chose to serve, when he argues that

The Soviet Republic’s political and military leaders undertook the task of defending the country: for the majority of the officers imbued with the nationalistic ideals this meant the

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<sup>156</sup> Peter Gosztony in Pásztor, *War and Society Vol. XX*, p. 76

protection of Hungary's territorial integrity. The majority of officers serving in the army, or engaged in service, came from the territories occupied by the Romanian, Czechoslovak, and Serbian Armies, or lying outside the demarcation lines. These officers saw the defense of their homeland and the liberation of the Hungarian territories under occupation as a just fight of self defense of the Soviet Republic.<sup>157</sup>

As a historian, it's easy to look back and see the inevitability of the loss of the territory that now resides outside of Hungary. However, it is also the duty of the historian to look back and ask themselves, what could I have done in the same situation? What were the right decisions really? If I had given five, ten or twenty years of service to the Austro-Hungarian Army, and then was called upon to defend my homeland against neighbors who neither liked me nor felt any great respect for my state's sovereignty, what choice would I have made? For some of the men who lived and died in these times, it was unthinkable to do anything other than continue to perform the duties that they had sworn to fulfill; protect, preserve, and defend. Because of their lost of identity, their keen sense of the violation of their nation's sovereignty, the desire to see their homeland reclaimed and their homes returned, they were able to turn a blind eye to the political method the goal was being accomplished with.

What the historian must really ask then is why this group of soldiers matter to historical study? What purpose do we have in getting to know the reasons behind their loyalty to a government they didn't believe in? Szákály also writes that in his experience,

In the course of the almost seventy years which have elapsed since the liberal democratic revolution and the proclamation of the [Hungarian] Soviet Republic, no work has analyzed completely the composition of the officers corps of the armies of the People's Republic and the [Hungarian] Soviet Republic.<sup>158</sup>

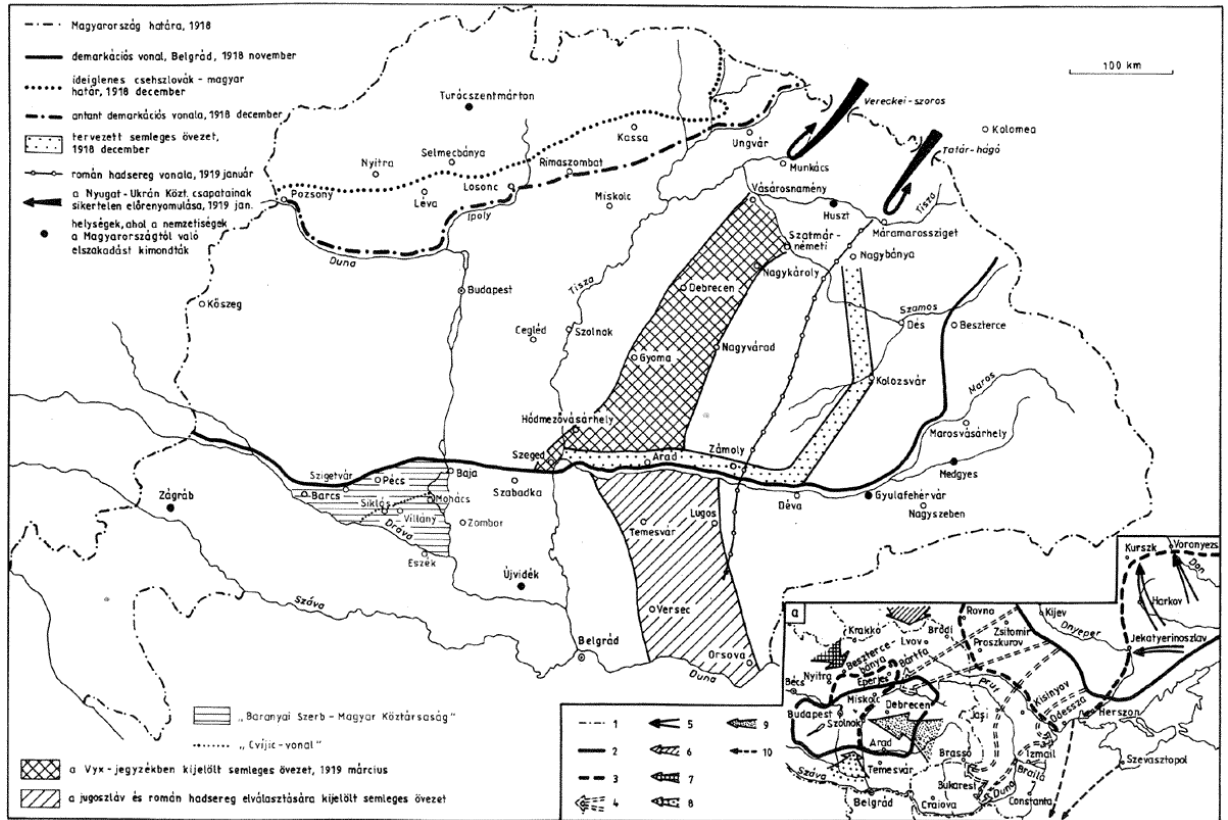
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<sup>157</sup> Szákály in Pásztor, *War and Society Vol. XX*, p. 172

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*, p. 169

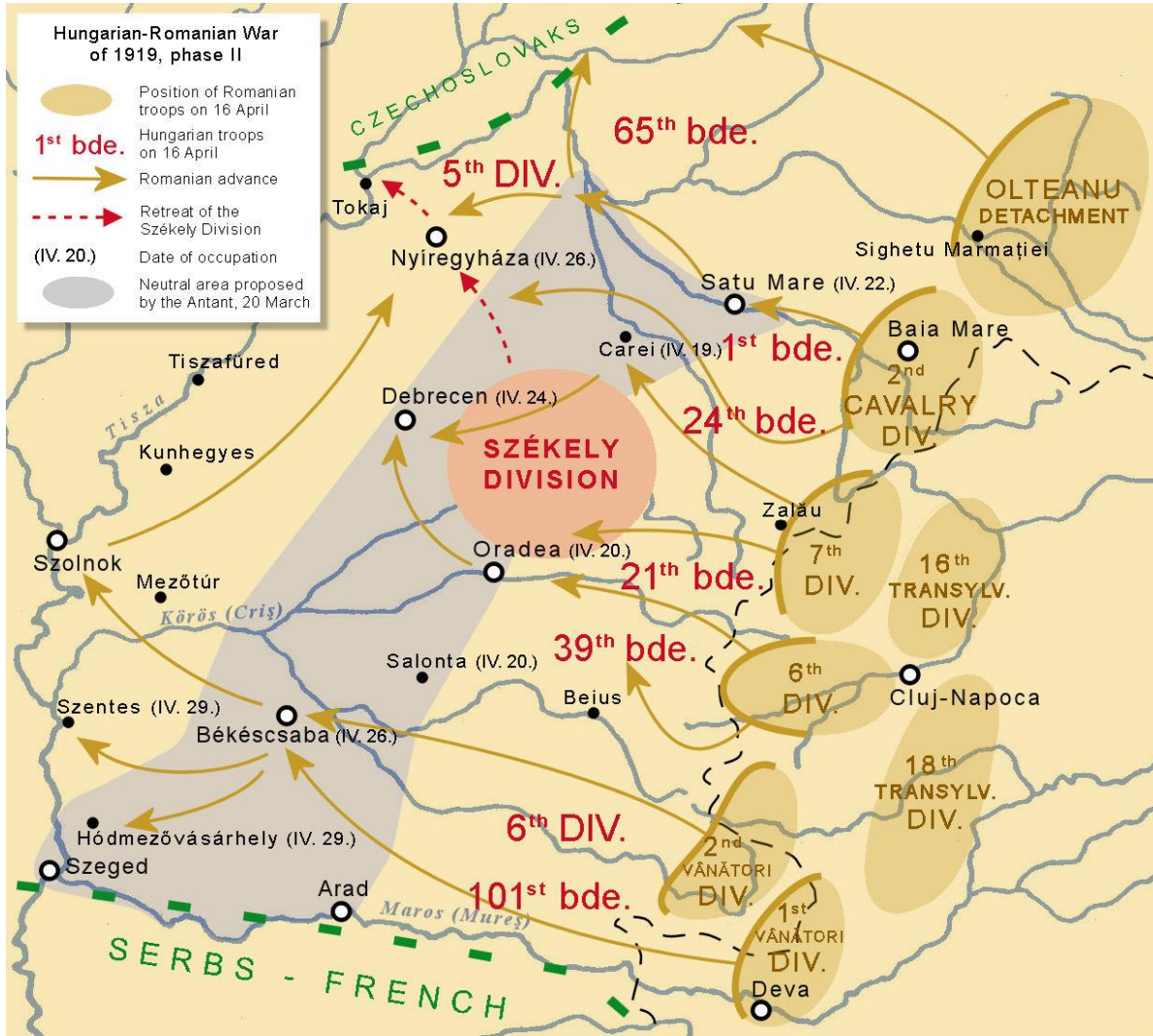
The purpose is in understanding how the role of sovereignty or in the minds of these soldiers' patriotism and nationalism can create a situation in which even diametrically opposed political classes can work together for a common goal; and how that common goal was asserted in the pursuit of Hungarian sovereign interests following the First World War. It lends its gravity to a larger discourse, in which the origins of Hungary's involvement in the Second World War comes into a more focused picture, and even gives background to ideas of revisionism in Hungary in today's modern political landscape. Without this historical treatment, the idea that men conditioned to abhor Communism, and what it stood for, might actually fight in defense of a government that was unabashedly the first Soviet Republic west of Ukraine, would seem bizarre and incomprehensible. This historical comparative study has striven to enumerate the answers to these questions, and to open further study into this subject.

**Demarcation Zones in Hungarian Periphery Figure 1**



**Demarcation Lines:** Map showing the demarcation lines around the peripheries of Hungary, to the north with the Czechs, the south with the Serbs, and the east with the Romanians.

## Hungarian-Romanian Positions April 1919 Figure 2



Positions of the Romania and Hungarian armies in the eastern theater in April 1919

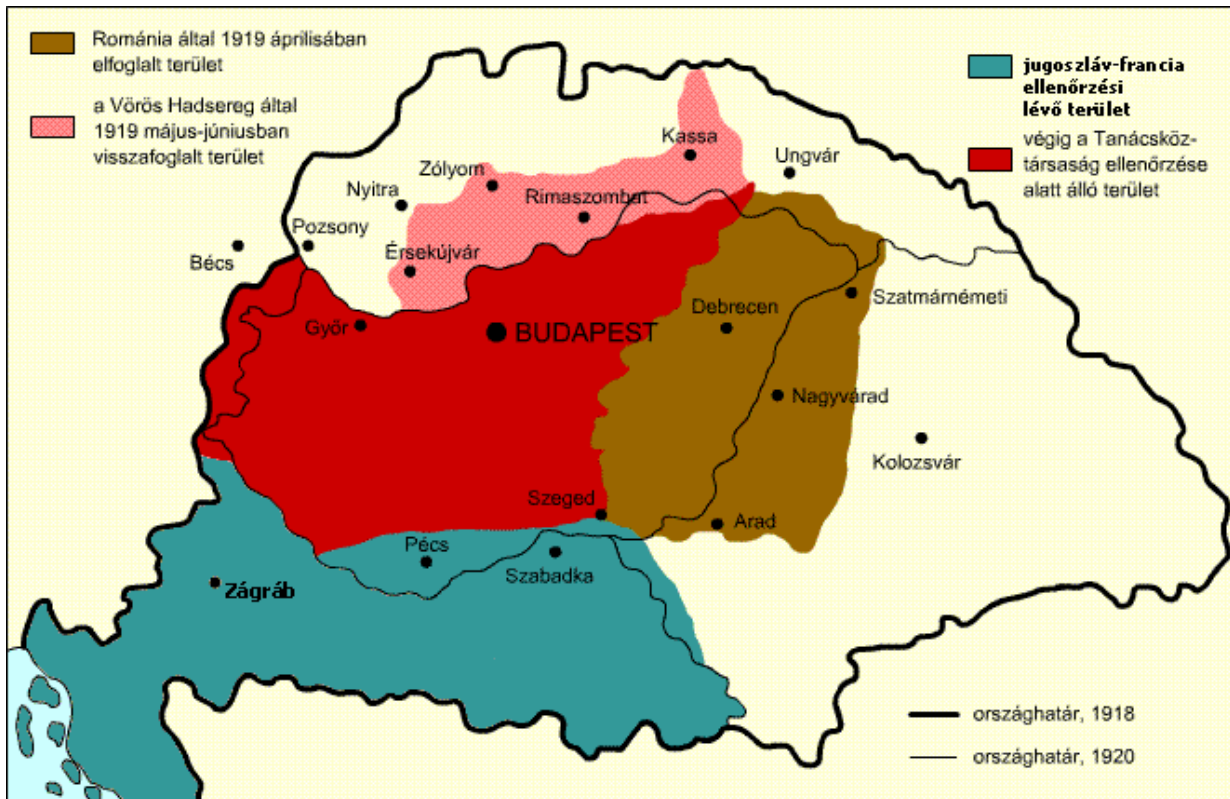


### Hungarian-Romanian-Czech Positions May 1, 1919 Figure 3



This map shows the link-up between the Czech and Romanian forces in the northeastern part of the two theaters of war. It also shows the retreat of the Hungarian forces to the Tisza River. It is prior to the Northern Campaign offensive.

## Northern Campaign in Slovakia Figure 4



Blue area shows territory lost by Hungary to Yugoslavia, Brown area indicates territory lost to Kingdom of Romania by April 1919, Pink area shows extent of Northern Campaign's recovered territory, Red area indicates size of People's Republic of Hungary.

# 1919 Offensives Figure 5



**Der Ungarisch-Rumänische Krieg von 1918 bis 1920**

This map shows the overall number of offensives in 1919. The green and blue areas show the extent of the Romanian-Soviet war, while the yellow-red-blue show the military offensives during the conflict between the Czech/Romanian/Serb/Entente forces and the Hungarians.



**Székely Division being inspected by Károlyi Figure 6**



Székely Division being inspected by Károlyi in Transylvania.

## **Maps, Figures, Images, Illustrations Bibliography**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:HungarianRomanian War of 1919, Romanian advance to Tisza - English.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:HungarianRomanian_War_of_1919,_Romanian_advance_to_Tisza_-_English.jpg)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:HungarianRomanian War of 1919, positions on 3 May - English.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:HungarianRomanian_War_of_1919,_positions_on_3_May_-_English.jpg)

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