

Lord Rothermere and Hungarian Revisionism¹

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The dismemberment of historic Hungary after World War I was an unparalleled tragedy for the Hungarian nation. Revisionism, therefore, provided a powerful unifying force for the Horthy regime between the world wars. Consequently, the rectification of Hungary's prewar frontiers was the most important national concern.

Revisionism generated an extensive literature, including books, pamphlets, leaflets, in various languages.² In Hungarian revisionist literature, besides some recurrent themes such as Hungary's role in the war, and rejection of responsibility for it and the war-guilt theory; Hungary and her relations to the Wilsonian peace; the injustices of Trianon; the political and economic necessity of treaty revision for the stability of Europe, one of the most often discussed issues was the role of the "opposing camp,"³ (that is Britain, France, Italy and the United States

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² For a detailed list of Hungarian foreign language propaganda publications see Tibor, G. Iant "Some Facts about Hungarian Propaganda for Territorial Integrity Abroad, 1918–20," *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1996): 53–56; and for a bibliography of publications on Trianon in Hungarian see Archimédész Szidiropulosz, *Trianon utóélete. Válogatás a magyar nyelvű irodalom bibliográfiájából. 1920–2000* (Budapest: XX. Századi Intézet, 2002).

³ "the idea of revision [...] is not an eager daydream of the Hungarian soul, not the nightmare of a shackled nation, not the sigh of the captive but an actual possibility hinted at by the opposing camp which, after so many vows and promises, has become a first cla

of America) who practically made the Treaty of Trianon, in righting the injustices done to Hungary. This was also underlined by the critical views concerning the Treaty of Trianon advocated by some of the representatives of the British, French, Italian, and American political and intellectual elite.

As early as 1919, there were already some indications that several influential politicians, such as David Lloyd George⁴ and Francesco Nitti, realized the problems with the peace terms for Hungary. During the interwar period the number of those who criticized the Hungarian peace treaty grew. By early 1920 an increasing number of British officials voiced their criticism. Admiral E. T. Troubridge, commander of the Allied flotilla on the Danube; Sir William Goode, director of Relief Missions; and Sir George Clerk, head of a special Allied mission to Hungary and Sir Thomas Hohler, the first British diplomatic representative in Hungary after the war, also complained about the proposed peace terms for Hungary, and, thus, prospects for central Europe. Members of the British Parliament (Lord Bryce, Sir Donald McLean, Lord Cavendish Bentinck, Lord Newton, Lord Montague, Lord Asquith, Lord Sydenham and others) also brought the question of Hungary into discussion, and both houses of the British parliament gave considerable attention to Hungary.⁵ Another well-known critic of the postwar system, John Maynard Keynes, in *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, attacked the peace based on long-term economic considerations and explained that it would shake the

ss mental concern.” A *Budapesti Hírlap* editorial commented on in Wright’s Memorandum to Secretary of State on “Hungarian Affairs in November 1928,” December 6, 1928. Roll# 10 M708 RG59, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).

⁴ In his Fontainebleau Memorandum on March 25, 1919, Lloyd George stated: “What I have said about the Germans is equally true of the Magyars. There will never be peace in South Eastern Europe if every little state now coming into being is to have a large Magyar *Irredenta* within its borders. I would therefore take as a guiding principle of the peace that as far as is humanly possible the different races should be allocated to their motherlands, and that this human criterion should have precedence over considerations of strategy or economics or communications which can usually be adjusted by other means.” Quoted in Thomas L. Sakmyster, “Great Britain and the Making of the Treaty of Trianon,” in Béla Király, Peter Pastor, Ivan Sanders, eds., *War and Society in East Central Europe. Essays on World War I: Total War and Peacemaking, A Case Study on Trianon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 119. Hereafter cited as Sakmyster, “Great Britain and the Making of the Treaty of Trianon.”

⁵ For more detail see Robert Donald, *The Tragedy of Trianon: Hungary’s Appeal to Humanity* (London: T. Butterworth Ltd., 1928).

“inextricably intertwined” economic bonds among the nations of Central Europe and will cause the system to fall, thus “endanger[ing] the life of Europe altogether.”⁶ Although Keynes’ work focused on the repercussions of the Treaty of Versailles, the book generally criticized the peace structure and, therefore, enjoyed popularity in Hungary. Similarly to Jacques Bainville’s book titled *Les Conséquences politiques de la paix* which also pointed out the political shortcomings of the peace settlement and predicted with accuracy its political consequences.⁷

Anything that foreigners said about the necessity of treaty revision “was, of course, seized upon eagerly.”⁸ These opinions became represented, as well as misrepresented. These utterances underlined the Hungarian belief that the revision of the Treaty of Trianon was possible. A British example, one of the most noted foreign contributions to revision, also demonstrates this. The media magnate Lord Rothermere’s press campaign gave popular revisionism in Hungary new energies.

In the summer of 1927 Hungarian revisionism received a surprise boost from abroad. On June 21, 1927 British press magnate Lord Rothermere launched an all-out anti-Trianon press campaign in his newspaper, the *Daily Mail*. In his writings, of which the best-known one was “Hungary’s Place In the Sun,” Rothermere pointed out the injustices and the mistakes in the treaty and demanded the return to Hungary of the areas with clear Hungarian majorities.⁹ Conducted on the pages of a daily paper, Rothermere’s campaign unquestionably put the Hungarian question into the focus of attention in Britain. Furthermore, the Rothermere campaign closely intertwined with revisionist propaganda for

⁶ John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920), 3-26. Etienne Mantoux, *The Carthaginian Peace, The Economic Consequences of Mr Keynes* (Oxford University Press, 1946) was a response to and critique of Keynes’s ideas.

⁷ Francis Deák, *Hungary at the Paris Peace Conference. The Diplomatic History of the Treaty of Trianon* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1972), 349–350. Jacques Bainville’s *Les Conséquences politiques de la paix* [The Political Consequences of the Peace] (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie, 1920).

Jacques Bainville was a French historian and journalist, founder of Action Française.

⁸ Wright’s Memorandum to Secretary of State on the “Trianon Revision Agitation,” November 4, 1927. Roll# 7 M708 RG59, NARA.

⁹ Lord Rothermere, “Hungary’s Place In the Sun,” *Daily Mail*, June 21, 1927. Full text of the article in Wright’s report to Secretary of State. June 28, 1927, Roll#16, M708, RG 59, NARA.

the Hungarian cause in the US: the Kossuth Pilgrimage to New York in 1928 and the Justice for Hungary movement were two of its direct results in America. In Hungary, the Territorial Revisionist League was established and began to publish a series of studies in Great Britain and France on treaty revision. Rothermere also had a formative influence on launching the Hungarian World Federation, which aimed to unite the Hungarians of the world on the platform of revisionism.¹⁰

Prime Minister István Bethlen, not fully pleased with the Rothermere concept of revision, explicitly distanced himself and his government from Rothermere's action, and he judged Rothermere's campaign ill-timed and unfortunate. The correspondence of Baron Iván Rubido-Zichy, Hungarian minister to London, also testifies to this fact.¹¹ Still, free propaganda was useful in retaining and reinforcing revisionist sentiments in Hungary and abroad alike.¹²

As Prime Minister Bethlen commented:

Of course, I am very glad that British public opinion is intently discussing the problem of the revision of the Treaty of Trianon. The Hungarian Government is, however, in no way connected with Lord Rothermere's action, as far as I know not one member of the Government has had intercourse with Lord Rothermere in regard to this matter. Furthermore, the point of view of the Hungarian Government in this matter is well known: we have no intention of at present demanding the revision of the Peace Treaty because in our opinion the situation is not yet ripe for this purpose. The public opinion of the world must demand consideration of this matter and we are only endeavoring to encourage this method of approach by constant but honest information and propaganda to be carried on by Hungarian society in general and the world press.¹³

¹⁰ See Sándor Krisztics, ed., *A magyarok világtörzsszusának tárgyalásai Budapesten 1929. augusztus 22–24* (Budapest: Magyarok Világtörzsszusa Központi Irodája, 1930).

¹¹ Miklós Zeidler, *A revíziós gondolat* [The Revisionist Thought] (Budapest: Osiris, 2001), 116. Hereafter cited as Zeidler, *A revíziós gondolat*.

¹² Ignác Romsics, *István Bethlen: A Great Conservative Statesman of Hungary, 1874–1946* (Highland Lakes, NJ: Social Science Monographs, 1995), 226.

¹³ To support this see the interview with Prime Minister Bethlen regarding Rothermere's activities in the afternoon paper *Magyarország* of August 6, 1927: "Of course, I am very glad that British public opinion is intently discussing the problem of the revision of the Treaty of Trianon. The Hungarian Government is, however, in no way connected with Lord Rothermere's action, as far as I know not one member of the Government h

British official circles had a definite interest in preserving the postwar *status quo* and “so far as His Majesty’s Government [was] concerned” official Britain also distanced itself from the Rothermere campaign and “belittle[d] [its] effect.”¹⁴ Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin’s remark, “Can you imagine anything more dangerous and irresponsible?” is an expressive and conclusive judgment of the lord’s action.¹⁵ On the other hand, Lord Rothermere won many prominent British politicians over to the Hungarian cause, among them Lord Newton, who became an ardent advocate of the Hungarian question in the British parliament.¹⁶

While official circles distanced themselves from Rothermere’s campaign, and his actions did not yield any political results, “Radomír apó,” as he was popularly called, enjoyed the respect and admiration of the Hungarian people, and became the hero of the day.¹⁷ Rothermere was seen as the “savior” of Hungary. Hungarians collected one million signatures in support of Rothermere’s action which were bound in albums, and presented to him in the summer of 1927 in a spectacular London celebration.¹⁸ Songs and poems were written in tribute to him,

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¹⁴ Wright’s comments relating to a conversation with a British colleague. Wright to Secretary of State, November 10, 1927. Roll #7, M708 RG 59, NARA.

¹⁵ Wright to Secretary of State, July 7, 1928. Roll#10, M708 RG 59, NARA.

¹⁶ See Lord Newton’s introduction written to István Bethlen’s *The Treaty of Trianon and European Peace. Four Lectures Delivered in London in November 1933* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1934), ix: “Briefly stated one of the main claims of Hungary amounts to the following: [...] all that is asked for is that all the other former Hungarian subjects should be accorded the right to declare to which State they desire to belong. Since the principle of “Self-Determination” forms the ostensible basis of the Paris Treaties, the demand can scarcely be described as unreasonable [...]”

¹⁷ See Viscount Rothermere, *My Campaign for Hungary* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1939) and Miklós Vásárhelyi, *A lord és a korona* [The Lord and the Crown] (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1977). Hereafter cited as Vásárhelyi, *A lord és a korona*.

¹⁸ Zeidler, *A revíziós gondolat*, 114.

and a memorial was erected in his honor.¹⁹ He was awarded several honorary degrees and positions; for example, he became the *Doctor Honoris Causa* of Szeged University. And when Rothermere's son, Esmond Harmsworth, visited Hungary in May 1928, he and his delegation were received as royalty.²⁰ Hungarian enthusiasm about Rothermere's campaign reached irrational heights when he was invited to the Hungarian throne by legitimist circles in Hungary.²¹

Lord Rothermere's political campaign had an influence overseas as well, when he won over many Americans and Hungarian-Americans after his unofficial visit to the United States in the winter of 1927–1928. While official America ignored him, Hungarian-American communities welcomed the Englishman as the savior of Hungary. He became popular with “the [Hungarian-American] man of the street and of the press.”²² His eloquent, enthusiastic and highly emotional argumentation stressed the responsibility of the United States in creating an unjust peace and appealed to the American liberal and democratic tradition. He had great influence on his audience by reciting popular slogans such as, for example, that “Trianon was born in the US” and made them believe that “Hungary's future will be decided in the United States;”²³ an argument that seemed obvious to some people, but the objective basis of such reasoning was rather unsound.

The American Legation in Hungary continuously informed the State Department about issues relating to Rothermere's campaign, as well as about the press coverage it received both in Hungary and abroad, with special respect to the successor states. State Department documents make it clear that Rothermere's eccentric activities were deemed unfortunate and

¹⁹ A Magyar Igazság Kútja was erected in front of the central building of Szabó Ervin Library, Budapest.

²⁰ Vásárhelyi, *A lord és a korona*, 93-106.

²¹ Vásárhelyi, *A lord és a korona*, 107-130.

²² László Széchenyi to Gyula Walkó, February 28, 1928. Doc. 95. 1928, K66, Hungarian National Archives. For Rothermere's popularity with “the man of the street and of the press” see the relevant articles of the January 5, 1928 and February 17, 1928 issues of the *Amerikai Magyar Népszava*. I.e. “1928,” *Amerikai Magyar Népszava* January 1, 1928, 2.

²³ “Magyarország sorsa Amerikában fog eldőlni,” *Amerikai Magyar Népszava*, April 27, 1928, 2. See also “Trianon lélekharangja,” *Amerikai Magyar Népszava*, April 28, 1928, 2.

harmful, and encouraged false hopes.²⁴ American minister to Hungary, Joshua Butler Wright's somewhat harsh judgment concerning Hungarian tendencies to overestimate the significance of the Rothermere's campaign reflects the official American attitudes toward revisionism. That Wright kept a shrewd eye on Hungarian affairs, especially on revisionist propaganda, is best demonstrated by his following comment: considering the extent to which the Hungarians believed that their difficulties interested the rest of the world, "[o]ne gains the impression," Wright said,

that these people are convinced that Hungary is an important factor in the general European policy of England and other great Powers; this is bred from their intense national spirit and love of country, which, I believe, is unsurpassed anywhere else in the world. It is therefore to be regretted that they appear to be blind to the ill-effects of this untimely agitation.²⁵

Lord Rothermere's activities in the US triggered two systematic anti-Trianon campaigns: the Kossuth pilgrimage to New York in 1928 and the Justice for Hungary movement in 1931.

At the corner of the Riverside Drive and 113th Street, there stands the second statue erected in the US in commemoration of Lajos Kossuth. Hungarians, Americans and Hungarian-Americans alike supported the creation of the statue, which was unveiled on March 15, 1928, during a spectacular ceremony. For the occasion, a delegation of approximately 500 Hungarians, the so-called Kossuth pilgrimage, arrived in New York, representing almost all layers and social classes of contemporary Hungarian society. The pilgrimage was explicitly declared to be a strictly unofficial social and cultural mission and any connections to government or other official or semi-official circles in Hungary were repeatedly denied. That notwithstanding, the Kossuth pilgrimage was a systematic anti-Trianon propaganda campaign in the US. With Kossuth's moral and political reputation as the basis for it, the participants of the Kossuth pilgrimage took every opportunity to speak up for the inevitability of the revision of the Treaty of Trianon.

The erection of the Kossuth statue was a symbolic act. Kossuth generated an image of Hungarians as a freedom-fighting, freedom-loving and democratic nation and it enjoyed a revival during the interwar years.

²⁴ Wright to Secretary of State, July 31, 1927. Roll#7, M708 RG 59, NARA.

²⁵ Wright to Secretary of State, September 30, 1927. Roll#7, M708 RG 59, NARA.

Kossuth, often called “the Hungarian Washington,” came to symbolize democratic and liberal values the American and Hungarian nations were thought to have shared. Such an imagined historical-cultural bond gained special significance in the context of Trianon inasmuch as Kossuth’s political and moral legacy was used to support Hungary’s cause.

The Kossuth pilgrimage was also linked to the activities of the Hungarian Revisionist League, a significant non-government ‘propaganda agency’ established on July 27, 1927 as an immediate outcome of Lord Rothermere’s campaign. The League, in order to gain the widest possible publicity for Hungary’s problem, set up branches abroad. The US capital gave home to the American branch, and Imre Jósika-Herceg was appointed its head.²⁶ Both Jósika-Herceg, the chairman of the pilgrims’ reception committee, and Ferenc Herczeg, the president of the League in Budapest, were ardent promoters of the pilgrimage, and took their fair share in its preparation and organization, and, thus, the propaganda work for revision in the US.

A better-known anti-Trianon campaign was the famous trans-Atlantic flight, popularly known as the “Justice for Hungary” movement in 1931. After Charles Lindbergh’s achievement in 1927, a prosperous era of aviation came and dozens of adventurous pilots of all nationalities tried to repeat Lindbergh’s feat. Hungarians were no exception to this rule. In the summer of 1931 György Endresz and Sándor Magyar made history by becoming the first Hungarians to fly across the Atlantic non-stop. Money was raised both by Hungarians (the insignificant amount of \$45) and the Hungarian-American community (\$5,000) to help the fulfillment of the ocean flight. Imre Emil Szalay, a well-off Hungarian-American entrepreneur, offered a generous contribution of \$25,000 which was indispensable in securing the firm financial background for the project.²⁷ Finally, the Lockheed could depart from Harbor Grace, New York on July 15, 1931. Endresz and Magyar managed to cover the distance of 5770 kilometers almost in 26 hours, thereby setting a number of records.²⁸

²⁶ For more see Miklós Zeidler, “A Magyar Revíziós Liga,” *Századok* (1997/2): 303-351 ; Zeidler, *A revíziós gondolat*, 88-124.

²⁷ Sándor Magyar, *Álmodni mertünk* (Budapest: Aero & Rádió Kft., 1991), 93–95. Vásárhelyi, *A lord és a korona*, 34.

²⁸ Endresz and Magyar covered the distance of almost 6,000 kilometers almost in 26 hours, hereby they flew at 250 km per hour in general, that is at the highest speed ever until that time in the history of flying. The “Justice for Hungary” flight also marked the fi

Although they had to make a forced landing in Bicske some 30 kilometers from their planned destination in Budapest partly due to unexpected technical problems and shortage of fuel, the pilots received the hail due to the heroes of the nation.²⁹ While their flight was momentous *per se*, its significance was increased by the fact that the flight served propaganda purposes. Upon Lord Rothermere's advice, who offered 10,000 dollars for the Hungarian pilot who would manage to fly across the Atlantic, the plane was named *Justice for Hungary*.³⁰ So, the flight besides the triumph of man and technology was a project to call attention to Hungary's seriously troubled political and economic status under the Treaty of Trianon.³¹ Since the Justice for Hungary flight received fairly extensive media coverage, Hungarian revisionism got some international attention again.³² This was, however, quite short-lived. The Hungarian ocean flight, only temporarily and by mere coincidence, diverted attention from other issues of more serious nature, as was the economic and banking crisis which hit Hungary in July 1931.³³

first time that an airplane crossing the ocean had radio contact both with the starting and the landing aerodromes. For more on this see Zsolt Miszlay, "Az első magyar óceánrepülés," *História* (July 2002), 29–30. Hereafter cited as Miszlay, "Az első magyar óceánrepülés."

²⁹ Miszlay, "Az első magyar óceánrepülés," 30. In order to raise money for the ocean flyers the American Hungarian Transatlantic Committee in Detroit issued special Justice for Hungary postcards which cost one dollar each.

³⁰ For more on Rothermere's relations to the pilots see Vásárhelyi, *A lord és a korona*, 62–65.

³¹ Nándor Dreisziger, "The 'Justice for Hungary' Ocean Flight: The Trianon Syndrome in an Immigrant Hungarian Society," in Steven Béla Várdy and Ágnes Huszár Várdy, eds., *Triumph in Adversity. Studies in Hungarian Civilization in Honor of Professor Ferenc Somogyi on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday* (New York: East European Monographs, 1988), 573–589; Kornél Nagy, "Igazságot Magyarországnak! A magyar óceánrepülés," *Magyar Szárnyak* Vol. 10 (1981), 63–75.

³² As compared to the Hungarian newspapers, which hailed the oceanflight with enthusiasm and admiration and devoted long articles to it, the foreign papers dealt with the issue only in the short news section.

³³ Vásárhelyi, *A lord és a korona*, 40, 46.