

Revolutionary Central Europe: Diary of an American in 1919

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***Abstract:** Nicholas Roosevelt, journalist and diplomat, served during the Paris Peace Conference as a member of the Coolidge mission, which had Vienna as its seat and gathered information about Austria and the other countries in the neighborhood. By accident, Roosevelt was in Budapest when the Hungarian Soviet Republic was proclaimed in March 1919. Based upon his experiences in and out of Vienna, Roosevelt wrote diary entries that have never been published. The language of the diary is interesting, not difficult to read, and often humorous, although sometimes politically incorrect in the twenty-first-century sense, as it contains anti-Semitic opinion and sentiment of American superiority toward Central and Eastern European peoples. It gives sharp characterizations on leading figures of the era, from Coolidge to Károlyi, and from Dulles to Wilson. The material is important also since it reflects the private opinions of an American captain about the United States' role in the postwar world and in the process of peace making.*

***Keywords:** Nicholas Roosevelt, United States, Hungary, Paris Peace Conference, 1919, Coolidge Mission*

Introduction

Diaries function as personal mirrors on history. Although reflected and retained through this personal lens, history presented from the first person singular perspective enriches our knowledge about a certain event or period. The following article shows such an example in which Nicholas Roosevelt's unpublished diary entries allow us a glimpse of the turbulent months of early 1919 through the eyes of an American officer. As he confessed, his notes "can only be classed as secondary sources," but also "useful...

as sidelights by an obviously alert observer.”¹ While the Paris Peace Conference was raging on, Nicholas Roosevelt spent crucial weeks in Central Europe, where revolutionary currents were palpable. In the case of Hungary a real revolution actually did take place. Roosevelt’s chronicling of events and persons connected to the emerging new world order in defeated Central Europe clearly adds to and nuances our knowledge about the period in general, and the persons and events in Vienna and Budapest in particular. The diary bolsters the image of the United States as the hope, an honest broker, and the possible savior of these peoples. In addition, the manuscript sheds light on the daily chores of the American fact finding missions sent to the various post-war countries in Europe. Also, the diary affords the reader a closer understanding of the “American view” of the era, although through one person’s eyes only. The diary cannot be taken as an overall description of Americans’ thinking and worldview in 1919, but aside from the idiosyncrasies of Nicholas Roosevelt, the text provides a fair understanding of a rather typical American approach to the postwar European chaos and the position of Central Europe in it.

One hundred and one years ago, on March 21, 1919, the Soviet Hungarian Republic was established. At this crucial juncture of Hungarian history an American officer was spending a few days at Budapest. His job was to gather as much information as possible of immediate postwar Hungarian affairs. Nicholas Roosevelt at that time served in the rank of captain, and was a member of the well-known Coolidge Mission with headquarters at Vienna, Austria. The leader of the mission, Archibald C. Coolidge, sent Roosevelt to Hungary. Since Roosevelt was an avid diary person, he recorded events and observations, names and feelings in his diary. He started writing his diary earlier, and he put together his notes made during his time in Paris and his work with the Coolidge Mission when he returned to the United States in the summer of 1919. The content of this diary—aside from a very short summary that Roosevelt committed to paper in his memoirs²—has never been published. With the centenary of the original diary the publication of his notes and comments provides a primary source for understanding turmoil and chaos, uncertainty and hope in Central Europe a hundred years ago—from the unique vantage point of an American.

1 Nicholas Roosevelt to Mildred Barnes Bliss, October 31, 1966, Series I: Personal Papers, 1878-1967 HUGFP 76.8, Papers of Robert Woods Bliss and Mildred Barnes Bliss, Harvard University Archives, USA.

2 Nicholas Roosevelt, *A Front Row Seat*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1953.

Harry Hill Bandholtz's memoirs about his stay in Hungary in 1919 and 1920 during the formation of what came to be known as the Horthy era (named after Miklós Horthy, governor-president of the country between 1920 and 1944) is well known and was a popular book when it came out.³ Bandholtz's diary entries were important not only as a historical imprint from an American officer in a Central European country after World War I, but its language was also conspicuous as it lived up to the "undiplomatic" characterization in the original title. Bandholtz knew no reign when it came to recording his feelings in his diary, and oftentimes he used derogatory or vindictive words. Thus it is no surprise that the book has remained a constant favorite of readers interested in Hungary's post-World War I history. In many ways a similar flair appears in Roosevelt's diary notes, which serves as proof that Bandholtz's style was not the exception but rather the rule. One has to accept that this style was the zeitgeist, especially when it came to the officers of the US Army—in the intimacy of their diary pages. At the same time, however, one gets to know the taste of the upper class Americans, since Nicholas Roosevelt belonged there without a doubt. He did not hold himself back on the pages and used language that today would be judged politically incorrect. Both conservative and liberal American thinking appears in the writing: the importance of democracy, the perceived immaculate state of the United States compared to Europe, but at the same time the foreign policy inexperience that comes with that status, American cultural superiority, anti-Semitism, anti-Bolshevism, etc. Roosevelt's political incorrectness and at times harsh honesty make the material even more engaging, and the diary entries made during the time of the Paris Peace Conference offer a unique historical insight into the year 1919—whether it is Paris and the American delegation to the Peace Conference, or the American intelligence mission in Central Europe.

Biography

But who was Nicholas Roosevelt? He was born in New York City in 1893 among favorable circumstances. The Roosevelt dynasty was one of the most prominent and wealthiest families in the United States. Some of the ancestors went back to the early colonial times, and one of them even undersigned the Declaration of Independence. Nicholas Roosevelt belonged

3 Harry Hill Bandholtz, *An Undiplomatic Diary*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1933.

to the Long Island branch of the family, and lived close to Oyster Bay. His father, James Roosevelt, was the cousin of later President Theodore Roosevelt, who, after the premature death of James Roosevelt, mainly brought up Nicholas. The boy, and later young man, adored Theodore Roosevelt and he early on sucked in progressive conservatism and foreign policy in Oyster Bay. In 1912, Nicholas worked hard on Roosevelt's campaign for another White House stint, and although it was not successful, the young man was heavily influenced by his famous relative as it came to American politics and view of life. During World War I he first worked as attaché at the American Embassy at Paris for sixteen months, then he was at Plattsburgh, New York, in a non-commissioned training camp. Later he was in Spain as a secretary to the American International Corporation, which errands provided him with invaluable insight into diplomacy and European affairs. At the time of the armistice he served in the rank of captain, and joined the Coolidge Mission in the last days of 1918.

After the Peace Conference, he worked as a journalist for the *New York Herald* (1921–1923), then for the *New York Times* (1923–1946), but occasionally he also contributed pieces to other newspapers such as the *Christian Science Monitor* or *Foreign Affairs*, and he was a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. In 1926 his first book was published that was followed by numerous other writings, usually concentrating on foreign policy. President Herbert Hoover wanted to nominate him to the position of Vice Governor of the Philippines, but partly because of an earlier book of his on that country, Hoover had to withdraw the nomination.⁴ Instead, Nicholas Roosevelt became minister to Hungary in 1930, from which post he resigned when his distant cousin, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, had won the presidency. He did not have a very good opinion about his distant cousin, which he clearly outlined in his 1953 memoir, *A Front Row Seat*. He served in the Office of War Information during World War II, where he was responsible for propaganda activities. In 1946 he retired and lived in California with his wife, Tirzah Gates, but the couple had no children. Nicholas Roosevelt devoted the remaining time of his life to various projects and writing about them, such as culinary activity or natural conservation. He died in 1982.

4 Nicholas Roosevelt, *The Philippines. A Treasure and A Problem*, New York: J. H. Sears & Company, Inc., 1926.

The Diary as History

The diary as a form of and mirror on history has been around for centuries, but the first detailed diary entries came into being during the renaissance, which era produced a previously unknown emphasis of self-consciousness and, in the wake of it, a larger need for self-reflection.⁵ The almost universal practice of putting down observations in a diary, however, really became in vogue in the mid-nineteenth century. Most typically, persons belonging to the upper classes grabbed their pens, but diplomats and politicians in particular were active in this field. Today, this form of preserving the present moment seems to be on the wane, largely due to the digital and globalized world, where the visual image is taking its place. The diary entry is a living imprint of history, since those persons scribbling down events into their diaries reflect fresh experience and observation, and they do it right after the event takes place, so the usually distorting feature of time and distant memory do not play a role. On the other hand, the diary entry can also be seen as a form of literature, even if the notes sometimes in short form are not representatives of fine literature. That is why it has an “unsure status,” because the diary is “an uncertain genre uneasily balanced between literary and historical writing, between spontaneity of reportage and the reflectiveness of the crafted text, between selfhood and events, between subjectivity and objectivity, between the private and the public.”⁶

Obviously, one always has to be on guard when faced with a diary entry, because, if nothing else, the unavoidable subjectivity will play a part. Still, these entries usually reflect history well. This does not mean that we should look at diaries as refutable historical artifacts, since these texts are personal “images” only.⁷ Coloring, magnifying, and distorting facts, as well as errors are all characteristic of it, but that also holds true for professional history writing. Although there exists plenty of counterexamples, in most cases the author of a diary entry does not purposefully distort the story he or she writes down. The author’s primary goal is clearly to preserve the present and not to lie about history.⁸ The author either wishes on reading the entries

5 David L. Ransel, “The Diary of a Merchant: Insights into Eighteenth-Century Plebeian Life,” *The Russian Review*, Vol. 63, No. 4 (Oct., 2004), 596.

6 Rachael Langford and Russell West, eds., *Marginal Voices, Marginal Forms: Diaries in European Literature and History*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999, 8.

7 Gábor Gyáni, “A napló mint társadalomtörténeti forrás,” [The Diary as Sociological Source] *Szabolcszatmár-beregi levéltári évkönyv*, 1997, vol. 12, 25.

8 Pál Pritz, “Napló és történelem,” [Diary and History] *Múltunk*, 2017, vol. 62, 1. sz., 4–6.

to be able to reproduce events and feelings ten, twenty, thirty, or more years later, irrespective of its nature—family, politics, or war; or wish to leave the diary as intellectual inheritance to their family. So, while a historian mainly analyzes the past, a diary entry mainly preserves it. This preservation may show signs of idiosyncrasies, also those of an analytical mind of the observer, but it presents history as it was for that individual. Also, diary entries made during a crucial time period, for example, the period of the Paris Peace Conference, may contain such information that is missing from diplomatic messages and other official reports. The latter contains information regarding “strictly business,” that is, what is connected to the job and position of the author. That is the reason why the personal dimension of the diary is suitable to record private impressions that clearly nuance our understanding of the surrounding events and personalities of the given time.

Depending on time and place, the level of “freedom” of the diary entries may also differ. If someone lives in a society and jots down events when they do not need to worry about the material getting into the wrong hands, the opinion will be a more open one, the author will be committed to a more “honest” style. On the contrary, in the atmosphere of an oppressive regime, a diary author will choose circumventing wording and style, even perhaps resorting to a code, driven by the fear what might happen to him/her if the authorities find the entries, read them, and, as a consequence, punish the author and /or their family. Seen from this point of view, Nicholas Roosevelt could write as freely as he wished, even if some of his entries were put down in foreign countries—he did not need to worry about being punished for their contents. Looking back a hundred years later we are able to appreciate the historical significance of some of the entries in his diaries.

Nicholas Roosevelt’s Diary of 1919

Nicholas Roosevelt thus belonged to the above mentioned cast of “diary people.”

For him it was natural to preserve as much as possible from the world around him, especially when it was eventful and far from his country—and World War I and the immediate aftermath was a perfect place and period for such preservation. Roosevelt was a man of written words. Early on in his life he discovered that he liked to channel his observations and feelings into

inscribed form.⁹ Later, adequately, he became a journalist where he could devote sufficient energy to pursue this passion. His chance to immerse in postwar diplomacy provided a perfect platform to express opinion on persons and events that he met, saw, and experienced. In times when he had no official outlet to contribute to, he often chose the diary as the vehicle for his thoughts.

There have been diary authors who knew that the public would read what they wrote, and their diaries clearly reflected this.¹⁰ In the case of Roosevelt this cannot be detected. Despite his obvious ambitions and a very strong ego, in 1919 he was too young to really believe that posterity would want to read his entries as a point of reference. Still, since he did hope to see his diary entries in print, it might be surmised that he wanted to show himself in a more favorable light than reality called for. And the manuscript is edited—narration connects the entries. But the language that we read is often critical—of almost everybody and everything—, and aside from a touch of too much assumed wisdom on the author's part, it is hard to believe that he left out important sections. Most probably, he thought that narration would give the entries an easier understanding and thus promote the chances of a published book.

It is an intriguing question why the book then did not appear in print. Still, one plausible and apparent answer is that the narrative and diary entries of a captain were not deemed so interesting especially when other works were coming out that dealt with the Peace Conference, and those books were to enjoy a larger interest and readership.¹¹ At the same time, one cannot exclude the possibility that since the manuscript was really a side-

9 Nicholas Roosevelt, *Account of the Republican National Convention at Chicago, June 1912*, compiled from notes taken on the spot by Nicholas Roosevelt. Typescript, after 1912. MS Am 2915. Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., USA.

10 One of the best examples is George F. Kennan, *The Kennan Diaries*, Frank Costigliola, ed., New York: W. W. Norton, 2014.

11 In 1919 and 1920 various books were published reflecting on the Paris Peace Conference, which later were followed by others: Ray Stannard Baker, *What Wilson Did at Paris*, New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1919; Sisley Huddleston, *Peace-making at Paris*, London: T Fisher Unwin Ltd, 1919; John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, London: Harcourt, Brace, and Howe, 1919; Vernon Bartlett, *Behind the Scenes at the Peace Conference*, London: G. Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1920; Bernard M. Baruch, *The Making of the Reparation and Economic Sections of the Treaty*, New York: Harpers & Brothers, 1920; Henry Wilson Harris, *Peace in the Making*, London: E. P. Dutton, 1920; Charles Homer Haskins and Robert Howard Lord, *Some Problems of the Peace Conference*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1920; Charles T. Thompson, *The Peace Conference Day by Day*, New York: Brentano's Publishers, 1920.

story to the dramatic events at Paris, the publishers felt—and in all likelihood they were right—that the American reading public would not be too interested in the complicated story of Central Europe, which was largely unknown to the average American anyway. Another possibility is that Roosevelt had changed his mind in the meantime, and this may have happened for various reasons as well. One of them is that the outcome of the Peace Conference and the spectacular American turning away from Europe in its wake also had a profound effect on him. He may have also thought that the text was often too critical, at places clearly offending certain persons. This may have been the very reason while the publishers refused the manuscript as well. Almost everybody mentioned in the book would have still been alive, many of them prominent figures, and aside from ethnicity and race, Roosevelt gave no quarters in his judgments regardless whether the person was an American or European, a lower ranked man or a high-status official. The publishers may not have wanted to carry the burden and invite attacks if releasing such a text.

The first occasion, then, that Roosevelt had visited Central Europe was in 1919, as a member of the Coolidge Mission. This group of Americans went to Vienna, where they set up a headquarters and traveled to all the countries in the larger region (Hungary, Czechoslovakia, the future Yugoslavia, Romania, Poland, not to mention the host country, Austria). The goal of the various one- or two-person missions was to collect as much information as was possible in the confusing days during the aftermath of the war and the ongoing Peace Conference at Paris. Roosevelt was sent to Budapest during the days when the Hungarian Soviet Republic was established in March 1919, and aside from a few official reports, he chronicled the unfolding events in his diary.

When one reads Roosevelt's diary entries one is struck by certain features that represent and reflect the mood and thinking of a wide layer of American society in the immediate postwar period. The diary reveals two important things. First, it conveys the Coolidge Mission's—and presumably those of other American missions—rhythm of work, daily tasks and challenges, and the general mood that surrounded it. The reader gets to know the hardships of travelling through postwar Europe, also the difficulty of accommodation and securing provisions, and the intrigue of gathering

information.¹² Also, based upon our knowledge about the period and locations, the diary gives a fair picture of the historical and political background of the three major locations it deals with: Vienna, Budapest, and Bucharest.

One of the recurring elements of the diary is anti-Semitism. In the first part of the twentieth century, this view was typical of the American upper class, as the Jews coming from Europe represented neither Anglo-Saxon nor Protestant ways. They had arrived to the United States from Central and Eastern Europe, and tried to keep their own culture, language, and, mainly, religion. This caused dislike by many Americans who wanted to see the immigrants melt into American society as quickly as possible, and feared what American values might become if the Jews and other immigrant groups retained their own culture. In the diary the words “Jew” or “Jewish” appears 72 times, and a large percentage of these are in a negative mode. Roosevelt met a great number of people in Central and Eastern Europe who were different from the American stock and style and whom he without thinking labeled according to their racial origin. For example, after his first meeting with the editor-in-chief of the *Neue Freie Presse*, Ernst Martin Benedikt, he offers the following characterization: “a most interesting Jew, large, fat, square-headed, but with the nose and mouth of the race.”¹³ Since Roosevelt belonged to the American aristocracy, perhaps one should not be shocked that, despite many of his liberal views, he carried his anti-Semitism quite far—at least in his own diaries. In this light it is not surprising that on arriving in the Romanian capital, not a “dirty Romanian,” but a “dirty Jew” received him at the accommodation.¹⁴

In the safe haven of his dairy, Roosevelt was not politically correct, and his unbridled style by default reflects the attitude of many of his peers. The whole text is saturated with the feeling of superiority concerning Europeans in general, but Southern and Eastern Europeans in particular. As he put it, “there is nothing in the world like the great blonde race of the North, out of which we have grown. It is greater than any Latin race, and greater than

12 There are not many such diaries that we know of, but the diaries of two other members of the Coolidge Mission confirm many of Roosevelt’s observations. See, Charles Moorfield Storey Journal, 1918-1919, Massachusetts Historical Society, USA, and Walter G. Davis Diary, Box 1, Folder 16, Walter Goodwin Davis Papers (MS 469), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, USA.

13 Diary entry of January 22, 1919, Nicholas Roosevelt, A History of a Few Weeks (unpublished manuscript), Box 18, Nicholas Roosevelt Papers, Syracuse University Libraries, United States, 79.

14 Diary entry of March 12, 1919, Nicholas Roosevelt, A History of a Few Weeks, 238.

any Slav.”¹⁵ The self-confident young American looked at European customs and thinking with distaste—especially in Central and Eastern Europe. Even if there were exceptions, the peoples living here made a very negative impression on Roosevelt. Generally speaking, the late nineteenth-century Social Darwinism, so prevalent in the United States at that time, can be detected in his words: the excellence of the Anglo-Saxons, but more typically the American political and social structure, which should be imitated by other countries, but the Central and Eastern European peoples with their feudal past and different religion are unsuitable for such a quest. “Politically,” comments Roosevelt, “the Eastern Europeans are badly brought up children.”¹⁶ A good deal of Theodore Roosevelt can be discovered here, but Nicholas naturally carried with him what he had learned and he judged the world accordingly. In the aftermath of the terrible carnage of the war, he magnified the errors of the newly established independent nations, and compared them with the prosperous and secure American homeland—the result of which comparison could only be negative for the Europeans.

In the wake of the Russian Bolshevik Revolution, the fear of social upheaval was palpable in the Western world. Since during the war quite a few Jewish-born immigrants, who were also revolutionary, protested against the war and wanted the United States to withdraw from it, their action only strengthened the anti-immigrant, anti-Semitic, and anti-Bolshevist sentiment already widespread in the United States—and Roosevelt was no exception. To make things worse, the events unfolding in Russia proved to the American elite and a large portion of the country that Bolshevism was a twisted ideology, where a minority tyrannically ruled over the majority, therefore they were anti-democratic, they wanted to do away with private property, pushed back religion, and had a vision of a revolutionary wave engulfing the whole globe—basically denying everything the United States stood for. When he came face to face with revolutionary stirrings in Central Europe, Roosevelt declared, “It isn’t Bolshevism—these people aren’t Bolsheviks—it is merely the work of a few unscrupulous Hungarian and Russian Jews, working with a few scoundrelly [sic] Austrian Jews, and playing on the feelings of a hungry mob to ride into power themselves. The more I have seen of this movement, the wider I have gotten against the Jews. For clever as they are, it is they who are at the basis of this revolutionary move-

15 Diary entry without date, but it is from January 1919, Nicholas Roosevelt, *A History of a Few Weeks*, 77.

16 Nicholas Roosevelt, *A History of a Few Weeks*, 271.

ment throughout Europe.”¹⁷ It has to be emphasized that stemming from his liberal worldview, Roosevelt also recognized and conceded that some sort of social changes must take place, which would not necessarily be harmful, but he clearly could not overstep his prejudices.

Roosevelt sometimes gives a detailed account of his talks with various newspaper editors in Vienna. It is not surprising that the future journalist sought out these contacts for information as to the Austrian and more particularly the Viennese situation. What he gleaned from Friedrich Austerlitz, Ernst Martin Benedikt, or Friedrich Funder, for example, is put down in the entries, and the Q&A's also give a nice summary of the difficulties that the new republic faced in the first few months of 1919. In addition to their predictions concerning the upcoming parliamentary elections, the leftist Austerlitz, for example, said to Roosevelt that there was no Bolshevik danger in Austria, but the food shortage might lead to violent scenes. Benedikt predicted the Anschluss in the future, and declared that only a Germany strengthened by the United States could stem the Bolshevik tide coming from the east. As for the Christian Socialist Funder, Roosevelt learned from him that in the Austrian's view a new Austro-Hungarian Monarchy or a similar constellation might be created in the postwar era.

It is also of significance that Roosevelt more often than not saw things in the correct light, and appreciated various things that others may have ignored. For example, he perceived accurately that all countries and nations in the region were expecting help from the United States. “Everyone,” he wrote, “no matter of what former persuasion or nationality, looks to America—Huns as well as Czechs; Slovaks as well as Slovenes; Austrians as well as Serbo-Croates; Roumanians as well as Ukrainians. America is apparently the referee in this big game, from their point of view.”¹⁸ He found it astounding but had to accept the fact that people here, since the United States could affect the outcome of the Paris Peace Conference, saw political capital in Americans even if they served in minor ranks and did only information gathering in Central Europe. Just like in the case of Austrians in Vienna, in Budapest, too, “no amount of persuasion could convince the Hungarians that our mission was not political and did not carry great weight in Paris.”¹⁹ In his analysis the Hungarian Soviet Republic was basically a

17 Diary entry of April 21, 1919, *A History of a Few Weeks*, 423.

18 Diary entry of April 21, 1919, *A History of a Few Weeks*, 152.

19 Diary entry of April 21, 1919, *A History of a Few Weeks*, 229.

national unity for self-preservation that tolerated even Bolshevik leadership for keeping the country intact, which also reflected well on what had taken place. "The Hungarians," he accordingly noted, "are united in their conviction that Hungary must not be dismembered, have made use of Bolshevism as a last desperate resort to preserve the integrity of their country, and have openly defied the Allies, and set a precedent for Germany to follow."²⁰

At the same time, Roosevelt sized up soberly the relationship among the various ethnic groups in the region, and what the American decision makers or diplomats in the larger sense thought about it. "The violence of racial jealousy among the Eastern European peoples," he commented, "is inconceivable to the more staid Anglo-Saxon mind. And the very strength of this feeling is a factor which our theorists on League of Nations ignore or deny. Yet it is a fact, an ever present fact; and failure to recognize it shows a deplorable ignorance."²¹ But in order to achieve a more just and lasting peace, Roosevelt believed the United States ought to have pursued a more active and courageous path. Well before the German peace treaty was in its final form, he clearly saw that it would end in failure, which would be connected to American amateurishness and indolence. If, he viewed, "we continue our inglorious meddling with international affairs, looked up to as The Hope of the Nations that are down, and as the ideal of disinterested and efficient action; whereas by our inaction we shall soon disappoint everyone and receive the just odium for the disaster to which we have so largely contributed."²² From this opinion, it was a logical step to criticize Woodrow Wilson, and this stemmed not only from party and political differences. Roosevelt was convinced that Wilson chose to use rhetorical sorcery where gaping wounds needed surgery, causing far more lasting damage in the long run. He accused the president of undue and exorbitant optimism, who opted for "a well-worded, moralistic rhetorical sentence" instead practical foreign policy. For Roosevelt such rhetoric would, and he mainly had Wilson's 14 Points in mind, give the false impression that "this verbal patent medicine will purge Europe of her ills overnight, and introduce the reign of brotherly love."²³

20 "The Hungarian Revolution," Roosevelt's report to the American Delegation at the Paris Peace Conference, March 26, 1919, *A History of a Few Weeks*, 367.

21 Nicholas Roosevelt, *A History of a Few Weeks*, 271.

22 Diary entry of April 7, 1919, *A History of a Few Weeks*, 410.

23 Diary entry without date, but it is from late March, 1919, Nicholas Roosevelt, *A History of a Few Weeks*, 383.

A further often occurring feature in the diary entries is Roosevelt's humor. His humor was the inheritance of the Anglo-Saxon tradition, that is, the satirical vein and especially witty comments to the detriment of others that was typical of aristocrats and the elite throughout the nineteenth century.²⁴ Accordingly, sometimes Roosevelt may be on the verge of hurting others and he shuns diplomatic language, but it cannot be denied that he used this wry, sometimes acrimonious humor in his summaries of various events. A good example for this vein his observation about a celebrated Viennese tenor. Roosevelt loved the opera, and in Vienna he was at one of the best places to satisfy his passion, and regularly made notes about the operas he attended. On one occasion he became quite angry over the performance of Erik Schmedes, the leading tenor of the Vienna State Opera at that time. As his notes conveys his dislike of the night, "unfortunately, they had Schmedes, who, as usual, sang perfectly vilely and received great ovations because he was famous as a singer before Franz Joseph came to the throne, and had sung in operas directed personally by Mozart, Beethoven and Wagner."²⁵

As it was mentioned above, Roosevelt published his memoirs thirty years later, in which he produced a sanitized and very short version of the original manuscript discussed here. In his *A Front Row Seat*, Roosevelt summarizes his 1919 material in about 30 pages, which is 11-12% of the length of the original material. The 1953 book speaks about his whole life experience, which was rich and diverse indeed, spanning more than half a century and the continents of America, Europe, and Asia. Thus, his experience at the Paris Peace Conference fit well in the strings of events he went through. More importantly, however, the original text had been altered to a significant degree; no doubt it was carefully tailored to the needs of contemporary circumstances, or one might even say it had been censored. It is too much to say that the two versions look as if there had been two different authors, but some conspicuous changes are easy to detect both in style and content. If a comparison is made between the original and the 1953 version, the latter is outstandingly diplomatic in its language. This change must have been due to Roosevelt himself, who, together with the world around him, had changed in many respects in three decades.

24 Rod A. Martin and Thomas E. Ford, *The Psychology of Humor. An Integrative Approach*, 2nd edition. Academic Press, 2018, 22.

25 Diary entry of May 23, 1919, *A History of a Few Weeks*, 483.

In his memoirs in 1953, Roosevelt used the following technique regarding the original manuscript. He summarized certain things based upon his extra knowledge he had gathered in the thirty years in-between. He also rewrote some passages and even quotations, although this did not alter the original meaning. He sometimes altered in the 1953 book what he chronicled back in 1919. For example, when on March 20 he accompanied the French Lieutenant-Colonel Fernand Vix to hand over the (in)famous note to president Mihály Károlyi, which caused the revolution and Bolshevik takeover the next day, Roosevelt in his 1953 book added certain things to the original text to be seen in a more favorable light than the original diary entry suggests. The most important change, however, and at the same time the most painful, is the lack of the original diary entries, or, in other words, the masking of the original thoughts of the author. This does not mean that Roosevelt in his memoir of 1953 basically wrote something altogether different than what he thought in 1919, but the text went through a large dose of sanitation. This is one of the main reasons why it is of significance to get to know the original version, which is much more straightforward, detailed, and because of these aspects truly counts as a historic text. The original manuscript opens a private window on the events unfolding around the author in 1919, while the memoir published more than three decades later places a curtain on that private window. In 1953 the author thought he wanted to highlight those Americans who were or had become famous: Archibald Coolidge, Allen Dulles, or Herbert Hoover. In addition, he also felt that his conversation with Franz Lehár and the latter's younger brother would be of more interest to American readers than some dialogue with Hungarian revolutionary or counterrevolutionary figures—and one must admit that probably he was right in this assessment. But it was his meetings with Mihály Károlyi, Pál Teleki, or Albert Apponyi, and his diary entries thereof that make the original so valuable.

Roosevelt held conversations with Károlyi, President of Hungary at that time. His basic impression was praise and a mild enchantment. He characterized Károlyi as “a sincere patriot,” who “through his patriotism [...] took the helm, only to be faced by impossible problems, attacked from within and without, with nowhere to turn.”²⁶ This last point soon materialized when

26 Diary entry of March 20, 1919, *A History of a Few Weeks*, 279.

the so-called Vix Note was handed over to Károlyi, and where Roosevelt was also present.²⁷ Pál Teleki made a very good impression on Roosevelt, partly because the latter learned a lot of information from the renowned geographer and cartographer, and future prime minister of Hungary. Teleki came through as “the most intelligent and in his line the ablest” among all the Hungarians Roosevelt had met.²⁸ As Roosevelt noted, Teleki “gave me a mass of information that filled up many gaps in my scant knowledge of Hungarian affairs... I got almost everything I wanted to know.”²⁹ Naturally, Teleki was feeding the American with careful propaganda regarding the large Hungarian ethnic blocs in the successor countries, which is a further indication how everybody in these countries grasped any American as a possible channel to the highest decision makers at Paris. The grand old man of Hungary, Albert Apponyi, was a different story to Roosevelt. The two had met fifteen years earlier, when Apponyi visited Theodore Roosevelt at Oyster Bay. The Apponyi of present basically gave a presentation on how Hungary would seek revenge if it were mutilated with millions of Hungarians left outside the mother country. Even worse, he implied that in the case of dismemberment, the Hungarians living in the United States, together with the Germans there, would make a united effort against Wilson and the Democratic Party. Roosevelt was, of course, a Republican but such a brazen threat against American democracy left him angry. No wonder that his assessment of Apponyi was mixed at best: “He is an interesting old scoundrel—very intelligent, perfectly unrepentant, and a thorough Chauvinist.”³⁰ Such observations do not alter the history we know but colors our perceptions about individuals and events.

His account of the handing over of the Allied note on March 20th to Károlyi records the nervousness of the Hungarian government in the face of demands that essentially determined its fall. Since the Allied and Associated Powers ordered the Hungarians to withdraw well behind the ethnic

27 Fernand Vix (1876–1941), was a French military officer and the leader of the Inter-Allied Military Mission in Budapest in 1919. He handed over the Allied note to President Mihály Károlyi on March 20, 1919, which the latter and his government could not accept and resigned instead, opening the way for a communist takeover.

28 Diary entry of April 16, 1919, *A History of a Few Weeks*, 279.

29 Diary entry of February 28, 1919, *A History of a Few Weeks*, 203.

30 Diary entry of February 28, 1919, *A History of a Few Weeks*, 202.

lines they regarded as fair, it was obvious that the Hungarians would be punished beyond what they conceived possible, and it was the harbinger of the ruin to come in the form of the Treaty of Trianon. Although the story of the Allied note is well known from history books, the personal atmosphere of that morning is put before the reader, and this opens a somewhat new dimension to the resignation of Károlyi and his government and the communist takeover on the 21st of March. And the Hungarian Soviet Republic portended the storm to break out. The Bolshevik takeover in Hungary gave not only headache for the Peace Conference as to how to deal with the new political formation in Central Europe, which by many was seen as the spreading ideological disease from Russia, but also sealed the fate of Hungary as to the outcome of the peace terms. In no way would have Hungary escaped the Paris peace talks without serious territorial and population loss, but had there been no communist regime fighting the will of Paris, the end result might have been somewhat less severe.

In 1953 Roosevelt could reflect on those dramatic years with the hindsight of more than thirty years. Therefore he judged many things in different light. He highlighted certain things accordingly, while other episodes and persons were basically deleted, although this drastic editing may have been due to the page limit he had to work in the case of his 1953 memoirs. Nevertheless, the two texts are very different from each other. For instance, the original diary entries run nine times longer than the space devoted to them in the 1953 book, and again, one can find very few original lines from those entries. It is also worth remembering how many vast changes had taken place between 1919 and 1953, which put things in different perspective for Roosevelt concerning his ideas in 1919, and that also gives some explanation for the discrepancy between the 1919 version and the 1953 memoir.

Conclusion

Perhaps, in light of the above, it needs no emphasizing that reading Nicholas Roosevelt's diary entries one comes across an important and interesting historic imprint from 1919. It is true that in that year a great many significant events took place: the Paris Peace Conference, Russian civil war, the Hungarian Soviet Republic, local wars in Central Europe, not to mention various crises outside Europe—and many books have been written about them. Scores of historians have examined these events, so the drama and the actors, the underlying correlations and the outcomes are well known.

The diary entries introduced here, however, are a rare historic mirror of a well acquainted young American officer, who was a beginner in the diplomatic and political domains. He happened to be present during a politically unstable period both in Vienna and Budapest, in which latter city he witnessed the birth of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, which had huge repercussions both for the Peace Conference and Hungary's fate. The author was an American who met the historic picture book in person, and who experienced many things one reads about in history books only. He meticulously and often in detailed form chronicled the situation on the streets of Vienna and the editors' opinion of various Austrian newspapers, the events leading up to the establishment of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, and more, all this peppered with small episodes and description of those involved. In between the events and the portraits he paints, one may glimpse into the everyday experience of a post-World War I American mission to Central Europe. Nicholas Roosevelt went through some of the most monumental days in Austrian and, especially, in Hungarian twentieth-century history and he partially recorded what he saw—naturally, through a personal sieve and an American prism. Therefore, his diary will enrich our knowledge and perception of the immediate postwar era.

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