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The Collapse of a Superstate

THE DISSOLUTION OF THE HABSBURG MONARCHY.

By Oscar Jászi . . . Chicago: University of Chicago Press . . . \$3.

Reviewed by
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THE current publication of the Austrian secret documents relating to the origins of the World War will confer on this important book a certain appearance of opportuneness. Nothing, however, could have been farther from the intention of the author than to produce a "timely" work. His purpose is scholarly and philosophic; his book is a product of research and reflection, with no concessions to the general reader in the way of brevity or breeziness and no indulgence in the modes and moods of the moment.

Mr. Jászi, who is now an American citizen and a member of the staff of Oberlin College, has been studying the question of the Dual Monarchy for twenty years or more. In 1912 he published in his native Hungarian a book in which he diagnosed the malady of his country and suggested a remedy. Now that the situation is past remedy, he wishes to present his case once more so that the world may perchance learn a lesson from the unhappy experience of the past.

The problem of the great Austro-Hungarian experiment was that of state organization. Here, for a longer time and on a larger scale than elsewhere in history, an effort was made to build up out of variegated nations and peoples a kind of universal state, and to fill it with a feeling of common solidarity. If the experiment had succeeded, the Habsburg monarchy (the author favors the German spelling of the name) would have solved on its territory the most fundamental problem of present Europe, which is also the problem of the League of Nations.

But the experiment was not a success. Indeed it seemed to fail cataclysmically, though Mr. Jászi is sure that the World War merely hastened a dissolution which was sooner or later inevitable. For the collapse of the Habsburg empire was not a mechanical but an organic process. The empire was wrecked on the problem of nationalism. An imperfect amalgamation of peoples, without a common state idea, but with plenty of mutual distrust and hatred, simply could not endure. A glance at the tables which the author gives showing the distribution of nationalities within the Dual Monarchy is more instructive than many pages of explanation and comment. Forty-five per cent of the fifty-one millions who constituted the empire were Slavs. This is double the proportion of Germans, who dominated the Austrian half of the empire, and more than double that of the Magyars, who virtually monopolized the control of the other half. If one adds Rumanians to Slavs, the total number of the potentially disaffected subjects becomes an actual majority of the inhabitants of the whole country.

But the author is not content to substitute a statistical survey, however illuminating, for a solid historical exposition. He follows carefully, almost doggedly, the various centripetal and centrifugal forces that operated for decades within the empire. The grim wrong is that the experiment might after all have succeeded in some such way as the smaller, simpler experiment has prospered in Switzerland and Belgium. "The more one digs into the history of the monarchy, the more clearly does one realize the long series of faults, errors and crimes which drove it into dissolution."

The author is a liberal of the political complexion of Count Michael Károlyi. If he seems at times to lay the preponderant emphasis on the Hungarian half of the Dual Monarchy that is because of his intimacy with the subject and not because of any exacerbated nationalism. No one could possibly be more fair-minded.

The problem of responsibility for the World War assumes a somewhat different aspect as a result of these investigations. In the author's opinion, although the Central Powers did not alone cause the war, they determined the time of its outbreak. Austria fixed the date of the con-

conflict and Germany did not stop her ally. (The recent disclosures from Vienna seem to corroborate this view.) "That is the reason why the ultimatum to Serbia was purposely so conceived that Serbia would not be able to accept it; why the offer of the Czar to present the conflict to the tribunal at The Hague was rejected; why they watched carefully that all foreign interference for the maintenance of peace should be eluded under diplomatic evasions."

But what of the future in the lands that were once Habsburg domain? Has there been any gain for legitimate national aspirations from the dissolution of the old empire and the establishment of the succession states? A gain there has undoubtedly been, but the old malady persists, less extensive but still virulent. Thus, only 81 per cent of the Yugoslav state, 71 per cent of Rumania, 64 per cent of Czechoslovakia and 62 per cent of Poland belong to the ruling nation. In order to prevent a repetition of the old troubles some revision of frontiers must be undertaken, national minorities must be allowed free local government and their own cultural and educational systems, and trade barriers must be lowered. "If the League of Nations should not be capable of carrying on these fundamental reforms all its jural and educational work will be futile. The disastrous rôle of the former Austro-Hungarian monarchy will be undertaken by other nations."

Mr. Jászi has written an imposing and authoritative work, the most valuable upon the subject in English, both for intelligent analysis and for detailed information. An extensive bibliography and a fairly adequate index round out the book.

