

# The Hungarian Economic Goulash

By Sidney J. Abelson

The Blue Danube, it seems, is bluer than ever—and well she might be.

Vienna can no longer be called gay; Czechoslovakia has passed into virtual vassalage; and Hungary, however much she might have sought the joy of life in times gone by, is pressed too hard today by sordid problems to do more than weep bitter tears into the great stream. The Danube gathers up a flow of despair in her head waters not very far from Munich and threads her way through eastern Europe to empty into the perhaps appropriately named Black Sea.

The Danubian states are notorious, of course, for political intrigue and economic bungling. The Hungary of today presents a graphic example of those periodic crises to which such ineptitude has driven the nations of eastern Europe.

No less recently than last November, Hungary had her brief day in the sun and now is cowering in the shadows which fell when that sun set.

In the hectic days following immediately after Munich the Fascist axis handed to Hungary a delectable slice cut from the luscious Czechoslovakian pie. Premier Bela Imredy wept hysterical tears, "This is the first real day of happiness," he said, "Hungary has had for twenty years." The whole Hungarian people rejoiced with him in the recovery of their lost lands—and for the moment the Magyars forgot a few pertinent facts which perhaps hold the clue to their utterly miserable situation today.

Yes, Hungary recovered a rich countryside, for Czechoslovakian democracy had served to encourage within the borders of this country those spontaneous and productive exertions which characterize real civilized progress wherever it has occurred. But this morsel, savory and nutritious as it was, could not nourish a gargantua wasting with disease—and at the present writing (March, 1939) Hungary is a land

deep in depression, weakened by widespread poverty and alarmed by an unemployment roll that has reached its highest peak in the nation's history.

Yet this is only part of the story. There are complications to boot. For one thing Hitler is anxious to reserve Hungary as a granary for his Greater Germany. He would like to see the Jews eliminated, for the Jews in Hungary are largely responsible for whatever industrial and financial progress that struggling nation has made; and the little corporal who is playing Napoleon with such devastating realism, wants no competition for his superior "Aryan" business men.

For another, the Hungarian land owning class, controlling 12,500,000 acres out of a total of 14,000,000 in the nation are opposed to any reform which would break up their estates or jeopardize their titles. They are torn between conflicting alternatives—bewildered and to a large degree helpless, they can find no common ground of practical action. They would gladly let the 3,000,000 landless and poverty stricken peasants starve to death if only they would do so pleasantly. But what about the Jews? "If the dying peasants become too restive couldn't we blame it all on the Jews?" A very bright idea to be sure—except that whatever industry, whatever evidences of modern civilization Hungary can boast are largely in the hands of Jews and perhaps (so might the thoughts of Hungary's landed lords run) it would be just as well to let the Jews sweat and keep things going. On the one hand the people are incensed against the Jews so that a synagogue in Budapest is bombed; on the other hand, the government answers this bombing with a swift imposition of martial law: on the one hand the government signs an anti-Communist pact with Hitler and Mussolini;\* on the other hand, it suppresses its own "Nazi" party:\*\* Premier Imredy proposes anti-Semitic legislation; then, in an atmosphere more reminiscent of opera-bouffe than of

statesmanship, he is forced to resign because he discovers his own grandmother was Jewish: the government leaders seem to be seeking a sort of "controlled" anti-semitism somewhat like the fatuously defined "controlled inflation" of which some Americans spoke a short while ago.

Here indeed is a veritable politico-economic olla-provida—a sort of Mulligan stew which must serve as fare for Hungary's masters instead of her famed goulash.

Many questions concerning the Hungarian situation remain unanswered and unpredictable. They are questions, however, which put in their present form, are of comparatively superficial import, for it will never matter much to the landless whether they are landless under one master or another.

But there is one phase of the Hungarian imbroglio which will bear close watching. The Hungarians who lived for twenty years under Czechoslovak rule learned a few lessons. Now that they are returned to the Fatherland they are able to teach those lessons to their countrymen—and these are easy lessons to which the desperate Hungarian peasants are turning very willing ears. Why not, they ask, divide the large estates in Hungary as they were divided in Czechoslovakia?

Yesterday the reacquisition of Hungarian-Czechoslovakia territory was a brave adventure which diverted starving peasants for a few hysterical moments—today it is the source of an education that may lead in time to a full understanding of the whole problem of land and liberty.

\* It was Hitler, of course, who drew Mussolini into the orbit of Anti-Semitism; and in joining the circle dominated by the Nazi tyrant, Hungary too leaves herself open to be drawn into adoption of Hitler's racial ideology.

\*\* I venture the suggestion that the Hungarian "Nazi" party was broken up at least with Hitler's connivance and possibly at his very direction. The Hungarian "Nazi" were patriotic Hungarians, having nationalistic leadership whose devotion was oriented toward their own Fatherland. Hitler is interested in an Hungarian Nazi party that has Hitler's interests at heart.