

8. Under Great-Romania

On the first of December 1918, in Karlsburg/Alba Julia the great National Convention of all Romanians who lived in Hungary came together and declared their merger with the kingdom Romania. This was the logical and just end point after a long fight for freedom and equality of a people, who formed the absolute majority of the population in the region where they lived. When the Romanian population of the city greeted the troops upon their entry in Klausenburg, full of gratitude, the commanding General is reported to have said the following: "Not we have won, but the Romanian mother. To her we owe the credit for the victory!" This was a prudent realization, showing the wisdom and modesty of a man.

It is being said that the way to hell is paved with good intentions. Justifiable one could also say that the way to power is lined with grand promises or with raw acts of violence. This time the former applies. The leading men of the National Assembly from Karlsburg, as late as yesterday, had stood in battle about the continuance of their people. But in the same year the Hungarian government still had closed more than a hundred Romanian schools. In heated remembrance of this wrong and of a past full of sorrow the representatives of the Romanian people were full of lofty ideals of freedom.

Therefore the Assembly proclaimed:

Full national and religious equality for all nationalities in residence

General, equal, direct, and confidential right to vote.

Freedom of the press, freedom to form associations, freedom to assemble.

Agricultural reform for the peasants in poverty.

For workers equal rights, such as those possessed by those in West-Europe.

As if they had lived these days under the consistent and massive threat of losing the peace they demanded:

A community of free peoples should form the peace....

.....in such a way that all nations, large or small, should be secured in the enjoyment of rights and freedoms, now and in the future,

...that war as means to regulate international relation is prohibited.

A National Council was set up with the seat in Hermannstadt. It cared for peace and order in the country.

In view of the Resolutions of Karlsburg on the 8th of January 1919 the representatives of the Saxons came together in Mediasch and, in the name of the Saxon people, declared to consent to the joining of Siebenbürgen. Subsequently the German school of the Protestant Church was left intact without even making a claim to teach the Romanian language there. But instruction in the Romanian language was introduced by the Consistory of the Country because it was recognized as essential.

In politics Idealists never have the last word. In their place step the Realists. That is probably the right thing, but their scope of vision is often limited and in this way the realization of pure ideals is often nullified. This also happened here. Through a new constitution shaped after the French model, the lawmakers wanted to create a unified National State. But there was no more any talk about autonomy of the minorities, like they had been promised in the Karlsburger resolutions and assured by international contracts to protect minorities. The school system of the church remained untouched, but the German civil servants were removed in the administration and the courts or transferred to Romanian settlements. German names of towns were prohibited, only Romanian names were allowed to be used. It was possible to be told that because one eats Romanian bread it follows that one has to speak Romanian. Instead of the Hungarian chauvinism slowly, but more and more a Romanian chauvinism emerged which culminated in the "Numerus Valachicus". Accordingly, everywhere, the percentage of Romanian representatives in business, industry, administration, and in education should correspond to the percentage of the total number of Romanians in the population. After the minorities complained about this to the United Nations in Geneva in 1937, this requirement was withdrawn.

The reform of agriculture originally had been scheduled for social reasons. But during its implementation an unmistakably national element came about in Siebenbürgen. Here the community and church properties fell under the expropriation. Thereby the Saxon communities lost the last remnants of communal forests, pastures, meadows, and acres, which, until then, could be leased by members without land holdings. In Grosskopisch land for pasture and agriculture in the Gerüttern was expropriated. Below the village the Saxon herb gardens were expropriated and given to the Romanians as farmyards. Nobody had built a house there; proof that nobody really needed them. In the Gerüttern south of the community there were also the grounds for the pastors. These were also in danger to be expropriated because there were no more pastors. But because the pastors' lot did not reach the size of 32 Jochs, which the law had prescribed, the church community demanded the pastors' lot as an extension (rather than a lot). They received it and thereby a loss was prevented. The lot remained property of the community, but the proceeds which had been used for the church and the school, were lost to the community.

The church community owned 100 Joch of forest on the so-called Breite, which was not touched by the Agriculture Reform. But in the following years the forest became a material burden for the church. If you compare the yearly sales of wood with the taxes demanded by the treasury one can observe that most of the time the taxes were greater than the revenue. In some years taxes were almost twice as high as revenue. Because of this the fire wood that was cut down for the staff of the church community and the school was very expensive. But this way they also had the opportunity to fetch the wood for construction and the necessary repairs of the church buildings from their own property free of charge. Therefore people perceived as very painful when the forest was expropriated by the Second Reform of Agriculture after the Second World War.

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The outcome of the First World War shook up most returnees to the core. They had fought faithfully for their father-land. More than a quarter of the Saxon combat soldiers at the front had been decorated for their valor. Now, not only the war was lost, but also the father-land. In its place something new and unknown had entered. The world in all its width, mobility, and perpetuation emptied itself into the petty narrowness of everyday life with all its commitments and concerns about family and the community. Their spiritual horizon had been lifted; they had been touched by ideas, which demanded critique of their social standing. Instead of finding recognition in the homeland they had to tolerate the Reform of Agriculture without their ideas having been taken into consideration. The opposite happened. Their pay became less. Also the means to maintain the church and the school were cut. Particularly the loss of the Siebenrichter Forests was most difficult for them because most of the earnings had contributed to maintain the schools. With the loss of the woods the totality of the communities lost more than half of their possessions. To maintain their institutions the church taxes had to be increased significantly. Soon, in some villages these amounted to more than the civil state taxes. At the same time the prices for agricultural goods went lower because the connection to the industrialized regions of Austria had been severed and because the agricultural landowners of Old-Romania produced cheaper. For many it was also unfavorable that members of another people should be judges on Saxon land. Young men, who barely had come home, again would be drafted for the Romanian army. All of this raised their resistance.

A Dissatisfaction Movement emerged in our people, which soon directed itself against the church and the pastors. The church demanded church taxes, and the preachers were accused of having sold out the people of Mediasch in the Assembly of the Representatives, who had decided to merge Siebenbürgen with Romania. But the numbers spoke convincingly for the political maturity of the decision, since the numbers also reflected the percentages of different peoples in the total population of Siebenbürgen at that time.

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At that time in this portion of the country lived:

1.500 000 Romanians

700 000 Magyars and

240 000 Saxons

The Movement came into being because of the dissatisfaction with the new situations, the large contribution requested for church and school, and ultimately by poverty. Perhaps socio-political moments also played a role. The leaders of the Dissatisfied Movement confronted the church with the demand to transfer the schools to the state. They reasoned that the state had promised full equality for all of its citizens, therefore it would be obliged to maintain in the German schools their native language, and even more so, because the schools were financed by the tax money of the Saxons. The other side was of the opinion they must remain under their own administration even under the burden of the most severe sacrifices. Only in this way there would be a guarantee that the school would remain the most important institution maintaining the

unique characteristic of the Saxon people. The experience of the past had taught the need to create a vision of the future and therefore this should define the actions in the present. Forced to draw conclusions about a parallel to the Hungarian rule one could detect first signs of Romanian-nationalistic trends and a rise of ill will towards the unsatisfied persons, which were supported by the majority of the people. In the end all of the school system was kept as it was. It soon became obvious how correct this was. Ridiculously small contributions were paid by the state for maintaining the German schools. At the end of the thirties the payment for a one-class-room elementary school was 400 Lei per quarter. In the budget of the political communities fourteen percent of the revenue was scheduled for the maintenance of the school buildings. This amount was most commonly expended for the Romanian schools. But the maintenance of the German school had to be funded totally by their own municipality, which significantly contributed to the backlog of the teachers' salaries in the poor communities.

In Grosskopisch, too, there were forty-seven men who had joined the Dissatisfied Movement. Most did this out of hardship.

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A few joined out of the spirit of opposition which manifested itself here in the mass movement. They paid no taxes for the church, parents sent their children – under daily protests by them – into the state school where the Romanian language was used in the lessons. Also, two couples without children switched to the Orthodox Church. But when they saw at a funeral of a relative that by their action they lost the security of the community they returned to the Protestant Church. The parents of school children also were taught a lesson to the better and wanted to re-enter their children into the German school. When they were asked out if necessity to pay back-log contributions, some were forced to sign a promissory note for the church, the amount of which often lapsed. How large the poverty of the church was becomes clear from the fact that the representatives of the community had to be invited several times until enough members were present to make an estimate of the costs or to write the bill for the church. The community of the church got into debt because of the poverty of the population and by the world economic crisis so that they no longer could staff the office of the parish priest from 1931-1937 because the community was insolvent. The clerical service was given by deputies in the meantime.

The totality of the population of the country was insolvent. The rate of interest climbed unbelievably high levels. The scarcity of money and the low prices for the agricultural products led, particularly the peasants, into ruin but subsequently also affected the craftsmen and the merchants. Even the state itself was indebted to such a degree that it could not pay the civil servants and the administrative staff, but had to issue government securities for their claims. In the year 1933 the government had to lower the private debts to a third through a remortgaging law. That was an important step towards healing of the country. But heavier than the material damage of the time was that hopelessness and lack of joy taking on new responsibilities got a foothold in the life of our community.