

HUNGARY'S RÔLE IN THE POLISH-SOVIET WAR OF 1920.

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II.

In these critical hours Hungary offered to assist the hardly-pressed Polish army, and was requested to send a cavalry force of twenty or thirty thousand and ammunition. Negotiations were set on foot. Count Ivan Csekonics, the Hungarian Minister in Warsaw, told the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs what troops Hungary could send. All that was now needed was that France should consent to this.

The Hungarian Government took the necessary steps, and also asked the French Government to persuade the Czechs to allow the Hungarian troops to march through Czecho-Slovak territory. On 4th August the Hungarian Minister in Paris reported that France was willing to accede to Hungary's request, provided that Czecho-Slovakia and Rumania were agreeable. *But on 10th August the Czech Government categorically refused to allow the Hungarian troops passage through the Republic.* Consequently, with the best will in the world, Hungary was not able to render assistance to Poland. In order, however, that the Poles should be informed of the fact that Hungary had done what she could to aid them, a delegation went to Warsaw and solemnly stated that *the Hungarian nation wished to assist Poland in her grievous position*, but was unable to do so because of circumstances over which Hungary had no control. This statement made a profound impression on the Poles, who at the time were going through the most critical period of their national existence.

The attitude adopted by the Czech Government was announced in detail on 15th August, on the eve, that is to say, of the Warsaw victory, by the "Prava Lidu", a news-

paper closely connected with the Czech Government. In it we find the following passage:

"The anti-Bolshevist barrier, which in any case was never very strong, has collapsed utterly. France and England have made an attempt to induce Czecho-Slovakia to take sides against the Soviet; together with Yugoslavia and Rumania we were expected to reinforce the Polish front. For our part this policy is wholly impossible. Come what may, nothing will ever induce us to adopt it. Hungary is willing to play the role of executioner. The Hungarians are prepared to send some divisions against Russia through Slovak and Ruthenian territory. In the name of Czech Social Democracy we declare that nothing, no advantage, no pressure, will ever persuade us to allow the forces of White Hungary to march through our territories. We are aware that a refusal may involve us in another war. And yet we are prepared to shoulder the terrible burden of war rather than allow Horthy's hordes to march through this country. The President and Government of the Czecho-Slovak Republic and all classes of its population adhere to the principle of strict neutrality. A time may come when we shall be obliged to fight for that neutrality."

The organ of the Social Democrats was not the only Czech newspaper to take up this attitude; the semi-official "*Tribuna*" also refused to hear of co-operation with Poland, and the "*Narodni Listy*", the paper of the National Democrats representing the extreme right wing, protested in a similar tone against the Czechs being used as pawns to further the imperialistic ambitions of other countries.

What Viscount d'Abernon writes of his meeting with President Masaryk aptly characterizes the anti-Polish sentiments of the Czechs. Viscount d'Abernon, namely, was a member of the diplomatic mission despatched by the Great Powers to Warsaw to watch events and, if necessary, to act as a mediator between Poland and the Soviet.

This commission arrived on 25th July in Prague where they were forced to spend a few hours owing to some engine trouble. As the French delegate — M. Jusserand, French Ambassador in Washington — was on good terms with

Masaryk, he persuaded the latter to receive the members of the commission. Masaryk nainted a very gloomy picture of the situation of the Poles. He not only considered the capture of Warsaw a certainty, but also warned the commission "against organizing any military assistance to the Poles, on two grounds: it was certain to be completely ineffective in a military sense, and it was liable to destroy the authority of the Western Powers in the subsequent negotiations for peace. By openly siding with the Poles in their hopeless position we would do them no good and we should do ourselves much harm" (Op. cit. pp 20—21).

The commission reached Warsaw on 25th July, and in his Diary Viscount d'Abernon expresses surprise to observe no signs of nervousness or panic among the population. Nor were there any.

In these critical times Polish patriotism had organized an army of volunteers about 200.000 strong, the greater part of which was made up of young boys, students, who rallied to fight for the salvation of their imperilled country. Many young boys belonging to families of my own acquaintance went out to fight the Bolsheviks and fell in battle. But there were also old men of 60 and 65, writers, poets, university professors, etc., in that army.

I have already mentioned that the Polish army was forced to keep on retreating for lack of ammunition. The supplies sent by way of Danzig could not be unshipped because the German docklabourers were on strike. In his Diary Viscount d'Abernon tells us of a plan to occupy Danzig with British and French troops because that town was holding up the transportation of ammunition to the Polish army at a time when Poland was in such great danger.

The Poles were indeed in desperate straits, for it was not only at Danzig that their supplies were cut off; the consignment of arms despatched by Hungary from the Isle of Csepel on 10th July had not arrived either, having been held up by the Czechs. Nor was this the only thing detained at the Czecho-Slovak frontier. None of the consignments sent by France to the Polish army were allowed through. When the Czechs closed their frontiers to these

consignments, they had to be sent via Vienna to Hungary and from thence in a roundabout way through Rumania to Poland.

On 30th July a fresh misfortune befell the supplies despatched via Vienna. Namely, the II Socialist International decided to boycott "reactionary" Hungary. At the time we did not know the real reason; it was only later we learned that the boycott was directed against the supplies of ammunition passing through Hungary, and under cover of it the Social Democratic workmen in Vienna held up all consignments addressed to Poland.

In this desperate situation the Polish Government made another attempt to persuade Prague to allow the French consignments to pass through Czecho-Slovakia, but the Czech Government rigidly refused to reconsider its decision. On 4th August Dr. Benes, Czecho-Slovak Minister of Foreign Affairs, declared that Czecho-Slovakia was determined to remain strictly neutral. Two days later, Mr. Lloyd George informed the House of Commons that there was no hope of Czecho-Slovakia rendering the slightest assistance to Poland, and the Press Bureau of the Czech Foreign Ministry energetically reiterated Czecho-Slovakia's determination to preserve the strictest neutrality.

This determination was again voiced by a Cabinet Council held on 9th August. Next day the Polish Chargé d'Affaires in Prague informed M. Tahy, the Hungarian Minister there, that the Czech Government had definitely decided against allowing the ammunition for the Polish army to pass through the Republic.

Meanwhile the Red hordes were making a forced march on Warsaw. General Tuchachevsky was eager to take the town, the fall of which he confidently expected.

In the first fortnight of August the foreign diplomats, with the exception of the Papal Nuncio — Mons. Achille Ratti, later Pope Pius XI, — left the apparently doomed city.

Everywhere it was said that the Polish army would abandon Warsaw for the time being and concentrate its forces behind the town. This was the plan advocated by the

French General Weygand, who had been sent to Warsaw as military adviser by the French Government.

On 14th August the advance guard of the Bolshevik forces reached Radzymin, a place barely 20 kilometres distant from Warsaw.

Warsaw seemed to be lost.

And then a miracle happened. The Polish army which had retreated 600 kilometres and seemed broken and demoralized, suddenly won a brilliant, decisive, wellnigh annihilating victory over the Bolshevik forces advancing on Warsaw with apparently irresistible strength. Pilsudski dealt the Soviet army a crushing blow and forced it to flee in disorder towards the east. Tuchachevsky, who fancied himself in the rôle of a Russian Napoleon and had dreamt of conquering Berlin and Paris, suffered a shameful defeat.

This was the "Miracle of the Vistula" (Polish: cud nad Vistula).

But what had happened? How was this possible?

It happened thus: Hungary in the meantime had managed to send ammunition by way of Rumania, so that the consignment despatched from Csepel on 10th July which had been held up at the Czecho-Slovak frontier, arrived on 12th August in Skierniewice, a place about an hour's distance from Warsaw. The cautious Polish military command had some 80 wagons — about 21 or 22 million cartridges — unloaded at Skierniewice and with astonishing rapidity distributed them among the Polish troops drawn up on the other side of the Vistula. Pilsudski then launched his victorious attack to the east of Warsaw. It was so fierce and unexpected that the Polish army soon broke through the Soviet lines and scattered them. Sixty thousand Russians were taken prisoners.

With this victory Pilsudski not only rendered an immortal service to Poland, but also laid a debt of gratitude upon the whole of Western civilization, for failing this the terrible flood of Bolshevism would have swept over the entire continent of Europe.

But Hungary also contributed to make that victory possible. This we may claim without boasting, for had Hun-

gary not sent ammunition to Poland, not all Pilsudski's brilliant commandership, not all the ardent patriotism of the Polish nation, would have saved the country.

Once more Hungary fulfilled her historical mission, which has always been to defend western civilization against the inroads of barbarians from the east. For this Europe owes Hungary as well as Poland a debt of gratitude. Alas! Europe is not fully aware of this and does not assess the value of the service rendered highly enough.

Hungary's part in the Warsaw victory has been finely described by Professor Louis Villat of Besançon in his famous pamphlet "*Le Rôle de la Hongrie dans la Guerre Polono-Bolchevick de 1920.*" In it he says: — "Thus during the Polish-Soviet war of 1920 Hungary, loyal to her historical friendship, rendered Poland services of such importance that without them the Polish army would not have been able to resist the enemy at Warsaw. At the same time Hungary gave a noble example of her devotion to the cause of civilization in general. And this took place precisely at the time when Hungary saw her territories partitioned by the very Entente to which Poland had belonged.

"Who knows whether the misfortunes which in 1920 might have overwhelmed Poland and consequently the whole of western Europe through the pressure of the Soviet, would not have been less threatening had there existed the common frontier between Hungary and Poland which for centuries fraught with stirring history had proved of such advantage."

Here it should be mentioned that the Polish army had been receiving supplies of Hungarian ammunition from the beginning of 1919 on. On 10th December 1918, M. Leo Wasilewski, Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, received the following communication from the Hungarian War Minister: — "Far be it from us to render the very slightest assistance to anyone fighting against Poland... We assure the Polish Government that we have endeavoured and shall continue to endeavour to strengthen the friendship existing between the two nations by every means in our power. The Polish Government may always count on our friendly support."

On 4th March the Hungarian and Polish Governments signed an agreement regarding the supply of ammunition, and

in that same month a large consignment was despatched to Poland. When, however, Bolshevism gained the upper hand in Hungary these consignments stopped, and it was only after the collapse of Béla Kun's régime that they began again.

In terms of this agreement, in 1919 we supplied the Polish army with 20 million Mannlicher cartridges, 20 thousand artillery shells and various items of camp equipment.

When at the beginning of 1920 the Polish Government saw that the Soviet was making great military preparations, it again approached the Hungarian Government, which on 6th March gave the Manfred Weiss factory in Csepel permission to supply Poland with 40 million cartridges of various types, besides 30 million Mauser cartridges.

This was the ammunition that the Czech Government refused to allow to pass through the Republic. It was held up at Kassa. Owing to the Czech embargo the consignments from France could not be forwarded to Poland except through Rumania via Hungary. On 10th July the Polish Minister in Vienna appealed to the Hungarian Government, which immediately decreed that the ammunition should be forwarded without delay and ordered the Hungarian railways to accelerate its transport.

Supplies of Hungarian ammunition continued to be sent to Poland even after the Battle of Warsaw, so long as the Poles were in pursuit of the Soviet army.

This enabled the Poles and Ukrainians to defeat the Soviet, and, as before stated, helped to save Europe from Bolshevism.

It is a great pity that this fact is not more widely known.

Professor Villat, whom I have quoted above, was the first to write of Hungary's rôle in the Polish-Soviet war of 1920. He did so in an article that appeared in the "*Revue Mondiale*" in 1930. A reprint of this article was published, and it created a tremendous impression in Poland. The Polish Press devoted lengthy articles to it; first of all the Polish newspaper enjoying the widest circulation, the "*Illustrowany Kurjer Codzienny*", commented on it, describing it as a sensational revelation.

Professor Villat's pamphlet was translated into Polish, and this provided wider circles with the opportunity of learning the decisive rôle played by Hungary in the Warsaw victory, but even so it is not so well known as it should be.

Europe knows practically nothing about it. What a pity that Viscount d'Abernon was ignorant of it and so could not tell the world in his famous work what Hungary's aid meant to the Poles at the Battle of Warsaw! It would have meant so much to us had he been able to do so. Nor was it known to the German author who under the *nom-de-plume* of Agricola wrote "*Das Wunder an der Weichsel*".

We should not be content to hide our light under a bushel. Europe must be informed of the historical importance of the Hungarian-Polish co-operation which saved European civilization.

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