

L'insurrection hongroise, 1956

Les troupes soviétiques qui ont afflué en Europe de l'Est en 1945 à la poursuite de l'armée allemande en fuite ont été accueillies comme libératrices par les habitants de Pologne, de Hongrie, de Bulgarie, de Roumanie et des autres pays de la région. Malheureusement, l'euphorie est morte avec la prise de conscience que Staline n'avait aucune intention de se retirer de l'Europe de l'Est après la défaite de l'Allemagne nazie.

Environ 15 000 métallurgistes (**steelworkers**) polonais à Poznan ont exprimé leur frustration régionale face à la domination soviétique lorsqu'ils sont descendus dans la rue pour manifester leurs divers griefs en juillet 1956. L'affrontement qui a suivi avec les troupes soviétiques a entraîné la mort de 38 travailleurs. Cependant, les émeutes ont également provoqué un assouplissement (**relaxation**) du contrôle centralisé du parti en Pologne en octobre suivant.

L'expérience polonaise a inspiré les Hongrois à agir. Dans l'après-midi du 23 octobre, une foule estimée à 50 000 personnes s'est réunie dans le centre de Budapest pour rendre hommage à un héros hongrois. Une proclamation déclarant l'indépendance et exigeant le retrait des troupes soviétiques a été lue. À 8 heures du soir, la foule était plus de 200 000 personnes et a défilé au Parlement pour exprimer ses revendications. Reboulée (rejeté) par le chef du Parti communiste, qui a qualifié les manifestants de «mob réactionnaire», la foule a encerclé le siège de la radio (headquarters) d'Etat dans l'espoir de diffuser leurs revendications auprès de la nation. La police hongroise secrète s'est opposée à la foule qui s'était barricadée à l'intérieur. Plus en colère, la foule s'est précipitée sur la station de radio et a immédiatement été la cible de tirs.

La révolution hongroise avait commencé. L'armée hongroise s'est jointe aux citoyens. Les combats ont duré cinq jours et ont abouti à l'expulsion des forces soviétiques de la ville. Il semblait que le soulèvement pouvait réussir. Les dirigeants soviétiques à Moscou avaient d'autres idées. Au petit matin du 4 novembre, une force d'infanterie accompagnée d'artillerie et de 1 000 chars a percuté la ville. Le 7 novembre, le soulèvement avait été écrasé.

The Beginning: "I have been the witness today of one of the great events of history."

Reporter D. Sefton Delmer filed this eyewitness account of the beginning of the uprising with the London Daily Express:

"I have been the witness today of one of the great events of his have seen the people of Budapest catch the fire lit in Poznan and Warsaw and come out into the streets in open rebellion their Soviet overlords. I have marched with them and almost for joy with them as the Soviet emblems in the Hungary were torn out by the angry and exalted crowds. And the point about the rebellion is that it looks like being successful.

As I telephone this dispatch I can hear the roar of delirious crowds made up of student girls and boys, of Hungarian soldiers still wearing their Russian-type uniforms, and overalled factory workers marching through Budapest and shouting defiance against Russia. 'Send the Red Army home,' they roar. 'We want free and secret elections.' And then comes the ominous cry which one always seems to hear on these occasions: 'Death to Rakosi.' Death to the former Soviet puppet dictator - now taking a 'cure' on the Russian Black Sea Riviera - whom the crowds blame for all the ills that have befallen their country in eleven years of Soviet puppet rule.

Leaflets demanding the instant withdrawal of the Red Army and the sacking of the present Government are being showered among the street crowds from trams. The leaflets have been printed secretly by students who 'managed to get access', as they put it, to a printing shop when newspapers refused to publish their political programme. On house walls all over the city primitively stenciled sheets have been pasted up listing the sixteen demands of the rebels.

But the fantastic and, to my mind, really super-ingenuous feature of this national rising against the Hammer and Sickle, is that it is being carried on under the protective red mantle of pretended Communist orthodoxy. Gigantic portraits of Lenin are being carried at the head of the marchers. The purged ex-Premier Imre Nagy, who only in the last couple of weeks has been readmitted to the Hungarian Communist Party, is the rebels' chosen champion and the leader whom they demand must be given charge of a new free and independent Hungary. Indeed, the Socialism of this ex-Premier and - this is my bet Premier-soon-to-be-again, is no doubt genuine enough. But the youths in the crowd, to my mind, were in the vast majority as anti-Communist as they were anti-Soviet - that is, if you agree with me that calling for the removal of the Red Army is anti-Soviet.

In fact there was one tricky moment when they almost came to blows on this point. The main body of students and marchers had already assembled outside their university in front of the monument to the poet-patriot Petofi who led the 1848 rebellion against the Austrians. Suddenly a new group of students carrying red banners approached from a side street. The banners showed them to be the students of the Leninist-Marxist Institute, which trains young teachers of Communist ideology and supplies man puppet rulers' civil servants.

The immediate reaction of the main body, I noticed was to shout defiance and disapproval of the oncoming ideologists. But they were quickly hushed into silence and the ideologists joined in the march with the rest of them, happily singing the *Marseillaise*...

The Soviet Reaction: "They took up positions around our block and opened fire with everything they had."

Hungarian journalist George Paloczi-Horvath filed this report with the London Daily Herald:

"It was dawn ... the day the Russians struck again.

We were awakened by the roar of heavy guns. The radio was a shambles. All we got was the national anthem, played over and over again, and continual repetition of Premier Nagy's announcement that after a token resistance we must cease fighting and appeal to the free world for help. . .

After our ten days' war of liberty; after the pathetically short period of our 'victory', this was a terrible blow. But there was no time to sit paralysed in despair. The Russians had arrested General Maleter, head of the Central Revolutionary Armed Forces Council. The Army had received ceasefire orders. But what of the fighting groups of workers and students?

These courageous civilian units now had to be told to put up only token resistance in order to save bloodshed. They had been instructed not to start firing.

I called up the biggest group, the 'Corvin regiment.' A deputy commander answered the phone. His voice was curiously calm: 'Yes, we realized we should not open fire. But the Russians did. They took up positions around our block and opened fire with everything they had. The cellars are filled with 200 wounded and dead. But we will fight to the last man. There is no choice. But inform Premier Nagy that we did not start the fight.'

This was just before seven in the morning. Premier Nagy, alas, could not be informed any more. He was not to be found.

The situation was the same everywhere. Soviet tanks rolled in and started to shoot at every centre of resistance which had defied them during our first battle for freedom.

This time, the Russians shot the buildings to smithereens. Freedom fighters were trapped in the various barracks, public buildings and blocks of flats. The Russians were going to kill them off to the last man. And they knew it. They fought on till death claimed them.

This senseless Russian massacre provoked the second phase of armed resistance. The installation of Kadar's puppet government was only oil on the fire. After our fighting days, after our brief span of liberty and democracy, Kadar's hideous slogans and stupid lies, couched in the hated Stalinite terminology, made everyone's blood boil. Although ten million witnesses knew the contrary, the puppet government brought forward the ludicrous lie that our war of liberty was a counter-revolutionary uprising inspired by a handful of Fascists.

The answer was bitter fighting and a general strike throughout the country. In the old revolutionary centers - the industrial suburbs of Csepel, Újpest and the rest - the workers struck and fought desperately against the Russian tanks. . .

Armed resistance stopped first. The Russians bombarded to rubble every house from which a single shot was fired. The fighting groups realized that further battles would mean the annihilation of the capital. So they stopped fighting. But the strike went on.

The Workers' Councils, the Writers' Association and the Revolutionary Council of the Students decided at last that the general strike must be suspended if Hungary were not to commit national suicide. . ."

References:

D. Sefton Delmer's account appears in the *London Daily Express*, Oct. 23, 1956; George Paloczi-Horvath's account appears in the *London Daily Herald*, Nov. 4, 1956; Sebestyén, Victor, *Twelve Days: The Story of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution* (1996).