

"EITHER HITLER OR HABSBURG"?

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ONE of the favoured lines of Habsburg propaganda is portraying the Habsburg dynasty and its policy as opposed to German nationalism and Pan-German imperialism. The Habsburg propagandists contend that the Austro-Hungarian Empire was the heir of the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation of the Middle Ages, which—in a sense—was a supranational or non-national structure designed to uphold the universal "Catholic" ideal of Christianity. Above all, they argue, the Empire was the only barrier to German domination of Central Europe—and hence of all Europe—which did not fall prey to Germany until the Empire was broken up. The Habsburg dynasty is pictured as the only factor able to reconstruct Central European unity. Hence the slogan or, rather, challenge to world opinion—"Either Habsburg or Hitler."

But this thesis proves to be false in the light of history, as well as of the present conditions in Central Europe. The alternative or antithesis "Either Hitler or Habsburg" is only seemingly one of choices; in reality it is a distinction in form only, not in substance. For essentially, Habsburg policy always was the medium of German domination over Central Europe, and never an anti-German policy.

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From the very beginning, seven centuries ago, up to the disintegration of the Habsburg Empire, the Habsburg policy was but fulfilment of the rôle originally assigned to the "Ostmark" by German kings, which was that of a spearhead for German domination over Central Europe. The policy of the Habsburgs as Emperors of the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation was primarily due to their dual position of being, as rulers of Austria, German princes, and, simultaneously, Bohemian and Hungarian kings. This accumulation of power assured their primacy among the German princes within the *Reich*; on the other hand, they used Germanism as the prop and mainstay of their rule over the non-Germanic nations of Central Europe. The balance, of course, was maintained at the expense of the national and constitutional rights of the non-Germanic nations. What originally was a personal union of the crowns of Bohemia and Hungary with Austria, was gradually

transformed, by reducing the constitutional integrity of the originally free components, into a German-administered and absolutely-ruled centralized empire, in fact an instrument of German hegemony. The corollary of this policy was the steady Germanization of the non-Germanic nations. In Bohemia for instance, persecution, confiscation and Germanization in the 17th century surpassed in ruthlessness that of Hitlerism. In fact, the educated classes of the Czech people, their ancient culture and literature, and even language, were almost destroyed in the name of counter-reformation.

The nineteenth century, however, saw the revival of the Slavic nations as the consequence of the "philosophy of enlightenment" [Komensky, Rousseau, Dobrovsky, Herder] and of the French Revolution. For the past hundred years, that is, since 1848, the Slavic nations of the Empire fought for national and political equality, and endeavoured to transform the Habsburg Empire from a German domain into a federation of equal nations which would be their true fatherland and their defender against German overlordship. They never succeeded, because the Habsburg dynasty, always a German dynasty, could not conceive such a rôle as conforming to its true mission. Even after the Prussian rival forced the Habsburgs out of the leadership of the German *Reich* by the defeat at Sadowa in 1866, the Emperor Franz Josef prided himself on being a German prince, and, clinging to the ancient memories and the aspirations to primacy among the German princes, still regarded Germanism as the foundation of his power. Though expelled from the assemblage of German princes and freed—against his will, of course—from the entanglement with Germany, he did not find the strength to reorganize his Empire so as to make it really independent of the German *Reich* by granting his non-Germanic races constitutional equality and so winning their allegiance. He saw no other choice and purpose for his policy than an alliance with Prussianized Pan-Germanism. This was the real meaning of the constitution of 1867, known as the "Austro-Hungarian Compromise." Splitting the Empire into halves, the dominant position over the Slavs being reserved in the one to the Austrian Germans and in the other to the Magyars, that constitution was an instrument to preserve German and Hungarian domination, and to make the whole Empire into a vassal and agent of Pan-Germanism. This policy finally led the Empire, against the will of its Slavic majority, into the World War, which wrought its doom. The old Empire failed just because the

Habsburgs [and the Austrian Pan-Germans and Hungarian nationalists] refused to divest Austria of its "German mission" and to endow it with a "Central European," a truly "Austrian mission" as expounded by the Czech historian F. Palacky in his *Idea of the Austrian State*.

What Palacky envisaged was a federal structure in which the Austrians, ceasing to consider themselves as part and parcel of political Germandom, would play a rôle of their own, different from their historical German mission, as an equal partner with the other Central European nations. This was also the only formula for the survival of the Habsburg dynasty. It was, however, not understood and was rejected. The Habsburg Empire became the opposite of what the Habsburg propaganda now likes to call "a supranational commonwealth of equal nations," and failed in its mission. It lived and died in the service of Pan-Germanism.

And die it had to, just because at the beginning and during the course of the World War the monarchy came as near as possible to the realization of the Pan-German *Mittel-Europa*. It is no exaggeration to say, that had it not been destroyed by the internal pressure of the non-Germanic races, it would have been disrupted by the Austrian Pan-Germans, who openly demanded its destruction rather than accept an equal status with the Slavic nations. The Habsburg dynasty condoned the Pan-German plans, and ultimately went to war for their realization. How, then, can the Habsburg idea be proffered as the panacea against Pan-Germanism?

If now the Habsburg propaganda contends that Austrians conceive as the *sine qua non* for their independence the restoration of the Habsburgs, that for the Austrians there is no other choice than "Either Habsburg or Hitler," it is tantamount to an actual reassertion of the Pan-German mission of Austria and the negation of an independent Austrian nationhood. For why could not the Austrians live as a nation, if they want to, without the Habsburgs? Why could German unity enforced by Hitler be met with the only alternative of a Habsburg? The answer implicit in the Habsburg claim is this:

Because Austrians are not a nation. They are but Germans, and as such they can fulfil their mission only through the Habsburgs—as they did throughout the centuries.

This is the real meaning of the Mission—attributed to Austrians—namely, that of the building of an empire; an empire symbolized by the ruling family, of course, in which, as it has

been said, Southeastern Germandom should retain a prerogative against the non-German nations as a prize for splitting Germandom. Although Habsburg propaganda ostensibly emphasizes the supranational and federal character of a new, future Empire, promising equal status to the various Central European races, it is not difficult to discern the real blueprint of that Empire. For Habsburg propaganda does not conceal that the reconstruction of a Habsburg "federation" is incompatible with Czechoslovak and Yugoslav national unity.

On every occasion the Habsburg propagandists insist that no such sort of unity exists; that the Czechs are a race and nation different from Slovaks; that, similarly, there is no unifying link among Slovenes, Croats and Serbs. The internal difficulties of those young states are being exaggerated and misrepresented. The splitting of these nations and their states is the avowed aim of this propaganda. What is the meaning of all this? What would the new Habsburg "federation" look like, according to that blueprint? Of course, there would be a "Bohemian State" with seven million Czech and three million German inhabitants. Then there would be an Austrian State, with about seven million German subjects. Then a Slovak State, with two and a half million Slovaks, which should "purely nominally", of course, be united with a Hungary of nine millions under the historical crown of St. Stephen borne by a Habsburg king. The Yugoslavs are to be dismembered too.

The Slovenes are to become either an autonomous unit within the Austrian State, or a federal unit: a country, in either case, with no more than one and a half million Slavic souls. The Croat Kingdom, with a population of about three and a half millions, is to be restored as a federal member of the new Empire—presumably in some connection with the Crown of St. Stephen. Serbia, of course, is excluded and should—thus the recommendation goes—unite with Bulgaria under the Karadjordje dynasty! Such is the phantasmagoric concept of the new Habsburg Empire.

Obviously its most characteristic feature would be this:

The Germans and the Magyars would again become the strongest members in such a "federation," comprised of dismembered races, and as such would therefore be entitled again to some kind of predominance or leadership. The Habsburgs even would not object to "splitting Germany" and annexing some parts of it—for instance, Silesia or Bavaria—thus increasing the German influence in their Empire. This is the meaning of "the empire building" under the Habsburg dynasty allotted

to the Austrians as the exclusive and only mission, the *raison d'être*, of an independent Austria. It is the old Pan-Germanic mission in a new garb.

A restored Habsburg Empire, indeed, cannot mean anything else. For the Habsburg dynasty has throughout its history incorporated, and even now cannot but embody, the old Germanic function of Austria. That alone is the content and meaning of legitimism in Austria. Hungarian legitimism, on the other hand, cannot conceive the Habsburg restoration except as the bearer and preserver of the historical idea of the integrity of the Crown of St. Stephen, which is but the expression of Magyar domination over non-Magyar peoples in Greater Hungary. The conceptions of the Austrian and Hungarian legitimists are, however, definitely dead in Central Europe, and cannot be revived.

Pan-Germanic imperialism has before been beaten in the First World War, and with it, logically, its accomplice the Habsburg Empire. It is going to be beaten again, and this time, let us hope, forever. If this war has any meaning at all, it is that of putting an end to the Pan-Germanic dream, not that of setting up a sham reproduction of the same system. The restoration of a Habsburg Empire would be, in fact, a compromise with Pan-Germanism, an avowal that it has not been and cannot be defeated.

The non-Germanic and non-Magyar peoples of Central Europe, who fought for many centuries for their liberation from foreign rule, will never submit to it any more or in any form. It is monstrous to want to employ such Machiavellianism as the Habsburg scheme in the attempt to enslave them again; even more so, if it is fostered by some reactionary politicians outside of Central Europe, to wit, on this continent, who profess to be fighting for liberty.

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The Habsburg restoration—which is to take place not on this continent but in Central Europe—would have to be achieved by force. By whom, and for how long? For the people of Central Europe would resist it. Any support, even if only ideological, to such a restoration is a travesty of the idea for which this war is being fought, namely the idea of Freedom. On the other hand, the Central European nations are willing to rebuild a Central European solidarity with an independent and democratic Austria and Hungary.

This solidarity and new cooperation can be based only on mutual respect and trust of equal democratic nations. I say democratic, because only the democratization of all Central European nations can lead them to true appreciation of the worth and dignity each of itself and of one another, and—therefore—to mutual respect and confidence. That confidence can hardly be achieved between nations with opposite political doctrines and national philosophies.

Obviously Austria can live as an independent nation only if the Austrians want to live as a nation, other than the German nation. Only of their own free volition can the Austrians assert their nationhood. If they do this, they need no Habsburg; if they don't, no "Habsburg idea" can perform that miracle.

And Austrians have proved that they are fully conscious of this condition of their national life. They are conscious of their specific civilization, and know that they need not forsake their language and cultural past and individuality to become a nation. On the contrary—only in asserting their nationhood will they fulfil their true Austrian and European mission. They reject the German mission represented by Habsburg.

The movement for a Habsburg restoration, as a matter of fact, has no roots whatsoever in the popular masses of either Austria or Hungary. In Austria in the last free elections, in 1932, the Social Democratic Party received 42 per cent of the votes cast, the Christian Socialists 36 per cent. Together, the two parties controlled more than three-fourths of the seats in Parliament. The rest were divided among the Great Germany Party, the National German Agrarians, and the fascist Heimwehr. Neither the Communists nor the Monarchists, it should be noted, ever succeeded in winning a single seat of the 165 in the Austrian Parliament.

After the delusion of German nationalism and the *Anschluss* obsession which prevailed during the first years of the Austrian Republic, the Austrians have realized that they are different from Germans, culturally as well as racially [having assimilated a strong admixture of non-Germanic races], and that their national individuality and civilization are worth fighting for. Indeed, they did fight for their national independence against the Hitlerian Pan-Germans valiantly. Two Austrian Chancellors, Dolfuss and Schuschnigg, fell as victims of that fight. Social dissensions which divided the Austrians were on the point of being settled by Chancellor Schuschnigg when Hitler struck

—to prevent Austrian unity and the assertion of national independence by plebiscite.

Austrian democracy will emerge strengthened from this war. The Hungarian landless peasants, too, see no salvation in a Habsburg restoration which would depend on the support of the old aristocracy and therefore tend to preserve the rule of their Hungarian feudal overlords.

Anyone who is acquainted with the true conditions in Central Europe knows that no real forces are behind all these Habsburg plans. Still, there are people abroad who think it opportune to back them. As it cannot be assumed that they are unaware of the actual conditions in Central Europe, it is clear that they foster and use these plans for their own ends—which have nothing in common with the will and interest of the Central European nations.

They, of course, are aware of the great strides democracy has made there, and the profound changes Europe is undergoing at a pace faster than we on this continent. They fear those changes which bring nearer the "century of the common man." They prefer the century of Archdukes. They think a Habsburg could turn the wheel back, or at least stop it. So it is not surprising that the Habsburg propaganda seeks and finds support of those who constantly are afraid. Afraid of Russia, of course!

These people do not see that the problem of social emancipation has its own roots in every nation; that this trend of evolution to economic democracy—the logical consequence of the French Revolution and of man's struggle for freedom—was facing European nations long before the Russian Revolution² in Czarist Russia, and it would have to be solved even if there were still a Czarist Russia.

These clever "realistic" politicians think a Habsburg restoration could weaken and check Germany and, at the same time, Russia. They are attracted by the idea of a Habsburg playing the rôle of a Darlan. But the winning over of Darlan really weakened the Axis, while backing Habsburg does not weaken, but on the contrary strengthens Hitler, because it weakens the democratic forces in Europe, the real allies of the United Nations.

For what interest has the Slovak, Austrian or Hungarian worker in fighting Hitler if he knows he is preparing the way for another reactionary régime, that of a Habsburg? Have we not experienced the disastrous consequences of the 20 years'

policy of the western democracies in trying to isolate Russia? Britons and Frenchmen have paid in blood the price of this policy, and they understand that without Russia's cooperation there can be no European (and world) security.

Great Britain has no use for the Habsburg dynasty, because she knows that the Central European nations are inflexible in rejecting Habsburg, and do not want to be misused again as a buffer against Russia, which is now paying so tremendous a toll in blood and wealth for their liberation.

Central Europe can serve Europe only as a bridge and intermediary between the European East and West, never as a barrier. For this reason the Central European solution must be based not only on the free agreement of the directly interested Central European nations, but also on the cooperation of all the main European powers.

This means, therefore, cooperation with Great Britain and France, and, of course, with its strongest neighbour, Soviet Russia.

A Habsburg restoration in Central Europe, imposed and sustained by all the reactionary forces in the world, could not survive. It would be overthrown again by the Central European nations, who would then seek the protection of Russia. But it certainly would not fail to wreck the solidarity uniting Great Britain, Russia and the United States. It would fan suspicion and distrust of Russia against the Anglo-Saxon powers, with the probable result of an eventual rapprochement between beaten Germany and "double-crossed" Russia.

Certainly, neither world peace nor calm social development would thus be served, and the whole purport of this fight for freedom would be stultified.