

# The Masses and The New Faith

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Manchester Guardians.

A MIXED crowd of men, women, and children crowded the platform, and as they stood they sang. It was the first train to Budapest after Bela Kun's fall, the first for quite a long period. The city itself was still some few miles away, for the station belonged to one of those outer industrial suburbs that characterise those Central European capitals that are all factories and slums. Distant rifle shots and an occasional thud signalled the gradual approach of the dreaded Roumanians from the parent city, of which they were by then in occupation. Under the flickering lamps one could see the strained expression upon the faces of these poor working folk as they anxiously stood there and waited. There was no talk. All were singing. They sang with intense earnestness, and the chant was repeated again and again. It was the "Internationale." The passengers, leaning out of the windows, listened quietly and unsympathetically. They were exclusively business men returning to Budapest in the hope—how illusory events have shown—of retrieving their lost fortunes.

Heard in England the "Internationale" sounds strange and somewhat revolting with its banal melody and almost unintelligible sentiment. On the Continent of Europe in the year 1919 it catches the ear very differently. You recognise it as the "Marseillaise" of a tremendous and dangerous revolutionary movement that, unlike that of over a century ago, seems to know no frontiers and to be unconscious of nationalism. It becomes unpleasantly familiar, and—I can speak for myself—always brings a certain sensation of fear. I had heard it in the streets of Paris on the First of May, when masses of workmen in the Place de la République had "barked" it hoarsely and savagely into the faces of the Cuirassiers; in Berlin again and again, sometimes to the accompaniment of machine-gun fire; in Hamburg.

Here it had a pathetic note. It was, almost certainly, the last time it was to be sung in this unhappy country; it was, as it were, Bolshevism's swan-song. Behind us we had left the White Terror raging in its full fury. White Guard officers had raided our train up the line for Red fugitives. At Raab the hue and cry was still on. In front of us lay the occupied city. A few hours later even this last pool of Bolshevism was to be scorched dry.

The incident, slight as it is, has this importance. It testifies to the sincerity and strength of the Bolshevik—or whatever other word one cares to use—faith among these working masses. During the next few weeks I had many opportunities of testing working-class feeling in Budapest. All the leaders were in prison or fugitives. Life was made hideous by the ceaseless and thorough search for arms and for suspects that went on day after day in the poor quarters of the town, by the tide of denunciation and espionage, by the fierceness of the Terror. You would suddenly find whole blocks of the town shut off by a cordon of Rumanian troops. Within the cordon no one was allowed to go out of doors, while a house-to-house search went on. Well-dressed Hungarian civilians or officers often accompanied the Rumanian search with lists in their hands. Issuing from the cordon, one would see groups of men being marched off. Occasionally a band of Red Guard soldiery would trail through the streets under heavy escort; simple boys, most of them,

who had accepted their conscription as passively under the Reds as they had done under the Hapsburg. No man felt himself safe. Even among the bourgeoisie that had hailed the fall of Bolshevism with delight there eventually entered the same fear. Denunciation was indiscriminate.

Amid this atmosphere of dread and suspicion men became afraid even to speak to you. I found it almost impossible, for example, to extract a statement from Mr. Peidl, the Socialist non-Bolshevik leader, whose short Prime-Ministership after the Communist collapse and splendid effort to rally all parties was brought to an abrupt end by the entry of our allies.

Yet throughout all this hard time the working class remained stalwart. They held aloof from the anti-Semitic fury. A Jew, of whatever class, was as safe in the working quarters as he would be in London, though for a Jew to enter the aristocratic "Burg" in Buda, where the Allied Missions had their headquarters and their soldiers, was to court death. Every effort was made to crush their spirit. First, their out-of-work pay was cut off. This was not a Bolshevik institution, but of much older standing. Nor was it cut off for purposes of economy. Then followed the devaluation at a stroke of their money; that is, the so-called "white" money in which their wages had been paid. The blue money of the Austro-Hungarian Bank was held exclusively by the rich and the peasantry. All the laws and regulations governing the hours and conditions of work were swept aside. Wages went down with a swoop. Instead of the equal rationing of food in a starving town, the little that came in went principally to the rich who could pay for it. In a short time the workers, moneyless, foodless, workless, and hopeless, would, as it was thought, be cowed enough to take their old place under the old discipline in the reopening factories that, of

course, had shut down on the collapse of the Soviets. Eventually the Rumanians spoiled this calculation and gave a final touch of catastrophe by gutting the factories of their plant.

I will give a piquant instance of the state of working-class mentality—even after the overthrow. "What do you think of Bolshevism?" I asked bluntly of a chief waiter at the Ritz, an efficient, deferential man who had served for years in one of the greatest London hotels. Most of the other guests, by the way, were English and American officers. The hotel was a part of the Mission headquarters. The answer was smoothly spoken, but just as blunt. "No doubt it was bad, sir. But I am a working man, and things were much better than now. Then I worked only eight hours a day and got good wages and time to live for myself. Now the proprietor has told us there is no limit of hours, and we must go on working so long as there is work to do; in practice, the whole day. Then I got as much to eat as other folks. Now I serve food to others that I cannot get myself." He added that he had not tasted meat for weeks and that his family was starving. Cynically regarded, the waiter's answer indicated a completely egoistic standpoint. It is a typical answer which almost any Hungarian worker gives. Short hours and high wages would seem at first to be their only standard. So with the workers of Berlin and Munich and every other city of Central Europe. Everywhere they are accused of lack of any will to work and of an immeasurable appetite for wages. Thus crudely stated, this charge is untrue. What has happened in fact throughout all these countries is a sort of servile rebellion, now definitely crushed in Hungary, but simmering elsewhere.

The mass psychology has undergone a vast transformation. It has lost its old allegiances and faith in authority, whether of masters or of Government. Freedom is its dominating motive; freedom to live, which means shorter hours and more leisure, and freedom to live a full life, which means wages enough to permit enjoyment of leisure. It may be egoism, but it has its good side. The worker is hardly conscious of any change of mentality. He believes in his right to freedom and a full life just as innocently and unself-consciously as he formerly accepted his relatively inferior human status. Nor can he understand any denial of this right. Such a mass psychosis is a far more formidable fact than the rise or fall of a Bolshevik Government. It is universal in Central and Eastern Europe. It is spreading westwards. Proletarian Governments may be crushed or fall by their own weight. But a mass psychology is not so easily dealt with. On the contrary, it has to be taken into account if social stability is to be regained.

The pathetic singing of the "Internationale" in the outer suburb of Pest last night was symptomatic of the working-class of Hungary is faced with a situation where out factories there can be worked because the workers will perish of hunger or they will drift away into the countryside or to Russia or Roumania. They were already being drafted off, partly by force, partly as indentured labor, when I left Budapest. But wherever they go they will carry their "Internationale," their new and simple ethic with them. Probably they will find it already in existence wherever they are likely to arrive. This is Bolshevism.



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A recent snapshot in the yard of the Kremlin