

The Idea of a Danubian Federation

in British and American Thought during World War I*

Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae, 1988, [1989] 2-3.

England and the United States, two obviously successful and powerful countries, the homes of noble ideas, possessing well-working political and economic systems, have always had a strong appeal throughout the Danubian lands, and especially in Hungary.¹ Since the central region of Europe has never held much importance for the two English-speaking countries, one shouldn't be surprised that the echo of this appeal has always been rather faint, sparse, and sympathy was discernible only on rare occasions, resulting from dramatic events.²

Before the first world war Britain as a great power and the traditional friend of the Habsburg Empire was not entirely indifferent to the conditions in what she regarded as the arch of the European state system. Throughout the 19th century a number of enterprising British travellers and interested observers wrote extensively (and, on the whole, reliably) on the Danubian monarchy and her peoples, usually from a viewpoint of sympathetic understanding.³ These works came to be the main sources of information for the American public, too, largely by default.

The traditionally favourable image of Austria-Hungary was destroyed by the world war: the ally of the German enemy was found to be almost as oppressive and aggressive as her partner, and soon the century-old tradition of insisting on the existence of a Central European great power was abandoned. In the spring of 1918 a policy of subversion and dissolution was launched, in the name of liberating the "oppressed" Slav and other nationalities. But this was only the final stage of a process which started in the early years of the century, when the gradual drifting apart of Great Britain and Austria-Hungary⁴ was accompanied by growing criticism of the internal conditions of the Monarchy, and especially of the treatment of the non-German and non-Hungarian nationalities. The articles and books of R.W. Seton-Watson, Wickham Steed and other critical authors received growing interest and agreement already prior to 1914, especially in liberal, radical and socialist circles, and they were successfully penetrating the governing elite, too, most notably the Foreign Office. The Hungarian half of the Monarchy, once described as "a model constitutional state," was particularly severely admonished.⁵ During the Great War all the imaginary and real shortcomings of Austria and Hungary were highlighted, but the blackened reputation was not the cause

¹ The early phase of this relationship between the American democracy and the Danubian countries (which symbolized a pattern discernible later, too) is covered by Bela K. Kiraly and George Barany (eds.), *East-Central European Perceptions of Early America* (Lisse, The Netherlands, 1977), esp. the beautiful essay of George Barany, "The Appeal and the Echo".

² The oeuvre of István Gál, amounting to hundreds of publications, is a monument of research into Central Europe's ties with the English-speaking world.

³ There is a good bibliography for them: F.R. Bridge, *The Habsburg Monarchy 1804-1918: Books and Pamphlets Published in the United Kingdom between 1818 and 1967*. (London, 1967)

⁴ F.R. Bridge, *Great Britain and Austria-Hungary 1906-1914* (London, 1972)

⁵ This transformation is the subject of my *The Changing Image of Hungary in Britain, 1894-1918* (Budapest, forthcoming).

of the volte-face of British foreign policy, only facilitated it, and later served as justification for the unjust borders drawn by the peace conference. The same course can be observed in American opinion and policy, with some lagging behind.

The independent but not unconnected decision of the two English-speaking democracies to adopt a policy leading to the emergence of "a new Europe" has been the subject of a large number of studies,⁶ but most of them concentrated on the decision to write off the Monarchy and paid little attention to the fact that for a long time neither the British nor the American public favored the break-up. An alternative policy, preserving the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy but transforming it into a democratic federation, had many adherents, mainly among British intellectuals leaning to the Left. It is not the aim of this paper to show why the idea of "peace without victory" and "justice for all" could not prevail, and why was it abandoned even by the man who appeared to be capable of enforcing this ideal: the President of the United States. My aim is merely to show the existence of an option which appeared to be very attractive and promising for some time, and to point out that the proposals calling for a federal rearrangement in Central-Europe were born not out of naivety or ignorance, on the contrary, they were based on a thorough acquaintance with the conditions of that area and also on a careful consideration of the dangers and the most likely consequences of the rival idea, a new Europe consisting of small nation-states. This essay bears witness to a conviction which I have felt long before I came across Hugh Trevor-Roper's dictum: "history is not merely what happened: it is what happened in the context of what might have happened. Therefore it must incorporate, as a necessary element, the alternatives, the might-have-beens."⁷

*

Right from the beginning of the Great War the group that was doing its best to educate the British public and its leaders on the necessity of replacing the Habsburg Monarchy with a number of new or greatly enlarged states, found strong rivals in those radical, liberal and socialist writers and politicians who tried to go beyond what they considered an outdated nineteenth century nationalist solution for self-government. MPs like A. Ponsonby, Ch. Trevelyan, R. MacDonald, Noel Buxton, authors like Hobson, Norman Angell, G.Lowe Dickinson, E.D. Morel were not keen monarchists, they supported the political emancipation of all neglected ethnic groups and recognized the democratic element of nationalism, but they believed that the more advanced part of the world had already passed the age of nationalism, and in the new world national

⁶ For the British side: Harry Hanak, *Great Britain and Austria-Hungary during the First World War: a Study in the Formation of Public Opinion* (London, 1962); W.H. Rothwell, *British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy 1914-1918* (Oxford, 1971); K.J. Calder, *Britain and the Origins of the New Europe 1914-1918* (Cambridge, 1976); W. Fest, *Peace or Partition. The Habsburg Monarchy and British Policy 1914-1918* (London, 1981); H. and C. Seton-Watson, *The Making of a New Europe: R.W. Seton-Watson and the Last Years of Austria-Hungary* (London, 1981) and Lajos Arday, "Economics Versus Nationality. British plans for Reshaping East-Central Europe in 1917-1919," *Hungarian Studies in English*, XI, 165-172. For the American side there is an authoritative, although somewhat biased account: Victor S. Mamatey, *The United States and East Central Europe 1914-1918* (Princeton, 1957). Much important material can be found in Arthur J. May, *The Passing of the Hapsburg Monarchy* (Philadelphia, 1966), 2 vols. - Several aspects of this issue are touched upon in the important collection of articles: Bela K. Kiraly, Peter Pastor, Ivan Sanders (eds.), Essays on World War I: Total War and Peacemaking: A Case Study of Trianon (New York, 1982), especially by the essay of Sandor Taraszovics.

⁷ Hugh Trevor-Roper, "History and Imagination," *The Times Literary Supplement*, 25 July, 1985, p. 835.

competition was bound to give way to national cooperation. The ultimate aim of many "progressive" thinkers was international (or world) government, and they hoped that the war - which they had opposed from its beginning - might at least help people realize the need for an international organization, primarily for the prevention of future wars.⁸

Opposition to the break-up, and especially to the dismemberment of the Habsburg Monarchy was a logical concomitant of such views. Naturally the radicals were not supporters of a more authoritarian, less democratic government, but they were against any disorganization, against the demolition of existing intricate structures, and were convinced that Austria-Hungary represented a viable economic organization. In their opinion federalization was the best means for satisfying the legitimate claims for self-government. "The more beneficial movement of civilization is not towards disruption but towards larger and ever larger political aggregates, including within them every kind of local autonomy."⁹ One of the leading figures of this group, Henry Brailsford, doubted that the breaking up of Austria and Hungary represented an idealistic programme, he rather saw in it an imperialistic one aiming at emasculating Germany and achieving her "encirclement" through a chain of hostile states - who would be at the mercy of Russia.¹⁰

These people seem to have been more aware of both the difficulties and the internal and external complications of a just settlement along national lines, since they were familiar with the ethnically mixed nature of the population of many areas in the Central European region. Angell's expression was telling: "If every Britain has its Ireland, every Ireland has its Ulster."¹¹ Perhaps the most influential of the Radical papers, *The Nation*, often spoke about the economic unity of the Danube valley, of the danger of the new states becoming political satellites, and of the strong likelihood that they would persecute their ethnic, religious and political minorities.¹² The weekly (most probably Brailsford) went as far as pointing out that the treatment of the various peoples of the British Empire was hardly better than the policies followed toward the minorities in Austria and in Hungary, where "a record partly good and partly bad, but always improving" was more promising than the policy of "the knife." "A slow course by self-treatment is in such cases a better remedy than violent surgery, for it implies the moral development of the ruling race as well as the liberation of the oppressed."¹³ Brailsford even expressed his doubts if the peoples of the Monarchy were really keen on independence, and knew that the differences between the Czechs and Slovaks, and also those between the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes were too great for effective unity. The true solution, according to *The Nation*, lay in federation with internationally guaranteed autonomies.¹⁴

⁸ H.R. Winkler, *The League of Nations Movement in Britain, 1914-1919*, (New Brunswick, 1952); A.J.P. Taylor, *The Trouble Makers. Dissent over Foreign Policy 1792-1939*, esp. chap. 5.

⁹ *War and Peace* [N. Angell's monthly supplement to the *Nation*], April 1917. - The views and writings of this group can be found in Harry Hanak, op. cit., see also idem, "A Lost Cause: the English Liberals and the Habsburg Empire, 1914-1918," *Journal of Central European Affairs*, XXIII, No. 2 (1963), 166-190.

¹⁰ His ideas can be followed in a number of articles: "The Empire of the East," *Contemporary Review*, Sept. 1914; "The Shaping of Mid-Europe," *ibid.*, March 1916; "The New Spirit in Austria," *ibid.*, Aug. 1917; "Security in Settlement," *Labour Leader*, Dec. 6, 1915. Much of that went into his *A League of Nations* (London, 1917).

¹¹ Quoted by Hanak, *Great Britain* 57.

¹² Hanak op.cit. supplies many quotations on these issues from the paper: 206-8, 221-2.

¹³ *The Nation*, Febr. 19. and March 31, 1917.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Jan.27, 1917.

Arnold J. Toynbee was not a member of this club of dissent, he was in fact working for the government in the Intelligence Bureau of the Foreign Office, and his knowledge of Central European questions was entirely (and admittedly) based on Seton-Watson's writings, but his sharp intellect discovered the weakest points of the arguments for dismemberment. He was ready to see some redrawing of the political map of Europe, but warned: "We can only do so by substituting for the pernicious doctrine of 'National Frontiers' the more radical principle of 'Economic Rights of Way'." He was adamant that any territorial change should lead to the creation of as small a number of national minorities as possible. Toynbee was of the opinion that Hungary might emerge from the war with her old frontiers unchanged but internally transformed, or the whole Monarchy would be rearranged into a federation of nations, and he could envisage even a customs union which would include the whole of the Balkans.¹⁵

It was no small task to convince the British public that the precondition of the better world that was expected to come after the war was the break-up of the old Monarchy. The government's primary interest was to win the war, and as quickly as possible. Although they had committed themselves to extensive territorial gains for Serbia, Italy and Rumania, in 1917 they were ready to forego these pledges if Austria-Hungary could be induced to abandon her German ally and concluded a separate peace with the Entente.

At that point the British Foreign Office, too, started to speak of federalization as the best solution for the Slavs of the Monarchy and rediscovered the danger of "Balkanization."¹⁶ The secret negotiations with Austria-Hungary were especially strongly supported (and pursued) by the "Liberal Imperialist" wing of the British government, most of whom came from the administration of the "white" dominions. Curzon, Smuts, Milner and the latter's "kindergarten" learned from the South African War that insistence on harsh terms might prolong a war unnecessarily. As "Imperialists" (in the original sense of the word) they looked upon the Habsburg Empire with some sympathy, and were not anxious "to destroy political aggregates, which have at least cohesion and firmness of texture, in order to set afloat a group of loosely built, experimental, small states swimming in the European whirlpool in dangerous proximity to the great, sharp-toothed empires..."¹⁷ Recognizing the increasing disintegration of the Russian Empire they feared that "the break-up of Austria would make Prussianized Germany the only strong power between the Baltic and the Mediterranean. She would be free from contact with another great and partly Germanic state, which has indeed lately shown itself her subservient tool, but is nevertheless always her potential rival." Milner had little faith in the proposed new states, and asked if the Croats were likely to prefer being ruled by Italians and Serbs.¹⁸ These colonial had already become satisfied with the results of the war (on the colonial front), consequently a compromise in Europe was not against their interests.

At that point the Saturday Review, the organ of intellectual conservatism, also came out against the nationality principle, saying that it would create chaos all round Europe, whereas a Central European great power, where the Slav majority would have

¹⁵ A.J. Toynbee, *Nationality and the War*, (London, 1915), esp. 10-17, 138-66 and 216-22. Idem, *The New Europe. Some Essays in Reconstruction*, (London, 1915) 39-45.

¹⁶ This stage of official thinking is best reconstructed by Rothwell, *op.cit.*, 83f. and Fest, *op.cit.*, 54-7, 81-7.

¹⁷ Such views could be aired only abroad, and it was done by Sidney Low, in the *Atlantic Monthly*, 1917, 39-50, quoted by May, *op.cit.*, II., 542. Cf. A.M. Gollin, *Proconsul in Politics. A Study of Lord Milner in Opposition and in Power* (London, 1964) 535-8.

¹⁸ *The Nineteenth Century*, May 1917, quoted by Fest, *op. cit.*, 97-8.

due influence, "would be an invaluable counterpoise to the German Empire and would be far less likely to disturb the future Europe than a congeries of small nations."¹⁹ Traditional conservatives even proposed that if amputations from Austria were indeed necessary, the ancient dynasty should be compensated for by handing back Silesia, which Frederick the Great had wrested from the Habsburgs in the 1740's.²⁰

The hopes of the advocates of a federalized Habsburg Monarchy were boosted by the news coming from Austria-Hungary in 1917. In the newly convened Austrian Reichstag the Slav deputies repudiated their co-nationals working with the Entente and reaffirmed their loyalty. Karl, the new Emperor, appeared to be seriously trying to end the war and to solve the national question by autonomies. All that prompted Brailsford to raise the question in the *Contemporary Review* whether the Allies were going to ensure security for the future by the large-scale revision of the frontiers and by a peace resting on a new balance of power, or by new solutions based on the advance of democracy and internationalism. He did not preclude the possibility of some changes in the frontiers and admitted the need of breaking the the hegemony of Germany in Central Europe, but thought that after the revolution in Russia, which eliminated reactionary Pan Slavism, the dualist system of Austria-Hungary was bound to give way to federalism. He listed his objections to breaking up the Monarchy. It would prolong the war. It would inevitably create large, most probably disaffected and unhappy minorities, who would be at the mercy of the dominant majorities. As the secret treaties with Italy and Rumania have shown, the new frontiers would surely reflect mainly military bargains and strategical considerations, and not national composition and the wishes of the population. From an economic point of view the new frontiers would lead to endless problems about customs and lines of transportation. Czechoslovakia and Hungary would form two opposite salients, militarily this would create a precarious situation, "perpetuating European strife," and all these states would be forced to rely on their allies to the extent of subordination, making independence less real than membership in a federation affiliated with the newly created League of Nations. Brailsford's solution was a different one. "A predominantly Slav Austria, bound by her past suffering and her mixed composition to desire peace, is the ideal barrier to the aggressive military expansion of Germany." He believed that Austria under Karl had already embarked upon the road towards federation, and he noticed changes in the right direction even in Hungary. The extension of the suffrage ought to make Hungary "as democratic as it is already a constitutional State. [...] Our concern is to insist that in some form the reality of self-government shall be conceded to each nationality of the Dual Monarchy" in the coming peace. From the behaviour of the leading politicians in the Reichstag Brailsford gathered the impression that most people in the Monarchy identified themselves with the programme of federation as opposed to the line taken by the exiles. His conclusion was that Austria might be ready not for a separate peace, but would compel Germany to accept a peace that would meet "our two dominant aims - the destruction of militarism and the insurance of nationality."²¹

Similar considerations led Noel Buxton, the MP well-know for his strong commitment to national freedom in the Balkans, to publish his own proposals for a fair Southeastern European settlement based on federalization, as the only solution that would ensure the rights and interests of all national groups and minorities.²²

¹⁹ *Saturday Review*, June 9, quoted by Fest, *op.cit.*, 97-8.

²⁰ Lady Walburga Paget, "Austria and Prussia," *The Nineteenth Century*, May 1917, 1098-1100.

²¹ "The New Spirit in Austria," *Contemporary Review*, Aug. 1917, 130-8.

²² N. Buxton, "The Entente and the Allies of Germany," *Contemporary Review*, Jan. 1917.

Following the October revolution in Russia official Britain became even keener on preserving the Habsburg Monarchy, reviving the doctrine of the balance of power. In December 1917 Smuts, the member of Lloyd George's War Cabinet, had two days of secret talks in Geneva with Count Mensdorff, the former Austro-Hungarian Ambassador to the Court of St. James. He promised British support and good-will toward Austria provided she freed herself from German domination. "If Austria could become a really liberal Empire in which her subject peoples would, as far as possible, be satisfied and content, she would become for Central Europe [...] a League of Free Nations, very largely free from the taint of militarism, and she would have a mission in the future even greater than her mission in the past."²³

The Prime Minister, Lloyd George, himself affirmed this line in his famous speech delivered to the leaders of the trade unions on January 5, 1918. He explicitly denied that his government intended to destroy Austria-Hungary and called for only "genuine self-government on true democratic principles" for her nationalities.²⁴ This standpoint had been approved by the War Cabinet.²⁵

THE FEDERAL IDEA IN THE UNITED STATES

In the United States interest in and knowledge of the central and eastern lands of Europe used to be far more deficient and fragmented than in Britain. Although the millions of new immigrants arriving from those regions maintained a strong attachment to and interest in their native country, they had very little influence on the contemporary American public, mainly because of their low social status. The outbreak of the war in Europe affected them profoundly in many ways, and their loyalties became divided even before the entry of the United States into the conflict. Whereas most of the Germans and Hungarians of America desired the victory of the Central Powers, the majority of the Slav immigrants became increasingly attracted by the idea of establishing national states of their own in the place of the Habsburg Monarchy.²⁶ The vast majority of the American public, however, took the continued existence of Austria-Hungary granted, at least until the spring of 1918. Few Americans were aware of the nationality problems of the multinational Eastern empires, and even those who were - like Professor Archibald C. Coolidge of Harvard - did not have a strong opinion whether there should be serious changes in their frontiers based on the principle of nationality, or "the historical unity of a country may legitimately demand consideration," like the case of Bohemia and Hungary. He could also envisage voluntary confederations made up of the smaller states of Europe.²⁷

The Chief Executive, who also happened to be an authority on government, was certainly not ignorant of the national conditions of Austria-Hungary, although the complexity of the situation couldn't but escape him. His early work, *The State*, contains references which might be interpreted as advocating a federalist constitution for the Habsburg Monarchy.²⁸ He looked upon the United States as a model of a federal

²³ Smuts' report was first published in Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, (London, 1938) 1478-89.

²⁴ Lloyd George, *op.cit.*, 1514.

²⁵ A.J. P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (Oxford, 1965) 96-7.

²⁶ Joseph P. O'Grady (ed.), *The Immigrants' Influence on Wilson's Peace Policies* (Lexington, 1967). Cf. T.G. Masaryk, *The Making of a State* (New York, 1967) 197-286.

²⁷ Archibald C. Coolidge, "Nationality and the New Europe," *Yale Review*, Apr. 1915, repr. in *Ten Years of War and Peace*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1927) 221-240.

²⁸ R.W. Seton-Watson, *Masaryk in England* (London, 1943) 94-5. Cf. Victor S. Mamatey, *op.cit.*, 41-42.

democracy,²⁹ and perhaps it is safe to assume that he would have welcomed the application of the model in Central Europe. In fact he hoped that these very principles might help creating an international, a world-wide organization of states. In that respect Wilson's thinking stood conspicuously close to the liberal peace programme conceived and debated mainly in British Leftist, anti-war groups. His friend and adviser, E.M. House, was especially active in cultivating ties with these people.³⁰

When the Entente Powers (temporarily, as it turned out) endorsed "the liberation of the Italians, as also of the Slavs, Roumanians and Czecho-Slovaks from foreign domination," Wilson's reaction was an explicit disapproval: "It is the President's view that the large measure of autonomy already secured to those older units is a sufficient guarantee of peace and stability in that part of Europe so far as national and racial influences are concerned..."³¹ Even in his speech proposing a declaration of war on Austria-Hungary Wilson denied any intention of radical changes: "we do not wish in any way to impair or to rearrange the Austro-Hungarian Empire."³² Prior to this declaration Wilson was careful to avoid any official association with, let alone support to the various movements which aimed at the integrity of Austria-Hungary, and even after the state of belligerency was declared he indignantly rejected Congressman La Guardia's proposal to induce Hungary "for complete separation from Austria and the establishment of a Hungarian Republic by means of a revolution."³³ In the President's opinion La Guardia's offer was "very unwise and dangerous, and quite contrary to the attitude of honour which it has been our pride to maintain in international affairs. [...] Too many irresponsible 'agents' are at large, and they are apt to do a great deal of harm."³⁴

As it is well-known, in early September, 1917, a body of scholars and experts called "The Inquiry" was established on Wilson's (and House's) initiative, in order "to prepare the United States government's program for peace in advance of the termination of military hostilities."³⁵ One of the original proposals for such an investigation, written on April 27, 1917, drew up a list of eight subjects to be studied. The seventh was "the adoption of a federal constitution for Austria," and called attention to such British specialists on a "scientific peace" as Brailsford, Buxton and Lord Bryce.³⁶ The first secretary of the Inquiry, Walter Lippmann, was also quite familiar with these British authors,³⁷ and he, too, counted only upon autonomies to be given to the national minorities within Austria-Hungary.³⁸ On House's request Norman Angell sent some suggestions from Britain for the work of the Inquiry. He called attention to the

²⁹ A.S. Link, *Wilson the Diplomatist. A Look at his Major Foreign Policies* (Baltimore, 1957)

³⁰ A.S. Link, *op. cit.*, passim, also in A.S. Link (ed.), *Woodrow Wilson in a Revolutionary World*, esp. Inge Floto's essay, 130-34. and Kurt Wimer's study, 146-73. Cf. Lawrence W. Martin, *Peace without Victory. Woodrow Wilson and the British Liberals* (New York, 1958) 135-62. and Arno Mayer, *Political Origins of the New Diplomacy* (New York, 1959) 44, 157, 336.

³¹ Lansing to Page, February 8, 1917. *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 1917, Supplement 1, 40.

³² *Ibid*, xi.

³³ George Barany, "Wilsonian Central Europe:Lansing's Contribution," *The Historian*, 1966, 224-51., and idem, "The Magyars," in O'Grady, *op.cit.*, 140.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 155-6.

³⁵ The authoritative history of this venture is Lawrence E. Gelfand, *The Inquiry. American Preparations for Peace, 1917-1919* (New Haven, 1963). Quotation from x-xi.

³⁶ William H. Buckler to Walter H. Page, Gelfand, *op.cit.*, 15-17.

³⁷ Martin, *op.cit.*, 145.

³⁸ W. Lippmann, Draft of a Reply to the Proposals of the Central Powers, June 18, 1917 National Archives [hereafter NA], RG 256, Inquiry Document 688.

need for finding a novel approach and solution for such international problems as the existence and future of the national minorities. Here "a 'settlement' made on the basis of the old principles of sovereign rights" would not work, he saw the task as "to devise a means whereby Germans could live under Polish rule and Poles under German."³⁹

The Inquiry staff involved in Austro-Hungarian and Balkan issues contained no one whose special field was the modern history or politics of those territories, they were mostly younger academics specializing in modern Western Europe (Charles Seymour), Russia (A.C. Coolidge), the Middle Ages (W. Lunt, A. Evans), the Far East (Clive Day), sociology (Max Handman, a native of Rumania), and Slavic philology (Robert J. Kerner, a Czech by birth). Despite their lack of formal qualifications they learned enough in the process of drawing up reports on the various territorial and other problems likely to arise at the peace conference that their recommendations (as distinct from the individual reports) cannot be criticized on account of ignorance or serious factual errors.

The first, preliminary results of the investigations and reports were encompassed in a memorandum (drawn up mainly by Lippmann and Isaiah Bowman) dated Dec. 22, 1917. It welcomed the signs of "the nationalistic discontent of the Czechs and probably of the South Slavs" and the apparent willingness of the authorities in Austria-Hungary to introduce internal changes in order to be "a fit partner in a league of nations. Our policy therefore consist first in a stirring up of nationalist discontent, and then in refusing to accept the extreme logic of this discontent, which would be the dismemberment of Austria-Hungary. [...] coupled with it [the references to the nationalities] should go repeated assurances that no dismemberment of the Empire is intended, together with allusions to the humiliating vassalage of the proudest court in Europe." The authors of the memorandum hoped that pressure combined with kindness might detach the Monarchy from Germany.⁴⁰

The recommendations of the Inquiry helped Wilson to draw up his Fourteen Points.⁴¹ Point 10 was an unequivocal statement calling for the federalist transformation of Austria-Hungary. "The peoples of Austria-Hungary, whose place among the nations we wish to see safeguarded and assured, should be accorded the freest opportunity of autonomous development." This was in complete harmony with Lloyd George's January 5 speech.⁴² In accordance with that it became one of the specific tasks of the Inquiry to study how "decentralization and federal autonomy" should ensure "the place of Austria-Hungary in the project of Central Europe."⁴³

The detailed study of Austria-Hungary was entrusted to Robert J. Kerner, a thirty year old Harvard Ph.D, who was teaching modern European history at the University of Missouri. Despite his conspicuous Slav prejudices he was considered an invaluable asset by his colleagues, since they were completely unfamiliar with the Habsburg Monarchy.⁴⁴ He was perhaps the most prolific of the "collaborators" of the Inquiry, but he was undoubtedly very partisan, prejudiced and occasionally wrong even in his

³⁹ N. Angell's memorandum, Oct. 14, 1917. NA RG 256. General Correspondence.

⁴⁰ *FRUS*, 1919, Supplement, The Paris Peace Conference [hereafter *PPC*], vol. I. 45, 48.

⁴¹ Gelfand, *op.cit.*, 134-53.

⁴² Ch. Seymour (ed.), *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House, I-IV*. Vol. III., 336-7.

⁴³ Report on the Inquiry: Its Scope and Method. March 20, 1918. *FRUS*, *PPC*, vol. I., 67.

⁴⁴ Coolidge to Shotwell, Dec. 8, 1917. NA RG 256 General Correspondence. Or Bowman's warning: "Owing to the fact that Professor Kerner is himself of Czech descent and an enthusiastic Czech nationalist, it is felt that his work requires careful checking up by men of cooler judgment." *FRUS*, *PPC*, vol. I. 85.

facts.⁴⁵ At first Kerner did not dare to come out openly with a proposal for the dismemberment of the Monarchy, he only gave a strong emphasis to the importance and strength of the movements that claimed autonomy and unity for the Czecho-Slovaks and the Jugo-Slavs, leaving it open whether that would be realized within a federalized Habsburg Monarchy or by breaking it up into independent sovereign states.⁴⁶ Before May, 1918, therefore he concentrated on safeguarding ethnic rights within the existing structure.⁴⁷ When the secret negotiations failed and ties between Austria-Hungary and Germany became publicly reaffirmed at Spa, Kerner felt free to propose "A New Policy for the United States in Central Europe": the recognition of the national movements and to give assurances for drawing "ethnic boundaries with just compromises in regard to military, economic and political considerations."⁴⁸

At that point, however, such a revision of U.S. policy was not considered by Charles Seymour, who was in charge of the Austro-Hungarian division of the Inquiry. His own report proposed "Austria-Hungary Federalized within Existing Boundaries" into six federal states, based on "existing [local] administrative or political boundaries, most of which possess an historic character, [...] although they would each of them also include racial minorities of which some would be of numerical importance." The proposed units were Hungary, Austria, Jugo-Slavia, Transylvania, Bohemia and Poland-Ruthenia. Seymour was aware that such a solution would not "satisfy the different ethnic and political groups of the Dual Monarchy," but thought it was still the most practical solution. His Hungary would have included the Slovaks and the Rusyns, although he indicated that they might be transferred to Bohemia and Poland-Ruthenia respectively. The Jugo-Slav part might have also included the Slovenians. The need for making provisions for the safeguarding of the rights of the minorities within each unit was also recognized.⁴⁹

*

It is not the task of this paper to show how and why a fundamental change occurred in both British and American policy towards Austria-Hungary in the spring of 1918, leading to the official recognition of the Czechoslovak National Council as the "trustee of the future Czechoslovak Government." Neither is this the place to answer the fundamental question how far this new Allied policy, and especially President Wilson's refusal to answer Austria-Hungary's request for an armistice on October 4, 1918 contributed to the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in the last days of October. After the summer of 1918 there was no longer a place in British and American policy for the consideration of the federal solution for Central Europe. But in British and American thought this idea continued to occupy some minds until the peace treaties apparently buried it. The last three serious considerations of federalism were thus only sad epilogues to a once flourishing and promising school of thought.

⁴⁵ Contrary to Gelfand's statement (op.cit., 200-2.) Kerner's reports did not receive universal approval, his methodology, style and even his grammar was sometimes strongly criticized, as well as his intention "to inject the partisan tenets of the Czechs." See "Critique on Kerner's Memorandum on Austria-Hungary," NA, RG 256. Inquiry Doc. 306.

⁴⁶ Robert J. Kerner's various reports to the Inquiry, March 4 (Doc. 305), March 25 (Doc. 310), May 17 (Doc. 316), June 12 (Doc. 317), NA, RG 256. Inquiry Documents.

⁴⁷ R.J. Kerner, "Minorities in Austria-Hungary...", Apr.22, 1918 (Doc. 313) and "Resume of Memorandum on Minorities in Austria-Hungary" NA RG 256. Inquiry Documents.

⁴⁸ May 16, 1918 (Doc. 839), NA RG 256, Inquiry Documents.

⁴⁹ Charles Seymour, "Austria-Hungary Federalized Within Existing Boundaries," May 25, 1918 NA Rg 256, Inquiry Document 509.

Although American political decisions and the events that took place in Central Europe at the end of 1918 induced the Inquiry to draw up its final recommendations in accordance with the division of the Habsburg Monarchy along national lines, with important modifications in favour of the Slav and Rumanian protagonists,⁵⁰ Seymour felt that he had to qualify the proposal by emphasizing the need to keep tariffs between the new states nominal and to maintain free and absolutely unrestricted transit traffic throughout the whole area of the so-called successor states. What was even more telling he ended the recommendations for the break-up with what was more than an afterthought.

"Some conclusions [...] gradually matured in the minds of the collaborators on this report [...] which, when finally expressed, were found to command the general agreement of the group. The Commission is forced to the conclusion that the frontiers proposed are unsatisfactory as the international boundaries of sovereign states. It has been found impossible to discover such lines, which would be at the same time just and practical. An example of the injustice that would result may be instanced in the fact that a third of the area and population of the Czecho-Slovak state would be alien to that nationality. Another lies in placing a quarter of the Magyars under foreign domination. But any attempt to make the frontier conform more closely to the national line destroys their practicability as international boundaries. Obviously many of these difficulties would disappear if the boundaries were to be drawn with the purpose of separating not independent nations, but component portions of a federalized state. A reconsideration of the data from this aspect is desirable."⁵¹ This was the last, desperate American plea for the federal solution.

Throughout the world war even the most ardent champions of the nationalist solution admitted the need for continued economic and possibly political cooperation between the peoples of Central and Southeastern Europe. Masaryk's argumentation appeared to be quite convincing: all the peoples of the area should be able to assert their right for self-determination and independence, but after that the road would be open for genuine friendship and some sort of organized cooperation. The foreign well-wishers of the projected New Europe were even more adamant to keep some sort of unity in the proposed diversity, and they were eager to help the new nations in coming to terms with each other. One of these well-wishers was Herbert A. Miller, Professor of Sociology at Oberlin College. The story of what was largely his own idea and creation, "The Mid-European Union," an organization of the American representatives of the nations of Central Europe, has been admirably told by Arthur J. May.⁵² Two factors stand out from the brief history (lasting from September to November, 1918) of that Union. Right from the moment of its inception it was flawed by a serious limitation: it was set up as an organization to promote federal unity in Central Europe, but a unity only of the victors. There was no mentioning even of the need to bring in, at least at a later stage, the Austrians and the Hungarians, not to mention the Bulgarians. The second conspicuous feature was the inability of even a small group of American immigrants and foreign visitors to hammer out their differences and to reconcile their nationalist conflicts. Within that group the Poles and the Ukrainians, the Yugoslavs and

⁵⁰ The most up-to-date and thorough work on the Central European territorial settlement is Bela K. Kiraly, Peter Pastor, and Ivan Sanders (eds.) *Essays on World War I: Total War and Peacemaking, A Case Study on Trianon* (New York, 1982)

⁵¹ Charles Seymour, "Epitome of Reports on Just and Practical Boundaries Within Austria-Hungary for Czecho-Slovaks, Jugo-Slavs, Rumanians, Poles, Ruthenians, Magyars," undated [around the end of 1918], NA RG 256. Inquiry Doc. 514.

⁵² Arthur J. May, "The Mid-European Union," in O'Grady, *op.cit.*, 250-71.

the Italians, and further on the Croats and the Serbs, the Carpatho-Ruthenians and the Czechs had heated arguments both about frontiers and about the current political and military events that were taking place in Mid-Europe. On October 26, at the foundation of the Mid-European Union in Philadelphia the replica of the Liberty Bell set up in the courtyard behind Independence Hall did not toll the dawning of an age of happiness and freedom, but it proved to be the death-bell of the new-born organization, and to a large degree also of the spirit of toleration and liberalism in Central Europe.

⁵³ We all know how the great hopes about the peace came to be shattered. The settlement based on the wishes of the ardent nationalists of the victorious camp led to much worse consequences than Amery - or anybody else - could dream of. The 'principle of nationality' did not become the true guiding principle of the settlement; it was reduced to a slogan favouring only the lucky victors. "In each of the new states there prevailed a narrow official nationalism," and the repressive policies used against national, religious and political minorities led to perpetual internal and external divisions and conflicts. "This state of generalized and mutual hostility provided opportunities for any great power intent on disturbing the peace."⁵⁴ Instead of finding their common interests the "small, unstable caricatures of modern states"⁵⁵ were looking for great-power patrons for the maintenance or for the overthrowing of the new order. After two decades of existence, faced with the brutal behaviour of Nazi Germany and abandoned by its creators, the brave new world set up partly by British and American policy-makers collapsed.

With such a wisdom of hindsight it is easy to see that the federal solution to the problems of Central Europe was an alternative which all the peoples of the region can only regret not to have been realized. This is a late justification for Oszkar Jaszi, who attempted to make the old dream of a Danubian Confederation into a practical proposal in a book published just before the final collapse. In the hour of reckoning his ideal, the United States of the Danube, received only scattered and faint support from the peoples and the politicians to whom it was addressed, and none from his two models, the British Empire and the United States of America. Thus history as it happened failed to honour Jaszi in 1918. But history as a form of thought about the past⁵⁶ has undoubtedly proved him right.

⁵³ "The Austro-Hungarian Problem," Memorandum by L.S. Amery, Oct.20, 1918. Public Record Office, London, Foreign Office, 371/3136/17223.

⁵⁴ H. and C. Seton-Watson, *op.cit.*, 435.

⁵⁵ F.H. Hinsley, Power and the Pursuit of Peace. Theory and Practice in the History of Relations between States (Cambridge, 1963) 282.

⁵⁶ John Lukacs, Historical Consciousness or the Remembered Past (New York, 1985) 5-9.

- * Research for the American plans and ideas covered in this article was made possible by an award received from the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, where I was a guest scholar in the summer of 1985.

A different version of this paper was read at the Oscar Jaszi Memorial Conference held at Oberlin College, Ohio, on November 8, 1985.