

NEWS

NEWS FROM AUSTRIA

AUSTRIA-HUNGARY AND THE OUTBREAK OF WORLD WAR I

Specialists from nine countries came to the Belvedere Palace in Vienna for an international symposium at which interesting discourses on the above topic took place. This meeting was held on June 17-18, 1964, in the former residence of the successor to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Francis Ferdinand of Este.

The Historical Institute of the University of Vienna and the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Ost, who organized the conference, exerted themselves to bring historians from both the East and the West together at the same table for an honest discussion of the reasons for the outbreak of the First World War. As was amply demonstrated during the course of the conference, this meeting was not a confrontation of persons representing two opposite points of view. The list of persons selected to read papers shows that a concerted effort was made to give representatives of the younger generation of historians—a generation no longer handicapped by the revisionist-anti-revisionist quarrel that grew out of national resentments—an opportunity to make themselves heard. As was expected by the organizers of the conference, the participants paid little attention to the question of guilt or innocence in regard to the outbreak of the World War.

In the opening lecture, Prof. Hugo Hantsch (Vienna), the chairman of the conference, went into the main problems discussed at the meeting. Outlining the basic methodological problems involved, he called the listeners' attention to the fact that the outbreak of the First World War demonstrated the "limits of the possibility of objectively discovering the truth." He especially warned against "the presumption of wishing to teach the past how it should have done it." "We can not put clues that were known only at a later time in the hands of the statesmen of 1914. We know only the consequences of the facts; we can not pass judgment on the motivation." Included in his lecture was an urgent appeal to the participants in the conference to be objective.

The first part of the program was devoted to the nationality

policy of Austria-Hungary and its significance for the outbreak of the war. With brilliant eloquence, Prof. Victor Tapié (Paris) described the personality and political ideas of the victim of the Sarajevo assassination, Archduke Francis Ferdinand.

Docent Werner G. Zimmermann (Zürich) endeavored to bring out various new factors which he believed should be taken into consideration in passing judgment on the Sarajevo assassins. In doing so, however, he ran into the danger of putting the accent on the wrong things. The social revolutionary component of the ideology of the assassins was definitely subordinate to its nationalist revolutionary aspects. When he asserted that the nationalism of the assassins was in no way Pan-Serb in nature but already contained ingredients of the "Yugoslav idea," Zimmermann was making historical interpretations that actually originated in a political situation which existed only after 1918.

Dr. Bogdan Krizman's (Belgrade) lecture on "The South Slav Problem and the Outbreak of the First World War" was essentially a supplement to Zimmermann's paper. After discussing political relations between Serbia and Austria-Hungary prior to 1914, he also went into the background of the Sarajevo assassination. Astonishingly, he fully accepted Hans Übersberger's conclusions. In doing so, he gave his assent, without expressly saying so, to the thesis that a significant share of the responsibility for the outbreak of the World War belongs to certain Belgrade circles. To be sure, he rightly maintained that the assassination was only of secondary importance in the outbreak of the war. The antagonisms between the imperialist powers were the decisive causes for the outbreak of the world conflict.

The papers on the conduct of the Czechs, by Dr. Karel Pichlík (Prague), and of the Hungarian government, by Dr. Péter Hanák (Budapest), were models of scholarship. Without engaging in polemics against the old Habsburg state, Pichlík described the changeable tactics of the Czech parties—tactics which were aimed solely at protecting Czech national interests. The Czechs turned against the Habsburg monarchy only during the course of the war, he pointed out. Hanák outlined the changes in Tisza's attitude and conduct during the July crisis. To complete the picture of the Austro-Hungarian nationality problem, Docent József Buszko (Cracow) talked about the

attitude of the Poles towards the outbreak of and during the course of the war.

The main emphasis of the conference was put on the first part of the program, as summarized above. The second part was devoted to the question of how and why the local conflict between Austria-Hungary and Serbia developed into a world war. Unfortunately, the question was answered only in part in the papers read at the meeting. Because K. B. Vinogradov (Leningrad) was unable to come, the important contribution on "The Attitude of Tsarist Russia" was never presented. No plans had been made for a paper dealing with French policy in regard to the crisis preceding the outbreak of the war.

In a paper on "British Reaction to the Outbreak of the War," Prof. D. C. Watt (London) made a first-rate analysis of the changes in the attitude of the English press. Although, on account of the great importance of public opinion in England, such an analysis was fully justified, those present at the conference would have liked to hear more about the policies followed by the British cabinet. The rejection of the Serbian ultimatum by the government in Vienna and the German march into Belgium, which the speaker said were decisive in determining the attitude of the press, were at best a welcome excuse for the British government to decide to take action against the Central Powers. Prof. Brunello Vigezzi's (Milan) contribution was more comprehensive. Nevertheless, he limited himself essentially to the views of the Italian parties on the problems which the outbreak of the war raised for Italy.

Only the reader of the paper on "German Policy in regard to Austria-Hungary during the July, 1914, Crisis" concentrated wholly on the behavior of the politically responsible offices of imperial Germany. When one compares his contribution with those of the other participants, who, to be sure, presented their topics from a wholly different point of view, it seems to be entirely clear that Berlin was the center of political action during the July crisis. The reader of the paper, Immanuel Geiss (Bonn), a student of Prof. Fritz Fischer, consistently upholds the thesis that the main, in fact, the exclusive, responsibility for the outbreak of the First World War falls on Germany. Although his lecture was not accepted without opposition, none of the participants and no one in the audience were able to bring up

anything substantial to refute Geiss' arguments.

Docent Richard Plaschka (Vienna), who, together with Prof. Fritz Fellner (Salzburg), presided over part of the conference, pointed out, in a cautious but fitting manner, that the present-day Austrian has not seemed to be at all embarrassed because so much of the responsibility of the former Austro-Hungarian monarchy for the outbreak of the war has been placed on its German ally. Austria-Hungary had to take the critical and difficult step and undertake a war. In 1914 the Habsburg state believed that it had to face the question of its very existence. This thesis was pursued by Prof. Hugo Hantsch in the final lecture on "Austro-Hungarian Balkan Policies, 1908-1914." Hantsch recommended that historians probe for that deeper meaning of history which can not be found just by reading the texts of the documents but only by attempting to ascertain their meaning.

Quite rightly, Prof. Hantsch could, in his concluding words, thank the organizers, the participants, and the three hundred auditors for their contributions to the conference, for, on the whole, the meeting was very successful.

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OTHER CONFERENCES

The Südostdeutsche Historische Kommission held its annual meeting on September 26-29, 1963, at Eisenstadt, the capital of Burgenland. At the conference emphasis was placed on topics dealing with the history of the Southeastern provinces of the former Danubian monarchy. H. Sedlmayr, of Munich, presented a paper on "The Baroque in the Danubian Area." H. J. Kissling, also of Munich, discussed "The Turkish Problem as a Problem of European History." Harold Steinacker, the most distinguished authority on the subject, spoke on "Magyar Nationalism."

On the invitation of Hungarian historians, an Austro-Hungarian historical conference was held in the Collegium Hungaricum in Vienna on November 21, 1963. In the introductory lectures various Hungarians gave an impressive account of the writings of Hungarian historians, especially those dealing with the problems of the joint Austro-Hungarian historical era. The main part of the meeting was reserved for a discussion of