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THE SOLUTION OF THE FIUME QUESTION

By

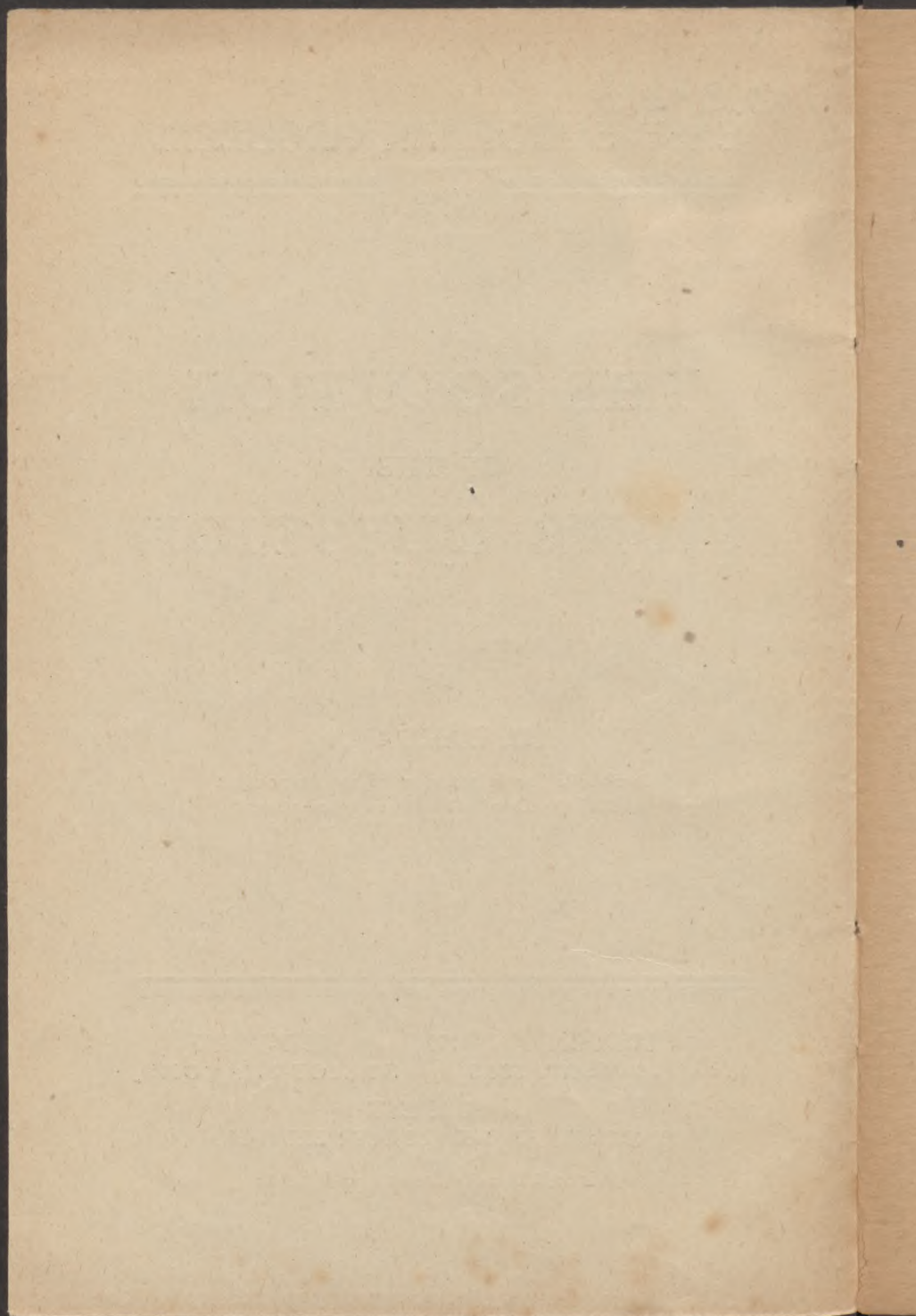
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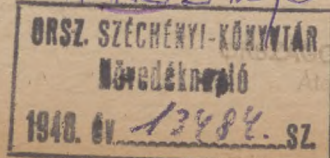
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There is no educated man who would wish to doubt that Latin culture is older and stands on a higher level than either that of the Slavs or that of the Magyars: but it is equally true that there is no man of common sense who would conclude from this fact that the polyglot (Magyar, German, Italian and Croatian) population of Fiume, a town which during the Hungarian régime was endowed with far-reaching privileges in point of language and with autonomy in matters of education, — a population moreover surrounded by territory inhabited by non-Italians, — must be in favour of Italian and only Italian irredentism! For by the same right numberless other ports of the Mediterranean basin could, without regard for the nationality of the hinterland, become the same, seeing that, since the days of the naval hegemony of Venice and Genoa, Italian, as the commercial language of the Mediterranean, has been, and still is, used by the general public there.

St. Veit an Pflaum, originally a Gothic settlement and later the property of the Habsburgs, an insignificant little fishing village and the receiver of stolen goods of the Uskoks, did not attain to any economic importance until it was annexed by Maria Theresa to the Crown of St. Stephen. The majority of the population, on the other hand, which had up to that period cultivated primarily the German language as that of the cultured classes, did not begin to be intensively "Italianata", until, in its fear that the marine administration, which constituted a "common" Magyar-Croatian affair, might be one-sidedly Croatised, the Hungarian legislature of 1867, with the approval of the Monarch, in terms of Article 66 of Act XXX. of 1868, made the "Italians

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of Fiume" a third factor in the decision of the question as to what amendments should be applied to the exercise with regard to Fiume of the autonomy given to the Croatian nation by the Hungaro-Croatian Compromise.

This is the epitome of the Fiume question as it stood before the outbreak of the Great War and as it is established in the so-called "Provisorium" of 1871, which institution, with due regard for the Ministries of Commerce and Finance, which had their seat in Budapest, enabled the Hungarian Government, in its efforts to obtain support for the jealously cherished marine policy of Hungary, to alienate from Zagreb and win over to the side of Budapest a part of the more wealthy inhabitants, by the aid and the throwing into relief of their particularism, their character as "Italians of Fiume".

Owing to the economic expansion of the Croatian inhabitants on the one hand and, on the other, to the one-sided preferential treatment accorded, at the expense of the representatives of the two other political factors, and without discrimination, to the representatives of the commercial and financial houses of Hungary proper who made headway in Fiume in the guise of hyper-Magyarism, this element of "Fiume Italians" was gradually reduced to beggary, sank lower and lower, from being the middle class became the lowest grades of society, was driven willy-nilly into the arms of a Socialism dependent on the methods of demagoguery, and ended by being merely "the mob", which, as is now well known, cannot be employed for the purposes of government. As such it played a certain part in the later stages of the "Fiume question", which, intended originally to act as the Hungarian Archimedean screw for the purposes of marine administration, became a chronic sore point in the relations between Magyars and Croats.

During the Great War — or even earlier, at the time of the establishment of the Entente — the Fiume question began to assume a different shape. The "Fiume Italian" element, namely, which had developed "Italianate" sympathies and, owing to its disappointment in economic

respects, was discontented with the Hungarian authorities, became one of the places of anchorage for the mines laid for the blasting of the Monarchy; and Fiume in a very short time became a hotbed of a centrifugal Italian irredentism, and indeed finally came under the control of the politically irresponsible "bosses" of business concerns possessing no political weight but employing characteristically American methods and exploiting every opportunity for their own ends.

Herein, however, we may at the same time find a guarantee that the present situation in Fiume will possess no political significance likely to influence the future, and that it will not prejudice any solution calculated to secure business prosperity on the one hand for Fiume, and on the other — *last not least* — for the autochthonous inhabitants of Fiume, at least on a basis of parity.

When on the other hand the Monarchy finally fell to pieces and the desired object had been attained, it must have been with certain mental reservations of a comic character that the irredentist leaders of Fiume and the prominent Italian statesmen began their negotiations; for Italy has surely no need of Fiume, while the people of Fiume are quite sick of Italy, and the present hunger-blockade is quite enough for them by way of a fore-taste of the economic decadence in store for them in the event of the realisation of their dream of incorporation in a Greater Italy.

Since the close of the Great War, however, the Fiume question has assumed the dimensions of a question of international import far in excess of merely Campanilistic standpoints, and has already become a "crux", not only to the Powers of Europe, but to America too.

Certain British circles, which see in the Hungarians, not the great enemy or the ally of the Germans, whose plans consequently are dictated, not by a "punitive" passion, but by a calm consideration of British interests, — in a word, the greater part of British public opinion is not only not ill disposed towards Hungary, but would have her

play the role of "counter-balancer", in particular — to mention one of the questions concerned — in the question of the hegemony of the Adriatic.

To these circles the long-drawn-out Fiume question is a hard nut to crack; it is a question which concerns not only Fiume, but British naval supremacy in the Mediterranean. It is interesting that, as we shall see below, the views of these circles today almost coincide with the Hungarian standpoint; and, if we investigate these views from the British point of view, we shall not only feel impelled to discover therein a certain goodwill, but must confess to the presence of a knowledge of the legal relations of the Hungarian sea-board which we had not expected to find in the possession of foreigners. The opinion that has been formed in these sober-minded British circles is as follows.

From the point of view of international peace it is imperatively and unconditionally essential to demand that the Bay of Fiume, the Quarnero and the Morlacca Channel, as well as the coast-line and the townships lying behind the same, which constitute a strategic whole, as being the key of the Adriatic, should never be permitted to serve as the coaling station, naval base or, in other words, the naval harbour of any Mediterranean Power, for such a proceeding would endanger the international trade route to the East Indies at present under the control of Great Britain, seeing that it would be useless for the two exits from the Mediterranean — Gibraltar and the Suez Canal —, to be in British hands, if, at the central point of the route, the key of the Adriatic were to come into the possession of a State which would be in a position to intercept the route at any moment at a point lying between the two ends. Now, situated as it is in the upper corner of the Adriatic, Fiume would be an impregnable naval base.

We must therefore regard it as out of the question that Fiume and its sea-board should ever become the possession of that Italy which has a considerable naval

power at her disposal; and we regard it as equally out of the question that the Treaty of Peace should afford Yugoslavia an opportunity, through the possession of Fiume and its sea-board, of developing into an important Slav naval power in the Mediterranean.

From the point of view of international commerce, on the other hand, it is essential that the *sine qua non* of the re-construction and subsistence of the new States that have arisen out of the dismemberment of the Monarchy, as are their supply with raw materials and overseas products, and later on their regular export and import trade with foreign countries, viz. free access to the sea and a neutral port, should be ensured in a manner as independent as possible of the competition of the international policy of the Great Powers. Now the only port of the kind that can be employed for this purpose is that of Fiume, now in dispute, and its sea-board; they alone are *de facto* available.

And, considering that the re-inforcing of the Central Powers is in the interests of the world-trade of Great Britain too, the economic prosperity of Fiume possesses an importance far beyond mere local interests and deserves the greatest attention of British politicians.

Starting from the standpoints treated above, some regard the future of Fiume to be that of a large free port, not fortified and under international protection.

This definition cannot, however, be regarded as anything more than a mere outline, — indeed, nothing more than a mere determination of the problem; for the idea of “free port” is only a conception embracing questions of customs administration which leaves open all the national, political, financial and international questions requiring solution. This definition, namely, does not give any answer in particular to the question as to how this free port is to maintain itself, or who is going to maintain it or more especially to further its development?

Only one kind of solution is calculated to be rational and lasting. Fiume must be given sufficient

coast-line and hinterland to enable it to maintain itself practically independently, to furnish its own food supplies, and to cover the expenses of its internal administration out of its revenue obtained from its agriculture, its manufacturing industry and tourist traffic. A territory of this kind might extend to include the town and district of Fiume (formerly belonging, as a *corpus separatum*, to Hungary), further the last estates confiscated from the Frangepáns by the State — viz. the fertile valley of the Vinodol roughly as far as Novi, the Isle od Veglia, Gottschee — which is inhabited by a non-Slav population —, and, finally, the east coast of Istria as far as the Arsa Channel as being the western boundary of the former Civitates Flanates as they existed under Roman rule. In this territory parallel measures could be taken to satisfy the cultural needs of the Magyars, Germans, Italians and Slavs, within the limits of an autonomous self-government in home affairs, in the administration of justice and in education, and in all financial matters connected with these departments. On the other hand, commercial, shipping and railway affairs, as well as the police and similar organisations connected therewith and the financial arrangements relating thereto, should be reserved for control by a mixed administrative organ composed of international factors delegated by the three States or polities interested, viz. the "Fiume Italians", Hungary and Yougoslavia, — which organ could exercise its functions for the control of the observance of the terms of peace and of the negative military interests referred to above either through the League of Nations or, on the basis of an agreement between the three States concerned, under the supervision or protectorate of some impartial Great Power, e. g., of Great Britain. A complementary part of this solution might be a new railway line under the "threefold" administrative *imperium* proposed above, to the exclusion of the out-of date "péage" system designed to secure inter-State relations after civil law patterns, which line would lead through Yougoslavia and West-

Hungary from Fiume via Zagreb, Csáktornya and Szombathely straight to Pozsony, and, with the aid of the Danube, would open up a direct economic route to the Adriatic for the other States of the former Monarchy too.

The participation of Hungary in this manner in the *condominium* outlined above would be entirely justified, not only by the enormous investments made by her unaided in the past in the harbour of Fiume, but also by the indubitable fact that she will remain in the future, as she has been in the past, the most important factor in the export trade of Fiume among the countries forming the hinterland of that port. Furthermore Hungary must be a significant factor in holding the balance between Italy and Yougoslavia, her role in this capacity being the foremost pledge for the lasting character of the solution; while, finally, the replacing of her exclusive control of the railway line traversing Hungarian territory from the Yougoslav frontier to Pozsony, in the interests of the other States that have arisen on the territory of the former Monarchy, by the *condominium* under the control of the mixed administration referred to above, would certainly entitle Hungary to claim that she should be enabled in the future to play that part of "third factor" in Fiume and its sea-board which she has played in the past.

The threefold "mixed special police" to be organised anew under the supervision of Great Britain as the Great Power appointed by the League of Nations or to be chosen at will by the three factors, — in other words, the marine and railway police administration, — might at the same time act as a test-institution for the policing of international traffic, and might later be elaborated as a pattern and developed into an institution of the international commerce of the future such as, while duly respecting all national claims and with due consideration for the complete assertion of the various national factors, would secure a state of order conform to international standards.

This solution would have a double advantage: first,

the neutralisation of the Fiume problem or rather its elimination as a point of rivalry between Italy and the Slavs, and, second, the establishment of a practical experiment in the manner of reconciling divergent and conflicting economic, national and international interests.

This solution would at the same time provide a guarantee that the "Fiume Italian", Yougoslav and Hungarian interests in respect of the Northern Adriatic shall not in time be treated as mere "*quantités négligeables*" and sooner or later, either within the limits of the League of Nations or independent of the same, become the prey of an international policy engaged in thrusting foreign interests to the forefront, to the neglect of all local interests and of those of the immediate hinterland which must involve considerable detriment to the latter.

To these views of sober-minded British circles we would on our own part add the following observations:

So far the loudest part in the Fiume question has been played by "Fiume irredenta" itself; while Italy, which, as is well known, has never in the course of history held possession in any form whatsoever of the territory of Fiume, waiving all responsibility, has permitted Fiume — posing in the role of the forlorn lover — to fall into the hands of irresponsible elements, and the Slav suitors would undoubtedly be only too glad to yield a point or two of their "rights" relative to the territory of Fiume, if they could as a result — in addition to a participation in the "threefold" solution proposed above — obtain even a little strip of exclusively Slav sea-board. These two factors have, therefore, so far been audible enough: only the "third factor" — formerly the most powerful of all —, the Hungarian, has till now failed to make its voice sufficiently audible in the interests of its former rights to the general public of Europe, running thereby the risk of its silence being interpreted to mean renunciation of its rights, even by those circles — whether official or not — which, as may be seen from the above remarks, are probably waiting anxiously for the moment when they will at

last hear that voice raised to demand the assertion of the Hungarian legal standpoint based on the principle of parity which will enable for example the British to point to a solution offering a way out of the dilemma which today seems so hopeless.

Therefore the time has come for the cause of Hungary to be represented, not only by the discreet protests of the official Peace Delegation which is under the restraint of diplomatic usage, but by the public opinion of the country, which, albeit irresponsible, is for that reason all the more powerful. The statements of these two forums need not coincide, however; indeed, like the different complementary colours, it is only in combination that they are calculated to present a clear picture to the eyes of the Areopagus which is called upon to decide.

The co-operation of the official and non-official circles of the Holy Crown of St. Stephen naturally cannot, however, expect to achieve more by way of result than the restoration and retention of what belonged to Hungary before the war. In contrast to the appetites so enormously increased by the Great War, therefore, the only solution we can propose to the Great Powers anxious to maintain the balance of power in the Adriatic, is one based on claims reduced on the principle of parity, which on the one hand offers the surest guarantees from the point of view of a lasting peace and on the other ensures both, Hungary and Fiume itself, the possibility of the greatest economic self-assertion.

In respect of the British conception of a solution outlined above, which after all is remarkably similar to the political structure of the *Provisorium* formerly in force but complemented by mutual territorial compensations, Hungarian public opinion would, I believe, act best for a pregnant expression of the Hungarian standpoint by extending the system of municipal representation contemplated for the purpose of affording the occupied territories representation in Parliament to Fiume too, demonstrating thereby, in respect of this *corpus*

separatum which was formerly indisputably under Hungarian sovereignty and administration, through the granting of seats in the Hungarian National Assembly to Fiume deputies domiciled in that town, not under the restraint of any official attitude and known to be impartial by all three Fiume factors alike (these deputies acting as it were as the channels for the manifestation of the divergent opinions which cannot, after all, be suppressed for long), demonstrating thereby the claims of the upholder of legal rights standing on the basis of the *status quo ante* exempt from any chauvinistic interpretation.



