

The Hungarian Revolution , an eyewitness account of the first five days

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THE
HUNGARIAN
REVOLUTION

AN EYEWITNESS'S ACCOUNT
OF THE FIRST FIVE DAYS

BY
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A Magyar Nemzeti Tanács felszólít mindenkit hogy a serek vivő
jét ... *Schmitt Alajos* ...
urat minden kérdésen átbecsássák.

Budapest 1918 október 31.



Schmitt Alajos

INTRODUCTION.

It was precisely a quarter to two o'clock.

A careless crowd occupied the terrace of the Belle-vue Hotel, their only problem for the moment being to decide whether to go for a walk into the forest, or to go for a bath at the Vöslau hot-baths. I had decided for the latter, when a garçon ran quickly up with :

"Please, Mr. Editor, to the telephone !"

A few minutes later cold shivers ran down my back, and the bath seemed farther removed from me than the stars of heaven.

Soon afterwards there were draughts of air about one, as the hundredth vehicle flew over the chaussées, impinged on the street-corners with two leaning wheels, shot over the pavement of narrow places, and were away into the precincts of Vienna. . . . One saw groups forming here and there, and with the commonplace was mingled an indefinable sense of the extraordinary.

Something had happened. In the Ballplatz, before the house No. 2, the offices of the Royal and Imperial Ministries of the All-highest House and of the Exterior, stood an unusual number of motors, among them some quite unusual foreign-looking vehicles. Hurrying men flew by. . . .

It was the 28th of June in the year of grace 1914.

* * *

Was all that was involved in it the heavy dream of a neurasthenic ? When I delve darkly into the past I see big-lettered headlines, under which black print gave out flames of fire.

Placards about victory, about grim struggles, charges, and petitions, and laments, and holdings-out, and reliefs, long war-reports of wordy youngsters, dull novels tinged with a tragic dark-mindedness, death-advertisements and casualty-lists. . . . they connect by misty links the day of hidden agents with to-day.

A world is in that melting-pot. Galileo's *eppur si muove* ("and yet it moves") had to prove true at least during those years. At least the one half of the earth has always been shame-

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...faced enough to hide itself from the sun. But on the circles, all the same.

* * *

A thrilling rumour of victory ran through us, the heat of which breathed fever and miasma, which did not warm, but scorched—and induced pyrexia. The reign of force inflamed and consumed the last wit left to men.

Was it not the law of gravitation—was it the swelling flood whose rise no object and no substance might hold out against, since the void has yawned?

The rush of mass ever swifter hurtling—mass of material, mass of men—was bound to give rise to an enormous reaction. It was easy to see that the foundation-stones of this rotten building would not at the present rate long resist disintegration. Dust must all that become, if all the laws of change and development were not to prove untrue.

I only darkly remember the first bread-coupons, the care of one's shoe-leather, the limited tobacco (limited because no one had limited his garment to his cloth), and the stoppage of the exhibition of placards.

* * *

THE CASTLE AND THE RULER.

A lanky man sprang lightly out of a carriage, and hastened up the steps. A stranger asked the sentry:

“Who was that?”

The man answered reverently:

“That is the Hungarian Premier.”

And after a short time came the lean man again, threw himself into the depths of the carriage—and no one asked the sentry:

“Who is that?”

The man in uniform said low:

“That *was* the Hungarian Premier”—and Tiza went, Esterhazy came, went likewise. Wekerle came... names, names, names.

* * *

At this time, which I may call the post-exaltation epoch of the war, appeared the first blank spaces—“censored”—in the newspapers of the Extreme Left. And like a plague, this

coccus bianco quickly infected the other organs also.

In the summer of 1917 one of the higher officers of the General Staff of the Vienna School said to me :

"Look you, we win the war, sure, if only munitions, or forage, don't run short."

Then I knew that both had run short—and I left him.

* * *

On the sharp advance of the Russians it was said: "Pooh, we will keep up the fête-days as they fall due"; but the fall of Przemyśl was not on a day of fête, but of Fate, which is an important difference.

Upon reverses followed crises; and holes were dugged in order, with the earth dugged up, to stop up rents made by the explosion of suppressed fury.

Ever sharper blazed up the flame of resistance which Hungary—people and independent parties—opposed to Felix Austria, and the first greater conflicts between Budapest and Vienna arose. Their origin is in the soul of the Hungarian nation, which with difficulty forgets. 1848 sprang out of the predicament into which Austrian speculation drove Hungary's industry, and blow upon blow was added to the quarrel. Who, engaged in strife, can claim Right as his sole objective? No one. The blame is to the unnatural wedlock of two systems straining parabolically apart—systems which should be led towards a community of interest in trade, by means of agitation and propaganda, appealing simply to sympathy.

Pathology was bound to avenge itself on the organism of both bodies. . . .

And now with all this was to be combined that eruptive force which arose out of the longing for freedom from an intolerable load, and led to the meeting of Károlyi and Franchet d'Espèray as a final result. Hungary broke up under the pressure of the load, and any one, like me, who was in the movements of the whole period of the war—any spectator of this divorce which severed two souls in one breast—can only say that the temporary so-called "predominance of place" of Hungary in the frame of the monarchy corresponded to an effective force, not to a subjective

will; and that the word was spoken in Budapest, but the deed budded in Vienna. To have any illusions as to that was only pardonable so long as it was considered useful to be able to assign the blame for the war.

... And so I come to the actual picture-gallery of the revolutionary events.

The revolution in Hungary was not organised, not manufactured, not *menagé*. It grew up freely, and just a dozen men sufficed to hold it together. A proof for or against? ... For! for the mass can only be moved by a summons relatively of the same elevation as itself. When the mass follows unknown leadership merely on account of a programme, this means that it wills to co-operate. And it co-operated, without swerving, without heat, without fail.

They made a revolution, the Hungarians, because there was nothing else to do. Because the gigantic upkeep of a gigantic army was growing on their shoulders, because they saw the Hapsburgs sitting ever in Vienna as Emperor and never in Budapest as King (although in such a royal comedy, directed to eye and mind and phantasy, precisely the seeing of the idol is essential to the realisation of the fairy tale), and because they had frankly had enough of fighting without motive.

History shows no Hungarian war aims—only the aim imposed upon the country of going to the aid of Austria.

Lust of annexations was not the cause of the war, but the consequence—a decisive distinction. To annex was desired, because war was being waged, but no single shot was fired with the idea of getting something out of it.

Hungary's revolution was the historical consequence of a biological principle. The sick place had to be removed by operation: a non-national Government, which managed the affairs of an Empire without any relation to the people, which throughout its whole structure was antediluvian in its reactionary trend, had, in the atmosphere of our time, to perish.

What is instructive for history is the essentials of this event.

The recognition of the inevitableness of the break-up inspired the people who rallied round

Károlyi with the thought of making pause, and of putting into practice their own innate pacificism. Pacifism? The instinct of self-preservation would in this case be the better term. It meant the weighing of the chance of bringing the secession from the union into harmony with evolution.

After the Parliamentary battles, the newspaper-war, in the tumult of a continuous resistance to the most varied attacks, the expectation was fulfilled.

And in this moment I recall that, from the beginning, Hungary had on her hands the whole weight of the war, provisioned the German troops, managed the whole question of transport with her own rolling-stock, and, beside this, exported. Now there was superfluity in Hungary, and it was constantly said to me: "In Budapest one fares splendidly, one eats white bread—a fault of the Government, which, clinging to the principle of absolute centralisation inherent in the administration of the land, fed Budapest free, so to say, so as to relieve the capital of petty inconveniences. It was a mirage—a bid for popularity in the capital, which in no other land is so truly and wholly "The Capital" as in Hungary. The Government, in fact, powdered Budapest over with white meal in order to conceal the lack of black meal in many districts. The cause is simple. Only through the appearance of Budapest's well-being could the equally centralised press be "convinced" that all was really being efficiently administered. By these manœuvres the Vienna Government in Budapest was able to win from the country, from the Parliament, every complaisance in the matter of supplies *ad infinitum* for the army.

* * *

And now I will carry my digression from the story no further—will not touch on Arpad's times, and on to the Anjous, down to the Hapsburgs, although precisely this Revolution has its roots in the deeps. Let it be taken as a fact that this war was the cartridge that exploded a mine of aimlessness and drifting, while the powder slowly, slowly, sometimes quicker, sometimes still slower, was accumulated beneath the people by statesmen, authorities, great heroes of history, and little intriguers of mean degree.

In the autumn of 1918 it was clear that the war was finally lost. The dictatorship built upon military authority and upon the infallibility of prerogatives was robbed of its basis. All began to totter. A current whose trend was indefinable gained in strength. The Emperor-King had become fond of the jewel of the love and warm co-operation of the people, even while he let himself be led ever farther into half-measures—in spite of a marked and quite genuine love of peace. He was called in the end "Karl the Sudden," just as in the beginning of his reign they called him "Wilhelm's Antidote."

The German retreat cast spherulic illuminations over hill and valley. Fall on the Bourse, disonances, confusion, rumours. Still Sisyphus pushed the stone ever up.

And then came the great Governmental crisis, the series beginning with the dismissal of Wekerle, the endless searches for lime and cement, an unheard-of expenditure of men and forces.

And then... then the word was: Károlyi could save the country. Save? I deny that. A man is only a man, and genius is powerless against the hydrophobia. Only some months earlier Károlyi could in truth have effected something, when, relying on a half-integral military power, he might have concluded a well-merited separate peace. But from within, outward, grow revolutionary forces, which do not suffice to supply the lack of actual armies. And so the appointment of Károlyi could only have availed to rescue the dynasty for hours or days. For radical democracy had to give so calm a field to the republican idea, that no dynasty could have withstood such a reality.

Once more, the Hungarian Revolution was a vote of the people. No kind of reactionary agitation, not the least, was to be remarked, and what agitation is now in existence, in so far as it is of any importance, is all ultra-radical. And a return to the old is desired merely by some odd people whose dulness only the Oriental parade of a Court could enliven.

While the revolutions in Germany, and especially in German Austria, have loosened sharp reactions, effective forces seeming to arise there to defend or to rehabilitate either the dynasty or the

authority of the old régime, in Hungary, on the contrary, only a movement toward still more Radical principles is in some measure perceptible, but no serious stress toward the restoration of the old is to be found, is to be roused, is to be bought.

Somewhat so stands the matter in Hungary; and her previous history led to the effective outbreak of this event.

It all had to happen as it happened. It was in the air. Invisible messages flew from heart to heart, strangers found themselves friends, a silent emanation rose over the wide land, and a telegraphy of souls carried the rumour of the event to the consciousness of men.

So all lay in the deepest peace in the pause of a period of world-war. One knew nothing. Only a boding cast its shadows before.

And then...

CHAPTER I.

THE EXPLOSION.

October 30th carried the saturated air of the political tension over the capital.

The newspapers gave themselves up to criticism, polemics, and a quite strange avalanche of news, for whose confirmation no "official" stamp was valid enough. The reports of the shots still re-echoed which had fallen by the Kettenbrücke. This had happened in this way:—

The Governmental crisis, which in one event contained chronic, acute, and latent elements, found not the man who could have controlled it. The throne tottered, and the supposition is justified that clever councillors conjured up mirages before the eyes of the man on the throne, who, moreover, only possessed the bare uniform, without leadership or independence of thought. All things urged to the necessity of placing the truth of the further developments before the monarch's eyes. This must of necessity be attempted in the way of a popular demonstrator. And as the demonstration—moving in an undeniably friendly temper—arrived at the Kettenbrücke to go on toward Ofen, so as to place the Insupportable in miniature before the eyes of the councillors of the absent Throne, Guards on horseback dashed up.

The front of the groups—for the demonstrators were not long a continuous mass—fell into wavering. The pressure from behind, however, carried

