STUDIA HISTORICA
Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae

TIBOR HAJDU

THE HUNGARIAN SOVIET REPUBLIC

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The fuller version of this study was published in 1969 in Hungarian as the second part of Tibor Hajdu's two-volume history of the 1918—1919 revolutions. An abridged version appeared as part of the 10 volume *History of Hungary*. It is this latter form that is slightly altered here for the non-Hungarian reader.

From reviews on the 1969 edition:

"... Hajdu's narrative on Hungary draws on an astonishing range of published and unpublished sources and omits nothing that has the slightest bearing on his subject. His prodigious research... combined with his remarkably objective reading of the Western literature have resulted in a factually unimpeachable study..."

(Slavic Review, Urbana, Ill.)

"Tibor Hajdu has already made a name for himself with his earlier works as a first-rate researcher. In his lecture held at the Memorial Session (in 1969) he stressed that the problems of the revolutions were closely connected with those of modern Hungarian history... With this synthesis, we have a more solid basis for discussing these issues in detail."

(Ungarn-Jahrbuch, Munich)

AKADÉMIAI KIADÓ
BUDAPEST

TIBOR HAJDU

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131.

Edited by

F. MUCSI

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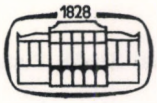

AKADÉMIAI KIADÓ, BUDAPEST 1979

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ISBN 963 05 1990 9

Printed in Hungary

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INTRODUCTION

The Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919 lasted for only 133 days, but this can by no means serve as the measure of its significance in the history of Hungarian, and, in a broader context, of European revolutions. The Russian Revolution and the collapse of the Monarchy undoubtedly played a decisive role in the formation of the Republic, and the dictated peace in the summer of 1919 had a similar role in its fall. Still, from the perspective of more than half a century, we increasingly see it to have been more than the last wave in the tide of revolutions started in Russia in 1917, and far more than the first genuine armed opposition to the peace plans of the Paris Conference.

The military and diplomatic struggle of the short-lived Republic, its attempt to bolshevize the Danubian Basin has long been the subject of extensive historical research, lately, too, a number of works have appeared on the subject in English.[1] In the light of most recent research, however, one might well find some of these approaches somewhat schematic, while others show a lack of access to the Hungarian literature, not to mention the archival materials. What we hope to offer here is not only a more thorough reliance on the sources now available, but also an emphasis that might be of some current interest. Today's reader might find it of primary significance that the Hungarian Soviet Republic was among the first to attempt the concrete realization of the Marxian theoretical model of socialism.

The experiment was rooted in the Russian Revolution, in Lenin's original concept of Marxism and so its solutions differed significantly from the 'realistic socialism' of today's socialist countries. It drew on many utopian elements, while it attempted a faster, more decisive approximation of the ultimate goals of socialism. Yet it was not only Leninism which inspired the Hungarian socialist experiment. The influence of

[1] Ervin Pamlényi (ed.), *A History of Hungary*, Budapest 1973; Arno Mayer, *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking*, New York 1967; Alfred D. Low, *The Soviet Hungarian Republic and the Paris Peace Conference*, Philadelphia 1963; Rudolf L. Tőkés, *Béla Kun and the Hungarian Soviet Republic*, New York 1967; Iván Völgyes (ed.), *Hungary in Revolution*, Lincoln, Nebraska 1971.

Austro-Marxism resulted in the first attempt in history at a practical compromise between Bolshevism and Social Democracy: the leaders of the revolution, though in principle adhering to the Leninist model could not avoid making a number of modifications that went beyond the variations naturally necessitated by geographical and other differences. Unlike the Russian Bolsheviks, who soon had to understand that they had to attempt the realization of socialism isolated in a hostile world unwilling to accept it, the Hungarian Soviet Republic looked for ways and means to co-operate and coexist with its neighbours, even when it was fighting them. The military situation of the Hungarian Soviet Republic was much worse than that of the Russian exemplar; on the other hand, its economic circumstances were better, the country was not in such a state of destruction, and it had the support of the majority of the intellectuals, something the Russian Revolution could only count on much later.

In the present study, I deal with the 133 days of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, without considering in detail the story of its genesis. The road leading to the 1919 revolution resembled the road of the Russian Revolution in a number of ways. It began with the bourgeois democratic revolution, which followed the postwar collapse of the Monarchy, and brought Hungary a national liberty, though at the price of breaking up what constituted the traditional Magyar statehood. For though Hungary did not succeed in gaining independence from Habsburg domination through the revolution of 1848, the Hungarian nobility did achieve a compromise with the Habsburgs in 1867, which gave them dominion over the Rumanians and Slavs who comprised nearly half of Hungary's population. The collapse of the Habsburg Empire, therefore, brought national independence but also the concurrent loss of those areas of the country which were inhabited by non-Magyars. In these and other lost areas a great many Magyars soon became an oppressed national minority.

It was this national crisis that helped the bourgeois democratic revolution to victory. Its government, with the popular pacifist Count Mihály Károlyi as its head, had to struggle for the modernization of the country even as it was struggling for the very survival of the nation.[2] To gain the goodwill of the victors and secure not altogether bad frontiers, Károlyi would have had to squelch the class struggle in good Wilsonian fashion; this however, he could not do and so at the very beginning of the

[2] On the Hungarian national democratic revolution and its failure see Michael Károlyi, *Faith without Illusion, The Memoirs of Michael Károlyi,* London 1956; Oscar Jászi, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Hungary,* London 1924; Peter Pastor, *Hungary between Wilson and Lenin: The Hungarian Revolution of 1918–1919 and the Big Three,* New York 1976–contains a detailed bibliography. On the antecedents of the Soviet Republic see Tibor Hajdu, "A Contribution to the History of the Proclamation of the Hungarian Republic of Councils in 1919", *Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae,* No 19, 1973.

revolution, a new crisis was inevitable. Károlyi became the President of the Republic, and appointed a government wherein half the members were Social Democrats and Dénes Berinkey was Premier. The government, which had no real administrative apparatus or army at its disposal, had to share its power with the people's soviets.

The extreme-left and the extreme-right each feared that the Berinkey government, half bourgeois and half socialist, would be unable to maintain this delicate balance and that they would lose out to the other side. Counter-revolutionary forces therefore began to arm; and for the same reason, the small but resolute Communist Party, formed under the leadership of Béla Kun, recently back from Moscow, summoned the peoples' soviets to proclaim the Soviet Republic. The soviets were however dominated by the social democrats who feared a socialist revolution enough to imprison Kun and his associates..

The decisive turn came in March 1919. The left wing of the Social Democratic Party – which enjoyed the support of the majority of the workers – had also finally to decide whether to continue to go along with the careful manoeuvres of its reformist leadership or to use its power to join the communists in an anti-imperialist revolution, to struggle for socialism, and to lead the nation in self-defense. The decision was dramatically hastened by the events preceding March 21, among which the best known is the Vix-memorandum, in which the French command ordered, on the authority of the French government, that Western Transylvania and the Eastern strip of the Great Hungarian Plain be turned over to Rumania. No less an impetus was the peasantry's revolt: appropriating some big estates, they demanded the revolutionary redistribution of all land. Equally menacing was the rallying of the working masses to the Communist Party, and their demands for the unification of the Communist and the Social Democratic parties. This demand so pervaded the masses of organized workers that the mutually hostile and distrustful leadership of both parties had to give in.

Thus when the Berinkey administration decided to resign on March 20th in favour of the Social Democratic Party, although it meant to protest the Vix-memorandum with this move, declined the task of solving the internal crisis.

THE PROCLAMATION OF THE HUNGARIAN SOVIET REPUBLIC

With the resignation of the Berinkey administration the path was cleared for the peaceful, bloodless transfer of power to the socialist workers. At that moment, the decision rested with the workers of Budapest. The proletariat of the capital almost unanimously decided in favour of a socialist revolution. The historical moment had arrived when the reformist leadership of the Social Democratic Party, established twenty years before, lost its political weight and influence on the masses in the wake of two decades of mistakes and failures. The most active group of the workers rallied around the communists and the left-wing and centrist social democrats. These movements, previously hostile to one another, now both pledged themselves to the socialist revolution, partly on account of their similar understanding of the situation, and partly because of the mood of the workers. The decision was even easier for an organized worker not actively affiliated with any party or political group than for the politically more sophisticated. The revolutionary decision of the organized workers was due to the imminent possibility of acquiring power, to the hope of the immediate realization of socialism. They viewed the political freedoms created by the bourgeois revolution as the means with which to put an end to the persisting economic exploitation. Although the right wing of the Social Democratic Party was opposed to the revolution, this had no practical significance, precisely on account of the general mood of the majority of the workers.

After the left wing of the Social Democratic Party seized the initiative within the party early in March, the social democratic ministers in the Berinkey government could no longer count on their party's support. The left wing published its program in *Népszava,* the Social Democratic Party organ: a workers' government; nationalization of big industry, mines and transport; agricultural cooperatives instead of land redistribution. The left wing did not make a secret of the fact that, in its view, the election of representatives scheduled for April 13 would only determine "whether socialism in Hungary will be realized by peaceful or by violent means".[3] This statement is underscored by the proposal of Vince Nagy, the Minister

[3] *Népszava,* March 19, 1919.

of Interior: let the SDP take over the government before the elections. The decision of the Radical Party to disband signalled the passive attitude petty-bourgeois democrats and intellectuals arrived at a few days before the 21st of March.

While the urban workers' soviets were forming directories for the immediate assumption of power, a typical representative of the provincial urban bourgeoisie, the former minister Ferenc Nagy wrote in the progressive Freemason journal, *Világ:* since the quick realization of workers' power is unavoidable, the bourgeoisie should voluntarily abdicate its power in favour of the social democrats in order to avoid bolshevism.

Thus the main theme of discussion in mid-March was already the means and forms of realizing the rule of the workers. It was at this time that the various groupings within the social democratic movement, while continuing their intra-party debates, began talks with the communist leaders. In the course of these talks it became clear just wherein the various groups differed, and so, there was no need for lengthy discussion on March 21st: the interested parties were well aware of the split between those who had been in favour of the workers' takeover, even before the Vix-memorandum, and those who were absolutely against it, and knew also about those who reserved their decisions pending the developments which now spurred even the vacillators to accept the risks.

Vix's 24 hour ultimatum further increased the decisive role of the capital. But the events in the provinces largely influenced the decisions reached in the capital: the mass movements and revolutionary acts of the March days did not meet with determined opposition by reactionary forces or significant intervention by the state apparatus in the country. A part of the military formations was revolutionary in spirit (Nyíregyháza, Kecskemét, Szeged, Pápa), the rest were passive. The 'Székely division', which consisted of Transylvanian refugees, constituted an exception, for it was under the influence of counter-revolutionary officers, and established a military dictatorship – as a state within the state – east of the Nyíregyháza–Nagyvárad (Oradea) line. The Budapest garrison, however, was all the more supportive of the revolution; the colonels at the head of the War Ministry (Stromfeld, Tombor), nationalist in sentiment and incensed by the Vix-memorandum, assured the social democratic War Minister, Böhm, of their support, thus orienting him, the key figure among the undecided, toward revolutionary action.

The Budapest newspapers did not appear on the morning of March 21st. The printers went on strike for a wage increase, but their leaders, who were in contact with the imprisoned Béla Kun, doubtless took into account the trouble they were causing the already paralyzed government. People had to rely on unverifiable rumours; the tension reached its peak on March 21st. By contrast with the bewilderment and helplessness of the

bourgeois politicians, the Communist Party had a clear set of goals and proposals to offer. Allied with the social democrats, they set to work preparing for the assumption of power. On the morning of March 21st they held a meeting in the largest factory, the Weiss-works on Csepel Island, with the representatives of the Soldiers' Soviet. After the meeting they proceeded to occupy the principal strategic positions; the police, sensing trouble, disappeared from the streets.

Before noon on the 21st, the leadership of the SDP held a meeting, and, on the basis of Vilmos Böhm's report, issued a resolution on its agreement with the Communist Party, on the establishment of a socialist government, and the rejection of the Vix-memorandum. The debate was still going on when Jenő Landler, one of the leaders of the left wing of the SDP, who had been sent as a delegate to the municipal prison, returned with the news that the Communist Party leadership was ready to agree on the joint assumption of power. The resolution – which not only meant the joining of forces with the communists, but also the acceptance of their program on the basis of Béla Kun's letter sent from prison a few days earlier – was declared with the support of the overwhelming majority of the social democratic leadership. This shows that the initiative in the party had completely passed into the hands of the left wing, which, by this time, gained the support of the majority of the capital's population, including the entire working class. The majority in the Central Council of Trade Unions, and even certain members from among the traditional right wing SDP leadership now sided with the left wing. The right wing group which voted against the resolution (Buchinger, Garami, Peidl, Propper) thus became isolated and withdrew into passivity. Garami – the leader of the SDP for two decades – emigrated.

The extent of the left wing's victory in the SDP is clearly shown by the fact that the 5 member negotiating committee sent to the prison was composed exclusively of men who had agreed with the contemplated seizure of power, and they were given *carte blanche* in determining the conditions of the agreement. Only thus could an immediate agreement become possible; furthermore, it was evident that the conditions were to be dictated by Kun. When the SDP's negotiating committee arrived, the prison and its neigbourhood was crowded with communist and left wing social democratic workers waiting for news. The agreement was reached under the influence of their presence.

According to the signed agreement, the workers' parties "decided on the complete union of the two parties in a meeting of their leaders held in common".[4] With the help of the workers', the soldiers' and the peasants'

[4] The protocol of unity together with many basic documents can be found in S. Gábor (ed.), *A magyar munkásmozgalom történetének válogatott dokumentumai (Selected Documents from the History of the Hungarian Workers' Movement)*. (MMTVD from hereafter) Vol. 5 (November 7, 1917–March 21, 1919), Budapest 1956, p. 688.

soviets, the united party would realize the dictatorship of the proletariat without delay, establish its army, and form an alliance with Soviet Russia.

In the negotiations they discarded the proposal of the centrist Kunfi for the two parties to maintain their organizational independence and form a coalition government. All he could achieve was that the word 'communist' be left out from the name of the united party; for the time being, it was to be called the Socialist Party of Hungary.

The talks were already in progress in the prison when the broader SDP party committee (Parteiauswahl) convened; their debate thus had only a smaller significance. There were only one or two opponents to the fusion, but "hardly anyone would even hear them out".[5] When Kunfi and his associates arrived toward the end of the meeting, and announced the signing of the documents for the fusion – the committee simply approved (with one vote against) the *fait accompli.* The majority of the Communist Party leaders discussed the unification in the prison, others in the party offices in Visegrádi Street. They voiced their misgivings towards the social democrats and the union, but nevertheless they accepted it.

József Pogány, president of the Budapest Soldiers' Soviet, was not nicknamed by his contemporaries the 'red Napoleon' for nothing – he was a man of quick decisions and sudden turn-abouts.[6] The talks were still in session in the prison between the leaders of the two workers' parties when the Budapest Soldiers' Soviet convened in the afternoon, and enthusiastically decided to support the dictatorship of the proletariat which, in fact, was not even proclaimed at that time. The Soldiers' Soviet not only made a solemn resolution, it set about the acquisition of power immediately. The meeting of the Soldiers' Soviet had barely adjourned at five o'clock, when Pogány's deputy, lieutenant Moór summoned Károly Dietz, the chief police commissioner of Budapest, informed him of the takeover and assumed the direction of the police force. Fully aware of the actual balance of forces, Dietz did not even attempt to resist: since no one had ordered an alert, he had barely 1,300 men on duty as opposed to the mobilized, well-armed garrison of 14,000 men, the 5,000 'People's Guards', not to mention the enormous and partially armed masses of the workers. Dietz had not received any orders from the Minister of the

[5] Wilhelm Böhm, *Im Kreuzfeuer zweier Revolutionen,* Munich 1924, p. 278.

[6] József Pogány (1886–1939) – a Social Democrat journalist and war correspondent. As Government Commissioner of the Soldiers' Soviet he was a member of the left wing of the Social Democratic Party of which he became the most prominent leader. Later a Communist, prominent in the Comintern in the 1920s (John Pepper). A victim of the 1937 purge.

Interior, but he did know that all the automobiles which could be found in the capital had been collected by the Soldiers' Soviet.

In the evening, the People's Guards, recruited from among the organized workers, occupied the police headquarters, and the artillery of the People's Guards stationed on Gellért Hill was ordered to bombard the government buildings in case of resistance. On the order of the workers' council of Csepel, the worker-guards of the factory seized the Csepel wireless telegraph station, which was guarded by French colonial soldiers. Troops dispatched on the orders of the Soldiers' Soviet surrounded the municipal prison: the Soldiers' Soviet *ordered* the attorney in charge to free the communist prisoners.

Thus, when the Budapest Workers' Soviet assembled in an enthusiastic mood at seven in the evening, on March 21st, to bring a decision in the name of the working class, the execution of their decision was already assured. While the meeting was in progress, the leaders of the underground Communist Party organizations, Tibor Szamuely, György Lukács, Artur Illés[7] and their comrades saw to the protection of the banks and big stores, sending the communists who gathered at the party's central office on Visegrádi Street to patrol around in the city, to safeguard law and order.

In this situation the counter-revolutionary forces proved to be completely impotent. While waiting for the decision of the Social Democratic Party leadership, Károlyi contacted the representatives of the right wing opposition. He asked them: would they be willing to take over the government on a nationalist basis, rejecting the Vix-memorandum, or would they support him if he stood up to the Entente in the lead of a socialist government. Those asked, were unwilling to assume any responsibility. Since they had entreated Vix for months, in vain, for the Entente occupation of Budapest, they could rely neither on internal resources nor on assistance from Paris. Their alarms were not taken seriously. (Count Ármin Mikes and other aristocrats had warned the British and the American missions in Vienna as far back as March 17–18, that if they do not occupy Budapest and remove Károlyi, the power will easily slip from his hands into those of the communists.[8] Count István

[7] Tibor Szamuely (1890–1919) – a radical journalist who became a founding member of the Communist Party of Hungary as a POW in Russia.

György Lukács (1885–1971) – took no part in politics until he joined the CP soon after its foundation. After Kun's arrest he was coopted to the Party's underground Central Committee, of which he remained a member for ten years until, in 1929, he found himself opposed to Comintern tactics.

Artur Illés (1878–?) – a worker's coop official, a left Social Democrat, and founding member of the CP, a member of the underground CC.

[8] National Archives (Washington D. C.), The Archives of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace. Coolidge Mission. Report of A. C. Coolidge, March 17, 1919; Report of N. Roosevelt, March 19, 1919; N. Roosevelt, *A Front Row Seat,* Norman, Oklahoma 1953, p. 103.

Bethlen told Vix on March 21, that if they do not occupy Budapest, the result of the memorandum will be a pro-Soviet development.)[9]

On the afternoon of the 21st, the Berinkey government held its last meeting,[10] with Károlyi himself presiding. Kunfi, arriving late from the meeting of the party committee, announced: the Social Democratic Party is willing to take on the formation of the new government. He also referred to their coming agreement with the communists, but he did not go into details, he only requested the immediate release of the communist prisoners.

The government was still in session when Baron Podmaniczky, councillor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, handed Vix the rejection of his memorandum, exactly on deadline.

After the meeting of the government, Károlyi expected to be invited to the meeting of the Workers' Soviet, where, on the basis of their resolution, he would appoint the social democratic government. Instead, he was informed by telephone that the Workers' Soviet voted for the fusion of the two workers' parties and proclaimed the dictatorship of the proletariat. His secretary told him that the proclamation, according to which he resigns the presidency and surrenders the power to the proletariat, had been released without his consent. Károlyi expressed his disapproval of the manner in which his own resignation was made known to him, but in spite of his reservations, he wished to support the new revolution.

In the Workers' Soviet, Sándor Garbai[11] reported on the unification of the workers' parties. He explained that the Berinkey government, which had now fallen into crisis, was basically a government of the bourgeois dictatorship, and that, in order to overcome the crisis, there is no other alternative for the working class "than to accept another type of dictatorship . . . ", the dictatorship of the proletariat. His statement was greeted with applause and exclamations: 'It should have been done sooner!' Garbai outlined briefly but firmly the tasks of the proletarian dictatorship, the unavoidability of adopting a regime of soviets and the international significance thereof, and declared unmitigated war on the counter-revolutionary forces. A constantly recurring motif of his speech was addressed to and against the right wing: the workers would, in any case,

[9] Francis Deák, *Hungary at the Paris Peace Conference*, New York 1942, p. 410. Lieutenant Colonel Vix headed the French mission in Budapest. Count István Bethlen (1874–1947) was the leader of the 1919 counter-revolution and Prime Minister between 1921 and 1931.

[10] Dénes Berinkey (1871–1948) – a department head in the Ministry of Justice with radical democratic views, Minister of Justice in November 1918, and Prime Minister from January to March 1919. After the revolutions he worked as a lawyer.

[11] Sándor Garbai (1879–1947) – President of the Building Workers' Union, a respected member of the Social Democrat Party leadership. A Centrist during the revolution, one of the founders of the Világosság group in exile, adhering to the so-called 'Vienna International'.

have proclaimed the dictatorship of the proletariat even against the will of the Social Democratic Party. "We can have but one duty, to adapt to the events and to solve the tasks that befall us well."[12]

The mood of the Workers' Soviet was, beyond doubt, supportive of the new revolution. The Document of Unity, Pogány's short report on the afternoon meeting of the Soldiers' Soviet, and the serious words of Elek Bolgár,[13] who spoke in the name of the communists, were greeted with joy. On the suggestion of the presiding Bokányi,[14] they adopted the resolution by public acclaim. With this, for the first time in our country's history, the workers took the power into their hands.

Around ten in the evening, the leadership of the two parties met at the secretariat of the Social Democratic Party, with Garbai presiding. It was already the realization of the decisive resolution that was on the agenda: first of all they appointed the members of the new government, who were not to be ministers, but commissars on the Russian model, and the government was to be called 'The Revolutionary Governing Council', thus distinguishing, even formally, the new, socialist revolution from the former bourgeois regime.

The newly formed Revolutionary Council immediately passed its first orders: the order of martial law, proclaiming capital punishment for anyone who resorts to armed defiance of the mandates of the Soviet Republic, who instigates rebellion, or engages in pillage and plunder. This order was not enforced to the letter, it was meant primarily as a deterrent. It was mainly directed against the class enemies of the revolution, but was also designed to prevent the anarchist or instinctive administrations of justice, the 'expropriations' by the people, which had earlier caused so much difficulty to the Russian Revolution. The second order, also formulated after the Russian model, completely prohibited the consumption of alcohol. The Governing Council declared that it would fulfill the functions of the party leadership until the coming party congress. One of the basic problems of the proletarian dictatorship is, in fact, well documented in this resolution, which was originally meant to be temporary: the separation of state management and party leadership remained indistinct throughout the 133 days of the Hungarian Soviet Republic.

The composition of the Governing Council, on the other hand, indeed followed from the circumstances of its birth, as it was based on the

[12] *Népszava,* March 22, 1919.

[13] Elek Bolgár (1883–1955) – anarcho-syndicalist who joined the CP. A diplomatist and university professor following his return from the Soviet Union after the Second World War.

[14] Dezső Bokányi (1871–1940) – a stone-carver who became the most popular orator of the labour movement, a long-time member of the SDP leadership. Condemned to death by a counter-revolutionary tribunal in 1920, saved by a prisoner exchange with the Soviet Union. Purged in 1937.

pre-unification conception of the social democrats whereby they would form a one-party government, and offer Béla Kun the Department of Foreign Affairs, both to insure the loyalty of the communists and to demonstrate the new, 'Eastern' orientation of foreign policy. Three-fourths of the social democratic commissars were from the left wing or the center of the SDP, the few right wing commissars received only departments with no political significance (public food supply maintenance, German minority affairs). The political leaders of the right stayed away from the government of proletarian dictatorship. The communists easily altered the centrist character of the government by suggesting that, following the Russian model, each commissar's deputy also take part in the sessions of the government. Since 9 of the 13 deputy commissars were communists, this solved the problem of communist representation in the Governing Council. But more important than their proportion in numbers, was the fact that in these revolutionary days the communists – relying on the mood of the masses and able to take advantage of their favourable situation – definitely had a decisive say in the proceedings.

At its next session, on March 22nd, the Governing Council could already note with satisfaction, that the socialist revolution had succeeded throughout the country peacefully, without bloodshed or resistance, indeed without significant disorders. (The revolution caused 7-8 deaths; six of these occurred in the backward rural part of Szolnok county, where, in the absence of an organized socialist movement, the anger of the poor met head on with the armed defenders of the old regime.) The events of March 21st did not resemble the first few days of November 1918 in the number and extent of its individual and mass outbursts. The peaceful transfer of power is one of the most significant features of the Hungarian socialist revolution. What made it possible was primarily the balance of forces, the temporary impotence of the enemies of the revolution, but this simple fact could only assert itself through extraordinarily complex motions, and it is to the credit of the revolution's leadership that they were able to size up the demands of the situation as it emerged, and adjusted to them rather than to the preconceived rigid scheme. Lenin himself approved of the daring decision and set it up as an example for other countries' proletariat.

"However great the difficulties which undoubtedly still face Hungary, we have achieved a moral victory in addition to a victory for Soviet power. A most radical, democratic, and compromising bourgeoisie realised that at a moment of extreme crisis, when a new war is menacing a country, already exhausted by war, a Soviet Government is a historical necessity . . . . the Hungarian revolution owing to its having been born in a totally different way from ours will reveal to the whole world that which

was concealed in Russia – i. e., that Bolshevism is bound up with a new, proletarian, workers' democracy . . . "[15]

The first condition for a peaceful victory is naturally the strength and unity of the revolutionary forces. It was in the first days and weeks of its victory that the mass basis of the revolution was strongest and broadest. The working class willingly took on the dictatorship, to the last man. Due to the war and the economic crisis, the replacement of the capitalist system of private property with collective ownership was approved not only by the proletariat in the strict sense of the word, but also by the soldiers who had suffered in the war of the ruling classes, by the disabled and the war widows, by the impoverished man in the street, by the underpayed commercial, administrative and industrial employees whose situation has suffered even more of a setback than that of the workers, by the domestic servants and other untouchables of society who became conscious of their human situation only with the first revolution. The agricultural labourers saw in March 21st the victory of their struggle for land.

The united action of the exploited workers is an attribute to *every* modern revolution, but it does not, in itself, guarantee a peaceful take-over. Paradoxically, the Hungarian workers were aided by the national catastrophe, the country's hopeless situation. The Vix-memorandum could only be rejected by a revolutionary government. By this time the landlords of big estates and the great capitalists clearly saw that there was no alternative but to adapt to the new, anti-Bolshevist European–American world-order by accepting the frontiers marked out by the victors, but since their major rationale for the war had been the protection of the historical boundaries of Hungary, they would have administered themselves the *coup de grâce* if they proposed acceptance of the memorandum *vis-à-vis* the call to national defence by the proletarian government. There was no other 'national program' they could come up with if they wanted to hold onto their properties. The failure of the policy of the traditional ruling classes, who were responsible for the war, forced them to draw back temporarily, just as it did later, after the Second World War.

The fault-line in the political spectrum of the broader strata of the bourgeois middle-classes and the intellectuals was *not* opposition to socialism (as it was after 1919 and before 1918), but their stance against the counter-revolutionary reaction. At this time Béla Kun was still the 'lesser evil', as opposed to Bethlen. Evidence for this is the fact that at the beginning of the parliamentary electorial campaign in mid-March, the

[15] Lenin's closing address to the 8th Congress of the CP on March 23rd 1919 and his address to the Moscow Soviet on April 3rd 1919. V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 29, Moscow 1965. p. 224.

right-wing block attached to Bethlen, Lovászy, and Heinrich swiftly became isolated. Lovászy, who, despite Károlyi's enormous prestige, carried the majority at the time the Károlyi party had split,[16] was losing his adherents one after another by late January, and would have gladly withdrawn. István Szabó of Nagyatád dissociated himself from the 'smallholders' group of Marquis Pallavicini,[17] and firmly backed Károlyi. Thus, in the elections, the major hope of the Bourgeois Bloc (Bürgerblock) lay in the support of the clergy. But the cancellation of the national assembly elections reduced the political role of the clergy; the strategy of the Catholic Church in the XXth century has been to assert its considerable political influence from the background and has usually steered clear of compromising itself in the petty politics of the day; at any rate, Cardinal Csernoch indeed followed such moderate tactics. On the other hand, the militant champions of the feudal-clerical tradition – the bishop Count Mikes, and the religious instructor Pehm (Mindszenty),[18] who were heated both by the enthusiasm of martyrs and inquisitors – were already interned by the Berinkey government. The lower clergy were not unaffected by the spirit of the revolution, – it is no accident that Ádám Persián, a commissioner of the Károlyi régime appealed to the 'Hungarian and proletarian hearts' of the lower Catholic orders on March 21st, when he called upon them to support the anti-imperialist Soviet Republic. The Church, normally the major support of the ruling classes, became politically isolated by this time, and although did not, for one minute, support the revolution of March 21st, but it did not consider active resistance or excommunication either. The other major force the ruling classes could rely upon: the state apparatus was also unfit for active intervention. The civil state machinery was paralyzed by the

[16] Márton Lovászy (1864–1927) – Member of the Independence Party, anti-German politician, edited the party organ *'Magyarország' (Hungary)*. Minister for Education in November and December 1918 as a member of the Károlyi government, then, turning against the revolution, he formed his own party. In the summer and autumn of 1919 he and his supporters took part in the counter-revolutionary Friedrich government, however, becoming aware of its unambiguously reactionary character, they left it.

Count Michael Károlyi (1875–1955) – a landowner, became the leader of the anti-German Independence Party in 1913. Prime Minister during the post-war revolution of 1918, then became temporary President of the Republic. After 1919, a leader of the anti-fascist exiles. Hungarian minister in Paris from 1947 till 1949.

[17] István Szabó of Nagyatád (1863–1924) – the first Hungarian peasant M. P., ready to enter into a compromise with all the successive regimes owing to the lack of political independence of his peasant ('smallholders') party.

Marquis György Pallavicini, (1881–1946) – Károlyi's brother-in-law, founded a conservative 'farmer-party' which helped to integrate Szabó's peasant party in the counter-revolutionary system.

[18] József Mindszenty (1892–1975) – a young chaplain in 1919 who became head of the Catholic Church in Hungary in 1945.

wavering of the Berinkey government on the one hand, and, on the other, by the workers' and peasants' soviets, which had considerably increased in power even before the actual turning point. The army officers' staff was in an ambiguous situation. Although nationalistic in sentiments, their majority was not enthusiastic about the Bolshevik Revolution but they were loyal to the army, without which they would have lost their social standing. And if a pacifist government had disbanded the army, the officers' staff would also have been liquidated. Few were attracted by the prospects of mending shoes or selling cigarettes. Therefore, even the most reactionary stratum of the officers' corps, the group most loyal to the traditional ruling classes, could only have risked to resort to counter-revolutionary action if they had been sure to count on the support of the units under their command, and there was mighty little chance of that in the atmosphere of the March days. Even Gyula Gömbös,[19] the strongest personality among the counter-revolutionary officers, fled to Vienna immediately after the disbanding of the MOVE (Hungarian National Defense Association) in February. The centers which remained actively counter-revolutionary after his departure (Transylvanian National Council, the North-Hungarian League, Awakening Hungarians, the Géher-group of the MOVE and some university and clerical groups) remained inactive in the days following March 21st.

Beyond the immediate circumstances of the moment, there were deeper reasons for the weakness of the counter-revolution as well. During the period of the Dualistic Monarchy we can only speak of a Hungarian state, indeed of a Hungarian ruling class in a limited sense. The bulk of the army was independent of the Hungarian state, there was no Hungarian foreign policy, and among the vanquished states Hungary was virtually the only one whose ruling classes had no stable Western connections. These ruling classes, used to the paternalism of Vienna and Berlin, were in fact unprepared for independence, and the alterations of the country's borders disarrayed them as well. We can also point out that although Hungary's emerging capitalism had already produced a conscious working class experienced in class struggles, there was no mature, modern, politically powerful capitalist class. The militant counter-revolutionary forces much preferred to align themselves with the declining aristocracy and gentry than with the 'Jewish' capitalists. This fact was also instrumental in the peaceful victory of the revolution.[20] Which of course does not mean

[19] Gyula Gömbös (1886–1936) – pro-German officer and politician, he founded MOVE, a Union of professional officers and N.C.O.s during the revolution. One of the organizers of Horthy's counter-revolution, Prime Minister between 1932 and 1936.

[20] The English-language literature on the subject barely touches on the role of classes in the revolution, at most it is mentioned in Károlyi's and Jászi's memoirs. In Hungarian see Tibor Hajdu, *Az 1918-as magyarországi polgári demokratikus forradalom (The 1918 Bourgeois Democratic Revolution in Hungary)*, Budapest 1968.

that we should easily dismiss the strength and resources of the overthrown *ancien régime.* Lenin's warning in a speech delivered in May of 1919 applied to Hungary as well: "Great revolutions, even when they commence peacefully, as was the case with the great French Revolution, end in furious wars which are instigated by the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie."[21]

[21] Lenin's May 1919 address to the Adult Education Congress, *op. cit.*, Vol. 29, p. 363.

THE HUNGARIAN PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION AND ITS EFFECTS ABROAD

If the Hungarian ruling classes were surprised by, and unprepared for March 21st, this was even more true of the Paris Peace Conference. At first, it could not even be clearly discerned in Paris what had happened in Budapest, not because they did not receive sufficient information about the revolution, but because the various communications, coming from different sources, were at odds with one another. While the governments of the various neighbouring countries who had an interest in Hungary's military occupation, as well as some 'well-informed' agents and newspapers spread the view that the turn of events was simply a manoeuvre of the Hungarian aristocracy, the latter busily disseminated false reports about the blood-baths of Budapest and the execution of the Archduke Joseph and of other politicians.[22] The fate of the Vix mission was also uncertain for a day or two; but the leaders of the West were much more anxious about the question, fundamental for the survival of the Hungarian Soviet: will the workers of other Central European countries follow the Hungarian example?

Even the coolly sober London Times was full of news in these days about Bolshevism in South Africa, the Norwegian Soviets and the communists of China and Korea. One day it reported that the Soviet Republic in Hungary was being supported by German imperialism, and the Red Army was being organized by Mackensen's chief officers, on the next day it published the news from a semi-official Rumanian source that Hungarian communist emissaries had arrived in Sophia to effectuate the Bulgarian socialist revolution. The Hungarian example was mostly feared to have been followed in the other capital of the fallen Monarchy—Vienna.

This confusion and uncertainty, which could only be subdued by the eventual Budapest mission of a responsible Entente politician, did, in any case, grant a few weeks of freedom for the Governing Council to formulate its foreign policy and seize the initiative.

[22] Public Record Office (London) Foreign Office (PRO FO) 371, Vol. 3514.

Those who initiated the proclamation of the Soviet Republic, that is, the communists, conceived of the Hungarian Soviet as part of the proletarian world-revolution; the unrealistic thought of building socialism within the Hungarian national framework never even occurred to them. For the communists it was not only a matter of principle, nor a mere military necessity that the Hungarian Soviet State be part of an international confederation, indeed, they could not imagine the Soviet's future in any other context. The leaders of the Hungarian Soviet Republic never made a secret of the unpleasant truth that the Hungarian people could not choose socialism – alone, by themselves.

Béla Kun announced on April 19, at the public meeting of the Budapest Workers' and Soldiers' Soviet:

"Two world currents clash in battle over the Hungarian Soviet Republic: imperialist capitalism and Bolshevik socialism . . . This is a matter of the international class struggle . . . When we founded the dictatorship of the proletariat in Hungary, we did not base our calculations on our ability to tackle the Entente troops with our military strength in organized warfare. We did not believe that we could stop the offensive which is threatening us from all sides with those six divisions which the armistice agreements have permitted the Soviet Republic. We have emphasized and we still emphasize that we based the fate of the Hungarian Soviet Republic on the international revolution of the proletariat."[2 3]

Indeed, Garbai spoke to the same point at the March 21 meeting of the Workers' Soviet, and the first, famous proclamations of the Governing Council addressed 'To All' similarly made the fate of the Soviet Republic dependent on the international revolution.

Béla Kun did not intend his public statement as a mere slogan. The meaning, purpose, support and hope of the Hungarian Soviet Republic was the international revolution of the proletariat. And this not only in the eyes of the communists, but also in those of the social democrats and progressive intellectuals who rallied to the revolution. Was this expectation, shortly thereafter disavowed by the majority of them, realistic at all?

Human imagination can never be quite as absurd as historical reality. The opposing camps saw the future of the Hungarian Commune in opposite perspectives, seemingly logical and similar in their extremism, the advocates of revolution believed in the victory of the world-revolution, and consequently, in the success of the Hungarian revolution, its enemies considered the lasting victory of socialism an absolute impossibility in *any* country. Before the eyes of both camps there hovered – perhaps still under

[2 3] Béla Kun, *Válogatott írások és beszédek (Selected Writings and Speeches)*, Vol. 1, Budapest 1966, p. 242.

the influence of the World War – visions of the imminent decisive battle between two worlds. What we can today state as fact: the socialist and capitalist systems can co-exist for extended historical periods, indeed a third world also enters the scene, producing numerous 'national' variations on the lasting combination of fire and water. A prediction to this extent would have, at the time, been rejected as a nightmare by both sides. Lenin himself only came to accept the possible co-existence of the two systems step by step, but he too had a much shorter historical period in mind.

Thus both opposing parties shared in the great illusion: the alternative of all or nothing. But that they exaggerated the conception of the world revolution does not mean that the adherents of the Soviet Republic were mistaken when they linked the fate of the Hungarian revolution to the international situation, to the developments of the revolutionary world struggle.

The conflict of which they sang – " 't is the final" – has not come to a conclusion, but from the perspective of half a century we can state that, in the period of the strive for socialism, Europe has been divided into two parts by economic, geographic and political characteristics and by differences in the national psyche. In the relatively connected zones of the East, with its Slav majority, and South, with its Latin-Greek temperament, the prospects of achieving socialism through revolution and civil war dominate. In the North and West, where the capitalist economy is complemented by the cool individualism of the ethnic psyche, a new, socialistic type of social order is much more probable to come about through compromises. Between these two zones, and subject to the gravitational force of both, lies the German language area, whose tragic path was prescribed precisely by this double bind, and which became, in the struggle of the two tendencies, the focal point of the common lot of Europe in both a good and a bad sense. And while the advocates of capitalist reform underestimated the revolutionary ground of the South and East, and while the communists, in their enthusiasm, could not believe that the Eastern fire could under no circumstances spread beyond the cool currents of the English Channel or the Skagerrak – they both recognized Germany's decisive role in the fate of the European revolution. Even though from today's perspective, we cannot share the hope that a victorious German proletarian revolution might have spread to the developed Western and Northern countries, the complete, or even partial, temporary victory of the German revolution might have consolidated the revolutionary forces in Eastern Europe, cutting off Western influence and so strengthening Soviet Russia. The motto of world revolution therefore meant, in practical language, the success of the German revolution, as we can read in Béla Kun's secret message to Lenin in January 1919:

"We are fully aware that our fate is decided in Germany, but despite that, we will do everything possible . . . "[24]

The Hungarian revolution was part of an East-Central-European revolutionary process, which was much more organically connected to the Russian Revolution than today's national borders would lead us to think. The 'Russian' revolution started in Russia's European cities, and in her ports facing Europe; and a decisive role was played by those areas which soon broke away from it – Poland, the Baltic, Finland, Western Ukraine and Bessarabia – but which also remained mediators of the revolution toward the new Central European states and Germany. In the chaos of the post-war transformations the old frontiers disappeared, the new ones did not yet emerge, and, for a few months at least, nothing prevented the contacts and mutual influences between the revolutionary groups of the various East-Central-European movements. Both the 1918 and the 1919 Hungarian revolutions were an inseparable part of this broader revolutionary effervescence. The question was: could the industrial workers with their internationalist sentiments induce the Czech, Slovak, Ukrainian, Yugoslav, Hungarian, German, Jewish, Rumanian (to mention only those among the many national groups which numbered several million) and the Baltic population of this divided geographic area to unite and establish a soviet zone linked and allied with Soviet Russia, or, would the efforts of the various nations who were now in an excellent position to establish independent, bourgeois 'national states' ultimately succeeed, efforts which, though initiated 'from above', found sympathy with the national peasantry and petty bourgeoisie, and had the energetic support of the victorious Great Powers. Not before 1920–21 did it become clear that it was possible to restrict the socialist revolution to the imposed borders of a single country, which thus in fact developed into a state formation. That is, outside the borders of Soviet Russia, the revolution was completely crushed, while inside its borders it spread within five or six years even to the originally counter-revolutionary, or the underdeveloped areas as well. We should not, however, forget that the territorial arrangement within which all this finally happened, did not prove to be final and did, by no means solve the peculiar and common problems of the area, in spite of the merits which it undoubtedly had.

It is quite understandable if, under these conditions, the revolutionaries of 1919 underestimated, in a somewhat Utopian fashion, the national and political boundaries that separated the various peoples of Central Europe. This 'Central-European' perspective greatly aided the proclamation of the Hungarian Soviet Republic and was one of the sources of the intrepid

[24] *Loc. cit.*, p. 188.

daring of the Soviet Republic and its Red Army – but it was also a disadvantage, since the less likely the victory of a Central-European revolution became, the more the camp of the active supporters of the Hungarian revolution dwindled, finally leaving the most consistent and the most persevering among them isolated and alone.

It is certain, however, that in the spring of 1919, Hungary was the most likely place for the revolution of the proletariat to succeed; and because of this, the Hungarian advocates of world revolution did not doubt that they had to seize the opportunity to attain power, thus furthering the revolutionary struggle of the neighbouring peoples. And the foreign advocates of the proletarian revolution greeted the success of the Hungarian comrades with enthusiasm and sympathy.

The struggling workers and soldiers of Soviet Russia were the most enthusiastic about the Hungarian proletarian revolution, since they saw in it the beginnings of the socialist transformation of Western Europe. This conviction radiated from Lenin's well-known statements, and from the greetings of the various central and local organizations, from the Comintern, Maxim Gorky and others as well.

"We are also seeing the seed sown by the Russian Revolution springing up in Europe" – said Lenin on March 23, 1919. – "This imbues us with the absolute and unshakeable conviction that no matter how difficult the trials that may still befall us, and no matter how great the misfortunes that may be brought upon us by that dying beast, international imperialism, that beast will perish and socialism will triumph throughout the world."[25]

It is well known that Lenin, enthusiastic as he had been, also had doubts on account of the peculiar circumstances surrounding the proclamation of the Soviet Republic in Hungary. In a telegram to Béla Kun he rightly raised the question "what real guarantees you have that the new Hungarian Government will actually be a communist . . . government? ", but, wishing to avoid pronouncing judgments from a distance of many hundreds of miles and without accurate information, he added: „It is altogether beyond doubt that it would be a mistake merely to imitate our Russian tactics in all details in the specific conditions of the Hungarian revolution."[26] In any case, the events of the next few days and Béla Kun's characteristically optimistic answer reassured him, at least as far as the essence of the matter was concerned: "Two days later we became fully convinced that the Hungarian revolution had at once, with extraordinary rapidity, taken the communist road."[27]

[25] Lenin's closing address to the 8th CP Congress, *op. cit.*, Vol. 29.

[26] Lenin's cable to Béla Kun dated March 23, 1919, *loc. cit.*, p. 227.

[27] Lenin's recorded speech at the end of March 1919 about the conversation he had conducted with Béla Kun over the telegraph wires, *loc. cit.*, p. 243.

The Governing Council declared the Hungarian Soviet Republic to be allied to Soviet Russia already in its first proclamation. The leaders of Soviet Russia, and especially of the Ukrainian Red Army did everything in their power to break through the Carpathians. The Hungarian revolutionaries were counting on this and building upon it. The Entente Supreme Command was aware of these plans and hurried to close off the Northeastern Carpathian fronts on both sides with secure military cordons, thus to prevent the 'bacteria of Bolshevism' from infiltrating Europe through Hungary. For the Hungarian Red Army, the formation of a common front would primarily have meant a great increase of moral power; the strategic stabilization of the Hungarian Soviet Republic could have eliminated the possibility – which was, throughout its existence, continuously threatening the Hungarian Soviet – that the Entente armies might launch a circular attack at any moment, against which Hungary was indefensible. Military strength, munitions could have been given symbolically at best by the not too numerous Ukrainian Red Army, which had been formed mostly out of local partisan units. But the unhindered return of the Hungarian ex-prisoners of war to Hungary would have been advantageous both for military strength and for morale. And the greatest prospects of assistance were offered by the engagement and cornering of the Hungarian Red Army's most dangerous enemy: the army of the Rumanian Boyars.

To join forces with the Russian Red Army was a genuine possibility, even if it was not quite as palpable as in Budapest they would have liked to believe. Since the Russian-Ukrainian Red Army had pressed forward several hundred kilometres in a few months, it seemed that the remaining two-three hundred could easily be left behind in a few weeks. The more so since the political situation in the territory of the Western Ukraine resembled that of Hungary in many respects, and it could be expected that the adherents of the left would prevail.

The Western Ukraine had been a part of the Monarchy until 1918. With the collapse of the Monarchy it gained temporary independence, the state machinery disintegrated and the power relations changed practically every week, depending on the military situation. The government, composed of social democrats and social revolutionaries, followed the example of the popular accomplishments of the Russian Revolution in many respects, but at the same time, it was sharply anti-Russian and its major support consisted of Petljura's counter-revolutionary army. Their situation also resembled that of the Károlyi government in that they too tried in vain to bring the existence of the Ukrainian nation to the attention of the Entente – in Paris they decided to split the Ukraine into two parts, and not to support even the fiercely anti-Russian Petljura unless he made an agreement with the Poles. The socialist Vinnichenko government resigned

on February 9th, 1919, to comply with the demand of French General Berthelmy, who stated: they should not count on any aid until the leftist elements "are chased out like dogs".[28] Although Petljura did continue to fight the Polish army, in order to win Berthelmy over, he stopped the talks with Moscow which had been begun by the Vinnichenko government. As a result of the Hungarian March Revolution and the successes of the Ukrainian Red Army in the Western Ukraine, the forces hostile to Petljura were rekindled. At their Stanislau congress at the end of March, the left adopted the slogan of socialist revolution; under their pressure a new socialist government was formed again on April 9th, which, though practically depending on Petljura, accepted a land reform bill, introduced an 8 hour workday, and so forth. The fact that a number of previously anti-communist partisan groups – among them hetman Hrihoriev's division – joined the Red Army, had a significant effect on the government's politics.

Béla Kun immediately sized up the importance of the changing Western Ukrainian situation for the Hungarian Soviet Republic, for the advent of peace would have opened the road between Budapest and Kiev (although railway connections could only have been established after the seizure and occupation of Lvov). Therefore he made an offer to Vinnichenko, who had fled to Vienna, to mediate between him and Lenin. At the beginning of April Béla Kun requested Lenin several times to consider the compromise with Vinnichenko, who sympathized with Bolshevism. In the end, the Soviet Commissariat for Foreign Affairs essentially rejected the suggestion. That this rejection had been a realistic one, was acknowledged even by the emigré Ukrainian historical literature. Any agreement with Vinnichenko, sitting in Vienna, would have been in vain as long as power was in the hands of Petljura's pogrom-warriors. The price of the agreement would have been – as it was in Hungary – to allow the vacillators into the Ukrainian soviet government of Kiev, which would have been contrary to Lenin's politics after the 1918 insurrection of Social Revolutionaries.[29]

Even so, for the time being, there remained the hope for the Hungarian Soviet Republic that if the Ukrainian Red Army crosses the river Zbruch, the frontier of the Eastern and the Western Ukraine, the ongoing talks would facilitate the defeat of Petljura and the conclusion of a peaceful compromise. In April they signed a trade agreement with the Western

[28] Quoted by V. Vinnichenko, *Vidroshdennia Natzii*, Kiew–Vienna 1920.

[29] Vinnichenko, *op. cit.*, and A. V. Liholat, *Razgrom natzionalistitseskoi kontrarevolutsii na Ukraine*, Moscow 1954; W. Kutschabsky, *Die Westukraine im Kampfe mit Polen und dem Bolschewismus in den Jahren 1918–1923*, Berlin 1934; V. A. Antonov–Ovseenko, *Zametki o grashdanskoi voine*. Vol. IV, Moscow 1933.

Ukrainian government. At the same time, the Soviet Red Army General Staff made preparations for the establishment of railway connections – with military force. The Entente intervention in the Ukraine – which, in point of fact, was part of a plan that included the adversely effective Vix-memorandum – failed, Franchet d'Esperey's personal appearance in Odessa the day the Vix-memorandum was handed over was of no use, by April 6th Hrihoriev's partisans were running about in Odessa's streets and the South Ukrainian expeditionary troops of the Entente had to be withdrawn once and for all. In the middle of April the Red Army reached the frontier of the one-time Monarchy at Kameniec-Podolsky, and with that came within 150 kilometers of the frontier of the Hungarian Soviet Republic at Jablonica pass. Elsewhere the srengthening of the left in Galicia provoked a number of workers' and peasants' movements, which culminated around April 14–15 in the insurrections of the workers of Drogobich and Stanislau.

Next to the Ukraine, the leaders of the Hungarian Soviet Rebulic would have liked to win Austria, above all, over to the cause of the international revolution. If Vienna joins Budapest, Béla Kun told the Governing Council at its March 27th meeting, we'll push the revolution through all the way to the French borders. The Austrian workers did indeed greet the news from Budapest with intense sympathy; they discussed at hundreds of meetings whether they should follow the Hungarian revolution. As it turned out, even in these revolutionary weeks the Austrian workers' movement remained under the influence of the Socialist Party, the traditional 'Austro–Marxism', which did not consider the internal and external conditions of Austria ripe for the seizing of power; still it could barely prevent civil war, even with its compliant politics.[30]

The resilient tactics of the Austrian centrists at first kindled over-optimistic hopes in Budapest, even though the very warm, March 23 response-greeting of the executive committee of the Austrian workers' soviets already clearly stated: " . . . even our bread supplies depend on those food trains which the Entente sends us. Thus we are entirely enslaved to the Entente."[31] The Entente openly threatened Austria: they would discontinue the food shipments and reinstate the blockade which had been raised only a few days before, if Austria follows the Hungarian example. In the first few days of the Soviet Republic the Hungarian social democrats also used their influence in Vienna, for Austria's support would not only have strengthened the position of the Soviet Republic, but would doubtlessly have increased the political weight of the social

[30] S. Gábor, *Ausztria és a magyarországi Tanácsköztársaság (Austria and the Hungarian Soviet Republic)*, Budapest 1969.

[31] *Arbeiterzeitung* (Vienna), March 23, 1919.

democrats in the government as well. But the Viennese mission of Vilmos Böhm, Mihály Károlyi and József Diner-Dénes could no more alter the position of Renner and his associates than the semi-secretly sent communist organizers could change the balance of forces in the Austrian workers' movement.

It would be difficult to gauge what played a greater role in the Austrian decision: their reformist convictions or the threats of the Entente. It is a fact that though the Austrian government kept up diplomatic relations with the Hungarian Soviet Republic and continued trade relations with it, indeed ignored the smuggling of arms, yet the social democratic leadership unequivocally adhered to the coalition government they had formed with the bourgeoisie. The Austrian communists continued to fan the fires spreading from the East with unceasing zeal, even in their increasing isolation. And although they did not score a victory, they indeed helped the Hungarian Soviet Republic, and the Austrian workers, who were able to win social benefits unequalled anywhere else in capitalist Europe. They knew that the Hungarian revolution had no small part in this. In the first half of April about 1,800 Austrian communists came to Hungary to enlist in the Red Army. The heroic decision already carried within itself the improbability of the Austrian proletarian revolution – although the Austrian communists did not admit this even amongst themselves until June of 1919.

The proclamation of the Soviet Republic had a remarkable effect on the workers of the other neighbouring countries as well. But in these countries the influence of the Entente was extremely great, the more so, since it could take advantage of the ongoing national liberation, the feeling of national unity, which mostly outdid the spirit of class struggle. To discharge the revolutionary spirit of the peasantry, the new states skilfully used the land reform, which also strengthened them by uprooting the German, Hungarian and partially Slav aristocracy, who had become interdependent with the Monarchy.

In Slovakia, the revolution of March 21 was greeted with mass meetings, local insurrections and demonstrations, whose slogans were mainly directed against the condition of martial law declared by the government, and against the order of mobilization (which was not extended to Hungarians). In many parts of Slovakia the people refused induction *en masse*. By way of response the government ordered the internment of the leftist and communist leaders as a preventive measure, and amended the March 25th order of martial law by prohibitions of assembly and the imposition of a curfew. Slovakia was essentially ruled by military dictatorship while in Bohemia more or less democratic conditions prevailed. For in Bohemia, where the powerful and experienced

bourgeoisie took over the repressive state apparatus from the Monarchy, the situation was nowhere near as revolutionary as in Slovakia.[32]

In Czechoslovakia the communist groups, not too numerous, could not prevail upon the Social Democratic left, led by Šmeral, to make a decision – they did not break away from the right wing until 18 months after the Hungarian Social Democratic left wing did so. At the end of March 1919, the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party met in Prague for an extraordinary party conference in order to draw up their position statement – as did the Austrian Socialist Party – *vis-à-vis* the Hungarian Soviet Republic. The communist minority, which, in practice, was already outside the party, and the German and Hungarian socialists did not accept the policy of supporting Masaryk, but Masaryk's conceptions of national liberation and democratic reforms determined the majority's attitude.

The proclamation of the Hungarian Soviet Republic had the most direct effect on the Yugoslav workers' movement. The debates of the Yugoslav workers' movement had reached a decisive stage in the spring of 1919, and the revolution in Budapest, according to Tito's words, contributed to the formation of the Yugoslav Communist Party in April of 1919.[33] As is well known, the communist movement there remained predominant thereafter. The Yugoslav workers sympathized with the Hungarian revolution, and felt no enthusiasm whatsoever for participation in a war of intervention. It became immediately apparent that the Yugoslav state could not participate in the suppression of the Hungarian revolution with any significant strength. The resistance partly came from the workers' movement, and, since the authority of the new state was still weak, great numbers of people simply resisted the draft in the newly acquired areas of the country. Serbia, on the other hand, suffered such great losses in the First World War, that it could offer but a very moderate number of men for service. Nor was the foreign policy of the government entirely unambiguous, in so far as they were saving their military strength for potential conflicts with Italy, Rumania and Albania, while their territorial demands from Hungary were already satisfied, and, so long as Hungary did not attack Yugoslavia, they even considered the Hungarian Red Army advantageous for keeping Rumania in check, as Rumania also made claims on the Yugoslav section of the Banat. This explains why the Belgrade government, when the French general staff asked Yugoslavia for three infantry divisions after having worked out plan of intervention against the Hungarian Soviet Republic, only promised a single division, and even that reluctantly and conditionally.

[32] Martin Vietor, *A Szlovák Tanácsköztársaság (The Slovak Soviet Republic)*, Bratislava 1960.
[33] *Tito's report to the 1948 Congress of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia*, Belgrade 1948.

In Rumania any manifestation of sympathy for the Hungarian revolution was ruthlessly crushed by the authorities who were preparing for armed intervention, but the self-conscious workers were not deterred by the terror. *Socialismul,* the Socialist Party organ in Bucharest, disclosed the truth about the biased reports which tried to depict the proclamation of the Hungarian Soviet Republic as a manoeuvre of the Berinkey government. At the beginning of April, the Transylvanian railroad workers protested against the threats of intervention with a general strike and sabotage; several hundred were arrested in retaliation. Beyond doubt, not only internationalism but Hungarian national sentiment also played an important role in the manifestations of solidarity in Slovakia and Transylvania, but the practical significance of this was lost behind the international concensus of the Hungarian and the non-Hungarian ruling classes.

According to the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs "public sentiment did not remain unaffected by the latest events in Hungary, the subversive activities of the communists have multiplied".[34] In Germany, under the shadow of the strict peace terms, waiting to be signed, the rejection of the Entente dictates met with sympathy even outside the workers' movement. Within the German workers' movement, where the Communist Party and the left wing of the Independent Socialists were trying to draw closer to each other through debates, the union of the parties aroused special interest. The workers of Munich approved of the Hungarian proletarian revolution without reservations, as is shown by the proclamation of the Bavarian Soviet Republic. Sympathy was also manifested by the strike movements which sprang up again in April in Braunschweig and other parts of Germany. During these weeks, right up to the defeat of the Bavarian Soviet Republic on May 1st, it could be hoped that Germany too would go the way of socialism; although the 'Majority' Social Democratic Party leadership took a stance of unequivocal rejection toward the revolution in Budapest from the very beginning, unlike their Austrian comrades who were tacking about under the pressure of centrism. In the western half of the European continent, in addition to the communist parties the left wing social democrats and other progressive groups were also in favour of the Hungarian revolution, although the geographic distance and the divergent nature of their internal problems made public opinion uncertain about the true significance of the Central European events. In the Italian or French Socialist Parties, where the communists had not yet split, the communists generally succeeded in getting the entire party to take a sympathetic stance. After March 21st, Marcel Cachin called upon the soldiers from the podium of parliament to refuse

[34] S. Gábor and F. Mucsi (ed.), *A magyarországi Tanácsköztársaság 50. évfordulója (The 50th Anniversary of the Soviet Republic of Hungary)*, Budapest 1970, p. 367.

obedience in case of an attempted armed intervention, in April a revolt broke out in the French fleet of the Black Sea: all this evidently contributed to Clemenceau's waryness of using the French troops directly for intervention. The English and American workers' movement had no such effect on their governments' Central European policies. The Asian revolutionary movements, on the other hand, gave occasion for hope; in March, 1919 the Korean people rebelled against the Japanese conquerors, in April the English army's volley-firing at India's Amritsar exploded the Penjabi rebellion, the revolutionary demonstration of students in Peking was followed by the large-scale May 4th movement in China. In the final analysis, those in Budapest who saw in the mass movements of Asia not merely a phenomenon attendant on the war, but a new and important factor of the world-revolutionary process were right, although they did overestimate these movements' effect on the formation of the European balance of forces at the time.

Foreign relations were of course decisive from the very beginning in the fate of the revolution. The Hungarian Commune had many friends and supporters throughout the world, but it had powerful enemies as well: the lords of the victorious imperialist empires and the new rulers of the neighbouring countries who feared for the solidity of their power. It was difficult to erect a realistic foreign policy on this contradictory ground, especially in a situation in which the armies of the enemy were a mere 2–3 days journey away from the revolutionary capital, which meant that any error could have resulted in disastrous consequences.

The Governing Council, recognizing that it was threatened less from within, by the deposed ruling classes, than from without, ceaselessly strove, from the very day of its formation, to improve its foreign affairs, utilizing all ways and means, trying the whole scale of possibilities to break out of its isolation.

The Soviet Republic saw the light in the sign of revolutionary national defense, but its leaders – veterans of war for the most part – were completely aware of the catastrophic prospects for the military situation should the country be attacked from various or all sides at once. Their faith in the further spread of the revolution was one more reason to repudiate the thought of initiating armed conflict, at least not until the red flag was raised in one of the neighbouring countries. In such a case, however, nothing would have restrained them from giving aid, not even if they had to cross the borders. At the time, the communists did not grant much significance to borders, particularly in a country which did not even have any.

The goal of the revolution was not the correction of the borders but rather their elevation – in the given situation nothing better could be

imagined, even from a purely national Hungarian point of view. There were no prospects whatsoever for the whole Hungarian nation to live together within the boundaries of a single Hungarian state, and Jászi's dream of the Danubian confederation met with the opposition of Paris and the ruling national bourgeoisie of the neighbouring countries. Thus the internationalist interests of the proletarian revolution met with the national interest in such a way that the revolutionaries were not drawn into the gravitational field of nationalism. The revolutionary leadership acknowledged the patriotic character of the Soviet Republic and wished to make people aware of it; explaining to the leadership of the Red Army, Béla Kun expounded that "the Marxian watchword that 'the proletariat has no homeland' can no longer be applied to the Hungarian proletariat, for it has ceased to be valid for us".[35] Nevertheless, his statements are characterized more by the assertion of proletarian internationalism than by patriotism; he took care to stress the proletarian nature of the revolution above all. Kun's cautiousness was partly a result of his anxiety about petty-bourgeois nationalism. From today's perspective it would seem that a bolder emphasis on the patriotic goals would have broadened the mass base of the revolution, especially among those in whose mentality the national sentiment dominated over class considerations: but on the other hand it would have moderated the non-Hungarian nations' sympathy toward the Hungarian revolution, and without that, the survival of the Soviet Republic had been inconceivable.

The Hungarian Soviet was eager to exploit the favourable circumstances of its birth for approaching the astonished Paris Conference. The possibility of a Bolshevik revolution in Hungary had been taken into account in Paris, but it was hoped that it would immediately collapse in a bloody civil war or in an armed attack against its neighbours, and that the people would then welcome the Entente forces sent to reestablish order. That the Soviet Republic might live in peace with its neighbours as the showcase of socialism in Eastern Europe – this possibility confused the rulers of the world, even if only for a few weeks.

The workers did actually conceive of the world-revolution as simply as did Clemenceau and his associates: on the night of the revolution a group of soldiers and youths captured the staff of the Czechoslovak embassy and confiscated their records. The directory of Békéscsaba sent two armored trains to seize a French military train bound for Arad. Vix might have been beaten to death on the 21st had Böhm not provided for his security in time. But General de Lobit, the signatory of the so-called Vix-memorandum, after having learnt of the rejection of his ultimatum, on the morning of the 21st, requested the British Admiral Troubridge to rescue

[35] *A Vörös Katona (The Red Soldier)*, March 30, 1919.

the Vix mission. Troubridge sent two monitors from Belgrade, which arrived on the following day. The red sailors immediately arrested the English commander, and addressing the crew as 'Comrades and sympathizers', called on the crew to join them. Béla Kun could only persuade the sailors with great difficulty to allow the despised Vix to depart.

Although the masses exaggerated Vix's role and autonomy – and the lasting effect of this mood can be felt on subsequent commentary as well – those who directed Hungarian foreign policy were more or less aware of the actual situation. For indeed, they were familiar with the contents of the Vix-memorandum even before Vix had received orders to convey it.[36] They did not take seriously his fluster on the day of the revolution (he requested 15,000 troops from Belgrade for the occupation of Budapest), in fact they asked him to stay on so that they may keep in touch through him, if not with the political leadership of the Great Powers – Kun was aware that Vix was not the proper channel to Paris – at least with de Lobit's command in Belgrade, the Balkan army of the Entente. Since Vix thought fit to leave, they sent Otto Roth, the party secretary of Temesvár (Timisoara) to Belgrade. Anxiety proved to be stronger than the prohibition against diplomatic communication with the Hungarian government; on March 25th de Lobit sent a telegraphic memorandum to Béla Kun accusing him of violating the cease-fire of November 13th and assigning him personal responsibility for the safety of the Vix mission. On March 27th, in the company of the French ambassador to Belgrade, de Lobit received Roth, who – while Troubridge's Danube flottila stood in readiness at Baja – reassured them of the peaceable intentions of the Budapest Soviet government. Kun also hastened to reply to de Lobit in a memorandum: he rejected the charge of violating the cease-fire, he guaranteeed the safety of the Vix mission and he expressed his readiness to pursue negotiations without any conditions.[37]

The exchange of memoranda and the negotiations with de Lobit was a diplomatic success – still, the major task was to clarify relations between Paris and Budapest. Thus already on March 24th Kun addressed an official memorandum to the Great Powers. The memorandum was handed to Prince Borghese, the Italian diplomat who had arrived in Budapest only a few days before the 21st, and who was persuaded aforehand by the social democratic commissars, Ágoston and Kunfi that the Soviet Republic would move in a 'moderate' socialist direction if the Great Powers showed understanding, otherwise it would be forced to take the Russian path. Borghese sent the memorandum along to the Italian Prime Minister

[36] Hajdu, *A Contribution* . . . p. 77; Pastor, *op. cit.*, pp. 131–132.
[37] PRO FO 371, Vol. 3514.

Orlando, who placed Béla Kun's message on the Peace Conference table on March 29th.

The Governing Council stated in its memorandum that it stood on the foundation of socialism, and considered itself an ally of Soviet Russia: "The alliance with Russia is not a formal diplomatic alliance, it is at the most – if we may use the expression – an 'entente cordiale', a natural friendship justified by the identical construction of their respective constitutions, which in the thought of the Hungarian government does not in any way imply an aggressive combination. The new Hungarian Republic, on the contrary, has a firm desire to live in peace with all the other nations . . . " It recognizes the validity of the Belgrade armistice signed by the Károlyi government, but refuses to acknowledge the Vix-memorandum, and instead invites the Peace Conference to send a delegation to Budapest, and they "declare themselves ready to negotiate territorial questions on the basis of the principle of self-determination of the People, and they view territorial integrity solely as in conformity with that principle."[38]

Recognizing and exploiting the latent possibilities of the astonishment of the Peace Conference and of the split between the Italians and the French Kun immediately achieved what Károlyi barely dared to try – bypassing the petty officers and suspect agents and getting his recommendations directly on the agenda of the Big Four. He asked a high price for his willingness to negotiate: above and beyond the request that by sending a delegation, the victors in principle recognize the rejection of their previous memorandum, Kun wanted to negotiate the new borders – which the Big Four had refused to discuss even with Germany –, indeed Kun even avoided the immediate renunciation of 'territorial integrity', which, in fact, he had never intended to insist upon.

A few weeks earlier or later Paris would never have even considered a memorandum of this sort; and however propitious the moment may have been, there was still no chance that the victors would pursue negotiations with the Soviet Republic on substantial issues. Yet for the revolution, even this merely formal diplomatic activity meant survival. In the first place because, while the Entente was negotiating, it did not attack; and secondly, because a decision had been made just a few days earlier to raise the wartime economic blockade against the former Austro–Hungarian Monarchy, and it was vitally crucial for the ruined Hungarian national economy that the import prohibitions used against it as political discrimination be discontinued.

[38] *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States. The Paris Peace Conference 1919.* Washington 1946, Vol. V. p. 18; Zsuzsa L. Nagy, *A párizsi békekonferencia és Magyarország 1918–1919 (The Paris Peace Conference and Hungary 1918–1919)*, Budapest 1965, pp. 103 and 258.

The question of the Hungarian Soviet Republic was first discussed at the Peace Conference on March 27th. Making use of the reports about the Soviet Republic's preparations for war, Marshall Foch proposed a sweeping plan for the occupation of Vienna and Budapest, and the expansion of anti-Soviet interventions. His proposals were rejected, primarily because the hopelessness of external intervention against Soviet Russia was recognized by the participants. In the case of Hungary, on the other hand, the great powers never for a moment relinquished the objective of violently liquidating the revolution, and none of them questioned the priorities of France, politically the most aggressive of the victors, in the East-Central-European 'sphere of interest'. The bankruptcy of the Vix type of politics and the uncertainty of the relations between revolutionary Hungary and the neighbouring countries urged caution, and for a few days the Anglo-Saxon leaders seized the initiative in the Hungarian question. There was essentially no difference between their policy and that of the French, they merely proceeded with greater caution. After listening to the accounts of Vix and Roth, Troubridge reported: "In my opinion there is still time to prevent Hungarian National Movement (from) becoming purely Bolshevist", and he asked to be sent to Budapest;[39] but the April 1st resolution of the Peace Conference assigned an even higher ranking emissary for the task, General Smuts, a member of the British War Cabinet and of the Peace Delegation.

Smuts conferred in Budapest on April 4th–5th. His main responsibility was to gain sufficient information and his authority – which nonetheless exceeded that of de Lobit – extended only to modifying the demarcation lines of the Vix-memorandum. The new Hungarian demarcation line he proposed was 25 kilometers to the east of Vix's, so that Debrecen would not have to have been evacuated, while Arad, Nagyvárad (Oradea) and Szatmár (Satu-Mare) would have fallen into the new neutral zone. This modification could not be accepted by the Governing Council, considering that it had come to power two weeks earlier with a program of rejecting the Vix-memorandum. Kun offered a counter-proposal: invoking the principle of the self-determination of peoples, the representatives of the Hungarian, Austrian, German, Czechoslovak, Yugoslav and Rumanian governments should be called together in Paris or Vienna to discuss the new borders and economic relations. Even Smuts acknowledged the rationality of the proposal, since it contained the most equitable, definitive solution – but precisely because of that, the proposal had no chance of being accepted.

On his return Smuts conferred with the Czechoslovak and the Austrian heads of state, who believed that an economic agreement among the states

[39] PRO FO 371, Vol. 3515. Troubridge's report to the Admiralty dated March 27th 1919.

in the Danube Basin was entirely possible. In his report Smuts supported Kun's idea of holding a conference, recommended removing the blockade, acknowledged the Hungarian Soviet Republic's desire for peace, and argued that Hungary could be best kept clear of Russia by inviting the Hungarians to Paris for negotiations. The most important result of his trip, however, was his conclusion that what was happening in Hungary was truly Bolshevism and not merely an extreme manifestation of wounded national pride. For this reason his proposals were ignored. In fact, the day after Smuts left Budapest, Franchet d'Esperey arrived in Bucharest and made an agreement with the Rumanian military command that they would begin attack as soon as they were ready and seize the line indicated by Vix. The next day Franchet d'Esperey was already conferring in Belgrade with the Yugoslav leaders, whose opinions varied, and, although they did not categorically refuse participation in the intervention, they asked far too high a price for it. When it turned out that Franchet d'Esperey was organizing the intervention on his own authority, only with the passive consent of Paris, they stayed away from him. The more so as the Yugoslav politicians were irritated by the fact that the royalist Franchet d'Esperey might be willing to place the Archduke Joseph, who was busily offering his support to everybody, at the head of the counter-revolutionary government to be formed in Budapest.

Masaryk and Beneš were theoretically willing to take part in the intervention, but their army was weak, and morale was low. And the opinion of the working class had to be taken into account since the united Social Democratic Party participated in the government. On April 3rd, Masaryk publicly reassured the social democratic leaders: participation in the intervention was out of the question. An awkward situation emerged: the Prague Ministry of War was secretly making preparations for an offensive under the direction of Entente officers, while the press worked at inciting public opinion through fabricated stories of Hungarian assaults.

Smuts' mission was the work of the British Prime Minister, Lloyd George, who had in the meantime withdrawn in face of his aggressive conservative opposition; and the Times and other influential papers launched a personal press campaign against Smuts; indeed they asserted that the centrists in the Governing Council (Böhm and Garbai) whom Smuts trusted, were Bolsheviks just like Béla Kun. Even Troubridge's informant in Budapest, Lieutenant-Commander Freeman-Williams, affirmed that Smuts' trip only strengthened the revolutionary government, and that an internal counter-revolution was doomed without intervention, but an armed attack would meet the least obstacles the sooner it was begun.[40] Freeman-Williams even disapproved of the ARA's

[40] *Loc. cit.*, Freeman–Williams' report dated April 13th, 1919.

delivery of an already paid-for shipment of lard to red Budapest from Trieste. Wilson and his followers in general were committed to finding a democratic solution in Hungary. But President Wilson had also lost much of his internal support, his nervous condition was getting worse, and in these days he, like Orlando, was absorbed by the Italian–Yugoslav conflict erupting over the occupation of Fiume. The advocates of immediate intervention felt that in Hungary, at least, they had a free hand, and in order to avoid further disputes they did not take their plans to the Peace Conference, knowing ahead that the implementation of their plans would not elicit opposition from the Conference, which was preoccupied with other problems.

As it was not possible to deploy additional armed forces at the time, the Rumanian ruler and his advisors accepted – as they did in 1916 – the temporary dangers of an attack with uncertain consequences, hoping that their allies would hasten to their aid in case of need, in order to obtain the maximum of their territorial demands. On April 10th, the Rumanian Crown Council decided to launch the intervention, the following day the head of the Rumanian general staff informed General Mardarescu, the commander of the armed forces in Transylvania, of the plan of attack and gave orders for its execution.

The avowed goal of the attack could only be to seize the Vix line, but the troops were ordered to proceed all the way to the Tisza river. On April 13th, the Bucharest envoys of the four Great Powers asked their governments in a joint memorandum to sanction the Rumanian attack,[41] thus the support of Paris was assured. The ultimate goal of the attack was not determined; this would have been premature from a military point of view, and, in addition, the liquidation of the Hungarian Soviet Republic could not yet be decided upon because the victors had no idea what kind of government they should put in its place. The Governing Council still seemed concerted at the time; the Allies no longer trusted Károlyi and his followers after March 21st, but they still hoped for a better solution than the revival of the pre-war, conservative political phantoms particularly hated by the Slav and Rumanian neighbours. It was partly for this that the hasty advances of the counts Gyula Andrássy, István Bethlen, Pál Teleki and the Archduke Joseph were rejected by them, and partly because the leaders of the 'historic classes' thought that by fighting Bolshevism they could acquire territorial and other concessions. In Paris, however, it was thought that the Hungarian aristocrats and capitalists owed gratitude and unconditional obedience if their power was restored.

Only ten days had passed between Smuts' friendly mission and the military intervention without an ultimatum, during which time Paris did

[41] *Loc. cit.*

not indicate its intentions nor made any new demands. The Hungarian Soviet Republic was fortunate that its government had not pinned too many hopes on the possibility of starting negotiations.

Béla Kun, as Commissar of Foreign Affairs, considered the strengthening of ties with Soviet Russia to be the most important. One of his first acts was to establish direct contact with Lenin via the wireless of Csepel Island, and he maintained contact with Chicherin, the Soviet Commissar of Foreign Affairs, in the same manner. With his help, but also through the use of messengers, planes, the Hungarian government kept abreast of news in Soviet Russia, its domestic and foreign achievements, and was well-informed of its current problems. Chicherin considered the Hungarian Soviet Republic very significant, and in addition to sending information and advice, he also endeavoured to encourage Kun to hold out. In this his judgment was not as carefully weighed as that of Lenin, and unlike Lenin, he did not take into account the fact that Kun was more in need of mollification than of encouragement by optimistic news. Chicherin and Kun endeavoured to alleviate the diplomatic isolation of Soviet Russia by making use of the Hungarian Soviet Republic's superior connections, but their efforts met with a negative response from the capitalist powers who were still hoping for Kolchak's victory.

The Hungarian Soviet Republic tried to establish contact with as many capitalist countries as possible in the interest of solidifying its economic and political position, but also for the sake of the revolution's propaganda. At the beginning of May, in addition to the Austrian embassy and the Italian, British and American diplomatic or military missions, the governments of Poland, Yugoslavia, Western Ukraine, and Denmark were represented in Budapest. Consulates were maintained in Budapest by Bolivia, Brazilia, Bulgaria, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Haiti, Liberia, Mexico, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, San Marino, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey and Uruguay. The consulates, in part honorary, also represented the interests of other states' subjects. The Hungarian Soviet Republic unsuccessfully tried to maintain the diplomatic ties established by the Károlyi régime in Switzerland, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.

The Hungarian revolutionaries were not only confident that the workers of Central Europe would follow their example, they also tried to influence them directly. The Hungarian Communist Party regarded itself not merely as a Hungarian party, but as one of the Comintern's Central European centers, and did everything in its power to establish communist parties in Czechoslovakia, Rumania and Yugoslavia and to support the Communist Party in Austria. The Rumanian, Czech, Slovak an Yugoslav groups had already been formed during the Károlyi régime, and after the proletarian revolution, the 15 national sections were joined in an International Socialist Federation. In addition to the above, the Federation

members included German, Bulgarian, French, Italian, Russian, Székely (the Magyars in Eastern Transylvania), Ukrainian, Carpathian Ukrainian and Jewish sections, and the Eastern Socialist Party which was comprised of Muslims (Albanians, Arabs and Turks). In addition to working on unifying the non-Hungarian socialist parties living within the area of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, the sections tried to spread the spirit of revolution on the other side of the fronts and among the soldiers of the enemy camps. They published and disseminated approximately 20 foreign language papers, often at the risk of their lives, not to mention the propaganda tracts and the German party and trade-union journals.

The foreign policy of the Hungarian Soviet Republic cannot be separated from its policy towards the nationalities, due to the lack of its territory's definition and the constant border changes. The Hungarian Soviet Republic took the principle of the self-determination of peoples as its basic stance, but this principle was applied to concord with the conception of world revolution. The Soviet guaranteed the rights of the non-Hungarians in Hungary in accordance with the principle of internationalism, primarily to protect their interests under the principle of proletarian equality and secondarily, expecting that the Soviet's rejection of every manifestation of nationalism would influence the neighbouring countries favourably. The program of the united party stated: "We must strive to do away with all the national prejudices which have been artifically bred among the proletariat speaking different languages", and in the interest of this "to avoid even the semblance of a policy of oppressing nationalities . . . Since the Hungarian proletariat was not nationally oppressed, as were the proletarians of the country's other nationalities, we must treat the latter with special tact, so as not to offend their national sensibilities . . . "[42] Every authority was obliged to handle requests and other matters in the mother-tongue of the petitioning party, if the latter so desired.

The Germans and the Ruthenians were to be represented by a country-wide National Council, which elected the German and Ruthenian commissars holding seats in the Governing Council.

We could invoke hundreds of examples to show how much the Hungarian Soviet Republic did to promote the equality of nationalities and lessen the hatred among them. Nevertheless, it is undeniably true that these laudable principles were only partially transposed into everyday practice. In this, only a small part was played by theoretical errors, dogmatic, 'left-wing communist' views, on the basis of which many in Russia refused to recognize Finnish or Polish 'bourgeois national self-determination'. The Hungarian Soviet Republic was not in any position

[42] MMTVD Vol. 6/B (March 21st–August 1st 1919), Budapest 1960, p. 51.

militarily to try to influence the self-determination of the non-Hungarian nationalities; the conflict of 'bourgeois' and 'proletarian' self-determination could not even be posed in the cases of the predominantly peasant Rumanian, Slovak, Ukrainian, and German nationalities – as it could be done with the Finnish. The essence of the problem was, on the contrary, precisely that – because of their level of development – popular nationalism had a greater effect on these people than the idea of class struggle. For their class struggle was not waged against a national bourgeoisie of their own, but against an at least formally Magyarized ruling class, and so, class feelings mingled with nationalistic sentiments.

It was with the German-majority population of Western Hungary (contemporary Burgenland and the area around Sopron and Moson) that class considerations played the greatest role. The socialist workers and the poorer population opted for socialist Hungary, the more so since here, the German population had never been discriminated against. The wealthy bourgeoisie and peasantry, however, supported secession, led partly by their national and political sentiments, and partly by the fact that a starving Vienna offered a favourable market to their products. Since the workers were not influenced for secession by the bourgeoisie, the Governing Council was justified in opposing secession. The German population of the Transdanubian and Bonyhád regions was not in a position to try to break off, but they strove for the autonomy of German territories that were more or less contiguous, an autonomy which the German Commissariat, organized by the leaders of the old, German-speaking social democratic movement, took great pains to work out in great detail and elaborate thoroughness.

The Rumanian, Ukrainian and Slovene (Wend) minorities ultimately wanted to unite with their ethnic relatives, therefore there was no way to work out a definitive solution for their situation. It was the situation of the Rumanians that posed the greatest difficulties. During the first few weeks, the large Rumanian population, which lived in the North-Western Transylvanian territory adjoining the territory east of the Tisza river, and was under the control of the Székely division of the army, had counted on joining Rumania; for this reason its leadership of intellectuals and priests turned a deaf ear to even a temporary compromise with the Hungarian Soviet Republic. The agitation of the socialists from the various Hungarian cities, particularly Nagyvárad (Oradea), was outweighed by the chauvinism of the Székely officers' staff which virtually practiced military dictatorship in the area, even more than by the Rumanian propaganda.

The conditions were different in the territory of the Ruthenians (Zakarpatska Ukraine). The military situation in the Ukraine forced those who advocated union with the Western Ukraine to inaction, while those who sympathized with the Soviet Ukraine supported the Hungarian Soviet

Republic as a part of the future international Soviet Republic. The workers' movement, on the other hand, was immature and lacked initiative, thus the Governing Council was obliged to tolerate the Ágoston Stefán type of pro-Hungarian clerical-intellectual clique as the head of the Ruthenian Commissariat. In consequence of the military operations, the soviets were generally abolished in Ruthenia by the end of April; and the Ukrainian nationalists of the Commissariat immediately shed their role as functionaries of the Soviet Republic and became the officials of the new Czechoslovak state, not in the least desired by the Ukrainian people. The local soviets survived for weeks in many places, and even such a short reign of the Soviet Republic had a part in making this impoverished region the most solid foundation of the Czechoslovak Communist Party in the twenties.

In the small region of the Wends the *directoire* was formed immediately after the proclamation of the Hungarian Soviet Republic to carry out the decrees and orders of the Governing Council. With this the Wend people obtained the self-government they had not been granted by the Károlyi revolution. But the people of this backward peasant region were unable to fill the frameworks of autonomy with socialist contents. The local nationalists, who became leaders on account of the lack of any other organized forces, soon fell into the nets of the counter-revolutionaries who were organizing from Austrian territories. The realization of Wend autonomy progressed slowly after the suppression of the counter-revolutionary rebellion. It was primarily the Red Army that guaranteed the protection of the territory – annexed to Yugoslavia in the meantime by the Peace Conference – and that promoted the realization of social welfare objectives.

THE CONCEPT OF THE IMMEDIATE REALIZATION OF SOCIALISM

In its very first public summons 'To All!' the Governing Council promised to "immediately begin the series of great works that would prepare and realize socialism and communism. The Revolutionary Governing Council proclaims the nationalization of the large estates, the mines, the factories, the banks and transportation companies. The land reform will be carried out, not by way of a land redistribution that would create small holdings, but through socialist productive co-operatives."[43]

With these few words, the proclamation in effect summed up the essence of the concept of achieving socialism, as conceived by the 1919 Hungarian communists and leftist social democrats. The use of the word 'immediate' is characteristic, as they truly did present a program for the immediate achievement of socialism, without allowing for a transition period. On the basis of our experiences today, this program, although based on the original, purely proletarian principles of socialism, appears to be unrealistic, indeed utopian in many respects. If however, we consider the fact that every revolution makes its own miscalculations and mistakes, we must not consider these utopian mistakes to be a principal feature of this revolution. Of primary significance is rather the fact that this revolution was founded on the political conception of the Comintern, on the expectation of the success of the world revolution within a few years, which in turn presumed a very rapid, co-ordinated economic growth led by the industrially most highly developed countries, with optimal international co-operation and market economy, and minimal unproductive (*e.g.*: military) investments.

By contrast, the economy of the Hungarian Soviet Republic was a military economy, but it did not in the least resemble the 'military communism' in effect in Soviet Russia at the time, and it bore even less similarity to the 'new economic policy' (the NEP) introduced after the civil war. Certain features of military communism were indeed to be found in the economic policies of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. But we would look in vain for such essential features of it as the restriction of

[43] *Op. cit.*, Vol 6/A, Budapest 1959, p. 3.

private enterprise and financial management to a minimum, the grain monopoly, the forced requisition of food, the 'prodrasverstka'. In its theoretical objectives, the economic policy of the Hungarian Soviet Republic most resembled the economic policies of the relatively peaceful months that followed the Russian October Revolution, which indeed aimed for the immediate realization of socialism, of proletarian equality (in wages, for example), and which also contained not a few utopian, communistic ideas.

This is supported by the fact that the Soviet press, and Lenin himself commended the rapid nationalization of Hungarian industry:

"The policy of the Hungarian Government was most firm and so Communist in trend, that while we began with workers' control of industry and only gradually began to socialize industry, Béla Kun with his prestige . . . could at once pass a law which converted all the industrial undertakings in Hungary that were run on capitalist lines into public property."[44]

Although the theoretical bases were similar, there were considerably more deviations in their practical interpretation. For an extended period the Soviet communists adhered to certain principles that have since become obsolete or been modified, but, from the very start, alluding to the difficulties of their practical application, they only carried them out to a modest extent or not at all.[45] Those who shaped the economic policies of the Hungarian Commune, on the other hand, instead of recognizing the not insignificant discrepancies between the 1917 programs and the 1919 practice, wanted to outdo these programs, pointing to the more highly developed state of the Hungarian economy. The more so as they wanted to achieve the greatest possible, spectacular results, both for the sake of strengthening the socialist consciousness of the Hungarian workers struggling in difficult circumstances, and for that of international propaganda.

One of the peculiarities of the Hungarian economy at this time was that its relatively sizable and viable industry struggled with a terrible shortage of raw materials, partially due to the blockade and partially to the dissolution of the Monarchy, that is, its separation from its traditional sources of raw materials and from an established economic system. The formation of the economic structure and organization of the new Hungary took several decades; in 1919, all that could be done was to use the accessible raw materials for the most important, primarily the military, objectives. This peculiarity reinforced the need for the nationalization of

[44] The quoted recorded speech by Lenin, *op. cit.*, Vol. 29, pp. 242–243.

[45] Lenin expressed this openly *e.g.* in *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, *op. cit.*, Vol. 28.

middle and small industry, thus strengthening the basic radical tendency. Priorities were necessary to prescribe, lest the irreplaceable raw materials be wasted on products of secondary importance; thus, tightening control over the reserve economy, introduced during the First World War as a temporary measure, was unavoidable. The capitalists could not guarantee the safeguarding of the equipment and storehouses even under the previous government. Many branches of industry were entirely unprofitable, thus the socialist state would have had either to support the capitalist economy with high unemployment compensation (to finance those workers, who, though officially employed, were unable to take part in production because of the shortage of raw materials), or it would have had to agree to mass layoffs. Both these paths were unacceptable, while general socialization seemed relatively simple as the country was not large, and in most of the important factories there were workers' soviets which had supervised and limited capitalist management already during the months of the 1918 revolution; there was, moreover, a well established network of trade unions. The state management of industry was greatly facilitated by the fact that a significant proportion of the employed industrial engineers and staff sympathized with the revolution – to an extent perhaps unequalled in the history of revolutions.

This rate of socialization helped rather than hurt production since the economic recession attendant on the transition would have been unavoidable in any case, if only on account of the shortage of raw materials, while nationalization greatly aided work-discipline. It was all the more damaging in the political sphere, however, since the conception ignored the dissatisfaction of the rather broad Hungarian lower middle classes which were in part integrated with the working class but still damaged by or worried about the socialization policies in many ways. On the other hand, working class unity was indeed solidified by the policy of maximum socialization which the workers supported.

The Governing Council was far more tolerant of the farmers than of the petty bourgeoisie in the towns whose dissatisfaction and possible counter-revolutionary feelings were counterweighed by their being highly divided, as well as by the presence of the industrial proletariat. This was the source of the peculiar contrast: minimal requisitioning in the villages, permitting, in principle, holdings of 100 acres, in practice, as much as 200–300 acres, while in the towns pension houses, movie theatres, pharmacies, photography shops and other small shops were all expropriated.

Under normal economic circumstances the transition might have been more even, smoother, but revolutions do not generally occur at the peak of prosperity. As Eugene Varga, the president of the National Economic Council said in the days preceding March 21st – so long as the people had no other choice than to bear with the hardships resulting from post-war

inflation, poverty and the reduction of the country's territory, they might as well go through the birth-pangs of socialism at the same time. The greatest success of the socialization program was that it enabled production to continue without major jolts, which, at the moment, was more important than increasing the quantity of production. By now we know that production is not necessarily better in a socialized industry than in capitalist industry, but neither is it necessarily worse. In 1919 even the best bourgeois economists were convinced of the absurdity of socialist production, as "the nature of factory enterprises does not tolerate workers' control".[46] The revolution wounded capitalist pride precisely by demonstrating in industry and in other areas that the management of mechanical work, the issuing of drafts, etc. required neither a special diploma nor membership in the upper classes.

It was precisely because of this that the Governing Council kept an exaggerated, if understandably anxious watch over every aspect of production, it tried to prevent even relatively insignificant hindrances, often at the expense of the political climate, and to protect the authority of engineers and other professionals. This caution was not in vain. It succeeded in preventing the less conscious elements among the workers, who took the notion of the transformation of the relations of ownership too literally, from carrying away the plant itself. (It happened, for example, that employees in tailors' workshops would use up the scarce raw materials for themselves and settle the accounts at minimal costs.) However, the number of thefts in industry was no greater than it had been during the months of the bourgeois revolution, and in agriculture they diminished perceptibly. On the whole, the assets of the national economy did not suffer significant damage, much less than did the area later occupied by the Rumanian army.

The early successes further boosted the utopianism of the great experimentators. So much so that they even considered it a compromise that the industries were nationalized as economic units, taking into account claims, debts and other interrelationships, rather than simply as allowances in kind: buildings, machinery, etc. And even this was considered temporary, as they believed the transition to a communistic economic system to be at hand. Accordingly, even in socialism, or the first step toward communism, they strived for arrangements that would serve the interests of advancement rather than of stability. Thus, for example, they tried to uphold the principle that no one should be paid significantly more than a well paid skilled worker, or that collectively

[46] Gusztáv Gratz (ed.), *A bolsevizmus Magyarországon (Bolshevism in Hungary)*, Budapest 1921, p. 472. The words are by Professor Sándor Matlekovits, former Undersecretary for Trade.

shared leadership rather than individual leadership should prevail in the factories. This bold tempo was justified by the argument that the transition, the first step toward communism, was to be a historically *short* period.

Debates on the upper limits of socialization went on for days in the Governing Council. The social democrats wanted to socialize only factories employing 50–100 workers or more; the communist Gyula Hevesi only wanted to leave in the hands of the owner those businesses which employed less than 10 workers; in the end, the limit was set at 20 workers. The significance of the debate was moderated by the fact that there was a highly centralized network of big industry, nationalized without any debate, *vis-à-vis* a very extensive network of petty industries, employing nearly half of the workers. In many instances the workers of the small-scale industries socialized the workshops they worked in even before the decree, indeed they socialized whole branches of industry, without regard to the number of the employed. In the smaller industrial concerns the aversion felt toward the owners was definitely sharper than that of a worker felt toward the big capitalist or shareholder who was perhaps altogether unknown to him.

The Governing Council was finally forced to modify the socialization decree in a number of its points. Thus, in the relatively highly productive milling industry, they set the limit at one wagon of production per day rather than at 20 workers; they socialized, without regard to the number of employees, the entire chemical and pharmaceutical industries, the motion-picture industry, the smaller gas-works, plus the chimney-sweep industry, chemical research and material-testing laboratories, power plants, warehouses, freight companies, the fumigators, window-cleaners and carpet-cleaning businesses, and so forth. Also socialized were the organizations and services related to social welfare, health and educational activity.

A special decree was issued, according to which the National Economic Council could, in the interest of production, claim "any instruments, tools, machinery, measurement devices, workshop or office furnishings as well as equipment constituting the property of private or non-socialized firms"[47] for its simple exchange value.

Many debates revolved around the socialization of small business. Attempts were made to amalgamate some small industrial branches into larger factories or regional centers, such as the gas-works, water-works, central heating, electricians, roofers, stovemakers, that is, all those concerned with home repairs. Similarly, attempts were made to set up

[47] MMTVD Vol. 6/B, p. 294. This volume includes the other more important economic regulations as well.

co-operatives for small industry, as the workers of the smaller firms had reason to fear that the privately owned small manufactures would be at a disadvantage *vis-à-vis* the socialized sector when it came to the distribution of raw materials. Some attempts were even made to acquire the raw materials from the state by organizing sham-cooperatives of small enterprises, thus the small enterprises preferred to undertake public works, projects commissioned by the state for the raw materials distributed – in such maneouvres they had gained sufficient practice during the war. Small workshops producing public commodities but lacking sufficient capital for their business could obtain credit from the financial institutions concerned to cover the costs of labour materials and tools. The fact that the state, in its extensive socialization of apartment houses, had to assume the tasks of the various constructions and repairs, also caused serious problems. Socialization was easily enough decreed, but the construction and repair network did not grow out of nothing overnight, therefore the new regional centers could but commission the small enterprises. The central organization of the small workshops required supervision, which did not prevent the abuses, but inflated the bureaucracy.

Since this type of management of the small workshops was not unproblematic, the directors of the national economy sought the solution in the further extension of socialization. József Kelen, People's Commissar for Social Production announced on May 8th that in the near future, small enterprises in all branches of industry would be socialized and centralized. But this ambitious project could not be realized, if only because of the constantly growing shortage of raw materials.

The enterprises owned by foreign companies were not nationalized for political reasons, and because of the trade agreements, but their production and supplies were placed under the supervision of the workers' councils, in the same manner as in the socialized sector. As being controlled by the Hungarian banks, the situation of the workers in the foreign enterprises was, for all intents and purposes, the same as in the nationalized factories.

The workers' councils and the trade-unions played a great role in the quick effectuation of socialization. The organization for the nationwide direction of production was set up with the active participation of the trade-unions. Industry was, to a great extent centrally managed, applying the principle of division by sectors. The situation of the non-Budapest factories occasioned much controversy: the revolutionary county and town soviets were not to interfere in the personal and other affairs of these plants. This strengthened the professional management and direction of the work, but the newly-formed organizations of specialized administration, on the other hand, were bureaucratic and politically neutral

compared to the soviets, and could not keep up with the local problems as they cropped up.

Since the Governing Council grew more and more absorbed in the political and military tasks and was thus unable to pay sufficient attention to the economy, while the decrees of the commissariats and the central offices often worked at cross purposes to one another, on May 19th the Governing Council established the National Economic Council. This united all the economic commissariats, and was to act autonomously in all economic matters. The majority of the members of the National Economic Council were delegated by the unions. The industrial production county councils, which had been organized in April, were first made subordinate to the National Economic Council as district councils, then transformed into regional economic offices, further reducing thereby the autonomy of the provinces. The authority of the district-county economic offices did not cover transportation, the mail, coal-mining, and those enterprises which were subject to special ordinances.

Centralization caused great dissatisfaction in the regional soviets. The principal reason for centralization was the shortage of raw materials which also led to the establishment of offices for the distribution of raw materials. These offices were set up on the organizational basis of the war emergency economic authorities. The supply centers made inventories of all raw materials, and frequently they took raw materials away from the improductive small industrial enterprises. Finally, the National Economic Council tried to strictly separate the direction of production and that of the distribution of supplies.

All these measures were steps toward the realization of socialist economic planning. The economic organization set up at this impressive rate was realized only in its frameworks; socialization, in many cases, was still only symbolic, as was the system of direct payments between the factories; the large sums involved in these financial transactions were far not so important as the modest but more real direct (barter) exchange of products.

Responsible for the direction of the socialized factories were the appointed commissars of production, who were aided, in case of need, by technical managers. The commissar of production was also aided, as well as supervised by a 3–7 man supervisory workers' council in each factory. Socialization would have been indeed inconceivable without these workers' councils. After March 21st they guaranteed the continuity of operations and the safety of public property on their own initiative, and after the appointment of the production commissars, in addition to supervising them, they independently handled matters of social welfare, food supplies, employment and personnel, they participated in the setting of wages, and in the organization of the Red Army.

The workers' councils generated much controversy. The economic directors and the former union administrators frequently voiced their objections to the councils' selfish, narrow concentration on the interests of the plant; since the members of the councils were subject to recall at any time, they were directly dependent on the workers in the plants and so, were not eager to execute unpopular measures. But the communists – Kun, Hevesi and others – defended the system of councils in spite of its weaknesses, both for the sake of reinforcing the foundation of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and because the strengthening of work discipline, especially among the less conscious workers, would have been inconceivable without them. Beyond the practical considerations, it also followed from the perspective of the realization of socialism without transition periods that they should insist on the workers' councils as indispensable elements in the building of communism.

As far as industrial production was concerned, the rate of the decline that began during the war and continued in the months of the bourgeois revolution, now slowed down. It was primarily in the munitions industry and products of prime necessity that production was planned to increase, with varying degrees of success, depending on how much raw materials, spare parts, coke and wood was available under the blockade. The food industry had ample capacity to process the meagre supplies. Many factors had a damaging effect on productivity: in addition to the abolition of the piece-rate system, the war, the meetings, and primarily the fact that in the process of reorganizing the national economy, many workers, actually out of production, had to be financially supported. Productivity was also held back by the fear of unemployment. By the end of the war there already appeared the phenomenon of wartime unemployment: there was an increase in the number of those who could not be employed in production, but who were also not fit for, or withdrew from, the military service which ended unemployment in 1914. Here we must mention, in addition to the disabled, the great number of those who had become seriously ill in the war and the hardships it entailed. (On May 31st, there were 46,974 persons receiving unemployment compensation, but the in-house unemployment, the number of duly paid commercial employees, waiters, etc., out of work on account of the shortage of commodities was much higher.)

Statistical data on production is easiest to trace in coal mining. In the area of the Budapest district inspectorate of mines (it was this area that produced the Hungarian Soviet Republic's coal supplies, for the most part) the 568 thousand tons production of the first quarter of the year dropped to 513 thousand tons in the second quarter, while coal consignments to Budapest dropped to almost half of what they had been the previous year, on account of the blockade and the loss of the mining district of Pécs.

With the help of the numerous organized bank clerks, the socialization of the banks and other financial institutions went rapidly and smoothly. The banks safeguarded and kept without any losses the privately owned gold and jewelry worth more than 2,000 Crowns, which the owners were obliged to deliver to them. Depositors could withdraw no more than 2,000 Crowns per month, with the exception of farmers and the owners of non-socialized factories or other economic units: these were permitted to use their funds without limitation for purposes of production and wage payments, as long as they kept accounts. The aim was the gradual simplification and amalgamation of the banking system; functioning banks were obliged to keep supplying those firms they had previously served with the funds necessary for the payments of wages, etc. Firms which did not have a bank account were financed by the Center of Banking Institutes. Plans were made to unify banking in three centres: a National Bank, as yet to be established (the Habsburgs had earlier prevented the establishment of an independent Hungarian National Bank), the Centre of Banking Institutes, and a Land Credit Institute for the villages.

The devaluation of currency continued as a legacy of the war, although full-scale inflation did not occur until after the overthrow of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. The process of inflation could not be stopped but only slowed down; wages had to be raised, while there were not enough goods to keep market prices in check. The extensive smuggling also depressed the value of the 'Hungarian' Crown, which was already barely negotiable abroad.

In addition to the serious financial problems, two rather unpleasant tasks needed to be rapidly resolved. The first was the problem of the 'white notes' inherited from the previous regime. Since the Viennese office of the Austro–Hungarian Bank prevented the printing of the old 'blue' bank notes, and independent Hungarian money did not yet exist, the 'white note', temporary in character as well as in appearance (it was blank on one side, and reminiscent more of a bill than of money), was not readily accepted, especially in the villages. Since wages and other state disbursements were paid in 'white notes', the purchasing power of wages decreased, and there arose a significant discrepancy – about 50% – between the two currencies officially valued as equivalent. The white note problem, as mass hysteria in general, is difficult to explain in rational terms, in any case, counter-revolutionary agitation and the uncertain fate of the revolution surely had a role in it. Although the redemption of white notes was begun in June, monetary problems hounded the Hungarian Soviet Republic throughout its rule. The bank note problem automatically engendered a shortage of small change.

Taxes posed still another type of problem. In the interest of winning over the peasantry, land taxes and back taxes on holdings of less than 100

acres were dropped since the income would have been small and its collection was thought to cause more political damage than bring material gains. Again we are confronted with the misunderstanding of peasant psychology: the tax would not have been too great a burden for the peasantry, in fact it would have allowed them to spend their white notes. In the dropping of the tax they saw proof that 'everything was held in common' and that soon their land would also be taken away from them. At the same time the regional councils were left without revenues – the resolution of this problem was put on the agenda, but only in the last days.

The flaws of the ambitious perspective of socialization without a program of transition were particularly evident in the ordinances concerning the common ownership of houses. A decree declared all dwellings to be common property by cancelling rents on family houses, thus, in their case, the expropriation was purely formal. The regulation reflected the attitude of proletarians who did not own a home of their own, and loathed their landlord perhaps even more than capitalists, since they felt this form of exploitation to be particularly unjust. It was, however, relatively easy to pay rent in inflated currency, at the most the state increased the stock of white money, while undertaking urgent repair work that had been neglected during the war. Those who owned their own homes objected to the regulation; the man who issued it had clearly not thought of the large sections of the working population whom they upset, particularly in the provinces. Local soviets saw things more clearly, *e.g.* in Sopron, where the soviet declared that only those houses would be nationalized "which ensured at least a few hundred Crowns net income a year for the Soviet Republic".[48]

The seizing of stocks proved a sound move in the socialization of trade, not because of their monetary value, but to ensure proper distribution. Wholesalers were nationalized as smoothly as the banks, the regulation however applied to retail tradesmen as well employing a staff of more than ten. The workers' control councils which were established had as important a role there as in small workshops whose *ci-devant* proprietors were appointed as production commissars.

The large number of shops, and small stocks, of the retail trade caused problems. One of the first measures by the Governing Council referred to pulling down the shutters and taking stock. This was unpleasant for everybody, given the conditions of life that were difficult enough anyway, but the government had to stop the rich spending their cash, gathering goods in short supply, and driving up prices. Only food and tobacco shops, and such as did not affect public supplies, *e.g.* book shops, stayed open without break.

[48] Sopron State Archives. Council papers 6044/1919.

The sad sight of closed shutters demanded action, but it was easier to close shops than to open them. Socializing the retail trade would have been a great burden for the state, but it was felt that giving them the green light might endanger socialism. In the villages the local soviets were to decide about the opening of shops, sometimes they sold off the stocks cheaply in the first weeks. In towns they tried new forms of distribution-cooperatives, factory requisitioning groups; these entailed certain elements of war communism, and meant that those employed by large works were at an advantage. The opening of shops was regulated, and they were under the supervision of shop workers. None of this however, could put an end to the shortage of supplies. The rise in wages and the devaluation of the currency opened the scissors between supply and demand even wider. The system of state distribution did not grow smoothly, while some of the traders used old connections to get by in the labyrinth of the black market. The trading spirit was certainly not killed, and a new regulation, in July, proved necessary to limit the issuing of new trading licences. A bold plan was worked out at the same time to liquidate private trade, entrusting the old cooperative (ÁFOSZ) of the Social Democratic Party to build up a network supplying consumers, while shops supplying trade and industry were transformed into agents of distribution. The plan, however, remained a piece of paper.

Foreign trade became a state monopoly. The minimal turnover was the fruit of much effort and was achieved with the cooperation of smugglers, and on other by-ways. Trade was the greatest with Austria, this – except for illegal arms smuggling – was regulated by a proper agreement. The purpose of foreign trade was the alleviation of shortages, profit was out of the question, supplies of matches, of kerosene – essential in rural areas that lacked electricity – of paper, etc. had to be obtained. Though the other Allied Powers kept up an ongoing protest, it proved possible to get a fair quantity of military supplies from, or through, Italy and Austria supplied ordnance to the tune of 12 million Crowns as part of the liquidation of the K. und K. armed forces, additional to smuggled weapons.

The Governing Council passed the basic regulation governing agrarian policy, nationalizing large and middle estates, after a week's debate, though its essence had already been part of the *'To All'* proclamation of March 21st. The breaking up of the estates, or any sort of compensation for former owners, was unambiguously rejected, it was declared, however, that smaller properties would remain in private ownership. The demarcation line was not determined centrally, but generally 100 Hung. yokes (approx. 140 acres) were the lower limit for nationalization, for church property as well.

"Estates that had become public property would be handed to the rural proletariat that worked the land for cooperative cultivation."[49] The regulation applied to roughly 5,628,000 yokes, naturally considerably less, roughly a million yokes, were so organized in the 133 days. This happened chiefly in Counties Somogy and Fejér, the metropolitan area in the widest sense, and in parts of Counties Győr, Heves, Vas, Veszprém and Tolna, wherever the political and military situation permitted, and mainly in places where the cooperative movement had already made a start in the weeks that preceded the proletarian revolution. The organization of cooperatives in the Trans-Tisza counties only got a start, and had to stop when they were occupied by the enemy in April.

It was the nationalization of the latifundia that was important both from an economic and a political point of view, while estates of a few hundred yokes that were of relatively lesser economic weight could wait. These were left in the hands of the owner or tenant farmer, under the supervision of the local soviets, in the hope that decision as to their fate would be made after the harvest.

The People's Commissariat of Agriculture established a centre to administer the cooperatives. This directed 23 district supervisors who were in charge of zone supervisors, chief stewards' and stewards' offices. The Cooperatives' Centre successfully endeavoured to build up a network, that would farm in a planned and integrated way. There was a great deal of centralization and paper work, including daily harvest reports, and fodder records. All this helped to protect common property, live-stock, etc. but it made it very difficult for workers' councils to have a say in management. The administration of the cooperatives showed, like that of industry, that the early stage of socalism is not necessarily accompanied by disorder or economic dissolution. On the other hand, it gave rise to bureaucracy of such a degree already in the first few months, to such a gap between management and 'the owners' for which there is neither need nor place in private enterprise. The many stewards, bailiffs and clerks, and even the former proprietors, all worked hard, lest they endanger their job and position, but the price of their loyalty was a curb on democratic self-government.

A large proportion of the estate-hands approved the establishment of cooperatives, particularly where too many in the villages were waiting for the distribution of land, so there would not be too much left for the 'people of the puszta'. (These people lived out on the estate, in barracks, like plantation hands.) But they didn't like the former proprietor and his administrators being left in place. They did not feel the estate to be theirs where 'Comrade Chief Steward the Count', drove out from his ancestral

[49] MMTVD Vol. 6/A, p. 114.

home, with his old four-in-hand, on his tour of inspection. The worker's councils and union acted against such gentlemanly ways, but no one dared entrust them with the management of the estates. The People's Commissariat of Agriculture planned to move the management round at the end of the farming years, so that no one would remain in his old estate where the hands either hated them, or touched their forelocks to them.

In today's terms the 1919 producers' cooperatives were more like a sort of state farm (sovkhoz) in which the workers' council, the local council, and the democratic atmosphere ensured the right of control, and to the expression of opinions, of the workers. The Governing Council would have preferred to do without cooperative democracy, but the workers' councils' delegates who attended the Agricultural Workers' Congress in June, insisted on this achievement and opposed exaggerated centralization. (The people's commissars weren't, of course, hostile to democracy either, they only gave priority to secure sound farming, decisive in the difficult economic conditions, and weighed it against the advantages of soviet democracy which indeed promised a favourable political atmosphere, but might have endangered the country's economy with endless meetings and the possibility of disobedience.)

It was in the early weeks of the revolution that the cooperative mood was the strongest amongst the field hands, largely as a result of the high level at which money wages and allotments in kind had been fixed. Critics rightly pointed out that, while surplus commodity production was one of the major arguments in favour of cooperatives, high wages put minimum profitability in peril. (Thus a greater part of the milk produced was promptly consumed.) The regulation on the other hand which temporarily changed extra allotments of food, fire-wood, etc. into white money, combined with other troubles to dampen the ardour of members of cooperatives, but even so their majority did not favour the division of the estates. As Eugene Varga said, while the proletarian revolution was prepared by the most conscious and most highly skilled sections of the proletariat, the first, simple achievements most palpably improved the situation of the most depressed sections, that is of field-hands and day labourers, and the unskilled. This explains why, after the suppression of the revolution, one quarter of the unorganized and backward field hands of state farms were dismissed as punishment.

Bearing in mind this peculiarity, the fact that estates were not divided up must be regarded as the most serious mistake committed by the Hungarian Soviet Republic. The party leadership, representing the industrial workers, had rejected the idea so to speak unanimously. The communists did so on the basis of a program of 'socialism without delays', interpreting the Russian land reform as a compromise enforced by necessity, while the social democrats rigidly applied Kautsky's low

opinion of the role of small peasant holdings to Hungary. Land distribution was reckoned a revisionist, petty-bourgeois slogan, no important person or group in the government supported it. There were some who looked at things pragmatically and wished to extend the basis of support for the regime by a limited land distribution. But even they only asked that the final decision be postponed to the autumn, being well aware of the peasantry's land hunger. It was characteristic that the demand for a division of estates found clearest popular expression precisely in the Trans-Tisza region where the revolutionary tradition was strongest. In the more passive Transdanubia and the area between the Danube and the Tisza it proved easier to carry through the ideas that had the support of higher authority. Later, in the final weeks of the revolution, two corps' commanders, Landler and Pogány proposed the division of some of the land in order to increase the enthusiasm of peasant soldiers, but it was too late by then.

The argument of the economic authorities was based on the need to ensure the supplies of the army and of Budapest, and socialized estates truly did much in that respect. In a revolution, however, political considerations should prevail, a division of land would have revolutionized the peasantry, its absence led to the peasantry's passivity, and this, in a country of peasants, very much weakened the mass basis of the revolution, the more so since the explanation for the mistaken agricultural policy must be looked for not in theoretical errors by some leaders or the entire Governing Council, but in the gap between town and country, and the absence of a class alliance between industrial workers and the peasantry. The tragic significance of the absence of a division of land lies precisely in the further delay, by some decades, of the opportunity offered to link up peasant anarchistic revolutionary attitudes with the socialist working class movement.

The revolution of 1918 indeed made the poor peasants conscious of their position. The Soviet Republic further increased this self-awareness. A landless peasant felt the equal of a peasant farmer. The absence of a division of land, and the efforts to neutralize farmers – this cautious policy blunted rather than sharpened the class struggle that had started in the villages. The have-nots demanded the distribution of the land of the rich peasant farmers and the requisition of their surplus products for the benefit of locals who lacked them. They were shocked by the fact that townspeople paid for the products of farmers with industrial commodities which they themselves lacked as well.

In keeping with their position, the field hand of large estates were firmest in their support of the proletarian revolution, though a large proportion were also disappointed by the absence of a division of the land, and they were not happy about the large wages earned by seasonal

labour (harvesters). In a number of places there were serious disputes about who could become a member of the cooperative. The number of members was limited, and categories of permanent and employed members were established. The many seasonal labourers tried to drive a hard bargain, they struck for higher pay as well, and preferred harvest work, while the farms were looking for labour to do the less well-paid hoeing of vineyards and beet fields.

In spite of the difficulties listed the poor peasantry supported the revolution, but few volunteered for service in the Red Army. The contrast of revolution and a hostile environment was blunted by news of land reform in Rumania, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia. The poor were all the same generally much more satisfied with their situation than before the revolution. High wages had more real purchasing power in villages, and the state of the country had much improved compared to earlier months and years. As a substitute for a land reform there was a fairly widespread distribution of two to three acre gardens, building lots, or rather household plots, no charge being made, and small areas were made available for tenant farming.

The most contradictory position was that of the smallholders with 1–6 acre holdings. Being poor they were sorry there had been no distribution of land, yet as proprietors they were afraid of requisitions, and collectivisation. There was no specific, differentiated policy by the Soviet Republic for dealing with this fairly large section of peasants, and yet it was precisely in their ambiguous case that non-economic political influence was most in evidence. They were very much exposed to the influence of rich farmers.

Cautious as they were, the authorities did not bear in mind differentiation in terms of wealth, types of farming, or region in their peasant policy. There was no desire to do more than neutralise those who did badly, farming poor land, while even those with around 100 acres were not subjected to any special restrictions in the majority of the villages. This equal treatment frequently shepherded the peasant farmers into one fold, under the leadership of the more well-to-do ones, particularly in smallholder villages (where there were no big estates).

Bearing in mind the shaky position of the revolution, those in charge of public supplies were rather cautious when collecting food surpluses. They did not act forcefully against the peasantry. The buyers could not make use of the forceful assistance of soviets made up of new peasant proprietors ('kombed'), as they did in Russia. If the villages did not provide their share of supplies these were obtained from the cooperatives. In this way bare necessities were smoothly obtained, but what was gained by the maintenance of the large estates was lost as a result of the weakness of the worker-peasant alliance, since most live-stock was in the hands of peasant

farmers. The economic importance of the large estates was overestimated in this respect, and finally, resort had to be made to requisitions. In Hungarian villages liberated in the course of battle, the inhabitants often joyfully contributed, voluntarily, where there was ample blue money, and army buyers had enough of that. Elsewhere selling went on with reluctance. Requisitions, fixed at 5 per cent for cattle, 50 per cent for sheep, and 15 per cent for horses, were largely covered out of cooperative and state owned stocks.

The Hungarian Soviet Republic tried to help peasant farms by a number of measures, *e.g.* by abolishing the state tobacco monopoly, the distribution of plant-sprays, credits, and last but not least, by ensuring calm conditions for cultivation. The results can be called good. A few months proved insufficient to make up for the wartime depletion of livestock, or the reconstruction of farms, but existing livestock levels were maintained, there was no starvation, and the distribution of food between town and country, and rich and poor, was more just. Bearing in mind the conditions, the victualling of the Red Army must clearly be considered good.

Spring sowing to a certain degree made up for the omissions of the autumn. About 1,036,000 yokes (roughly 1,400,000 acres) of wheat were sown, as against 1,414,000 yokes the previous year. The figures for rye were 754,000 and 912,000, respectively. The decrease is partly due to the fact that the figures include the areas where fighting was going on. In Pest County, unaffected by fighting, the sown area exceeded that of the previous year. Fields left fallow were allotted to those who volunteered to cultivate them, without respect for the person of the proprietor. In Somogy County, as late as June, they hurried to sow fast growing maize and greenfeed on fallow acres.

The harvest was orderly, threshing however was dragged out, partly because of a shortage of fuel, but also because of sabotage on the part of richer farmers. Going by the reports of the state farms, the harvest was 25–30 per cent smaller than the pre-war average, some of the decline was, however, due to looting and destruction on the part of the occupation forces. Generous plans by the authorities for the new farming year, and for the modernization of large-scale production did not go beyond paper work.[50]

[50] Much has been published on the agricultural policy of the Soviet Republic. Of special importance are Eugen Varga, *Die wirtschaftspolitischen Probleme der proletarischen Diktatur.* Vienna 1920; Jenő Varga, *A földkérdés a magyar proletárforradalomban (The Land-question in the Hungarian Proletarian Revolution),* Berlin 1921; *Bolshevism in Hungary, op. cit.* (the chapter on landownership policy and agriculture); Vera Szemere, *Az agrárkérdés 1918–19 (The Agrarian Question 1918–19),* Budapest 1963; Károly Mészáros, *Az őszirózsás forradalom és a Tanácsköztársaság parasztpolitikája 1918–1919 (The Peasant Policy of the Frost Flower Revolution and the Soviet Republic 1918–1919),* Budapest 1966; József Kanyar (ed.), *A Tanácsköztársaság Somogyban (The Soviet Republic in County Somogy),* Kaposvár 1968.

The Governing Council endeavoured to outline the image of a future communist society, at the same time defining the path and instruments of a gradual rise in standards of living by issuing directives for every aspect of public welfare. The leadership openly stressed that misery could be done away with, and socialism could come true only if the economy as a whole were transformed, the structure of production were adjusted to the new order, and production were increased to the required degree. It was a project that would have required years, but there were things that could be done for the *immediate* improvement of living conditions, and, in fact, needed to be done not only because this was the objective of socialism, but also because economic decline could hardly be stopped with a starving and enfeebled work-force. The millions who were not soaked in socialist ideology needed discernible improvements to gather confidence and moral and physical strength for work and the struggle ahead, and that though improvements in public welfare were difficult enough to carry out in the given economic conditions.

Social policy measures by the Soviet Republic in many ways carried on from the work of reform *initiated by the Károlyi government.* Though the class character of the two governments differed, and the new government was not bound by the barriers of private property, yet the uncut pages of the book of the incomplete bourgeois democratic revolution were continued, that is all the programmes to save the world which, floating above class divisions, had been worked out and propagated by the radical intellectuals long before March. But over and above this heritage the working class had fought for many achievements in the days of dual power, which did not have to be obtained again, but only had to be reinforced and secured. Indeed, however odd it may sound, the proletariat had succeeded in obtaining concessions of a sort in the last, catastrophic, weeks of the bourgeois government which were a heavy burden for their own state, since now, more had to be given where less was already too much.

This is precisely what happened with the wage-rises. Industrial and agricultural labour, exploiting the sweeping increase in their political power, obtained relatively high wages in the weeks before the proletarian revolution, it was nevertheless unimaginable that the victorious revolution should not raise wages, at the same time calling on the workers to go ahead to produce a real cover for the high wages.

In the days before March 21, the ironworkers had – as they had done in October 1918, just before the first revolution – signed a new collective agreement with the ironfounders federation. According to the federation's statistics, in the period following March 21, hourly wage-rates went up by ten to twenty per cent, twenty-five in the case of a couple of more backward trades (foundry-polishers, and women machinists). This meant

that under the Soviet Republic average ironworkers' wages were 100–120 per cent higher than in the final months of the war, while those of certain trades such as boilermakers, metalfounders and rivetters, as well as machine-tenders, day-labourers, and women-workers had grown three-fold. The trades union figures are more modest than those provided by the capitalists, who manipulated by stressing the highest wage rises, but according to the unions as well, the average rise, compared with October 1918, was close to 100 per cent. In trades that did not earn as much as the ironworkers did the improvement was generally proportionately higher, *e.g.* in food processing, tobacco industry, textile industry, chemical industry, timber and building industry.

On April 17 the Governing Council passed a general wages regulation. The March collective agreement served as a basis, but the possible maximum was fixed at a somewhat higher level. Hourly wage-rates for skilled labour were to be between 4 and 8.50 Crowns, 3 to 8.50 Crowns for the semi-skilled, 2.50–6.50 Crowns for the unskilled, and 1.50–2.50 Crowns for young workers. Cutters were to get 50 Crowns a shift, putters 40 to 42.50 Crowns.[51]

Wage categories were established in consultation with trades unions, the classification of individual workers, or jobs, had to be done in consultation with the factory workers' councils and shop stewards. The word of the latter was decisive. According to Miksa Fenyő the director of the Association of Manufacturers (GYOSZ), wage limits had to be centrally fixed since "the workers' councils arbitrarily raised them, without considering other industries, frequently not even bearing in mind particular works belonging to the same industry".[52] Wage ceilings were altered later, in part because of rising prices, and also to counteract surviving anomalies, as well as in the course of a gradual return to piece rates. Between April and July the wages of skilled ad semi-skilled workers went up by 10 to 20 per cent, those of women and unskilled workers by 30 to 80 per cent. To get a proper comparison one should remember that in the meanwhile the eight-hour-day was introduced, and that the workers' councils in fact proved more generous in reckoning up hours worked and overtime. The operation of the labour courts had to be suspended since worker-judges often fixed impossible sums for compensation where notice was given, or as redundancy pay.

Public servants and employees of private firms were classified in five categories, putting an end to excessive differentials. Office boys etc. under

[51] Katalin Petrák and György Milei (ed.), *A Magyar Tanácsköztársaság szociálpolitikája (The Welfare Policy of the Hungarian Soviet Republic)*, Budapest 1959; MMTVD Vol. 6; Benő Gál, *Munkanélküliség, munkabér, munkaidő (Unemployment, Wages, Working Hours)*, Budapest 1934.

[52] Károly Huszár (ed.), *A proletárdiktatúra Magyarországon (The Proletarian Dictatorship in Hungary)*, Budapest 1920, p. 120.

seventeen got 120–150 Crowns a week, untrained clerical assistants 170–320 Crowns, trained clerks and officials 220–400 Crowns, which could be raised to 500 Crowns. Section heads and executives in people's commissariats received 430–600 Crowns, those in charge of large firms or government authorities 520–650 Crowns. The differential between lowest and highest pay, bearing in mind certain lump sums for overwork payed to executives, was roughly a multiplyer of six to seven.

The eight-hour-day, an old working class movement demand, was introduced by decree. The hours of work of domestic servants, who had earlier been entirely at the mercy of their employers, were regulated (ten a day), and so were their working conditions. Annual paid leave was introduced as a principle for industrial and agricultural workers, etc.

In agriculture the rise in wages, in money and kind, was on an even higher scale than in industry. The large rise obtained after the bourgeois revolution was topped by the Soviet Republic by 25 to 30 per cent (25–30 Crowns a day for a man). More important still were the wages in kind; these were many times over their nominal value, and often out of the reach of those who got their pay in money only. The position of those working for agricultural cooperatives and state farms improved most markedly, and amongst them that of the poorest most of all. Allotments of a general kind (grain, milk, firewood, gardens, fodder for animals) had a larger share within the income of the poorly paid. These allotments also had the effect that the value of previous special allotments, restricted to a smaller circle of workers, now became comparably lower. Cooperative members received 2,3–2,4 tons of grain, and the harvester's share rose to one eighth to one seventh of the crop.

Bearing in mind the rise in prices, real wages of industrial workers grew by close to 24 per cent between December 31, 1918 and July 31, 1919. Standards of living calculated as the existential minimum for a five member family (with one wage-earner) rose to slightly above that of the six months before the war. According to Benő Gál's index, real wages were 24.6 per cent below the thus calculated existential minimum in July 1914, and 21.4 per cent in July 1919. The average standard of living of private employees was somewhat below that of workers, corresponding roughly to the 1917 average.

These good results were achieved thanks to maximum effort and manipulation on the part of the economic leadership who knew full well that apart from the war and the blockade, a transitory decline in the standard of living of urban workers and employees is a natural trend of the initial period of the proletarian revolution, partly owing to individual laxity and structural transformation that produces a temporary drop in productivity, and also because some of the goods produced to satisfy

capitalist needs, such as urban castles and other luxury buildings, etc. could not be rationally distributed and exploited.

The Governing Council attempted to countervail depressing economic factors by measures that further extended social equality. The extension of compulsory health and accident insurance to all wage-earners and cooperative members was amongst them. The voluntary insurance of smallholders was linked to this. Medical treatment became free within the scope of general insurance and the right to sickness benefits was extended to a year. A general old age pension at the age of sixty was planned.

100 per cent disability payment was raised to 400 Crowns a month, that of childless wives of POWs to 300 Crowns, the low assistance given to war widows and orphans was trebled. Working women received 12 weeks paid maternity leave. School medical services were extended, as was the compulsory medical check up of children. The care of children in need was accepted as a state duty, extending all the way from holiday campaigns to the provision of footwear. 'Illegitimate' children, a tenth of all children in the country, one fifth in Budapest, were granted equal rights. All this was done in a backward country where state social care had been minimal until then.

Making sure there was something to eat every day proved harder than declaring rights, particularly in Budapest, the mining areas and in the Subcarpathian Ukraine. Thanks to equal distribution, and the extension of rationing, no one starved, but food was monotonous, and poor in calories, though, in Vienna, they would have been glad to get the pearl barley, pumpkin and cabbage that were despised in Budapest. The shortage of fats was worst. Veterans home from the war had to wear their uniforms, there was insufficient clothing for them to change to mufti.

The Constitution declared: "The State will maintain those unable to work, and such as want to work but for whom no work can be provided."[53] The local soviets established a register of abandoned, aged and children, blind and disabled in preparation for their placement. Not only workers made idle by the shortage of raw materials but also clerks temporarily redundant till reorganization was completed continued to receive their pay. The idea that superfluous clerical staff be resettled to do healthy work on the land met with little enthusiasm on the part of those affected. Aid paid by the Metropolitan Council grew five-fold. Special care was taken to improve the position of apprentices and young workers who proved to be the most enthusiastic supporters of the revolution.

Housing was the most serious problem in Budapest and other towns. Stagnation in the building industry during the war, and the flood of

[53] MMTVD Vol. 6/B, p. 214.

refugees created indescribable conditions. About a quarter million in Budapest lived seven or eight or more to a room. The authorities took a bold step. More than a hundred thousand of the worst-housed proletarians were moved into the palaces and roomy apartments of the rich. Of all the measures then taken this created most bitterness amongst the middle-classes. Premises no longer needed, such as bars and brothels, were also requisitioned. Requisitioning also went on in the provinces, though to a lesser degree.

The better distribution of existing housing was, however, able to satisfy only part of the demand, the more so since not only those in need were catered for, some of the space was occupied by the tricky, and those who had the right connections. Large housing estates were planned, but the shortage of materials meant that work was largely confined to smaller jobs and necessary repairs. Rents of small flats that were already low owing to the inflation, were reduced by 20 per cent. This also applied to lodgings.

Housing requisitions also had a symbolic significance. Proletarians and the bourgeoisie were thus made best aware what the abrupt abolishment of the social cast system meant. Middle-class families objected not only to the loss of a room or two, but felt humiliated by the need to share kitchen and bathroom facilities with horny-handed workers who had hardly been considered human before. True enough, some of those who moved in from the basements and rooms that lacked the usual offices did not prove ideal flat-sharers, but the bourgeoisie was not called on to put up with greater horrors than that. The horrors expected following rumours that had filtered in from Russia did not occur, though fear certainly played a part in the peaceful atmosphere of the early days. It soon turned out that the initial threats – courts martial were mentioned at the end of just about every regulation – soon exhausted themselves in the small town soviets getting the shopkeepers to sweep the streets, and in an attempt to forbid the playing of cards an even dominoes as it were to compliment prohibition.

It was typical of the atmosphere and of the collapse of social dividing walls that around 15,000 marriages, more than ever before were concluded in Budapest in the days of the Soviet Republic. A large part of the newly weds had cohabited earlier, but it was then that they legalized their relationship. Divorce was made easier, but none were granted to the wives of POWs.

General health insurance in conjunction with the nationalization of hospitals and clinics, etc. made free medical services for workers and their families possible. The health committees of local councils extended facilities by abolishing private rooms and requisitioning châteaux and other buildings, fitting additional beds. A central beds register regulated to all hospitals, including the former private ones. A central hospital victual-

ling service was established, and a large percentage of the huge number of propaganda lectures provided health information. The health authorities managed to stop the spread of the typhus epidemic from certain neighbouring countries, and much was done in the field of veterinary quarantine as well.

A decree prescribed that each hospital be jointly managed by a medical practitioner and a manual worker (nurse, etc.). The latter had no right to interfere with expressly medical decisions, nevertheless this specific manifestation of democracy was soon abolished, in spite of the protests of the councils of hospital workers.

As a final guarantee of social equality, the Budapest Soviet abolished all charges for funerals.

STATE AND REVOLUTION

The Soviet Republic considered the principles laid down by Lenin's *State and Revolution* as directives. The old state was to be replaced by the direct rule, dictatorship of the proletariat.

This original model has largely changed since then and today's practice in the socialist countries significantly differs from Lenin's initial ideas. This has been explained by changed circumstances, the lasting coexistence of the two systems and the lasting priority given to military defence. Lenin had presumed that socialism would be established within a short period, in the hope that the proletarian dictatorship would soon hand over its place to a classless and stateless communist society. The idea thus accorded with the 1919 program of a socialism that brooked no delay. They understood well what Lenin meant by the break up of the bourgeois state; not that the old officials be exchanged for new ones – on the contrary, he thought it desirable that specialists should be kept on – but that soviets that would be frequently renewed would replace the special institutions of a privileged minority (privileged officials, and the command structure of the standing army) so that the majority would itself directly carry out the oppressive functions. The more the people as a whole would exercise state power, the less this would be needed. The elective character of all officials follows, as well as their recall *at any time,* and that their pay be reduced to the level of the wages of ordinary workers. These are the ordinary and self-evident democratic norms which express the changeover from bourgeois democracy to proletarian democracy.[54]

The soviet system formed the basis of the state of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. Local and district soviets were elected on the basis of official lists which every voter had the right to amend freely. Every man and woman above the age of 18, except for 'exploiters' and the clergy, had the right to vote and to be elected. The suffrage was thus even more extensive than the highly democratic provisions made by the Károlyi government. There was a purpose behind extending it to the young. In accordance with the principles laid down by Lenin, district, county, Budapest, and national

[54] V. I. Lenin, *State and Revolution* (1917) Chapter III/2 in *Collected Works*, Vol. 25.

soviets were elected indirectly, at meetings of the lover level soviets, who chose amongst their own members. The mandate was for six months, but individual members, or the soviet as a whole, could be recalled at any time. Indirect election was the guarantee of effective recall. The soviets could ask those of their members whom they delegated to higher bodies to report, and could then recall them.

District self-government was a new feature in the organization of the Hungarian state. The soviet system implied it; since decisions were to be taken by the soviets at every level, they endeavoured to treat the apparatus, in which the old officials continued to serve, as subordinate executive organs, proving more or less successful in this endeavour. The five hundred member Budapest Workers' and Soldiers' Soviet had a special role. Its membership, as representatives of Budapest district soviets, included most of the People's Commissars and other important officials. In crises that often required speedy decisions the Budapest Soviet frequently had to act in the name of the country's proletariat. The soviets were in practice led by executive committees that sat in permanence, which were known as *'directoires'*. They were elected at the soviets' plenary session, and often altered. County and urban soviets and the trades unions, acting in the name of factory councils, elected the National Congress of Soviets.

In accordance with needs, and sometimes going beyond them, local soviets continued to employ the old officials. This was a consequence of peaceful transition, the officials did not openly confront the dictatorship of the proletariat as in Russia. This was of political importance since a large number of dismissed officials would have magnified tension and the camp of the active counter-revolution. Keeping their positions, many still engaged in sabotage and supported the counter-revolution, though nowhere near to the degree they were wont to boast about afterwards. Their outlook was, in general, reactionary and anti-worker, surely exerting hostile influence. Most important however was the help they were able to offer the ruling classes in the last, crucial days of the revolution. They were instrumental in the speedy restoration of the state apparatus and the liquidation of the Soviet system. They could do this because in many cases even top county officials continued to work, after demotion. In some counties the old county administration continued to operate at the side of the *directoire* endeavouring to keep control over administrative matters at least. But even in these counties, political matters were only dealt by the *directoire* of the county soviet. A network of specialist committees, including experts and others elected by the soviets, covered many fields, including education.

Local and county soviets had considerable power. 133 days were not enough to issue new regulations to cover everything, and the old ones could not always be suitably applied in a socialist spirit. On the other

hand, soviets and their executive committees on a higher level in the hierarchy were empowered to countermand any measures taken by lower ones. County soviets had no authority over production, and there were fierce disputes about who was in charge of the 'Red Guard' which replaced the police and gendarmerie. The soviets rightly worried about dangers inherent in the mixed composition of the Red Guards, and insisted on continuous control, but all they achieved was that the Red Guards and the Commissariat of Interior supervisors were instructed to cooperate with the local *directoires*. Some of the county soviets established their own red guards.

The relationship between central and local soviets was a fundamental problem. Counties were supervised by commissars in charge of home affairs and other political fields. These often found it difficult to hold the weak local soviets together, but then, often it were they who made the work of local soviets difficult by issuing contradictory measures. This is what was called the 'dictatorship of commissars'. Local soviets wanted the greatest independence in questions such as food distribution where national and local interests mostly tended to conflict. Many central measures caused obvious difficulties to local soviets, since they left local conditions out of account.

The Chairman of Veszprém County Soviet told the National Congress of Soviets that estate owners appointed as production commissars on their own properties were not allowed to operate, and one was even arrested. Thereupon the People's Commissariat of the Interior promptly sent telegraphic instructions to release him. "We ignored them, not because we ignore regulations but because we knew what he had done . . . "[55]

Sometimes central commissars were expelled from a district. Finally on May 10, the Central Party Secretariat forbade all political commissars except such as were sent by the Party Secretariat or the People's Commissariat of the Interior to interfere in political matters. Young and enthusiastic but inexperienced men, with no knowledge of the region, created panic here and there by rhetorically discussing the abolition of private property and the obsolete institution of marriage. Wherever the local soviet was strong these commissars only troubled their work, there were remote hill villages however, or places near the demarcation line to which these commissars were the first to introduce the spirit of the revolution, though they may well have been sent merely to register ecclesiastical property or to buy eggs.

Available data show that manual workers, mainly industrial workers, made up the majority of members as well as executives of soviets. Though

[55] *A Tanácsok Országos Gyűlésének jegyzőkönyve (The minutes of the National Congress of Soviets)*, Budapest 1919, p. 71.

minor abuses were frequent, major ones were rare. The composition and practice of village soviets largely depended on the environment in which they operated, ranging all the way from communities of prosperous farmers to mining settlements.

Extraordinary and great powers accumulated in the hands of the Governing Council particularly up to the middle of June when the Party Congress elected the Party Leadership, and the National Soviet Congress elected the one hundred and fifty members of the Federated Central Executive Committee which exercised Head of State functions.

The majority of People's Commissariats recruited new staff but the old ministerial structure essentially formed the organizational basis. Since the former staff was also kept on, at least on paper, numbers were swollen, for instance in the People's Commissariat of Education to three and a half times the earlier figure. The National Economic Council on the other hand relied on a largely new organization since the old ministries of trade and industry were not, of course, equipped for the centralized management of the economy. Thanks to a socialist movement amongst engineers which flourished towards the end of the war many socialist and other progressive specialists could be recruited for industrial management, and they made up a large percentage of the 1,200 new members of the staff.

Of other central offices only the most important were affected by the need to demolish the old state (the metropolitan housing office, courts, the gendarmerie, etc.) since in this respect, the new state did not have precursors comparable to the network of local soviets that had been present in the previous regime. Elements that were only indirectly connected with the oppressive functions of the state were maintained, and it was planned that they should continue indefinitely after the necessary transformation. These included transport and communications, teaching, health and cultural as well as certain economic authorities.

The fight for the liquidation of the old state apparatus thus produced a doubling of the bureaucracy as its first fruit. The skeleton of the old had to be maintained until the new state was erected, both to ensure continuity until new organizations were ready to take over, and also to neutralize the old.

The coexistence of the 'old' and 'new' bureaucracy was not peaceful. The communists demanded the complete demolition of the old state apparatus, while right-wing social democrats defended all those ready to continue to serve in the name of a sort of humanism that rose above classes. The mood of the working class was hostile to engineers and management, so that determined action had to be taken to defend them. The right-wing trades union opposition on the other hand proclaimed that the new bureaucracy was worse than the old. Lenin had already pointed out in 1917 that the state under socialism was also subject to alienation,

and it has turned out since that, given the elimination of certain resistances and counter-influences, this is true to a considerable degree. Furthermore, in 1919, owing to its amorphous nature, the unified workers' party was not in a position to have a command over the state, or even to exercise the control-functions of the working class over its own state, all it could do, and this showed its weakness, was to contribute to the strengthening of the dictatorship of the proletariat by coalescing with the state to a certain degree. Spontaneous revolutionary attitudes that surfaced in the soviets made up for a lot, but there were cases where the absence of a conscious coordinating force was acutely felt, such as in conflicts of interests between the working class and the peasantry which had its effect on the Soviet system. The operation of town soviets improved considerably with the passing of time but a fair proportion of village soviets turned passive in the final weeks of the Soviet Republic.

Divisions of opinion were most in evidence concerning the functioning of the police, military etc., in other words the repressive organizations in the strict sense of the term. Right from the start there were heated arguments concerning the composition of the Red Guard. Finally a compromise was reached. The organizational framework of the police and the gendarmerie was abandoned, but a large proportion of their officers and other ranks were recruited by the Red Guard, which was reinforced by workers and war veterans. Socialist leadership was ensured in Budapest at least, in the provinces however, the role of the Red Guard depended on its composition and on local conditions. A major proportion of units in fact fulfilled their duty but it happened more than once that counter-revolutionary conspiracies were initiated in the ranks of Red Guard units that were independent of local soviets or Party organizations.

A number of combat-worthy revolutionary minded worker detachments were successfully set up in Budapest. The best-known were the 'Lenin Boys', the Cserny detachment with roughly two hundred members, recruited amongst Communist Party guards and sailors. Given counter-revolutionary stirrings it was they, as a rule, who supplied the brawn for Tibor Szamuely and the Interior Political Department. These leather-jacketed 'terrorists', who looked most romantic, no doubt did much more to curb the counter-revolution than the Red Guard, thanks also to the bloody rumours spread about their deeds. The truth is they killed altogether 12 people other than such as had been condemned to death by a court, including three gendarme officers who had taken part in counter-revolutionary conspiracies, and, at the start of the Rumanian attack when they collected hostages from the ranks of the bourgeoisie, three well-known politicians, two earlier Secretaries of State – the Holláns – and Lajos Návay, who had been Chairman of the House of Representatives.

Keeping an eye on the counter-revolution devolved on a new agency, the Political Department of the People's Commissariat of the Interior headed by Ottó Korvin. Following the Rumanian attack Tibor Szamuely was commissioned to maintain order and discipline behind the front line being empowered "in the service of this objective, to rely on every possible instrument, including doing without revolutionary tribunals".[56] Everyone thought it natural that, wherever any counter-revolutionary mutiny was manifest, Szamuely's train would appear the next day, restoring order within an hour or two, using all means he considered necessary.

The suppression of counter-revolutionary revolts, and the ensuing reprisals were in the first place part of the duties of the armed forces. Additionally revolutionary tribunals dealt with all serious crimes, such as robbery and murder, as well as defending the proletarian state against conspiracies, rumour-mongering, agitation, and offences against prohibition, all matters covered by martial law. The old state apparatus was most successfully 'demolished' in the area of the judiciary. The activities of the courts were essentially suspended, revolutionary tribunals established independently of them took over all important or urgent matters in addition to those covered by martial law, while the councils themselves, or subcommittees elected by them, dealt with petty offences. A good 90 per cent of the members of revolutionary tribunals in Budapest were workers, and 77 per cent of those in the provinces either workers or peasants.

Commissions consisting of two workers and a lawyer examined all criminal proceedings initiated before the revolution, and stopped the great majority, wherever causes that were part of the capitalist system explained the crime. Revolutionary tribunals condemned more than four thousand persons, about a quarter for counter-revolutionary activities and an equal number for offences against prohibition, the latter were generally fined. Altogether twenty-seven persons were executed following verdicts reached by revolutionary tribunals, no one being condemned for political activity prior to March 21st.[57]

A start was made on drafting a new legal system. Plans that are worthy of mention include the election of judges by the soviet, with a right of recall. The chairmen of labour councils were to be chosen by the trades unions. Laymen could appear as counsels for the defence. Provision was made for a separate German and Ukrainian council to operate at the side of the future National Supreme Court.

[56] MMTVD Vol. 6/A, p. 288. Arbitrary executions are described in Gusztáv Gratz, *A forradalmak kora (The Age of Revolutions)*, Budapest, 1935, and, with considerable exaggerations in A. Kaas and F. Lazarovits, *Bolshevism in Hungary*, London 1931.

[57] Béla Sarlós, *A Tanácsköztársaság forradalmi törvényszékei (The Revolutionary Tribunals of the Soviet Republic)*, Budapest 1961.

THE CULTURAL POLICIES OF THE SOVIET REPUBLIC

Generally the two revolutions in 1918 and 1919 can be said to have shared many historical tasks, and to have had a number of common features. This particularly applies to science and culture. Following up bourgeois democratic initiatives was in itself a program for socialist culture, and most of those at work in science or culture found scope enough to suit them in the new order, even if they showed a certain reserve as regards political methods and objectives.

Every field had its own intellectual 'general staff' and a program designed to catch up backwardness, which it offered to those in charge of the revolution. Their urgency and the desire for all at once was not really in keeping with the opportunities. Progressive-minded artists, scholars, and teachers, however, knew of no more urgent task than breaking through the barriers of the stupefaction of centuries, and the obsolete educational system. Socialist teachers had elaborated a system of primary and secondary education that can still serve as an example already at the time of the bourgeois revolution. This could be taken over as a whole by the Soviet Republic. Educational reform was judged particularly important since low educational standards were being blamed all the time for relatively low productivity in Hungarian agriculture and industry.

All schools and educational institutions (the majority had been provided by the churches) were nationalized. School attendance was made compulsory to the age of 14, and a start was made on creating the general comprehensive school and on doing away with one class-room village schools for children of all ages. The general comprehensive school was designed as a work school as well, an optional foreign language being taught in the upper forms. The five-form secondary school would also stay a school for work, there would be no final leaving examination, and the teaching of the natural sciences and of living languages was to be stressed. It was proposed that social facts be taught in elementary school, and sociology in secondary schools. There were to be no school fees. The old administrative system was abolished, schools being part of the competence of councils. The mood of the revolution led to the establishment of

students' councils in secondary schools, their operation was however not in harmony with school discipline and they were therefore abolished at the end of the school year.

The Soviet Republic declared the separation of Church and State, but the decision to abolish religious instruction was left to local soviets. This was done in Budapest and by a number of soviets in the country – the spirit of the revolution dictated such action, but not the tough position it found itself in which was only made worse by making the question more acute. The expropriation of church estates, church schools, and other property unconnected with the devotional life had been a hard enough blow for the denominations anyway, particularly the Roman Catholic Church, but the approval of the overwhelming majority of the population could be reckoned with, including that of the teachers involved. The end of religious instruction on the other hand met with an unfavourable response on the part of the majority of parents and, in conjunction with other exaggerations, it facilitated the fast growth of the mass basis of the counter-revolution.

In institutions of higher learning they carried on with the replacement of teachers found unsuitable, started under Károlyi, by scholars who stood for modern ways who had been pushed aside since the turn of the century. The University of Budapest did not dare continue the resistance shown to Kunfi as minister when he became a people's commissar, not even when he suspended the faculty of law, the centre of university reaction. The separation of church and state naturally referred to the faculty of theology as well. The University Council was dissolved and a committee led by the mathematician Pál Dienes replaced it. The newly appointed staff included Mihály Babits, Sándor Ferenczi, Lajos Fülep, Lajos Kozma, Karl Mannheim, György and Jenő Pólya, Elemér Vadász, György Hevesy, Gyula Szekfü, and Irén Götz-Dienes, the first woman to teach at a Hungarian university.[58] Neither György Lukács, nor Kunfi got a chair since they could hardly sign their own appointments.

Major curricular changes were planned, such as separate training for scholars and teachers, and a number of new chairs of design, industrial and town-planning and decoration at the Technology University, additional to training in the history of art.

Scholarships for poor students, as well as colleges and refectories were designed to alter the composition of the student body, making it more

[58] Not one of those listed was a socialist, since the Károlyi government had already given chairs to a number of outstanding Hungarian socialist scholars over the protests of the University. From among those who became known internationally, Eugene Varga and Oscar Jászi were amongst them. Those appointed by the Soviet Republic were largely young scholars and scientists neglected as moderns. The psycho-analyst Ferenczi was amongst the older ones, being a Freudian he could not teach at a Hungarian university. The physicist György Hevesy, and the sociologist Karl Mannheim and mathematician Pál Dienes taught at universities abroad after the revolution.

democratic. A special matriculation examination was instituted to permit students to enrol who had not completed their secondary studies or passed the Secondary School Leaving Examination.

The operations of Academy of Sciences which was alien to the spirit of the Soviet Republic were suspended and the building was temporarily allocated to the Red Guard.

An adult education program was even more grandiose than the school reform. Courses for illiterates were organized throughout the country and great plans were made to develop specialist training. Thousands of popular science lectures were held and a 'Workers' University' opened its doors in Budapest; only manual worker trade unionists were permitted to enrol, and they were given the afternoons off to attend. Thousands of workers attended basic courses in management, bookkeeping, languages and other subjects. Privately owned valuable works of art were nationalized and put on display. Lecture series and guide-tours for members of the working class were arranged in museums. Large editions of the works of Marx, Engels and other socialist theoreticians were printed, a team was appointed to translate Das Kapital into Hungarian, and hundreds of pamphlets, using a simple language, popularized the doctrines, regulations and measures of the revolution.

The revolution endeavoured to ensure the conditions for the free flowering of the arts and sciences. It was then that modern, 20th century, trends first found acceptance and state recognition, thanks no doubt also to the fact that most of the artists supported the political revolution as well. Perhaps only Csontváry amongst the great stod apart from the group of the progressive artists, being progressive on canvas *'only'*, and his death remained unnoticed. A carefree life for artists, whatever their school or trend, was considered the job of the state. Artists received assistance and support, and advances. A teaching studio for young people attracted by modern art was opened in the Andrássy Palace. Béla Uitz, Ferenc Medgyessy, József Nemes Lampérth were put in charge. Kernstok taught talented young members of the working class in Nyergesújfalu, a communist journeyman-joiner named Derkovits was amongst them. István Csók, Bertalan Pór and Márk Vedres were appointed to professorships at the Academy of Art. A host of artists directed by Mihály Biró and Sándor Bortnyik helped produce memorable May Day decorations in Budapest. The revolutionary posters which covered the walls meant a high point in the history of Hungarian poster design.

At the time of the dictatorship of the proletariat, Zoltán Kodály was in charge of the Academy of Music. Kodály, Béla Bartók, and Béla Reinitz were the members of the music *directoire.* The many worker concerts were all well attended. Bartók gave a public recital for the first time in nine years. There were queues at the 'ordinary' and the 'trades union' box-

office of the Opera. The theatres were crowded, since many were now in the position, for the first time, to think of buying truly cheap tickets for white money. The theatres had plans to innovate, but for the time being they performed the old repertoire giving emphasis to progressive plays whenever possible. A truly new public filled the theatres.

The socialized film industry was able to react more quickly to the revolution. The 35 to 40 films made under the direction of Alexander Korda and other tried and proven specialists included works by Gorky and Upton Sinclair, and even an original story of a Hungarian strike. Newsreels recorded the events of the day for future generations. Five cinemas for children were opened in Budapest in May, and children were no longer allowed to attend the screening of films designed to amuse adults. (After the defeat of the revolution Korda, like many other young artists, went into exile, some, such as Arnold Hauser, Béla Lugosi, László Moholy Nagy, Béla Balázs and Pál Fejős made a name for themselves abroad. Tódor Kármán had to go as well because of his leading role in the People's Commissariat of Education.)

Literature being closest to ideology amongst the arts it would be an exaggeration to say simply that the best writers were enthusiastic about the Soviet Republic. The writers in sympathy with Károlyi's republic generally joyfully welcomed March 21st. The Vix-memorandum, the peaceful transition, and the spirit of Ady which still held together the small pre-1914 progressive camp, all helped. Later, due to the difficulties and mistakes, and as a result of the shaky position of the middle class and the peasantry, writers began to differ amongst each other in keeping with their personal ideologies.

There were exceptions, but conservative writers in general from the start rigidly opposed the Soviet Republic. The early 20th century cautious liberals, amongst them Gárdonyi, József Kiss and Heltai, all the class-conscious bourgeois, took a passive line. Sándor Bródy, Ernő Szép, Lajos Bíró, and even Ferenc Molnár, whose bourgeois thinking was of a more democratic sort, kept a benevolent eye on developments while the path stayed smooth.

Some of the modern nationalist writers, such as Gábor Oláh and Dezső Szabó, took a liking to the defiant tone of *To All!* and briefly expressed themselves in favour of a kind of national bolshevism.

The real followers of Károlyi's republic, the democrats and radicals, clearly supported the new revolution in its early weeks, keeping up with Károlyi's own changed attitude; the populist Móricz, Juhász and Móra even welcomed the thoroughgoing democracy of Communism. "Why should I weep for my life of yesteryear", Krúdy asked. "Should I feel sorry for the jewels that belonged to others? . . . Why should I feel sorry for yesterday's Budapest, the pickpocket, smelly, foul Budapest, the old Hungary

that was perfidious to all her worthy sons, and ripe for execution in her sins . . ."[59]

The determination of Krúdy, Babits, Karinthy and Kosztolányi was addressed to the past, not to the morrow. They approved the cultural and national objectives, but they retreated when they saw that the Soviet Republic wanted to paint everything in its own colours, and they were scared off by a fight they thought senseless. They were not interested in counter-revolution, and therefore retired into passivity as the confrontation became more acute. The flow of their writings ebbed after May 1st. The non-socialist press ceased to publish, and that contributed too, as part of a policy of narrowly interpreted class interests. This was the effect the tender conscience of artists had on them. In Szeged, which was occupied by the French, active resistance swelled in Juhász and Móra, faced as they were with the counter-revolution rearing its head in front of their very eyes. Its approach always strengthened the shaken plebeian loyalty they felt for red Budapest.

It was only natural that communist and social democratic writers should unambiguously support the revolution. True, the 'old' communists wrote little, precisely because they were otherwise engaged in the revolution. Franyó's *Vörös Lobogó* (Red Flag) stood four-square behind the revolution, and with it Lajos Nagy and Sándor Márai. So did Kassák's futurist group. The stressing of their organizational identity and their independence of party politics was no obstacle to passionate revolutionary writing, as *e.g.* in Kassák's lines addressed to the Congress of Young Communist Workers: "Who could have more to say to you than us, who are neither on this side nor beyond the shores. We stand in the midst of life, as in the sweep of swift waters, with a large red star on our foreheads, singing of ourselves who are you."[60] Nor, on the other hand, did they show any restraint in attacking writers they branded as bourgeois in an angry sectarian way that damaged the cause, monopolizing as it were revolutionary literature. Social democratic writers were much more peaceful. They were happy to have their own paper, association and mess. In works of differing value they proclaimed the ideals of socialism.

The Soviet Republic fundamentally supported modern trends in art, the more so since, in the conditions given, these were most in need of financial and other support. This did not, however, take place at the expense of other schools. To quote György Lukács:

[59] Krúdy's piece appeared in Károlyi's paper 'Magyarország' for April 9th 1919. It is included in an outstanding collection of literary writings from the revolution: Farkas József (ed.), *Mindenki újakra készül . . . (Everybody is getting ready for the new . . .)* 4 Vols., Budapest 1959–1967, Vol. 3, p. 72.

[60] *Ma* (weekly) July 1, 1919, in: Farkas József *op. cit.*, Vol. 3, p. 445.

"The dictatorship of the proletariat made sure that it did not treat any trend, be it obsolete or current, as official. The aim was to spread culture, and to raise working people to the level to decide what there was in the art and culture of the past and present they had need of, and what they could do without. Every fight about so-called official art was about this. The Kassák group, for instance, always tried to be recognised as the official art of the dictatorship, and that claim – it must be said – was always rejected by the People's Commissariat. On the other hand it defended Kassák's lot against social democratic attempts to suppress them . . . "[61]

Coping with such literary wars which, in the last resort led to the prohibition of journals, was pretty difficult. It was easier to help the common flowering of the arts in other cultural fields. Béla Kun had every justification when he said to an English journalist:

"The realization of the value of the 'intellectual' by the Hungarian Revolution was perhaps the greatest step in advance made, in comparison to the Russian attitude towards them a year ago."[62]

[61] György Lukács's statement in the March 1969 issue of the Hungarian monthly, *Társadalmi Szemle.*

[62] Alice Riggs Hunt, *Facts about Communist Hungary,* London 1919.

THE PEACEFUL DAYS OF THE REVOLUTION

The Rumanian army attacked at dawn on April 16th 1919. There had been no doubt of its eventuality, the Hungarian Revolution was suspended on a hair, and the days of peace had to be exploited to the full. Socialist features had to be created, or at least declared, and an army to fend off the expected armed intervention had to be put on its feet.

The peaceful taking over of power meant the absence of disturbances such as those of November 1918. The hated system collapsed as the war ended, bourgeois democracy proved insufficient, but there was no murderous hatred as against the Habsburgs. The democratic republic had managed to ease many tensions. The majority of nationalities had achieved self-determination, and the soldiers had returned home. Posters proclaiming martial law appeared on the walls, there were the 'terror teams' which, knowing they were backed by the workers and a firm government, were able to act with greater determination, when needed, than the mixed bag of police and voluntary guards of bourgeois democracy. The Soviet government gave the starved all it could, the people therefore did not feel looting to be justified, and those responsible could not hide in the general turmoil.

It was through a system of worker, soldier and peasant soviets that covered the country already at the time of the Károlyi revolution, that law and order were maintained. Most power was concentrated in these soviets especially after the beginning of March. The soviets were by then well aware of the state of the administration, the parish councils, the law enforcement agencies, food stocks, etc. On March 22nd, as soon as news arrived from Budapest, they were in a position to take the necessary measures promptly, and carry out the first instructions of the Soviet Republic which were issued in quick succession.

In most towns and villages it was the task of the local soviets or party organizations to announce the historic news at public meetings on March 22. Wherever the local soviet or council seemed competent, it continued in office to the April elections, wherever it gave cause for disaffection, or if its composition did not give due weight to the increased political importance of the poor, a new one was constituted, a temporary election took place, or one was chosen by public acclaim at a mass meeting. By the

end of March, new soviets were chosen everywhere, or else the old was confirmed in office, a greater or smaller number of new members being coopted.

Although the revolution was indeed victorious everywhere, without setbacks, its social basis and the activity of supporters greatly differed region by region. To say Budapest was its heart is no empty phrase, that is where the Soviet Republic stood or failed. Both in civil life, and in the Red Army the inhabitants of Budapest did much more than their share, not even to mention the concentrated mass presence of the proletariat. This concentration, the capacity to organize, and permanent contact with the leadership is to account not only for the greater number of supporters in the capital, but also for the greater awareness and political sense here as compared to the provinces. Most of those in leading roles belonged to the ranks of the Budapest working class or that of the capital's socialist intelligentsia, able thus to stay in close contact with the heartbeat of life in the workshops.

Leadership in the provinces was more indirect, more 'manipulated'. And while the *interests* of the people were equally expressed in villages, its *will* and *mood* was only indirectly, therefore inefficiently forwarded. Furthermore, instinctive support for the revolution extended in the first place to well-known local problems, a juster distribution of goods, or conscious support for the soviets as opposed to the old administration, but things worked nowhere near as well when it came to supporting the collection of food supplies, or the implementation of truly popular slogans of national defense by undertaking military service. Such difficulties were more in evidence in areas inhabited by non-Hungarians. True enough, a fair proportion of the population of even Budapest were not of Hungarian parentage, but these people had generally settled there determined to assimilate, and they supported Hungarian national objectives regardless of their own native language. At the same time, they proved more resistant to the extremely chauvinist counterrevolution. The result of the antisemitic slogans of the latter was that the Jewry which accounted for well over a third of the petty-bourgeois, self-employed professionals, and landlords in Budapest, did not dare line up behind the counter-revolution, even when they somewhat grew hostile to the March revolution. Dissension amongst the petty bourgeoisie thus potentiated the strength that lay in the unity of the working class.

In the provinces working class power was most clearly supported by the poor in Eastern Hungary (the area beyond the river Tisza) and by the big towns of the Great Plain: Nagyvárad (Oradea), Szeged, Debrecen, Miskolc and Arad. This was the area where clerical influence was the most insignificant, and there was a greater overlapping of instinctive revolutionary attitudes and the conscious efforts of the local leadership. Those

living between the rivers Danube and Tisza sympathized with the revolution as well, but while working class moods predominated in industrial areas around Budapest, Salgótarján and Miskolc, the surviving strength of the counter-revolution was more discernible in the agricultural areas. The counter-revolutionary camp, though passive at the time, was strongest in Transdanubia. It was held together by the influence of the Austrian bourgeoisie, the Hungarian clergy and the lords of the latifundia, and the tough tenacity of modernizing farmers. And though the industrial towns and mining areas did not fail to become strongholds of the dictatorship in this region either, they soon found themselves on the defensive in confrontation with the counter-revolution.

Given the changes in the area under the control of the proletarian revolution, Transdanubia territorially became its constant hinterland, and this proved to be a considerable handicap. The antagonism between Budapest and Transdanubia marked the whole history of the Soviet Republic. The take-over was however undisturbed, even in Transdanubia.

The Governing Council took up an attitude of expectancy towards possible supporters of the counter-revolution, that is the bourgeois politicians, and this tolerance marked the domestic policy of the early peaceful weeks. Nothing much was done to win them over, but they were not persecuted either. Only Wekerle, who headed the last wartime government, and two police-officers responsible for a memorable beating-up to which Béla Kun had been subjected, were interned. The majority of the non-socialist members of the Károlyi government ceremoniously handed over their offices, calling on the staff to support the new order. The Hungarian National Council met once more to declare itself dissolved. Resolutions of dissolution were passed by the executives of the Radical, the Lovászy, and the Károlyi parties.

In contrast with the trimming and tacking of his ministers Count Károlyi changed from a sympathizer into a whole-hearted socialist during the months of the dictatorship of the proletariat. In a number of statements he put on record his loyalty towards the Soviet Republic. "Let us oil the wheels of the new administration", he said to his ministers who had assembled to take their leave. At Kun's request he went to Vienna to try and convince the leadership of the Republic that the Hungarian example was worth following. Back home, he accepted the post of political commissar of the Consumers' Co-operative 'Hangya' (the Ant).

Bearing in mind that obvious enemies also hastened to assure their positions or at least their safety by declarations of loyalty one can state that, in the early weeks, unity outside the workers' party appeared greater than within it, where the differences between Leninism and social democracy soon produced opposed points of view.

To put it simply, both sides recognized the need for union but neither was really happy about this necessity, except perhaps the numerous left-wing social democrats who had found themselves in a near schizophrenic state at the time of the persecution of the communists. Up to the middle of April it looked as if the Centrists, led by Garbai, Kunfi and Böhm unambiguously supported the dictatorship of the proletariat. This was not, however, true of the right-wing trades union bureaucracy. Its more elastic members, such as Dovcsák, Peyer and Haubrich, helped to organize the new order, to maintain their position within the working class movement, the majority, however, though they may have occupied some sort of office, grouped themselves around Gyula Peidl who headed the Printers' Union and, sympathizing with Garami who had gone into exile, took up a defensive position.

The communist leaders looked on union as an unavoidable station on the road to victory. Suppressing their doubts they endeavoured to persuade the rank and file, particularly the dissatisfied young, to accept compromises. A meeting of communist activists was convened on March 22nd, the day after the fusion, where some of the speakers expressed doubts, and others demanded vigilance and the immediate disarming of the gendarmerie and the police. The activists had to be convened again on March 26th, when they finally accepted the decision to unite the two parties. They, and Zinoviev, the chairman of the Comintern who had been making enquiries, were calmed by Béla Kun's promise to convene a party congress within a fortnight. The definite name of the unified party would be part of the agenda. In fact, an early congress would have favoured the communists.

Outside Budapest the union of the workers' parties produced minor frictions in a few places only. A fast growing membership was far more typical of the early days than inner-party conflict. Thanks to the Social Democratic party the membership had numbered several hundred thousand, now it soon reached a million and a half. Almost all industrial workers became party members, and thanks to organizing work by the Union of Agricultural Labourers, and Smallholders (FÉKOSZ), hundreds of thousands of earlier unorganized poor peasants became party members. This furthered revolutionary attitudes in the village, at the same time, however, it made it impossible to demand standards for a thus devaluated party membership.

Attempts were made to turn craft and landowners associations and other interest groups into trades unions. The Trades Union Council, to defend itself, felt itself compelled to issue a list of trades unions it recognized, accompanied by the appropriate warnings. On the other hand, the main organizational supports of the Communist Party were dissolved or lost their importance. These included the federations of demobilised soldiers

and non-commissioned officers, of the unemployed and of the disabled. There was no need for them any more to represent particular interests, buth with their loss militant communist mass-movements had folded up.

The communists and left-wing social democrats recognized the nature of the problem, but the daily grind, the immense quantity of routine work which devolved on them, swallowed up their energies. The revolution achieved much, but one of the most important achievements could barely be noticed even then, and that was precisely what it was for. The day after the revolution, there was water in the taps, the bakers were at work, the trams operated, the garbage was removed, copper sulphate was distributed in time, in other words there were no spokes in the wheels of civilized society. This was all very important and not only because of its effect on the general mood. The temporary passivity of the bourgeoisie was largely due to the fact that they first reckoned with the automatic economic bankruptcy of working class power, and were rather surprised when it failed to occur.

The Governing Council was the centre of feverish activity. Its table, under a cloud of tobacco smoke, was surrounded by messengers, people asked to call, secretaries and delegations. Day after day the People's Commissar for Justice placed new decree's drafts on this table, on the surrender of arms and gold, stock-taking in shops, or the prohibition of dealing in luxury articles. (One needed a special shopping permit issued by house-wardens to buy clothes or shoes, furniture or kitchen utensils.) It would no doubt have made sense to concentrate on essentials where action really brooked no delay, such as the concealment and smuggling of goods. In those cases, and generally in stock-taking, soviets, stewards and wardens received considerable help from petty officials, shop-assistants and domestic servants who approved of the expropriation of capital. The Governing Council deliberately tried to obtain speedy results, trying to strike deep and wound the capitalism in this brief breathing space. The activity of millions speeded up things, those working in fields of secondary economic importance did not want to fall behind, and often anticipated even the instructions from above, in which there was no shortage anyhow.

There were indeed differences of opinion within the government, but until early in April, these concerned tactics only, connected with the rate of changes they should impose. Centrist people's commissars urged caution in this sense, sometimes rightly, *e.g.* when they opposed the uniform cessation of religious instruction, or the suppression of liberal and democratic bourgeois papers. As regards the upper limit of workshops and plants to be nationalized they had to retreat in the face of reality. On one question the revolutionary point of view came off second best: the communists were unable to stop the integration of the police and

gendarmerie with the Red Guard. Unity at this stage still looked real, communists and social democrats did not form separate camps.

The first political conflicts were concerned with Budapest affairs. The majority of workers' district councils constituted in a revolutionary manner, without elections, were under communist or radical influence, but two of the members of the three-man temporary *directoire* which headed Budapest, had been inclined to the right, and left their office early in April. Dezső Biró, one of the organizers of the Red Guard followed suit. Thus, of the eleven members of the Trades Union Council elected in 1917, only Vilmos Böhm remained to still accept political office, but he had never belonged to the right wing.

Jakab Weltner, who had been, next to Garami, the most striking figure of the old right-wing party leadership, represented a different sort of attitude. Being one of those who decided the fusion he acted as an inner opposition from the start, and edited *Népszava,* the party daily, in that spirit, though he did not agree with those who waited for the early failure of the dictatorship, being convinced that there was no returning to a bourgeois democracy with social welfare policies – which had been abandoned on March 21st.

"Having stepped on this path", he editorialized, "proletarian and capitalist dictatorship are the only alternatives, there is no other way. We must make every effort to ensure that a form of the fight should survive in which workers hold power through the soviets. Every other form means that the old slavery, the old servitude and misery will once again be the lot of Hungarian workers."[63] Weltner looked further ahead than those whose horizons were limited by the cashier's window of the mutual benefits society. Being aware of more, he was also more afraid; he was the chief spokesman of caution, of 'human and honest ways of dealing' with the bourgeoisie and other enemies of the revolution.

These words of his were linked to the first open conflict after the fusion. At the April 1st meeting of the Governing Council Pogány, the People's Commissar for Defense, proposed that local soviets should not be allowed to interfere in military matters, and that soldiers' soviets be dissolved. Unlike other left-wing Social Democrats, Pogány found himself in a difficult position thanks to the union. Right up to the middle of March he had tried to radicalise his party's policy, without the communists, and trying to outbid them. He made enemies right and left as a result, his predecessor, Böhm, loathed him as much as Tibor Szamuely and Béla Szántó, his communist deputies. Colonel Stromfeld, the most outstanding of the officers, would not even consider working in Pogány's People's Commissariat. The antipathies were potentiated by the Bona-

[63] *Népszava,* April 4, 1919.

partist airs and graces the highly talented Pogány gave himself. The district councils rallied with the communist soldiers against Pogány, and at last the communist People's Commissars and Böhm together demanded that Pogány go. His resignation had not even been published when, on the next day, the communist soldiers demonstrated against him in front of the Defense Office – the day before the arrival of Smuts! – to prove to the world that Pogány's departure had not been voluntary.

Since Pogány and Szamuely had clashed openly, both had to leave the Defense Office, and Böhm profited. Not for the first, and not for the last time, Béla Kun was able to exploit the crisis to speed up developments. The whole of the Governing Council was transformed, the Deputy People's Commissars became People's Comissars as well, and most of the commissariats were then headed by a college of two or three. Most of the deputies having been communists, the change meant a shift in power in their favour, and the disproportion between power relations in the revolution and the composition of the government came to an end. To avoid splits Kun acted sharply against similar moves. It is not easy to decide where, in a revolution, the *avante garde* role of small active groups comes to an end, and where adventurism that finds itself isolated from the masses begins. Kun drew the line after achievable results were safely home in the barn. When Kunfi, who tended to brood, asked: what if the democratic majority is at the back of the demonstrators? he answered: "I am not going to let the fate of the proletariat in Hungary be decided by Snotty-Nosed Jack."[64]

Kun was also influenced by the desire to meet General Smuts the next day with a demonstration of order that imposed respect, as well as by the rapprochement between some of the communist commissars – Vágó, Vántus and Fiedler – and the social democrats following the fusion which led them to condemn the demonstration, as the left-wing social democrats did. They did not understand that the lack of confidence shown by the demonstrators was justified, even if they chose the wrong target.

Sándor Garbai continued as Chairman of the Governing Council. Jenő Landler and Béla Vágó were Commissars for Internal Affairs, Railways and Shipping; Jenő Hamburger, György Nyisztor and Károly Vántus for Agriculture; Béla Kun, Vilmos Böhm, Rezső Fiedler, József Haubrich and Béla Szántó for Defense; Zoltán Rónai and István Ládai for Justice; Mór Erdélyi, Artur Illés and Bernát Kondor for Public Victualling; Zsigmond Kunfi, György Lukács, Sándor Szabados and Tibor Szamuely for Education; Béla Kun, Péter Ágoston and József Pogány for Foreign Affairs; Dezső Bokányi and Antal Guth for Labour and Public Welfare;

[64] The minutes of the April 3rd, 1919 meeting of the Governing Council. Archives of the Institute of History of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party. F. 601, group 1. For Béla Kun's role in the revolution see: György Borsányi, *Kun Béla*, Budapest 1979.

Henrik Kalmár for German Minority Affairs; Béla Székely and Gyula Lengyel for Finances; Ágoston Stefán for Ukrainian Minority Affairs; and Jenő Varga, Antal Dovcsák, Gyula Hevesi, József Kelen, Mátyás Rákosi, and Ferenc Bajáki for 'Social Production' (Planning, Industry and Trade). The list stayed essentially unchanged till June though, once the war of intervention started, a number of commissars with other duties, including Szamuely and Pogány, and others as well, devoted all their energies to military matters.

Thirteen of the thirty-four members of the Governing Council had been in the Communist Party before March 21st, seven were expressly left-wing social democrats, that is men who, even before the 1918 revolution had openly opposed the party leadership. A fair number additionally belonged to the Böhm, Garbai, Kunfi centre, or were labour leaders such as Bajáki or Bokányi, who could not be classified with either the Right or the Left. Five or six were expressly on the Right. Of these Dovcsák, and Haubrich who could only be considered as on the Right with certain reservations, played a political role, the others were administrators. There were two non-socialist specialists – Dr. Stefán and Dr. Ládai. The political weight of the right-wing social democratic leadership was more in evidence outside the Governing Council, in the trades union and party apparatus. Sándor Csizmadia, who, for some years had really been reckoned a peasant democrat, even as a member of the Social Democratic Party leadership, left the government, and the working class movement, at the time of the transformation. His tragic fate exemplifies the difficulties the working class movement and the revolution had in absorbing that cooperative, land-distribution peasant socialism, so characteristic of the peasant masses, which he instinctively represented within the SDP.

The strength of the Left within the Governing Council was given in the first place not by its numbers there but by the backing of the working class masses. It was thanks to them that the revolutionary line was generally asserted on major points at issue. Béla Kun was the real leader of the Governing Council, everyone saw him as the delegate to Hungary of Lenin and the Russian Revolution, as the representative of the new International. That is how he too, interpreted his job, and it was in that sense that he tacked and trimmed his sails, plotting a tactical course amongst the various currents present amongst communists and social democrats, and the various hostile powers.

One must establish, looking at the composition of the Governing Council that it was not inferior intellectually to any Hungarian government since 1867. None had ever contained a better qualified politician dealing with education and culture than Lukács, or a more highly trained economist than Varga. Many of the social democrats had been members or commissars of the Károlyi cabinet of all talents, and several of the

communists were to have well-known careers later. Twelve of the thirty-four commissars were workers, their proportion being thus smaller in high positions requiring considerable administrative skills and other knowledge, than in local soviets. Only two or three of them had still been manual workers when the war had started, the others had been members of the party, trades union or cooperative apparatus. Nine were employed professional men, five lawyers or medical practitioners, and seven altogether clerks or officials of various sorts. Some of these had long been in party service, on the staff of party papers, or the legal advisers of trades unions. The composition of the Budapest intelligentsia explains why roughly 60 per cent of the members of the Governing Council were of Jewish parentage, a fact duly exploited by counter-revolutionary agitation. What was even worse was that, after Csizmadia had been relieved of his duties, only one agricultural labourer remained amongst the people's commissars, and he as well had long been a trades union official. This reflected the age-old relationship prevailing between the working class movement and the village, and was connected with the mistakes made when it came to agriculture. It was typical that György Nyisztor, for it was he, should have been the oldest commissar, at 50, the survivor of an earlier age in the working class movement. The youngest, 27, were József Kelen and Mátyás Rákosi, members of the Budapest communist intelligentsia. The average age of the commissars was 38.

The negotiations with Smuts and the soviet elections were the first major tasks awaiting the reorganized government. There were no major conflicts. The Right only objected to the manner in which dwellings of the rich had been taken over, but the mood of the masses there unambiguously favoured the radical solution. Kunfi hesitated, but Kun nevertheless succeeded in proclaiming undelayed elections. These were based on a Temporary Constitution accepted by the delegates of Budapest district councils and party organizations at a meeting held on March 31st.

Most of the country, including Budapest, went to the polls on April 7th, in some of the counties polling day was some other date between April 6th and 10th. The soviets were elected for six months on the basis of official tickets which could be amended. In Budapest and the towns voting was by secret ballot, but the conditions for it were not ensured in the most villages. Suffrage was not universal. Earlier there had been property qualifications, now these were reversed. The electorate was naturally much more extensive than in 1910, roughly four and a half million, half the total population, had the vote.

Voting was indirect, soviets on a lower level delegating the members of the next higher one. In the election of county soviets, urban soviets were generally given twice the vote of rural ones, in order to increase the influence of workers.

There was little time for preparations, but the mood was nevertheless enthusiastic, since the majority voted for the first time in their lives. A little less than half of those entitled to, actually voted, but there were considerable differences. In Budapest half the population, that is two thirds of all adults, in other words the large majority of those entitled to, actually voted. This was largely true of the provincial towns as well. 35 per cent of the total population voted in Szeged, which was occupied by allied forces, 40 per cent in Debrecen, 42 per cent in Nagyvárad (Oradea). In rural areas however, no more than 20 per cent went to the polls, even fewer in some counties such as Békés, Csanád, Komárom, Szolnok, parts of Transylvania. This was also true of a number of typically peasant towns, under 10 per cent, in Kecskemét, in Csongrád and Szolnok counties, but also in Veszprém and Pápa.

One should however bear in mind that, in keeping with prevailing customs, most of the village women did not dare to vote, and there were places where they were simply not given access to the booths. The uncertain mood related to land reform reduced participation in the villages, and also, chiefly in distant farming areas, the small number of polling stations. Finally, many of the provincial *directoires* interpreted provisions concerning exploiters much more strictly than the Temporary Constitution, including even small farmers amongst them.

The overwhelming majority of soviet members elected in industrial towns were industrial workers. In villages and peasant towns the majority were agricultural labourers and poor peasants, especially so on the Great Plain and Southern and Eastern Transdanubia. In County Somogy the 'reverse census' was over 5 acres, in Kisújszállás a bare three. In the northern, more industrialized part of County Pest more of the soviet members were industrial workers rather than people engaged in agriculture. The poor, growing in self-confidence, reduced the mass basis of the soviet power by restricting the small-holders. The rich on the other hand, hung on to power where they could, and in many localities ensured their sons or sons-in-law, or other clients, a place on the list of the propertyless. In towns and villages with a petit bourgeois character, power typically slid from the hands of the well-to-do to a wider stratum of petit bourgeois tradesmen and peasant farmer householders. In villages this was true especially in numerous parts of Counties Vas and Sopron, and elsewhere in Western Hungary, but also in some of the more backward regions of Northern Hungary.

Professional people, particularly teachers, were elected to soviets as well, and the poorer tradesmen too, in greater numbers still. In many places war-veterans insisted on separate representation, thus further increasing the high proportion of the young. Women were elected to numerous councils,

but always only one or two, signifying rather than realizing the declared equality of the sexes.[65]

Electoral meetings brought conflicts to the surface, and it was in connection with the electoral campaign that the first of the more important counter-revolutionary moves made themselves felt. In the earlier weeks there had been only isolated counter-revolutionary activity. The urban citizenry or the gentry did not dare to move, some clergymen abused the licence of the pulpit, and the first demonstrations, producing armed clashes as well, took place in County Sopron, well-to-do peasant farmers and vintners being the participants. Elsewhere as well, electoral meetings ended in brawls, and the chairman of the Dömsöd *directoire* only survived injuries thus received by a few days.

In Szeged, however, the native city of the counter-revolution, the working class defied reaction in spite of foreign occupation. A *directoire* was formed, the achievements of the Soviet Republic were proclaimed, and, inasmuch this proved possible under the shadow of French bayonets, they were realized. Once the *directoire* was forced to flee they organized soviets in the unoccupied environs. Later a new *directoire* was formed in Szeged by bourgeois democratic politicians. Tacking midst the shoals of the local workers' councils and the French they recognized the Soviet Republic and even held the soviet elections which turned into a noisy demonstration of tens of thousands in support of the threatened revolution. The occupiers were forced to tread cautiously at first, in Pécs however, and in towns of Slovakia inhabited by members of several nations, mass arrests of those sympathizing with the Soviet Republic already started then, as they did in Transylvania, and in the almost purely Slav Croatia.

The honeymoon of the revolution continued after the elections. The results proved the viability of the dictatorship of the proletariat in a manner that brooked no denial. Active or passive resistance against certain tickets or candidates in no way reflected general dissatisfaction. The soviets, with strength added by their new composition, continued their work, and, within a few days elected the higher soviets and delegates to the National Congress of Soviets.

County councils ordered new ballots sometimes unnecessarily in quite a few villages, especially in Counties Vas and Sopron, but also in Pest and other counties, objecting to the mandates of 'exploiters', just because one or two men of property found themselves among the several dozen soviet members. Nothing like that happened in Budapest. Voting had to be repeated in Budapest's district VIII however, because Buchinger and

[65] On electoral procedures and results see Tibor Hajdu, *Tanácsok Magyarországon 1918–19 (Soviets in Hungary 1918–19)* Budapest 1958.

Mór Preusz, who had opposed the proclamation of the Soviet Republic, there figured on the official ticket. The communists of the district had therefore run an opposition ticket of their own, which secured tens of thousands of votes. In the course of the new ballot they corrected the official ticket which had been unified meanwhile.

New social policy and socialization regulations inspired by victory at the polls, appeared at an increasing rate starting with the middle of April. There was orderly work in the fields, and in all those workshops where raw material was available. Production was in full force at the Csepel Ordnance Works, since the foreign intervention under preparation had thrown its shadows ahead. News from abroad, however, had never been as encouraging. The new Bavarian Soviet Republic, with a firm revolutionary line, had been proclaimed, the workers of Eastern Galicia had risen in revolt, and workers' Volkswehr Battalions in Vienna were getting ready to rise, having received help from Hungary. Budapest had also supplied funds to the Yugoslav Communist Party to help them buy a building to house their H. Q. and to extend their organization. Workers had laid down their tools in many parts of Europe, and the importance of these strikes was blown-up by the Hungarian press. Zsigmond Móricz, the great writer expressed revolutionary optimism in articles replete with messianic faith.

"Who would have thought that following the horrors of war life would bubble again so quickly, showing such rank luxuriance . . . Hungary has at last embarked on the road of happy peace. I bear witness to this holy conviction."

"Small-holders sit in fright at the doors of their small larders, convinced that they are left to defend themselves. In the cooperatives on the other hand cloudless calm and happy peace rule . . . Communism, of which the imaginative naive were afraid since they identified it with the prison of the phalanstery will produce a magnificient age where individuality will flourish."[66]

The first meeting of the Budapest Workers' and Soldiers' Soviet was held in a festive mood on April 15th. Béla Kun, in his opening address, quoted Marx: "The proletarian revolutions criticize themselves" and therefore Kun established that "a certain degree of bureaucratization already shows itself" in the operation of the soviets, "and yet, Comrades, what we have to keep a careful watch on is never to present our own will as the will of the masses . . . let us be a working body, and not a chattering body . . ."[67] He announced that a party congress will have to be convened for May 4th, and a soviet congress as soon afterwards as possible.

[66] *Pesti Hírlap*, April 15 and 17. Published in *Mindenki újakra készül* . . . , Vol. 3, pp. 118 and 125–126.

[67] MMTVD Vol 6/A, p. 215.

The counter-revolutionary events that took place in the days of the elections entailed certain reprisals. Though they were not widespread they proved that the great majority of the bourgeoisie had outgrown the patriotic mood of the early days. As a warning some of the most hated representatives of the *Ancien Regime* were put under arrest, Samu Hazai and Leó Lánczy amongst them. Even bearing in mind these reprisals one can still call the weeks preceeding the foreign intervention the peaceful period of the Soviet Republic. According to official figures issued by Váry, Deputy Attorney General after the revolution, five hundred and ninety men were executed at the time of the Soviet Republic, but these figures included common criminals, and counter-revolutionaries killed in action or in brawls,[68] eighteen of them in the twenty-six days up to April 15th. In the Governing Council the social democrats successfully opposed demands for a more severe dictatorship, and at their request the bourgeois democratic papers were allowed to continue publication in spite of the shortage of newsprint. Landler and Kunfi suggested to the Governing Council that the strength of the churches ought to be divided in order to weaken the counter-revolution, greater tolerance must be shown towards them, and there ought to be negotiations with the 'clerical councils' constituted in the 1918 revolution. Kun and Garbai however rejected such ideas that were alien to the spirit of the proletarian revolution. The episcopate, being aware of their weak position, applied a policy of caution which stopped the clerical councils from taking the initiative in approaching the revolution with which they sympathized in a number of respects.

[68] Albert Váry, *A vörösuralom áldozatai Magyarországon (The Victims of Red Rule in Hungary)*, Vác 1923.

THE FIRST WAVE OF FOREIGN INTERVENTION

The Soviet Republic inherited a bankrupt army, with no more than 60,000 serving soldiers, from the previous regime. The majority supported the revolution, but the units were in a state of dissolution. The Székely Division on the other hand, recruited from natives of Eastern Transylvania, which was soundest from the military point of view, only supported the revolution conditionally, in the hope of defending the integrity of the country's borders.

Recruitment for the Red Army started promptly on March 21st. Freely interpreting the framework of the six infantry and two cavalry divisions permitted by the Belgrade armistice, one could get close to a strength of 200,000. The major objective of the military policy of the Soviet Republic, and the most important guarantee of its survival was a well-equipped, trained and disciplined army of such numerical strength. The number might appear small compared to the millions engaged in battle during the Great War, but given its end, and conditions of demobilisation, the numbers appeared respectable, and sufficient to oppose any potential enemy, *one at a time* since the general demobilisation made much larger armies unlikely on their side as well. Such an army was of course insufficient to fight a multi-front war against the united armed force of the Allies, the main political objective of the Government was therefore to try and avoid a universal war of intervention until one could reckon with some kind of outside assistance, and a fundamental change in the international situation.

The Red Army was essentially one of revolutionary volunteers. The voluntary principle, following four and a half years of blood-letting, acted as a serious brake on recruitment, but the Soviet Republic never found itself in the position to enforce successfully the conscription, let alone to use reprisals. In the spirit of the revolution, and in order to further voluntary recruitment, the low soldier's pay was raised to half a labourer's wage, plus of course full keep, and a number of other perquisites, including immunity from requisition and ensuring the security of their dwelling.

The old officer corps had to be kept on by the Red Army, following a certain culling, and the system of political commissars was introduced to

control them. Soldiers' soviets were dissolved, military discipline demanded that. Their political weight was made up for by the political commissars to some degree only. To evaluate the good quality of the officer corps and understand their political unreliability it is enough to recall that numerous officers, who later became prominent generals in the counter-revolutionary system wore the red arm-band, including Géza Lakatos, Döme Sztójay, Prime Ministers in 1944, Ferenc Szombathelyi, and Henrik Werth, both chiefs of the General Staff in the Second World War. The retirement of all generals and colonels made it possible to promote young staff officers who had proved their mettle in the Great War to posts of responsibility where they could display their abilities. These included the highest ranking officers of the Red Army Colonel Aurél Stromfeld, Lieutenant-colonels Jenő Tombor and Ferenc Julier.

Recruitment for the Red Army started in an enthusiastic mood. In the early days the most militant fighters of the revolution answered the call to the colours: Russian Bolshevik prisoners of war, Vienna volunteers, thousands of industrial workers and miners who had illegally crossed the demarcation line from Pécs, Szeged and Arad to join the Red Army. A fair number of workers, students and other young men from Budapest, Debrecen and Nagyvárad joined, as did members of the landless rural proletariat of the area beyond the River Tisza. Around 20,000 new volunteers joined early in April. A similar number continued to serve amongst the members of the armed forces of Károlyi's People's Republic. Recruitment then slowed down, mining and war production were declared reserved occupations. It became clear that, except for a relatively small *avante garde,* mass recruitment was most successful in areas where production could not spare potential volunteers. Only a fraction amongst those in the provinces, in the ranks of the peasantry, the *petit bourgeoisie,* the professionals and those engaged in trade and commerce who actually sympathized with the revolution answered the call to arms, the more so since a large proportion of manpower that survived the war was either unsuitable for military service from the start, or else was disabled by wounds or disease on active service.

On April 16th, the day of the Rumanian attack, the Red Army had an official strength of 55,000, in fact there were a few thousand more. Another contributing factor to this low strength was that those in charge of the People's Commissariat for Defense, counting on initial foreign policy successes, had not reckoned with such an early attack. By the end of April numbers reached 70,000, in spite of major losses; around the middle of May there were 120,000 soldiers, not counting the Reserve Workers Battalions. The planned strength of 200,000 was only achieved for a short period, early in June, at the peak of the Northern Campaign.

Around the middle of April the Red Army was outnumbered roughly three to one on the Czechoslovak front, and two to one on the Rumanian front. Only a few battalions guarded the frontier to the south and with Austria since attacks from those directions were least likely. Considering the circumstances logistics were satisfactory. The artillery was of good quality, but there was a great shortage of artillery ammunition as well as in medical supplies. The sound state of the railway network somewhat alleviated problems arising from being outnumbered since troops could be easily moved from one theatre of operations to another. At the start of armed hostilities the enemy was in no way better supplied, but they could obtain new supplies much easier. The Western Allies did not want to expose their soldiers to infection by the 'germs of Bolshevism', but their large war surplus stocks were at the free disposal of the armies of intervention while the Red Army had to rely on smuggled staff.

There were no real battles before the middle of April though engagements between patrols, armed reconnaissance and local clashes were fairly frequent. Even this relative calm was only apparent, the French General Staff did not stop war preparations at the time of the Smuts mission in spite of the formal rejection by the Peace Conference. At a secret meeting held on April 10th, at which the countries which later formed the Little Entente (Czechoslovakia, Rumania and Yugoslavia) participated together with Greece and Poland, it became clear that though they agreed in their judgment on the Hungarian Soviet Republic, there were conflicts between them, and Rumania alone was ready and determined to attack. Franchet d'Esperey decided to wait no longer, and to launch a Rumanian attack.

The Rumanian leadership, as in 1916, was once again ready to take risks in the interest of maximum gains. The King of Rumania, in a message sent to London, declared a stop to the advance of Russian Bolshevism, cutting off the Hungarian and Russian Soviet republics from one another and securing a free hand for the Allies in Central Europe as the objectives of the attack. Besides, the attack was expected to counterbalance the moral damage caused by the Odessa defeat. However, it was no secret to those in London that the major motive was to push the Rumanian–Hungarian and Rumanian–Yugoslav frontier lines as far West as possible. The Great Powers gave their implicit consent for the attack aware of their authority to establish the definite frontiers at Paris anyhow.[69]

[69] Military operations are described by Colonel Ervin Liptai, *A Magyar Vörös Hadsereg harcai 1919 (Fighting by the Hungarian Red Army 1919)* Budapest 1960; Wilhelm Böhm, *op. cit.*, contains many facts told with the prejudices of a participant; the most authentic Rumanian account is General G. D. Mardarescu, *Campania pentru desrobirea Ardealului şi ocuparea Budapestei (The Campaign for the Liberation of Transylvania and the Occupation of Budapest)*, Bucharest 1921. For the diplomatic background see Zsuzsa L. Nagy, *op. cit.*, and Arno Mayer, *op. cit.*

The Rumanian attack started on the evening of April 15th with an artillery barrage, and the offensive extended to most of the eastern front by the 16th. The major blow was aimed at the Székely Division holding a thin 130 km long line in the northern sector between Csucsa, Szilágysomlyó and Técső (Ciucea, Simleu Silvaniei and Tiatchev). The division, faced by superior numbers, was forced to retreat. On the very first day the Rumanian Army advanced a fair way into County Szilágy. The 39th Brigade was still able to hold the line at Csucsa for a while, but the 6th Division grouped around Honctő (Gurahonc) to the south of it was forced to retreat the very first day. On the 17th the 6th Division suffered blows that led to its withdrawing beyond the Világos–Nagyzerénd (Siria–Zerind) line. The Székely Division also continued to retreat towards Debrecen, while the Rumanian cavalry, in pursuit, tried to cut off the main line of withdrawal. In the north the enemy occupied Técső.

The 39th Brigade was thus threatened with encirclement. For this reason it abandoned the Királyhágó (the high pass over the mountains leading to Transylvania) and retreated in panic towards Nagyvárad (Oradea).

Colonel Kratochvil, the commander of the Székely Division, had already tried to negotiate with the Rumanians earlier, as soon as it became clear that the Governing Council did not insist on the integrity of the country's frontiers, but he had been unsuccessful. The Rumanian government consistently rejected the overtures of every sort from the Hungarian side, even when it came to the efforts of the successive counter-revolutionary governments, being afraid that it would no longer have a free hand if dealing with a Hungarian state recognized by Paris. Colonel Kratochvil finally had to be content with surrender, securing certain conditions for withdrawal, no more, but the chivalrous enemy did not even care to hold himself to them. In the course of the retreat and the secret negotiations Kratochvil and his officers who had in fact established a military dictatorship in the territory under their control, openly persecuted the *directoires* and the commissars, and were merciless towards the Rumanian inhabitants. As a result in those villages, largely inhabited by Rumanians, class-struggle played second fiddle to nationalism, and the Rumanian peasantry welcomed the Royal Rumanian Army as liberators. The urban *directoires* tried in vain to organize resistance, all they managed to do was to secure movable public property and requisitioned goods beyond the River Tisza.

It would be futile to blame the Revolution for having been unable to fully coordinate socialist and national objectives. The *directoires* and their supporters, all the enthusiasts of socialism, longed for peaceful work, most of them lacked the determination and implacability of Russian revolutionaries. National feelings and national hatreds fit those better who look

to the sword, but that sort of nationalist bitterness soon gives rise to its opposite number. What the Székely Division gained through military strength it lost by stirring up Rumanian chauvinism. The cruelty of the Rumanian enemy created terror and panic; they did not care to take prisoners in the early days of the offensive, and if they did, village folk attacked the defenseless Hungarian prisoners, giving vent to the pent-up mood produced by the persecutions of the days that had just gone by. From a military point of view however, one cannot put all the blame on the Székely Division for the collapse of the eastern front, since the defense put up by other troops had produced no better results in the days preceding the betrayal. The Governing Council was well aware of the way Kratochvil felt, and would have relieved his men replacing them by more reliable reserves if such had been available.

The Governing Council discussed the military situation on April 18th. Most of the commissars were not aware of its seriousness, but perhaps for that very reason opinion was unanimous in favour of continuing the fight. There were arguments about tactics, that is all, and the proposals were mostly directed at strengthening the home front. The radicals, Szamuely and Lukács, urged the more systematic dictatorship of the poor, proposed the destruction of documents of private property, such as land registers and title deeds, and urged to satisfy the demands of the poorest, the victims of war, thus mobilizing them more forcefully in support of the regime. The more moderate Kunfi suggested giving land to the landless, and Garbai argued in favour of the repeal of prohibition.

The Budapest Workers' Soviet met next day, April 19th and passed a resolution proposed by Kunfi to mobilise the proletariat. Half the workers of Budapest, as well as half the members of the soviets and of the Governing Council would leave for the theatre of war. The district and factory soviets and the revolutionary-minded workers gave enthusiastic reception to the resolution. Veteran soldiers amongst the soviet members reported at the barracks, and the others spent some days collecting those weapons that were left over from the Great War and were still largely in private hands. The weapons were badly needed partly because of the threatening counter-revolution, and also in order to equip fighting soldiers. By the end of April the Red Army had a strength of 70,000 of which a third is estimated to have been workers from Budapest and environs, which means that the composition of the Army had changed radically.

The heroic stand of the working class was not, however, enough to throw the hundreds of thousands of people into battle. 11,500 had volunteered in the course of April in the three counties of the 'Stormy Corner' (South-East Hungary), the most revolutionary peasant area, which, however, was lost to the enemy by the end of the month. The

proportion of volunteers was much smaller in peasant areas that were still controlled by the Soviet Republic at the end of April. Even fewer members of the professions and of the petty bourgeoisie volunteered; not that the majority would have been hostile to the Soviet Republic but, they were indeed badly shaken by the fact that following the peaceful days of March the time of the bloody struggle had arrived.

The men of property and the officers and officials who shared their views demanded the restoration of the pre-1918 administration in all the evacuated territories. In Debrecen they attempted a counter-revolutionary revolt, stirring up the rank and file of the police-force. The actions of the policemen who refused military service were put down with the help of local workers and Austrian volunteers. There were smaller counter-revolutionary moves elsewhere in the north of the area beyond the River Tisza, and around Kecskemét, where the followers of the Héjjas brothers were beginning to gather, though the Kecskemét *directoire* dispersed them quite easily.

As an answer to counter-revolutionary stirrings the taking of hostages was ordered on April 19th. A total of 489 men of property, well-known local politicians were taken to the Central Prison, including the Archduke Joseph Francis and Ignác Darányi as well as a number of former ministers who had belonged to the right wing of Károlyi's party, such as Lovászy. Not surprisingly, some of the men who later were amongst the first Prime Ministers of the counter-revolutionary period, István Friedrich, Károly Huszár and Sándor Simonyi-Semadam were also hostages. The senselessness of the taking of hostages soon became clear; not even once was the Governing Council able to summon the determination to execute a hostage as a reprisal, the organizers of the counter-revolution were not, therefore, worried by their fate, the method of taking hostages however led to fear and antipathy amongst professional people and the middle classes. At the end of May, when the military situation was somehow balanced, the Governing Council ordered the release of all the hostages.

Following the Rumanian attack the revolutionary leadership tried to put some order in church-and-revolution relations, doing so in a manner that was neither fish nor fowl. On April 20th, Easter Sunday, an order by the People's Commissariat of the Interior concerning the freedom of religious worship, the inviolability of churches and their equipment, and the right to religious instruction for those who volunteered for it, was read aloud in churches. The *directoires* were forbidden to remove ministers of religion, or to disturb them in their work, as long as they did not commit offences for which they had to face a revolutionary tribunal. At the same time ministers were asked to leave clerical employment, being assured of a proper job. The large majority which did not answer this call was on principle left without state support, but temporarily they continued to

receive their dues. Simultaneously an order was issued nationalizing the estates belonging to the church. This sensitively touched the interests of the Roman Catholic Church in particular, but such measures brooked no delay since a significant section of the country's latifundia was involved. The call to ministers to leave their flock was, in a way, a help to the church leadership since it split church reform movements that had been fairly strong. The hastening of the secularization of church property naturally increased the number of camp-followers of the counter-revolution amongst the church-goers. Central commissions were delegated to do the job since local soviets frequently implemented the order only half-heartedly. Though inventories were taken showing extreme caution, and the letter of the law was adhered to, the tiniest of abuses produced indignation, let alone thoughtless action, such as the eviction of Archbishop Csernoch, the Prince-Primate, from his Palace at Esztergom.

The effects of mobilisation only showed after May 1st. Battalions were thrown into battle one by one, as soon as they were got together, to plug holes in the deteriorating military situation. As a result they were largely cut up without being able to affect the fall of the dice. The Rumanian horsemen occupied Szatmárnémeti (Satu Mare) on April 19th, and Nagyvárad, the communist stronghold in Eastern Hungary, had to be evacuated. Surviving forces in the southern sector were concentrated between Arad and Nagyszalonta (Salonta). Every unit that could be spared was directed towards the Debrecen–Nyiregyháza area which was to serve as the base for a counter-attack. In the two days that followed, the advance of the enemy was temporarily slowed down but the 39th Brigade disintegrated after the evacuation of Nagyvárad, and around the 20th Kratochvil cut even formal contacts with Budapest, and his surrender was expected to occur in a matter of days if not hours.

On Easter Monday, April 21st, the Rumanian Army reached the originally declared objective of its offensive. It occupied the Huszt–Szatmárnémeti–Nagykároly (Carei)–Érmihályfalva (Valea lui Mihai)–Nagyvárad–Nagyszalonta–Kisjenő (Chişineu Criş)–Arad line. Encouraged by the ease of the advance, and bearing in mind the offer by the Székely Division, the Rumanian H. Q. issued a new order of the day:

"The initiated operations must be continued with maximum energy, right up to the complete destruction of enemy forces fighting east of the River Tisza."[70]

The regrouping of the Rumanian forces was complete by April 22nd, and the new attack started. The task of the northern wing was to occupy Mátészalka, and the encirclement from the north, coming from the River Tisza, of the Székely Division. In the centre they concentrated on the

[70] Liptai, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

occupation of Debrecen, and the southern wing continued to push back the 6th Division towards the Tisza. Mátészalka was occupied on the 22nd and Debrecen on the 23rd. In Debrecen the few units that put up a fight were utterly wiped out in the unequal fight, among these were also the Vienna Volunteers. Their commander, Leo Rothziegel, a printer, and one of the founders of the communist movement in Austria, was killed in battle. The town of Gyula, in the south, was occupied by the enemy on the 24th.

The Governing Council hastened to learn from the defeat. Operations could not be directed from Budapest, a unified Trans-Tisza Command was therefore established close to the front, at Szolnok, which soon turned into the command of the Red Army as such. Vilmos Böhm became the Supreme Commander of the Red Army, concentrating powers in his hands that vied with those of the Governing Council. This in fact, presented a new danger not because of his ambitions, but because of his wobbly centrist policy. He was an outstanding organizer, but the price of his good relations with the officer corps was the curbing of the activities of the political commissars. His greatest achievement was securing the services of Colonel Aurél Stromfeld, who was perhaps the most outstanding Hungarian military leader in this century, as Chief of the General Staff.

Stromfeld renounced the possibility of frontal defense but it nevertheless proved impossible to carry out his orders. In the central section the Red Army reoccupied Hajdúszoboszló and Hajdúszovát. Böhm and Szamuely ordered the execution of Hajdúszoboszló's former city major and the manager of the savings bank. Like counter-revolutionaries in other places they had hissed a white flag and expelled the *directoire*. The next day, while Szamuely was holding forth about the military situation at a meeting of the Budapest Soviet, Hajdúszoboszló changed hands again and the Rumanians advanced on Püspökladány.

On April 25th the Army Command decided on the establishment of three well-defended bridgeheads on the left bank of the River Tisza at Szolnok, Rakamaz and Tiszafüred. Even in that untenable situation Stromfeld could not make up his mind to give up the area east of the River Tisza. In history there were great generals who wore down the enemy retreating, attack, however, was Stromfeld's life-blood, that is where his will took him, and a sense of purpose that brooked no contradiction, and also his impatience. He despised petty objectives and cautious tactics. His personality and the army of the revolution were well matched, for the latter too was better suited to take a place by storm, rather than to determined defense.

The government of the revolution, however, was forced to trim its sails, going counter to plan. The revolutionary attempt in Vienna had come to nought, the expected revolution in Croatia had not taken place either,

Berlin did not follow suit after the proclamation of the Bavarian Soviet Republic, and the Red Army in the Ukraine did not come any closer to the Carpathians. Though the Great Powers did not openly accept responsibility for the military intervention suggested by them, direct negotiations with Paris were out of the question. Italian and American diplomats were still busy in Budapest but their word did not carry overmuch weight in Paris. The British and, especially, the French rejected diplomatic feelers, they were much more interested in a Czechoslovak–Rumanian *cordon sanitaire,* and in the occupation of the Subcarpathian Ukraine, cutting off potential contact between the Hungarian and the Russian Soviet Republics. That is why Béla Kun initiated negotiations with the American Professor Brown who represented the least aggressive current amongst the victors. He represented the Coolidge Mission located in Vienna, and was known to be seriously concerned about implementing President Wilson's principles in Central Europe.

An ambiguous diplomatic game started. Kun tried to wrest an invitation to Paris by promising a government reshuffle, leaving out the 'extreme communists'. This might not have won real international recognition for the revolution, but as a diplomatic success, it might well have meant a breathing space the Red Army needed to get back on its feet. Brown, on the other hand, wished to entice Kun abroad, at least as far as Switzerland, allowing a social-democratic government to be formed in his absence which, following the example of Renner's Austria, would have fitted into the new Europe of the Paris Peace Treaties. Who will be putting a fast one over on whom, it was the old diplomatic game once again. Even many years after his death Kun was criticised by Marxist historians because of these 'treacherous' negotiations, while in 1919, British and American diplomats repeatedly alleged that Kun led Brown by the nose. The Allied Missions in Vienna would have preferred to see some sort of accord among the various trends – the many counts in exile (from Batthyány to Bethlen) and Garami – naturally, on the basis of an unconditional acceptance of the peace dictate. The exiles were already sufficiently broken in spirit to accept the latter, but it was more difficult to agree on domestic policy. They were already counting the hours of Bolshevism but were not sure about whether a repeat performance could be better prevented by reforms or by terror.

On April 26 the Governing Council discussed Kun's report on the proposal he had submitted to Paris *via* Brown. He asked for an end to the blockade and for the Rumanians to be ordered to retire to the Smuts line that had been rejected earlier. By way of exchange, he offered the removal from the government of Szamuely, Pogány and Vágó, since they, as Kun noted, were in the battle area anyway, and an end to the taking of hostages, and to the 'terror'. Elek Bolgár, the Minister in Vienna who was

on good terms with Brown, Jakab Weltner and Miklós Cservenka, two of the social democrats were to replace them. Kun, at the same time, asked for a personal meeting with representatives of the Great Powers to be arranged in Switzerland.

Brown's above conditions could have been fulfilled if, at that price, the Allies had become reconciled to the Soviet system. It was clear however that the replacement of Kun, and then of the communists, and the abandoning of the dictatorship of the proletariat would be demanded soon after. Kun therefore kept the implementation of the proposals in reserve in case military surrender became unavoidable anyway. Brown's message was however held up by Professor Coolidge, his chief of mission in Vienna, and he only forwarded it to Paris on May 1st, accompanied by caustic comments, in the hope that the Rumanian advance – whose cessation Wilson, his own President, had in fact demanded – would make further concessions to the Bolsheviks superfluous. The effect of the note on the Governing Council was therefore more important than the Paris response.[71]

At the April 26 sitting, Kun's steps were approved without overmuch discussion, but the argument was all the fiercer when Dovcsák, Vice President of the Governing Council, and spokesman for the right-wing trades-union leadership, condemned the dictatorship of the proletariat, saying that the workers' regiments were only prepared to take part in parades, but would not fight. He even raised the idea of giving up power. Not only the communists and the left-wing social democrats, but the centrist people's commissars Böhm and Kunfi, and even Mór Erdélyi, spoke against Dovcsák. It became clear however that the centrists were also entertaining dangerous illusions owing to the apparent readiness of Paris to negotiate. They opposed taking hostages, arrests, and the requisition of food and other commodities to help build a good image towards Paris, and to regain the support of the petty bourgeois masses. The communist Attorney General, Jenő László, who urged the taking of hostages, was relieved of his duties at their request. The soundness of their proposals is debatable. Perhaps the revolution could have survived without taking hostages, but surely not without requisitions. More grave errors were that they overestimated the power of minor Allied officers and other agents, and they did not recognise that the fate of the revolution depended less on the petty bourgeois or professional people, than on the activisation of the masses themselves who were indifferent or even enthusiastic about the revolution but did not volunteer for active service.

[71] The reports of the Coolidge mission are in the National Archives, State Department, 184.01; see also the Hoover ARA papers in the Hoover Institute of Stanford University. They are discussed by Mayer, *op. cit.*

There is no doubt that none of those in the Governing Council, including Böhm, showed any awareness of the seriousness of the military situation.

At Nyírbakta, on April 26, Kratochvil's representatives signed the protocol of the surrender. The members of the Székely Division were treated as prisoners of war by the Rumanians, some of them however, once the surrender was proclaimed, escaped to the Tisza and joined the Red Army. Kratochvil's betrayal was the final blow to the theatre of war beyond the Tisza. Thanks to measures taken by Stromfeld there was no breach in the line. He had placed the First Division behind the Székely Division as a second line of defence, the loss of the 10,000 strong well-equipped unit however roughly cancelled out the surplus strength gained with the reinforcements sent beyond the Tisza the previous week, and the strength of the Red Army was the same as at the start of the intervention campaign.

Stromfeld was forced to accept the evacuation of the area beyond the Tisza, but unlike Colonel Tombor, Operational Chief of the Defense Commissariat, he insisted on defending the offensive bridgeheads. He was forced to recognise that his forces were not capable of holding a defensive line in the plain since this demanded the discipline of trench warfare of 1915. He hoped, however, that roughly three weeks' training would be sufficient preparation for a counter-offensive, though "at present, they were forces in name only".[72]

By the 27th a speedy retreat had become the chief objective of the Red Army, since the enemy used all the forces at his disposal to try and cut them off from the Tisza, and thus destroy them. On the 27th the southern and northern front began to move as well. French forces occupied Hódmezővásárhely, Makó, and their environs, and it was to be feared that a united French–Yugoslavian attack would eventuate, though, in the event, it did not. In the north of the country, however, the campaign of the Czechoslovak army was under way, after days in which patrols clashed. The primary aim was closing the gap in the North-Eastern Carpathians, and making communication between the Hungarian and Ukrainian Red Armies impossible. On the 28th the Czechoslovak and Rumanian forces linked up between Csap and Munkács (Mukacevo), thus making the restoration of the Máramarossziget (Sighetul Marmaţiei)–Odessa railway line a forlorn hope, and the Subcarpathian Ukraine was lost as well. The military occupation of that territory by the Czechoslovak forces was the first step towards its annexation by the new state.

The evacuation of the area beyond the Tisza was complete by the end of April, nor did it prove possible to defend the bridgeheads with the

[72] Stromfeld's letter to the People's Commissariat for Defense quoted by Tibor Hetés, *Stromfeld Aurél*, Budapest 1967. p. 154.

exception of Tiszafüred. Some of the troops dispersed, and discipline amongst the rest fast declined as a result of defeat, rumours and counter-revolutionary propaganda. Many required medical attention, and it was difficult to provide it. It was questionable whether the line of the Tisza could be held if the Rumanian Command should once again extend the objective of the attack.

Anxiety was not unfounded. General Presan, the Chief of the Rumanian General Staff, sent a wire to the Allied Supreme Command on April 28 proposing the occupation of the whole of the territory held by the Soviet Republic and the destruction of the Red Army. He offered Rumanian divisions to take part in a joint action aimed at the occupation of Budapest.

They hesitated in Paris. Neither Presan nor Brown was given an answer, but the livening up of things on the northern front and the southern front suggested that the military commands were preparing for a joint attack. After securing the Subcarpathian Ukraine the Czechoslovak army was to approach Budapest the closest possible, from the direction north and west of the Tisza. On the 30th they entered Sátoraljaújhely, and continued to press forward in the direction of Miskolc, Eger and Salgótarján. In the north the Red Army did not fall apart, as it did beyond the River Tisza, the retreat was orderly, fighting rearguard actions, but it was not adequate for prolonged resistance. Small numbers were somehow counter-balanced by the greater determination of the workers and miners of this more industrialized area, than had been the case beyond the Tisza in the early days of the campaign of intervention where they were taken by surprise. The spirits of the Czechoslovak forces were not as high as those of the Rumanians. The Rumanian officer corps was firm with the rank and file, and implacable with the civilian population, thus preventing any real show of unrest. This acted as a deterrent even on Red Army. Under the Rumanian occupation, several hundred revolutionaries were deported from County Hajdú alone, 200 Hungarian officers were interned in County Békés, birchings and even executions occurred every day. Six were put up against the wall in Rakamaz, thirteen in Őr, and twenty-nine in Nyírmeggyes.

At the end of April the situation was serious indeed. Even Budapest was in danger of being caught in a pincer movement by the two hostile forces. The Governing Council therefore turned to President Wilson and, referring to the principle of self-determination, asked him to put a stop to the genocide of the Hungarian nation, promising that the Soviet Republic would respect the peace of its neighbours too.[73] Naturally there was no answer, nor was there any prospect of Italian mediation, since Prime

[73] US Papers . . . The Paris Peace Conference, Washington 1947, Vol. XII, p. 453.

Minister Orlando left the Peace Conference for a time because of differences of opinion with President Wilson concerning the fate of Fiume (Rijeka).

The Governing Council had to prepare for every eventuality. The Vienna Legation was asked to request political asylum in Austria for the people's commissars and their families in case of need, and the communists prepared money and men ready to go underground. Béla Kun, acting in the name of the Governing Council, addressed peace proposals to the governments in Belgrade, Bucharest and Prague, and sent the note to President Wilson, the Transylvanian Rumanian National Council and Moscow as well, and also to the socialist parties of the countries concerned. To quote:

"We have solemnly declared that we do not insist on the principle of the country's territorial integrity, and now we tell you directly that we accept, without reservations, the totality of your territorial and national demands. In exchange we ask for the immediate cessation of hostilities, non-interference in domestic affairs, free transit traffic, trade agreements that accord with the economic interests of both parties, and the protection of our national minorities which remain in your territories. This means that you have achieved all you strove for . . . If, nevertheless, the war is continued, this will be done in the service of foreign interests, the interests of foreign imperialism, and in the first place those of the Hungarian ruling class."[74]

At the time the note was sent foreign observers were sure that the Soviet Republic would collapse, and the Austrian Minister in Budapest asked for permission to return home. Béla Kun, however, still put his trust in the Hungarian working class, in the help to be received from the Russian revolution, in the spread of the revolution, and in conflicts of interest among the imperialist powers. He received a wire from Chicherin, the Soviet Russian Commissar for Foreign Affairs, that contained encouraging hints. When the Rumanian High Command transferred troops from Bessarabia to Hungary – said Chicherin – it seems they neglected the revolutionary movement there, and also that they were, de facto, in a state of war with Soviet Russia. And there was something that Kun was unaware of when he drafted the note: Pichon, the French Foreign Minister, had already told the Rumanians they could not cross the River Tisza.

[74] MMTVD Vol. 6/A, p. 355.

THE MAY 1ST CRISIS AND THE ORGANIZATION OF THE COUNTER-OFFENSIVE

By May 1st the Soviet Republic was close to catastrophe. The area under its control was confined to Transdanubia and the area between the Danube and Tisza, less the Baranya–Baja zone occupied by the Serbians. The Czechoslovak Army threatened the capital from the North, *via* Salgótarján, and the Rumanians could have crossed the defenceless Tisza at their pleasure, joining their allies under the walls of Budapest.

The situation of the revolution was more paradoxical than ever. The workers of Budapest declared their faith in socialism in an imposing parade that was to be remembered for many decades. The whole town was covered in red. Public speakers urged their listeners to hold out, they promised that the past would never return. And on that very day the Bavarian Soviet Republic, the only western ally of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, was suppressed in Munich.

Workers' battalions paraded in Budapest while the Szolnok bridgehead, a mere 100 km away, was being taken by the enemy, and rumours reached the capital, unfounded as it happened, that the enemy had crossed the Tisza and had taken Szolnok. Miskolc, Diósgyőr and Ózd were evacuated on May 1st. If the Rumanians crossed the Tisza, Hungarian troops located east of the Zagyva river, in defence of Eger, were in danger of being cut off.

Two thousand five hundred soldiers defended Salgótarján. The chief shop stewards of the Salgótarján factories called on Béla Kun at the end of April and demanded weapons. At his order three truckloads of new military equipment were sent on April 29, and the Salgótarján Workers' Regiment was formed the next day. The miners and young workers wanted to fight, but the older steel-workers, "war-veterans, held a meeting and decided not to take to arms" since the struggle was hopeless.[75] Commissar Hevesi addressed a public meeting in Salgótarján on May 1st. As a result of his straight talk, and the discussion that followed, miners and steelworkers took up defensive positions at the side of the soldiers.

[75] Tibor Hajdu, *A Magyarországi Tanácsköztársaság (The Hungarian Soviet Republic)*, Budapest 1969, p. 176 (quoting a contemporary report).

On May 1st Béla Kun and Béla Szántó, in the name of the People's Commissariat for Defense addressed the following order to the Army Command:

"Your task in the battle area is to prevent the Rumanians crossing the Tisza, and to stop the advance of the Czechs between the Duna and Tisza, as well as getting troops that have been withdrawn from the line back into a combatant state as soon as possible, with the aim of using these forces to launch a united counter-offensive against those sections of the enemy which most effectively threaten Budapest, the centre of the Soviet Republic, or those against which a counter-offensive offers the best prospects."[76]

It was thus clear that, should the Rumanians refrain from crossing the Tisza, the northern front would prove decisive. Forces would have to be concentrated there, between Szob and Sátoraljaújhely, since the enemy did not attempt to cross the natural defensive line of the Danube either then or later.

Archduke Joseph, who had been trying to get support abroad, arrived in Budapest on May 1st and occupied a suite in the Ritz Hotel. Late at night, while the celebrating people were enjoying the deceiving lights of fireworks, a delegation of right-wing trades union leaders called on the Governing Council to resign, demanding that, temporarily, power should be handed to a twelve man directorium they were prepared to form. There was no decision. The Governing Council and the Workers' Soviet were convened for the morrow and also the representatives of the Budapest workers' regiments and the body of iron worker shop-stewards. The military situation was discussed. The centrists, unable to take a firm stand in the difficult situation, more or less supported those who urged capitulation. Böhm offered to send "men with white flags to the Rumanians to negotiate an immediate cease-fire. The offer found support. But communists at the meeting recommended that we immediately call on the armed proletariat, with a call to move up to the battle-line without delay, to defend the dictatorship. Vilmos Böhm, the social democratic Commander in Chief, resolutely rejected such 'revolutionary romanticism' . . . "[77]

Böhm interpreted the result of the meeting his own way. On the morning of May 2 he ordered the cessation of military operations and ordered an officer each at Miskolc, Baja and Szolnok to offer a cease-fire to the army on the other side. Béla Kun on the other hand, ordered the railway bridge at Szolnok to be blown up. In the course of the day, rumours worse than the truth, suggested a state of complete dissolu-

[76] Quoted by Liptai, *op. cit.*, pp. 195–196.

[77] Jenő Landler's memoir in the Hungarian Communist Journal *Új Március*, which was edited in Vienna, March and April 1926.

tion. The People's Commissariat for Defense ordered that units not fit for battle be taken by express train through Budapest, without a stop, to their destination, lest they loot or create panic in the capital. Towards the evening better news reached to Governing Council. It became clear that the Rumanian Army had not as yet started to cross the River Tisza, and the officer sent to the Czechoslovak Army reported that the *Italian* colonel who met him was surprised by his offer, promising a reply for the fourth, and no further advance on the third. Since the southern front was completely calm too, the Red Army could count on a breathing-space of a day or two.

The Governing Council met on May 2. According to the 'well-informed', they were intending to resign. Members of the party secretariat were invited to attend, as were trades union leaders. It was characteristic that Károly Peyer and Ferenc Miákits, the most uninhibited among the rightists, held the floor most of the time, while commissars who were with the army in the field, were absent. The mood was, however, determined by Béla Kun's unexpected performance. Those who had seen him the previous day took him to be a broken, sick men, in a state of depression, and liable to shed tears. By the morning he had pulled himself together. He ensured that military leaders sympathizing with the revolution were given the support they needed, and he was able to take control of events. At the noon sitting he gave an unadorned account of the situation, and at night he announced, as a surprise, that he had ordered that operations be continued.

Kun's decision to continue the fight was supported by the left, and also by some reformist social democrats who were afraid of the expected consequences of resignation. Kunfi, speaking for the centre, as well as Bokányi and Weltner, declared their faith in the March Revolution, but they saw no future in continuing the fight.[78] Kunfi proposed that power be handed to the trades unions because the Allies refused to negotiate with the Soviet Republic. The *directoire* to be formed must insist on the social achievements of the Soviet Republic, but they should liquidate the dictatorship and ask the Austrian government to mediate with the Allies. The position of Peyer and his confederates made it clear however that a Trades Union Government would – logically – retreat further than that.

[78] The 'Austromarxist' Zsigmond Kunfi (1879–1929) was perhaps the brightest amongst the social democratic intellectuals, Garami's left counterweight in the executive up to the revolutions. Minister for Education in both revolutions, then the foreign editor of the Vienna *Arbeiterzeitung* for a decade, a scourger of the Budapest SDP leadership headed by Peyer and Miákits, both of whom had turned completely opportunist.

– Károly Peyer (1881–1956) had been an iron worker who became a trades union official concerned with the everyday grievances of the membership. He showed no scruples in the service of his aims, reaching agreement with both Kun and Horthy. – Miákits (1876–1924) had also been an iron worker leader. Kunfi maintained that at the time of the revolution, light was thrown on his earlier contacts with the police.

They proposed a coaliton with the bourgeois parties which could suitably come to an agreement with the Allies. They mentioned that the Soviet Republic did not get any direct help from the workers abroad, or from Soviet Russia. The expected world revolution did not take place, and the imperialist powers were not prepared to accept the existence of a dictatorship of the proletariat in the heart of Europe. A further shedding of blood would therefore be useless.

There was more to their argument than the supporters of the left were prepared to accept, what the latter saw clearly, however, was the impossibility of a 'return to the October democracy'. Capitulation unavoidably meant renouncing not only the social and political achievements of the proletarian revolution, but those of the bourgeois democratic revolution as well. The determination of Kun and the left however finally produced results, and the meeting resolved that the "Governing Council would not resign and would take measures in time to defend the city, including a possible surrender if necessary to prevent looting, the most far-reaching defensive measures would be prepared in any event . . . "[79] At Böhm's request József Haubrich was appointed commander of all armed forces in Budapest, including the police. The appointment of Haubrich was, as it were, a pledge of cooperation between the trades union leadership and the Governing Council. As a foundry worker, before becoming a trade union official, he had fought right trough the war as an artillery sergeant. Haubrich was a sound politician, able to follow the mood of the public. He had helped establish the Soviet Republic without reservations, regardless of opinions he may have held earlier. One could count on him as long as the majority of the working class held out, but in any event he guaranteed the security of the right-wing opposition within the party, and he enjoyed a certain popularity amongst officers as well because of his straight-forward style and the elasticity with which he interpreted regulations, particularly those concerning prohibition.

The Budapest iron worker shop-stewards, numbering over one thousand, unanimously voted to fight. The position of those of the factory worker's regiments was not as much of one piece, but they, in any case, showed themselves ready to defend the city. The total picture was not, therefore, hopeless, and at the evening meeting of the Workers' Soviet Béla Kun could take a more firm and resolute stand than he did at the meeting of the Governing Council. At the end of his dramatic speech the question was not whether to try to hold Budapest or not, but: "how can Budapest be defended? ". He carried the audience, those wishing to capitulate were barely given a chance to speak, and even those going into details about what was to be done met with impatience.

[79] MMTVD Vol. 6/A, p. 388.

The meeting ended at half past nine at night, when the Governing Council was again resumed. The latter passed a resolution without debate, aimed at getting the proletariat as a whole on its feet. The commissars split up at three in the morning, after a short rest they all hurried to the factories to call the workers to arms. The Governing Council was still in session when, as instructed by it, Colonel Tombor issued an order to "all command posts that can be reached":

"The Governing Council orders most forceful resistance for all fronts. All Budapest workers will be sent to the line to reinforce the soldiers. Any withdrawal of troops must cease forthwith, and those possibly directed back already, must be immediately ordered back to the front."[80]

In the morning the workers in the factories, the district councils enthusiastically joined the Budapest Workers' Soviet as did the provincial workers' soviets a little later. This time the optimism of the communists had proved well-founded.

At the time of the May crisis the fate of the Hungarian Soviet Republic was the subject of lively diplomatic activity, this however, did not influence the timing of events at home, nor were foreign observers able to keep up with the fast changing situation. The Austrian Minister reported as late as May 4 that a right-wing 'trades union' government would be formed within 48 hours. Harold Nicolson, the Central European expert of the British Peace Delegation, noted in his diary for May 4: "Béla Kun, it seems, has bolted and a middle government will be created."[81] On May 3 Renner gave instructions to the competent Austrian authorities to ensure the safety of commissars to whom political asylum had been granted.

The uncertainty in the country led to contradictory diplomatic steps. Commander Freeman-Williams, intelligence officer of the Royal Navy in Budapest, proposed the speedy occupation of the capital and the establishment of a social democratic government, to prevent the Red Terror. In the interests of this he suggested that the Rumanian Army be permitted to cross the Tisza, and support for their advance to be given from the direction of Szeged. On May 3 General Segrè, the head of the Italian Military Mission in Vienna, offered Kun by way of compromise that Budapest be occupied by Czechoslovak troops under Italian command, and political direction. Kun refused the offer but negotiations with Segré continued. The other Allied missions in Vienna were in favour of a speedy occupation of Budapest, without any sort of negotiations. The head of the British Mission told his government that Bolshevism would get on top in Vienna as well if the Rumanians were not allowed to occupy Budapest.[82]

[80] *Loc. cit.*, p. 405.
[81] Harold Nicolson, *Peacemaking 1919*, London 1933, p. 324.
[82] PRO FO 371, Vol. 3515.

A. C. Coolidge thought it incumbent on himself on May 1st to dissociate himself from Professor Brown, the member of his mission in Budapest. Brown then finally left Hungary on May 10.

In Paris, however, they had become more cautious after the Odessa fiasco. The Anglo-Americans were not in favour of direct military intervention, and in early May the draft peace treaty to be handed to the Germans tied down their attention. In the hope that the Austrian and Hungarian treaties could be signed soon after the German one, Lloyd George once again looked at the proposals made by General Smuts, and suggested that Hungary be invited to attend the Peace Conference. The others opposed him, arguing that the Soviet Government was on the brink of failure, later, perhaps for that very reason, they accepted the British proposal. Though the vanquished were not invited to negotiate, but only to listen to the peace conditions, mere appearance still meant *de facto* recognition, not to mention the platform which the publicity of the world press offered.

The Allied missions in Vienna did their best to get the invitation withdrawn. The British Major sent with it to Budapest was told to wait for special orders before handing it over. Around the 6th the order arrived not to forward the invitation for the time being. As so often in history the politicians of the Great Powers satisfied their consciences, and the soldiers and diplomats made sure that nice phrases did not turn into dangerous reality. Meanwhile they decided in Paris, on May 5, only to put an end to the economic blockade when and if the Soviet Government fell. Within a few days the situation became clear, and the blockade was tightened up. Since the signing of the German Peace Treaty did not proceed smoothly either, the Peace Conference did not come to a decision on whether or not the Hungarian government was to be invited since the German Peace Treaty was more urgent and more important.

We cannot tell how the Peace Conference might have reacted if a social democratic government had indeed been formed. All the less so, as the existence and peace of Hungary played second fiddle to more important questions all along. The absence of a 'suitable' potential Hungarian government certainly made the possibility of an occupation of Budapest more difficult. The supporters of Károlyi and Jászi considered the position of the Soviet Republic to be hopeless, and gradually moved to Vienna. They did not want to sink to the level of becoming agents of the Allies, and were convinced that negotiations on a footing of equality were out of the question. If some moderate members of the Károlyi government, as Batthyány and Garami, were ready to cooperate with the victors, they found it difficult to come to an agreement with the leaders of the traditional political parties. First it was Garami and Batthyány who were afraid of letting themselves down by talking to Andrássy, later the situation was reversed.

By then, the Allied missions had become ready to cooperate with the more sober representatives of the traditional Germanophile Hungarian ruling class, in order to oppose 'Bolshevism'. There were a number of obstacles though; the country's neighbours were afraid of the insistence of these Hungarian politicians on territorial integrity. The Rumanians were unwilling to negotiate with anyone, the Czechoslovaks were only ready to do so with a democratic government, while Belgrade proved the most elastic, but even there, all that István Bethlen's representatives achieved was that they were eventually listened to.[83] István Bethlen who was already considered as the head of the counter-revolution in the weeks preceding March 21, addressed a memorandum to the Peace Conference and to the French Armée d'Orient offering 'all possible services' in the destruction of Bolshevism, and assuring them that they would form a broad coalition government, in which there would be a place even for Garami, i.e. for right-wing social democrats, as long as they were granted a loan, and if Budapest were occupied by Western forces.

Bethlen, however, thought that the Rumanian and Czechoslovak forces should withdraw to the demarcation line valid before the Vix note. "The new government cannot accept a demarcation line which was rejected by the two previous governments since they would otherwise be accused of having betrayed the country . . . "[84] Paris did not accept such conditions from anyone, not to mention that, *following* the occupation of Budapest, they could count on taking their pick amongst governments ready to give way unconditionally. The tough job was getting rid smoothly of the Soviet Government, without using methods that would create trouble on the spot, and that would scandalize the working class in their own countries.

Andrássy was more cautious than Bethlen. He asked the British Legation in Switzerland to agree to the formation of a Hungarian National Council under his chairmanship. He received a negative answer. At that time the Foreign Office still listened to those among its experts who looked on the Hungarian aristocracy as being responsible for the outbreak of the war (Nicolson, Namier). Finally, it was not Andrássy, but those belonging to Bethlen's group who took a decisive step forward – in an odd direction – towards regaining power. On May 2 they kidnapped the Hungarian Minister in Vienna, and made off with the 135 million Crowns in the Legation's cash-desk. As a result the clique of reactionary counts lost any sympathy it might have had amongst the right-wing of the democratic emigration. Nonetheless, the nucleus, around which the

[83] For Bethlen see Note 9.
[84] In: *Bolshevism in Hungary, op. cit.*, p. 797.

leading group of the future fascist system was to grow, began to take shape. Following this coup, and in possession of the money, a close relationship was established between some of Bethlen's friends and British newspapermen and diplomats.

The latter, and the other Vienna missions, unambiguously went on nursing plans of an intervention. On May 6 the Bucharest Ministers of the four victorius Allied powers wrote a joint letter to their governments proposing that the Rumanians be permitted to cross the Tisza, and occupy Budapest, the latter jointly with other Allied forces. The Rumanian Government pointed out, using them as its mouthpiece, that the Hungarian Soviet Republic was only operating on the diplomatic level in expectation of help from the Russian Red Army, which was proved by the fightings in Bessarabia. At the same time they asked that the Bulgarian army be disarmed, since it threatened a Rumania engaged in a two-front struggle against Bolshevism.

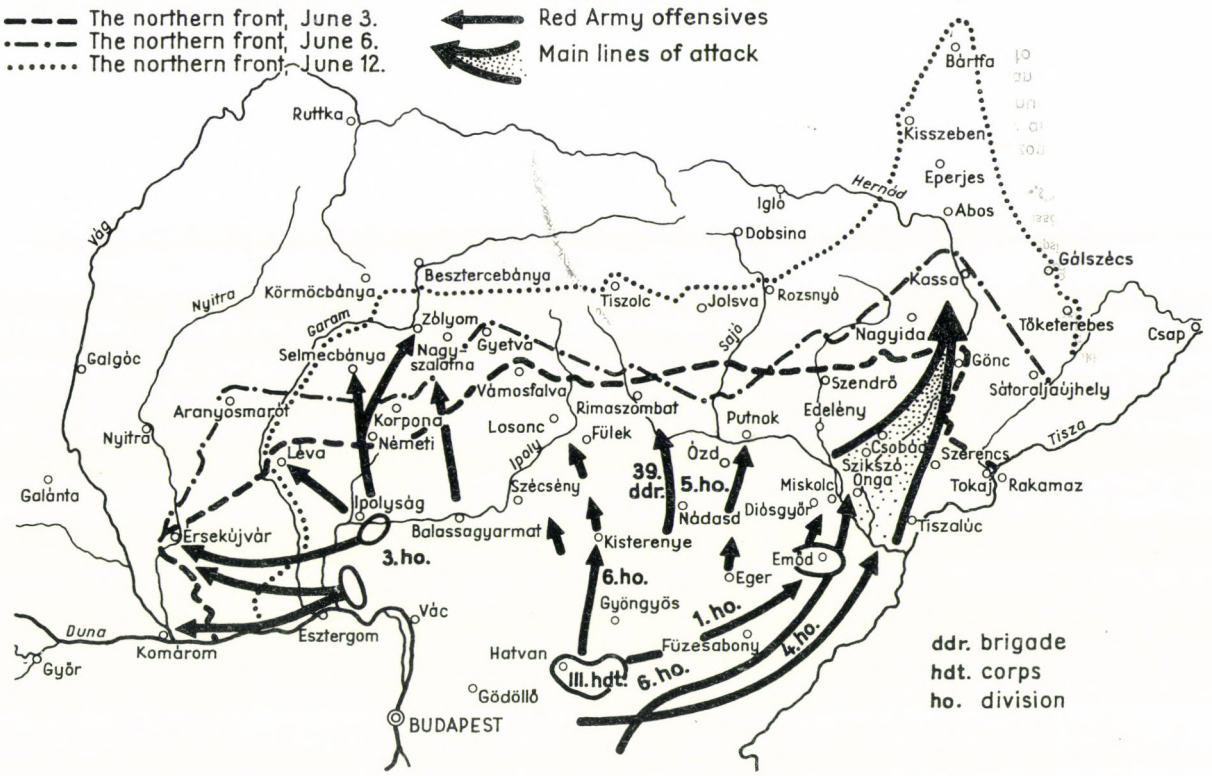
The Peace Conference was not opposed to intervention on principle, as shown by its support for Czechoslovak military operations, but it was precisely the military weakness of the Czechoslovaks which threw doubt on the timeliness of united action. To allow the Rumanians to cross the Tisza under such circumstances meant risking failure. In the case of success, on the other hand, Rumanian occupation of Budapest, might have had undesirable consequences for the Peace Conference; in the first place Franco–Rumanian influence could have grown excessively in the Danube Valley, upsetting the balance of powers amongst the victors, and secondly, the opposition between Belgrade and Rome, and Belgrade and Bucharest would have become more acute. Clemenceau personally told the Rumanian Prime Minister that the prohibition to cross the Tisza meant more than a mere phrase for public consumption, and at that moment the Rumanian General Staff also had its doubts about the feasibility of the action, lacking support from the Allies.

The difficulties for the Rumanians arose because of the fact that the advance to the Tisza had been pretty fast, lines of communication were overstretched, and the hinterland was not securely under control. Budapest had not been a planned objective when the offensive was initiated, and a frontal assault without appropriate support on the wings, may well have been beyond its strength. Early in May the waters of the Tisza, and of the Berettyó rose. The Rumanian railwaymen's strike, lasting from May 9 to June 15, also caused serious difficulties.

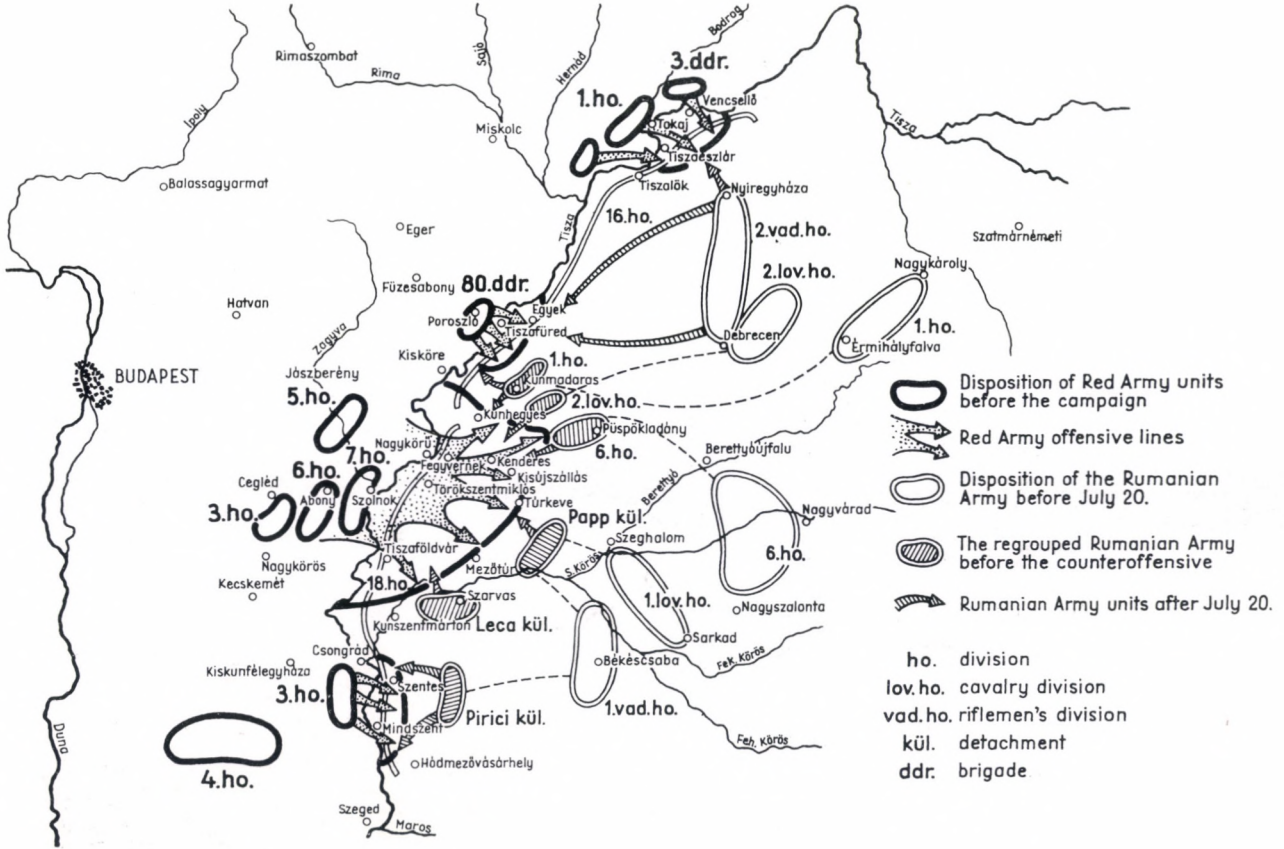
Soviet Russia, allied to the Hungarian Republic not by any formal treaty, but by common ideology and purposes, addressed an ultimatum to Rumania on May 1st, demanding that Rumania vacate Bessarabia whose occupation lacked all foundation in international law, and in a separate note they demanded the evacuation of the Bukovina as well. Nor did the

The Vix and other demarcation lines

The maps have been taken from Col. E. Liptai, *A magyar vörös hadsereg*, Budapest 1969; and Gy. Ránki (ed.): *Magyarország története*, Vol. 8. Budapest 1976.



The Northern Campaign of the Red Army



The Tisza Offensive

The Governing Council formed on March 21, 1919

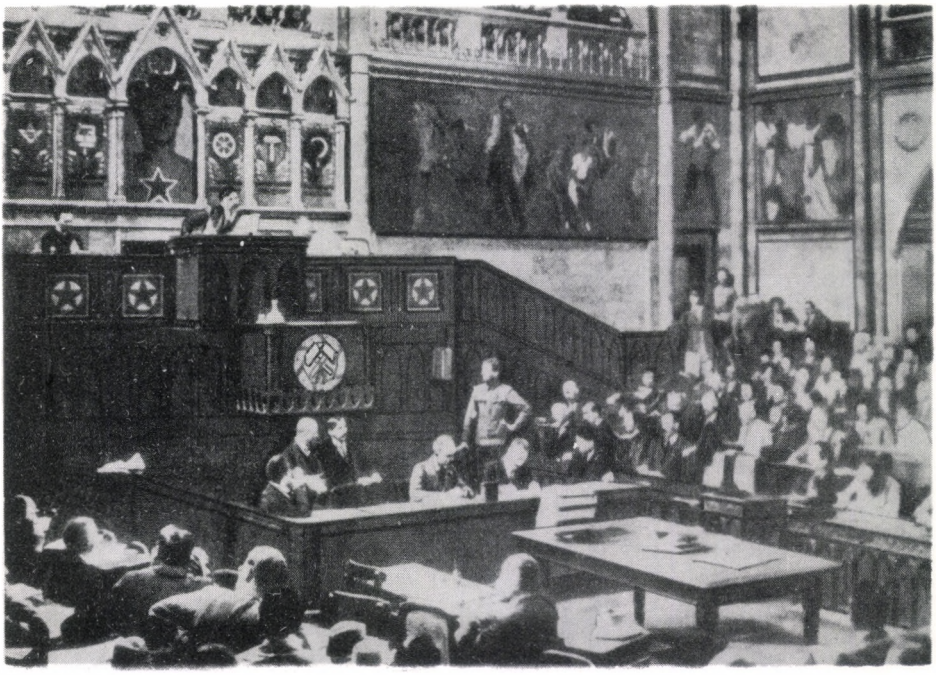
The April Parade of the Workers' Regiments in Budapest

May Day, Budapest, 1919

Béla Kun addressing Red Army units

György Lukács among Red soldiers in June

Lenin and Tibor Szamuely attending the parade of the Workers' Reserve Battalions on May 25, 1919



The Congress of the United Socialist-Communist Party held in June in the Parliament building

Vilmos Böhm, Colonel Stromfeld and staff officers in the mobile Red Army Headquarters

Red Guards fighting the mutiny of the Danube Flotilla

Soviet government make a secret of the fact that, to quote Podvoisky, the Ukrainian Commissar for War, attempts by the Rumanians to "throttle the young Hungarian Soviet Republic" decisively influenced the Soviet decision.[85] After the ultimatum expired the attack started on the Dniester line, and the forces of the Red Army in the Ukraine were concentrated there. On Podvoisky's orders they began to organize an internationalist division consisting largely of Hungarian prisoners of war, and a Bessarabian division.

Christian Rakovsky, the head of the Ukrainian Soviet Government, was himself a veteran militant of the Rumanian socialist movement, and was therefore happy to fight the Rumanian boyars. He did his best to reach the Carpathians as quickly as he could, but Denikin's advance in the Donets Basin soon turned any plans of a breakthrough illusory. On April 21 Lenin had still ordered Vatsetis, the Commander in Chief of the Red Army that "the advance into part of Galicia and Bukovina is essential for contact with Soviet Hungary. This task must be achieved more quickly and surely . . . " On May 5 he was already forced to address a severe warning to the Ukrainian leadership saying that the "turn towards Rumania" must be temporarily suspended in order to overcome Denikin.[86] The Ukrainian Soviet Government nevertheless ordered the 3rd Ukrainian Army on May 7 to break through the Rumanian line on the Dniester. Next day, on the 8th, the division led by the Hetman Hrihoriev, which was entrusted with the carrying out of decisive blow, mutinied against the soviet power, the fact that they did not want to fight outside the frontiers of the Ukraine, considering support for the Hungarian revolution to be a foreign cause, was a major contributing factor. The fight against the mutineers tied up the major forces of the Ukrainian Red Army for a fortnight, and by the time they suppressed it, at the end of May, Denikin's offensive put them on the defensive. True, Petljura's army had largely fallen apart by then, and by the end of May the Red Army advanced as far as Brody on the Budapest–Lemberg (Lvov) railway line, but the Poles hurriedly occupied the line of the Stry, and the possibility of aid *via* the Western Ukraine came to an end as well, since this would have meant war against Poland as well.

All the same the Ukrainian Red Army had crossed the Rumanian plans at the decisive moment, early in May, allowing the Hungarian Red Army time to regroup. "Apparently the Rumanians have stopped their advance at the Theiss owing to the situation in Bessarabia", a Foreign Office official noted in the margin of the May 6 despatch from Bucharest on May 8.[87] For a time the optimistic reports and comments published by the

[85] *Izvestia*, May 6, 1919.
[86] Lenin, *op. cit.*, Vols. 35 and 44.
[87] PRO FO 371, Vol. 3515.

Hungarian press concerning events on the Ukrainian battle-field also helped restore a martial spirit. The Czechoslovak leaders on the other hand were disappointed by the consolidation of the Tisza line. For a few weeks they alone fought a mobile war of intervention, so they soon lost the advantage given by much larger numbers. They nevertheless continued their attack, partially because the experience of recent days led them to underestimate the Red Army, and they also rightly reckoned that, sooner or later, the diplomatists in Paris would come out in favour of increased support for a military solution. The Czechoslovaks were not certain that their maximum territorial demands, including the industrial areas of Miskolc and Salgótarján, were home and dry.

The military objectives of the Soviet Republic early in May were thus defence on the northern front, using the battle-fit units, while at least minimal forces controlled the other lines and frontiers. Most importantly, the Red Army had to be reorganized.

After May 2 numerous workers' battalions went up to the line, with a total strength of about 15,000. Another eight workers' regiments were formed in Budapest to act as a reserve, their total strength was close to 25,000. They spent two to three afternoons every week undergoing training. In the months to come the strength of mobilized workers' battalions grew around twelve to fifteen thousand. The total number of volunteers far exceeded that. More than two thirds of the workers of the Northern Central Railway Workshop volunteered, and the Hungarian State Railways were compelled to request a limitation on call-ups in the interests of maintaining railway traffic.

On May 14 the strength of the mobile Red Army was close to 120,000, 44,000 of them had been called up after May 3. Bearing in mind the losses, strength had doubled. In those days the Red Army turned into what we could call a real proletarian army. The most class-conscious workers, revolutionary students, and men who had fled from occupied territories, led by members of their local *directoires* fought side by side. All the leaders of the working class who could be spared at home went up to the line, thus a hundred of the three hundred members of the Budapest 7th District Council. Even in May, the officers had only good things to say about the fighting qualities and discipline of the workers' regiments. A sufficient number of officers volunteered to provide commanders even for the workers' reserve regiments, war veteran workers were largely found only among platoon commanders. After March 21, and already at the time when Böhm was Minister of Defense in the weeks preceding it, the officers had been subjected to severe political screening, but at the end of April

the Governing Council saw no alternative to ordering the compulsory call-up of all professional officers.[88]

The impetus of organizing an army was used by the Red Guard to launch a new weapon collecting campaign which met with considerable success. The high spirits of the working class were once again able to enlist the support of petit bourgeois and professional people who sympathised with the revolution. They may not have moved up to the line but they recognised and supported the patriotic war.

It was no less true however that a major part of the radical intelligentsia which had, in the beginning, enthusiastically supported the Soviet Republic since it saw it as a more radical, or even an *ad absurdum* implementation of its own principles, now turned their back on the Red War because of their pacifist feelings. It was not by chance that great writers like Móricz, Babits and Árpád Tóth, who had waxed enthusiastic over the March orders that proclaimed the destruction of capitalism, did not write a single line in support of the Red Army. They had learnt from the war that Hungarian soil was very important, but Hungarian blood was much dearer. The relationship to the revolution of the right-wing bourgeoisie was not as complex as that, most still chose passivity, but a determined and far from insignificant minority had started to act, particularly in regions that were a long way from the heart of the revolution. In the first few days of May the Red Army was still being organized and too weak for war, and though recruiting had been successful, the Red Army only reached its May 1st strength on the seventh, because of losses, and deserters. Its primary task at that time was to put down domestic counter-revolutionary revolts, that were none too strong but whose extension offered a threat.

Counties Szolnok and Heves, Abony and Balassagyarmat constituted a real 'White Zone' between the Czechoslovak and Rumanian fronts, expecting the enemy to march in. Only 'Red' Salgótarján stayed firm between the Tisza and the Ipoly. Abony and Szolnok were cleansed by a brigade formed under Szamuely's leadership, the 'jász' country by a detachment of sailors, Hatvan and Eger by Workers' Guards from Kispest, in a real fight, before the Rumanian and Czechoslovak forces could respond to the call of the counter-revolutionaries. This forceful stand consolidated the shaken authority of the dictatorship. Of help were also those regulations which were issued in the first half of May to improve the financial position of various sections of society. Regulations concerning

[88] In Soviet Russia the debate against the romantic opponents of the employment of professional officers had been decided in the preceding months. See Lenin's speech to the secret session of the 8th Party Congress, which was only published recently, *Leninski Zbornik*, Vol. 37, Moscow 1970, p. 135. He there decided in favour of the practical position taken by Trotsky and the Army Command.

rises in wages, the continuation of unemployment benefits, freeing the peasantry of the tax-burden etc. however, largely moved within limits that had been set earlier. The crisis did not prompt a revision of the dogmatic economic policy. There was no division of land and, as a result, the high spirits of the working class found no echo amongst the rural poor.

The leadership was unable to make use of the May breathing space to extend the mass basis of the revolution. The petit bourgeois, clerks and shop-assistants could at best be neutralised, and even that was a major success since the increasingly difficult situation the revolution found itself in made a number of measures, to which they were hostile, unavoidably. These included reprisals against counter-revolutionary action.

The loss of the area beyond the Tisza also meant the loss of the most class-conscious, revolutionary part of the poor peasantry. The poor peasantry of Transdanubia, and of the area between the Danube and the Tisza had only taken the first tentative steps in the direction of political organization. The industrial workers were considerably more divided at that time than they were later to become; there was the mass of unskilled labourers who easily changed their jobs, and the relatively small number of skilled men who made up the bulk of labour movement activists. Given the general sympathy of those who earned their living by manual labour, we can still understand why the number of the active militants of the revolution was relatively small. It appears as a rather general characteristic of modern Hungarian society that the small group of professional politicians who were in charge during the counter-revolution, was only backed by a relatively small number of politically conscious petit bourgeois and middle class people and therefore always had to rely on support from abroad. They, in turn, were confronted by the active, but relatively small elite of socialist workers and intellectuals, whose links with progressive movements abroad, and their difficulties in obtaining the support among the broad masses, led them to abstract, *avante garde,* and doctrinaire thinking.

Thus, after gaining power relatively easily, the revolutionaries and their supporters lost it easily, too, not only because of the rather weak domestic counter-revolutionary forces, but also because the outside pressure of imperialism was not sufficiently counterbalanced by the active stand of politically conscious masses. The élite of the working class temporarily saved the revolution in May, but the danger now was that this mobilized élite would be exhausted and bled white in the fight. The counter-revolution could only come to power with outside help, and was able to consolidate its power by the severe persecution of this élite, literally destroying many of its members.

On May 5, Béla Kun met Šrobar, the Czechoslovak Minister for Slovak Affairs, in Komárom. Their talks produced no tangible results. The

Czechoslovak government, though first denying their military involvement in press statements, and then blaming alleged Hungarian attacks, did not renounce participation in the war of intervention and on May 7 they tried to take Salgótarján.

Böhm, recalling what had happened beyond the Tisza, recommended that Salgótarján be abandoned. The communists rejected the idea of giving up this mining area of essential importance, rightly claiming that if the fighting can be confined to one area it allows forces to be concentrated. People's Commissar Gyula Hevesi organized the defense of Salgótarján with the aid of Mátyás Rákosi, Lajos Lázár and other communists. Tools were laid down in the mines and other workshops, the workers set their units up on the outskirts of the settlement and then went over into the counter-attack. The phenomenon observed in the Russian civil war was evident at Salgótarján as well; workers who were reluctant to leave their own domicile, fought with great determination to defend their home area. Around May 11 people could get back to work, the regrouped 6th Division arrived and began its counter-attack aimed at liberating the Nógrád basin.

Though it proved possible to restore the proletarian power in the whole area between the front lines early in May, counter-revolutionary conspiracies and spontaneous revolts flared up day after day, especially in Transdanubia. Conspiracies by metropolitan military and police officers, the gentry, lawyers and high officials became all the more frequent though Otto Korvin's Political Department of the Interior revealed new centres week after week.

The common motive of the Transdanubian counter-revolution was clerical influence and the anxiety of rich and animal-raising peasants. These, partly German by origin, greatly feared losing their property. Civil and military officers of the old regime were in a better position to keep their influence in this area than they were on the Great Plain. This is what the Szmrecsányi group of extremist exiles counted on when they tried to cross the River Lajta (Leitha) at Bruck, on May 6. Around fifty officers appeared at the appointed meeting place, but the Red Guard already chased them back at the bridge. The Bruck coup caused a brief tension between the Bethlen–Teleki and the Szmrecsányi–Pallavicini groups. Bethlen's lot wanted a counter-revolutionary dictatorship, but of a kind that would be acceptable in the West, while Szmrecsányi and Gömbös were not the least fussy about their choice of tools. The professional officers, increasingly turning into a separate political force, accused Bethlen of being soft, they insisted that an implacable military terror, leaning on foreign bayonets, was the only reliable remedy against the revolution. The two camps soon reunited, after it became clear that the Allies chose to ignore the renowned leaders of the traditional political

parties, Apponyi, Andrássy and Vázsonyi. The Allied missions would have liked to establish a government in exile headed by Tivadar Batthyány (one-time deputy of Károlyi), but the supporters of Batthyány and Garami preferred political passivity to cooperating with pre-fascist groups of Bethlen and Gömbös. Time was in Bethlen's favour. Once he understood that the Allies wanted a government that did as it bid without talking back, he only had to wait till the grace of the missions turned from fastidious democrats to obliging officers who ensured him power.

The Arad Government was less important than exiles in Vienna. At the end of April, when the French command posts were still busy with plans for a united intervention, General de Lobit called on the gentlemen of Arad and environs to form a counter-government which would follow in the rear of the advancing French forces. Lajos Návay, for some time speaker of Parliament, was first designed as Prime Minister, and then, after he was taken hostage at his castle, and on the way to Budapest, was shot at a railway station by the escort, he was replaced by Count Gyula Károlyi, a former Lord Lieutenant of County Arad, and owner of large estates.

Though there was no French attack, the Arad Government was formed on May 5. It was not taken seriously in Vienna, and even less so in Budapest, while the Rumanians thought it an advantage if no Hungarian government existed, that might be invited to be present in Paris, at the Peace Conference. The Arad Government therefore hurried to Szeged, placing itself under the protection of the French, but the Rumanians arrested some of its members *en route* and kept them under guard for about a fortnight. When they finally reached Szeged personal discords occupied them for a while, then, on May 31, they appeared in public as the Szeged Government, in a changed composition, and issued a proclamation.

After the May 1st crisis diplomatic experiments of the Budapest government were restrained. Yet during the days of the crisis the Rumanian High Command, having given up the idea of continuing the offensive, handed cease-fire conditions to the men sent by Böhm. They expressed a readiness to stop at the Tisza line, if they were allowed to establish nine bridgeheads on the right bank, if the Red Army were disbanded, and all their weapons and war materials, as well as a large quantity of civilian vehicles, rolling stock etc. were handed over. In other words they wanted to replace, at the expense of the Soviet Republic, what the hosts of Kaiser Wilhelm and Emperor Charles had robbed as sanctioned by the Peace of Bucharest. The conditions were unacceptable, they simply refused to talk to Professor Brown who had gone to Szolnok on May 3 to mediate. Those inclined to capitulate were thus forced to recognize that there was no chance of substantial negotiations on an honest basis. Brown himself, in his last

report, indicated that military occupation was the only possible means towards liquidating the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The Coolidge Mission came to an end a bare fortnight after Brown's departure. Lieutenant Colonel Romanelli, appointed head of the Italian Mission, arrived in Budapest on May 12, and from that time to the end he was reckoned to be the chief Budapest representative of the Allies, though he never held a commission to that effect. Romanelli's main function was to further Italian influence in Hungary. He thought of the Soviet Republic as merely transitional, but nevertheless as the only real party for negotiations in the May situtation.[89] Though the Czechoslovak army was in part officered by Italians, and the missions supported the Hungarian counter-revolution, the same missions nevertheless kept up relatively close links with some commissars, and gave real help to the Red Army in its endeavour to replace its war materials.[90]

After the end of the May crisis the successful reorganization of the army once again faced the Governing Council with the need of coming to a decision. What use should be made of the Red Army? The decision was dictated by circumstances. The Czechoslovak army alone attacked, and the fighting in the Salgótarján area showed that it could be defeated by the Red Army. Victory there first suggested that the counter-attack should be launched to the north-west of the town, as a continuation of the successful defense. The 3rd Corps, about to be organized, was designed to bear the brunt of the offensive. Jenő Landler commanded it, with Lieutenant Colonel Julier as his chief of staff.[91] The 3rd Corps had the greatest strength, a large proportion of the Workers' Battalions was directed to join it. It assembled around Hatvan from where it could be easily deployed in any of the battle areas. While it was being organized there were news that the Allies intended to attack from the south, between the Tisza and the Danube, using French troops as well.

It was not really a false rumour, just obsolete news. As mentioned above, the French Command had in fact planned to participate in an attack concentrated on Budapest, but since it did not succeed in getting Paris' approval, the plan was shelved for the time being. On May 11 the

[89] Guido Romanelli, *Nell' Ungheria di Béla Kun e durante l'occupazione militare romena*, Udine 1963.

[90] See the papers of the Halstead mission, National Archives, State Dept., 184.011102.

[91] Jenő Landler (1875–1928) was the legal adviser of the 1904 railwaymen strike and later became a highly respected leader of the social democratic left wing. He did not join Béla Kun in November 1918, thinking his policy too daring. For the 133 days of the revolution he fully collaborated with the communists, becoming one of the reorganizers of the Communist Party after the collapse, though his antagonism to Kun would not die down. His Chief of Staff, Ferenc Julier (1878–1946), was a typical staff officer, more closely occupied with the business of the moment than with long-term considerations. He certainly kept in touch with Gömbös and other counter-revolutionaries. Later a 'treason-myth' of a type characteristic of Hungarian historiography, largely exaggerating his role, grew up around his figure, in part in order to discredit Landler.

Governing Council discussed the situation with Stromfeld, and they agreed that an attack was to be expected from the direction of Gyékényes and Szeged. The conference decided that "only the most essential forces would be left" in the northern and eastern fronts, and in Transdanubia "whose task would be observation, holding up the enemy advance as long as possible" while "all the forces thus liberated would be deployed offensively against the enemy advancing between the Danube and the Tisza".[92]

Local fighting continued on the northern front, in defense of Salgótarján and Eger. The heroic resistance of miners and workers, and then the appearance of the 6th Division, had led to the flight in panic of the Czechoslovak forces north of Salgótarján already on May 10. A. Rab, the Commander of the 6th Division, taken by surprise, was not able to exploit the favourable situation immediately, but he promptly ordered armoured trains and advance guards to pursue the enemy, following suit next day with the main body of his forces. On the 12th the Red Army occupied Fülek (Filakovo) and the Czechoslovak army fled as far as Rimaszombat (Rimska Sobota), that is it retired to positions held on March 21. Furhter pursuit was not authorized by Army H. Q., chiefly because of the illusory fear of an attack by the French.

After military events had however shown that the Czechoslovak forces lacked in martial spirit and were poorly led, and that the state of the Red Army had considerably improved, the High Command, though continuing to consider defense against the attack expected from the south to be the central task, ordered that preparations be made to retake Miskolc.

Military successes, and the ensuing consolidation of law and order at home, that is the quietening of counter-revolutionary activity, provided a favourable background for the northern campaign. Since the objectives of the attack were, for the time being, limited ones, the centrists approved as well in the hope that the improvement of the position of the Soviet Republic would also improve possibilities for a compromise with the victorious powers. For that reason Böhm and Weltner, in view of the arbitrary actions that had occurred, urged that the 'terror groups' and special units be disbanded. They were not satisfied with disciplinary action against Cserny (Commander of the much-feared 'Lenin Boys'), they clearly opposed a forceful stand against the counter-revolutionaries as something that would spoil the chances of a compromise.

In May the policy of the centrists and of the right-wing party and trades union officials still radically differed. Though the centrists and the social-democratic minded workers who followed them increasingly expressed their doubts, they nonetheless did their share in organizing national

[92] Liptai, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

defense and promoting socialist changes. What they wished to do in the long run, was to reach a compromise with the West on the basis of worker power. The trades union bureaucracy on the other hand turned into splitters, and threatened the existence of the dictatorship of the proletariat from the inside. In the interests of organizational unity, Kun had forbidden the communists to form any separate sort of group, and only the *Vörös Újság (Red Paper)* was preserved as an organ for an unambiguously communist point of view. The trades union right wing on the other hand, held regular meetings, starting with the middle of May, in the Abonyi street Calvinist convent building. At first people's commissars were also invited to attend, and constructive exchanges of opinion took place on what the unions could do to help improve production. Soon however the meetings turned semi-secret and establishing contact with the Allies became their principal subject, essentially on the basis of a non-socialist programme, that is giving up the socialist gains. The position of the Red Army did not interest them since, as Peyer put it to the delegates of the miners of Pécs: "it does not make sense to fight just to delay the entry of the Rumanians by a couple of days."[93]

It was worse still that while Kun, or Kunfi, and even the right-wing but well informed People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Péter Ágoston, who had clear notions about foreign policy, realised one could negotiate with the Italians, or with Americans of Brown's sort who supported President Wilson, Peyer and his associates met their mate in Freeman-Williams who had returned after the May crisis, and used him to keep the intelligence services of the enemy informed, carrying on political negotiations on that level. *Népszava,* and *Az Ember (The Man)* a weekly published by Ferenc Göndör of the right wing, initiated a press campaign against the communists. Difficulties in supplying the public made the stirring up of conflicts particularly dangerous. A large part of the shops was closed, the wartime flour and meat shortage were in evidence again, the age of spinach and pearl barley had started.

The communists answered furiously, pointing out that one of the results of the defense of the bourgeoisie was the flooding of the offices of the worker state, and even of the soviets, with bourgeois elements. Purges were carried out in many places and even house-wardens who sided with the rich were replaced. (Wardens were elected in every house in Budapest. Their duties included the issuing of purchasing licences, and assistance with requisitions and the denunciation of counter-revolutionaries.) On May 15 all non-socialist papers were banded. This was not a happy solution since writers lost jobs, and the citizenry of Budapest their habitual daily papers.

[93] MMTVD Vol. 6/A, p. 703.

The above conflicts were serious enough, but at around the middle of May, even more grave problems peresented themselves, causing the inner split of the short-lived unity. The communists did not confine their military aims to re-taking Miskolc, they wanted to launch an attack which would shake the basis of the capitalism in Central Europe. They were better aware of the chances to extend the attack than the centrists, on the other hand they either ignored or refused to recognise that capitalism in Europe was slowly consolidating its position. The German peace conditions, handed over on May 7, prohibited the *Anschluss* and this meant the failure of Otto Bauer's foreign policy, a policy relatively sympathetic to the Hungarian Soviet Republic. The capitalist system was consolidated in Austria and Germany, the reformists gained the upper hand within the labour movement, and the German ruling class grew to recognize that formal acceptance of the Peace Treaty was inevitable. But Béla Kun had built his hopes largely on the unacceptability of the German peace conditions, that is the impossibility to enforce payment of the heavy reparations. He could not predict that after the German government, having no alternative, signed the treaty, the victors would gradually relax the conditions they insisted on in 1919. The communists rightly held that certain contradictions of capitalism will not be solved within that society, but those societies indeed succeeded in regaining control over these disruptive forces, at least until the next world war.

The German peace relegated the discussions of peace with Austria and Hungary to the background. This was a disadvantage since the invitation addressed to the Hungarian government was finally taken off the agenda. The frontiers of Hungary were unilaterally determined in the course of May, but they were not published before the German question had finally been decided. The frontiers essentially agreed with those the victors had previously laid down in secret treaties. Comparing the maps of the 1918 Czechoslovak secret memorandum[94] with the frontiers of May 1919 and the Trianon Treaty makes clear that the Vác–Salgótarján–Miskolc line, and the territory North of the Szikszó–Bodrog line were denied to Beneš, but Czechoslovakia was awarded the Subcarpathian Ukraine as well which had not cropped up in the earlier demands. The May frontier between Austria and Hungary remained the old one, Renner only later obtained the area now known as the Burgenland, as it were, as a reward for giving up Bauer's foreign policy.

On May 15 Böhm signed the order to retake Miskolc. Hungarian military historians are not agreed on whether the results might not have been better if the Red Army had struck while the iron was hot, straight after Fülek, in spite of unpreparedness, chasing the surprised enemy while

[94] PRO FO 371, Vol. 3136, p. 490.

the going was good. The probable impetus of an attack in full swing supported the argument, and, given success, the results would have been greater. It would have meant a breakthrough at the centre, forcing a withdrawal on the eastern wing.

More powerful arguments still spoke in favour of retaking Miskolc. To start with, lesser forces were needed for the attack since the Czechoslovak troops were defending themselves though cut off from their base. The liberation of Miskolc and environs meant speedy and considerable economic and political profit, and one could reckon with the support of the local population to a larger degree. At that time the Soviet Republic had not given up hope of establishing contact with the Soviet Ukraine. It was not a mere coincidence that Tibor Szamuely was sent to Moscow and Kiev at the time of the attack on Miskolc to clarify the problem of coordinating military operations.

Before the Miskolc operation the Governing Council took important decisions to increase organizational centralism. Government commissioners were appointed to cooperate with county soviets. This limited the powers of the latter to some degree, but they were to be the superiors of the various political commissars which in turn filled the soviets with great satisfaction. At the same time it was decided to establish the National Economic Council, integrating economic people's commissariats and national authorities. A proclamation was issued outlawing the Arad Government.

Intervention in Hungary was discussed in Paris on May 19 once again, but the necessary agreement for a coordinated attack was still lacking. By then there was little left of Wilson's influence, that is, of the open and direct diplomacy of the supporters of the self-determination of nations. After the Coolidge mission had been disbanded, it was Hoover who came to decide US policy on Hungary. Wilson's supporters, though not rejecting intervention, had insisted on the restoration of a democratic republic, relying on right-wing social democrats in opposition, and they rejected the idea of a Rumanian–Czechoslovak occupation of Budapest. Hoover on the other hand gave preference to the speedy liquidation of Bolshevism, considering any sort of negotiations with the Bolsheviks, let alone their *de facto* recognition, the worst possible method. The Rumanian army and Gömbös' revengeful officers were the best possible instrument for a bloody reckoning, and President Wilson's withdrawal from the Peace Conference cleared the way for them.

On April 22 Captain Gregory, Hoover's right-hand man, had still been complaining to his chief that the aristocrats, the French and the Rumanians had overthrown Károlyi, and with him the best policy.[95] On

[95] Hoover Institution ARA (Paris Archives), box 73.

the first of June however, though still toying with the idea of restoring Károlyi, he indignantly rejected a proposal by the British Admiral Troubridge, who controlled the Danube, to sail down the river and talk to Béla Kun in person; Troubridge seemed as unaware as Brown had been earlier that he was playing Kun's game.[96] Thus the admiral received a severe reprimand. Lieutenant Commander Kenworthy who had raised the Vix story in the House of Commons on May 15 as part of a protest against intervention in Russia, accusing the Allies of subjecting the right of national self-determination to power politics and the rewarding of their allies, was not even given the courtesy of a reply by the Foreign Secretary.[97]

[96] *Loc. cit.;* Troubridge's proposal is discussed by a report by the U. S. Chargé d'Affaires in Belgrade dated May 31 1919. National Archives, State Department, 864.01/14.

[97] The speech by Commander Kenworthy, a Labour M.P. is in *Hansard,* Vol. 115, pp. 1900–1921.

THE NORTHERN CAMPAIGN

On May 18 the Czechoslovak army once again went over into the attack at Salgótarján. The situation turned crucial, the workers were called to arms again and, together with the Red Army, they broke through the ring enveloping the town. Fighting was in full force when news reached the Czechoslovak Command which diverted their attention from Salgótarján. At dawn on May 20, after a short preparatory artillery barrage, the Red Army had started to attack south of Miskolc and Diósgyőr.

The attack by the considerably reinforced First Division commanded by Lieutenant Colonel József Kerekess proved successful; the defenses of the enemy were broken, and the Czechoslovaks abandoned the town that very evening, the Red Army entering in the morning of the 21st. The Italian generals were aware that an attack was planned, and they had some idea of the strength of the Red Army as well, but they did not reckon with Stromfeld concentrating more than half of the fighting units available to him on carrying out and securing the attack. He still did not dispose of a sufficiently great superiority in numbers, but this was made up for by the enthusiasm of the workers' regiments and the help given by the population.

In those days the fighting spirit of the reborn Red Army was outstanding. Armoured trains had a considerable share in the victory. One unexpectedly ran into Miskolc railway station already in the morning, creating panic and destroying delayed trains. The relatively strong Red Artillery also proved effective.

As soon as the first companies reached the town the workers rose. They hurried to the police station where the collected weapons were kept, and, armed in this manner, about three thousand attacked the enemy in full flight. Railwaymen disobeyed the orders of the occupying forces. Telegraph wires were cut, rails taken up, and breech blocks removed from the field-guns.

The Hungarian, Slovak and German workers of a number of towns behind the enemy lines rose in armed revolt. This happened at Ózd, Rozsnyó (Roznava), Pelsőc, Tornalja and Rudabánya. They destroyed the bridge at Perkupa, thus making it impossible for the enemy to send reinforcements to Miskolc.

The commanders of the Czechoslovak forces in their reports following the battle of Miskolc, complained of the fatigue and indifference of their soldiers, and even of the Bolshevik sympathies of some of them. There were mass desertions, especially on the part of Slovaks who easily found their way home to their villages. Slovak units were therefore transferred to Bohemia, but it happened that only half the rank-and-file of the transit battalion reached their new destination.

On May 22 Sajószentpéter, north of Miskolc, fell to the Red Army, on the 23rd however, the enemy, assisted by Rumanians stationed near the Tisza, went over into a counter-attack to retake Miskolc. Panic broke out in Miskolc, and Julier asked for permission to retreat, arguing that Miskolc could be retaken the next day, from more favourable positions. Stromfeld forbade evacuation. The 3rd Corps, holding out with determination, proved capable, at the expense of considerable losses, to repel the attack from the north and east.

There was no major fighting for a week after the defence of Miskolc. While fighting was going on at Miskolc it proved possible to advance north of Eger and to put an end to the anxious state of the city which had lasted for weeks. Attacks on Fülek and Salgótarján were repelled, and at the end of May the Soviet Republic thus firmly controlled the Nógrád and Borsod industrial areas. The line of the Tisza was successfully strengthened and local Rumanian attempts to cross the river were repelled. Early in May, and connected with the May 23 attack on Miskolc, Rumanian forces occupied the areas between the Tisza and the Bodrog and Hernád rivers and crossed the Hernád. After the failure of the counter-attack they retired behind the Hernád, continuing to offer a threat to Miskolc.

Böhm gave an account of victory at Miskolc at the May 24 meeting of the Budapest Workers' Soviet. A number of socialists from abroad who had come to visit the Soviet Republic spoke at the Budapest meeting, including Morgari, Schweide, Vukichevich, and C. Eastman.[98] Ivan Matuzović declared in the name of the South Slav Red Battalion stationed in the Baranya area that they will forcefully hold the front which he was defending with his brethren, and the enemy will only be able to reach Budapest only over their dead bodies. "But the Serbians who face us, give us their fraternal greetings, and say they will never attack us."

Béla Kun, in his report, set the Soviet two major tasks: "fighting rumours and fighting starvation." The two were connected, since food shortages day after day influenced the mood, and rumours deliberately spread by counter-revolutionary groups, using leaflets as well, were also

[98] The minutes of the meeting are in the Archives of the Institute of History of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party, 600/3 f.; C. Eastman, after her return home, published a report on the people's commissars in the New York *Liberator*, August, 1919.

extraordinarily effective, in part because there was naturally less of a sense of stability midst great changes, and also because the press had become monotonous and people were looking for other sources of information. The chief subjects were the food shortage, the white-back banknotes, religious instruction, what would happen to the property of smallholders, and the senselessnes of war.

As far as the working class was concerned, defeatism was the biggest trouble, the first bigger losses led to extraordinary excitement among the most closely affected working class families.

Early in the Great War the idea of fate, and then the fatalism of mass deaths blunted feelings of mourning. Once the war was over the idea proved unbearable, particularly in the eyes of women that, once the regular and general bloodletting had come to an end, it was just their family that should lose someone, and the relatively small losses lessened fatalism, and increased a feeling that this could have been avoided, prompting them to ask why it should have been 'he of all people'.

In villages the functions of traditional German-, Rumanian- and Slav-baiting were taken over by antisemitism coupled with slogans in defense of religion. Since the liberal bourgeoisie, particularly its Jewish majority, had no sympathy for such slogans, and since nationalization did not as seriously affect the Protestant churches as the extremely wealthy Roman Catholic hierarchy, the role of the latter, and of their political supporters grew by leaps and bounds within the camp of the counter-revolution and conservatism. The clergy were personally threatened financially by the dictatorship, regardless of denomination. The first half yearly 'congrua' payment due to them was made, and on July 1 the celibate clergy were given severance pay of 1,000 Crowns, the married clergy got 2,000 Crowns, still, the time was fast approaching when they would be totally dependent on donations by the faithful, a solution antipathetic to both clergy and laity.

By the end of the Great War a million of the inhabitants of the old Hungary professed the Jewish religion, a quarter million lived in Budapest and environs. The deliberate Jew-baiting of the counter-revolution was directed on the one hand against the metropolitan working class, close to a sixth of whom were Jews, the proportion being higher still amongst the skilled workers and in the ranks of organized labour, and also against Jewish professional men and intellectuals, a large section of whom, chiefly in the capital, less so in the provinces, was most important in the democratic and socialist movements. The specifically Hungarian middle-class problem added fuel to the fire. The stratum of officials that had formed around a gentry nucleus, which considered its position and inherited patrimony, was exposed to a two-fold pressure. Unemployed professional people fleeing from the detached territories, and the large

number of Jews confined to the self-employed professions all tried to obtain secure and pensionable posts in the civil service, in the name of patriotism and equality. The socialist revolution made the Jewish question more acute amongst the professions. Showing the mobility of the self-employed, Jews left typically bourgeois professions declared redundant by the revolution, and hurried to occupy the places of fired 'reactionary' state officials.

In the villages whispering anti-semitic propaganda was aimed at both the youthful agitators from the city who were bereft of a sober sense of proportion, as well as the number of Jewish people's commissars. The latter gave scant attention to this aspect that deserved most careful consideration: even raising the problem was impossible for a good socialist. Counter-revolutionary propaganda thus tried to canalize the mood which was hostile to Jewish capitalists, middlemen and businessmen against the labour movement. This indeed worked with backward people of a religious turn of mind, but also amongst the 'Christian middle-class' concerned to maintain its competitive position.

After the Battle of Miskolc the government and the High Command debated the direction of the next attack. One in the north-western direction, on from Salgótarján, was finally abandoned, though success there would have meant the expulsion of the Czechoslovak army from Slovakia. The Military Command decided to break through the link-up between the Czechs and the Rumanians, first beating the Czechs, and then, crossing the Tisza, turning on the Rumanians. It is open to question whether the carrying out of such a bold plan had not exceeded the strength of the Red Army, in any case, Stromfeld himself deviated from it already at the start, and moderated it, as dictated by circumstances. There was much in favour of the plan, in the first place the liberation of the area beyond the Tisza could have extended the basis of the revolution by successfully pressing the notion of national self-determination, not to mention securing the ripening harvest. The liberation of the Subcarpathian Ukraine would also have been of great advantage because there it was hoped to establish contact with the Ukrainian Red Army. Finally, it had become quite clear that the Rumanian command was getting ready to cross the Tisza and launch a new attack. This would have been preempted by an unexpected strike. The latter two aspects had however lost their importance even before the attack had started, because of the following reasons.

Tibor Szamuely who had returned from Moscow and Kiev after an adventurous ten days' journey by plane and train, reported to the government on May 31, informing them of his talks with Lenin and his comrades. The position of the Russian Red Army had temporarily deteriorated. Soviet Latvia was lost, the Whites threatened Petrograd, while the

situation on the Ukrainian front was most crucial of all. They could not stop Denikin's advance, and the Ukrainian Red Army was concentrated on the defense of the Donets Basin. Fighting continued along the Dniestr, with occassional Soviet successes, but the main aim could only be to tie down Rumanian forces. Szamuely certainly helped the concentration around Kiev of Hungarian Internationalists (former POW's), using the slogan: 'home, carrying our weapons!' This continued right up to August. They were intended to be the advance guard of a break through the Carpathians, should the fortunes of war make this possible. By the end of May, however, there was no longer any likelihood of a link-up between the two Red Armies, and the Rumanian command was in a position to be more clearly aware of this than the Hungarians.

The weakening of the Ukrainian Red Army made it easier for the Rumanians to offer in Paris to cross the Tisza once again. President Wilson, however, continued to prefer to see a French occupation of Budapest, and he still put his hopes in the Czechoslovak forces. The four leaders of the Great Powers therefore, at their May 30 meeting, once again rejected the Rumanian offer. The supporters of the plan did not readily accept this decision. General Franchet d'Esperey supported the Rumanian government, and on June 6 the British, French and American envoys in Bucharest jointly asked their governments to allow the Rumanian High Command to satisfy the request by Czechoslovakia, "to join advance on Budapest" and to cross the Tisza, because they "are unanimously of opinion danger of leaving Bolshevists alone is incalculable".[99] All that was asked of the French and Yugoslav forces was to carry out a demonstration. The French High Command agreed with the new offer but at that very time Clemenceau was under heavy attack by the socialists who opposed the intervention.

In any event the danger of a Franco–Rumanian attack lessened, and though Stromfeld could not be as aware of this as an ex post facto observer of events, he gradually modified his original plan in the direction of the occupation of Slovakia, the more so since the first clashes already promised a successful conclusion of the campaign.

The northern campaign started on May 30 is amongst the most remarkable chapters not only of the history of the Soviet Republic, but of the whole of modern Hungarian military history. Seventy-three battalions and forty-six batteries launched it. More than half were concentrated on the right, near Miskolc. The Czechoslovak Army disposed over ninety battalions and thirty-two batteries in Slovakia. The Red Army could not really call on superior numbers, even along the main line of attack, though it was superior in artillery. The 1st

[99] PRO FO 371, Vol. 3515.

Corps feigned a crossing of the Tisza, to tie down the Rumanians. It was to have crossed in fact around June 3–4, according to the original plan, but this crossing did not take place.

The northern campaign produced important successes on the very first day already. In the east the Red Army reached Szikszó, Bánréve and Putnok, the 80th Brigade, reinforced by international units, carrying out an impetuous encircling attack, put the enemy to flight and marched into Losonc (Lucenec).

The days that followed led to further successes. On the 31st Rimaszombat (Rimavská Sobota) and Edelény on the road to Kassa (Košice) were taken. On June 1st the First Brigade, supported by workers, miners, police, etc. assembled at Esztergom, crossed the bridge over the Danube – F. Gawlinski, the commander of the Polish Red Company was killed at the bridge – and occupied Párkány. A battalion which advanced boldly, well ahead of the forces, recruited largely from natives of the town, took Léva (Levice) as it were by a *coup de main.* This amounted to reaching the line defined by the river Garam, and thus opened the road to Pozsony (Bratislava). The First Brigade was therefore given the order to stop attacking along the Danube, and to put greater forces into Léva, securing it as the base for a further attack.

The 3rd Corps succeeded in crossing the Sajó and Hernád rivers, pushing back the Rumanians who were in readiness awaiting an order to attack. The 3rd Corps occupied the territory between the Hernád, Tisza and Bodrog rivers, and advanced on Szerencs.

Budapest received the news from the north with enthusiasm, the tidings of joy were, however, flavoured with gall. News from the west and south were of a different sort. As soon as the counter-offensive started, counter-revolutionaries deliberately struck a blow from the back. The 'Szeged Government' headed by Gyula Károlyi, was formed on the day the campaign started. The supporters of Count Mihály Károlyi and the social democrats refused to join this body of reactionary hues, but Count Pál Teleki as the representative of the Vienna-Anti-Bolshevist Committee, and Rear Admiral Miklós Horthy both accepted a portfolio. The latter's determined attitude soon made him the leader of the 'white' officers. The younger and politically compromised Gömbös was satisfied with the role of *eminence grise.*

Problems of its own at first limited the importance of the Szeged Government. A strike in Szeged lasting some weeks protested against its power guaranteed by the French gendarmerie. Revolts in the south and west of Transdanubia insignificant as they were, still threatened the peace of the hinterland. The railway strike initiated by officials of the Southern Railway, was too a greater danger to the northern campaign. Szamuely's firmness, as well as the support of railway workshop staff, stokers and

other railwaymen, allowed the strike to be put down quickly, but new revolts broke out along the lines of the Southern Railway, and the attention of the government was divided between the external enemy and the 'Hungarian Vendée'. Conflicts with the petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry became sharper.

The activities of the 'Abonyi street conspirators' livened up, and this also weakened the dictatorship of the proletariat. Towards the end of May, Peyer, Miákits, Samu Jászai and others repeatedly negotiated with Lt.-Commander Freeman, asking him if the Allies would recognise a 'Trades Union Government' in which there were no communists. According to Freeman they promptly and readily accepted his conditions: no cooperation with Soviet Russia, an end to propaganda abroad, the restoration of a social order based on private property and free elections.

Freeman went to Vienna on June 2nd to report to Colonel Cuninghame, who had no faith in the succes of the plan, not believing in the possibility of overthrowing the Soviet Republic from the inside, the less so since Böhm and Kunfi, as Böhm himself put it "were frightened by the responsibility" and did not support Peyer's plan. Kun knew of the secret negotiations, that is why he addressed his request to Lenin which resulted in the "Greeting to the workers of Hungary" (an open letter advising firmness both in strengthening the dictatorship of proletariat and against vacillation and treachery of the social democrats). At the end of May and early in June stormy trades union meetings were held to discuss Lenin's message, and came out in support of the dictatorship. A meeting of Budapest iron worker shop-stewards on June 2nd condemned the negotiations of Miákits and his lot.

On June 2nd the west wing of the Red Army reached the River Nyitra, and the east wing was within 30 km of Kassa (Košice). By dawn on the 3rd the Rumanians had completely withdrawn from the right bank of the Tisza, burning the bridges behind them. The attempt to cross the Tisza the next day, at Stromfeld's orders, with the aim of retaking Nyíregyháza, failed.

The western campaign culminated in the occupation of Érsekújvár (Nove Zamky). Had troops vainly attacking along the Tisza been contracted there, the road to Pozsony (Bratislava) would have been wide open, thanks to a plain ahead, close to the Danube, and inhabited by Hungarians. The French General Mittelhauser who was in charge of the defence of Pozsony was able to exploit delays in taking a decision to organize his defenses and a counter-attack. In the central area, between Besztercebánya (Banska Bistrica) and Kassa, the attack lost its impetus facing the Lower Tatra, that hilly country. But the Landler Corps could not be stopped. It moved ahead with the support of new local recruits, and new soviets formed in towns and villages. In tough fighting unusual in

this campaign, it broke through the enemy lines, and marched into Kassa on the 6th. The occupation of Sárospatak essentially meant that the Czechoslovak Army in the Subcarpathian Ukraine was cut off.

By the time the Budapest Workers' Soviet assembled in festive session on June 7th the Red Army had occupied Selmecbánya (Banska Stivnica) and Zólyom (Zvolen). Disturbances in the hinterland of both armies abated in Transdanubia, but flared up in Slovakia, in spite of the proclamation of a state of emergency. Mittelhauser sent an S. O. S. to Paris and the British Minister in Prague drew the attention of London to the fact (on June 7th) that the fall of Bratislava, near Vienna "would entail very serious consequences". Three days later he reported that the Hungarian attack continues "with much increased violence", and that the French commander, "General Pellé seems very anxious concerning situation which he regards as extremely grave".[100] The French mission asked for French forces.

Böhm spoke about the taking of Kassa to the Budapest Workers' Soviet, military bands paraded the streets of Budapest, and the Soviet Republic seemed in a better state than ever before. The counter-revolutionaries had been defeated in Transdanubia, and could not get off the ground in Szeged. Baron Zsigmond Perényi, one of the Budapest conspirators, wrote that in the capital "the citizenry was too weak, and too disorganized, above all they had no arms of any sort, and could not do anything on their own against the well equipped working class masses".[101] True, the camp of active opponents of the revolution was weakening, but that of active supporters also narrowed. Public opinion was increasingly growing weary and fatigued, which easily led to pacifist illusions. The petty bourgeoisie, the non-industrial working people, were filled with the feeling of insecurity of those who belong nowhere.

The Red Army, brilliantly led by Stromfeld, liberated a whole region in the first weak of the northern campaign and radically changed the military situation. Cooperation, staff work, the use of artillery, the speedy movement of troops, and the independence of units in carrying out orders were all exemplary. There were negative aspects, as well. The drawn out line held by the Red Army was further lengthened without destroying the enemy. The time of decision was put off, as the attack in the direction of Miskolc–Kassa–Eperjes (Presov) came to be central. The dynamism of the situation proved more powerful than the plans, and the campaign moved best where resistance was weakest.

After defeat at Kassa the Czechoslovak Command concentrated forces on the defence of Pozsony. If Stromfeld had given up the idea of crossing the Tisza in time, it might have been possible to achieve a strategic success

[100] *Loc. cit.*

[101] Kaas–Lazarovits, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

in Western Slovakia after June 6th. On june 7th Mittelhauser achieved a preponderance of forces by concentrating his troops, and retook Érsekújvár. Other than small territorial gains he did not achieve much, while the 6th Red division, supported by an armed rising of local workers, occupied the hurriedly evacuated Eperjes on June 9th. The major enemy forces had been thus driven out of Eastern Slovakia, and a decision had to be taken: in which direction was the attack to continue, towards Bratislava or beyond the Tisza? That is when a note from Clemenceau, who chaired the Paris Peace Conference, was received. It requested the Soviet Republic "to put an end without delay to its attacks on the Czecho-Slovaks, otherwise the Allied and Associated Governments are absolutely decided to have immediate recourse to extreme measures to oblige Hungary to cease hostilities and to bow to the unshakeable will of the Allies . . . "[102] The 'extreme measures' clearly referred to a general attack. If, however, the Soviet Republic as it were carried out the wishes of the victorious powers, its representatives would be invited to sign the peace conditions.

The Governing Council found itself in an awkward situation. The invitation was the result of a 77 day life and death struggle. Its price was the abandonement of positions that had been fought for on the field of battle, and more than that, of the right to self-determination of the Hungarian nation. In the long run one could not refuse. Germany also had become reconciled to what could not, for the time being, be changed. Diplomatic recognition on the other hand was more than a pure formality for the Soviet Republic. It meant the end of not only a *de jure* state of war, but a real one, and survival.

The peace treaty had to be signed, as it was finally signed, in fact, by the chauvinist Horthy regime, but the decision was much more difficult for the Soviet Republic. Public opinion did not understand that signing was unavoidable. For the officer corps, up to June, the Governing Council was the only Hungarian administration which – apart from its social objectives – was ready to fight against the peace dictate. The 'other' government at Szeged was there as an alternative, and it was at the very least an open question what choices the officers of the Red Army would make if the struggle became meaningless to them owing to the acceptance of the new frontiers.

On the surface the Clemenceau note looked like the recognition of the status quo created by the victories of the Soviet Republic, in fact the very opposite had happened. They had decided in Paris to close the Hungarian question and, at the same time to put an end to Bolshevism in Hungary. The note was a provocation, and it offered some breathing space to the Czechoslovak forces. The Governing Council tried to delay things in its

[102] MMTVD Vol. 6/A, p. 670.

answer to Clemenceau, taking as its starting point the Károlyi government's well-known and high-handed argument that the occupation of Slovakia by the Czechs offended against the Belgrade armistice. It agreed to put a stop to fighting if the interested parties met in Vienna to discuss problems connected with the armistice. At the same time the invitation was accepted since "the Soviet Republic of Hungary does not harbour hostile intentions against any nation, it wishes to live in peace and friendship with them all, the more so since it does not insist on the principle of territorial integrity".[103]

No one could believe that Clemenceau would accept this as an answer, though Bethlen and his associates, who had, in March, advised Mihály Károlyi to accept the Vix note, now played a new card: they offered their patriotic support, through the Vienna legation, if the Soviet government should remain intransigent. The latter tried to use the few days left before the expected next exchange of notes to improve the military situation.

After discussions in the General Staff Stromfeld reworked his plan of campaign. "The general situation demands that, before the bulk of the army crossed the Tisza turning against the Rumanian forces, it first settle the lot of the Czech army for some time to come."[104] According to the plan the enemy must be beaten in a frontal attack north of the Danube, and forced to accept a decisive battle within a confined area. Bratislava and Western Slovakia would then be occupied. Bearing in mind that the offensive was due to start on June 15th, the day of the Czechoslovak elections, and that on this day Ernő Bettelheim, Kun's plenipotentiary in Vienna, aimed to start a new revolt beginning with an armed demonstration by Austrian communists, one may well suspect that, in the event of success, the Red Army would not have stopped in its tracks when they reached the old frontiers.

The plan was sound, but late. Regrouping required days, and these did not favour the Soviet Republic. Operations died down, not because of the exchange of notes, but owing to the regrouping, and the exhaustion of the offensive. Losses had been great and, in twelve days, they had advanced a distance of almost 140 km, over hills and dales.

The victories of the Red Army culminated on June 10th. Bártfa (Bardeiov) was taken, and Rozsnyó (Roznava) was occupied by the 5th Division after heavy fighting. In the North the Red Army reached the frontier of Galicia, that is of the new Poland, but the enemy was able to withdraw to Csap in the Subcarpathian Ukraine, in good fighting order,

[103] *Loc. cit.*, p. 671.

[104] Tibor Hetés (ed.), *A magyar Vörös Hadsereg (The Hungarian Red Army)*, Budapest 1959, p. 363.

and, together with forces that had withdrawn into the Szepes region, they threatened the Sátoraljaújhely–Kassa–Bártfa line, necessitating the leaving behind of part of the 3rd Corps. In Central Slovakia the line was wavy, without major changes, on the western wing however, the initiative rested with the enemy. Mittelhauser occupied Selmecbánya and Zólyom, pushing in and shortening the initial arc of the planned Hungarian attack.

Drawing up a balance one must appreciate first of all the magnitude of the results obtained in unfavourable circumstances. Occipying this largely mountainous or hilly area in ten to twelve days, against an enemy who disposed over superior forces, was made possible only by outstanding staff work, and the enthusiasm of worker and trans-Tisza peasant regiments, that of international units, and volunteers from northern Hungary and Slovakia. The internationalist spirit of the Red Army proved a great help, as did the risings by workers, and sabotage and guerrilla operations behind the enemy's lines. Slovak volunteers joined the Red Army in large numbers, and even more Slovaks deserted from the Czechoslovak forces.

The Red Army paid a big price for these victories. After May 1st a relatively thin stratum of highly class conscious workers took to arms. The élite of the revolution was bled white, or exhausted, not to mention the loss of production. Numbers rose in May–June, but to a lesser degree, both quantitatively, and qualitatively. In the middle of June the Red Army disposed over 168 infantry battalions with a total of 60,000 rifles. Add 9–10 squadrons of horsemen, 84 artillery batteries, gunboats, aircraft, etc., the militarized Red Guard, and the workers' regiments of the reserve. Numbers were not small, bearing in mind the losses, they were close to those of the Czechoslovak army recruited from a larger territory, but they were terribly few bearing in mind the position the Soviet Republic found itself in. Untapped reserves promised no more than the replacement of expected losses. General conscription was introduced on June 10th, and though not without any success, it was not really implemented since no sort of sanctions were taken against draft dodgers.

The successes of the northern campaign could only have been repeated with a growth in strength as speedy and as large as that produced by the May mobilization. The principal strategic result, reaching the frontier of Galicia, in the middle of June no longer sufficed to permit a link-up with the Red Army of Soviet Russia. No doubt it helped the Soviet Republic to survive for some time since, if the Red Army had not shown such strength and determination, the imperialist powers would not have hesitated to stamp out the fire of the Hungarian revolution much sooner, intervening in the country's affairs in some way.

THE CHANGE IN THE POSITION OF THE REVOLUTION AND THE RETREAT

The Congress of the united party met in the middle of June 1919, followed by the National Meeting of Soviets which had to come to a decision, among others, on a vital issue: the answer to the Clemenceau note. The position of the revolution fundamentally changed in the middle of June, the Red Army and the home front had become firmer, the counter-revolutionaries had essentially suffered a defeat, but at the same time the revolution was completely isolated on the international plane.

The two extremes placed great expectation in the June 12th Party Congress: the communists who were not satisfied with the way the merger had been implemented, and the right, getting ready to counter-attack, who felt that they had given up too many positions in March, and who, relying on their organizational basis, were getting ready for a coup. Freeman-Williams, who felt that the ground was getting too hot for him, stayed on for the Congress, according to his own report, because he was well aware of the plans hatched by Peidl and his associates.

The merger had in fact only created a framework. The Communist Party, of an *avante-garde* character, with 30,000 to 40,000 members, was submerged in the mass party created by the merger whose membership, a million and a half, at least on paper, was many times over that of the old Social Democratic Party as well. (New union members became automatically SD Party members, too.) Workers who had been unorganized and uneducated before, and the urban and rural poor who, though emotionally linked to the working class, became politically conscious only as a result of the revolution, lost heart easily. They could certainly not be relied on like the Russian Bolsheviks. It was natural that the masses should flood the workers' party in power, the trades union bureaucracy however stopped the obvious discrimination between trades union and party membership. The holding of a trades union congress was out of the question since such a congress threatened with the replacement of the old trades union leadership. Therefore these leaders firmly exercised their veto against any structural reform, so that even the communist fractions, formed before March 21, were dissolved. It was very difficult to assert the

vanguard role of communist and social democratic workers and intelligentsia in the context of such an amorphous mass.

There is no doubt that it was a confused version of the Leninist interpretation of the party's role that reached the Hungarian communists. It was part of the confusion around the notion of the working class that the social democrats thought of the trades unions, and the communists of the workers' soviets as the equal of the party, though this theoretical distortion of Lenin's idea there reflected the specific Hungarian situation. The view however that theoretical and practical mistakes in party organization were a major cause of the defeat of the revolution is indeed without foundation and merely the result of the customary self-laceration of exiles plus a misinterpretation of Lenin's post-festum critical remarks (in 1920, at the time the 2nd Congress of the Comintern took place).

Party organizations, though they were not the vanguard or leading force of the dictatorship, nevertheless did much useful work. Wherever they were strong enough they tried to perfect their ranks. They were least effective in the army, working at the most through the political commissars whose functions were limited. The political ambiguity of the leadership was a bigger cause of trouble, this however really reflected power relations. When they enjoyed the active support of the masses the revolutionaries could take and implement revolutionary decisions. The enthusiasm of the workers was however the only support the revolution enjoyed, and thus the weight of the compromisers indeed grew in the days of faintheartedness. Such a direct reflection of public moods had many advantages, but 'instinctiveness' achieved a scale which was truly a long way from Leninist norms concerning party unity and discipline.

Behind the scenes struggle turned into open conflict at the Congress. In the early days of the dictatorship leftist youths and soldiers dissatisfied with the speed at which things moved had demonstrated against compromises, at the time of the Congress, however, the Right attacked, and the Left, bearing in mind the military situation, only defended themselves forcefully. That's how things had changed. Weltner set the key-note of the attack with an article *Népszava* published on the day the Congress opened. He rejected Lenin's message where it referred to the waverers, and openly attacked the communists.[105]

Weltner was the link between the Right and the Centre, that's what lent his words more weight. Both sides listened to him. At the end of May the Centre had still kept clear of the Right's illegal negotiations with the Allies, once the latter had, temporarily, abandoned unsuccessful

[105] V. I. Lenin, *op. cit.*, Vol. 29, p. 391. "Be firm. Should vacillation manifest itself among the socialists who yesterday gave their support to you, to the dictatorship of the proletariat, or among the petty bourgeoisie, suppress it ruthlessly. In war the coward's legitimate fate is the bullet."

conspiring, the Centre essentially joined them in their stand against the communists. The foreign policy situation was turning increasingly hopeless, and Böhm and Kunfi as well were looking for way of coming to terms with the Allies, treading more carefully than Peyer. Lenin later said about them that the imperialists knew how to exploit the waverers, and that men like that, in their indecisiveness commit treason just like those who actually do the betraying, though the individual differences may be great indeed.[106]

The Party Congress accepted the Marxist–Leninist party program submitted by Béla Kun, but conflicts were already present in its discussion. Béla Kun proposed that the Congress should adopt the name 'Party of Communists of Hungary' in the sense of the merger document which had left the decision to the Comintern. Though Social Democrat militants of the revolution such as Dezső Bokányi and Kálmán Wallisch, supported the proposal, but Kunfi and Weltner, who had actually signed the document on behalf of their party, went back on their promise. As a compromise, all agreed on 'Party of Socialist and Communist Workers of Hungary'. Kunfi, in a major speech, supported the dictatorship of the proletariat, and would have nothing to do with those aspects of social democracy which meant the maintenance of bourgeois democracy, but he demanded a more moderate policy *vis-à-vis* the bourgeoisie, a policy which, bearing in mind the consolidation of capitalism in Europe, would make coexistence possible. Such a policy, however, was impossible for the Soviet Republic.

Things exploded when the Executive Committee were elected. The Right, exploiting the fact that the majority of delegates were old guard party and trades union officials, organized the defeat of the ticket which in itself had been the fruit of a compromise. A number of candidates on the Left had their names crossed out, and those of Miákits, István Farkas, and the like were written in. The unexpected coup incensed the communists. They declared that they would not accept the vote, "reserving complete freedom of action for themselves, in every respect".[107] This determination frightened Kunfi, Böhm and Weltner, they knew that Kun was not talking about press polemics when he mentioned freedom of action, and they turned for help to Haubrich, the commander of military forces in Budapest. Haubrich, however, though in a key position, and a known opponent of the communists, knowing that the Budapest

[106] *Op. cit.*, Vol. 30 ("The Notes of a Publicist"), Feb. 14th, 1920.

[107] Béla Szántó, "The Hungarian Soviet Republic" (unpublished MS in the archives of the Institute of History of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party). Only fragments of the Party Congress minutes have survived. For an account of events see Szántó and Böhm, *op. cit.* The more important speeches were published by the party press *(Vörös Újság, Népszava, Volksstimme)* and by MMTVD Vol. 6/B.

workers' regiments would not turn on the latter, clearly rejected the idea of an armed coup. Landler mediated between the two sides, and as a result, after a number of stormy scenes, Böhm faced the Congress in plenary session and asked them in the name of the Red Army to accept the original ticket by acclamation. As a result the communists Kun, Pór, Rudas, Vágó and Vántus, the former left social democrats Landler and Nyisztor, two union leaders, Bokányi and Bajáki who were close to the Left, Böhm, Garbai and Kunfi of the Centre, and Weltner were elected to the thirteen strong executive.

There was thus no split, but neither did the Congress solve the problems of the revolution or of the party.

The congress of the Youth Alliance led by communists met a few days later. The majority of socialist youngsters had joined the Communist Party already at the end of 1918, and the association kept its communist hues after the union of parties as well. The discussions of the 120,000 strong organization took place in a revolutionary atmosphere, and as a straight-out answer to the Party Congress compromise they adopted the name of 'Communist Young Workers' Federation of Hungary'. The vigour of the revolutionary students and of young skilled workers who were close to them in outlook and intellectual standards, could not really affect the position of the Soviet Republic, since their influence on the masses of country labourers, building workers etc., not to mention young peasants, was minimal. Their importance for the future was all the greater. It was at their discussions, where ultraradical and anarchist views were frequently expressed, that the bulk of the CP membership of the 1920s became familiar with the doctrines of socialism.

The National Congress of Soviets met between June 14 and 23, directly after the Party Congress. Major changes had however occurred in the international and military situation. On June 13, while the Party Congress had been split and was then formally mended, Clemenceau addressed a new note to the Soviet Republic, which described Hungary's new frontiers, except the Hungarian–Yugoslav one. They were now presented as a final dictate, not even mentioning a formal invitation to Paris. This note was in fact a much more severe blow against the Hungarian nation than the memorable Vix note. It not only gave blessing to the splitting away of the non-Hungarians, but territories inhabited by close to 3 million native Hungarians near to a quarter of the total, were adjudicated to neighbouring countries.

Clemenceau called on the Governing Council to withdraw its forces behind the final frontiers without delay, reporting completion of the operation to the Peace Conference on June 18th. If this were not done the victorious powers "will hold themselves free to advance on Budapest, and to take such other steps as may seem desirable to secure a just and speedy

Peace". The Red Army thus had to be withdrawn from Slovakia, there being no Hungarian forces beyond the established frontiers elsewhere. The note promised that Rumanian forces would also be withdrawn from the area east of the Tisza "as soon as the Hungarian troops have evacuated Czecho-Slovakia".[108]

Red Army soldiers were at first ignorant of the note. Its effect on operations, and on them, only made itself felt around the 20th. Having given up the idea of crossing the Tisza Stromfeld wanted to deploy the larger half of the Hungarian forces in Western Slovakia. He planned his new offensive for June 15th, using the specially established 5th Corps, commanded by Pogány, with Colonel Edgar Craenenbroek, who harboured counter-revolutionary feelings, as his Chief of Staff. The slowness of preparations meant postponing the attack to the 17th, but General Mittelhauser, who commanded the Czechoslovak forces, had in turn prepared a general attack for the 16th, preempting the Red Army. Kun received Clemenceau's second note on the 15th, the eve of the Hungarian and Czechoslovak offensives, facing the Soviet Republic with a most difficult decision.

The obscure drafting of the note left a whole series of questions unanswered. Did the note mean that intervention plans were dropped, or was it a cover-up for them? Those responsible for it – Balfour drafted it – did not themselves clearly know what their next step would be, though there was undoubtedly no intention of reconciliation with the Soviet Republic. Denikin's victories had led some to put their hopes in a close collapse of Soviet Russia. Not only the generals, Hoover as well, urged intervention, writing to Wilson on June 9th: "I can see but one solution and that is for the French troops which are now in Jugo-Slavia to advance on Budapest without delay. Otherwise it appears to us that both the Czecho-Slovakian and the German–Austrian Governments will surely fall."[109]

Coolidge also demanded intervention. Lloyd George was perhaps the only firm opponent of a military solution in Paris, but he as well was influenced in that direction even by his more moderate advisers. R. W. Seton-Watson who had visited the theatre of war in Slovakia thought that the Szeged government being no better than the Budapest one was the chief problem. He recommended the following course:

"Middle course between Bolshevik policy and that of discredited old regime must be found ... If Entente will not send troops, Czech, Roumanian and Jugoslav troops should be allowed to act and be supplied as well as those of Admiral Koltchak."[110]

[108] U. S. Papers ... The Paris Peace Conference. Vol. VI, Washington 1946, p. 412.

[109] Hoover Institution, ARA (Paris Archives, Box 73; Arno Mayer quotes the letter from the Wilson papers. *Op. cit.*, p. 828.

[110] A copy of Seton-Watson's dispatch in National Archives M. 820, PPC, 530 roll.

At its meetings of June 9th and 10th the Council of Four had rejected a proposed general attack, rebuking the Czechoslovak and Rumanian prime ministers who had appeared in person to urge such a course, particularly the latter, arguing that the Rumanian attitude strengthened Bolshevism. The Great Powers obviously relied on the hope that the communication of the final frontiers would create a feeling of hopelessness amongst those who supported the national cause, thus isolating those who held out at the side of Bolshevism.

The establishment and communication of the final frontiers primarily favoured Czechoslovakia, while Yugoslavia, given the postponement of the establishment of the final frontier could continue to entertain hopes of being allowed to keep the coal mines around Pécs. The frontiers were to the disadvantage of Rumania, insofar as Prime Minister Brătianu, relying on the Treaty of Bucharest, had hoped for more than that, and though he accepted the decision he told Clemenceau that they would only evacuate the area east of the Tisza after the signing of the Peace Treaty. And yet Brătianu could not afford to overplay his feeling offended because his proposals to amend the frontier were not taken into consideration, while Czechoslovakia, as it were to make up for her pains, had the committee's draft line amended in her favour on the banks of the Ipoly. Brătianu was in no position to complain, since it had been Clemenceau who had after all defended Brătianu's aggressive policy against Wilson, thus securing the support of the Rumanian Army for his future plans.

Clemenceau could not have had his next step clearly in mind when sending the note. He was faced with the same questions as the Hungarian government: the reaction of German and Austrian public opinion to the peace conditions, the weakening, but still dangerous Western and Central European revolutionary movements, and additionally, the reaction of the Hungarian Soviet Republic to the ultimatum contained in the note. Could be that the Big Four wished to use the note as the legal basis of unavoidable intervention. Allen Dulles at least suggested this in his later summing-up of the role of the Clemenceau note. In his view it was considered natural in Paris that Béla Kun would reject the ultimatum one way or another and when, "to everyone's surprise, Béla Kun yielded to the order of the Conference and withdrew from Slovakia" and then demanded justice from Clemenceau when the Rumanian army did not evacuate the area east of the Tisza, "this put the Conference in an embarrassing position".[111]

Clemenceau had obviously calculated that, once the intransigent Soviet Republic was overthrown, the new Hungarian government would be granted the evacuation of eastern Hungary, an invitation to Paris and the

[111] National Archives PPC 864.00/18.

end of the blockade as a reward. That is why Brătianu's threats did not cause him anxiety. Until the Hungarian government received an invitation to Paris – that too was promised – Rumania could wait with the withdrawal of her forces. Rumania would only be confronted with the horns of a dilemma if a representative of the Soviet Republic went to Paris and signed the Peace Treaty, but there was no need to fear that eventuality.

Clemenceau's reckoning only proved sound inasmuch as his proposal once again broke up the unity of the united party. The failure of the June 15th rising in Vienna was a big blow for the Budapest communists who had placed their hopes in a world revolution. Following the forced confrontation a proletarian revolution in Austria looked highly unlikely, and the Czechoslovak election results on their part consolidated bourgeois-nationalist democracy.

The newly elected Party executive met to discuss the answer to Clemenceau. No minutes have survived, and memoirs contradict each other. Kunfi and others thought the fight meaningless, and were looking for a way out, that much is a fact. Communists and left social democrats opposed the retreat, and so did, for nationalist reasons, the Vanczák–Peyer group on the Right, since their offer to capitulate had been knocked back a mere fortnight earlier. Stromfeld, invited to attend, also opposed the idea of retreat. Finally, the leftist László Rudas was the only member of the Party leadership who voted against the compromise resolution which accepted withdrawal on principle.

Böhm stressed in his memoirs that it was "a decision on principles only. As regards implementation the Party leadership decided to empower the army command to stop fighting at a suitable moment, but, in order to gain time, and to allow for further concessions, the withdrawal was not ordered yet."[112] Kun, in his answering note, maintained that a cessation of hostilities had been ordered (this was not true), but could not be implemented because of attacks by the Czechoslovak army. True enough, Mittelhauser's attack on the sixteenth did not allow the Clemenceau ultimatum to expire, *both sides* thus wished to employ the days in which the notes were exchanged to improve their military position in a manner that could influence political decisions.

Kun also informed those in Paris that he had got in touch with the Rumanian and Czechoslovak High Commands to establish Mixed Commissions with the representatives of the Red Army which would establish the timetable of bilateral evacuation. The most ambiguous part of his reply concerned the most difficult question, that of the recognition of the

[112] Böhm, *op. cit.*, p. 472.

new frontiers. His note stressed the irreality of the established frontiers, but did not anywhere reject their recognition outright.[113]

This was, of course, the most crucial question an answer to which would have been the equivalent of destroying the morale of the Red Army. When answering the call to arms the working class mostly wanted to defend the new society, and not the old frontiers, for them, further fighting did not make sense as long as the social changes were allowed to survive within the new borders. Why die for frontiers when the world revolution was coming anyway, pulling down all barriers. The officers and the refugees argued the opposite: why should they fight if the Soviet Republic was ready to accept the new frontiers in order to survive? That's not what they were promised when they took the last troop train and left their families behind, and donned an officer's tunic without badges of rank„ which looked ridiculous to them, to fight in an army whose political objectives and spirit were alien to them.

On June 16th, and then on the 17th, Mittelhauser, using considerable forces, tried to take Léva, but the rested 4th Division that had arrived from the Tisza, and had taken up positions behind the line, chased him back with an unexpected attack. The 3rd Corps, however, had wasted its strength in the attacks of the previous days, and could only barely resist the enemy, who was employing fresh forces, so that despite the reinforcements, Rozsnyó was lost.

The proclamation, at Eperjes, on June 16th, of the Slovak Soviet Republic, was counterpointed by the firing of field-guns. This was the first attempt to create the workers' and peasants' state on Czechoslovak territory. It is up to Slovak historians in the first place to tell its story, the present object can only be to clarify the role of the Hungarian Soviet Republic in these events.

There is no doubt that the initiative came from Budapest. The Czech and Slovak section of the united party, relying on the idea of a world revolution, had recruited Red Army men and done 'agitprop' work in the ranks of the Czechoslovak Army for some time. After the Red Army had occupied larger Slovak inhabited areas, they had cooperated with Slovak soldiers in the Hungarian Red Army to help form local worker and peasant soviets. It was only after their successful operation that they thought of proclamining the Slovak Soviet Republic. In the words of M. Vietor, the Slovak historian, these temporary soviets, established with the aid of the Red Army "prepared the election of Soviets so quickly that, following the proclamation of the Slovak Soviet Republic, the Slovak Revolutionary Governing Council had an almost complete network at its

[113] Kun's cable dated June 16th is published in U. S. Papers . . . The Paris Peace Conference. Vol. VI, Washington 1946, p. 518.

disposal, and with the help of this network they started on the implementation of the dictatorship of the proletariat."[114]

The mass basis of the Slovak Soviet Republic was certainly weaker than that of her older Hungarian sister. The Czechoslovak Republic was much more able to satisfy national aspirations than the 1918 Hungarian Republic. There were only a small number of industrial workers in Eastern Slovakia, and the Czechoslovak Communist Party had not even taken shape yet. Just as there were many Jews amongst the people's commissars in Budapest, so there were many Hungarians in Kassa, though the majority were Czechs and Slovaks. On the other hand, there is no doubt that the local Slovak population played a decisive role. Lacking local initiative in March, they did not even attempt to create a similar Rumanian Soviet Republic in Eastern Hungary (around Nagyvárad) with large Rumanian rural population.

Chicherin, the Soviet Russian Commissar for Foreign Affairs had called on Béla Kun to ensure national self-determination for the Slovaks. Kun answered the same day, on June 9th: "All preparations have been made to proclaim a Slovak Soviet Republic."[115] By the time the proclamation occurred the situation had considerably changed. The withdrawal of the Red Army from Slovakia was already under consideration. Kun, however, weighed this against the hope of world revolution, and in this light this was certainly no reason to put off the proclamation of the Slovak Soviet Republic, the less so since A. Janousek, its chairman, a Czech himself saw the future of Slovakia as part of a socialist Czechoslovakia. Indeed, with considerable, and characteristic naivity Janousek approached T. G. Masaryk himself with this purpose in mind.

The evacuation of Slovakia was only finally decided on in the last days of June, when the situation showed that a continuation of the northern campaign was hopeless. The National Congress of Soviets had, however, already at its foreign policy debate of June 19th empowered the Governing Council to take the necessary action when needed.

The foreign affairs debate was preceded by an attempted offensive by the 5th Corps. The 8th Division carried out a brilliant crossing of the Zsitva and Nyitra, threatening Érsekújvár. On the 18th Mittelhauser asked Šrobár, the Minister of Slovak Affairs to leave Pozsony with his office, since he could not stop the Red Army. On the northern wing, however, the 11th Workers' Regiment, fighting at an altitude of about 1,800 feet exhausted itself and denied the order to attack Selmecbánya (Banska Stiavnica) since the fight promised to be tough. The regiment left the line against orders, cursing Kun and the war. Reserves were exhausted.

[114] Vietor, *op. cit.*, p. 80. More extensively in Martin Vietor, *Slovenska Sovietska Republika v r. 1919 (The 1919 Slovak Soviet Republic)*, Bratislava 1955.

[115] MMTVD Vol. 6/A, p. 697.

Fighting between June 16th and 19th thus showed that the balance of forces was roughly equal. The initial moral advantage of the Red Army was counter-balanced by the better reserves of the enemy who could reckon with outside help. In April and May impetuous attacks had produced successes for both sides. In June there were already tough armies that were facing each other; it proved impossible to turn the tables within a few days.

Soviet Russia was the last hope of the Soviet Republic. In a message on June 18th Lenin warned Kun against the Allies: "You are right to start negotiations with the Allies. They must be started and continued, every possibility must be exhausted to obtain a peace or at least a temporary cease fire, to give the people breathing space. But do not trust the Allies for a moment, they will trick you, wishing to gain time so that they can grab you by the throat later, and us as well."[116]

The warning was the essence. The cable shows Lenin was not opposed to negotiations on principle, but also that he did not, because he could not, promise any help. There was no mention of Russian Red Army victories, something Chicherin *e.g.* never omitted. His silence implied a warning. In the summer of 1919 the Hungarian Soviet Republic had to rely on its own strength alone, decisions had to be taken in the awareness of that. After six weeks' silence Lenin only addressed Kun personally again at the end of July' " . . . we are aware of Hungary's grave and dangerous situation . . . "[117]

It was a tough decision that Kun and the Congress of Soviets were faced with. There was as little hope of continuing the revolutionary war as of an honest compromise. The only thing to do was to tack while one could, hoping the wind would change. This was the essence of Kun's report, as against Leftist speakers, such as Szamuely and Pogány, who, as a matter of principle, thought of bargaining with the imperialists as a betrayal of the world revolution. Pogány went as far as arguing that a decision on the battle-field ought to be hurried, while Kun wanted to delay it, being opposed to Kunfi and Illés Mónus-Brandstein, the prophets of capitulation, as well, who thought that by giving up territory and accepting the new frontiers "the proletarian revolution and the domination of socialism could be saved".[118] Kunfi also argued that Paris would not talk to the Governing Council, thus, by implication, putting forward the idea of a social democratic government once again to negotiate peace, accepting the role of the Right which in those days, following its failure at the Party Congress, had beaten a retreat. Kunfi's was an intellectual capitulation to

[116] Lenin, *op. cit.*, Vol. 36, June 18th 1919.
[117] Lenin, *op. cit.*, Vol. 44.
[118] The minutes of the National Congress of Soviets, *op. cit.* Major speeches are also in MMTVD Vol. 6/B.

reformism, with which he in fact had never agreed, thus the crisis of Centrism in the Hungarian socialist movement.

The Congress unanimously accepted Kun's motion, giving a free hand to the Governing Council. The mood was more unambiguously revolutionary than at the Party Congress, and Kunfi, who became the target of indignation, was left out of the Governing Council. Quite a few veteran activists followed him, all those who did not believe in bourgeois democracy but were unable to stomach the consequences of the dictatorship of the proletariat. What lent their withdrawal importance, and tragic aspects, was that it expressed the mood of a large and important part of organized labour.

The majority of delegates did not seem to have been aware of the seriousness of the situation as either Kunfi or Kun. Long and often thrilling debates took place on the implementation of socialism, and the mistakes made, and in connection with Varga's excellent report on the economy. Numerous useful proposals were made. They demanded tougher measures against rich peasants and the requisition of their surplus crops; also an end to prohibition; action against careerists and counter-revolutionaries; more differentiation to be shown in peasant-policy; the replacement of landowners appointed as production commissars of their own estates; the restoration of the communal tax; the simplification of the centralized and bureaucratic provisioning network; increased support for artisans; a brake on rough anti-religious propaganda, etc.

Political differences showed most in the foreign policy debate, open manifestations of the Right were limited to a speech or two that met with disapproval. After debate on military questions and foreign policy, the draft constitution prepared under the direction of Zoltán Rónai was hotly debated and accepted. This was the second socialist constitution in world history. It laid down the power of the proletariat and public property in the means of production as basic principles, the rights and duties of working people, including the duty to work, as well as the right to work and the right to a pension of the disabled. Socialist state organization based on the soviet system was regulated in detail, and the right to the self-determination of nations was declared. The constitution used the name Socialist Federal Soviet Republic of Hungary, indicating that the country was ready to federate with every new soviet republic, as part of an 'international soviet republic'.

The Congress of Soviets was due to meet twice a year; between sessions the Central Federal Executive Committee was to be in charge.Around half of the hundred and fifty members of the latter were workers or trades union officials, a third professional men, officials and clerks, and though a third of the members were from the country, the number of peasants, who made up the majority of the population, was very small. At its first

meeting, on June 24th, the Committee elected the new Governing Council, Garbai continuing as president.

The new government was based on compromise. Neither Kunfi, nor Szamuely, were included. Close to half the people's commissars were left social democrats who, together with the communists, formed a large majority. Though included in the membership, the Right was not represented by its real leaders. Seemingly the Right was present, and then again it was not. Its withdrawal in fact meant the falling apart of the party, whose unity had up to then been maintained with great difficulty.

Events forced the premature closure of the Congress. Counter-revolutionary revolts and the fighting demanded a concentration of attention. Otto Korvin's Political Department of the Interior had revealed a whole series of counter-revolutionary conspiracies in Budapest. That of officers became the conspiratorial centre. They planned to obtain the support of Stromfeld and Haubrich, and once that was done they wanted to carry out an armed coup. The idea itself was rejected by both Haubrich and Stromfeld, and Major Hönig, in whom Haubrich put his trust, the commander of the Budapest Ironworkers' Reserve Division – later one of Horthy's generals – called off the action. Some of the young officers, left to their own devices, fearing that Haubrich would leave them in the lurch if their plans stood revealed, decided in despair to start a counter-revolutionary revolt.

Meanwhile, between June 18th and 24th, spontaneous counter-revolutionary risings took place, not in Transdanubia on this occasion, but in the Danube riparian area, between Kalocsa and Dunapentele. These found support among the landed peasantry, helped by the former gendarmes who had been kept on by the Red Guard. There, in the silent reaches of the Danube, midst lonely homesteads, where life had always been cheap, there was extraordinary cruelty which, at the same time, isolated the peasant husbandmen killers who mouthed religious slogans, from the poor. In Szekszárd several hundred, led by officers, attacked County Hall. Their suppression was made more difficult by the lack of confidence which local workers showed in the County *Directoire*. The latter, according to the investigation that followed, had turned 'bureaucratic' in its methods.

The Szekszárd counter-revolution was suppressed by a special detachment helped by local young workers. Szamuely's armoured train took the rails to Baja, fighting all the way. Nineteen counter-revolutionaries bearing arms were killed at Kecel, and forty-eight at Dunapataj. In this difficult situation, partly as a reprisal against the cruelty of those in revolt, partly in order to terrorize the opponents of the revolution, Szamuely also used rough methods that had not been in use before. These certainly achieved their immediate aims.

It was noticeable that the officer corps of the fighting forces on the battlefield made no attempt to revolt or to help those who did. The revolutionary militancy of the privates was largely responsible, as well as the determination of political commissars, but there was also a certain sense of national responsibility, a knowledge of the enemy they faced. Two memoranda addressed to the Governing Council – in Landler's absence – by Colonel Julier, acting in the name of the officer corps of the 3rd Corps, were fairly typical. Establishing the exhaustion of the army, and the demolishing effect of the Clemenceau note in those days when the majority of political commissars attended various congresses, he proposed that deserters be summarily dealt with, that the national flag be introduced, and above all he wanted a clear answer to the question whether or not the Soviet Republic proposed to accept the new frontiers.

The Governing Council was faced with a difficult decision. The request was the opposite to Kunfi's, and yet neither Kunfi nor the officers offered security against the other. If the Soviet Republic, being unable to count on a world revolution, placed itself on a national footing, the officer corps and the nationalist middle classes would once again find themselves at the crossroads, but such an undertaking promised no success. If the Soviet Republic stayed true to its international platform it would lose the support of the officer corps in a fight which, for the time being, looked hopeless. There was really no possibility to embark on a new direction, nor was there enough energy to find one. There was only one thing left: holding out along the road they had started on.

On June 24th gunboats on the Danube, flying the national colours, fired on the Soviet House, and that was the end of the flag question. The secrets of the June 24th counter-revolution will probably never be revealed. The organizer, Captain Lemberkovics, and some of his mates, were silenced for ever even before the counter-revolution was suppressed. There had to be someone who silenced them quicker than the courts of summary jurisdiction could have acted. For a long time the communists felt sure of Haubrich's guilt, some of the participants on the other hand, suspected the work of *agents provocateurs*. The investigation showed that although Haubrich did not take part, he knew about the conspiracy but he did not take it seriously. It is certain that he was more likely to cover up for, rather than persecute the guilty.

The rising was apparently well prepared. The guns of an artillery barrack gave the sign while the Budapest Workers' Soviet discussed economic questions, the gunboats appeared on the Danube, and the 'Empress Ludovika' military academy cadets occupied the international telephone exchange. The communist leaders did not panic, however. The law enforcement agencies were ready, the workers of Budapest and the

majority of the troops stood by the revolution, and order was restored by the morning.

At the meeting of the Central Executive Committee on June 25th the Left demanded exemplary punishment and increased powers for the security organs. The resolution passed showed determination but not even the sentences of the court of summary jurisdiction were carried out. True enough, once the revolts in Budapest and along the Danube were put down, order was largely restored, and no further similar attempts were made.

There was little change in the fighting. The command of the Red Army tried to produce decisive victories but the spirit of the soldiers was defensive, rather than offensive. The effect of genuine news, and of rumours, could be felt. Most successes were in Central Slovakia, but when the 8th Workers' Regiment were given the order to take Branyiszkó by assault, to open up the road to the Szepes region, they held a meeting and declared that they thought further sacrifices futile, since the Allies had anyway established the final frontiers. The regiment left its positions in marching order and retired behind the line. The assault was attempted next day, using other troops, but it failed.

The falling apart of some of the workers' regiments – those who had no stomach for the fighting simply travelled home – was mainly the result of a change of mood in the hinterland. Defeatist propaganda, successful in a number of factories, and the absence of regular supplies, created doubts amongst the soldier-workers. On the 23rd the wives of soldier-workers from Salgótarján demonstrated in front of the Town Hall and demanded "the demobilization of the regiment within 24 hours or else the immediate conscription of everybody between 18 and 45".[119] Béla Kun himself put in an appearance at the railway machine-works 'wives' meeting' which preceded the above decision of the 8th Regiment, recruited from the works, by two days. At the same time the army command had to issue special orders to stop twelve to sixteen year old boys joining the fighting forces, but the growing administrative, public supplies and cultural apparatus issued too many reserved occupation certificates to men around twenty. The burden on large factories was too great, and the training and recruitment of workers in the provinces and in smaller workshops was often neglected. The weight of workers' regiments within the army declined, and this strengthened the position of officers who wished to switch to a nationalist line.

On June 22nd the German Reichstag after a stormy debate, agreed to the signing of the Peace Treaty with a bare two thirds majority. Paris was

[119] Hajdu, *A Magyarországi Tanácsköztársaság, op. cit.*, p. 299.

no longer tied down by the German question. On June 23rd the Soviet government received an ultimatum from Maréchal Foch, the Allied C-in-C, ordering, in the name of the Peace Conference, the cessation of hostilities by the morning of the 24th, and the withdrawal of the Red Army from Czechoslovak territory by nightfall on the 28th. Foch let them know that, should he be left without an affirmative answer by the 23rd, he will presume the rejection of his request.

Böhm, in his answer, accepted the cease-fire offer. He did not react to the time-limit of the withdrawal, confining himself with reference to the Clemenceau note to requesting the despatch of commissioners to establish the precise frontiers, thus by implication accepting withdrawal to the new national border. At the same time he asked the Peace Conference: "... what guarantees they offered that the Royal Rumanian forces would evacuate the territory indicated in the Clemenceau note"[120] since Rumanian units had blown up all the usable bridges over the Tisza at dawn on the 21st.

There were weighty arguments in support of the acceptance of a cease-fire. The Red Army obviously needed rest, and the home situation as well demanded an armistice. In Paris President Wilson packed his bags now that the German question had been solved, and the reins were thus fully in Clemenceau's hands who determinedly opposed any sort of negotiation with the Soviet Republic. One wonders, however, why, having given an affirmative answer, they did not try to postpone the withdrawal, at least until Clemenceau demanded it forcefully, for the sake of the Slovak Soviet Republic, if for no other reason.

There is no doubt that the June 24th counter-revolution hastened a decision. The confrontation between the government and the officer corps, and between the supporters of the revolution and the Right, had become permanent. The Right, seeing the waning enthusiasm of the working class, became bolder. This was all the more dangerous since the working class, far from desiring the failure of the Soviet system, did not even reckon with that possibility, and therefore did not pay much heed to warnings by the communists.

June 24th saw the armistice taking effect. At the same time Kun asked Clemenceau for guarantees once again that the Rumanian army would evacuate Hungarian territory east of the Tisza. Péter Ágoston, who was negotiating in Bratislava, expecting Clemenceau's answer, asked for the cease-fire to be extended. General Pellé, the French Commander in Chief of the Czechoslovak army, was only ready to do so up to the thirtieth, refusing to discuss the problem of Eastern Hungary. The Rumanian government, at that time, did not even answer the question of the Soviet

[120] MMTVD Vol. 6/B, p. 307.

Republic, but the suspicion seemed reasonable that, if they were allowed to do so, they would stay at least till the harvest was completed.

On June 29th the Governing Council accepted Kun's report on the Party Executive resolution of the previous day. It accepted the position of evacuating Czechoslovak territory up to the line of demarcation, with the justification that according to army reports the war could no longer be carried on.

When the Central Executive Committee met on the 30th to approve the decision the withdrawal was already under way. Ágoston and Mittelhauser had settled on a 4 km wide no man's land. Though the agreement only had military relevance, the Czechoslovak right to administer the evacuated territory was recognized. It was interesting that Kun, on the 30th, while presenting an unrealistically optimist picture of the foreign policy situation nevertheless stressed that "what prompted me to share this point of view *(to accept withdrawal)* was not the position of the international revolution, but disorganization at home".[121] Home policy reasons were also given priority by Szamuely and Pór, the other two communists who spoke in the debate. Kun realistically stated the lessons of the counter-revolutions. Those, he said, who straightened the rode to capitulation will be disappointed, together with the petty bourgeoisie since "the events of the last few days have shown that in Hungary the choice lay between two alternatives only: the firmest and most severe reaction and monarchism, and the dictatorship of the proletariat".[122]

The possible effects on the Red Army of the intention to withdraw were already known when the June 30th resolution was passed. Some units protested, others, owing to their exhaustion, were glad of the cease-fire though the loss of the fruit of their fighting hurt them. The two feelings together had a demoralizing effect. Those recruited in Eastern Hungary hoped they would be able to return home. According to Böhm, between the sessions, Landler repeatedly raised the possibility of rejecting the ultimatum and consequently Böhm promptly offered to hand over the command to him, but the opposite position of the majority came out on top in the end.

The retreat was ordered and disciplined. More than half the area occupied in the course of the northern campaign had to be evacuated. The effect of giving up the fruit of heroic fighting had an unambiguous effect on the officer corps. As far as they were concerned the rejection of the Vix note had raised the Soviet Republic above the old ruling classes that had been ready to give in. The idea that the withdrawal was to be the price for a breathing space to put down the counter-revolution – includ-

[121] *Op. cit.*, p. 370.
[122] *Op. cit.*, p. 372.

ing the contemplated occupation of Szeged – naturally did not attract them. According to Géza Lakatos even Stromfeld said: "I fought the Czechs and Rumanians, but I will not carry on a war against counter-revolutionaries!"[123] Not that he thought of himself as one of them, as Chief of Staff he acted against their treachery, but the retreat faced him with a serious dilemma, and passivity was the only way out for a man who would not budge from what he thought right. When he left, a number of officers followed his example.

[123] *A bolsevizmus Magyarországon, op. cit.*, p. 300. The author of these words, Captain Géza Lakatos, was on Stromfeld's staff in the High Command of the Red Army, later a three-star general, and the head of the government which unsuccessfully tried to surrender to the Allies in the autumn of 1944.

THE SITUATION IN JULY AND THE TISZA OFFENSIVE

In July the Soviet Republic obtained a breathing space of three weeks. There was no fighting, and no counter-revolutionary revolt, but everyone knew that this calm was one, preceeding a great storm, the attack against the last position held by the revolution in Central Europe was in preparation. This knowledge governed the leadership and every action on their part was marked by the race with time, and a snatching at straws in despair. Many of their actions are therefore difficult to explain by logic, and this goes not only for the fatal Tisza offensive. Thus, though none thought that the Red Army would less be needed, Böhm gave the peasant-soldiers harvesting leave, and the Governing Council employed some of the workers' regiments on food requisitioning duties.

It was a sign of exhaustion and fluster that not only the signing of the Pozsony minutes, but the retreat itself were completed with unjustified haste by the beginning of July. The proclamation the Governing Council addressed to the soldiers announcing the retreat, more or less admitted to the acceptance of the new frontiers, but promised that "we will not give up an inch where the people speak Hungarian".[124] The Rumanians expressed themselves much more clearly. Starting on June 29th they repeatedly expressed their intention to keep the area up to the Tisza under their occupation. It was from the world press that Kun learned about the decision of the Bucharest government not to answer his note since it did not recognise the Bolshevist regime. There was no question of a withdrawal of forces until such a time as Hungary had a government which the victors were prepared to recognise. Brătianu only answered Clemenceau's June 13th note on July 2nd, saying they would only evacuate the area east of the Tisza after the Red Army was demobilised. He referred to the need to secure the line against Soviet Russia, and to some Hungarian gentlemen, who had truly sent delegations to Rumanian commands asking them to continue the occupation.

In the state of expectation the Governing Council found itself in the first third of July, it endeavoured to make good some mistakes of the

[124] MMTVD Vol. 6/B, p. 368.

revolution, proposing reforms that were important, but too late. At the July 4th meeting Pogány and Nyisztor proposed that some of the 150–300 acre farms be divided up amongst the landless so as to liven up the class struggle in villages. Kun said that it was vitally important to take measures that noticeably improved the lot of the working class. The meat ration should be made larger, and stocks of clothes, shoes and underwear ought to be found and distributed amongst working class families.

At least a start was made on uniformizing multicoloured bank-notes, and a new taxation system was worked out. Forceful measures were taken to improve supplies, but this, because of more insistent requisitions, met with the powerful resistance of the farmers who kept livestock. Horses could only be conscripted with the help of the soldiery. The mood of villages improved somewhat when, after a lot of sterile debate, the drinking of half a liter of wine was permitted, something that was unavoidable anyway because of the harvest.

The government also endeavoured to use this time to clean up the state apparatus. A purge was carried out at the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, at the Red Guard, higher military commands, and at local soviets. Many villages in Northern Hungary liberated during the northern campaign elected their soviets in July. The *Vörös Újság (Red Paper)* started a campaign to unmask counter-revolutionary activities and corruption. The government and the press devoted their attention to the consolidation at home of the dictatorship, and general improvements at a time when there was not much realism in dealing with questions of detail. Meanwhile the withdrawal of the Red Army was concluded without incident, and up to July 10th it looked as if the Governing Council did not bother its head about the position of the area beyond the Tisza.

For a fortnight, between July 4th and 18th Julier was in charge of the Red Army. Böhm who spent less time on military matters than on political solutions as he imagined them and then actually resigned as Commander in Chief appointed Julier Chief of Staff after Stromfeld's departure. Julier was the fatal figure of this fatal month. As a trained K. und K. staff officer he had absorbed too much of the Austrian–Habsburg spirit to be capable of independent political or strategic decisions. Under Landler's control he had good work carrying out Stromfeld's ideas. Finding himself at the head of the army he automatically took out his predecessor's files, and carrying on from there, he prepared a plan of campaign for the liberation of the area beyond the Tisza. Julier had unambiguously opposed the Soviet Republic since the decision was made on the withdrawal, but neither could he accept the adventurous overtures of Gömbös and his associates, nor even force his fatal plan of campaign onto the Governing Council.

There were more determined 'Whites' than Julier in the General Staff at Gödöllő, but they as well were very cautious after June 24th. Nevertheless, as the initiative gradually slipped out of the hands of the Governing Council, the power of the General Staff automatically grew. It was typical of the former that when Béla Szántó, the Commissar for Defense demanded forceful action against deserters and draft dodgers, Dovcsák determinately opposed him, and the end was no decision at all. Others objected to the improvement of the victualling of the Red Army, insisting that it was truly well fed, and public supplies occasioned a lot of anxiety by mid-July. Poor women had looted the warehouses of the 'proletarian commodity exchange' in a number of places, which naturally had not offered industrial commodities in 'exchange' to proletarians, but to farmers who had crop surpluses.

In the meanwhile Horthy issued leaflets calling on Red Army men to desert the colours, while others, being printed in Budapest, proposed that a vote be taken in the factories: did the workers want a dictatorship, or a social-democratic government that would include Buchinger, Garami, Peidl and Weltner? It proved possible to arrange such a vote in a factory or two, but what was even more important was that Weltner and Peidl were not willing to disclaim all connection with the leaflet. The counter-revolutionaries did not come out into the open in Budapest, they placed their hopes in splitting the working class. There had only been one bourgeois demonstration, the general meeting of the journalists' organization where they held a debate on the freedom of the press, but even this meeting ended in a split.

The withdrawal from political life of those democrats who had supported the Soviet Republic, was completed in those days by the departure of Mihály Károlyi. He had tried, without success, to help a social-democratic administration to power, based on Kunfi's sort of ideas. "There was no sense in aimlessly sticking around, waiting for the victory of the counter-revolution", he wrote.[125] With the departure of centrist social democrats (Kunfi, Böhm) and the left-wing democrats of Károlyi's party, a broadly based process ran its course amongst the liberal-democratic professional men and the petty bourgeoisie. As the international position of the revolution turned increasingly hopeless and Slovakia was evacuated, following the bloody suppression of revolts they did not sympathise with, they fed on rumours and groats, saw little sense in a Red War, and turned their backs on the Soviet Republic. It was all the easier for technocrats, officers and social democratic leaders to leave positions that had become a burden since, after five years, the first summer

[125] Mihály Károlyi, *Az új Magyarországért (For a New Hungary)*, (selected writings, edited by György Litván) Budapest 1968, p. 318.

had arrived when families could go on vacation together, and all those who could afford it went off to Lake Balaton.

Early in July the relationship of various trends in the social democratic movement to each other was obscure. Böhm invited their representatives, Pogány, Landler, Weltner and Haubrich, to Gödöllő on July 5th. He had first asked for the support of the Allies through Lieutenant Colonel Romanelli, head of the Italian Mission in Budapest – for a plan the essence of which was a military coup that was to replace the communists and establish a social democratic government. The meeting made it clear that the former left social democrats, represented by Pogány and Landler, would hold out at the side of the communists if the united party should break up. The Right was not united either. Haubrich, who feared the communists, and Böhm, trusted that the Allies would be happy to cooperate with a social democratic government, Weltner, and the People's Commissar for Justice Ágoston, then in Vienna, predicted that the social democrats would go down with proletarian power, and the White terror would come to the top. After the failure of the meeting Böhm resigned his position as Commander in Chief, and was appointed Minister to Vienna at his request.

Haubrich did not drop the idea of a military coup. He negotiated with Julier, and personally called on the British Military Mission in Vienna, asking for an Allied occupation to further his plans. Böhm also negotiated with the British, and with Bauer, the Austrian State Secretary for Foreign Affairs. The only result, not desired by the Hungarians who initiated these contacts, was that those who supported intervention got the upper hand in Paris. They recognised that neither the social democrats, nor the counter-revolutionaries, nor the 3,000 strong National Army of the Szeged government would be able to overthrow the Soviet Republic at home. Allied policy in Hungary was based on two things considered undesirable: they did not want Bolshevism, and they did not want the Habsburgs back in any shape or form. Over and above this the composition of a Hungarian government was largely a matter of indifference to them, as long as it recognised private property, and gave way to their demands. If Böhm or Haubrich could seize power they would recognise them just as they'd recognise the Szeged Government if they occupied Budapest. There was no hope of the latter, that is why they rejected the proposal of the Italians who now centred their Hungarophile policy on Szeged rather than Budapest, all the more so since their Allies had told them that they would not tolerate any more arms supplies to the Red Army. Finally, in Paris, they became reconciled to the fact that the revolution could only be put down by an Allied occupation of Budapest, then they would at least chose the government that suited them. Their sympathies shifted from the social democrats to a more forceful military dictatorship. "Something like Kolchak", Gregory recommended early in July, urging intervention every day

because "Kun is stronger than ever and will continue to gain strength so long as the Entente takes no decisive action . . . "[126] Every historical situation needs its own men, indeed brings them to the surface, so do revolutions, participants however more or less go on thinking in the categories of the past. The Western Allies had fought the reactionary Habsburg Monarchy, hating its leadership, and they were glad to see a democratic government in its place. They had seen Michael Károlyi as someone who put an end to reaction, later they wondered if he did not open the gates to Bolshevism. The victorious powers needed a system in Hungary which give way to them, while showing no mercy to the Bolsheviks, and though they had to overcome their antipathy to Horthy, Bethlen, and Teleki, they managed. To be honest, it was not easy. In July they still took no notice of the Szeged Government, but six months had barely passed and they no longer insisted on what they could have insisted on, that the Hungarian government invited to sign the Peace Treaty should have democrats and social democrats amongst its members. In July 1919 it was hard work for the British to persuade Böhm to talk to Bethlen, six months later no one could persuade Bethlen to talk to Böhm.

Meanwhile the situation had further deteriorated. The social democrats were angry with the communists who, in a hopeless situation, and with doctrinaire stubbornness, insisted on the dictatorship of the proletariat in a besieged fortress. The communists did not trust the social democratic leaders, and with good reason. Open attacks started, calling Szamuely and the law enforcement agencies to account, and the communists were busy reorganising their party. Szamuely wanted to start a paper under the title *Kommunista (Communist)* to criticise compromisers and traitors, as Marat had done. An extreme left conspiracy with obscure aims was directed against Kun, which ended when Kun, at the hand of a few palpable examples, showed that he, the trustee of the world revolution, firmly claimed the right to absolutely dispose over the lives of his comrades.

On July 10th the Governing Council discussed the General Staff's plan for a crossing of the Tisza. Since there was no hope of a withdrawal of the Rumanian forces they decided – after taking a last formal diplomatic step – to liberate territories adjudicated to Hungary by force. Nothing occurred in either the foreign policy or the military situation to justify this undoubtedly misguided action. Success would only have been an excuse for intervention. The only possible argument in favour was preemption, anticipating the enemy's strike, thus upsetting his plans. Rattigan, the British minister in Bucharest, wired to London: "Béla Kun

[126] Hoover Institution, ARA (Paris Archives) Box 73. Gregory's reports dated the end of June and early July.

appears to have realised, Allies have at length decided to deal with him and has evidently resolved to get in first blow."[127]

The crossing of the Tisza was also designed to alleviate the difficult situation at home. They wanted the crop being harvested east of the river, and there were psychological aspects as well. Waiting as if condemned to death, in a dark cell, proved unbearable for the government and Julier.

European trades unions organized a protest strike for July 20th and 21st in support of the Russian and Hungarian Soviet republics. The Executive Committee of the Comintern addressed an appeal to the workers of the world asking them to assist the demonstration. The press of the Soviet Republic suggests that they hoped for a 'world strike' on a scale that would tie the hands of the Allied generals. They put their hope in Rumanian revolutionary movements as well. The June railway strike was hardly over, and the refusal of orders was common in the Rumanian army. Just before the Tisza crossing the Rumanian garrison had mutinied in several places, including Máramarossziget (Sighetul Marmaţiei), Debrecen and Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia).[128]

And yet the crossing of the Tisza was an act of desperation. The Soviet Republic had nothing to lose – that is the only possible explanation. Though one cannot calculate things with precision in history it is certain that, without the Tisza crossing, the end result would have been the same, though delayed by a week or two.

On the day of the crossing, the front line strength of the Red Army was two thirds that of the enemy, who, what's more, disposed over large reserves. Additionally the tightening of the blockade had increased the shortage of ammunition and a fair number of experienced officers had left their posts. Julier nevertheless argued in favour of the attack. A success would have further increased the weight and influence of the General Staff, and failure would lead to the speedy owerthrow, hoped for by himself and his associates, of the Soviet Republic.

On July 11th Kun addressed another note to Clemenceau asking him to see to it that his promise that the area east of the Tisza would be evacuated, was given effect to. Any illusions regarding Clemenceau were dispersed by the answer. "The Peace Conference cannot discuss any matter with you whilst you do not carry out the conditions of the Armistice."[129] This pretty debatable reference was to the demobilisation of the Red Army. This was not the essence. Clemenceau himself told his allies that "Béla Kun has right on his side".[130] Lloyd George said in a

[127] PRO FO 371 Vol. 3515.

[128] Gheorghe Unc, *Die Solidarität der Werktätigen Rumaniens mit der proletarischen Revolution in Ungarn*, Bucharest 1970.

[129] U. S. Papers . . . The Paris Peace Conference, Vol. VII, Washington 1946, p. 121.

[130] A. D. Low, *op. cit.*, p. 79 and Arno Mayer, *op. cit.*, p. 839.

confidential letter that, if the Hungarians agree to disarm the Red Army, nothing could stop the Rumanians crossing the Tisza. This had no influence whatever on the intentions of the Big Four.

Freeman-Williams who had thought it advisable to leave Budapest quickly after the Party Congress since he feared that the leaders of the Right he had been in touch with would be arrested, in his reports clearly urged that Budapest be occupied, since he saw no other way of overthrowing the Soviet Republic. Colonel Cuninghame, sharing the view of the French command, asked for a nine division strong Allied force to pacify Hungary. After President Wilson's departure, Hoover declared himself in favour of intervention, in the name of the American delegation, and the Foreign Office that had sung a different tune earlier, acceded to the military opinion, arguing that, the German Peace Treaty having been signed, there was no great risk involved in intervention. In a message "to the King and the War Cabinet" sent on July 9th Arthur Balfour, the Foreign Secretary, expressed himself as follows regarding further delays: "It is a public profession of impotence by Allies, which will convince every recalcitrant State, small or big, that we may be defied or ignored with impunity. It will leave Hungary as a focus for Bolshevik propaganda; and commit Béla Kun to contrive with Lenin what mischief he pleases . . . "[131] He proposed the immediate disarmament of the Red Army, making use of Rumanian, Czechoslovak and French forces. At this stage the government in Belgrade offered one division. Lloyd George once again wondered when the Rumanians, if they entered Budapest, would move out again, but on July 11th the Council of the Peace Conference entrusted Franchet d'Esperey with the solution of the Hungarian question.

On one matter only did the Peace Conference show itself favourable to the Soviet Republic; it rejected the idea of supporting the Szeged Government. After the suppression of the long protest strike of the Szeged workers, the Szeged Government only owed its survival to the French Command on which it became totally dependent. Admiral Troubridge, Freeman-Williams' superior officer, called on Gyula Károlyi to make room for a democratic government acceptable in Paris. This was formed on July 12th, as headed by Dezső P. Ábrahám, who belonged to the right wing of what had been Michael Károlyi's Independence Party, but he could not obtain the support of the social democrats or democratic forces. All he could do in the interests of democracy was to include a Jew in his government, and leave out Horthy. The Great Powers refused to talk to Ábrahám, but in turn they allowed Horthy to organize the National Army as their Commander in Chief, preparing the armed forces of the counter-

[131] PRO FO 371 Vol. 3515.

revolution. Ábrahám's government was only a screen for Horthy and his officers. Horthy's lot obtained the support of a number of senior Red Army officers, who not only supplied Vienna and Szeged with news, but were also getting ready to take Horthy's side when the opportunity offered, with all troops whom they could persuade to follow suit.

Meanwhile the Red Army hastened preparations to cross the Tisza. On the 13th the General Staff issued orders for a crossing at dawn on July 20th. The original plan had to be modified when it turned out that the Red Army only had 56,000 men available, out of a paper strength of 280,000, partly owing to exhaustion, and partly owing to the division of forces, and sabotage by some commanders. A total of 87,000 men reported in Budapest as a result of the conscription laws, but 58,000 were found unfit, sick or in weapon industry, or simply unwilling to fight and securing a doctor's help and only a part of the rest joined the colours. The position was worse in the provinces, with the exception of one or two towns, like Salgótarján whose Reserve Workers' Regiment was moved to the Tisza. Such good results were counterbalanced by the sabotage mentioned: intact units, fully equipped for fighting, were kept in Transdanubia without fighting duties.

The first plan had a wide front in mind, the second only contemplated a narrow one, giving strength solely to the 1st Corps to strike the principal blow at Szolnok. The 80th International brigade was possibly sacrificed on purpose, being given the objective, which much exceeded its strength, of crossing at Poroszló, and proceeding to take Debrecen. The central crossing of the 1st Corps was to be covered only by the 2nd Division, crossing in the south, at Csongrád, and the 3rd Corps attacking in the north along the Tokaj–Nyíregyháza line. The plan was not bad if the 3rd Corps had really had the strength of a corps, but there was nothing like that. The Chief of Staff, Lieutenant Colonel Géza Schwarz, rang up Julier, his former chief, at the last moment, expressing his disbelief, and refusing to carry out the plan. Julier showed signs of confusion, he could not bluff a trained fellow officer, as he had bluffed Landler and the Governing Council, and he quickly agreed that the Tokaj Corps should carry out a demonstration only, for the time being. As a result the unsuspecting 1st Corps was in danger of being encircled all the more easily by the Rumanian command who were familiar with the Hungarian plan, the more heroically they advanced and departed from the Tisza.

The Tisza campaign started in an atmosphere of treason and uncertainty. Intelligence work on both sides was facilitated by the 'class war nature' of the fight and also by the citizenship problems of the officer corps of the old Austro–Hungarian Monarchy. Connections between hostile general staffs were too good, and the Anti-Bolshevist Committee and officer deserters also did their bit. The value of intelligence reports

was however lessened by continuous changes in plans, and 'retouched' reports.

In Paris, on July 17th, the foreign ministers discussed Foch's plans. He reckoned he could confront the 150,000 strong Red Army with 220,000 men, which he thought sufficient if the encircling attack was carried out under a unified command. The Italian Foreign Minister proposed the use of the P. Ábrahám Government, but this was rejected because of Balfour's doubts and Beneš's protests. The plans were submitted to the Great Power governments, but the Tisza offensive had started meanwhile.

At dawn on July 20th the Red Army crossed the Tisza at Tokaj, Szolnok, and south of Csongrád, under cover of a barrage of three hundred guns. The crossing was successful everywhere, and the enemy retreated, abandoning several field-guns and other war material. Encouraged by the day's successes, an order was issued for the international brigade to cross, and for the 3rd Corps to occupy Nyíregyháza. Joy was premature. There was strength enough to overcome the two Rumanian divisions drawn up along the Tisza, the bulk of the Rumanian forces was however defensively deployed at depth, and their rested major forces were only thrown into battle against a Red Army exhausted by its successes, a number of days later. Strength and reserves were lacking to bring this daring attack to a successful conclusion.

On the day of the attack, counting on a 'world-wide' strike, the united party addressed a dramatic appeal to the proletarians of the world: "We rise like a lonely rock in the imperialist tide that floods us. Lonely but free . . . We did not believe for a moment that the imperialist boyars would withdraw their troops . . . we know that the days of our enemy are counted . . . "[132]

Instead of a 'world-wide' strike, general strikes were indeed held in a number of countries, in Austria, in Yugoslavia, in numerous towns in Rumania, principally in Bucharest, in Kolozsvár (Cluj) and the Zsil (Jiu) Valley too, thought the Rumanian socialist party leadership had expressly prohibited it for the area of Transylvania. The strike was successful in a number of Scandinavian countries, and things got moving in Germany, Poland and Bulgaria. Results were however minimal in a number of countries that were important for the Soviet Republic, such as Czechoslovakia, and primarily Great Britain and France. In France the government made important concessions at home to secure the withdrawal of the strike notice. Italy was the only country among the Allies, in which the strike succeeded, but as Italy did not take part in the intervention, this lessened its importance. The absence of a world-wide strike, following exaggerated expectations, led to a feeling of depression in Hungary.

[132] MMTVD Vol. 6/B, p. 486.

More bad news arrived on July 21st. The Peace Conference, reversing an earlier decision, allotted Western Hungary (Burgenland) to Austria. Béla Kun recommended that the Governing Council reject this decision and demand a plebiscite. At that time the joy at the successful Tisza crossing was still felt, and the hopes placed in the workers of the West were still alive.

Böhm had already drawn the consequences of the relative ineffectiveness of the big strike on the day of the offensive. At that time the British and Italian missions still thought an agreement with the Social Democrats to be important, while the French had kept out of the negotiations, and Halstead had been ordered by the State Department to act likewise. Cuninghame and Böhm agreed on July 23rd that there would first be a Böhm–Garami–Ágoston–Haubrich regime, to be followed by a coalition that included the bourgeois parties, and elections. Böhm naturally did not inform Kun about the true objectives of his negotiations, and yet it was not Kun, but Böhm, who fell into a trap. Cuninghame and Borghese, for Italy, had indeed come to an agreement with him but their governments, and the Peace Conference, looked on these talks as informatory only, which committed them to nothing. The Great Powers profited, since, as a result of their encouragement, the Social Democrat leaders now systematically sought capitulation, acting against their own interests. The days of the Soviet Republic were counted anyway, the social democrats were important to the victors as long as the Workers' Regiments and the Red Guard were armed. Following the collapse of the Red Army the interest of the Allies, Great Britain in the first place, was switched to Bethlen and his associates.

Böhm suffered disappointment in other respects as well. It was clear to the Peidl–Peyer group that the 'trades union' government must draw a line between itself and the 'sins' of the revolution, there was therefore, no room in it for either former people's commissars or Jews. Peyer and his lot felt so sure of their position that they convened a trades union congress, where a new Trades Union Council was elected, whose membership, in its large majority, consisted of non-political union officials. All such plans however collapsed because of events on the battlefield.

What happened beyond the Tisza up to July 24th was largely the joint consequence of the distribution of forces and Julier's plan of campaign. The crossing had been a success and boldly moving forward they had taken Szentes and Hódmezővásárhely, and reached Karcag. After the experiences of the occupation the people welcomed them warmly everywhere. Following the first stronger counterattack, however, the 2nd Division evacuated Hódmezővásárhely. A day sufficed to form a local workers' soviet, and not much more was needed to round up its fifty-six members, and put them up against a wall after the town was lost. The

citizenry was filled with fear, depression and anger. This could have been a warning for the High Command. At Tokaj the 3rd Corps only cautiously put out advance guard feelers, but the 1st Corps lost touch with its wings at the Tisza, and on the 24th the centre did not hold when outnumbered three times over, they were beaten into a hasty retreat. This was the day of the tragedy of the volunteers from abroad in the international brigade as well. They could not hold the line against a much stronger enemy and without artillery or ammunition. The blood of almost a thousand internationalists dyed the river Tisza red that day. The international brigade was abandoned by its officers but in the south the 2nd Division, led in person by its commanding officer, once again took Szentes by assault, only to be forced to retreat by greater numbers approaching from every direction.

By the twenty-fifth the tragic consequences of defeat were clear. The majority of the troops continued the unequal struggle, but there was no decisiveness left in the divided Governing Council, or the General Staff which, freed of all political control, went its own way. They were unable to minimise the scale of the catastrophe by concentrating forces. The General Staff gave up the game. The Tokaj 3rd Corps, getting ready to attack was given the order to withdraw to the western bank during the night, and the 1st Corps, left on its own east of the Tisza, began to disintegrate.

On the 25th Böhm, Peyer and Weltner met the heads of the British and the Italian missions in Vienna. Böhm still misunderstood the situation. He explained to Cuninghame that it would be easier to get rid of the communists if the Rumanian counter-attack proved successful. He urged Peyer to wait, being unable to see that time was working against him. Böhm and his associates could not then have lengthened the days of the dictatorship of the proletariat anyway, even if they wanted to, but if the Red Army and the Soviet system had remained intact, the Allies might have been satisfied with a social democratic government. Those who were playing for a fall were cutting the ground away under their own feet. There could be no agreement since the Great Power foreign ministers, meeting in Paris on the 25th and 26th to discuss the reports from Vienna, were not willing to promise anything to anybody in the changed military situation. On the 26th the Peace Conference issued a declaration which was in effect an appeal to overthrow the Soviet Republic, but there was no reference to the negotiations, that is Böhm and his men were dropped. Cuninghame, however, got them to believe the opposite.

According to the declaration, the Governing Council does not represent the Hungarian people, it "has not only broken the armistice to which Hungary was pledged, but is at the moment actually attacking a friendly and Allied Power." Therefore " . . . if the blockade is to be removed . . . if

peace is to be settled it can only be done with a Government which represents the Hungarian people . . . " and carries out all the demands of the Peace Conference. Finally, without even mentioning the promise, contained in the Clemenceau note to evacuate the area east of the Tisza, it established that " . . . all foreign occupation of Hungarian territory . . . will cease as soon as the terms of the armistice have, in the opinion of the Allied Commander-in-Chief, been satisfactorily complied with."[133] Meanwhile the Allied Commander-in-Chief organized a stab in the back of the retreating Red Army using French and Yugoslav forces for the purpose.

By July 26th all but a narrow bridgehead at Szolnok of the area east of the Tisza was once again in the enemy's hands. The Czechoslovak army, lacking any sort of excuse, began to occupy the neutral zone laid down in an agreement signed a bare three weeks earlier.

On July 27th the Rumanian army was given the order to cross the Tisza. Time for preparations was needed, so the Red Army was also given three days' respite to organize the defence of the Tisza line. On paper the situation was more favourable than at the time of the attack. A topographic feature had to be defended, and the supply-sources were closer. In another political situation, with a less exhausted army, one might have been able to hold up the attack, at least until things started moving at the other intervention-fronts. But Budapest could only have been defended this time if the working class as a whole had been mobilized, and the factories closed down, and even then only with small hopes of lasting success. The fact is that news of negotiations in Vienna, the trust which leading social democrats put in Cuninghame, and the hope that some of the social gains at least could be saved by the resignation of the Soviet Government, threw doubt from the start on the possible reaction of the exhausted working class. Leading social democrats had not got people to understand what they did not understand themselves, that the resignation of the Governing Council did not mean that there was no need to defend the Tisza, and Budapest, if they wanted to save socialism, or democracy, or at least the relative freedom the labour movement enjoyed before 1914.

On the 27th the outnumbered two divisions left at Szolnok bridgehead withdrew as well. Disintegration continued behind the lines while Szamuely, the chairman of the 'Hinterland Commission' who had been quietly removed, supervised proletarian children from Budapest spending their holiday on Lake Balaton. Béla Kun was with the army. His car crossed the last Szolnok Tisza bridge when the man sitting at his side was killed by gunfire. Then, in Budapest, he addressed soldiers moving from Transdanubia to the Tisza, and he answered Lenin, who, following the Paris

[133] U. S. Papers . . . The Paris Peace Conference, Vol. VII, pp. 321–322.

proclamation, anxiously asked for information. Kun's words allow one to feel his despair.

"I fear that, in the near future, the Rumanians and the Czechs will carry out a concentric attack, and that would mean the end for us . . . I consider it a sign of the complete absence of cooperation that it could happen that Rumanian forces moved here from Bessarabia could beat us . . . May I remind you that our territory is so small that there is no place to retreat to."[134] Kun must have had a very rosy view of the situation in the Ukraine, where, Poltava having fallen, Kiev had to be defended. His fear of the six Czechoslovak divisions drawn up to attack Hungarian frontier guards on August 3rd was all the more realistic. Ágoston reported to Kun on the Vienna negotiations. He must have told that Peyer's lot informed Cuninghame that a 'purely' social democratic government would not be able to maintain law and order, and since they wanted to form an alliance with the bourgeoisie they did their best to rid themselves of Böhm and other, similarly 'compromised' people's commissars. Böhm's position finally started to wobble when Otto Bauer gave up the direction of Austrian foreign affairs for good. Chancellor Renner, like the French mission, was inclined to put his trust in Garami, who emigrated soon after March 21.

At the July 29th meeting of the Governing Council, Landler reported on the military situation. The Rumanians had established two bridgeheads at Tokaj. Landler said that he and other people's commissars would travel to Tokaj the next day to restore the fighting spirit of the 3rd Corps. The Trades Union Council met as well on the 29th, and assured Peyer of their support. Haubrich made preparations to seize power.

On July 30th three Rumanian divisions successfully crossed the Tisza north-east of Szolnok, thus largely sealing the fate of further operations. Julier calmed Landler, these were only tactical bridgeheads, he said, to dodge having to oppose them by force of arms. The General Staff, the government and the party leadership, breaking with earlier practice, no longer kept the workers informed and weighed up the chances of catastrophe more or less in private. At the same time a number of organizations and institutions, and many supporters of the revolution, engaged in activities which, at that stage, were senseless. The citizenry of Budapest, fearing the 'Red Terror' quietly waited for the Allied forces, supplying Romanelli and his mission, from whom they expected defence and orientation, with news. But Romanelli himself did not know what intentions the Rumanian command and Paris harboured.

Béla Kun met Böhm, Weltner, and Peyer at the Királyhida (Bruck) frontier station on July 30th. Kun knew what the military situation was

[134] MMTVD Vol. 6/B, p. 545.

like, he nevertheless rejected the suggested surrender, asking them to continue negotiating without coming to an agreement. Böhm returned to Vienna without having accomplished anything, and Kun sent Lenin another message, asking for help. Lenin encouraged him to hold out, August 1st being the date of the projected counter-attack on Denikin. That had to be postponed to the middle of the month, and then it ended in failure. The Whites controlled the whole of the Ukraine for a few months, the Red Army of Soviet Russia was only able to occupy the left bank of the Dniester early in 1920.

The country's mood deteriorated further. In Transdanubia women demonstrated against food-shortages. The people's commissars, headed by Garbai, returned from Tokaj without results. The 3rd Corps wanted to fight no longer, but even if they did, the Czechoslovak attack would have tied their hands in any case. Horthy in Szeged urged the Red Army in vain to turn on Budapest. However much he tried, he could not get the army to oppose the Soviet Republic. The soldiers did not desire the overthrow of the Soviet Republic, nor did they want the rule of the 'National Army'. They were tired, and they wanted peace. Coming home from the war in the autumn of 1918, seeing the misery their family lived in, they carried the revolution to victory. Now, exhausted by an endless war, they threw away their arms obeying the call of their families.

At dawn on July 31st the enemy, overcoming pretty stiff resistance, established a bridgehead at Kisköre. The 3rd Corps even carried out a counter-attack against a division that had crossed, but then withdrew, at the orders of the General Staff, to defend Miskolc. Because of the resistance encountered, the Rumanians only advanced cautiously on the 31st, except for a Cavalry Brigade that rode ahead to cut the Budapest–Miskolc railway line. In Cegléd, at the H. Q. of the 1st Corps, Kun, Landler, and the commanders of the corps conferred with Julier who tried to persuade them to give up the fight and thus avoid the occupation of Budapest. The majority of those present however decided on a counter-attack, north of Szolnok, on August 1st. The 1st Corps was to form the nucleus, but every other unit still able and willing to fight, that could be transported there, was to take part.

The Trades Union Council met as well roughly at the same time as the Cegléd conference and after listening to Weltner they decided, with a large majority, to ask the Soviet Government to resign. The leaders of the Soviet Republic met late at night to work out their attitude to this resolution. They were all aware of the hopelessness of the military situation. It was not power relations that divided them, faith in the world revolution clashed with illusions entertained about the Allies. Haubrich and Weltner urged the acceptance of the non-existent Vienna agreement, "so the Rumanians would not march into Budapest, since,

under their protection, the counter-revolution would come to power". Kun on the other hand proposed " . . . that the Workers' Soviet be convened promptly, that the working class organizations be shaken up, and everyone be sent to the line as soon as possible". Finally, "because of Szamuely's aggressive insistence, there was no agreement, and the view gained ground that armed resistance should be tried once again".[135]

Stromfeld appeared at Gödöllő on August 1st to try and save what could be saved, though he had come too late. The 1st Corps had carried out orders, and retaken Szolnok, but the Rumanian cavalry had reached the Budapest–Miskolc railway line and they had ridden into Jászberény, it therefore proved impossible to hold Szolnok, the 1st Corps was threatened by speedy envelopment, and that is what soon happened to them.

On the morning of August 1st the Governing Council met for the last time. Béla Kun, as on May 2nd, recommended that the Workers' Soviet be convened. He spoke openly about the mood that prevailed in the army, but he stressed encouraging signs, the Szolnok attack, the strength of the available artillery, and, against his own convictions, he suggested that the Allies did not wish to see Budapest occupied by the Rumanians. He proposed that the fight go on and that the workers' reserve regiments be thrown into the battle. Kun was supported by the communists and by the majority of the left social democrats, though a feeling that it was all in vain was beginning to overcome some of them as well. Eugene Varga asked that "we should not fight to the bitter end since the new regime would collapse within months anyway, and be succeeded by the new workers' revolution". The majority of the working class thought likewise. The social democrats on the Right did not count on a new revolution, but the only way out they could see was surrender to the Allies, on the basis of the 'agreement' with Cuninghame. Ágoston who did not trust the British mission, suggested that the new government ought to lean on Italy.

The clear stand of the Right made further debate impossible. Haubrich, referring to the military situation, refused to carry out what he called the futile mobilization of the workers' regiments, and even threatened to go to the factories with his friends, to call on the workers to revolt. Kun and Szamuely could not stop the passing of a resolution of resignation. Zoltán Rónai, a member of the Centre, was entrusted to present the resolution to the Workers' Soviet.[136]

After the meeting Haubrich and his officers took the initiative. The Governing Council had not dispersed yet when two officers of the Buda-

[135] Jakab Weltner, *Forradalom, bolsevizmus, emigráció (Revolution, Bolshevism, Exile)*, Budapest 1929, pp. 251–252; on the meeting of the Trades Union Council, *Arbeiterzeitung*, August 2, 1919.

[136] No minutes were taken at the last meeting of the Governing Council. I am using Péter Ágoston's journal (Archives of the Institute of History of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party, Ágoston Papers.)

pest Corps looked up Julier and asked for help to remove the Governing Council. Julier, ever cautious, said there was no need of that any longer.

The last meeting of the Budapest Workers' and Soldiers' Soviet started at three in the afternoon. Rónai did not deny the Soviet Republic in his long speech. He spoke of compromises that would save "Hungary's soil so that the flag of the world revolution could fly there once again when this world revolution has spread to other countries as well". His speech could hardly change the fate of the revolution, its most damaging aspect was having to let his listeners feel that he spoke on the basis of some sort of secret agreement which would ensure the Hungarian working class a state of affairs not unlike the Austrian one.

Then Kun addressed the Workers' Soviet for the last time. That Béla Kun who had for some days now fought for the dictatorship of the proletariat with superhuman energy, collapsed. He said it straight out that the trades union government would only offer a temporary transition to the White Terror. But he blamed the working class. "Comrades, this proletariat needs the most cruel and merciless dictatorship of the bourgeoisie to teach it to be revolutionary."[137]

The members of the Soviet who had listened to Rónai amidst bitter outbursts, gave Béla Kun a standing ovation, bidding him farewell. This honest demonstration had no practical consequences, however. The chairman closed the meeting without discussion, and without taking a vote, there was nothing to discuss. Kun's mistake was to support the submitted proposal with his mere presence, when the union hardly survived, even formally, and he should have shown that he had nothing to do with what happened, and with what would happen. The new Prime Minister, Gyula Peidl[138] was not willing to address the Workers' Soviet, which would have seen things more clearly if it had been familiar with Peidl's views. Peidl distinguished himself from Rónai and the Centre, he did not agree with the composition of his own government which he meant to last only a few days, though he did not predict the character of the government which was to follow, as Béla Kun did. It was a tragic mistake that the chairman, the communist Biermann, asked the Workers' Soviets to continue. After the surrender, the members of the *directoires* became the first victims of the rage of the occupants and the counter-revolutionaries.

[137] Minutes of the August 1st meeting of the Workers' Soviet. Archives of the Institute of History of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party, F, 600 group 3.

[138] Gyula Peidl (1873–1943) – one of the pre-war leaders of the Printers' Union and the Worker Cooperatives. Minister for Labour and Welfare in the Károlyi government between January and March 1919. Did not participate in the union of the two workers' parties, headed the 'Trades Union' Government between August 1st and 6th 1919, in exile up to 1921, after his return parliamentary leader of the Social Democratic Party.

The revolution had failed. The Red Army was ordered to stop fighting, but there was no need for such orders. Some of the soldiers scattered, others fled in close formation, those who could not get away were taken prisoners, and many were excuted as suspected communists. The 40,000 privates and 1,200 officers of the 1st Corps who were surrounded at Szolnok all became prisoners. People's commissars and their entourage and families were given asylum by the Austrian government, others, communists and social democrats got away if they could, Tibor Szamuely, at the frontier, in a last bold action, avoided the fate of those of his comrades whom the Whites took alive.

The failure of the Soviet Republic in fact meant the failure of the Frost Rose 1918 October revolution as well, and of any sort of democracy, as the new, counter-revolutionary regime (which threw Peidl over within a week) considered even the pre-1918 times as too liberal. Defeat was unavoidable in the summer of 1919, looked at from a historical perspective, however, the blood shed was not shed in vain.

"When in Hungary, following the class struggle at home, or great shake-ups abroad, democracy will be victorious, the whole world will see with astonishment what furrows the revolution had ploughed midst the Hungarian clods of earth, and how much of the seed sown that looks lost today has struck root in the souls of workers and peasants!" – Kunfi wrote ten years later, at the very time when the counter-revolution was at its most consolidated stage.[139]

The struggles of the revolution brought up the first great generation of the Communist movement in Hungary, whose prominent figure, Béla Kun, in a book written while interned in Austria, first summed up the weaknesses and errors of the Soviet Republic, rightly stated that the Hungarian working class was "all the same the most advanced representative – at the side of the Russian – of the revolutionary class-consciousness of the international proletariat. Whatever the judgement of history might be on the Hungarian stage of the proletarian revolution, there is no doubt that in the 132 days of the dictatorship, almost twice as long a time as that of the revolutionary Commune of Paris – the proletariat of Hungary acted for the international working class, and in its name."[140]

[139] Sigismund Kunfi, "Die Besiegten (1928)" in: *Die Neugestaltung der Welt*, selected articles by S. Kunfi, Vienna 1930, p. 98.

[140] Béla Kun (under the *nom-de-plume* Balázs Kolozsváry), *Von Revolution zu Revolution*, Vienna 1920, also in Italian, *Di rivoluzione in rivoluzione*, Milan 1920.

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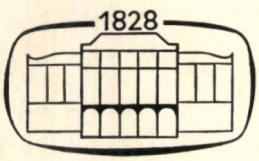

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