

# THE STORY OF THE BOLSHEVIK REVOLUTION IN HUNGARY

BY

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In October, 1918, after Revolutionary Councils had been formed at Prague and Zagreb, *a revolution broke out in Hungary too* (October 29th.). Daring dreamers, trusting President Wilson's "Points", believed that an Entente-ophile Government would create a good impression among the Entente Powers. And in all States which had been defeated in the War (in Hungary too, though that country was the last in order), shady elements by revolutionary methods seized the reins of power. In Hungary Count Michael Károlyi established a revolutionary régime based on adherence to the Wilsonian ideas. *This incapable régime, however, led to utter anarchy. And in the meantime Communists — prisoners of war who had returned from Russia — began to bid defiance to the Government.*

Even despite the considerable — or even decisive — power exercised by the Socialists, it was no use the Revolutionary Government fighting its life-and-death struggle against communistic agitation. On January 4th., 1919, the labourers took possession of the mines at Salgótarján; while on February 4th. the Soldiers Council demanded the suppression by armed force of the counter-revolutionary movements; on February 12th. the free union of demobilised soldiers asked Government to urgently grant them 5400 crowns a head, while on February 20th. bands of communists attacked the editorial offices of the "*Népszava*" (official organ of the Social Democratic Party) and provoked a bloody riot which claimed a few victims both among the police and among the Socialist workers. The following day the Government resorted to energetic measures against Béla Kun and his accomplices; but, in order to avoid being suspected of conservative leanings, *it also laid its hands on*

*the so-called "counter-revolutionary" elements, some of the latter — a few leading adherents of the ancien régime — being interned.* The measures put into force against Béla Kun, however, alarmed the Government itself most of all. *The Right wing of the Socialist Party was accused of stirring up an internecine feud and of Noskeism by the Extreme Radical Wing of the same Party — men who continually coquetted with the Communists and professed agreement in principle with the Independent Socialists of Germany.* (It was Noske, German Socialist Minister, who overthrew the Spartacus movement in Berlin.) Early in March, as a result of the personal intervention of Michael Károlyi, the Communists who had been arrested were declared to be political prisoners and *were allowed to agitate and incite to insurrection unhindered from their quarters in the concentration barracks, as also to keep permanently in touch with their followers.* On March 14th., 1919, the majority of Members of the most powerful Trade Union, that of the Iron and Metal Workers, took sides with the Communists. And the official organ of the Social Democratic Party wrote that — *unless the general elections fixed to be held early in April gave the Socialists a majority, the Party would refuse to respect the will of the people and was ready even by force to assert its principles.* This open proclamation of terror was merely the logical consequence of the excesses committed by the Party either in an official way or in the form of irresponsible actions which refused to respect even the limitations postulated by the revolutionary comradeship-in-arms.

The bourgeois elements — those elements which were sober minded and national in feeling — were hustled in the direction of counter-revolution. The banner of revolution was deserted also by that part of the bourgeoisie which had at the outset followed that banner either in good faith or from fear. The Revolution lost even more ground when the proletariat massed in the Trade Unions and the poor agrarian elements turned their backs in daily increasing numbers upon the "Michaelmas Daisy" (the nickname of the Michael Károlyi Revolution) which had been trampled in the mire.

On March 18th., 1919, William Böhm, Minister for War,

— a man who had formerly been a typewriter agent —, submitted to a Cabinet Council a Bill dealing with the problem of socialisation. On March 19th. Lieut.—Colonel Vyx, head of the French Military Mission, handed the Government a Note in which by order of the Paris Supreme Council *he fixed a new line of demarcation. This line thrust the Czech frontier forward as far as the mouth of the Ipoly, cutting off the whole area of Upper Hungary as far as Máramaros, while on the East that frontier ran from Vásárosnamény to the east of Debrecen as far as the Maros.* On March 20th., under the effect produced by the Note, the Revolutionary Government decided to hand in its resignation and *resolved to surrender its office to a purely Socialist Government. Kunti and his followers having previously already agreed with the Communists on a common programme, in the afternoon of March 21st. the Soldiers' Council — and during the night of the same day the Workers' Council — decided to make Károlyi resign his office as President of the Republic and, uniting with the proletariat in order to ensure the order of production, to proclaim a Soviet Republic, which should endeavour to establish connections with the Russian Soviet to replace those with the Western democracies.* The rumour was spread that the advance guards of the Russian Red Army had already reached the Carpathians; it was announced, further, that the Hungarian proletariat was to join hands with the Russian Army in opening a new war against capitalistic imperialism for the liberation of the workers of Hungary. The change of régime — like that of October 31st., 1918 — was on this occasion too effected in the form of a *“bloodless revolution”*.

The Károlyi régime lost its political power — which for a few months was in its possession only nominally and on paper — to the accompaniment of almost the same phenomena as accompanied its assumption of office. And the chief hero of the Revolution — Károlyi, the *“Hungarian Kerenski”* — passed out of sight quietly, almost unobserved, falling from the high position in which he had been placed by a disappointed and desperate society in a state of mind bordering upon irresponsibility. Ruins marked his coming and ruins were left in the path of his departure.



During the night of March 21st., 1919, the Communists liberated from the concentration barracks formed a Government of People's Commissaries with Alexander Garbai at its head, though in reality it was under the direction of *Béla Kun*, the People's Commissary for Foreign Affairs. On March 22nd. a telegram addressed to "every one" announced that *Hungary had been converted into a Soviet Republic. The new dictators at once confiscated the liberty of the Press, dissolved the State police, had all shops closed, requisitioned all mansions, placed all savings deposits, safes and current accounts under an embargo, organised revolutionary tribunals, "socialized" factories, mining undertakings and latifundia, established a "Red Guard" and a Red Army and ordained universal labour conscription.* There can be no doubt that the proclamation of a dictatorship of the proletariat in Hungary exercised a powerful effect upon the Entente Powers; for those Powers feared that the new Bolshevik centre might set on fire the whole area of Central Europe then in utter chaos, — that the Spartacus movement, which had not yet been suppressed, the Austrian Socialist Republic, a weak-kneed system, and the Munich Soviet, then a few days old, might unite their Red flames and cause a gigantic conflagration in which all the technical and spiritual culture created by the peoples of Central Europe would be reduced to ashes. The South African General Smuts arrived in Budapest on April 4th. as representative of the "Big Five" and presented to the revolutionary governing council a Note in which he fixed a new line of demarcation and offered to raise the blockade. *Béla Kun* refused the proposal; and Smuts left Hungary. Apart from the Socialist Government of the German-Austrian Republic not a single State acknowledged the Soviet of Hungary — not even as a *de facto* Government. In the meantime the Rumanians took advantage of the anarchy prevailing here and advanced as far as the river Tisza.

The inner incoherence of the new régime was shown by the mutiny of the first international regiment, which drove Joseph Pogány from office as People's Commissary for War and by the aid of a veritable military revolution removed the

organiser of the Soldiers' Councils. The majority of the 31 People's Commissaries sitting on the re-constructed Governing Council were Jews; and the same formidable preponderance of that race was in evidence also in the town and county directories, in the production commissions and in other Soviet offices too. On April 24th. a revolutionary tribunal condemned to death Dezső *Nikolényi*, an officer serving with the frontier police, and William *Henczel*, advocate, the charge against them being that they had stirred up a "counter-revolutionary movement". *A beginning was made with the collection of hostages. The criminals were set free from the prisons and their places given to those eminent members of Hungarian public life. A certain "comrade" of the name of Surek moved that by way of intimidating the counter-revolutionaries the bourgeoisie should be massacred.* The loss of ground suffered by the Red dictatorship was accompanied by an enhancement of the severity and the horror of the Terror, which was given a free hand, not only against the bourgeois and national elements of the Hungarian people, but also against those former Social Democrats who refused to submit to the new régime. The public worship and educational policy of the new régime (e. g. sexual enlightenment of children of ten), — *the Bolshevik system of education based upon the learning by heart of the Marxian teachings — poisoned the soul of the younger generation and shattered the tranquillity of family life.*

The greatest danger the Soviet régime had to face was the sabotage and passive resistance of the countryside, the villages refusing to adopt the idea of the socialisation of landed property and to accept "white money" (forged notes), while they condemned the towns to a starvation blockade. Against this passive resistance force proved quite unavailing. On the contrary, — *the dismembered country was aglow from the smouldering fires of isolated, unorganised, bitterly counter-revolutionary movements; and wherever these fires were trampled out or extinguished by the aid of horrible massacre, they burst into flame elsewhere more violently than before* (in the region between the Danube and the Tisza at Szolnok, Kalocsa, Dunapataj, in Trans-Danubia at Köpháza, Csorna, Kapuvár, Devecser, etc.). Neither the Vienna Counter-

revolutionary Committee (formed on April 17th.) nor the Szeged Counter-Government formed on May 5th. at Arad under the presidency of Count Gyula *Károlyi* was able owing to a lack of arms, money and direct connections — to in any way influence these bloody and tragical movements. *The Rumanians did not continue their military operations, coming to a standstill at Szolnok, on the banks of the Tisza, where they dug trenches.* This lull was utilised by the Communistic organisation working with a zeal worthy of a better cause to put their disorderly troops into better shape and to restrict the jurisdiction of the "Convent Commissaries". As a consequence of the disappointment suffered the first organised counter-revolutionary action in the Capital of the country was launched sooner than had been expected. (On June 24th. there was a "putsch" on the river monitors, while the cadets of the Ludovika Military Academy seized the telephone exchange in *Mária Terézia-tér.*) That the premature armed movement, which was the glory and the tragedy of Captain Eugene *Lemberkovics*, was not followed by so bloody a retaliation as had been threatened by the Reds, *was due to that having been prevented by an ultimatum addressed to Béla Kun by the Italian Colonel Guido Romanelli, the officer in charge of the Italian Military Mission in Budapest.*

On June 12th. — the first day of the party meeting of the Socialist-Communist Party — there was a heated discussion between the leaders of the older Trade Unions and the Communistic dictators respecting the methods to ensure the maintenance of the Soviet rule. Those who desired to continue to operate with the means of physical terror, referred to the encouragement given by Lenin, who in a message addressed to the Hungarian Soviet made it the elementary duty of the Soviet Government *not to display any weakness or take half-measures in dealing with the bourgeoisie, which, though lying low, was in secret preparing to show its teeth. The considerations which prevailed upon the moderate elements to oppose these perverse and frantic plans, were not merely humanitarian; they were convinced that the rule of the proletariat, isolated as it was in Hungary, would never be able to get a firm footing in Central Europe.*



And they had long abandoned the idea that a world revolution was likely to help the Soviet of Hungary to get out of the mess in which it found itself. Béla Kun for a time vacillated between the two extremes; for *the Entente and the Hungarian counter-revolutionary committee were not prepared to allow him a loophole of escape unless he desisted from bloodshed*. The repeated counter-revolutionary demonstrations, the railway strikes, the depression of the workers belonging to the Trade Unions, the fact that the Vienna Counter-revolutionary Committee succeeded in getting hold of the party funds hidden in the Hungarian House in that city (the 140 millions with which the Communists had intended to stage-manage a revolution in Vienna), the resistance and aversion of the countryside, — all these moments excited Kun's indignation and stirred him to fury; and at the meeting of the Central Executive Committee of the Councils held on June 25th. his vote turned the scale in favour of the proposal *to assert with the utmost ruthlessness the dictatorship of the proletariat*. The Revolutionary Governing Council was compelled to declare a state of siege in Budapest and environs. At the general assembly of Councils Alexander Garbai made a long speech in which he announced that the workers of Hungary were to receive a new Constitution from the proletariat which had awakened to a consciousness of itself and its power and that the old Constitution was to be relegated to the upper shelves.

*When, in answer to Clémenceau's telegram, Béla Kun ordered the occupied regions of Upper Hungary to be evacuated, in his address to the general public he referred to the promise made by the French Premier and the Big Five which encouraged him to believe that the Rumanians by order of Clémenceau would surrender the Trans-Tisza region to the Hungarian Soviet.* It was in vain that the People's Commissary for Foreign Affairs urged that the promise should be fulfilled. On July 21st. he sent a Note to Clémenceau in which he announced that he would resort to armed force and would by force compel the Rumanians to withdraw. The Red Army was again re-organised for the great offensive. General military conscription was introduced, the officers of the former Hungarian Army were compelled

to report for service; and the army was raised to a higher level, particularly in technical respects. The new Chief of Staff, Colonel Francis *Julier* — so it would appear — never for a single moment deluded himself into the hope that he could succeed in time in converting the rabble of which the Red Army consisted into a strong and disciplined national army. The fact can be established indisputably that *Julier deliberately led the Red troops into the catastrophe that overtook them, in order to crumble to pieces the last pillar of support of the dictatorship of the proletariat.* On July 20h. the Red Army crossed the Tisza at several points; but after some initial successes it was defeated all along the line. On July 25th. the process of general dissolution began; at its meeting held on July 31st. the Workers' and Soldiers' Council (a body consisting of 500 Members) resigned *en bloc*, following the lead given by Béla Kun, and transferred the executive power to a Government formed of Social-Democrat Trade Union leaders which, in order to facilitate the work of transfer and to prevent disorders and the shedding of blood, accepted the condition formulated by Béla Kun and his associates that it would ensure them the right of sanctuary within the territory of the Austrian Republic.

*This general anarchy was utilised by the Rumanians to occupy a part of defenceless Hungary; but the work of national re-generation was begun by the Szeged Counter-revolutionary Government and its army under the command of Nicholas Horthy. The country was re-conquered, and the age of national renaissance began.*