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The Vix Mission in Hungary, 1918–1919: A Re-examination

Late in October 1918, in the shadow of impending defeat, nationalist revolutions rocked the Austro-Hungarian Empire. By the time the Austro-Hungarian representatives signed the Padua Armistice on November 3, imperial authority no longer existed in the Dual Monarchy. In Hungary the revolution of October 30 brought to power a coalition government led by the liberal pacifist, Mihály Károlyi. The coalition included the Károlyi-led Independence Party, the Social Democrats, and the Radicals of Oszkár Jászi. This revolutionary government's aim was to liquidate the semifeudal remnants of the old order by introducing democratic, political, and social reforms.

Károlyi counted on Allied sympathy once he had negotiated the Belgrade Convention between his government and the French representatives of the Allies. Friendly relations were expected between the Hungarians and the French Military Mission in Hungary, whose responsibility it was to oversee Hungary's adherence to the conditions of the cease-fire. Much to the chagrin of the Hungarian leaders, the government could only note that despite the presence of the French Military Mission the terms of the Belgrade Convention were being flouted by the Czechoslovaks, the Rumanians, and the Serbs, with apparent French support. Consequently, the Hungarians came to regard the French military representatives led by Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel Vix as enemies of Hungary.

This view of the Vix mission has been accepted by several historians specializing in Hungarian history. Even Zsuzsa L. Nagy and Arno J. Mayer repeated it in their recent publications.¹ The documents that were made available recently at the Archives of the Ministry of War in Paris, however, contradict this traditional interpretation. In the light of these documents, Vix could be characterized as a friend rather than an enemy of the Hungarians. When he arrived in Budapest, he intended to fulfill the obligations of the Belgrade Convention. Since the treaty was regarded by the Károlyi government

1. Arno J. Mayer, *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking: Containment and Counter-revolution at Versailles, 1918–1919* (New York, 1967), pp. 539–62; Zsuzsa L. Nagy, *A párizsi békekonferencia és Magyarország, 1918–1919* [The Paris Peace Conference and Hungary, 1918–1919] (Budapest, 1965), pp. 26–104. For the same interpretation in poetry, see Ezra Pound, "Canto XXXV," *The Cantos, 1–95* (New York, 1965).

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as well as by the hostile successor states as favoring Hungarian interests, Vix could be considered pro-Hungarian. The same term could be applied to Vix's superiors: General Henrys, the commander of the French Army of the Orient, and General Franchet d'Esperey, the commander of the Allied Army of the Orient. Vix's orders were countermanded, however, by the commander of the French forces in Rumania, General Berthelot, whose orders were anti-Hungarian. Moreover, decisions handed down by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris also contradicted some terms of the convention. This conflict of authority over Hungarian affairs seriously weakened the effectiveness of the Vix mission.

As outsiders, the Hungarians were not able to see that the confusing orders to the Hungarian government originated from different sources. Thus they came to blame Vix for being the chief instigator of anti-Hungarian measures. Caught in the middle, Vix was unable to extricate himself from the situation. He lost his head, and in order to reassert his authority he resorted to arbitrary measures in his dealings with the Hungarians. The famous Vix ultimatum was merely a culmination of Vix's exasperation. The documents found in Paris, and others in Washington, make it possible to establish that the ultimatum was not a part of a rightist anti-Károlyi conspiracy supported by Franchet d'Esperey, but the sole creation of the leader of the French Military Mission.

The birth of the Vix mission was directly tied to the peculiar situation the Károlyi government faced once the Padua Armistice was signed. Because in the early days of November the Allies were still fighting Germany, Allied operations in Hungary could not be ruled out. It seemed likely that the Allied Army of the Orient, under the command of General Franchet d'Esperey, would soon enter Hungary in pursuit of the Germans. Such right of invasion, which was set down in the Padua Armistice, was viewed with alarm by the Hungarians. The Hungarian government feared that if Serbian or Czechoslovak troops entered Hungary with the Allies, they would try to occupy large tracts of Hungarian land permanently. The government was therefore anxious to sign a military agreement with Allied representatives so that attempts of annexation by Hungary's neighbors would be avoided.

A parley of the new revolutionary government with Allied representatives that would be concluded with a formal agreement was also seen by Budapest as a *de facto* recognition of the Károlyi government by the Allies. The dilemma the Hungarians faced in this respect was the question of whom to approach. Should Károlyi treat with the Italian Diaz at Padua or with the French Franchet d'Esperey, whose forces were already at Hungary's southern frontier? The appointment of Marshal Foch as Allied supreme commander convinced the Hungarians that they should approach the French.²

2. Michael Károlyi, *Memoirs: Faith Without Illusion* (New York, 1957), p. 47.

By their decision the Hungarians unwittingly recognized an arrangement that had been accepted by the Allies for some time: France's primary responsibility over East Central Europe. Consequently, the Károlyi regime, which had an avowed Anglo-American foreign policy orientation, had daily contacts only with the French representatives of the Allies. The involvement of the French military representatives in Hungarian affairs, which actually caused the collapse of the Károlyi regime and the birth of Béla Kun's Communist republic, is therefore an important chapter of Hungarian and Central European history. Until the very recent availability of archival material in France, the full importance of French involvement in Hungary was little known.

A Hungarian delegation left Budapest on November 6 for Belgrade to negotiate with General Franchet d'Esperey. It was led by Mihály Károlyi and included the minister of nationalities Oszkár Jászi, the noted publicist Lajos Hatvany, and the representatives of some revolutionary organizations. Captain Imre Csermák represented the Soldiers' Council, and Dezső Bokányi, a long-time labor activist, represented the Workers' Council. On the evening of November 8 the Hungarians were received by Franchet d'Esperey. The reception was cold, and the French general took every opportunity to humiliate Károlyi's entourage. He made anti-Semitic remarks when Hatvany, who was Jewish, was introduced. When Csermák was introduced as the representative of the Soldiers' Council, Franchet d'Esperey became agitated and exclaimed in horror, "Vous êtes tombés si bas!"³ Later in the parley he inquired in a cynical manner if the "socialist" representative understood French. He also indicated that, contrary to their claims, the Hungarian delegates did not represent a democratic and neutral country but a defeated power. He told the mesmerized delegates that he was only willing to talk to them because of his respect for Károlyi, whom he had come to know during the war as an honest man. He urged them to support Károlyi as Hungary's only hope, the only man who could improve the nation's lot. He commended them for coming to see him rather than going to General Diaz, because, he said, it was he alone who had the right to suspend hostilities in his sector.

With the general audience at an end, Franchet d'Esperey then invited Károlyi and Jászi to follow him into his study next door, where he presented his terms. His purpose was twofold. Primarily, he was determined to carry through his intended march on Berlin. For this reason, he demanded that all strategic points in Hungary be occupied and all means of communications be secured. His secondary purpose was to establish a line of demarcation between the Allied and Hungarian forces. Károlyi and Jászi were handed a map of the Balkans and Hungary with a red line drawn across it. The area that was to come under Allied occupation included the Hungarian territory of the Bánát (Bánság). On the advice of his Serbian aides, Franchet d'Esperey planned

3. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

to have Serbian troops occupy the Bánát. Article 17 of the terms, however, guaranteed that the kingdom of Hungary would remain under Hungarian jurisdiction.⁴ Once the terms had been agreed on, the Hungarians insisted on telegraphing the Supreme Council in Versailles to signal their acceptance of the military convention on condition that, pending the signature of the peace treaty, the frontiers of Hungary, excluding Croatia and Slavonia, were to be respected by the Allies, and that in case of a German attack the interests of Hungary were to be protected.

Thus, despite Franchet d'Esperey's hectoring, the Hungarians were offered reasonably fair terms and accepted them provisionally. The delegation then returned to the Hungarian capital to await the Supreme Council's answer and to have the convention ratified by the revolutionary National Council. On November 12 Franchet d'Esperey forwarded to the Hungarian government Versailles's reply. Signed by Clemenceau, it declared that Franchet d'Esperey could discuss only military questions with Károlyi, making it clear that the Belgrade Convention was of a purely military character.⁵ The following day a Hungarian delegation, led by Special Ambassador Béla Linder, formally accepted the terms of the convention in Belgrade.

The convention required the demobilization of all Hungarian forces with the exception of six infantry divisions and a cavalry division intended to preserve internal order. The prescribed demarcation line followed the upper valley of the Szamos (Someş) River, went through Beszterce (Bistrița) and Marosvásárhely (Tirgu-Mureş) to the Maros (Mureş) River, along it to its union with the Tisza River through Baja and Pécs and along the Drava River, following the border of Croatia-Slavonia. The area south of the demarcation line was to be evacuated by Hungarian troops within eight days and occupied by the Allies, even though it was to remain under Hungarian administration. The Allies retained the right to occupy all points and localities deemed necessary for strategic and tactical reasons by the commander in chief. The convention further stipulated the evacuation of German troops from Hungary and the severance of diplomatic relations with Berlin. The Allies agreed, in article 17, not to interfere in the internal affairs of Hungary. Article 18—the last—declared an end to all hostilities between the Allies and Hungary.⁶

After the document was ratified by the French representative, General

4. Zoltán Szende, "Count Michael Károlyi at Belgrade," *The Hungarian Quarterly*, 5, no. 3 (1939): 425–37; Jérôme and Jean Tharaud, *Quand Israël est roi* (Paris, 1921), pp. 155–57; Jean Charbonneau, ed., *Franchet d'Esperey, Maréchal de France* (Paris, 1956), p. 64; Károlyi, *Memoirs*, pp. 132–35; Francis Deák, *Hungary at the Paris Peace Conference: The Diplomatic History of the Treaty of Trianon* (New York, 1942), pp. 10–11, 359–61.

5. Vilmos Böhm, *Két forradalom tűzében* [In the Fire of Two Revolutions] (Budapest, 1946), p. 61.

6. Deák, *Hungary at the Paris Peace Conference*, p. 361.

Henrys, and by Linder, it was mutually decided that a French Military Mission would be dispatched to Budapest to supervise implementation of the Belgrade Convention. The mission was organized in Belgrade by the commander of the French Army of the Orient, General Henrys. It included fifty-seven members—twelve officers and forty-five enlisted men—and was headed by an officer of General Henrys's staff, Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel Vix.

The orders issued to Vix on November 20 instructed him to engage in activities that far surpassed the duties originally intended for the supervisor of the convention. In addition he was ordered to gather intelligence information, including general information and reports on the economic situation as well as on military matters. He was to survey the movement of all foreigners in Hungary. This task included the identification of permanent residents who did not originally come from areas of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, and Vix was to find out the reasons for their permanent status. If any of these persons were to leave Hungary, the purpose of the trip had to be investigated. Vix was also asked to report on Austro-Swiss relations, and likewise to survey France's small allies, Serbia and Rumania. Finally, he was to recruit agents in Hungary, though he was warned that the recruitment had to be done with utmost secrecy, since their intelligence work would deal with the actions of the Rumanians in Transylvania as well as with the activities of the Czechoslovaks and the Yugoslavs.⁷

The Vix mission arrived in Budapest on the evening of November 26 and was welcomed by Béla Linder, who was accompanied by a delegation of military officers and by members of the Ministerial Armistice Commission, which, as Linder explained to Vix, was to deal with all questions pertaining to the execution of the Padua Armistice and the Belgrade Convention.⁸ The commission was organized by the Council of Ministers so that Vix would not have to contact individual ministries when need for such communications arose. Thus it included representatives from ten ministries which had some responsibility in carrying out various provisions of the Padua Armistice and of the Belgrade Convention. It also included the commissioners of coal and of rail and water transportation. The Ministerial Armistice Commission was presided over by an army staff officer, Colonel Victor Stielly, who was present at the signing of the Belgrade Convention.⁹

On November 30 Stielly presented the Hungarian government's first

7. Ministère de la Guerre, État-Major de l'Armée, Archives historiques, Vincennes, Paris, Campagne contre Allemagne (1914–1918), carton 106, dossier 2 (hereafter cited as CCA).

8. Vix to Henrys, Nov. 28, 1918, CCA, carton 106, dossier 3.

9. Pál Schönwald, *A magyarországi 1918–1919-es polgári demokratikus forradalom állam- és jogtörténeti kérdései* [The Constitutional Questions of the Bourgeois-Democratic Revolution of 1918–1919] (Budapest, 1969), pp. 159–61.

major demand to the Allied representative. This demand, which often recurred in Hungarian communications, asked the Big Four to occupy Hungary for the sake of avoiding disorder.¹⁰ General Henrys in Belgrade viewed the plight of the Hungarians with sympathy and telegraphed Franchet d'Esperey in Salonika asking him for the occupation of Hungary. Henrys argued that this move was necessary to avoid a clash between the Hungarians and the Czechoslovaks, who were disregarding the Belgrade Convention by creating border incidents.¹¹

Unknown to General Henrys a decision had been reached in Paris on November 25 that was in direct contradiction to the Belgrade Convention. On that day the Czechoslovak minister of foreign affairs, Edvard Beneš, sent a memorandum to the French foreign minister, Étienne Pichon, asking for French aid. In a closely reasoned letter he argued that since France recognized Czechoslovakia within its historical boundaries as an Allied belligerent, it surely could not allow Allied territory to be occupied by an enemy power. The territory in question was Slovakia, which according to the Belgrade Convention was to remain under Hungarian administration until the Peace Conference decided otherwise. Pichon replied two days later and assured Beneš that Paris would send instructions through the Supreme Council to order the withdrawal of Hungarian troops.¹² Thus article 17 of the Belgrade Convention was broken in Paris within twenty-four hours of Vix's arrival in Budapest. France's position was taken without consultation with the other Allies, even though theoretically the Supreme Council was to make collective decisions. In practice, however, the principle of the "primary responsibility" of individual Allied powers prevailed in regions where they were solely or predominantly active.¹³

The order for Hungarian withdrawal from Slovakia was transmitted to Vix on December 2, and its reasoning followed the lines of Beneš's argument. With this order Vix also received directives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs informing him of the French government's refusal to recognize the Hungarian People's Republic and its government headed by Károlyi.¹⁴ Another communiqué, which Vix received six days later, ordered him to treat the Károlyi government as a mere local authority without international status.¹⁵ Vix delivered the French memorandum instructing the Hungarians to withdraw from Slovakia on December 3. The note did not actually define the exact

10. Stielly to Vix, Nov. 30, 1918, CCA, carton 106, dossier 3.

11. Henrys to Franchet d'Esperey, *ibid.*, dossier 2.

12. Edvard Beneš, *My War Memoirs* (Boston, 1928), p. 477.

13. Victor S. Mamatey, *The United States and East Central Europe, 1914-1918: A Study in Wilsonian Diplomacy and Propaganda* (Princeton, 1957), p. 352.

14. Henrys to Vix, Dec. 2, 1918, CCA, carton 106, dossier 2.

15. Henrys to Vix, Dec. 8, 1918, *ibid.*

territory to be relinquished; it merely protested the “occupation of Slovakia” by Hungarian troops who had expelled the Czechoslovak forces that had briefly occupied the area in mid-November. Károlyi objected in vain that it was the Hungarians who had been driven out of Slovakia in the first place.¹⁶

After the delivery of the memorandum, Hungarian public opinion, which until then had been friendly, began to turn against Vix and to regard the French Military Mission with hostility.¹⁷ The Hungarian leaders also came to believe that Vix was a heartless tyrant, and the major participants in the Hungarian government characterized Vix as the *bête noire* when they later wrote their memoirs. This characterization found its way into secondary works as well. In contrast to these views, however, the reports of Vix to his superiors show a certain sympathy toward the struggling Hungarian government, a view shared by his superior in Belgrade, General Henrys.

As soon as Vix handed over to the Hungarians the orders of the Supreme Council, he wired Henrys explaining the difficulty of his position as an overseer of the Belgrade Convention, which was being unilaterally broken over the Czechoslovak question. He was also critical of the position of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in withholding recognition of a government which had some legal status.

Upon receipt of Vix’s communication, General Henrys telegraphed the headquarters of Franchet d’Esperey at Salonika explaining the perplexing situation. Henrys complained that as signer of the Belgrade Convention he was embarrassed because the sincerity of the French was rightly being questioned. He further complained that the small allies of France were abusing the privileges accorded to them. On the question of recognition, he noted that Károlyi would resign if he were aware of France’s position. Henrys accepted Vix’s legal logic in claiming that as a signatory of the Belgrade Convention the Hungarian government could be considered the representative of an internationally recognized successor state. Furthermore, Henrys ominously warned his superior of the dangers that Károlyi’s resignation would bring about. He forecast disorders that would force the recall of Vix from Hungary. To avoid such a situation, Henrys suggested that a scrupulous respect of the convention would help Károlyi to keep order. In addition, he revived Károlyi’s call for Allied occupation of Hungary to avoid conflict between the nationalities.¹⁸

In reply to the urgent calls for justice, Franchet d’Esperey sent some modified orders to Henrys on how to approach the Hungarian question. Though Henrys was still not to permit the Vix mission to negotiate with the Hungarians matters that were unrelated to the convention, Vix was now authorized

16. Henrys to Franchet d’Esperey, Dec. 9, 1918, *ibid.*

17. Henrys to Franchet d’Esperey, Dec. 7, 1918, *ibid.*

18. Henrys to Franchet d’Esperey, Dec. 9, 1918, *ibid.*

to accept Hungarian complaints and other communications, which were then to be forwarded to the appropriate authorities. Apparently Franchet d'Esperey received instructions on this matter from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for the ministry soon after informed the Allies that France did not recognize the governments of defeated states but it did accept communications from them.¹⁹

The Allied commander in chief, who agreed that Károlyi's departure from government would create an anarchic situation in Hungary, ordered General Henrys not to push Károlyi too far. Nevertheless, Franchet d'Esperey called on Henrys to be stern with Hungary, since it was one of the greatest adversaries of France. He also tried to explain to Henrys that the resolution of the Czechoslovak boundary question was difficult because he had received no specific orders defining Czechoslovakia's borders with Hungary. He claimed that such decisions had not yet been made in Paris. At the same time he noted that the occupation of Hungary for political reasons had been rejected by Paris.²⁰

If the Czechoslovak affair put the French mission in an uncomfortable position, Rumanian incursions into Transylvania caused further difficulties for the French guardians of the convention. On December 16 Lieutenant-Colonel Landrot, a liaison officer of General Berthelot, who commanded the French forces in Rumania, informed Vix that according to Allied decisions the Rumanian troops were to cross the line of demarcation and were to take positions at a new line stretching from Szatmárnémeti (Satu-Mare) to Nagy-károly (Careii-Mare) to Nagyvárad (Oradea-Mare) to Békéscsaba. The justification for this move was the need to protect the Rumanian peasants in Kolozsvár (Cluj) and in the Maros Valley.

Upon receiving this information, Vix informed the Hungarians, though he made it clear that his information could not be considered an official order because he had heard nothing from Belgrade on the matter. He asked the Hungarians to order their troops not to resist Rumanian advances for the sake of avoiding bloodshed, and he promised to call on the Rumanians not to advance for the same reason. Vix also sent a hurried report to Henrys on the situation and expressed surprise that such an important decision was not communicated to him directly. He further protested the injustice of the projected Rumanian advances, claiming that the disregard of the original demarcation lines destroyed the convention and for that reason the mission ought to be withdrawn.²¹

19. Foreign Office, French Embassy to Foreign Office, Dec. 31, 1919, F.O. 371/3514 in the Public Record Office, London.

20. Franchet d'Esperey to Henrys, Dec. 13, 1918, CCA, carton 106, dossier 3.

21. Vix to Henrys, Dec. 16, 1918, *ibid.*

Even before Vix had received an explanation from General Henrys, it became evident that the Rumanian advances were ordered by General Berthelot without the approval of his superiors. On December 18 Berthelot ordered Vix to ask the Hungarians to withdraw from Kolozsvár, which was to be occupied by the Rumanians until French soldiers were available for the occupation. Vix was further taken aback by Berthelot's order and bitterly complained to Henrys about the existence of dual authority in Hungary. In addition to receiving orders from Franchet d'Esperey and his subordinate Henrys, Vix was now being commanded by Berthelot, the leader of the French armies in Rumania and southern Russia.

The jurisdictional dispute over Hungary became more confused with the involvement of the French ambassador in Prague, Clément Simon. On December 23 Simon sent to the Czechoslovak representative in Budapest, Milan Hodža, the latest decision of the Supreme Council. The council had established a new line of demarcation between Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Vix, who ought to have been informed about the new delimitation, was kept in the dark, and Hodža proceeded to acquaint Károlyi with the terms of the council. It is likely that Hodža failed to inform Vix because he feared that Vix would delay action by clearing Simon's message with Franchet d'Esperey. Vix finally learned about the content of the message from the Hungarians, who approached him with vehement protests. Hodža's action infuriated Vix, who now saw a third Allied authority in Hungary in the person of the Czechoslovak envoy. The French military representative was at a total loss as to what to do, and considered his position untenable. He saw the Supreme Council's action as a violation of the Belgrade Convention. Furthermore, he considered Berthelot's demands on the Hungarian government, which called for one hundred locomotives and fifteen hundred wagons, in the same vein. In his report to Henrys, Vix wrote: "In summary, the Convention of November 13 is no more than a scrap of paper [*chiffon de papier*]. The attitude taken by our small Allies and by ourselves, the absence of authority capable of redressing abuses, seem to show well that now there is one authority: the right of the strongest."²²

Vix felt that the usefulness of his mission to Budapest would be over unless concerted efforts were made to give the Hungarians demarcation lines that were respected by all. Furthermore, he suggested the occupation of Hungary by French and British forces. He did not know, however, that the British cabinet had voted against such an occupation as early as November 22.²³ He concluded his report by remarking that in the absence of positive action it

22. Vix to Henrys, Dec. 23, 1918, *ibid.*

23. War Cabinet Papers, C.A.B., Nov. 22, 1918, in the Public Record Office, London.

would be better to recall the mission, because in its present position it only existed to endorse injustice and injuries in the name of France.²⁴

Vix's complaints were relayed to Franchet d'Esperey on two separate occasions. On January 11 Henrys asked the commander in chief to occupy Hungary and protect the Vix mission, whose authority was so greatly compromised by the interference of Berthelot and the Czechoslovaks.²⁵ Two days later a more bitter complaint was launched from Belgrade, written in the wake of Berthelot's visit to Budapest, where he had reiterated his demands on the Hungarian government. Henrys warned that Berthelot's demands would deprive the Hungarian government of important resources and would hasten the rise of Bolshevism in Budapest. He also assailed Berthelot's circular argument for his anti-Hungarian measures: Berthelot first accused the Hungarians of violating the Belgrade Convention, which he then wanted to modify because he considered it arbitrary. Such ideas astounded Henrys, since they violated Franchet d'Esperey's commitments to the Hungarians. Henrys therefore considered Berthelot's behavior a threat to the effectiveness of the Vix mission and, furthermore, an encouragement to Rumanian intransigence toward Hungary. Henrys reported that with Berthelot's counsel the Rumanians had "apportioned lands over which only the Peace Conference could make decision."²⁶

Franchet d'Esperey relayed Henrys's complaint to Paris. The Ministry of War, which replied at the end of January, restated Franchet d'Esperey's supreme authority over all forces in the Balkans and subordinated Berthelot to him. Paris further ordered the suspension of any new disturbance of the territorial status quo in Hungary.²⁷ Franchet d'Esperey's authority was further defined by the creation of the Army of Hungary under the command of General de Lobit. De Lobit's headquarters were in Belgrade, and in essence he merely replaced Henrys as Vix's superior. In spite of the curb, Berthelot, whom Franchet d'Esperey considered a megalomaniac,²⁸ continued to flaunt his independence as the commander of the French Army of the Danube and kept on interfering in Hungarian affairs.²⁹

As a consequence of the delimitation of authority in favor of Franchet d'Esperey and General de Lobit, the French Military Mission in Hungary gained a new lease on life. This fact, however, did not make the mission more popular in the eyes of the Hungarian leaders, who were unaware of the conflict of authority among the French leaders. The Hungarian government could only

24. Vix to Henrys, Dec. 23, 1918, CCA, carton 106, dossier 3.

25. Henrys to Franchet d'Esperey, Jan. 11, 1919, CCA, carton 3830-696-70 E.

26. Henrys to Franchet d'Esperey, Jan. 13, 1919, *ibid.*

27. De Lobit to Vix, Feb. 4, 1919, *ibid.*

28. Charbonneau, ed., *Franchet d'Esperey*, p. 150.

29. Comte de Saint-Aulaire, *Confessions d'un vieux diplomate* (Paris, 1953), p. 471.

note that despite the presence of the Vix mission, the Belgrade Convention was being flouted by the Czechoslovaks, the Rumanians, and the Serbs. The French seemed to support these illegal acts. The moderate backers of Károlyi soon came to regard the French behavior as an indication of Allied aloofness to the Károlyi government and thought that a change to the right in the composition of the Hungarian government would be welcomed by the Allies.

Márton Lovászy, the minister of education and a moderate Károlyi supporter, precipitated a government crisis by handing in his resignation at the end of December. He called his step an act of protest against the radical policies of the Károlyi government. In another move, Lovászy and his followers pulled out of the Károlyi party and formed a so-called Bourgeois Opposition. In the hope of securing Allied backing, Lovászy soon paid a visit to Vix. He told Vix of the impending government crisis and claimed that Károlyi was willing to resign in favor of the Bourgeois ministry of Lovászy. Károlyi insisted, however, that any viable government must include the moderates of the Social Democratic Party. Lovászy, who was aware of Károlyi's immense popularity, had an alternative solution. He had suggested to Károlyi that the new cabinet could be made popular if the prime minister were to become the president of the republic—a post that could be created with the concurrence of the National Council. Since Károlyi had refused the offer, Lovászy inquired if Colonel Vix could find out if Paris regarded a Bourgeois government as more favorable. Vix informed Lovászy that he ought to discount Allied military support for his endeavors and refrained from promising him information on the mood of Paris.³⁰ Lovászy left Vix without any further comment, apparently fully realizing that his ambitions were inappropriate.

The departure of Lovászy and his followers from the Károlyi camp forced Károlyi to hand in his resignation to the National Council on January 11. A new cabinet was not formed until January 18, under the leadership of Dénes Berinkey. The government was dominated by the strongest coalition member, the Social Democratic Party. Károlyi stayed on as the president of the republic and continued to lead Hungary from this newly created post. Thus Vix's warnings of a drift to the left resulting from Allied disregard of the convention were amply proven by the end of January. With this fact accomplished, Vix began to worry about the possibility of the outbreak of Bolshevism in Hungary.

The fear of Bolshevism, which preoccupied the minds of Allied leaders, was thus also evident in the minds of those appointed to watch over Hungary. Vix regarded the containment of Bolshevism in Hungary as one of his tasks. The Hungarian Communist Party, which was organized in Budapest at the

30. Henrys to Franchet d'Esperey, Jan. 6, 1919, CCA, carton 106, dossier 2.

end of November 1918, became the target of Vix's attention. The party was led by Béla Kun, who had returned from Russia for the explicit purpose of organizing the party, with Lenin's blessings. Though party membership did not exceed two thousand, the party paper, *Vörös Újság*, seemed to attract a considerable number of readers.

When in January a Russian Red Cross mission arrived in Hungary, Vix considered the event the beginning of an international conspiracy. Though the avowed purpose of the Russians was to negotiate the exchange of former prisoners of war, Vix claimed that, according to an informer, the Russians brought money and propaganda material to the Hungarian and Austrian Communists. Responding to pressure by Vix, Hungarian authorities put the Russians under protective custody on January 7, with plans for their expulsion as undesirable aliens. Before such an act could be carried through, two officers of the French mission called at police headquarters and demanded transfer of custody of the Russians. The following evening the Russian Red Cross delegates were taken to the railway station by French military escorts and, despite vehement protests, were sent to Salonika for French internment.³¹

On January 20 Vix was able to report with satisfaction that since the arrest of the Russians there had been a *détente* in the Communist movement. He attributed the slack to the Communists' lack of money and to the defeat of the Spartacist revolution in Berlin.³² Though the arrest may have been seen in such a salutary light by Vix, the Hungarians were not able to establish any positive connections between the Hungarian Communists and the Russian Red Cross mission.³³

The arrest of the Russians had great significance, however, because it could be regarded as an act that made Vix a military dictator in Hungary. Apparently the great conflicts of the period forced him to abandon his neutral position, and for the first time he acted without consulting his superiors. The international standing of Hungary also suffered a great blow from the incident. The arrest of foreign nationals on Hungarian soil seemed to affirm the Bolshevik claim that Károlyi was a lackey of Entente imperialism directed against Russia. Soviet Russian Foreign Minister Grigorii Chicherin indignantly telegraphed Budapest demanding information on the whereabouts of the Russians and asking for their release. Chicherin further threatened the expulsion of a Hungarian Red Cross mission from Moscow.³⁴

The Hungarian Ministerial Armistice Commission turned to Vix in an

31. Sándorné Gábor, *A magyar munkásmozgalom történetének válogatott dokumentumai* [Selected Documents of the History of the Hungarian Labor Movement] (Budapest, 1956), p. 451.

32. Vix to de Lobit, Jan. 20, 1919, CCA, carton 106, dossier 2.

33. Stielly to Vix, Jan. 21, 1919, CCA, carton 3830-696-70 E.

34. Sürgöny Tchitcherintől, Moszkva, Feb. 9, 1919, *ibid.*

attempt to have the Russians sent back to Moscow. It reminded the French that the fate of one hundred thousand Hungarian prisoners of war was in the balance, and warned that this arrest might mean death for many, while others would be “pushed into the arms of Bolshevism.”³⁵ The Hungarians received no reply to their request, most likely because the arrest was considered by Vix and his superiors as a successful act in stemming Bolshevism.

The decline of Communist agitation in Hungary was, however, a false observation. The Czechoslovak coal blockade, which deprived the Hungarian factories of their major source of energy and brought rail communications to a virtual standstill, could work only in the interest of the Communist agitators. The daily reports of the intransigent behavior of Hungary’s neighbors increased the appeal of Bolshevik propaganda, which called on the Hungarians to fight in alliance with Soviet Russia against the “predatory imperialism of the Entente.” When, for the first time, a Bolshevik demonstration erupted in violence on February 19, it merely illustrated the plight of Hungary. The arrest of the Communist leaders hardly helped to eliminate the real source of popular discontent. Rather, late in February a decision of the Supreme Council which further reduced the imperium of Hungary was eventually responsible for the rise of a Communist regime.

On February 26 the Peace Conference decided to adopt a recommendation of the Supreme Council that aimed at eliminating the almost daily flare-ups in Transylvania between the Hungarians and the Rumanians. The new line of demarcation between Hungary and Rumania allowed Rumanian advances that surpassed the Belgrade Convention frontier by forty-five miles. Furthermore, a neutral zone was to be created between the Rumanians and Hungarians that was to be occupied by non-Rumanian Allied troops. The “temporary frontier” of Arad–Nagykároly–Szatmárnémeti fitted into the strategy of Foch, who was bent on all-out intervention in Russia.³⁶ On February 25 Marshal Foch informed the Council of Ten that he planned to establish a unified front stretching from Finland to the Crimea. For the assault on Russia he planned to use Polish, Czechoslovak, Rumanian, Finnish, and Greek troops. Direct rail connections through Hungary were imperative for his campaign, and the revised demarcation line in Hungary put all essential railways under Allied control. Foch’s plan for an all-out war against Russia was rejected, but the tactical “temporary frontier” was not modified. It was not taken into consideration that Allied control of Hungary’s railways was not needed in the absence of a war against Russia.

Since the rearranged demarcation line was military in character, the orders were sent to Franchet d’Esperey. Bucharest was also informed about

35. Stielly to Vix, Feb. 20, 1919, *ibid.*

36. Mayer, *Politics and Diplomacy*, pp. 544–45.

the new frontier, and Rumanian forces were at once ordered to make preparations for the occupation of the area newly accorded to them.³⁷ The Budapest government was not advised of what had happened in Paris, but unofficial rumors of the decision appeared in the press almost immediately.³⁸ It seems that in response to these rumors of further dismemberment, the Hungarian government ordered the reorganization of the army to make it battleworthy. The army was to become a volunteer force numbering seventy thousand, a size that conformed to the limits set in the Belgrade Convention. Károlyi himself embarked on an inspection tour of the Sekler Division which guarded the Transylvanian frontier. This tour was especially significant because, according to Vix, the Seklers had military and moral superiority over the Rumanian troops in Transylvania.³⁹

On March 2 Károlyi stopped at Szatmárnémeti, and in his address to the troops declared that he would not accept dismemberment of Hungary. If necessary, he said, "we will liberate the country with arms in our hands."⁴⁰ Such a desperate speech by Károlyi indicated a further hardening of attitudes among the Hungarian leaders. The situation was aggravated by exactions made by Vix at the end of February in the aftermath of an incident involving some undisciplined Hungarian soldiers who, acting without superior orders, stopped a munitions train in the northern city of Miskolc. The train, destined for Poland under French supervision, carried arms that the Hungarian government wanted to exchange for coal. The soldiers fired at the locomotive, disarmed the French guards, and refused to let the train pass.

In reprisal for the incident, Vix demanded an immediate indemnity of two million rounds of ammunition.⁴¹ Such an act was indeed contrary to the spirit of the Peace Conference, which allowed for reparations but not for indemnities. That Vix meted out the punishment without consulting Belgrade further demonstrated his dictatorial posture. On March 12, however, a telegram from de Lobit carried a congratulatory message from Franchet d'Esperey commending Vix for the firmness he had exhibited toward the Hungarians.⁴² This encouragement to act independently came at a crucial time, for on the same day Vix received the February 26 decision of the Peace Conference.⁴³

37. Sherman D. Spector, *Rumania at the Paris Peace Conference: A Study of the Diplomacy of Ioan I. C. Brătianu* (New York, 1962), pp. 109-11.

38. Rapport hebdomadaire, Semaine du 9 au 15 mars, 1919, CCA, carton 106, dossier 2.

39. Résumé hebdomadaire de la situation en Hongrie, Semaine 23 février au 1^{er} mars, 1919, CCA, carton 106, dossier 3.

40. Sándor Juhász-Nagy, *A magyar októberi forradalom története, 1918 okt. 31-1919 márc. 21* [The History of the Hungarian October Revolution, Oct. 31, 1918-Mar. 21, 1919] (Budapest, 1945), p. 176.

41. De Lobit to Franchet d'Esperey, Mar. 1, 1919, CCA, carton 106, dossier 2.

42. De Lobit to Vix, Mar. 12, 1919, *ibid.*

43. Arpad Szepal, *Les 133 jours de Béla Kun* (Paris, 1959), p. 81.

Because the document, which was signed by de Lobit, was not accompanied by any specific instructions for implementation, Vix went on to treat it as he saw fit.⁴⁴ Besides defining the new demarcation line, it specified that Hungarian withdrawal must start on March 23 and be completed within ten days. The neutral zone that was to be occupied by the Allies was to remain under Hungarian administration. The Rumanian troops were to advance on the territory relinquished by the Hungarians as soon as the Hungarians were outside the neutral zone.⁴⁵

Vix, who was personally experiencing the growing impatience of the Hungarian government, recognized that transmission of the memorandum was not appropriate at that time, because it would bring the government down. He also observed that in northeastern Hungary the Ruthenian corridor between the Czechoslovaks and the Rumanians was left in the hands of Hungary. Vix, who felt that a Russian-Hungarian alliance in defiance of Allied demands was likely, decided to warn his superiors that through the border town of Csap the Hungarians could in the future be recipients of direct Soviet help. To avoid such a possibility, Vix suggested the establishment of a French control commission at Csap, a scheme that soon carried the approval of Franchet d'Esperey.⁴⁶

While Vix was waiting for the approval of his plan, events in Hungary took an unexpected turn. On March 15 the American military attaché in Bucharest, Colonel Yates, stopped in the Hungarian capital. In the course of his sojourn he visited Lieutenant Philip Goodwin, the representative of the Coolidge Mission. This mission, which had its headquarters in Vienna, was responsible for collecting information on East Central Europe for the American plenipotentiaries in Paris. Colonel Yates also visited Károlyi and lastly Vix.

The Hungarian leader used this meeting to complain to Yates about the Czechoslovak occupation of Slovakia and about the Rumanian advances in Transylvania. Yates told Károlyi that Slovakia was accorded to the Czechoslovaks by the Peace Conference. He also warned Károlyi that Transylvania must also be ceded to Rumania if the Peace Conference so decided. What Yates clearly implied to Károlyi was that the rumors of the February 26 decision were true.⁴⁷ This conversation thus can be construed as the first official notification to Károlyi of the new Allied *démarche*.

44. Goodwin to Coolidge, Mar. 15, 1919, Archives of the Department of State, Coolidge Mission, 184.01102/232 in the National Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as Coolidge Papers).

45. For the text of the memorandum see Deák, *Hungary at the Paris Peace Conference*, p. 407. The examined French material did not contain the memorandum.

46. De Lobit to Franchet d'Esperey, Mar. 15, 1919, CCA, carton 106, dossier 2; Franchet d'Esperey to de Lobit, Mar. 17, 1919, *ibid.*, dossier 3.

47. Vix to de Lobit, Mar. 16, 1919, CCA, carton 106, dossier 3.

After his visit to Károlyi, Yates visited Colonel Vix and reported to him the substance of his conversation with Károlyi. Furthermore, he spoke of his intention to telegraph Paris and ask for the suspension of Rumanian actions in Hungary until the Rumanians were strong enough to defeat the Hungarian forces in case of conflict. He also thought that the prospective neutral zone should be occupied by Anglo-American forces as well.⁴⁸ The suggestion meant the postponement of the execution of the memorandum in Vix's hands.

Vix was greatly taken aback by what Yates had to tell him. Clearly Yates's meddling in the affairs of Hungary raised the specter of dual authority again. The fact that Yates was not even French, but an American, caused further irritation. On March 19 de Lobit transmitted Vix's complaint to Franchet d'Esperey and warned the Allied commander that Colonel Yates had forewarned Károlyi, thus giving the Hungarians time to offer resistance to the de Lobit memorandum.⁴⁹ Vix apparently was moved by the same fear, since on the very same day, while de Lobit was asking for new instructions. Vix decided to act without the orders of his superiors. He got in touch with all the Allied representatives who were in Hungary and invited them to his office for a briefing session arranged for the next day. Lieutenant Goodwin, who was just leaving for Paris, could only guess the purpose of the briefing session; rightly, he thought it would be about the de Lobit memorandum. Like Yates, he also considered its transmission to the Hungarians inadvisable. When he arrived in Paris on March 22, he immediately wrote to the American mission warning of the consequences of the de Lobit memorandum: "The result of this order will be extremely serious. It places a large number of Hungarians under Rumanian domination, and is likely to arouse the national feeling of the people to a greater extent than any other act which has taken place up to the present time."⁵⁰

The only thing that Goodwin failed to perceive was that Vix had called the other Allied representatives together in order to have them present when he gave the memorandum to President Károlyi on the morning of March 20. The memorandum handed to Károlyi was the same one that Vix had received on March 12. To make it more authentic, however, Vix dated the typewritten document in ink as the nineteenth of March, making it look as though it had been sent from Belgrade the day before.⁵¹ With these two perfidious acts, he apparently wanted to show the Hungarians that the note reflected the most recent desires of his superiors and that he had unanimous Allied support.

48. Vix to de Lobit, Mar. 16, 1919, *ibid.*

49. De Lobit to Franchet d'Esperey, Mar. 19, 1919, CCA, carton 106, dossier 2.

50. Goodwin to Grew, Mar. 22, 1919, Coolidge Papers, 184.01102/284.

51. Henri Simonyi, "Visszaemlékezések" [Memories], *Századok*, 1966, no. 1, p. 104.

Károlyi seemed to be taken aback by the memorandum and, after reading halfway through it, asked Vix if he could send for his minister of defense, since the withdrawal was of a military nature. Vix suggested that Károlyi also send for the prime minister, implying that the pullback had political significance as well. At this juncture Károlyi claimed that the memorandum was unacceptable, for it clearly showed that Hungary was to be dismembered. Any government that signed such a document, he added, would not last a day.

After Vilmos Böhm, the minister of defense, and Berinkey joined the discussion, Vix added a new term to the memorandum by demanding that it be accepted or rejected within thirty hours.⁵² Thus de Lobit's memorandum became the famous Vix ultimatum. The encouragement Vix received for acting on his own now gained a tragic importance. Károlyi had little recourse other than to work out his plans of resignation. The ultimatum made it clear that there was no time either to bargain over the stipulations of the note or to appeal to higher authorities. The note thus created a new governmental crisis.

The same morning, after the encounter with Vix, Böhm called on his two military advisers, Colonels Stromfeld and Tombor. He informed them of the contents of the ultimatum and asked them to prepare a map with the new borders and to give their advice on how acceptable they were. Within half an hour they had suggested the rejection of the Vix ultimatum, claiming that the new borders would result in the complete economic, political, and military destruction of Hungary. At the same time Böhm was informed that the crack Sekler Division in Transylvania would refuse to follow orders if the ultimatum was accepted. Colonel Tombor added to the collective decision an appeal for a pro-Eastern policy and for a mass levy to defend the country. He told Böhm that a socialist government capable of organizing the masses must be formed and suggested a compromise with the Hungarian Communists so that there could be cooperation with the Russian forces in Galicia.⁵³

At an emergency cabinet meeting the same day, Károlyi also suggested a Socialist-Communist alliance to marshal forces that could save the country. On the following day the Károlyi government rejected the Vix ultimatum, and at the same time it reported to Vix its demission.⁵⁴ The new government that took its place was a Socialist-Communist fusion government headed by Béla Kun, who promised to defend the borders of Hungary with arms in

52. United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference, 1919*, 13 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1942–47), 12: 414–16.

53. Böhm, *Két forradalom tüzeben*, p. 191.

54. For text of the Károlyi note, see Deák, *Hungary at the Paris Peace Conference*, p. 409.

alliance with Soviet Russia. Thus Vix became responsible not only for the collapse of the Károlyi regime but for the birth of the Communist republic.

The new situation required new approaches; the French Vix mission had outlived its usefulness—it left Budapest for Belgrade on March 25. Its performance could hardly be considered a successful one, for it had failed to fulfill its obligation to supervise the Belgrade Convention. The mission's ineffectiveness was due to the conflict of authority in the region of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire. Most important, the unauthorized intervention of General Berthelot sabotaged Vix's efforts. From January 1919 on, Vix had been unable to cope with the confusing situation, and he proceeded to act in an arbitrary and authoritarian way that was equally uncalled for in the convention. Perhaps he was trying to outdo those who challenged his authority. His ultimatum was the last act of an exasperated man who was willing to invite a crisis in the Hungarian government rather than accept further challenge to his authority by another outsider, this time representing American interests.