**Hungary and Europe – B Török**

**Extract-The Uprising of 1956**

Wars for the freedom of the nation were a dominant part of Hungarian history. The Magyars could never endure for a long time the slavery of the oppressors. The events of 1956 are however somewhat different from the freedom-wars of the past. The uprisings of Rákóczi or Kossuth were led by the nobles and were politically and militarily organised. The up­rising of *1956* had, on the other hand, its roots in the industrial workers of the country and, in fact, the revolt was leaderless. A most cruel and degrading oppression which lasted for more than a decade created a desperate attitude in the population which was ready to ignore the political considerations and chal­lenged, in a nearly suicidal manner, the superpower which was on the verge of dominating Europe.

Notwithstanding, the explosion of the revolt was a result of external political moves and was determined by the policies of the non-European powers who ruled over the destiny of the once mighty continent.

The Soviet Union, after the death of Stalin, made certain moves to consolidate her western advances. Her idea was to gain time before she decided to commence a final battle for the domination of Europe. A peace was a necessity for the Soviet Union as the acquirement; production and stockpiling of atomic weapons were a "sine qua non" for an encounter. She had to also witness the disintegration of the colonial might of the Europeans and she realized that, without a substantial naval force, Russia would not be able to challenge the maritime powers.

These are the reasons why Russia was finally prepared to compromise in the Berlin crisis and showed some flexibility on the Greek-Turkish line. She did not force a showdown in the French and Italian scene and created again an understanding with the U.S.A. The Soviet Union therefore informally accepted the fact that she could not reach over the Yalta boundaries and, on the other hand, the U.S.A. did not further pursue the idea of the liberation of Eastern Europe and the problem of the unification of Germany was also shelved.

In Hungary the U.S.S.R. took steps to change the Stalinist leadership. The head and main personalities of the regime were in fact non-Magyar Soviet citizens and there is a story told that one of the leading Russian politicians lectured Rákosi in that his rule was evidently unacceptable to the Magyars, who had endured the rule of the Sultan and the German Emperors, but would not succumb to his Kingdom.

The Suez Crisis was in full swing in the month before the Hungarian uprising and one may see certain connections between the events noted.

Nasser made his first move to nationalize the Suez Canal. This action of course was a further step to complete the dis­integration of the British and French Empires, but, for the newly created State of Israel, it meant the beginnings of an Arab encirclement and they decided to occupy the Canal in defiance of the emerging new order.

The Soviet Union was ready to act as the champion of Arab freedom and made resolute military preparations to counter the expected British-French-Israeli move.

Under the circumstances, Moscow gave positive orders to Budapest not only to change the hated leadership, but to ensure the creation of a national consensus which would have secured her right wing if a march to Suez had to be ordered.

The brain-trust of the Communist leadership then took steps to arrange certain events which would have created a national reconciliation in Hungary. On the 15th March, 1848, the Youth of Pest proclaimed their 12 points, which culminated in the Kossuth uprising. The Communists now posthumously rehabili­tated the executed Rajk and his collaborators. The tertiary students of Szeged "left" the Communist union of the university. A similar action by the Budapest students was "not opposed." The Government acknowledged the autonomy of the universities and the contours of a demonstration, imitating the famous "15th of March," took shape.

As more than a hundred years ago, the university students now proclaimed again in 12 points the wishes of the nation. The text of the "demands" was obscure, leaders did not emerge and the Government had all the opportunity to manipulate the happenings.

This skillfully staged show however erupted into a national uprising.

The leaderless, oppressed masses isolated behind an iron curtain were unable to judge the political situation of the world and were seriously misled.

The voice of America, which was of course the voice of the C.I.A., indoctrinated the Hungarian listeners to believe that the Soviet Union was weak, the post-Stalinist leaders were fighting each other, the world was witnessing the fall of the Soviet might and now the oppressed people had to take up arms. Accordingly, when the Communist leaders did not take any action to counter the apparently revolutionary moves of the university students, the feeling grew that the time had arrived to defy the rule of Moscow.

Therefore, the new "15th of March" did not proceed accord­ing to the plans of the regime. The mass march to the square, where General Bem's stature reminded the Magyars of the glory of the fights against the Habsburgs, was still endured by the police. When however the masses decided to take over the radio station of Budapest, the political police (A.V.O.) opened fire. The first shots were discharged and during the night of the 23rd October, *1956,* with the help of deserters from the Communist army, the workers and students received weapons and the fight for the radio station began.

It is not easy to appreciate the history of this revolution which lasted for only two weeks. There can be no comparison with the freedom-wars of Rákóczi or Kossuth. In those struggles the nation had time and area to organise her resistance. Military units were formed and a sound war-industry produced the tools of war. The leaders had defined aims, and sound foreign policy.

All these elements were missing in the October struggles of 1956. Hungary was militarily occupied by the Soviet Union and Russian units had their bases on strategic key points. The communication centers, the airports, railways and highways,

were controlled by the Soviet Army. The Hungarian army had Russian weapons, its ammunition reserves were low and the Hungarian army units had only few artillery, tanks or motorized elements. A war in the conventional sense could not be waged by Hungarian forces. Also, the guerilla type resistance and attacks by the armed population were only possible as the Soviet Union wanted to give a chance for a compromise solution to emerge which would have saved the political reputation of the Hungarian Communist Party.

Accordingly, the Hungarian uprising was not directed and waged against the Russian army, but it was the revolt of the people against its cruel oppressors. Of course, the nation was aware that, behind the Communists, Moscow was the real enemy of Hungarian independence and freedom. Consequently, the uprising made her central aim the independence and neutrality of Hungary.

Basically, however her claim for neutrality was the main reason why a compromise was not possible. The Soviet Union certainly wanted to consolidate the Hungarian political position, but toward her own interest of creating a relatively co-operative base for her further advances. Hungary could not be allowed to leave the Warsaw Pact and the Yalta-Empire of the Russians.

The gunfire began on the night of the 23rd October. Street fights developed between the security forces and the armed workers and students. The Government acted resolutely, pro­claimed military law and asked for Russian help.

The next day it became evident that the uprising had spread and, in the Capital, and the bigger towns’ bloody encounters disrupted public order. The Government asked for the deploy­ment of more Russian troops. In order to appease the people, the Government was reorganized. Imre Nagy was appointed as Prime Minister and the hated Hegedűs and Gerő remained in the background. Amnesty was proclaimed and the time limit to surrender arms was again and again extended.

From the point of view of the Communists, the situation grew worse. More and more districts of the Capital and country centers came under the control of the revolutionaries. The army joined the rebels in large numbers and the Government did not dare order the deployment of the troops, generally fear­ing their change of colors.

Following Moscow's advice, the Government made or promised further concessions. The Russian troops were withdrawn into their barracks and the Government began negotiations with the rebels.

On the 25th October, Gerő’s abdication was announced and John Kádár became his successor. Further, the radio made the announcement that the Government had begun negotiations with Russia for the withdrawal of the Soviet troops. Evidently, this announcement only desired to stress that the Russian troops would not participate in any further conflicts and would be confined to their barracks. The emerging leaders of the up­rising however felt that, if pressured, the Russian troops would leave Hungary. Therefore, the speeches of the revolutionary leaders began to refer to the neutrality of the country and their wish for Hungary to become the bridge between East and West and urged the withdrawal of Hungary from the Warsaw Pact.

On the 26th October, the hard-pressed Communist Party and Government were ready for further promises. The totalitarian state would be abolished and a free election to be held. The Government accepted the demand of the people to ensure the Russian withdrawal from the country, but the Soviet Union alliance with Hungary would continue on the basis of equality. By this time however the revolutionaries insisted on the neutrality of Hungary.

On the 27th October, the Government was again reorganized. Non-Communist Ministers were also appointed, such as Bela Kovács and Zoltán Tildy. The Government was however still a Communist one and the memory of the years *1945-1947,* when the Communists ruled within the framework of Coalition Governments was still alive and the revolutionaries pressed the Government for radical changes.

The next day it became evident that the Communist Party and their Russian-supported forces had lost the battle, which was of course possible only as the regular forces of the U.S.S.R. had been withdrawn into the barracks. The population rejected any co-operation with the Yalta regime and the opportunists who, up to this point, were collaborators of the Government deserted their posts in mass and sought freedom from revenge by crossing the Austrian frontier and posing as refugees.

The revolutionaries did not have outstanding leaders, but, in the districts of the Capital and in the towns, people's revolutionary councils were formed and a new administration attended to the preservation of public order. The revolutionaries belonged to the full specter of political colors. Disillusioned Communists, left and right-wing political prisoners freed from the prisons and the concentration camps took up positions. They all had one common aim, namely to ensure the independence of the country and to achieve freedom from the social, economic and military suppression of the Soviet Union. The problem of the future constitution was not a question of the present. They hoped to settle this in freedom.

A national guard was set up and more and more public institutions co-operated with the revolutionaries.

On the 30th October, the Government was again reorganized. More liberal and conservative leaders joined ministerial ranks and certain political parties announced their re-establishment. Cardinal Mindszenty was freed and the First Baron of the land began political negotiations to clarify the position. On the same night Radio Budapest was placed under revolutionary control and was broadcasting as Free Kossuth Radio. The freedom of the press seemed to have been reborn and independent news­papers were published. Paul Maléter was appointed as Minister of Defense and Irnre Nagy, the Prime Minister, made his fateful proclamation that Hungary intended to withdraw from the War­saw Pact and requested the Soviet Union to arrange negotiations for the withdrawal of the Russian troops from the country.

This announcement was the turning point of the uprising. The Soviet Union had disengaged most of its troops in the encounter between the revolutionaries and the Communist security forces, as its aim anyhow was to create in Hungary some sort of a political consensus of the population, but was not willing to evacuate its occupation forces from the country and so lose its sphere of influence.

The rule over the Carpathian Basin is the natural base of any offensive policy against the Balkan Peninsula and, in the case of an attack of the Soviet Union from the Czech-Moravian area towards Austria and Southern Germany, the rule over Hungary was a necessary security of the rear lines. Any such Soviet attack on the left wing should see troops moving from Transdanubia into Austria and against Vienna. Accordingly, Hungary was an offensive base of the Soviet Union and could not be released from the bonds of Yalta.

In the meantime, the Suez crisis was set aside by the common ultimatums of the Soviet and the U.S.A. which secured the surrender of the British-French-Israeli policies 25 and Russia was able to move some of her troops, mobilized for a Suez action, against Hungary.

The Government of Imre Nagy was now under revolutionary control. The new organization of the Government disclosed this fact and there were only three Communist Ministers in the Cabinet, clearly in minority. One of them, John Kádár, withdrew from the business of government and, in fact, entered into negotiation with the Soviet authorities. Subsequently, he was named as the chief of the new Government with instructions to re-establish the Communist order.

The last revolutionary Government had no illusions about the severity of the situation. Their main aim was to prove to the world that free Hungary did not want a Communist solution of the crisis.

The position of neutrality for Hungary, the basic demand of the uprising, however was unattainable against Russia. Regarding some economic and social demands, the Soviet was ready to make concessions, which the ensuing rule of John Kádár clearly proved, but neutrality of the country was not possible in *1956.* The imperialism of the Soviet Union had not as yet come to its ends. The death of Stalin, the end of the Cold War and the age of "peaceful co-existence" meant only an interval in the history of Soviet imperialism.

On the 4th November, *1956,* fresh Russian troops began the occupation of the country and now the Soviets attacked in force the national guards of the uprising.

The people's resistance however lasted for months. Guerilla type encounters, general strike of the workers and passive resistance of the population marked this period. Secret radio stations sent their messages to the West, praying for help, but the superpowers and their satellites were not willing to change the political balance of power in Europe which was meant to be a division of Europe between the non-European power-alliance.

From the Hungarian point of view, the revolution however was not in vain. Hungary again appeared on the political scene

as at least morally the leading East-European power. Her attitude and resistance against the oppressors created a new national mythos.

Notice was served on Moscow that Hungarians do not endure slavery and her policy must change at least economically and socially if a relatively peaceful co-operation of the country is sought.