

Appendix

Two articles by the Secretary of the Finnish Legation in Budapest (1940–1944), T. H. Heikkilä, on the development of the condition of Hungary in 1945¹

1. Social and Economical Condition (from *Kyntäjä*, no. 2a, February, 1945, 3–5)

When, at the breakdown of the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary in 1918, an "independent" Hungary was formed, it did not amount to the birth of "a new state" in the ordinary sense of the word. On the contrary, it is well-known how proud the Hungarians are of their thousand-year-old past. And not without reason; its parliament is perhaps the oldest in the world. However, the grand outer shell of the state had become so obsolete that it could no longer, in spite of its great museatic value, meet the requirements of the times. Thus the aftermath of the World War brought about a revolution in Hungary, too.

But the revolution in Hungary was not based on any other preparation than pointing at the age-old sins of the ruling classes against the common people. It was easy enough to get it under way after the lost War but it did not carry with it any such basic materials on which democratic life could have been built. A temporary reign of horror and terror was established of which the Rumanians took the advantage by marching up to Budapest. In (these confusing) conditions Admiral Horthy who was surrounded by contra-revolutionaries, reinstated peace without much bloodshed. Hungary remained a monarchy under its former laws. In the peace treaty (of Trianon) Hungary gained borders which quite straightforwardly cut territories off from the former state.

¹ These articles were found by Antti Heikkilä in *Kyntäjä*, a paper of the Agrarian Union. They have been translated into English by the editor.

Two facts now became decisive for the coming development of Hungary: the unreformed character of the social life of the country and the harsh peace of Trianon. The former spelled domestic, the latter foreign political impasse.

Horthy undoubtedly had great potential to lead the state of Hungary. All those who still lived in the romantic atmosphere of the dual monarchy could easily agree on him. As a personality who had lived in the court of the Habsburgs and who had created a remarkable career in the service of Franz Joseph, was excellently suited to step to the throne guarded by a thousand-year-old crown which could not be given to a monarch in a moment when monarchs had lost their credibility for ever. On the other hand, there were not any suitable candidates. But this solution which was "in absence of anything better" dictated by nobles meant the suppression of most, even healthy, aspirations for reforms. A landowner's descent, habsburgian education and professionalism of an admiral are rarely an opportune background for a social reformer. It is evident that Horthy did not have the career of a reforming statesman in mind. But it is all the clearer that he could not have survived personally had he, as the suppressor of the revolution, started to realise the programme of the revolution. For even if Horthy's position was quite strong, it was imperilled by one weakness: he is a protestant whereas majority of the Hungarians are catholic. The catholic church is a formidable political power. The nobles are mostly catholic. The interests of the church and nobility converge in many issues. Admiral Horthy had to take these factors into account and, as already mentioned, this did not cause a great revision in the policy which he would have adopted anyway.

In consequence, Hungarian society was left to develop 'naturally'. The old-fashioned character of the realm of St. Stephen and the "misery" of the Hungarian people have quite often been exaggerated. As far as I succeeded in acquainting myself with the people's life, the most prominent remnants of the past were those external forms which have next to nothing to do with "misery" but which have a wide ethical meaning. I mean the barriers between social classes. The numerous and largely extravagantly wealthy nobility lives in its own world, as a self-assertive, exclusive caste. The middle-class is composed of shaky materials. Its members, many of them noble in origin, imitate the nobility at least in looking

down on the lower classes. As they reach high status in society, they almost regard themselves as being on a par with the nobles, at least with the ones who do not own lands any longer. The peasantry is somehow respected but it is also a caste from which it is difficult and hard to detach oneself. Only relatively few from peasantry can rise through education and gain a respectable status in society. Besides, the peasants themselves are – in public and, in particular, in their own consciousness – divided in inequal groups according to property. A wealthier peasant will not mix with a poorer one and marriages of poor and wealthier are hardly allowed. The workers are worst-off; they are not recognized as a social class at all and anybody hardly respects them. It is possible that the nobles and others show patriarchal friendliness towards their servants and other workers with whom they have dealings but as a class and members in social family they remain unrecognized.

'Natural development' has worked more freely in economic sphere. Many nobles have suffered from impoverishment, lost their lands, and are now working for salary in office. Quite a few young "countesses" and "baronesses" work as typists. They are hard-working but earn a little, and so they drift down in social scale and – pretty as they are – are usually married to a bourgeois civil servant to whom this kind of good deal means a "promotion" in respectability and good hopes of success because these girls have relatives in every government.

The middle-class that rules business and free professions does not essentially differ from the ones in other countries. The only difference is that it has to compete with the Jews who are more vigorous and perhaps more skilful and usually get the highest earnings.

The peasantry is quite extraordinary in many respects. As I said earlier, it forms its own caste. Their dresses, their view of life and their economic conditions are age-old. Half of the land in Hungary is owned by some 1200 great landlords. Only the other half is in the hands of the peasant population who number millions. In most cases, the peasants own from five to ten hectares of arable land, rarely more, but sometimes even twenty-five hectares. There is no forest at all. If fertility of the land and favourable climate is taken into consideration this should be sufficient for a living for one family. It appeared that peasants were actually living comparably

well and their household was in good order. As I glanced into their storehouses I usually saw respectable amount of ham in spits. When I sat at their dinner-table the sin of overeating often occurred to me although something extra had been brought to the table "for the guest". The sunday-dress of a peasant woman shows that she does not have to suffer from cold; during summer parades they wore at least nine underskirts. So, "misery" is in general quite a relative concept. In any case, to apply it to a Hungarian peasant is mostly exaggeration. However, the fact remains that the economic condition of the peasant is poor. He does not have any capital, and this state of affairs binds him to his eternal lot. He cannot initiate any reforms, expand his fields by buying additional land, nor get his children a proper education in secondary schools. He cannot afford to buy books nor to subscribe a newspaper. Thus, the Hungarian peasant leads his life without mental interests and latitude. Generation after generation his life is the same; the circumstances never change. There is plenty of time to gain some extra income because agriculture in Hungary does not demand much labour in winter-time. But there is no forestry and not much industry there. The peasant cannot but be contented with working on his own lot. When his own household does not employ him he has to remain idle. This means low income. By a landreform dwarfish plots could have been expanded in order to provide peasants with better opportunities. Vocational agricultural training has also been neglected. For this reason the cultivation of small plots is not efficient. One further obstacle stands in the way of prosperity of Hungarian agriculture: the lack of suitable markets. In war-time this was not a problem but in normal times it is. All South-Eastern Europe is filled with agricultural products for they cannot be exported because of the great distance from the markets. Germany has imported quite a lot but its markets are very unstable. This is a hindrance for the development of dairy farming in particular. The peasants have only very few milking cows because they do not use much milk in their own households and the use of butter is almost unknown. The peasants drink wine or beer and spread pork fat on their bread, and finish their meal with a shot of spirits.

The condition of *the working class* is varied according to employment. The life of a cowherd is almost as monotonous as the life of his cattle. He usually sleeps on a bench attached to the roof of

a cowshed or a barn. Illiterate and totally ignorant of the outer world such a cowherd leads his life in mental darkness. Money is an unknown concept to him and he does not have a share in any of the advantages that make life worth living. His life is gloomy and toilsome. Summer in the sunny fields of the southern climate is sweaty and hot. The earnings gathered then have to support one over winter, for there is not any winter work to do. Actually, there is only harvesting since there is no need for ditching because summer is regularly almost rainless and the land gets dry for sowing by itself thanks to the long spring. Although daily earnings are fairly high they do not come to much for every month of the year to live on.

Factory workers, especially the skilled ones are considerably better-off. Their standard of living is about the same as everywhere in Central Europe. Craftsmen earn good wages, too, but they are all the same very skillful.

This was the situation during the war. Favourable economic conditions had probably improved it all down the line. However, this improvement was only temporary. The worker was able to realize it when he had to buy clothing or food-stuffs beyond the limits of the coupon; his wages, though they had increased, were not sufficient, especially in the year 1944 when prices went up extraordinarily.

From this survey which is out of necessity quite cursory, one conclusion can be drawn: social conceptions in Hungary are generally more old-fashioned than economic conditions. Many an observer held that the bitterness and class-hatred engendered by the former were so wide-spread that a revolution would soon follow if an occasion for it were to arise. There were also those who surmised that it would be a bloody one. However, the general view had it that the peasantry would not join the revolutionaries. But, of course, this cannot be taken for granted.

The development of foreign political situation which is now in an exciting stage is dealt with in a later article.

2. Foreign Policy

(*Kyntäjä*, no. 4-5, April-May, 1945, 7)

The peace treaty of Trianon aroused a mood of hopelessness in the Hungarian people. There were circles who understood the separation of non-Hungarian territories from the state but the fact that a large section of the Hungarian nation remained outside the new borders upset everyone. This formed the basis of the movement which demanded a revision of the treaty. At the same time relations with neighbouring countries, Czechoslovakia, Rumania and Yugoslavia became strained. These last mentioned naturally would not give anything back voluntarily and Hungary could not consider to force the issue – alone.

The only possibility to reach rectification was to gain support for the aspirations of Hungary from the outside. At first Hungary turned to London. Public opinion in England started quite soon to criticise the mistakes of post-war peace treaties. The mood of the world developed favourably for Hungary but this did not seem to have any meaning on its borders. Co-operation with Italy became very close but it eased the position of Hungary only morally.

Instead, Hitler's rise to power and the consequent growth of German influence created a temptation for Hungary to acquire compensation. The temptation was far too great to resist. On the other hand, common policy with national-socialist Germany was not altogether a pleasant affair for the leaders of Hungary.

After the war Hungary was for ten years ruled by liberals who were led by Count Bethlen. This political party was basically cautious and did not contemplate hostile solutions. However, it had to step aside in 1933, and the government of Hungary took on a more rightist colour under the leadership of General Gömbös. Gömbös was a sworn germanophile and his aim was to establish very close ties with Germany. Some political circles in Hungary forcefully resisted this policy since the programme of national-socialism included many points that were repulsive to Hungarians. Especially the points concerning the treatment of the Jews aroused "prejudices" in a country the public opinion of which was greatly affected by Jewish population. Gömbös died in 1936 so that his activities did not coincide the times of the high rise of Hitlerism. When the borders of Germany began – at first peacefully – to move,

Hungary took part in dismembering Czechoslovakia. The enthusiasm aroused by the regaining of the old territories, though peace-meal, clouded the minds of the Hungarian leaders to some extent but they tried to stay aloof of the general conflict. They followed the programme: reincorporate Hungarian territories, otherwise conciliatory policy towards outsiders. The government of Teleki went even so far as to give up all claims on Yugoslavia and conclude an agreement of eternal friendship with it. When Germany in 1941 demanded the right of way through Hungary in order to attack Yugoslavia Count Teleki declined. At the moment Hungarian "patriotism" and German might were so overwhelming that Teleki could not handle the situation. He resigned demonstratively by committing suicide.

Now germanophiles took over and Hungary joined the Axis almost without reservations. This policy was highlighted as Hungary entered the war against Soviet Union in summer 1941 and declared war against England and the United States at the beginning of December in 1941. Some changes concerning the treatment of Jews were also brought into effect in legislation following the wishes of Germany.

When the war on the eastern front culminated in the battle of Stalingrad and the destruction of the German sixth army there, the Hungarians begun to feel forebodings. They wanted to retreat in good order but this was actually no longer possible. In 1943 the situation was so unfortunate for Hungary that it could not, as one clever reporter put it – "surrender unconditionally because there were not any enemies close enough to whom give up arms". So, Hungary had to try and estrange itself from Germany without having any chance to approach its enemies.

That the war should overrun the country was now axiomatic. It was remarkably painful to await the one and only possible outcome, Hungary's becoming a theatre of war. This was, however, the situation of the country during last summer. Nobody could find either a political or his own personal way out of it. Since there was no Sweden-like neutral country across the border, the escape from "the sinking ship" did not offer great chances.

The extreme right then took to desperate measures and took power with German assistance on the 15th of October, 1944. This was supported by those who considered their future destroyed in any

case. In order to prolong the war and their own lives they dragged Hungary completely into a struggle in which it had been able for five years to play only a minor role without losing neither much man-power nor economic values. It resulted in a few months' battle over Hungary which naturally brought great devastation to the country. Budapest and greater part of the country have already been liberated. A new provisional government has been formed but the fate of Hungary is otherwise quite obscure.

Those Hungarians who criticised the way the foreign policy of the country was conducted, used quite sharp language. The fact that Hungary had not been able to create good relations with any of its neighbours but warred with all of them was regarded as highly aggravating. According to the views of many the circumstances in rump-Hungary had become quite tolerable and the future would have brought opportunities to minor conciliatory arrangements had the government stayed aloof of Hitler's adventurous policy. These voices of reason did not, however, sound an echo any earlier because megalomania had infatuated the political circles. At the end of the Hungarian tragedy regret was of no avail. Thus Hungary has to take the long way back to peaceful conditions.

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