War and Revolution

The Hungarian anarchist movement in World War I and the Budapest Commune (1919)

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INTRODUCTION

The Budapest Commune of 1919 has been neglected by the historians of anarchism, yet it provides an important and fascinating opportunity to understand the anarchist movement at a crucial historical moment. We can see how and why anarchist fortunes declined after the end of the First World War, as anarchist organisations fused with Marxist parties, or were crushed by protofascism.

The Commune also raises issues with contemporary resonance — such as the role of anarchists in revolutionary situations, and the part played by anarchism in shaping what has been described as *"Western Marxism"* , although both of these subjects are complex enough to require their own studies. In piecing together the history of the Hungarian anarchists, I have also been forced to think about the way ideas about anarchism circulate within the British anarchist movement. This last point is of particular interest, because although many of the foremost theorists of anarchism have been European, contemporary anarchist thought often appears subject to a form of cultural imperialism that parallels the cultural imperialism of the dominant system. We remain unaware of important aspects of our own and European history while our ideas and priorities are often influenced by the cultural values of the anarchist movement in the USA. Because of a common language ideas are easily circulated across the Atlantic, whereas language barriers separate us from the influence of European anarchism. This can cause real problems for the development of anarchism as an effective social movement. A classic example of a missed opportunity was our failure to support the newly emergent anarchist groups in Eastern Europe after the collapse of Stalinism.

LATE 19th CENTURY HUNGARIAN ANARCHISM

Soon after the foundation of the first Social Democratic Party in Hungary, a left-wing opposition emerged, forming its own organisation in 1881, described by the police as "socialist anarchist". Influenced by the German social democrat turned anarchist, Johann Most, and the radical Viennese journal *Die Zukunft*, this group looked to a massive popular uprising to overthrow capitalism. Their first newspapers were banned, but in 1883 they published *Neparkarat* (People's Will!) and its German-language counterpart *Radikal*. The group and the papers managed to survive for more than a year, during which time they moved to a more Bakuninist position. Although the Hungarian anarchists were not engaged in terrorism, in 1884 the Minister of the Interior ordered the expulsion of all foreign anarchists, and imprisoned the Hungarian organisers. Andras Szalay, the editor of both papers, and the author of a fiery editorial: "*Against tyrants all means are lawful*" was imprisoned and died in jail.

A second strand of Hungarian anarchism coalesced around the figure of Jeno Henrik Schmitt, who advocated a form of Christian anarchism influenced by Gnosticism and Tolstoy's book *The Kingdom of God is Within You*. Schmitt and a small group of followers launched a journal *The Religion of the Spirit*, which contained translations of Tolstoy's writings, and reports of the Dukhobors' struggle against military conscription in Russia.

Schmitt publicly resigned from his job as librarian in 1896, as a way of renouncing the state in practice as well as in theory — partly in response to pressure from the authorities after he contributed an article on "*the religion of anarchism*" to Gustav Landauer's Berlin journal *Der*

Sozialist. During the same year Schmitt suspended publication of his first paper *Die Religion*, and started two new papers, *Allam Neikull* (Stateless) and *Ohne Staat* (Without the State). In January 1897 he began a campaign of political agitation amongst the peasantry, in co-operation with the social democrat turned anarchist, Istvan Varkonyl.

Varkonyl led a breakaway faction from the social democrats that had developed into a radical peasant movement, influenced by a mixture of anarchism, Proudhonism, and Narodnik-style[1] socialism. Varkonyl's idea was for a Swiss-style federation of local self-governing communities, peasant unions, district workers' federations and national councils. In his scheme land would not be collectivised nor divided among small-holders, but allotted temporarily to the cultivators. Schmitt and Varkonyl were also influential in shaping the anti-statist programme of the Independent Socialist Party, Which in 1897 issued a manifesto, that identified:

> *"the state as the well-spring of all evil and, therefore, advocates that people refuse granting funds and manpower to it, so that violence ceases to exist even in its legal form in the name of order."*

Although Varkonyl's movement successfully mobilised the mass of the peasantry during the great Harvesters' Strike of 1897 its success was short-lived. The government reacted swiftly, banning peasant congresses. Workers' meetings were forcibly dispersed by the army resulting in serious casualties. The *Independent Socialist* newspaper was banned, and Varkonyl fled to Vienna, but was extradited and imprisoned for nine months. Schmitt, although a Tolstoyan pacifist, was put on trial for incitement to violence. The agrarian movement collapsed under the repression, with many of its members joining religious sects, rejoining the social democrats, or other breakaway groups. Schmitt himself moved to Germany in 1908, living with Gnostic friends until death in 1916.

Another peasant activist was Sandor Csizmadia, a farmworker from impoverished area around Oroshaza. Forced to give up his small holding and became a railway worker in order to earn a living, he also became an anarchist, and in 1894 was imprisoned for anarchist propaganda. Frequently jailed for his activities he used imprisonment as an opportunity to learn to read and write, and became a poet. His published work included *Songs of a Proletarian* (Proletarkoltemenyck) and *To the Dawn* (Hajne'ban) and the "' *Workers' Marseillaise*" the Hungarian revolutionary "hymn" frequently sung on demonstrations.

In December 1905 Csizmadia helped form a Union of Rural Workers to challenge the power of the landowners. It grew rapidly. By May 1906 it had 25.000 members organised in 300 groups, eventually growing to 625 groups and 75.000 members. The Union gave the peasants the confidence to organise strikes – but again the state took draconian action to break the peasant organisation, arresting 4.000 and imposing massive fines on agricultural workers who stayed away from work, and banning the Union. Csizmadia was among the first to be arrested, and after his release he was forced to go into hiding on several occasions.

[1] The Narodniks (Russian: Наро́дники) were a socially-conscious movement of the Russian middle class in the 1860s and 1870s. Their ideas and actions were known as Narodnichestvo (Наро́дничество), which can be translated as "Peopleism", though it is more commonly rendered as "populism".

ERVIN BATTHYANY AND EARLY 20th CENTURY ANARCHISM

At the end of the 19th Century Ervin Batthyany was one of the most active anarchists in Hungary. A member of an ancient aristocratic family, he studied at Cambridge and London Universities, and was influenced by Kropotkin's anarchism and the ideas of Edward Carpenter. In the mid 1890's he returned to Hungary where his family possessed large estates in Pannonie. His anarchist beliefs prompted a strong reaction from his family who forcibly incarcerated him in a sanatorium for two years. Influenced by Tolstoy's example, he distributed the land among the peasants who cultivated it. Inspired by the Narodniks he planned to establish clubs, reading rooms and schools on anarchist lines in the countryside. His first act was to start a progressive school at Bogote 1905 in a challenge to the Catholic Church's monopoly on education. It was immediately attacked in the press by the local clergy as *"ungodly"* and by the authorities as seditious. On at least one occasion a local cleric led an attack on the school by a stone-throwing mob armed with sticks. Windows were broken and the anarchist poet Sandor Csizmadia was injured. Undeterred Batthyany expanded the school, providing free textbooks as well as free education.

Batthyany also provided financial backing for anarchist newspapers and journals, including the journal *Tarsadalmi Forradalom* (Social Revolution), although shortly after its launch he handed editorial control over to Karoly Krausz, once an advocate of Schmitt's Christian anarchism, but by then a member of the Revolutionary Socialist Group of anarchists. Batthyany financed *Allam Nelkul* in 1895, (also edited by Krausz) which survived under a number of titles until 1914, and a monthly paper *A Jovo* (Future). He translated the works of Kropotkin, Tolstoy and Stirner into Hungarian, and wrote and published many pamphlets for circulation, including a study of Edward Carpenter. He first appeared in Budapest speaking on anarchism in a lecture series organised by the influential but dissident Sociological Society. He argued that anarchism should be based on human solidarity and mutual aid, rather than the biblical principles advocated by Schmitt. It was largely due to his energy that several anarchist circles developed In the early years of the 20th Century.

The intensity of Batthyany's activism and disheartening personal disputes with other anarchists eventually resulted in his gradual disengagement from Hungarian anarchism. The school in Bogote was taken over by the state, and Batthyany moved permanently to England in 1910, and became quietly involved within the movement there.

Among those influenced by Batthyany was Bojtor, who directed his activities to the workers' circles in Budapest. According to one account, Bojtor was arrested for involvement in an attempt on the life of Emperor Franz Joseph. He fled to Italy, but was deported and eventually finished up in France, where he remained until returning to Budapest at the end of World War I.

ERVIN SZABO

Towering over Hungarian anarchism is the figure of Ervin Szabo — an unusual synthesis of scholar, propagandist and conspirator. Son of a failed small businessman, he studied in Budapest and Vienna, before eventually becoming a librarian in Budapest. He played a significant part in the development of a modem public library system in Hungary, and became director of the Budapest Municipal Library, which he transformed into a model institution. His influence extended across the political divisions of Hungarian socialism.

During his early political career Szabo was a member of the Hungarian Social Democratic Party (HSDP), although he was simultaneously the Budapest contact for Russian revolutionaries who he met when studying in Vienna. His role within the HSDP was oppositional but he did not break with the social democrats until 1909. During this period he edited a two-volume selection of the works of Marx and Engels, the introduction to which has been praised as the best introduction to Marxism available in Hungarian. In 1905 Szabo unsuccessfully attempted to organise critical opposition within the HSDP in an effort to reform the party's structure and to radicalise its agrarian programme. When this failed he joined the Revolutionary Socialist Group, a Budapest-based group formed by anarchists and disenchanted socialists like himself.

Founded by Krausz, the Revolutionary Socialist Group was under police surveillance from it's formation. It consisted of about 40–50 craft workers and focused mainly on anti-parliamentary and anti-militarist propaganda, leafletting and flyposting round Budapest. Krausz edited the group's paper *Tarsadalmi Forradalom* (Social Revolution) from his home, its normal print-run of 3.000 copies increased to over 5.000 for the special anti-militarist issues. Although hampered by lack of funds the revolutionary socialists gradually established contacts with other groups in Hungary, and its organisational base expanded to about 200. Szabo tried to organise a syndicalist propaganda group, sometimes in co-operation with other Budapest anarchists, including Ignac Beller, a machinist in a factory. Although the meetings were small, they brought together many of the people who subsequently became active in the anti-war movement several years later.

Szabo also took part in the activities of the *"Fabianist"* Sociological Society, was a major contributor to the journal *Huszadik Szazad* (Twentieth Century), and kept up a serious correspondence with prominent French syndicalists, organising a meeting of visiting anarcho-syndicalists in Budapest, and occasionally contributing to *La Mouvement Sociale*. This was a difficult time for Szabo, increasingly isolated from the social democrats, and disappointed by the growing connections between some sections of the international syndicalist movement and nationalism.

THE ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT

During the early years of the war Szabo restricted himself to analysing the nature of war and capitalism in a series of articles and lectures. These were not calls to action, but a lucid analysis of the economics of war. In the winter of 1915/1916 he organised a meeting of writers who were against the war (including the later Marxist Grygory Lukacs, the poet Mihaly Babits, screen writer and author Bela Balazs and economist Andre Gabor), but nothing followed on from the meeting. In 1916 he tried to organise opposition to the war inside the HSDP, but was again unsuccessful.

The first brief but successful attempt at articulating opposition to the war was the initiative taken by Szabo's friend, the anarchist writer and artist Lajos Kassak. Kassak was pitched into work while still young, and according to his own account became an effective agitator in his early teens, causing a strike in a power station at the age of 12. When he was 21 he decided to walk to Paris, with the slightly older Emil Szittya, an apprentice who had lived for several years by begging and who later became a writer. They walked through Switzerland and Germany to Belgium, where Kassak was arrested while attending an anarchist meeting, and spent several days in prison, before deportation. With the help of the anarchists he eventually reached Paris.

In Paris he encountered modernist ideas about art and literature. On his return to Budapest he began publishing short stories, and promoting avant-garde ideas. In November 1915 Kassak began publishing *A Tett* (The Act), in imitation of the German *Die Aktion*, a paper that had successfully fused art and politics in opposition to German militarism. *A Tett* was idealistic, anti-war, and determined to change the world, but its anti-war stand and general rebelliousness led to its total suppression in August 1916. Kassak was not easily deterred and by November had commenced publishing its equally radical successor, *Ma* (Today), although that also had problems with censorship.

As the war dragged on its effects on the workers and peasants became more pronounced. Workers frequently laboured more than 60 hours a week to make ends meet, and children as young as 10 and 12 worked up to 12 hours a day. By 1916 the currency was worth only half its pre-war value, wages fell, although profits soared, in spite of the disruption to industry caused by the war. On the Eastern front, hundreds of thousands of Hungarian soldiers died fighting Entente troops in the bitter cold of the Carpathian mountains, and casualties continued to mount. Throughout 1915 and 1916 there were increasing numbers of strikes.

The Hungarian police were monitoring the connections between Hungarian radicals and the anti-war socialists in Switzerland. One police report of summer 1917 notes that few of the Hungarian socialists had contact with the anti-war movement overseas. Among the few exceptions was Ervin Szabo, who was in almost constant communication with groups across Europe, receiving publications from anti-war groups in several countries.

Although under police surveillance, Szabo used his professional position as librarian to ensure that he was better informed than anyone else in Hungary about the international anti-war movement and the Metropolitan Library became a centre for anti-war propaganda. Szabo's unique mastery of conspiratorial techniques learnt during his association with Russian revolutionaries when younger gave him a central role in the clandestine anti-war activity that began to unfold.

The spark that ignited the anti-war movement was provided by a young woman student, Ilona Duczynska, a cousin of Szabo's who had spent two years studying at the Technical College in Zurich. Despite iII-health from over-work and poverty that resulted in two bouts of tuberculosis, Duczynska was inspired by the Russian Revolution, and abandoned her studies to act as a courier for the Zurich anti -war socialists. On her return to Budapest she went to see Szabo with news of the anti-war socialists. She found Szabo already well-informed, and in possession of a copy of the *Zimmerwald Manifesto*, Rosa Luxemburg's *Junius* pamphlet, and copies of Munzenberg's paper *Jugend-Internationale*. Szabo put Duczynska in touch with the Galileo Circle (a study group formed in 1908 by Szabo's cousin Karl Polanyl, it included Marxists, revolutionary socialists and anarchists who were opposed to the increasing militarisation of Hungarian society caused by the war). Some of the students Duczynska met through the Galileo Circle were to form the core of the anti-war movement.

Szabo was in close contact with several shop-stewards, and in October 1917 arranged a meeting in his apartment between Duczynska and some of the Galiliests, and Ignac Becker. Becker, an organiser in the Independent Bollermen's union, had been a member of Szabo's Syndicalist Propaganda Group Since 1910. A second meeting was arranged in the back room of a tavern, when two Galileists met with about a dozen shop-stewards and workers. The meeting was chaired by Becker, and among those attending were Deszo Vegh and Antal Mosolygo (chief shop-steward at an airplane factory) for the Syndicalist Propaganda Group. Several of the others were from the

munitions factories, including Sandor Osztrecher, the chief shop steward at the Csepel Manfred Weiss works, where 30.000 people worked.

The meeting agreed to produce a leaflet based on the Zimmerwald manifesto, to be distributed in the factories, in the name of the *"Group of Hungarian Socialists Adhering to Zimmerwald"* . From the beginning, however, the group used the name Revolutionary Socialists among themselves. The meeting also planned an anti-war street demonstration. Events snowballed, and two evenings later three members of the new group went to address a workers' gathering held in one of the suburbs. More people joined the group: including bank clerk, Otto Korvin and his brother Joszef Kelen, an electrical engineer; bank teller Imre Sallal, and medical student Albert Lantos. Korvin, the son of a timber-yard worker, who was rejected for military service because of a spinal deformity, rapidly became a key figure in the anti-war movement, inciting Hungarian sailors at Pola (on the Adriatic coast of Croatia) to mutiny.

One week after the Bolshevik's overthrow of the provisional government in Russia, a large meeting was held, with some 150 shop stewards attending. This meeting finalised the arrangements for the first anti-war demonstration, planned for the evening of Saturday 17 November, at a major city intersection. At the appointed time groups of workers and Galileists converged on the junction and marched towards the city centre, shouting *"We want peace"* , *"Peace or Revolution!"* and so on. Although it was initially blocked, and then attacked by the police, the demonstration lasted for an hour, and was the first of many, as it triggered pendent demonstrations by other groups. From September 1917 onwards, Szabo met regularly with Duczynska and others, often in cemeteries in order to avoid spies.

Szabo taught the group how to combine legal and illegal techniques successfully, monitored, advised, and edited agitational material, but was reluctant to provide guidance to the group beyond encouraging its activities against the war. One of the groups to become involved in the anti-war effort was known as the *"Engineer Socialists"* . They argued that the development of science and technology brought benefits to the majority of people, and that capitalism had to be abolished so that the benefits of scientific progress could be brought to all. In spite of its technocratic vision of socialism, this group was important, as white-collar workers were not allowed to join existing unions, and so were forced to develop their own organisations which were free of social democratic domination. In Spring 1917, members of this group had helped to form an illegal Inter-factory Committee, with representatives in over 20 major factories and utilities in Budapest. The intention behind the formation of the Committee was to co-ordinate strikes, and although the strike plans were unsuccessful, the Inter-factory Committee's influence spread through several trade union locals, and gained sympathisers among social democrats.

Opposition to the war continued to grow, and on December 26th 1917 two syndicalist shop stewards (Mosolygo and Osztrelcher) prompted the formation of the first workers' council, and at this point, the Inter-factory Committee, and others joined in. Plans were made for a general strike and attempts were made to establish links with Austrian workers in Vienna, but without success. When a major strike did take place in Vienna in January 1918, it was unrelated to the efforts of the Hungarian opposition. It spread rapidly to Germany, and within days to Hungary, sparking huge mass meetings in which many soldiers took part as disaffection at last found an outlet, convinced that Hungary should abandon the war, Ilona Duczynska planned to assassinate the main advocate of Hungarian involvement, Prime Minister Istvan Tisza. Tisza had also (in 1912) ordered troops to open fire on workers demanding the vote. Accounts differ as to Szabo's involvement in this plan, but armed with a revolver Duczynska paced nervously up and down

under the row of plane trees in front of Tisza's residence on the Andrassy Ut. Tisza's carriage drew up, and security men got out of the accompanying police vehicle. As Tisza stepped from his carriage Duczynska grasped the butt of her revolver but just as she drew the gun from her bag she heard a newspaper seller shouting that Tisza had resigned as Prime Minister. Relieved not to have to go ahead she stood and watched as he entered his mansion, a defeated man.

Early in January 1918 the police arrested several of the Revolutionary Socialist anti-war group which with increased daring was even leafletting inside army barracks on a mass scale. On one occasion young anarchists caught inside the barracks by police were badly beaten. Police also closed down the Galileo Circle, and two days later the entire anti-war group, with the exception of Szabo, Korvin and Mosolygo were arrested and charged with sedition. Undeterred, Mosolygo organised a secret meeting of syndicalists and representatives from the Inter-factory Committee, and laid plans for a 'Workers' Council for Budapest" representing every factory, craft and geographical area of the city.

In the middle of January 1918 a general political strike led by the railway workers union and the metal workers union' occurred, outside HSDP control. 150.000 workers demonstrated on the Budapest streets, shouting *"Long live workers' councils!"* and *"Greetings to Soviet Russia!"* . Although the strike was not authorised by the HSDP, the party backed it for the first three days, and then suddenly claimed a victory and called off the strike. Initially strikers refused to halt the strike, but eventually gave way to avoid splitting the workers' movement. Although the social democrats had managed to undermine the strike it left their control of workers' organisations weaker.

Otto Korvin brought several new recruits into the anti-war movement, and he and his comrades redoubled their efforts, preparing and distributing hundreds of copies of leaflets during the next few months, each prompted by a significant domestic or foreign event. Nearly all of the leaflets promoted the idea of workers' councils, and according to one member of the group, Jozsef Lengyel, the last sentence of every leaflet was taken from Kropotkin's *Appeal to the Young*. The desperate economic conditions and deteriorating military situation gave them an eager audience, but in May fifty revolutionary socialists and syndicalists, including Duczynska and Tivadar Sugar, were arrested. The group was broken. Szabo and Korvin again escaped arrest, although Szabo was questioned by the police.

New strikes broke out in June in reaction to the shooting of demonstrating workers, and the first workers' councils were set up to co-ordinate activity. The strikes spread from Budapest to other industrial centres, but were called off after 10 days by the social democratic leadership.

Duczynska and the other arrested members of the Galileo Circle were brought to trial in September, 1918. Duczynska was singled out for particularly harsh treatment:

> *"The accused, Ilona Duczynska, in addition to the six months pre-trial detention, which occurred through no fault of hers, is condemned to a further two years during which, every second week she shall be for one day on only bread and water, on which day she will also have a hard bed and during the first month of every six month period she shall spend fifteen days in solitary confinement".*

The military situation continued to deteriorate, and Secret War Ministry circulars reported that:

"Women workers not only frequently attempt to disrupt factories by interrupting production, but even deliver inflammatory speeches, take part in demonstrations, marching in the foremost ranks with their babies in their arms, and behaving in an insulting manner towards the representatives of the law."

In October the Hungarian War Cabinet collapsed. There were uprisings and mutinies in the army and navy, desertions reached record levels, and armed groups of deserters linked up with strikers and rebellious peasants, seizing the land, and dashing with the police. The anarchist newspaper *Tarsadalmi Forradalom* (Social Revolution) reported on the formation of a revolutionary *"Green Guard"* in Croatia and the Szeremseg (now part of Croatia) formed by deserters from the Hungarian army. These revolutionary bands fought with the hated gendarme units in the villages, killing several members of the gendarme, seizing or destroying their weapons, and engaging in acts of expropriation from the wealthy. The state apparatus began to fall apart under pressure from below.

It was at this point that Ervin Szabo, who already suffered from tuberculosis, fell victim to the epidemic of Spanish flu, and died in the same month. Even in death Szabo remained influential, as his funeral brought all the different elements of the opposition together for the first time, and made people aware of their collective strength. Factory workers downed tools as a mark of respect, and thousands joined Szabo's funeral procession.

GOVERNMENT COLLAPSE

Against a background of military mutinies, strikes and massive daily street demonstrations, the government collapsed. Soldiers were deserting en masse and setting up soviets (workers' councils). On the 27 and 28 October, they dashed with the police, leading to gunfights with rifles and machine guns that left many dead and wounded. On 29 October Hungary was declared a republic, and the following day a workers' uprising toppled the government without bloodshed. Armed insurgents occupied strategic positions throughout Budapest, breaking open jails and freeing political prisoners. The ruling class fell back on the leader of the parliamentary opposition, the anti-war count Karolyl, to lead a new coalition government which included the Hungarian Social Democratic Party as a junior partner.

The change of government did nothing to slow the pace of revolution and the next day (30th of October) there was a demonstration in front of Karolyl's party HQ calling for an immediate armistice. The police charged and street fights broke out. On the 1st of November the crowds massed on the streets, invaded the police stations and disarmed the police. 400.000 people marched through the streets singing the *"Workers' Marseillaise"* ! The new government's weakness was rapidly exposed when on November 13th Karolyl was forced to sign an armistice agreement that divested Hungary of about half of it's former territory. In spite of this massive concession the agreement resulted in only a temporary pause in the military attack against Hungary.

The state's power was slipping away as the workers became more confident. On 16 November hundreds of thousands of demonstrators gathered outside the parliament building to demand a socialist republic. The streets were full of mutinous soldiers returned from the front. Officers were attacked on the streets and had their insignia torn from their shoulders. Workers at the

Manfred Weiss arms factory at Csepel, just outside Budapest, where the Syndicalist Propaganda Group had been active, seized control of the factory, and formed a workers' militia.

The economy was collapsing, Hungary was still blockaded by the Entente armies, and the food situation was critical. The army no longer supported Karolyl's government.

Instead the workers were armed and political power was fragmented between the coalition government, the Soldiers' Council, the Workers' Council and the Hungarian National Council (HNC). The social democrats controlled the Soldiers' and Workers' Councils, had considerable influence in the National Council, but only minority representation the government. But they used the power they had to systematically exclude the revolutionary socialists, syndicalists, and Engineer Socialists from the HNC and from the Budapest Workers' Council. On November 17th 1918 representatives from all these opposition groups, met with dissident elements within the HSDP and agreed to form an *"Ervin Szabo Circle"* to co-ordinate their activities.

Meanwhile Bela Kun had returned to Budapest. Kun, once a member of the Hungarian social democrats, had become a Bolshevik while in a Russian prisoner of war camp. He was intent on establishing a communist party run on Bolshevik principles in Hungary. The reformist strategy of the HSDP, and the rapid radicalisation of the Hungarian people might have resulted in a new organisation to co-ordinate revolutionary opposition without following the Bolshevik model, but Kun provided a clear organisational blue-print, and a strategy that appeared successful in Russia, as well as ample funds to finance propaganda.

Kun approached all the dissident elements, and a preliminary meeting was held in the flat of Engineer Socialist Jozsef Kelen. The anarchists were reluctant to participate, but did so at the personal request of returned prisoner of war Tibor Szamuely. Szamuely, a journalist and member of the social democrats, had frequented anarchist circles in Budapest before being conscripted. Captured by the Russians, he had become an active agitator while still a prisoner of war. After his release he had become involved with the Bolsheviks and fought with them in the civil war. He had also visited Peter Kropotkin in Russia before returning to Hungary.

In December 1918 he was actively involved in the riots at Nyiregyhaza, in which one of his brothers was seriously wounded. Next month he tried to organise a local insurrection in Satoraljaujhely, but was arrested. He managed to escape and helped by Kassak went into hiding.

The meeting in Kelen's flat agreed to set up the Hungarian Communist Party, with the result that the new party was from the outset a fusion of anarchists and communists, in which some anarchists played a key role. Among those who joined the communists were Korvin, Duczynska and the "ethical" Marxist Gyorgy Lukacs who at the time was influenced by Szabo's anarchism.

Otto Korvin's organisational skills were indispensable (he had a network of informants, including contacts at the wireless office, that soon made Kun one of the best informed people in Hungary). Mosolygo, who was at first prepared to co-operate was offered the vice-chair of the party, but resigned almost immediately after a disagreement with Kun over tactics and methods.

By early 1919 there was a sharpening of the conflict between workers and the coalition government. There were an increasing number of street demonstrations in the cities and spontaneous land-seizures in the countryside as the government was unable to satisfy the workers' demands. State power collapsed in the countryside as estate workers and servants set up voluntary co operatives to co-ordinate agricultural production and formed local workers' councils. Workers had begun to occupy their factories to counter the owners' attempts to close them down. Soldiers' councils were in control of the arms depots, and the luxurious Hotel Hungaria had been transformed into a canteen for the children of Budapest. A revolution from below was beginning.

On February 20th, 1919, the *Association of the Unemployed* marched on the editorial offices of *Nepszava* (the HSDP paper) to present demands to socialist members of the cabinet. Fearing violence the HSDP requested police protection.

The police attacked the demonstration and became embroiled with the anarchist self-defence groups resulting in four police deaths. The government retaliated by arresting 68 known communists and anarchists, and the detainees were beaten up. Newspaper reports of the beatings scandalised Budapest. Demonstrations and the threat of retaliation from the USSR resulted in a relaxation of the conditions of detention and the dropping of the most serious charges. While Kun and other leading communists lounged in prison, those anarchists inside the Communist Party who had not been imprisoned took over the task of running the organisation, strengthening their position, and establishing a new, libertarian direction for the party.

The revolution began to spread. Increasing numbers of factories were taken over by the workers, and on 10 March the local soviet took control of Szeged. Their example was rapidly followed in other towns, and peasants seized the lands of former Prime Minister Count Esterhazy. On 20 March print workers in Budapest refused to print the HSDP newspaper, and went on strike, triggering a general strike that demanded the release of the imprisoned communists, and the transfer of power to the workers.

The deteriorating military situation and increasing domestic chaos encouraged the HSDP executive to commence negotiations with Kun. These discussions were given an additional urgency by an ultimatum from Colonel Vyx, the French Chairman of the Entente mission in Budapest, that would have resulted in Entente occupation of all Hungary, except for a 20 mile radius around Budapest. The Entente ultimatum was rejected unanimously as unacceptable by the government, which resigned the next day. The following day, the 21st of March, a Socialist Republic was declared.

The collapse of the government strengthened the hand of both the HSDP and the communists, who soon made an alliance.

THE BUDAPEST COMMUNE

Talks between Kun and the social democrats resulted in the formation of a Revolutionary Council comprised of 17 socialists, 14 communists and 2 non-party experts, which met for the first time on March 22th 1919. The internal organisation of this Hungarian soviet was to rest on a system of workers' and soldiers' councils.

A new Hungarian Socialist Party was formed, uniting the HSDP and the Communist Party. Although communist representation was out of proportion to its size, and the programme of the Council was based on Kun's proposals, the 700.000 member Socialist Party effectively swallowed the smaller Communist Party with its membership estimated at between 10.000 and 30.000. Szamuely was given a key role in the War Ministry, and Korvin was made Political Commissar, in charge of the Political Investigation Office, effectively a kind of police force designed to gather intelligence and prevent counter-revolutionary activity.

Although both Szamuely and Korvin held key positions in the new party, unification resulted in the creation of a left opposition in the Communist Party formed by those who had been imprisoned with Kun but not told about the negotiations with the social democrats, and those who had run the party until his release, and who were now planning an armed uprising for May. The

syndicalists also opposed the new order, as they felt that the powers of the Revolutionary Governing Council were excessive, and that the Workers' Councils should be the organisational basis of society. In April elections were held for the Budapest Council of Workers and Soldiers' Deputies. In the Budapest Eighth electoral district a slate consisting entirely of syndicalist and anarchist write-in candidates had been elected in place of the single party ticket, but the Revolutionary Governing Council voided the results. Some of the anarchists who had been active members of the Communist Party, left and formed the Anarchist Union. This union included Krausz, Bojtor and a Romanian lawyer, Andorka Kogan. With help from Korvin they occupied the Almassy Palace as a social centre and Krausz began to re-publish *Tarsdalmi Forradalom* (Social Revolution). The Anarchist Union began setting up libraries and discussion circles in an attempt to expand the social base of the revolution.

Differences soon emerged between the Anarchist Union and left communists like Szamuely and Korvin who remained in the party. Sandor Csizmadia, an anarchist veteran of Varonki's Peasant Union had been briefly appointed Commissar of Agriculture in the Commune but was dismissed from his post by Kun. At one point Kun ordered the arrest of Kogan and Bojtor; but Korvin defied Kun, released them, and used his position to provide funds for the Anarchist Union, with the result that the differences between the left communists and the anarchists lessened. It is unclear why Kun ordered the arrest of these two anarchists, but it may have been because Kogan had been involved in the daring theft of arms and equipment from a French infantry camp, which was the headquarters of General Vyx, who was overseeing disarmament.

One of the most controversial groups were the *"Lenin Lads"* , formed by a comrade of Szamuely's, called Jozsef Cserny, a shoemaker's assistant, who had joined the Navy during the war, and had subsequently fought with the Bolsheviks in Russia. The Lenin Lads were comprised of formerly mutinous soldiers and sailors. They have been described as the eyes and ears of the revolution, and deliberately set out to cultivate an image that would terrorise the Right. Their HQ was decorated with enormous posters that simply said *"Terror"* in large letters. Reactionary writers have attributed all kinds of terrorist acts to this group, but during the whole period of the Commune there were only 129 executions of counter-revolutionaries, of which perhaps 80 could be attributed to the Lenin Lads (although some estimates of the number of executions is as high as 590). These numbers pale into insignificance when compared to the thousands slaughtered by the counter-revolutionaries later on. The Right in Hungary was becoming increasingly desperate, and there were a series of minor coup attempts, although these were often thwarted by the Lenin Lads and by Szamuely's *"Red Guard"* . Outside the control of the State the Lenin Lads soon attracted the enmity of the social democrats, who insisted they be disbanded and the members sent to the front. Outflanked on the left, Kun had become increasingly reliant on social democratic support, and agreed to their demands, so the Lenin Lads were disbanded on 19 May. Within days they responded with an unsuccessful bomb attack on their most outspoken opponent, Wilhelm Bohm SDP head of the Red Army.

The programme of the Commune, which formed the basis of the alliance between the communists and the social democrats, clearly shows the pressure of the libertarian faction inside the organisation. It called for the suppression of the army and the police, the socialisation of banking and the confiscation of assets, the abolition of bureaucracy, and the socialisation of transport. A major point of disagreement, however, was the proposal for land nationalisation[2]. The Com-

[2] In contrary to what many anarchists and revolutionary socialists wanted — socialisation.

munist Party was determined to run agriculture through the state. They appointed the original owners as *"Commissars for production"* so there was little difference between the old boss and the new boss for the mass of the peasants. This move deprived agrarian reform of any revolutionary content, and sowed distrust among the peasantry, making the supply of food to the besieged capital even more problematic during the final weeks of the Commune.

There were also bitter disagreements about censorship in literature and the arts. These came to a head in June following the First Congress of the Hungarian Socialist Party, when the writers associated with Kassak's paper *MA* (Today) wrote an *Open Letter to Bela Kun* in the *Name of the Arts* opposing censorship. One hundred thousand copies of this 24-page pamphlet were secretly printed and openly distributed to the workers of Budapest. Kun was outraged, but Kassak and the other writers had widespread support even inside the renamed Socialist-Communist Party of Hungary.

Entente troops launched a new military offensive against the fledging Soviet Republic, spearheaded by Romanian forces, which were numerically superior and better armed than the hastily assembled volunteer Red Army, and within a few days were only 60 miles from Budapest. In the face of almost immediate military defeat, the socialist-controlled Budapest trade unions and the syndicalist factory stewards hastily recruited and equipped an insurgent force of 50.000 workers. They organised collections, and sent *"flying columns"* of clerks, postmen and office workers to the front. Surprisingly this hastily assembled rag-tag army stopped the Romanian advance, and wrested every major city on the Hungarian plains from Entente control.

Almost as soon as the Lenin Lads and Szamuely's Red Guard had been broken up, right-wing socialists prepared their own coup attempt, but then abandoned it. A second more serious coup attempt occurred on June 24th 1919, when a gunboat opened fire on the *"Soviet House"* which acted as the home of the Revolutionary Council. Former professional soldiers and deserters from the Hungarian Red Army were engaged in 24 hours of street-fighting with militia loyal to the Commune.

Although the coup was crushed, it led to increasing demoralisation in the Revolutionary Council, and the resignation of several of the "moderate" socialists. Kun's faction responded by taking draconian measures to increase production, and arrested several protesting syndicalist organisers, including Mosolygo.

The anarchists and syndicalists made a desperate attempt to breathe life back into the revolution. While Szamuely and Cserny re-organised the Lenin Lads, the anarchists planned an insurrection for July. Centred on 200–300 workers from the armaments factories and from some of the more left wing workers' councils, the anarchist plan was discovered before it could be properly Implemented. Two Ukrainians, Jefimov and Jukelsa, suspected of involvement were shot and thrown into the Danube, but the rest of the anarchists, protected by Szamuely and Korvin, were allowed to escape. Accounts are ambiguous about Szamuely's role, and he is sometimes accused of involvement in the planned insurrection, and betraying it at the last moment.

The Revolution had reached an impasse — riven by factionalism in Budapest, and under attack from Entente troops on all sides. Early military successes by the Red Army, especially in Slovakia (where a Republic of Slovak Councils was also proclaimed), could not continue without military help from the USSR, but the Soviet Red Army, that had once looked like it would break through Entente lines, and link the Hungarian revolution with the Russian one, was now on the retreat. Kun opened secret negotiations with the Entente powers, and the French government agreed to allow a socialist government in Hungary, in return for a cessation of hostilities.

Kun and the Bolshevik core were losing their nerve, and were becoming increasingly isolated, as the workers' councils assumed more and more responsibility for the organisation of society. Kun made a major tactical error by suggesting a peace treaty, along the lines of the Brest-Litovsk treaty, to the Czechoslovakian government. This resulted in the sacrifice of the Slovakian revolutionaries, an increased feeling of isolation and further demoralisation among supporters of the revolution in Hungary. The socialist chief of the Red Army, Bohm, resigned.

On July 20th, the Hungarian Red Army was crushed by Romanian troops in the south, and on July 30th Kun was forced to resign, to be succeeded by a trade union dominated government, and the occupation of Budapest by the Romanian army. Protected by the presence of the Romanian troops, Admiral Horthy subsequently executed a nationalist coup overthrowing the trade union government.

With the collapse of the soviet, Kun and the Bolsheviks negotiated a safe passage out of Hungary in a sealed train. The anarchists and left communists were deliberately excluded from this arrangement and attempted to organise resistance inside Hungary, but with little success. Szamuely tried to flee the country, but was caught by border guards, and beaten to death in a thinly veiled *"suicide"* . Korvin stayed in Budapest, and Lukacs who was also left to his fate records that:

> *"Among comrades who were romantically overstrained, or engaged in adventurous daydreaming, or, again suffering from serious nervous depression, Korvin issued instructions for underground fiats, about contacts with one another, connecting links, etc., with genial matter-of-factness. The two of us talked about how to keep each other informed, how to exchange impressions, how I should transmit my writings — through his intermediary — to the underground printers. But only once did I receive any information from him [...]"*

Korvin was caught, imprisoned and tortured with red hot irons. Three anarchists who had fled to Vienna, returned to Budapest to organise a raid to free Korvin. One, Professor Strassny was Austrian, two others were Hungarian, a medical student named Marcel Feldman, and an engineer called Mauthneri who had been in charge of an artillery battalion during the Commune. Their plan was betrayed and the anarchists were arrested. Feldman died in a Hungarian jail in 1920. Mauthner was initially sentenced to death but this was commuted to hard labour. After a series of attempts he eventually succeeded in escaping in June 1921, finally seeking refuge in France. Among the others involved in the rescue attempt, the two Rabinovich brothers (aged only 18 and 20) were disembowelled by bayonets in their cells, and the younger brother of Tibor Szamuely hung himself. Korvin was also hung. His final words to his brother were: *"If you return, forget what was done to me."* Reaction and repression stifled life in Hungary for decades afterwards. The counter-revolutionary terror resulted in 4.000 executions, and some 9.000 deaths from starvation and injuries among the revolutionaries held in prison camps, out of a total of 30.000 people interned.

What happened to some of the anarchists who survived? Kogan went to Vienna, and then to Russia, where he tried to organise an insurrection against the Bolsheviks. He was arrested and sent to Siberia. A note published In the French paper *Le Libertaire*, reported that he was shot in 1925. Kovacs was captured during fighting at the front, and was imprisoned in Sofia, Salonica and then Guyana. Bojtor fled to France where he was detained in the asylum at Charenton. Mosolygo was imprisoned and then released, and after failing in an attempt to establish a Hungarian branch

of the IWW, spent the last years of his life in the USSR, and died there in 1927. Lukacs, and the poet Jozef Reval (who was briefly involved with the anarchists) became members of the post World War II communist government, although Lukacs, to his credit, sided with the workers during the insurrection of 1956. The few surviving anarchists and left-communists who remained active In the Hungarian Communist Party formed a left opposition, and were subsequently shot during the Stalinist purges. Kassak remained an anarchist, living in Vienna, and promoting avant-garde ideas in art.

Ilona Duczynska fled to Russia disguised as a returning refugee. After working for a few months with Radek organising the 1920 Cornintern conference she resumed her role as a courier, smuggling diamonds to Vienna to finance the Hungarian communists in exile. She was expelled from the Communist Party for her criticism of its authoritarianism. In Vienna she took part in the 1934 civil war, fighting with the autonomous Schutzbund (the remnant of the workers' defence militia) a story chronicled by her in *Workers in Arms*. Her outspoken criticism resulted in her expulsion from the Austrian Communist Party. She eventually married Kali Polanyl, the Hungarian social theorist, founder of the Galileo Circle and author of the influential book *The Great Transformation* and they settled in Canada. Duczynska never lost her revolutionary instincts, and after the Hungarian uprising of 1956 she returned frequently to Hungary, meeting again with her former comrade-in-arms Jozsef Lengyel, who had written several novels. She smuggled his writings out of Hungary, translated them into English, and arranged for their publication. In the last years of her life she took up the cause of Peter-Paul Zahl, a young German printer and poet imprisoned following the shooting of a policeman. Zahl had been sentenced to years imprisonment, but on retrial his sentence was increased to 15 years. Duczynska circulated his writings and attempted to organise a committee of support, and to get his case reconsidered. In Hungary she actively supported dissidents like Miklós Haraszti, a poet imprisoned for organising an unauthorised demonstration against the Vietnam War.

Although the anarchists suffered severely from the repression in the aftermath of the Horthy coup, and some members drifted into Gnostic circles, by the mid-1920s a small, clandestine anarchist organisation was organising and producing its own paper *Uj Vilag* (New World).

The anarchists played an important part in kick-starting opposition to the war, and in the subsequent Hungarian Revolution, attempting to broaden it and provide it with a libertarian direction. They were able to provide a catalyst for opposing the war, but their numbers were insufficient to enable them to create an effective movement independent of other factions. This resulted in the dilemma experienced elsewhere, as in Russia and Spain, where anarchists sought to co-operate with statist currents.

In Hungary anarchists and Marxists already worked within the same organisations and groups, so the anarchists were pre-disposed to co-operation. During the crisis conditions of war and Revolution this tactic eventually divided the anarchist movement, weakening it further. Undoubtedly the split within the international anarchist movement over the First World War contributed to the isolation of anti-war anarchist currents within Hungary, and predisposed them towards involvement with the anti-war Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks in turn pursued an active policy of recruitment from anarchist groups. The pressure of war, which continued in Hungary long after it had finished elsewhere in central Europe, also forced anarchists to co-operate with others when in more peaceful circumstances they would have chosen different tactics. As crisis enveloped the Commune and the authoritarianism of the social democratic-communist alliance became more pronounced, members of the Anarchist Union attempted to develop an alternative independent

strategy, based on broadening the social base of the revolution, but the pace of events cut this short.

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