

## Comments

Despite differences in both the subject matter and the points of view expressed in the four papers about which I have been asked to comment, I am left with the impression that they have certain common tendencies. Each of the authors attempts in his own way to add a piece to a puzzle which, despite innumerable studies about the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, still remains unsolved.

Two of the papers approach the subject in a general way. Fritz Fellner has attempted to analyze all of the many factors that precipitated the collapse of the Dual Monarchy, while Stefan Pascu, in his study entitled "The National Unity of the Romanians and the Breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire," has looked at the problem entirely from the point of view of the national unity of the Romanians. The other two papers are scholarly studies of two specific questions. Robert F. Hopwood has analyzed "The Conflict between Count Czernin and Emperor Charles in 1918," and Alfred D. Low has given an account of Austria's relations with Budapest and Berlin in his paper on "Austria between East and West: Budapest and Berlin, 1918-1919."

While each of the papers is concerned with a piece of the puzzle, the picture will never be complete, for we shall never have a satisfactory, overall explanation for the disintegration of the monarchy. None of the papers pretends to give an answer to what is still an unanswerable question. Yet, despite the undoubted intrinsic value of each paper, the discussion continues—in the *Austrian History Yearbook* as well as elsewhere. For example, in his most recent book,<sup>1</sup> Victor L. Tapié rejects the thesis that the history of the Danubian area is characterized by an unceasing fight of the nationalities against a centralizing monarchy. He shows that the nationality problem is actually of relatively recent origin and insists that it must not be identified with, or explained by, the antagonisms of class, religion, or historic rights. Moreover, he maintains that it is inaccurate to talk about a single governmental system that remained unchanged throughout the cen-

<sup>1</sup>*Monarchie et peuples du Danube* (Paris: Fayard, 1969).

turies, for the Habsburgs frequently endeavored to adapt their political and administrative systems to the conditions prevailing at particular periods. Of course, their efforts were not always successful, but their failures were caused by both external and internal difficulties.

It may well be that we will never know why the monarchy disintegrated. Let us not forget that we have still not found a satisfactory explanation for the disappearance of the Roman empire fifteen hundred years ago. One of the difficulties in finding a definite and clear-cut explanation for the collapse of the Habsburg monarchy is that a totally objective study is impossible. A person's own underlying concepts are bound to influence what he writes—a weakness which Fellner acknowledges with even greater precision when he speaks about the "superabundance of special studies [which] seriously endanger efforts to approach the subject from the point of view of universal historical continuity."<sup>2</sup> Fellner also points to the limitations of such studies when he refers to the irrelevance of the writings of certain Austrian historians who maintain that "the collapse is only a perpetuation of a claim advanced before 1918 by the German-Austrians, acting in the capacity of representatives of the central administrative offices in Vienna, that the policies of the government in Vienna represented the whole empire."<sup>3</sup> In a similar vein, he stresses the limitations of historians belonging to the non-German nationalities of the former Austro-Hungarian monarchy by stating that much of what they say belongs to the past.

Yet, with remarkable optimism he asserts "that historians are now endeavoring to attain objectivity and are ready to recognize the national and political goals of other peoples when they write about the collapse of the monarchy. That understanding which could not be reached in the midst of political quarrel has been realized by historical scholarship."<sup>4</sup> Such optimism is indeed remarkable, but any historian who reads Pascu's article on "The National Unity of the Romanians and the Breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire" realizes that this eminent Romanian historian does not seem "ready to recognize the national and political goals of other peoples."<sup>5</sup> Pascu's paper, while extremely interesting, barely

<sup>2</sup>See *ante*, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup>See *ante*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>4</sup>See *ante*, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*

reaches beyond the treadmill of a certain historiography, fashionable during the interwar period, which violently condemned the "repression of . . . nationalities"<sup>6</sup> and "a regime that was able to maintain itself only with the support of the gendarmerie and the military system."<sup>7</sup> For Pascu, it seems self-evident that "the lack of economic unity of the Dual Monarchy was another important reason for the collapse."<sup>8</sup> His main thesis is far removed from the subtly-shaded position assumed by Karel Pichlik at the November, 1968, Reims conference on "Europe in November, 1918:" "While before the war Austria-Hungary was a power" that was courted by the Entente Powers, "after the war the Western Powers wanted to have new allies in this part of the world and in Europe." Among the inhabitants of the former Austro-Hungarian empire this "role could be played only by the political representatives of the national liberation movements."

However, the subjectivity which may account for the narrow-mindedness of certain historians was not necessarily derived from nationalistic convictions or inspired by the nostalgia of the Viennese for the old empire. For instance, what about the notion of the Soviet historians who contend that the lucky conjunction in 1917 of triumphant nationalism and communism made the disintegration of the Habsburg monarchy "inevitable?" How would Fellner categorize this kind of approach?

It seems to me that Fellner wishes to approach the subject "from the point of view of universal historical continuity," on the one hand, while, on the other, he advocates using "the modern methodology of social scientists as auxiliary tools."<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, he does not define his method clearly enough for us to be able to accept it as a remedy. He himself rarely resorts to the "modern methodology of social science" in his paper. Neither does he tell us what kind of continuity he has in mind when he talks about the "universal history approach." Is it the continuity of the collective security system based on the balance of powers existing before 1914? Is it cultural continuity? Or economic continuity? Or the continuity of the monarchy as a supranational entity? Nowhere does he state

<sup>6</sup>See *ante*, p. 63.

<sup>7</sup>See *ante*, p. 67.

<sup>8</sup>See *ante*, p. 63.

<sup>9</sup>See *ante*, p. 5.

exactly what he has in mind when he talks about continuity or the integration of all elements of a "general" continuity.

Thus, Fellner's paper, while well written and well documented, is more a personal than a general interpretation. It is "general" only so far as it is a mixture of considerations which are neither integrated nor systematized. Moreover, Fellner's views, while sometimes pertinent, are often subject to question. His explanation of why and how the monarchy collapsed actually closely resembles that of his predecessors. For instance, he states: "As for the Austro-Germans, they are still dominated by the idea that military defeat alone brought on the collapse of the monarchy—that, had it not been for the war and the military defeat, the monarchy would have continued to exist."<sup>10</sup> And a little later he asserts that a "careful study of the actual course of events during the time of dissolution would indicate clearly that the internal disintegration did not have to be initiated from outside the monarchy."<sup>11</sup> Yet the reader subsequently becomes aware that Fellner feels obliged to explain the disintegration of the Habsburg empire by the evolution of inter-allied diplomacy, i. e., of a force that came "from outside the monarchy."

This time he is not wrong. It is obvious that both "inside" and "outside" factors played a role in undermining the Habsburg empire. However, the most recent research tends to show that the fate of the monarchy rested above all in the hands of the victorious Allies who subsequently imposed their decisions upon the peoples of Central Europe. In this connection mention should be made of Leo Valiani's *La dissoluzione dell' Austria-Ungheria*,<sup>12</sup> which is one of the finest studies on the subject. Both Valiani and other scholars have recently called attention to a few quite obvious facts. First of all, they ask how it is possible to assert that if the Central Powers had won the war an empire would have disappeared from the political map of Europe? After all, the war was still far from won in 1915 and 1916. Likewise, who knows what would have happened if the Allied Powers had succeeded in making a separate peace with Austria-Hungary? Fellner himself realizes "how disastrous the German orientation of Austro-Hungarian foreign policy was for the existence of the Austro-

<sup>10</sup>See *ante*, p. 7.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup>Published in Milan by *Il Saggiatore* in 1966.

Hungarian monarchy.”<sup>13</sup> He is also aware that external factors played an important part in the breakup of the monarchy. “The dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy,” he writes, “must be looked at in connection with both the collapse of Russia’s position as a Great Power and the disintegration of the Ottoman empire.”<sup>14</sup>

In short, I believe that, no matter how much the national movements may have contributed to the collapse of Austria-Hungary, these movements would have been unsuccessful had it not been for the war and Austria-Hungary’s defeat. Fellner gives no proof to the contrary—and no one ever will. But the mere fact that Fellner *admits* that the nationality problem was extremely important shows that he has introduced a value judgment into his discussion. So have historians of the Viennese school when they support their analyses with arguments about the value of stability and equilibrium; the Social Democrats, when they wrote about the all-importance of supranationality; and the Bolsheviks, when they wax eloquent over the happy marriage between communism and nationalism à la Lenin. Others do the same when they stress the importance of federalism or economic efficiency, in comparison with the lesser economic opportunities of small nations.

Fellner’s analysis is valuable because he contributes new ideas as well as facts. But I do not believe that the time has come to write broad syntheses, for it is still necessary to clear up many problems through detailed, special monographic studies. Moreover, we still need more time just to think things over. Numerous and contradictory aspects of the whole problem still need to be studied in depth before we are ready for sound comprehensive syntheses.

It is obvious that, whether he writes a general synthesis or deals with a special problem, each historian’s approach to the many factors involved in the disintegration of the Habsburg monarchy will be strongly influenced by his own underlying concept of what constitutes the real essence of the problem. For instance, a historian who examines the breakup of the empire from the perspective of the European balance of power will inevitably come to conclusions that differ considerably from those of another historian who focuses his attention

<sup>13</sup>See *ante*, p. 10.

<sup>14</sup>See *ante*, p. 22.

on the national movements. The whole problem will be viewed in still another light by those who approach it from a sociological, cultural, or economic point of view. A satisfactory synthesis can never be written as long as such opposing, often contradictory, points of view are glossed over or kept hidden. On the contrary, a true synthesis can eventually be made only if the whole problem is first studied from as many angles as possible and if opposing viewpoints are identified and taken into consideration insofar as they merit it.

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