

A Document

**“Our Unfortunate Hungarians:”
Early Hungarian Settlement in Montreal.
A Speech by Mária Bagossy Fehér**

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Hungarians began to settle in Canada already before the First World War, however the size of this early migration was a pale shadow of the movement of people from Hungary to the United States in the three-and-a-half decades before 1914. The arrival of Hungarians in Canada in any appreciable numbers began only in the mid-1920s, after the passing of the first so-called “quota laws” in the United States that greatly limited the admission of Eastern Europeans to the American Republic.

In interwar Hungary the circumstances that prompted people to consider emigration were numerous. Some of the factors were the same as those that drove hundreds of thousands to travel to the United States in the decades before the First World War. The most important of these was uneven economic development in the country. While Hungary’s economy grew by leaps and bounds during the last decades of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th, large areas of the country and certain types of economic activity lagged behind. In fact in many parts of the country, especially in its north-eastern counties, there was overpopulation in the countryside accompanied by widespread poverty. Many of the problems these conditions had caused persisted after the First World War. Added to these were serious difficulties that had been caused by the war. Before 1918 Hungary was part of an economic unit that encompassed much of Central Europe, after the war, and in particular after the truncation of the country through the peace treaty of Trianon of June 1920, she became an isolated land deprived of its traditional markets as well as most of her

natural resources. The country also had a large refugee problem as the result of the influx of tens of thousands of government officials, technical experts and teachers who had left the Hungarian territories that had been assigned to Hungary's neighbours by the peace treaty. Many Hungarians, especially residents of Hungary's impoverished countryside, had nowhere to go, now that "Amerika" had closed its gates before them, but to Canada — and a few Latin American countries.¹

The number of Hungarian immigrants who came to Canada in the six years after 1924 when that country re-opened its gates to them has been estimated to have been about 28,000. The vast majority of these newcomers were "agricultural types" but there was a sprinkling of middle-class elements among them, most often refugees from the lands that had been taken away from Hungary. The vast majority of these new arrivals were young males who came with the hope that, once they established themselves in Canada, they could send for their wives or girlfriends, or find picture-brides for themselves from Hungary. Canadian immigration authorities directed these newcomers to the Canadian West where they were expected to work on farms or in such fields as railway construction, mining or forestry. Some of the newcomers were settled on marginal lands that were modestly productive in the 1920s but became wastelands in the drought-stricken 1930s.

Sources describing the early Canadian lives of these immigrants are not plentiful. They consist of a handful of books and a few hitherto unpublished documents. Perhaps the most interesting and least known among these sources is the book of Sámuel Zágonyi, *Kanada egy európai bevándorló megvilágításában* [Canada through the eyes of a European immigrant] (published by the author in 1926). The book contains an appendix which gives, in fair amount of detail, the experiences of three recent Hungarian arrivals to Canada.² Another book that can be considered a mainly primary source on the subject of the lives of 1920s Hungarian immigrants is Ödön Paizs, *Magyarok Kanadában* [Hungarians in Canada] (Budapest, 1928). It contains much information that is useful to the historian of this subject. Still another such work is Jenő Ruzsa, *A Kanadai Magyarság Története* [History of Canada's Hungarians] (published by the author, 1940). This book is a storehouse of information on Canada's Hungarian communities for the historian who has enough patience to sort through a bulky and disorganized volume.³

Among unpublished documents relating to the subject the most interesting are the detailed, often insightful reports that István Schebeck Petényi, the Hungarian Vice-Consul in Winnipeg, sent to the Hungarian

Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Budapest, about the conditions that faced Hungarian immigrants to the Canadian West in the late 1920s.⁴ Another unpublished document that has much valuable information on the Hungarian communities of Northern Ontario and the Canadian West during the Second World War is the report that Béla Eisner prepared for the Canadian government during the Second World War.⁵ In view of this scarcity of primary sources on the lives of the Hungarian immigrants who came to Canada in the 1902s the appearance of any new document related to the subject must be greeted with enthusiasm.⁶

Mária Bagossy Fehér's 1935 Speech

The new document in question is the speech Mária Fehér gave in Hungary about conditions for recent Hungarian immigrants in Montreal during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Mária Fehér was the wife of Mihály Fehér, the pastor of Montreal's newly-established Hungarian Reformed congregation. She came to Canada in 1928 to join her husband in Montreal. In 1935 she returned to Hungary for a visit, and it was during her stay there that she gave an account of her experiences to an audience made up of her Hungarian acquaintances, former schoolmates and teachers. The speech does not cover the story of Montreal's Hungarians before Mária Fehér's stay in the city, and it probably doesn't cover accurately the story of the establishment of her husband's congregation, even though she claims to know the details of this story. Still, the speech provides some hitherto little-known information on many aspects of the subject. It should be used in conjunction with Mária's husband's account of the congregation's history.⁷

What Mária Fehér's speech doesn't say is that the first Hungarian settlers in this, at the time the largest, Canadian commercial and financial centre were Jews who immigrated at the end of the 19th century. There were apparently so many East European Jews in the city that the Presbyterian Church of Canada thought it worth while to establish a mission in the city the overt aim of which was to convert at least some of these people to Presbyterianism. The minister in charge of this effort was a certain Reverend J. McCarter who selected as his assistant the Hungarian-born Trebitsch Lincoln. Lincoln was a promising candidate for the job. He was young and energetic. He had been born into a Jewish family but as a teenager he converted first to Lutheranism and then to Presbyterianism. Besides his native Hungarian, he spoke German, Yiddish and English. He undertook his task with enthusiasm and began proselytising — visiting

Jews in their homes or talking to them wherever he could —not only in Montreal but in neighbouring small towns as well. “There is no evidence” says his biographer, “that in his work for the Presbyterian mission Trebitsch ever converted a single Jew.” In fact, the mission came to an end, mainly because it ran out of funds, and Lincoln returned to Europe to continue his extraordinary career — that was to include a stint as a member of the British Parliament, a spy in Germany, and in his old age, as a Buddhist monk in China.⁸

In her speech Mária Fehér made only one reference to the Hungarian Jews of Montreal mentioning briefly that in the early 1930 there was a club for Hungarian-speaking Jewish youths in the city. Apparently contacts between recent Hungarian immigrants to Canada and the by then second-generation Hungarian Jews were rare or non-existent.

Mária Fehér’s history of the Hungarian community of Montreal starts with 1926 and first tells the story of the founding of the first Reformed congregation of Hungarian Protestants in the city. This part of the document it may not be accurate in some of its details. This is perhaps not surprising as Mária arrived in Montreal only in 1928 and her recollection of what she had heard about events before then may not be accurate. According to her husband’s 1966 account the United Church of Canada had invited him to do his missionary work in the Toronto area and not in Ottawa. On arriving in Toronto, however, he found that such work had already been started there by the Presbyterian Church so he asked to be sent elsewhere. He was sent to Kingston in eastern Ontario but on finding no Hungarians there, he was allowed to proceed to Montreal.⁹

Another comment in Mária Fehér’s account that might not be accurate is her claim that between 1928 and 1935 Montreal’s Hungarian population increased tenfold, but she might not have been far off the mark. Further, in her speech she talked of still another reason why, according to her knowledge, some Hungarians left Hungary in the 1920s. In this connection she said that “There were also those who left because they feared that they would have to face justice because of their activities during the Commune; these people hoped that they could hide....” Since she never returned to this subject, I left this comment out from the translation of her speech. This could have been a statement that she might have felt was expected of her in the highly anti-communist political atmosphere of Hungary of the mid-1930s.

There is strange omission in Mária Fehér’s account of conditions for Hungarian immigrants in Montreal during the late 1930s and early 1930s. She makes not a single a reference to the French-speaking residents

of the city, even though they made up roughly about half of the total population. True, Mária and her husband and most of their Hungarian compatriots lived in a section of Montreal where English-speakers and immigrants lived, but the omission is still strange. Perhaps Mária lived in this “small world” and never ventured to other sections of her metropolis.¹⁰

As a final introductory comment let me explain that the words Mária Fehér uses for her compatriots in Montreal was “*szegény magyarok*.” These words could be translated into English as “poor” or “penniless” Hungarians, but a more accurate translation would be “unfortunate” in the sense of “pitiable Hungarians.” In fact Mária Fehér’s profound sympathies for her unlucky compatriots is evident throughout her speech, and illustrate accurately the essence of her life’s work — dedicated as it was to the service of these unfortunate people.

NOTES (to the introduction)

¹ On Hungarian settlement in Canada in the 1920s see N.F. Dreisziger *et al.*, *Struggle and Hope: The Hungarian-Canadian Experience* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982), 98-102. Also, Nándor Dreisziger, “Hungarians in Brazil,” in *Hungarians: From Ancient Times to 1956*, ed. Nándor Dreisziger (New York, Ottawa and Toronto: Legas, 2007), 173-181, especially 174-176.

² On Zágonyi’s book see N.F. Dreisziger, ed. “Immigrant Fortunes and Mistortunes in Canada in the 1920s,” *Hungarian Studies Review*, 17, 1 (Spring, 1990): 29-59. The reliability of Zágonyi’s stories cannot be ascertained.

³ Ruzsa’s book is indeed very disorganized. His daughter explained much later in a taped interview that his father used to type parts of the book, in her bedroom, during late evenings and at night, and took whatever he had written to the typesetters in the morning. As a result, he book’s first draft was its final draft. (Oral history interviews, Multicultural History Society of Ontario, now housed in the Public Archives of Ontario.)

⁴ There reports are discussed in Dreisziger, *Struggle and Hope*, p. 134, note 62.

⁵ Béla Eisner, “Report of my Good-Will Visit to the Communities of Hungarian Origin...,” manuscript dated at Montreal, 1942. See also Dreisziger, *Struggle and Hope*, pp. 173-176, and pp. 190f (note 13.) Béla Eisner was probably the “bank official” that Mihály Fehér met in 1926 soon after his arrival in Montreal.

⁶ An excellent secondary source on the subject is John Kósa, *Land of Choice: Hungarians in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957). See also chapters 4 and 5 of Dreisziger, *Struggle and Hope*.

⁷ Mihály Fehér, *A Montreáli Magyar Reformatus Egyház Jubilumi Emlékönyve, 1926-1966* [The Jubilee Album of the Magyar Reformed Church of Montreal] (Montreal: the United Church of Canada, 1966). Some of the records of this congregation are available in the Canadian Archives Branch of the Library and Archives of Canada, in Ottawa-Hull. They consist of the minutes of meetings, reports and correspondence, some in the original and some on microfilm. The collection's call number is MG 8, G 76.

⁸ Bernard Wasserstein, *The Secret Lives of Trebitsch Lincoln* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), see especially chapter 2, "The Montreal Mission." The quotation is on p. 24.

⁹ Fehér, *A Montreáli Magyar Reformatus Egyház*, p. 17. See also Dreisziger, *Struggle and Hope*, p. 180. Was Fehér sent to Kingston or Ottawa? The latter makes more sense as it was Canada's capital and was a larger city than Kingston. We'll never know for sure.

¹⁰ Mrs. Mary Fehér White, Mária's daughter, told the writer of these lines that Mária knew some French, but she had learned this in Europe and was never able to understand the dialect of French spoken by *les Québécois*. Still, the lack of any reference to them in a fairly long speech is strange; but perhaps it is not unusual. I have known several Hungarian residents of Montreal who over the decades had learned English but hardly ever learned more than a few words of French.

The Text of the Document:

Our Unfortunate Hungarians who Emigrated — and their Canadian Lives

Mária Bagossy Fehér

[In her introductory paragraphs Mária Bagossy Fehér reminisces about her former teachers and apologizes for not being able to speak as fluent Hungarian as she did when she had been still living in Hungary seven years earlier. She also defines the subject of her lecture as a report on "our unfortunate [szegény] Hungarians who emigrated — and their Canadian lives."]

**The Impact of Trianon:
Intellectual and Activist Movements
of Hungarian Youth in the Detached Territories,
1920-1933**

Deborah S. Cornelius

The effects of the Treaty of Trianon were nowhere more intensely felt than by the new generation of youth in the territories cut off from the former Hungarian kingdom. The partition of the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary, and in particular of the Kingdom of Hungary, by the treaty radically altered political borders in Central Europe. Hungary was required to cede seventy percent of its territory to the neighbouring countries; the regions lost contained three million Hungarians who overnight became national minorities within the “successor states.” Two minority Hungarian youth groups formed in the aftermath of Trianon: the St. George Scout Circle, later Sarló [sickle], in newly-formed Czechoslovakia, and the Transylvanian Youth [Erdélyi Fiatalok] in the greatly enlarged Romania. Their members had been born in the old Kingdom of Hungary and they grew up as the members of the country’s dominant majority. Suddenly finding themselves an unwanted minority in a foreign country, they sought a way to maintain a Hungarian identity as members of a minority community. In contrast to the older generation of Hungarians who kept demanding treaty revision and a return of their lands to Hungary, they foresaw the need to work for cooperation among the peoples of a multi-ethnic Central Europe. They also came to believe that they were destined to play a role as future leaders of the Hungarian minority.

Although the Paris Peace Treaty was based on the premise that the “successor states” would be nation-states, the newly-formed or newly enlarged neighbours of Hungary were all multi-ethnic. Since the new states claimed to be national states, their success depended on the formation of new national identities and loyalty by the citizenry to the new state. In this situation the large Hungarian populations were considered a threat and governments introduced policies to eliminate or neutralize this danger. Between 1918 and 1924 an estimated 426,000 Hungarians left the ceded territories. For many the time

of decision came when the government of the successor states began to purge Hungarians from the state administration and educational systems; government officials, railroad employees, and teachers were dismissed. Subsequent purges in commercial, financial and industrial establishments forced many professionals and members of the managerial strata to leave. Land reforms, which destroyed the economic power of Hungarian landowners, also affected a large number of estate employees: managers, and even servants whose existence was tied to large-scale agriculture. As result of massive flight, the total number of Hungarians remaining in the ceded territories sharply declined; in Czechoslovakia, as compared with the 1910 census, the Hungarian population decreased by 13.7 percent and in Romania by 13.4 percent.¹

Slovakia

The Hungarian population of Upper Hungary, the Felvidék, ceded to Czechoslovakia, was radically changed as the result of the refugee exodus. The Hungarian-speaking area of Upper Hungary had been an integral part of the Hungarian Kingdom for centuries and had no independent history as a region. Many of the former political and cultural leaders had fled and the remaining population — divided by class, occupational status, and religion — had no political or cultural tradition to unite them. Sixty-four percent of those remaining was made up of agrarian and forestry workers. The potential political strength of the Hungarian population was weakened by the census of 1921 which included a separate national category for Hebrew/Yiddish. Since many who were both Hungarian-speaking and Jewish declared their nationality as Hebrew, the census figures for Hungarians were reduced to 745,431. Under Czechoslovak regulations this number was considered too few to qualify for the minority rights granted the country's German minority, including the right to a separate university.

Over the centuries of Hungarian rule in Upper Hungary had been a natural process of assimilation, reinforced at the end of the nineteenth century by the Budapest government's aggressive Magyarization policy. Assimilation was rewarded by upward social mobility, and many middle class non-Magyars or those aspiring to middle class status, embraced Hungarian culture and even the language eagerly. Completion of a secondary school education in the Hungarian *gimnázia* was the route to a career in teaching or the bureaucracy. In the extremely class conscious society of the age Hungarian was the language of the educated, conferring the social status so important for respectability.

In the years immediately following the territorial changes wrought by Trianon, the Czechoslovak administration worked to reduce Hungarian influence in the country. According to the law of 10 December 1918 Hungarians would be retained in their positions only if they were willing to take the oath of allegiance to the Czechoslovak constitution, learn to speak the official language within one year, and finally if they met certain unspecified qualifications required for holding a particular office. Under a new ministry for Slovakia, the minister plenipotentiary, Vavro Šrobár, considered Hungarian culture and education to be contaminating influences on the Slovak population. He felt it was his duty to cleanse Slovakia of Hungarian influence so that the new generation of Slovaks could be educated in Slovak schools. Hungarians were removed from positions particularly in the administration and in education even in predominantly Hungarian areas. Secondary schools were viewed of particular importance as the means to educate the new Slovak elite and fully incorporate of Slovakia into the Czechoslovak Republic.

The rapid Slovakization of the secondary schools was confusing and disorienting for Hungarian-speaking youth. All but eight of the former sixty Hungarian-language secondary schools were dissolved, and in the remaining schools many Hungarian teachers were removed and the administration became Slovak. Since there were few Slovak teachers capable of teaching in Slovak there was a rapid turnover of teachers and even schools were changed. For the Hungarian-speaking students the new national anthem confirmed their status as outsiders. Rezső Limbacher, a future Sarló member, commented that when singing the words of the second stanza which spoke of raising our swords for the destruction of our enemies — “it wasn't pleasant to think of the fact that the enemy, the destruction of whom the song foretold, was us.”²

Measures by the state authorities to dissolve or suspend the activities of Hungarian cultural and educational organizations paralyzed Hungarian cultural life. No form of Hungarian organization was allowed aside from the officially recognized Hungarian minority political parties. The two parties in Parliament represented the interests of the different classes; the conservative National Christian Socialist Party the land owning classes and clergy, and the Hungarian National Party the peasants and tradesmen. The parties formed an opposition block rather than cooperating with the government in power, and their negative attitude eliminated any possibility of working in harmony with the government in Prague.

The youth who were to form the St. George Scout Circle found their home within the Slovakian-Hungarian scouting movement. During these early years when Hungarian institutions had ceased to function, the Hungarian scout troops provided a haven for the disoriented minority youth. The scouting

movement in pre-war Hungary had gained great popularity in the secondary schools, and shortly after the war scout troops began to reorganize. Czechoslovak officials were reluctant to recognize Hungarian scouting, believing that the Slovakian-Hungarian scouts would be influenced by the Hungarian government's policy of irredentism. Nevertheless a number of scout troops found ways to function, registering as clubs in secondary schools or functioning semi-legally, as did the Little Carpathian Touring Society, the training ground for the St. George Circle scouts, which registered as a hiking group.³

A scout publication, *A Mi Lapunk* [Our Paper], founded by Lajos Scherer in January of 1921, attempted to fill the vacuum left by the lack of a formal Hungarian scouting organization. The monthly publication served as a forum for the isolated secondary-school scouts, who were encouraged to send in their own writings, accounts of hiking trips, ideas and articles, in order to make the paper their own. In this way scouts who were unable to meet came to know each other and create a sense of a scout community. Hungarian minority youth of all classes came together within the scouting movement, unusual in the hierarchical stratified Hungarian society of the time. They considered themselves part of a community united by scouting bonds of brotherhood and by their Hungarian identity within the Czechoslovak state.

By the second half of the 1920s the situation of the Hungarian population in Slovakia began to improve. The consolidation of Czechoslovakia had progressed to the point that Czech and Slovak politicians no longer feared that the national minorities would cause the disintegration of the state. For the first time they considered the possibility of including national minority parties in the government, and the government lifted its ban on Hungarian cultural organizations. A new generation of Hungarian youth began to attend Czechoslovak universities. The majority of students went to Prague and enrolled in the excellent Charles University which had both German and Czech divisions. Edgár Kessler/Balogh, the future leader of Sarló, had spoken German from childhood and registered in the German language division. Ferenc Horváth had learned Slovak in Érsekújvár and graduated from the Czech division. Those who knew German could also enrol in the new German-language technical university in Brno. Zoltán Boross was among the few who registered at the Slovak university in Bratislava/Pozsony. He had learned some Slovak but understood little during the first weeks of classes. Since there were not enough educated Slovaks to fill the positions, they were filled by Czech professors.⁴

The scattered Hungarian students were at a disadvantage compared to the German and Czech students who had strong student organizations that administered scholarships, dormitories, and clubs. Following the precedent set by other student groups, in 1925 the Hungarian students in Prague founded the Hungarian Christian University and College Students of Prague; after protests by Hungarian Jewish students the word 'Christian' was dropped. Later that year the Prague organization combined with students in Bratislava and Brno, forming the Czechoslovak Hungarian Academic Organization (CsMASZT). Most Hungarian-speaking students joined the organization and eventually received support from the country's Hungarian political parties and clubs.

The St. George Circle

In 1925 in Prague four former members of the Little Carpathian Scout Troop decided to establish a senior scout group, the St. George Circle. To emphasize their Hungarian identity they took their symbol from the statue of St. George and the Dragon in the Prague Castle courtyard, sculpted by Hungarian brothers in the fourteenth century. Of mixed ethnic and religious background, they searched for a unifying principle, finally deciding that only Hungarian culture could unify the Hungarian minority. Their constitution, written for the Czech authorities, was quite traditional emphasizing scouting goals, but their secret aim was to unite all Hungarian youth in Czechoslovakia (including Ruthenia) through the scouting movement.

At first they had little luck recruiting new members, but through a competition of "story-telling afternoons" they were able to appeal to secondary school scouts. It was these two cohorts of students who had spent their childhood in the Hungarian Kingdom that were to form the Sarló movement later. Functioning on the assumption that the village community embodied Hungarian culture with roots in the past, they recruited students to go to villages and teach the children Hungarian culture through folk tales, legends and games. The few scouts who participated were awarded with the title of "regös" [minstrel]. The title recalled the heroic service performed by minstrels who carried news to isolated Hungarian communities during the time of the Turkish occupation.

A significant step in the growth of the fledgling movement was the all-scout camp at Liptószentiván [in Slovak: Liptovský Mikuláš] called by the St. George Circle in summer of 1926 in order to create a united Hungarian scout way of thinking in the Republic. This was the first time that scouts who had communicated through *A Mi Lapunk* were able to meet one another, as

well as the paper's editor, Lajos Scherer. Representatives from scout troops in seven cities attended and adopted the idea of a village friends movement, agreeing that the scouts should cultivate their Hungarian roots in the villages. Unfortunately for the movement's founders, their romantic view of the village did not reflect the reality. The definition of "village" in Slovakia was simply that of any settlement with fewer than five thousand people, therefore not eligible for certain public services, including a middle-school. Villages in Slovakia were extremely diverse, some made up of farming populations, but many combined agrarian labourers with small scale-manufacturing, lumbering, and paper mills.

An unusual alliance began to form between urban youth of Bratislava /Pozsony and provincial youth from the agrarian town of Nové Zámky [Érsekújvár], an alliance which was to give the movement its unique character. There had been no tradition of scouting in the worker/peasant town, since scout troops had been established primarily in the elite *gimnazia*, but Odiló Hornyák, the scout master of the Little Carpathian scout troop, had been transferred to Nové Zámky [Érsekújvár] and soon organized the Czukor scout troop. During the Easter school-break he took the members on a trip to Bratislava/Pozsony to join the Little Carpathian troop in a two day camping trip. During the trip the scouts began to plan the next project — a summer hiking program to the countryside.

During the summer of 1927 the scouts planned a "regös" contest to hike through the countryside making friends with the village children and collecting ethnographic materials. Lajos Jócsik from Érsekújvár mapped out the Hungarian-inhabited territory of Slovakia into six regions assigned to four senior scout patrols. The scouts visited more than fifty places in the countryside recording what they perceived as village traditions. After the successful experiment they began to make detailed plans for more extensive "minstrel wandering," but their visits to the villages were unexpectedly banned by the Czechoslovak authorities.

By 1928 the senior scouts had built up a core membership of secondary school and senior students. St. George Circles were formed in the university cities of Brno and Bratislava. The scouts from all social classes were bound by their collective identity and activities of going to the villages. When the older generation, suspicious of city youth's activities among the peasantry, questioned whether the programme fit into traditional scouting, Edgár Balogh, the acknowledged leader of the group, countered that scouting was not just an extension of school but a serious movement to correct the problems of a society in crisis.⁵ The Hungarian writer, Zsigmond Móricz, who joined the St.

George Circle members in a drive to raise money for the benefit of a student *mensa* fund, found the students more serious and clear-sighted than their fathers who lived in a fantasy world. “Their fathers are the prisoners of the old ideologies: the sons the modern masters of ‘*realpolitik*.’”⁶

Transylvania

The situation for the Hungarian population in the territory of Transylvania, ceded to Romania after World War I, was quite different than that of northern Hungary. Transylvania formed a geographical unit with a long tradition of political autonomy and separate corporate identity. From medieval times the three 'historic peoples' of Transylvania — the German Saxons, Hungarians, and Székely Hungarians — had maintained their separate identities, including religious freedom and the special privileges of the Saxons and Székelys. Although many Romanians had moved into the area over the centuries they had not been included as one of the region's historic peoples. After the collapse of Hungarian rule and the transfer of Transylvania to Romania the Romanians intended to change this situation. Romanian nationalists believed the Romanian nation to be unique and regarded the ethnic minorities in Greater Romania as foreigners; they were particularly antagonistic to the Magyars — the former ruling nation — and Jews. Measures were taken to eliminate the potential influence of both Hungarians and Jews in the new state.

From 1918 to 1920 voluntary flight and the expulsion of prominent Hungarian citizens with their families by Romanian officials sharply reduced the number of Hungarians who were to remain in Transylvania. An estimated 222,000 Hungarians left the territories granted to Romania between 1918 and 1920.⁷ The great majority of refugees were members of the upper and middle classes, including large numbers of government officials and members of the intelligentsia.

After this early exodus the remaining Hungarian intellectual community floundered. Attempts by the Transylvanian Hungarians to unite were marred by political conflicts between conservative former officials, mainly concerned with drumming up international support for the revision of the Peace Treaty, and others who believed it necessary to attain accommodation with the Romanians of Transylvania and perhaps achieve autonomy for the region. Many Transylvanians, both Romanian and Hungarian, believed in the existence of a unique Transylvanian identity. They did imagine it within the framework of Greater Romania.

The problems of nationalizing the schools in post-1920 Transylvania were similar to those in Slovakia. Magyarization had been so successful in places that it was not easily shed with the change to Romanian political rule and there was a dearth of qualified teachers to teach in Romanian. Romanian elites had been partially responsible for the staying power of the Hungarian language. Many of the elites had embraced magyarization: parents did not want to send their children to Romanian schools and their children often did not know Romanian. In 1926 a Cluj/Kolozsvár magazine article expressed concern that Romanians in Cluj did not read Romanian newspapers, and that Hungarian was spoken often in the family, society, stores, and at parties, concluding that the language of the Romanian 'elite' in the city was Magyar.⁸

On 12 May 1919 the Royal University of Kolozsvár was taken over by representatives of the Transylvanian provisional government. When it opened its doors as Cluj University under Romanian management in fall of 1919 the former Hungarian professors and a majority of the student body emigrated *en masse* to Hungary. A whole generation of young Hungarian intellectuals left Transylvania. The university's immediate and total takeover by Romanians did not have universal support. Romanian historian and politician Nicolae Iorga (1871-1940) spoke out against immediate nationalization, arguing that minority nationalities deserved the opportunity to receive education in their mother tongue, and that there were not enough trained people available to staff a Romanian university Cluj, but Onisifor Ghibu, secretary general in the Department of Public Education of the provisional government, was adamant. He had found very few Romanian students or staff in the city's public schools, which reinforced his determination to reverse the situation at once.⁹

With the Romanization of public schools, the historical Hungarian churches, Unitarian, Reformed [Calvinist], and Catholic, expanded the number of denominational schools.¹⁰ Yet in this way they separated the Hungarian youth by denomination which prevented the Hungarian youth of Transylvania from uniting as did the youth of the St. George Circle/Sarló in Czechoslovakia. After 1919 most Hungarian-speaking students attended the confessional secondary schools. For their university education many left the country to study abroad either in universities in Hungary or in Western Europe. The remainder attended the Hungarian theological academies: for example the later Transylvanian Youth leader Ferenc Balázs attended the Unitarian Theological Seminary, and Dezső László attended the Reformed Theological Seminary.

Béla Jancsó, future leader of the Transylvanian Youth, was caught in the dilemma of minority students after the war. Those who chose to study in

Hungary were often unable to return; yet university education in Romania required the knowledge of Romanian. Jancsó enrolled in the faculty of medicine in Budapest in 1921 but the violence and bloodshed of the counter-revolution repelled him. Within a year he returned to Cluj/Kolozsvár and enrolled in the Romanian university. Because he had no knowledge of Romanian, he flunked out in December. In 1923 he returned to Hungary and enrolled in the medical faculty of the former Kolozsvár University, now located in Szeged in southern Hungary, where he studied for the next five years before returning to Transylvania.

For those few students who enrolled in the Romanian universities in Cluj/Kolozsvár or Bucharest the situation was quite different than for the Hungarian students at Czechoslovak universities. Students with Czech high-school certificates had many opportunities for financial aid — and the Hungarian minority students succeeded in founding the organization of Hungarian University Students. Romania in 1925 under the Liberal Party regime was under martial law with a limited right of association. There was little student aid available and a state law expressly prohibited the establishment of any organization of university students based on nationality.¹¹

The Formation of Sarló

By 1928 the conceptual framework and aims of the St. George Circle members had begun to crystallize. The students had come to realize that their romantic view of the villages had little resemblance to the reality of the serious economic and social problems, and decided to investigate the actual living conditions of the people — of all the working masses. At a second all-scout camp meeting held at Gombaszög (in Slovak: Gombaseck) from August 3 to 13, the two flags flying over the camp symbolized the transformation of the movement — the St. George Circle green lily scout banner on one flagpole, the sickle [sarló] the symbol of the Hungarian peasants and workers. The Sarló flag was voted by the scouts to be the symbol of the movement, proclaiming the birth of a Hungarian scout movement with its roots in the people. The scouts had only intended to modify the character of scouting with no intention of leaving the scouting movement, but the founding of Sarló came to be regarded by conservative Hungarians as a move to the left. Eventually, some members of the older generation withdrew their support. Over time the generational rift was to contribute to the radicalization of the Sarló group.

Nearing the end of their university studies, the students in Bratislava/Pozsony organized self-education seminars to learn practical subjects to

further their careers. Student experts taught seminars in law, medicine, engineering, social sciences, and teacher training, each with an established curriculum and assigned readings; in April 1929 they published their first semester program in their new publication, *Vetés* [Sowing], to help Hungarian students in Prague and Brno prepare themselves to address the problems of the villages. The Slovak and Hungarian agrarian populations had endured the harsh consequences of Slovakia's economic stagnation. In addition the Hungarian population suffered from legal problems, cultural decline and a land reform which had reduced employment for day labourers. The students realized that their careers might well depend on these minority populations of workers and peasants.

The influence of the Sarló group spread rapidly in the late 1920s. They had become the acknowledged leaders of the Hungarian minority university youth and had also begun to attend meetings of Czech and Slovak students in liberal groups such as the YMCA and the Czech ethical movement *Etické hnutí*. They were warmly greeted by the radical Slovak vanguard of the group, DAV, a group of young Slovak Marxist and leaders of the new Slovak intelligentsia who were even more critical of the Czechoslovak state because of what was seen as its unjust policies toward Slovakia.¹² As the first generation of Slovak intelligentsia they had expected to replace the Czech administrators and teachers imported into Slovakia, and because of the delays in this process they had begun to look on the Czechs as colonizers.

Sarló's new initiatives reached a broader group of young intellectuals and university students in Hungary and Transylvania. In Hungary intellectual circles had followed the senior scout activities through *A Mi Lapunk*, and after 1928 their influence spread through their cooperative activities with the Bartha Miklós Társaság [Miklós Bartha Society, hereafter BMT]. The BMT had been founded in 1925 by refugee graduate students from Transylvania, Slovakia, and Yugoslavia, and in 1927 under a new leader, Dániel Fábian, the society became a meeting place and forum for the new generation of youth, debating Hungarian economic and social problems. Cooperative ventures with Sarló began after Balogh spent a semester in Budapest in 1928, and in 1930 the society's publication, *Új Magyar Föld* [New Hungarian soil] carried six articles by Sarló members publicizing their activities and concerns.¹³

News of their activities had begun to reach other groups of university students. The first issue of *Vetés* reached the students in the Gábor Bethlen Circle, the future Szeged Youth, which had been founded by refugee students from Transylvania in the transplanted University of Kolozsvár. The leader, György Buday, wrote to praise their work, which influenced his plans to

develop a Village Settlement Movement among the agrarian proletariat on the outskirts of the large agrarian town. The new group of Hungarian students beginning to form in Kolozsvár learned about Sarló from the articles in *Vetés*.

In 1930 Sarló's ill-advised March 15th demonstration known as the wreath affair led to their becoming *persona non grata* in Hungary. The members had become convinced that Hungarian minority problems could only be solved within the framework of a Danubian Federation of Peoples. They decided to send two emissaries to Budapest for the March 15th celebration of the 1848 Hungarian Revolution for Independence, a traditional student holiday. To symbolize the need for cooperation among peoples, the emissaries carried ribbons in the colors of each of the Danubian peoples along with a red banner to be attached to the wreath which they were to place at the statue of Hungarian patriot Sándor Petőfi. The students had clearly misjudged the political climate in Hungary. The wreath laying was forbidden and the "wreath affair" raised a storm in a Parliamentary session called to discuss the matter. Representatives believed the students had insulted the nation by placing ribbons bearing the colors of the "successor states" on the statue. Interestingly, leaders of the Hungarian opposition parties defended Sarló, attributing their action to naiveté. In a chance encounter, Balogh met conservative leader Géza Szűllő who greeted him, saying: "Well, you've made a fine mess of things... but I'm sure you'll find some way to put things in order."¹⁴

The Transylvanian Youth [*Erdélyi Fiatalok*]

By 1929 several trends had converged which made possible the emergence of a critical mass of Hungarian students at the university in Kolozsvár/Cluj after a hiatus of ten years. Attitudes among the Transylvanian Hungarian middle classes had begun to change. Romanian rule no longer appeared to be transient. Hungarian territorial revisionism had been surprisingly muted in regard to Transylvania. The local political situation for the Hungarian minority had improved after the elections of 1928. The National-Peasant cabinet headed by the Transylvanian politician Iuliu Maniu (1873-1953), which had come to power on November 10, 1928, lifted martial law, censorship, and other restrictions on communication which had been imposed under the government of General Alexandru Averescu (1859-1938). Under Maniu, the first genuinely free elections in Romania were held on December 12th, and the Hungarian population received a more proportionate representation in Parliament.

An increasing number of Transylvanian Hungarian students realized that if they wanted to pursue their careers in Transylvania, they would have to

study at Romanian universities. Two conditions which had up to then prevented Hungarian youth from registering at a Romanian university, the lack of knowledge of Romanian and the possibility of attending a foreign university and validating the diploma earned later in Romania, had largely disappeared. The Romanian authorities made a rule regarding foreign diplomas under which it became almost impossible to validate degrees from Hungarian universities. As a result of this change a small number of Hungarian students returned from abroad, including Béla Jancsó. By 1929 a generation of secondary school students had completed their eight years of *gimnazium* studies under Romanian rule and had attained fluency in Romanian.

In 1929 two groups of students came together, an older group and a younger one, fresh from the *gimnázia*. They faced the common problem of marginalized Transylvanian Hungarian intellectuals — how to select careers and direct their lives to a future as members of the Hungarian minority within Romania.¹⁵ Most were members of families long established in Transylvania and had been educated in the religious and generally conservative spirit of the denominational schools. For the younger generation the system of values of the older generation was no longer meaningful. The sentimental and uncritical patriotism advanced by their educators and religious leaders was perceived as a sign of an unwillingness or inability to recognize the new conditions facing the Hungarian minority. The efforts of Hungarian politicians to maintain the position of the former Hungarian ruling classes and their failure to formulate policies to help the large majority of Hungarians in the countryside proved these people's incompetence. The new generation considered themselves better qualified than their fathers to perceive the "realities" of the minority situation and seek new alternatives.

József Venczel, a member of the younger group, defined the beliefs of these twenty-year olds: "This generation never lived in or experienced imperial Hungary and has no sense of belonging to a Hungarian state.... As a generation we have little belief in our self-worth.... Our generational inferiority complex rests on our lack of education: the 20s generation has no understanding of literature, they do not know Hungarian history, they have no knowledge of Hungarian intellectual life." Concerning the differences between the generations, he explained: "We have no connection with the generation before us. Our strength has never been based on the concepts of power and prestige. On the other hand, the idea of leadership of the people — the creed of cultural *magyarság* — differentiates us completely from the older generation."¹⁶

In the years from 1929 to 1933 the Transylvanian Youth [*Erdélyi Fiatalok*] became a forum for the new generation. Unlike the Hungarian students in Czechoslovakia, the Transylvanian Youth were never able to establish a legal organization of students recognized by the state authorities. Their activities took place within the denominational youth groups of the historic churches, Unitarian, Reformed and Catholic, which also provided the only form of student aid through maintaining residential student *kollégiums*, although some assistance also came from the National Hungarian Party for a student *mensa*. The publication, *Erdélyi Fiatalok* carried out the work of organizing and directing the youth movement from 1930 until 1933 when a split occurred in its membership.

In January 1929 Béla Jancsó began to organize the Transylvanian minority youth, inviting leaders from the three denominational student groups to meet on neutral territory, using the facilities of the regional Székely Association. He chose the tenth anniversary of the poet Endre Ady's death, a bold move since Ady's work was banned from the Hungarian classroom because of his criticism of the Hungarian ruling classes, his pessimistic view of the Hungarian future, and his immoral lifestyle. Jancsó's interest in and respect for Ady had been strengthened by the work of a young Hungarian bishop of the Reformed Church in Transylvania, Sándor Makkai. In 1927 the *Soli deo Gloria*, a Reformed youth group in Budapest, had asked Makkai to write a critique of Ady's poetry. In response to this request Makkai produced a book titled the *Magyar fa sorsa — A vádlott Ady költészete* [Hungarian fate: the poetry of the accused Ady]. Unexpectedly, especially for members of the older generation, Makkai did not condemn Ady but used him to criticise the older generation, in particular its members' glorification of the Hungarian past. Makkai considered Ady's tragic vision of the nation overly pessimistic — but justified. The catastrophe that had struck the Hungarian nation with Trianon had been brought on by the mistakes made by the pre-war Hungarian leadership. Makkai's conclusion, intended to counter Ady's pessimism, gave direction to the new leadership. To minority youth in Romania, cut off from the larger Hungarian community and under pressure to assimilate, Ady's vision of the tragic fate of the Hungarians was especially relevant. Ady viewed the Hungarians as a people who had lost their way. To him Hungarians were a dying race, caught between East and West ... doomed to remain backward, they were never to be able to actualize their own unique characteristics as a people.¹⁷

The leaders gathered at a meeting of the Székely Association were intensely conscious of the small number of Hungarian university students and the inroads Romanian influence and assimilationist policies had made on

Hungarian culture in the countryside. Ady's vision of Hungarians as a "dying race" made it all the more important to people such as Jancsó to unify Hungarian students in Transylvania in an organization. He and the other young leaders decided to form a Youth Division of the Szekély Association, agreeing to meet weekly for lectures and discussions. Organized up until then only in denominational youth groups, this was their first opportunity to debate those topics of particular significance to their generation. Their weekly meetings, held in Kolozsvár/Cluj, formed the basis for a surge of organizational activity in the summer and during the fall semester.

It was in this atmosphere of heightened student activity that Jancsó made his plans for a student publication, following the example of the Sarló periodical *Vetés*. Jancsó was determined to keep the publication independent from any official influence, either political or denominational, and the surprise appearance of the *Erdélyi Fiatalok* in January foiled any chance of the founding of a politically supported youth publication. During the next three years the movement's founding members and four co-workers played a leading role in organizing and directing the movement's varied activities. The lack of a national organization left a void that was filled partly by the denominational youth organizations which were led by several of the movement's leaders. These groups met weekly and carried out most activities, but often their activities overlapped.

The ultimate goal of the Transylvanian Youth was to ensure the survival of the Hungarian minority in Romania and their most successful work was in their self-education seminars and their village research. Practically speaking, the village offered almost the only possible opportunity for Hungarian youth to get work — as teachers, ministers, doctors, agrarian engineers. Since almost three-fourths of the Hungarian population, which included peasants, craftsmen, factory workers and miners, was concentrated in small towns and villages, the continuation of the Hungarian language and culture depended on these rural Hungarians. Most endangered were those in the ethnically mixed areas of Hungarian and Romanian populations where government policies worked toward assimilation through discouraging Hungarian language education and the work of the Hungarian churches.

The leaders had been influenced by the Sarló publication *Vetés*, which described their self-education seminars in which students studied minority law, health issues, engineering, social sciences, and teacher training, to educate themselves for leadership of the villages. They organized a village seminar with lectures planned throughout the year, aiming to work out a scientific method of village work, to give practical direction to village studies,

and to help the villages, but organized village work began only in November of 1930. The program to work with the rural population was only possible in the authorized denominational organizations. They worked cooperatively with the Unitarian Ferenc David Society and the reformed Young Christian Association to put together a sociographic questionnaire which was distributed by members who lived in rural areas and resulted in about twenty-five serious studies. Simultaneously the Catholic league, which kept its activities separate, initiated a contest soliciting articles on the villages to encourage their youth to make contact with the villagers.

The research during summer of 1931 produced mixed results. The most extensive sociographic research was conducted by five students in the area of Kolozsborsa/Borşa north of Kolozsvár as guests of Baron Ferenc Banffy. Imre Mikó's research resulted in his book *Az Erdélyi falu és a nemzetiségi kérdés* [The Transylvanian village and the nationality question] published in early 1932, which was attacked by conservative Hungarians because of its references to class warfare and the need to cooperate with the Romanians — but it was praised by Romanian and Hungarian scholars for its evenhandedness. A project of the Catholic League, with József Venczel as one of the leaders, visited twenty-four villages and collected ethnographic material. This last project revealed potential strains in the movement's unity. Venczel, although secretary of the village seminar, did not act in that position but worked within the framework of the Catholic League. The village seminars continued during the next academic year but the momentum to establish a large-scale program of student village research floundered.

The Demise of the Hungarian Youth Movements

With the onset of the Great Depression the once liberal government of Czechoslovakia began to use repressive measures to quell worker and peasant unrest. By this time the views of Sarló leaders, especially the avant-garde, had begun to diverge more sharply from those of the organization's leaders as well as many of its members. Their concern for the working masses, their willingness to cooperate with Slovak and Czech students, angered and upset many members of the older generation. The shift in alliances and emphasis on class divisions rather than Hungarian unity by the more radical members came when many of the members were completing their university education and were facing a difficult employment situation. Radicalization of several of the leaders after a bloody attack on Hungarian workers by the Czech gendarmerie brought

them into conflict with both the Czech and Hungarian political leadership and led to the fragmentation of the group and its eventual decline.

The Transylvanian Youth movement suffered a damaging blow in spring of 1932 with a reversal of support from the Székely Association that had provided them movement with loans, moral support, and the free use of its facilities. A newly elected leadership decided to withdraw these privileges and require payment for the use of meeting rooms. The work of the movement was radically affected and the Village Seminar lectures were cancelled for the rest of 1932.

Tensions had been mounting within the membership between the Catholic League Student Section and Marxist students — and they exploded at the student conference in November 1932. During a heated debate, János Demeter, a founding member and a Marxist, attacked one of the speakers, Dr. Jenő Szentimre, a member of the Székely Association who had actively supported the youth group. The altercations began the process through which the unity of the youth group disintegrated during the early months of 1933.

There were other causes for the break-up. Few students who had matriculated in 1931-1932 had joined the movement, and the generation of 1929 were finishing their studies and leaving Kolozsvár. The papal bull of 1931 "Quadragesimo anno" had an increasing influence on Catholic youth, leading to a new definition of social responsibility under neo-Catholicism. But perhaps the most significant cause was the change in the political situation after Hitler's assumption of power in 1933 and the growing domination of Romanian politics by King Carol. In December of 1933 the right-radical Iron Guard, which had recently been banned, took its revenge with the assassination of the liberal Prime Minister Ion G. Duca (1879-1933). Martial law was declared and a new government instituted increasingly repressive measures including the imprisonment of a number of intellectuals and the banning of publications. From this time on the Village Research field trips and evening performances of the Transylvanian Youth were banned.¹⁸

Perhaps it was inevitable that the groups should break up given the political trend toward polarization in Europe during the early 1930s. In Slovakia the Slovak socialist students became more radical, joining the Leftist Front, while the *Nástupisti*, the younger generation of leaders in the Slovak People's Party were attracted by the policies of fascist regimes. In Romania, the fanatic and nationalistic Iron Guard, its membership made up mainly of young people and peasants, was increasing in strength. The goals of the new Hungarian generation of minority youth to work for the cooperation of peoples in ethnically mixed Central Europe appeared utopian.

Despite progress made in the years since the demise of communist rule and the Soviet Empire, including the extension of the European Union to countries in Central Europe, that goal has still not been achieved.

NOTES

¹ István I. Mócsy, *The Effects of World War I. The Uprooted: Hungarian Refugees and Their Impact on Hungary's Domestic Politics, 1918-1921* (New York: Social Science Monographs, Columbia University press, 1983), 10-14.

² Rezső Peéry, *Reguiem egy országrészért* [Requiem for a part of the country] (Munich: Aurora Kiskönyvek, 1975), 50.

³ For a full account of the history of the St. George Circle/Sarló movement see: Deborah Cornelius, *In Search of the Nation: The New Generation of Hungarian Youth in Czechoslovakia 1925-1934* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

⁴ Zoltán Boross, Interview with author, Debrecen, 22 March 1988.

⁵ Edgár Balogh, "A csata fele" [The battle joined]. January 1927. *A Mi Lapunk*, 3-4.

⁶ "Pesti Napló," 21 April 1927, in Zsigmond Móricz, *Tanulmányok, cikkek* [Studies, articles] (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyviadó, 1959).

⁷ Mócsy, 12.

⁸ Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building & Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 154.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 219-223.

¹⁰ Between 1918 and 1920 the Unitarian and Reformed churches doubled the number of their schools from 348 to 690 (Livezeanu, 179).

¹¹ The animosity of Transylvanian-Romanian officials toward the idea of the establishment of Hungarian student organizations is discussed in Livezeanu, 181-182.

¹² DAV means mob, a name originally given in jest by the Slovak youth.

¹³ *Új Magyar Föld III*, 1930.

¹⁴ Balogh, *Hét próba*, 196.

¹⁵ The number of Hungarian speaking students matriculated at the University of Cluj/Kolozsvár in 1930 was over 700. It grew to over 1,000 in the next few years.

¹⁶ József Venczel, "Határnemzedék: erdélyi magyar húszévesek" [Border generation: Transylvanian Hungarian twenty-year olds], in *Erdélyi föld – erdélyi társadalom* [Transylvanian soil — Transylvanian society] (Budapest: Közgazdasági és jogi könyvkiadó, 1988), 43-46.

¹⁷ Sándor Makkai, *Magyar fa sorsa: a vádlott Ady költészete* [Hungarian fate: the poetry of the accused Ady] (Cluj-Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Szépmíves Céh, 1927), 16-17. Makkai (1890-1951) was a teacher of theology. He also wrote poetry and fiction. His book on Ady provoked bitter debates. Almost as controversial was one of his early historical novels, *Ördögszekér* [The devilwagon] (1925), but it contributed to his popularity. Several of his novels were translated into foreign languages.

¹⁸ Cseke Péter, ed. *Erdélyi Fiatalok: Dokumentumok, Viták 1930-1940* [Transylvanian Youth: documents, debates 1930-1940] (Bucharest: Kriterion Könyvkiadó, 1986), 14.

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