

Nation Versus State: The Swabian "Volksbund" and Hungarian Public Opinion in Early 1939

On 26 November 1938, Hungary's Béla Imrédy government granted the *Volksdeutsche Kameradschaft* (VK), the Nazi-oriented Swabian faction, permission to establish the *Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn* (VDU). The new "völkisch-cultural organization"¹ would be allowed to compete with the government-controlled *Ungarländisch-Deutscher Volksbildungsverein* (UDV), heretofore the only nationwide Swabian cultural organization authorized to function in Trianon Hungary². For nearly five months the VDU languished in limbo, while its leaders anxiously awaited validation through the Hungarian government's enabling decree.

In the interim, however, the *völkisch* leaders were convinced that now, at last, some of their long-standing grievances would be remedied. The government would transform bilingual and Magyar elementary schools into German institutions, *volksbewußt* German teachers and acceptable textbooks would become available, and all types of German schools, except universities, would be allowed to operate. Swabians would be able to launch financial drives, conduct church services in German, organize their own political party, establish autonomous clubs and associations, and publish German newspapers and magazines unhindered by government regulations and supervision³. In fact, the government authorized the VDU, and allowed the monthly *Deutscher Volksbote* (1935—1938) to be transformed into a weekly newspaper, the *Deutscher Volksbote, Wochenblatt für Kultur, Politik und Wirtschaft* (DVW), only because the Third Reich's diplomatic pressures compelled Hungary to act⁴. This study traces the *völkisch* Swabians' growing exasperation with the government's failure to improve Swabian educational facilities as a gesture of good faith during the period prior to the release of the enabling decree in mid-April 1939, and it explains why the government reneged on its promises.

Since the end of World War I, Hungary's Swabian society had been teetering on the brink of ethnic oblivion. Reduced by the provisions of

¹ See Matthias Annabring, *Volksgeschichte der Deutschen in Ungarn* (Stuttgart, 1954), p. 106.

² A full report of the *Volksbund's* establishment is in *Der Auslandsdeutsche*, 21 (1938), pp. 781—782. Franz Basch's inaugural speech is in *Nation und Staat*, 12 (1938—1939), pp. 204—211.

³ Loránt Tilkovszky, »Volksdeutsche Bewegung und ungarische Nationalitätenpolitik (1938—1941)« *Acta Historica*, 12, No. 1—4 (1966), p. 81. Also see Thomas Spira, "The Volksdeutsche Kameradschaft and the Swabian Demarche on the Eve of World War II", *East Central Europe*, forthcoming.

⁴ L. Tilkovszky, »Die deutsche Minderheit in Ungarn in der Zeit des Faschismus«, *Jahrbuch für Geschichte der sozialistischen Länder Europas*, 15, No. 2 (1971), p. 75.

the Trianon peace treaty to about one-half million predominantly dispersed rural inhabitants, the Swabians comprised only about 5 1/2 % of Hungary's overwhelmingly Magyar population of about 8 1/2 million people. For the first time in modern history, Hungary was virtually a homogeneous Magyar nation-state. Swept up in the prevailing worldwide nationalistic tide, the Magyars had little patience with the national aspirations of their non-Magyar citizens. In private, non-Magyars could use their ancestral language and enjoy their cultural peculiarities; but to ascend the social and economic ladder they would be forced to submerge personal ethnic sentiments and become Magyarized⁵.

The minorities' clauses of the Versailles peace treaties, which bound Hungary, somewhat mitigated the severity of these assimilationist tendencies⁶. The Swabians, for example, were able in 1924 to launch the UDV, the nationwide cultural organization subsidized and controlled by the government. It failed, however, to satisfy Swabian aspirations, and never sparked a vigorous grassroots movement. In 1923, the government revived the nearly extinct Swabian rural elementary school system by establishing three types of educational categories in state-run elementary schools: Type A schools, or German institutions, where Magyar was taught as a subject; Type B schools, or bilingual institutions; and Type C schools, or Magyar institutions, where German was taught as a subject. These schools never became effective agents of German culture, due to official inertia and hostility, complicated by the lack of sufficient funds, qualified German teachers, and appropriate textbooks. Responding to Swabian complaints and pressures from Germany, in December 1935 the government introduced a new school law. However, this regulation also disappointed Swabian expectations. By September 1938, all Type A and Type C schools were slated for replacement either by bilingual institutions resembling the Type B schools, or by exclusively Magyar facilities. Most Swabians considered this solution a retrograde step, and thereafter the government was unable to arrest disaffection in the ranks of the German minority⁷.

⁵ For a concise explanation of this viewpoint by a former Hungarian Ministry of Education official, see G. C. Paikert, "Hungary's National Minority Policies, 1920—1945" *The American Slavic and East European Review*, 12 (April 1953), pp. 101—104. Also see C. A. Macartney, *Hungary and her Successors, 1919—1937* (Oxford, 1937), pp. 451—452; and Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars* (Seattle and London, 1974), pp. 195—196; Robert M. Bigler, "Heil Hitler und Heil Horthy! The Nature of Hungarian Fascist Nationalism and Its Impact on German-Hungarian Relations," *East European Quarterly*, 8, No. 3 (Fall 1974), pp 251—256.

⁶ Of course, Hungary resented the imposition of these limitations on her sovereignty by the authors of the Treaty of Trianon. See Walter Schneefuß, *Deutschtum in Süd-Ost-Europa* (Leipzig, 1939), p. 79.

⁷ Reports about school conditions from the *völkisch* perspective may be found in nearly every issue of *Deutscher Volksbote*, beginning in 1935, and in *Nation und Staat*. Also see Tilkovszky, »Volksdeutsche Bewegung«, p. 82.

By 1935, Hungary's Swabian society had become imbued with the Nazi brand of *völkisch* spirit promoted by the Third Reich for all *Volks-genossen*. In Hungary this type of loyalty peaked in that year, when the UDV's radical faction led by the general secretary Franz Basch seceded from the UDV and proclaimed the VK's independent status. Provided with covert financial and moral support from the Reich⁸, this radical cadre, composed largely of young intellectuals, began seeking grassroots support among the Swabian agrarian and urban masses and *völkisch* intellectuals. The DVW, edited by Georg Goldschmidt, propagandized the organization's Nazi-oriented program in simple but eloquent prose that appealed to the Swabian lower classes. While paying lipservice to Hungarian patriotism, the newspaper promoted thinly disguised Nazi doctrines, and soon split the Swabians' national and ideological loyalties⁹.

The Magyar-Swabian controversy entailed fundamental and irreconcilable principles. Before World War I, most Swabians had no difficulty harmonizing their loyalty to the German cultural nation and their devotion to the Hungarian state. But following Hungary's dismemberment after the war, the Magyars began demanding undivided devotion to the Magyar cultural and political nation from all Hungarian citizens. According to this view, a person's membership in the nation involved a voluntary acceptance of that country's cultural and political norms. This standard clashed with National Socialist philosophy, because the Reich, on the other hand, expected every German *Volksgenosse*, regardless of citizenship, domicile, or birthplace, to be a faithful German nationalist. The Nazis considered nation and state to be distinct concepts. As Ägidius Faulstich, a VDU stalwart, explained, *Volk* was a natural creation based on common blood and language, and a shared *völkisch* essence. It was not the accidental product of peculiar circumstances, but resonated to eternal, immutable laws, and united its members psychically and spiritually¹⁰. A person's membership in the nation thus hinged on his native attributes, whereas his affiliation with the state depended on personal choice. Therefore, a Swabian citizen of Hungary could be simultaneously *volkstreu* to the German *Volksgemeinschaft* and *staatstreu* to the Hungarian political state, but only if the latter allegiance did not clash with the demands of his primordial duty to the German *Volk*. The bitter controversy and misunderstandings that poisoned Swabian-Magyar and Hungarian-German relations during this time may be seen as both product and cause of this unbridgeable gulf¹¹.

Hungarian Prime Minister Béla Imrédy's 25 December 1938 Christmas message demonstrated uneasiness with the promises tendered to the radical Swabians one month earlier. The government realized that

⁸ L. Tilkovszky, *Ez volt a Volksbund* (Budapest, 1978), pp. 15—16.

⁹ For a survey of events up to and including 1938, see Thomas Spira, *German-Hungarian Relations and the Swabian Problem* (New York, 1977).

¹⁰ »Volk und Volksgruppe«, DVW, I (5 February 1939), p. 2.

¹¹ See further, János Hajdú and Béla C. Tóth, *The "Volksbund" in Hungary* (Budapest, 1962), p. 14.

the non-Magyar minorities' preoccupation with maintaining their ethnic consciousness was "an affair of the heart". But these peoples should not be permitted to dismiss Hungary as merely their place of residence. They must consider the country as their fatherland. Mutual trust would eventually solve all problems, he thought. In order to deflect the Swabians' attentions from the lure of *völkisch* arguments, Imrédy promised to launch a grandiose government land reform program that would gradually transfer sizable estates into the hands of small farmers¹².

Imrédy's innuendo had subtly discredited the patriotism of Hungary's non-Magyar citizens. A 28 December 1938 interview with the Prime Minister convinced Basch that his own optimistic expectations regarding the settlement of the Swabians' grievances had been ill-advised¹³. The question of the Swabians' loyalty to the Hungarian state (*Staatstreue*) thereupon became a vital topic to the *volksbewußt* Swabian leaders. The *völkisch* Kurt Gündisch objected to the government's demand that the Swabians demonstrate their trustworthiness to the Hungarian state by acknowledging that their interests harmonized with Magyar aspirations. Gündisch considered the government's view to be topsy-turvy. Citizens' rights had to be unconditional, whereas beneficiaries had to be loyal to the state. Until and unless the Swabians ceased being patriotic, the government had no right to withdraw privileges enjoyed by everyone else. Indeed, the government was dutybound to grant the Swabians their *völkisch* rights. Gündisch also ridiculed the government's requirement that Swabian interests be coopted with the Magyars'. This, he believed, was a concealed plan for Magyarizing the Swabians. Gündisch would urge Swabians to promote the Hungarian state's welfare, but only if the Magyars honored medieval King St. Stephen's injunction to his countrymen that the interests of Hungary's non-Magyar citizens be safeguarded¹⁴.

In an interview with *8 Órai Újság*. Franz Basch endorsed Gündisch's views. The *Volksbund*, he boasted, represented 80 % of Hungary's German population, but he assured Magyars that they had nothing to fear, because the organization was loyal and legal. Furthermore, the *volksbewußt* Swabians would never challenge the supremacy of Magyars as the country's leaders. But the Swabians deserved status as a nationality (*Volksgruppe*) and not just a minority, representation in the Hungarian parliament, a state secretary for Swabian affairs, *völkisch* teachers in their schools, and the right to establish *völkisch* social organizations. Basch pleaded for the public's understanding and trust. The Swabian connection with the Third Reich was strictly cultural and spiritual. These nonpolitical contacts need never be renounced, he argued, because they did not conflict with the Swabians' Hungarian loyalties. Indeed, Swabians

¹² »Programmrede des Ministerpräsidenten. Ausführliche Erörterung der Innen- und Außenpolitik der Regierung«, DVW, I (1 January 1939), p. 1. Also see Imrédy's article in *Pester Lloyd* (Morgenblatt) (25 December 1938).

¹³ T i l k o v s z k y, *Ez volt a Volksbund*, pp. 40—41.

¹⁴ »Unsere Staatstreue«, DVW, I (8 January 1939), pp. 1—2.

were eager to serve Hungary by acting as intermediaries in settling German-Hungarian controversies¹⁵.

Basch's boast that the *Volksbund* represented 80 % of the Swabian population was probably an exaggeration, but his swaggering alarmed the Magyar public. The extent of the VDU's following is conjectural, but in at least one Swabian community the radicals' own documentation contradicted Basch's claim. In Bátaszék, 406 Swabian parents were to decide which type of language training their children would receive. Only 100 parents chose the bilingual school option; the remainder favoured establishing a Magyar institution that would also provide some reading and writing instruction in the German language¹⁶.

The Basch interview unleashed a storm of protest in Hungarian public life and in the Hungarian press. Almost to a man, Hungary's influential conservative opposition, notably Count István Bethlen, Gyula Kornis, and Tibor Eckhardt, assailed both Swabians and the government. In its 14 January memorandum the group urged Regent Miklós Horthy to dismiss Imrédy from office for having harmed the Magyar cause by placing the Swabians under the jurisdiction of treasonous ethnic leaders. Sooner or later, these pied pipers would pit the Swabians and Germany against Hungary¹⁷. Some papers assailed Basch's temerity in designating the Swabians as a nationality; others dreaded the prospect of growing Swabian independent-mindedness, and deplored the possibility that Swabiandom might eventually achieve corporate status in Hungary. Indeed, DVW admitted that the Swabians sought to gain "legal personality" status (*Rechtspersönlichkeit*) in all walks of communal life: culture, economics, politics, and *Weltanschauung*¹⁸. This was a thinly disguised euphemism for autonomy.

A casual observer might have argued that Imrédy had proposed somewhat similar solutions for Hungary's minorities in a speech delivered in Budapest a few days earlier. In fact, Imrédy had reasserted Hungary's obligation to protect the "non-Magyar minorities" because they had shed their blood for the fatherland like its other children. They belonged to the Hungarian political nation, but simultaneously they were "the devoted guardians of their national characters, speech, and customs"¹⁹. Imrédy had thus reiterated Hungary's willingness to permit individual ethnic peculiarities, whereas the *völkisch* Swabians desired these privileges to be applied collectively. Radical Swabians considered the Prime Minister's declarations to be opportunistic. Imrédy, in their view, wished to humor Hungary's recently acquired non-Magyar citizens,

¹⁵ »Franz Basch spricht zur ungarischen Öffentlichkeit«, DVW, I (8 January 1939), pp. 2—3.

¹⁶ »Auch in Bátaszék wurde die Schulfrage gelöst — aber wie!« DVW, I (5 February 1939), p. 4.

¹⁷ Tilkovszky, *Ez volt a Volksbund*, pp. 41—42; Paikert, G. C.: *The Danube Swabians*, The Hague, 1967, pp. 167—168.

¹⁸ »Volksgruppe«, DVW, I (15 January 1939), p. 3.

¹⁹ »Die neue nationale Front-Bewegung des ungarischen Lebens, Große Rede des Ministerpräsidenten«, DVW, I (15 January 1939), p. 3.

some of whom were Germans. He wanted to convince these peoples that Hungary treated the non-Magyar minorities magnanimously, and thereby encourage other ethnic expatriates to rejoin the Hungarian fold. And, of course, Imrédy also hoped to impress Berlin with Budapest's purported change of heart in the much-criticized treatment of ethnic, especially Swabian, minorities.

The *völkisch* Swabians attacked the government on still another thorny issue. DVW complained that barely fifty schools existed in the country's 400-odd Swabian communities where reading, writing, and arithmetic were being taught in German. About 200 schools had been transformed into Magyar facilities. Three out of four Swabian parents surveyed had criticized the government's approach to the minority school problem. DVW charged that Swabian parents desiring German schools encountered subtle but pervasive opposition and obstructionism by the secular and ecclesiastical authorities, who defied the Prime Minister's solemn Christmas pledge that German children must have access to German schools²⁰.

In the Hungarian Parliament the reaction against Swabian assertiveness mounted. On 18 January, several deputies, including the Speaker of the House, reproved the Hungarian National Socialist deputy Count Sándor Festetich for implying that the police harassed VDU members for no other reason than that they were Germans²¹. One week later, a Member of Parliament reported that his constituents in a Swabian village near Budapest had lodged a complaint because the authorities had introduced a German (*i. e.* bilingual) elementary school against parental wishes. Allegedly, they desired instruction exclusively in Magyar for their children. Another Member cited similar examples in Pest County, and he pilloried the Swabians for demanding special rights; he also criticized the Prime Minister for having given the *Volksbund* permission to function, and for negotiating with its leaders. He would rather see Swabian malcontents emigrate to Germany²².

Minister of Education Count Pál Teleki's speech in Parliament reiterated the government's position on the minority issue. He also dashed the notion that he might permit any sudden change in the way the minority school system was being administered. He would forbid any alterations conceived in haste or introduced under duress. Most importantly for the radical Swabians, Teleki rejected any school plan predicated on the concept of collective *völkisch* representation. On the contrary; the government would consider complaints and suggestions only if they were indis-

²⁰ »Ist die Schulordnung durchgeführt?« and »Wie führt man die neue Schulordnung durch?« DVW, I (15 January 1939), p. 3. Also see subsequent DVW issues for village-by-village surveys on the school problem to document pervasive violations of the school laws by the local authorities.

²¹ »Sturm im Parlament wegen des Volksbundes«, DVW, I (22 January 1939), p. 2.

²² »Das Neueste. Die Schulfrage im Parlament«, DVW, I (29 January 1939), p. 10.

putably lodged by individual parents, not via petitions obviously solicited collectively by the *Volksbund*²³.

DVW disputed Teleki's basic premises regarding nationality rights and minority education, and especially scorned his determination to regulate school language on the basis of individual parental choice. The newspaper wanted this issue determined by the "eternal standards of Volkstum". Any other solution would produce strife each academic year, and the German *Volksgruppe* would be in constant danger of being assimilated. The burning question was whether Hungary in fact desired to Magyarize the Swabians. It believed that Teleki's scheme would definitely ensure the eventual absorption of the Swabians into the Magyar stream²⁴.

The Hungarian anti-*völkisch* campaign soon spilled over into the international arena. During his 16—17 January visit to Germany, Hungarian Foreign Minister Count István Csáky pledged that his government would soon remedy the Swabian school problem, especially in the confessional institutions, where the minority school laws did not apply. But Csáky also deplored the mushrooming growth of "unwelcome symptoms" in certain Swabian circles (*i. e.*, the *Volksbund*). The radicals' illegal machinations against the security of the Hungarian state threatened to undermine centuries'-long Magyar-Swabian amity, Csáky warned. Moreover, he traced the source of these disturbances to Germany. The Germans denied Reich complicity in any alleged anti-Hungarian plottings, and demanded proof of illegal interference by Third Reich agencies²⁵.

Franz Basch sought to counteract Csáky's anti-*völkisch* complaints with the German regime by appealing directly to the Third Reich's public. In the February issue of *Volk und Reich* Basch cited the nationality problem as one of Hungary's gravest difficulties, a crisis to be resolved only by a truly resourceful and fearless Hungarian statesman. But first, the Magyars would have to jettison mountains of erroneous notions and shed centuries of anti-German prejudice. At the moment, the 1935 school law had yet to be implemented to the satisfaction of Hungary's German *Volksgruppe*. The Swabians still lacked representation in the Hungarian Parliament, and were compelled to accept alien spokesmen (*i. e.*, pro-Hungarian Swabian assimilants) hostile to *völkisch* principles. Basch assailed the Hungarian government for not having fulfilled its promises, resulting in bitter disappointments to Swabians. In his view, the regime pursued divisive policies by utilizing the services of assimilated village officials to undermine the *völkisch* Swabians' morale. This assimilationist era, Basch asserted, was at an end; the Swabians of Hungary were in the throes of a strong and irreversible *völkisch* renaissance²⁶.

²³ »Kultusminister Graf Teleki zur Schulfrage. Eine Antwort auf die Interpellation der Abg. Horváth und Baross«, DVW, I (12 February 1939), pp. 5—6.

²⁴ »Unsere Stellungnahme zur Parlamentsrede des Kultusministers«, DVW, I (19 February 1939), p. 1.

²⁵ »Klarheit«, DVW, I (5 February 1939) p. 1.

²⁶ »Dr. Franz Basch: Die deutsche Volksgruppe in Ungarn. Grundsätze, die gelöst und Rechte, die gewährt werden müssen«, DVW, I (5 March 1939),

The German government thereupon publicly intervened in the minority rights controversy. In a presentation prepared for diplomats and the foreign press, Minister of the Interior Wilhelm Frick reiterated the National Socialist position that all expatriate Germans, including citizens of other states, belonged to the indivisible German *Volks-gemeinschaft*, but that fidelity to the latter need not conflict with a German individual's devotion to the state in which he resided. Frick explained that all minorities throughout the Third Reich enjoyed far-reaching rights. None of them, including the 10,000 Magyar peasants in former Austrian Burgenland, had Germanization forced upon them. Frick threatened that failure to improve the condition of Hungary's German minority might have unpleasant consequences for the Magyars living in Germany²⁷.

By late winter, the *Volksbund* realized that Magyar sentiments were so overwhelmingly anti-Swabian that any plans for corporate status would have to await more auspicious circumstances. On 15 February, Count Teleki replaced Imrédy as prime minister. *Volksbewußt* Swabians viewed the change with consternation. Imrédy appeared to be a pro-Swabian stalwart compared to Teleki, whose anti-Swabian public record spanned two decades. At a 4 March *Volksbund* meeting, Basch expressed his fear that the new government planned to revoke Imrédy's concessions, persecute Swabian *Volks-genossen* in Hungary's western and southern border regions, and encourage the anti-Swabian hate campaign of the Jewish-dominated Magyar press²⁸. But the Third Reich cautioned the *Volksbund* to moderate its attacks on the Hungarian government. Germany desired tranquility in the Danubian region because the projected incorporation of western Czechoslovakia and then of Poland into the Reich would once again demand Budapest's cooperation and good will²⁹.

The Swabian radicals disregarded these instructions. They continued pressuring the Hungarian government, but through changed tactics. In the pages of DVW they began demanding a new nationality law that would enable the Swabians to enjoy a special position in Hungary, albeit short of corporate status. The radicals blamed Swabian difficulties on the absence of constitutional provisions designed for their welfare and protection. Georg Goldschmidt explained that Hungary's current minority legislation, the still valid 1868 Nationality Law, might theoretically protect non-Magyar language rights, but noted that repeated government violations had discredited this statute. In view of the juridical vacuum, the Swabians required a new fundamental law. Nothing short of compre-

pp. 1—2. Also see »Die Lage der deutschen Volksgruppe«, *Nation und Staat*, 12 (1938—1939), pp. 446—448, in a similar vein.

²⁷ »Reichsminister Frick über das ungarländische Deutschtum [aus »Magyar Nemzet« vom 2. April 1939.]«, DVW, I (9 April 1939), p. 2.

²⁸ Országos Levéltár, No. 53cs.C.16 160/1939.

²⁹ Tilkovszky: A német irredenta és Magyarország. A magyarországi népinémet (volksdeutsch) mozgalom útja, *Történelmi Szemle*, 13, No. 3 (1970) p. 393, and his »Volksdeutsche Bewegung«, pp. 75—77.

hensive legislation respecting each nationality's "eternal right" to function according to its own cultural standards would ever satisfy the Swabians³⁰.

On 15 March 1939, Germany incorporated Bohemia and Moravia; Slovakia became a German protectorate, and Hungary seized the Carpatho-Ukraine. These events intensified the expectations of reform for Hungary's *völkisch* Swabians. They hoped that after her new acquisitions, Hungary would be even more dependent on Germany than before. But, as Georg Goldschmidt observed, Swabians anticipating a change of heart in the hostile attitude of the Hungarian press and public were doomed to disappointment. Goldschmidt expected tangible government concessions for the minorities, not the vague Magyar press releases that the newly incorporated non-Magyar nationalities would have to be treated better than in the "old days", if a repetition of the post-World War I catastrophe was to be averted. He deprecated Prime Minister Teleki's announcement that henceforth, Hungary would abandon the defunct nationality policies of the liberal era in favor of King St. Stephen's traditional methods. Goldschmidt had been convinced that Teleki would introduce national autonomy statutes for the Swabians, resembling those the Transylvanian Saxons and the Croats had enjoyed in the vanished Habsburg Empire. He noted that most Hungarian newspapers discussed granting rights to the Slovaks and Ruthenes, but not to Hungary's far more numerous and better-educated German-speaking people. Some papers characterized the Swabians as a menace to Hungarian security, and urged Magyars in mixed ethnic areas, especially in the German-inhabited counties adjoining Germany, to assist the name-Magyarization campaign in order to counteract the more prolific Swabian birthrate³¹.

Subsequent reports in the Hungarian press failed to alleviate the *völkisch* Swabians' disappointment in the way the Hungarian public felt about Swabian rights. On 5 April, *Magyar Nemzet* editorialized that it was not new nationality laws that were needed, but the honest application of existing ones. The 9 April issue of *Új Magyarország* advocated autonomy only for the Carpatho-Ukraine. On the same day, *Esti Újság's* editor, Member of Parliament János Makkai, emerged a lone Magyar dissenter. In his view, Hungary's Magyars must henceforth draw exclusively on their own ethnic stock for strength, and stop Magyarizing Hungary's minorities. The country's ethnic groups must be granted autonomy and given the opportunity to develop their own leaders and intelligentsia. He considered this as the only way to achieve harmony in Hungary, which had once again become a nationality-state³².

Makkai's pronouncement was a voice in the wilderness apparently rejected by most influential Magyars, as the government's recently revived popular name-Magyarization campaign suggested. Since 26 Novem-

³⁰ Georg Goldschmidt, »Um ein neues Nationalitätengesetz«, DVW, I (5 February 1939), p. 4.

³¹ »Auf neuen Wegen?« DVW, I (2 April 1939), pp. 1—2.

³² Georg Goldschmidt, »Einem neuen Ungarn entgegen«, DVW, I (16 April 1939), p. 2.

ber 1938, the VDU leaders had been hoping to regain some of the ground lost in the minority schools and in launching re-Germanization drives among assimilated Swabians. Instead, the Hungarian government appeared intent on further eroding the Swabian ethnic base. On 15 January 1939, the Mohács chapter of the Hungarian War Veterans' Organization had urged all minority members to Magyarize their names, so their patriotism would not be questioned³³. At the end of March 1939 in a convention speech, Dr. József Ambrus, leader of Turul, the official Hungarian youth organization, urged non-Magyar members to Magyarize their names within a stipulated date. This announcement, the government's official newspaper *Hétfő* reported, was greeted enthusiastically with thunderous applause³⁴.

The growth of what appeared to be a concerted anti-Swabian campaign at the highest and most influential levels of Hungarian public life perturbed the *völkisch* leaders. Georg Goldschmidt deemed the situation particularly galling, because according to a manifesto issued by Regent Horthy, the relatively underdeveloped Ruthenes were soon to receive administrative autonomy. Goldschmidt considered it outrageous that the far more literate and culturally evolved Swabians, with their proven fidelity to Hungary, continued having their rights to self-government denied³⁵. In his Easter message, Prime Minister Teleki reiterated that Hungary must readopt the nationality policies of King St. Stephen, in order to ensure the country's smooth development. He totally ignored the Swabians³⁶.

By now, Basch had become thoroughly exasperated by the Hungarian government's failure to expedite the country's existing nationality laws, let alone introducing new ones to satisfy the *volksbewußt* Swabians' aspirations for autonomy. Teleki and Csáky were Berlin-bound on an official visit. Basch wished to inform the appropriate Reich authorities beforehand that the "outwardly pro-German, and inwardly anti-German orientation" of the present Hungarian regime was a painful reality. Early in April, Basch visited the German capital. Upon his return, he threatened that, unless the government granted the Swabians "total mobility", the Third Reich would apply potent remedies to bring Hungary to heel. Henceforth, Hungary would have to pursue unambiguously pro-German policies, introduce effectual anti-Jewish laws, and involve Swabian peasants proportionately in a thorough land redistribution program³⁷.

Basch gambled that his aggressive tactics and strategic timing would bluff the Hungarian government into offering concessions as a means of creating a congenial atmosphere conducive to Teleki's and Csáky's

³³ »Ein sonderbarer Kameradschaftsbefehl der Mohács-er Obergruppe des Frontkämpfer Landesverbandes«, DVW, I (26 March 1939), p. 5.

³⁴ »Geht die Namenmagyarisierung weiter?« DVW, I (2 April 1939), p. 4.

³⁵ »Gleiches Recht«, DVW, I (9 April 1939), pp. 1—2.

³⁶ »Aus dem Osteraufsatz des Ministerpräsidenten Teleki«, DVW, I (16 April 1939), p. 1.

³⁷ Tilkovszky, *Ez volt a Volksbund*, pp. 47—48.

Berlin consultation with Reich officials. Considering the Hungarian public's hostility to past Swabian assertiveness and the government's customary reluctance to yield under pressure, it came as a tremendous surprise when on 13 April 1939, Minister of the Interior Ferenc Keresztes-Fischer released the enabling decree that enshrined the *Volksbund* as the *volksbewußt* Swabians' legal cultural organization³⁸.

To their dismay, however, the Swabians soon discovered that, from the *völkisch* perspective, their new autonomous status left a great deal to be desired. They failed to acquire the freedoms they coveted. The key word in the regulation was "cultural". The Minister stripped all non-cultural activities from the *Volksbund's* range of control³⁹, and changed the designation "*Volksgruppe*" (national group) to "Hungarian citizens of German nationality"⁴⁰. But for the moment the Swabians celebrated. They saw their "victory" as a vindication of their unity, determination, persistence, and fidelity to *völkisch* principles. They thanked the government for its vote of confidence, despite "the vicious anti-Swabian press campaign". Many Swabian demands remained unfulfilled, DVW asserted, but the government's courageous action promised happier times for the Swabians. The VDU thereupon restated its simultaneous devotion to the German *Volk* and to the Hungarian fatherland⁴¹.

The question remains, why did Hungary promise Swabian reform in November 1938, only to renege throughout the winter and early spring months of 1939, and then why did the Hungarian government reemerge with a concession that appeared to be generous just when Magyar-Swabian tensions had reached the breaking point? The Third Reich's influence on Hungarian domestic and foreign policy, and the Germans' oft-repeated concern for the welfare of the Swabians, profoundly influenced and modified Hungarian strategy throughout these months. During the Munich crisis, Prime Minister Imrédy had compared Hungary's past and future path to a "narrow mountain ridge with yawning abysses to the right and to the left of it"⁴². Imrédy's allegory still applied the following spring. Many of Hungary's political leaders admired certain features of National Socialism, even though its brutality repelled and alarmed them. They feared that overwhelming German dominance of east-central Europe might adversely affect Hungary's chances of remaining an influential, let alone sovereign, nation. They dreaded the nefarious influence of the alien Nazi *Weltanschauung* not only on the

³⁸ Turul 104.213/1939-VII.a.

³⁹ Tilkovszky, *A német irredenta*, p. 393. The consequences of these limitations were not realized at the time. See »Der Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn genehmigt«, *Nation und Staat*, 12 (1938—1939), pp. 547—548.

⁴⁰ Tilkovszky, *Volksdeutsche Bewegung*, p. 85, and Tilkovszky, *A Volksbund szerepe Magyarországon második világháborús történetében*, *Történelmi Szemle*, 11, No. 3 (1968), p. 297.

⁴¹ »Der Volksbund genehmigt«, DVW, I (23 April 1939), p. 1.

⁴² Speech of 1 October 1938, cited by Thomas L. Sakmyster, *Hungary, the Great Powers, and the Danubian Crisis 1936—1939* (Athens, Ga., 1980), p. 209; also see his "Hungary and the Munich Crisis: The Revisionist Dilemma", *Slavic Review*, 32, No. 4 (December 1973), p. 740.

Swabians, but on Hungary's impoverished urban and rural proletarian masses as well. They also recognized that the Reich demanded decent treatment of its expatriate brethren in all those states that desired to transact business with the National Socialist regime.

To compound Hungary's problems and isolation, after the Munich crisis Hungary's leaders realized that the Western powers, especially Great Britain, would be neither willing nor able to remedy the perceived injustices of Trianon⁴³. Friendly Italy might have promoted Hungarian interests more vigorously had that country not been eclipsed by the more dynamic and powerful Third Reich. Hopes of economic, political, and territorial gain, as well as the desire for protection against the perceived Bolshevik menace, propelled Hungary into Germany's arms, despite her leaders' apprehensions⁴⁴.

But Hungary's statesmen considered the *volksbewußt* Swabians as perilous to national security as the power-hungry Third Reich's interference in Hungary's internal affairs⁴⁵. The Hungarian dilemma involved balancing obligations to Germany and risks involving Swabian fidelity in formulating policies designed to please the Reich and the German minority without compromising Hungary's sovereignty. The Hungarians wished to defer as long as possible "the evil day" when they would be forced to fulfill all of Germany's demands regarding the Swabians. This explains Hungary's vacillation between promises to the German minority and non-fulfillment of Hungarian pledges, a rotation perennially succeeded by further cycles of paper concessions and violations⁴⁶. The government's "generosity" in April 1939 was no exception in this routine. The enabling decree was merely a Hungarian government gesture to propitiate the impatient and fractious Reich on a problem that was very close to the latter's heart. Hungary also wished to deny its restless radical Swabian citizens use of a contentious issue during a sensitive period in German-Hungarian relations. Only in August 1940, when Hungary became the beneficiary of the German-sponsored Second Vienna Arbitral Award, did that country capitulate to Reich demands by granting the Swabians unconditional autonomy and corporate status under Hungarian law.

⁴³ Sakmyster, pp. 234—235.

⁴⁴ Eric Roman, "Munich and Hungary: An Overview of Hungarian Diplomacy During the Sudeten Crisis", *East European Quarterly*, 8, No. 1 (March 1974), p. 84.

⁴⁵ Tilkovszky believes that the Hungarian leaders' greed for territorial gain overruled their judgment and submerged their fear of National Socialism. See his *Revizió és nemzetiségpolitika Magyarországon (1938—1941)*, Budapest, 1967, pp. 11—12.

⁴⁶ See Michael G. Hillinger, "The German National Movement in Interwar Hungary" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 1973), pp. 217—219.