

Collapse of Hungarian Soviet Republic

AFTER the downfall of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy the Hungarian democrats, with Count Karolyi and Oscar Jaszay at their head, came into power in Hungary. The new government tried to consolidate the remnants of the rotten feudal state of Hungary. But it was too late. Hungary is a country where a handful of feudal land lords own three-fourths of the land. The different Tiszas undermined the corrupt governmental machinery completely.

The bourgeoisie of Budapest, the most vicious in the world, was not able to consolidate anything. And as always when the structure of a state is crumbling, and as Karolyi realized, there was only one solution of the problem and that was to transfer the power of the state to the Social Democrats, who at that time were the only organized body in industrial Hungary.

With the aggressive onrush of the masses of workmen for better working conditions, more pay and more bread, Karolyi slowly lost the power of government.

Meanwhile—right after the downfall of the dual Empire—Hungarian comrades returned from Russia, where, as prisoners of war, they participated in the revolutionary struggle of the Russian working class. Among them was Bela Kun, the president of the International Federation in Moscow.

The Communists at once began to clear the way among the workers of Hungary. The Social Democrats, who during the war discredited themselves, were unable to check the wave of Communism. In order to save themselves, they expelled the Communists from the party. And when the Communists established a party of their own and carried on an extensive propaganda of uncompromising Communism, the social-patriots started a merciless persecution of the Communists, who were arrested and prosecuted in masses.

But the results of that method brought entirely different results than was expected. In the economic breakdown, in the complete inability of the corrupt bourgeoisie and the oligarchy, as well as in the treachery of the social-patriots—the workers in industry after industry abandoned the social-patriots and went over to the Communists. This movement was led by the metal trade workers, the iron workers, the printing and publishing workers, and then the railroad and transportation workers followed. Soon all the groups of workers were on the side of the Communists, with whom already the majority of the army stood as the armed background of the revolution. Then instantly and unexpectedly came the "coup" of the "Nepszava" (the official social-patriotic paper in Budapest). Though innocent, Bela Kun and a number of other Communists were placed under arrest. This act of the social-patriots aroused the workers, who heard the rumor that Bela Kun was badly beaten by government agents in prison. Furthermore, there was a rumor, that the government planned to deport Bela Kun to some secret place.

In the night of March 20—21 the Communist forces under the leadership of Tibor Samuelyi (who escaped from prison) equipped with two batteries of artillery made an attack on Budapest and demanded the immediate release of Bela Kun and all the other Communists.

Count Karolyi, confused by the imperialistic intentions of the Entente and the lust for conquest of the Czechs and the Roumanians, condemned and discredited personally, found it advisable to deliver the power

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of the state entirely into the hands of the Social Democrats.

THE "UNITY" OF THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS WITH THE COMMUNISTS.

The Social Democrats now had to choose from three alternatives: 1) Resignation; 2) merciless war with the Communists; and 3) unity with the Communists.

Not willing to resign, and equally not very anxious to play the role of Ebert-Scheidemann-Noske, because they were the weaker and therefore unable to play that role, the Socialists chose the third alternative: Unity with the Communists. Kunfy, who was minister in the government of Karolyi, held conferences with Bela Kun, who was still in prison. On the basis of a platform Bela Kun had drawn in prison, unity of the two parties was realized. The platform called for the arming of the people, disarming of the bourgeoisie, expropriation and confiscation of large estates, and the socialisation of the banks, the wholesale houses, the stores and the industries. On March 27, the wire carried the famous message that the Soviet Republic of Hungary had been proclaimed. All power was taken over by the Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Councils, who at their first convention constituted themselves as the "Hungarian Party of Socialist-Communist Workers".

Thus the revolution was achieved without disorder and bloodshed.

The news of the revolution in Hungary was received with a certain reservation in revolutionary circles abroad, because of the experience that without a revolutionary tradition the social revolution can not be accomplished. The bourgeoisie and the social-patriots saw in it only a game of the Hungarian imperialists to save their integrity. In the meantime Bela Kun issued a proclamation in which he renounced the territorial integrity of Hungary and affirmed the ethnographic principle of self determination.

Such a transformation without bloodshed can only be explained by the weakness of the Hungarian bourgeoisie, which could not resist the aggression of the proletariat; and by the apathy and the nationalism of the petty bourgeoisie and the intellectuals. This example certainly will not repeat itself in the world revolution. The Hungarian intellectuals and petty bourgeoisie, who are entirely conservative and uncultured, during the first day looked with favor on the dictatorship of the proletariat, because they expected from it the salvation of their nationalism and the satisfaction of their own personal interests. Meanwhile, the Soviet Government carried on the socialisation of the banks, the industries and the commercial enterprises. All deposits in the banks over the amount of 20,000 crowns were expropriated and all large land holdings of over 100 acres were declared the property of the Commune. Because of the lack of progressive intelligence the reform of public education proceeded very slowly. With the energetic measures of the revolutionary judiciary, crime decreased to a minimum. The manufacturing and selling of alcoholic beverages were prohibited, personal safety was assured much more than under the government of the bourgeoisie; but the bourgeoisie prepared the counter-revolution within the

ranks of the slum-proletariat and the hoodlums.

After the first decrees of the Soviet Government were introduced the bourgeoisie and the conservative intellectuals felt themselves oppressed, and the petty bourgeoisie and the slum-proletariat became discouraged because the iron discipline prevented them from looting and exploiting the gains of the revolution for their own personal advantages. Their movement accordingly turned into counter-revolutionary channels.

Society dames, discharged detectives, counter-revolutionary officers, and nuns driven from the convents, mingled in disguise with the unconscious masses and plotted against the Soviet Republic. The Christian Socialists took advantage of the efforts of Bela Kun to accomplish the revolution in a humane way and preached sedition openly in processions, in the churches, etc.

This tactic of Bela Kun, of accomplishing the revolution a humane way, led to division on the left and on the right.

The left wing, under the leadership of Tibor Samuelyi, demanded radical measures and formed under the name "Lenin's Boys" a terroristic group. When Bela Kun under the pressure of the Entente tried to disperse that group and send its members to the front they defended themselves with machine guns in the military camps and demanded the repeal of the order. Through the mediation of individuals serious conflicts were prevented.

The right wing, under Kunfi, the former right wing of the Socialists, sabotaged in the government and in all the Soviets as well. With the co-operation of the bourgeoisie they weakened the moral strength of the proletariat to a great extent. And so far as there was honest effort among them, they were already too corrupt through their social-chauvinism to be able to fill the important revolutionary positions that they were holding. So the unity of the Hungarian proletariat, that on March 21 was accomplished by the leaders of the Communists and the Socialists was only an illusion, because it contained the germ of disintegration.

The organization of the Red Army was at first a hard task, because of lack of real proletarian discipline. The Roumanians and the Czecho-Slovaks with the help of the French troops were advancing toward Budapest. At first the Red Army was defeated at every point. On May 2 not only the bourgeoisie but the Communists anticipated the collapse of the Soviet Republic. Nevertheless, the Government did not lose hope and courage. The Central Workers' Council ordered the mobilization of half of the industrial proletariat. One half of the members of the government in a noble proclamation called upon the workers of Hungary to defend the Socialist Republic. In the short time of a few weeks the Red Army increased from 27,000 to 240,000 men. The Roumanians were thrown back behind the River Theiss; the Czechs suffered remarkable losses, being compelled to give up two-thirds of the Slovak territory, in which a Slovak Soviet Republic was immediately proclaimed. The formation of workers' battalions raised the morale of the other formations; but when, under the pressure of the entente, the Red Army had to withdraw without a battle from the Czech front, the spirit waned. While counter-revolutionary activity became more intense, proletarian class consciousness began to disappear; the working women publicly demanded that