

PART 'B'

Allied Reaction to the Hungarian Soviet Republic

The proclamation of the Hungarian Soviet Republic had a tremendous impact upon the Paris Peace Conference. The collapse of the Károlyi Government had been foreseen, predicted and forewarned, but Paris did nothing to come to the aid of the struggling democratic Republic. Now that Bolshevism had arrived in the heart of Europe, the Peace Conference became suddenly alarmed. The cynicism which had surrounded the February 26 decision showed that Paris was aware of the political consequences of drawing a new Demarcation Line and creation of a Neutral Zone. Political reports on the situation in Hungary could not have left any doubts as to the mood of the country.

The Peacemakers in Paris either did not care about the consequences, or perhaps they were too isolated in the heady atmosphere of Paris.

To the Peacemakers, the Peace Treaty with Germany took top priority in their thinking. The former Austro-Hungarian Empire, by comparison, was a low priority backwater. Matters relating to it were treated with an attitude of benevolent boredom.

It is interesting to note at this point, that Australia was well represented in Paris. Our Prime Minister, Billy Hughes, who favoured a harsh treaty with Germany, had no opinion to offer on the dismantling of Austria-Hungary. Australia's representative on the Territorial Committee for Czechoslovakian affairs, Mr Cook, when asked to express his view on the nationalities question, could only mutter, to the discomfort of the interpreter that "they were all like one big happy family out there".

A British observer, Sir Harold Nicholson, later wrote in his memoirs that "Hungary is partitioned by these five distinguished gentlemen ... indolently, irresponsibly partitioned while the water sprinkles on the lilac outside while the experts watch anxiously while A J B (Balfour) in the intervals of dialectics on secondary points, relapses into somnolence while Lansing draws hobgoblins upon his writing pad while Pichon crouching in his large chair blinks owlshly as decision after decision is actually recorded ..." ...

This attitude by the Allied **civilian** leaders in Paris translated into indecision and inaction.

The Allied **military** leaders, on the other hand, were anything but inactive.

Marshal Foch was preparing a united Allied army to invade Russia and annihilate the Soviet Government of Lenin. He viewed the establishment of another Soviet Government to his rear, in Hungary, with alarm. Martial spirits ran high.

On March 27, Foch placed his Napoleonic-like scheme for the invasion of Russia before the Council. It was essentially the same plan that the Council of Ten rejected a month previously. He proposed to establish a Cordon Sanitaire from the Black to the Bearant Sea, occupy Vienna as a precautionary measure and "clear out the infected areas in the rear, such as Hungary".

President Wilson rejected the plan immediately, recognizing it as the "beginning of a march eastward". Foch had presented his plan on several occasions and each occasion Wilson had vetoed it: "We have always arrived at the conclusion that we cannot consider military intervention".

Lloyd George and Clemenceau strongly supported President Wilson, and rejected Foch's schemes. The civilians had succeeded in curbing the appetites of the military.

Among the military representatives at Paris, the American General Bliss was the only one to oppose the crushing of the "infectious disease" in Hungary. He described the complexity of the Hungarian problem and concluded that it may be possible to crush the Bolsheviks but not Bolshevism. The President echoed the sentiment: "The only means to kill Bolshevism ... is to fix the frontiers and to open all the avenues of commerce". The Peacemakers had acknowledged that the causes of Communism in Hungary were the insecurity over borders, social conditions, the consequences of the blockade, unemployment, lack of food, desperation and degradation.

The Council of Four clearly rejected military intervention against Hungary, as well as the grand project against Russia. But they did not review their approval of the February 19 Bratianu Resolution of the seizure of Hungarian territories for the so called neutral zone, established for the invasion of Russia.

Instead, the Council of Four decided, on March 31, to send General Smuts, the eminent South African statesman, to Hungary.

The Smuts Mission

General Smuts was given very wide powers. His mission was defined as follows:-

General Smuts is to proceed to Hungary in order to examine the workings of the Armistice concluded at Villa Giusti on November, 3, 1918 ...

To explain that the neutral zone between Hungary and Rumania was strictly to stop bloodshed ... no intention of prejudicing eventual settlement of boundaries

General Smuts has full discretion to travel anywhere in Hungary and to make any adjustments in boundaries of neutral zone as he sees fit.

General Smuts and his staff arrived in Budapest on a special train on April 4, 1919. His party consisted of two Foreign Office diplomats, Harold Nicolson and Allen Leeper, Colonel Heywood of British Military Intelligence, Cyril Butler of the Food Control Commission, and numerous aides de camp, cypher clerks, typists and orderlies. Nicolson's initial reaction to his "first sight of an enemy country" is worthy of note:

"Everybody looks very pinched and yellow: no fats for four years. The other side of the blockade ... The people in the streets are dejected and ill-dressed ... I feel that my plump pink face is an insult to these wretched people".

General Smuts told Kun and his Cabinet that the drawing of the Neutral Zone was completely unjust and proposed an alteration to it. The new line was drawn between eight and twenty kilometres east of the original one. This left the city of Debrecen within Hungary and the major cities of Arad, Nagyvárad and Szatmár placed within the Neutral Zone. The consequence of this was that the three cities would be occupied by Allied troops, not Rumanians.

The Hungarian press had portrayed the presence of Smuts as a great diplomatic victory for Béla Kun's conduct of foreign policy.

General Smuts returned to Paris to give his report to the Supreme Council. He stated that the Hungarians had not concluded any formal alliances with Soviet Russia. Hungary had a moderate, conciliatory government which had turned to Russia for support because it feared an invasion by the Great Powers. Now that "this fear has been removed from their minds they are obviously more inclined to stand well with the Great Powers, and the dangers of a joint attack on Rumania have not only been minimized but definitely removed". He suggested, therefore, that by a continuation of "our wise and conciliatory attitude", Hungary would remain in the Western camp.

General Smuts, interestingly enough, thought that Béla Kun's government was purely a transitory phenomenon which would not last for long:-

"As a government they are very weak. They consist entirely of Jews and do not represent more than the large Jewish proletariat of Budapest. Outside the capital their authority is very small, if not practically non-existent, and in Budapest itself they represent only a minority".

The Report of General Smuts had a considerable impact on the shaping of Allied policy towards the Hungarian Soviet Republic. His low opinion of the government's chances of longevity led to the Allied abandonment of the idea of military intervention. The Peace Conference decided to do nothing at all. In lieu of a positive policy, the Allied Governments elected simply to wait and see.

No action was taken, therefore, on Smuts' recommendation to settle the frontier questions immediately in order that economic treaties could be concluded and stability returned to Central Europe. Nor was the blockade to be lifted. The suggestion that the countries concerned with the new frontiers should settle them directly among themselves at a meeting in Paris was also rejected. Sir Eyre Crowe demanded that this idea be "categorically rejected", because "it will drive the Rumanians, Czechs and Yugoslavs really into despair". He insisted that there should be absolutely no question of negotiating over frontiers with "the enemy powers".

Reports similar to General Smuts' poured into the British Foreign Office. Admiral Traubridge, for instance, who had been suggesting intervention, concluded that "should any French units or the troops of its neighbours, appear in Hungary, the whole country would rally behind Béla Kun.

A report by General Plunkett confirmed the nationalist character of the forces which swept Béla Kun into power, and attempted a psychological analysis of the situation:

The Hungarians are not promising material from which to form real Bolsheviks. They are too amiable and mild, too fond of music and amusements.

The Military Invasion of Hungary

While the Peacemakers were procrastinating, the French military clique had decided on firm action. They were not restricted by any questions of conscience, responsibility, or issues of legality.

Pichon, Foch and the national chauvinists in the Quai d'Orsay and the French Ministry of War had suffered numerous setbacks at the Peace tables to their plans for military adventures. This was largely as a result of American suspicion of their intentions. The French military missions throughout the Successor States had alarmed the Americans. General Bliss, for instance, reported to Secretary of State Lansing on April 11, 1919, that:-

"The imperialistic idea has seized upon the French mind like a madness ... (their aim) is to create a chain of states, highly militarized, organized under French guidance and intended to be future allies of France ... Each of these states has aggressive designs upon the surrounding territory and each is determined to get by force, if need be, as large areas as possible".

In another memorandum, General Bliss warned that:

"The newly created states are bending every energy to the creation of as formidable an army as they can raise. All the assistance ... that we give them assists them in this detestable purpose. Every dollar's worth of food that we give them enables them to spend a dollar on military equipment. With the best intentions in the world, we are doing what we can to enable Europe to maintain another 30 years war".

So it was not just the French who were seized by this military madness; the young Czech and Rumanian States were also anxious about security arrangements. In order to obtain this security and to satisfy their maximum nationalistic demands, the Successor States were more than willing to become the tools of aggressive French nationalism. Therefore, Ioan Bratianu, the Rumanian Premier, needed very little encouragement from his French protectors to take the field.

Rumania, the "bulwark against Bolshevism", had made the continuation of its fight against the Red Army in Bessarabia conditional upon further Hungarian withdrawal in the West.

Foch and his group supported the Rumanian demands. They claimed that for Rumanian troops to be used effectively in the East, they must be given guarantees that the Hungarians would not attack them from the West. This was just a pretext for Bratianu's rabid appetite for more territory. It was known to him, and also known in the West, that Trotsky's Red Army was in great difficulties.

Since the Peace Conference appeared to be favouring Hungary, the Rumanians came to the conclusion that "they must rely on themselves for their own protection". Guised in the mantle of an anti-bolshevik crusade, the Rumanians decided to occupy Budapest. On April 10, the Rumanian army was ordered to advance to the Tisza River. On April 16, the Rumanian army, lead by French officers and under the command of General Berthelot, attacked along the whole of Hungary's 250 mile long Eastern frontier. It was obviously a well planned and co-ordinated attack. The ill-prepared Hungarian army was cut to pieces by the powerful offensive. By April 30, the Rumanians had reached the Tisza at all points. They were less than 60 miles from Budapest.

The disorganization and weakness of the Hungarian Red Army was due to political reasons. The new government attempted to solve the problem by creating a proletarian class army.

This army comprised six divisions - a total of 52,000 troops - but the only battle-ready unit was the Székely Division, which numbered 9,500 men. Unfortunately for the Red Army, the Székely Division surrendered to the Rumanians on April, 26, 1919.

This would explain why the Rumanian offensive was so confident of success. Neither Bratianu nor Foch would have risked the invasion if they had thought that serious resistance by the Hungarians was possible.

Another reason for the collapse of the Red Army was the opening of a second front by the Czechs on April 27, 1919. The Czech army crossed the undefended demarcation line in Slovakia and occupied the rich mining area Salgótarján in Northern Hungary and the major industrial city of Miskolc. Hungary suffered two successive Pearl Harbours. At the end of March, the Czechs had requested that the demarcation line be moved further south in order that they may be "able to resist Bolshevism in Hungary". Benes, the Czech Foreign Minister, also asked for permission to occupy Ruthenia because "it is absolutely necessary for us to be in contact with Rumania and with the Rumanian armies in Hungary".

Without the consent of the Big Four, and evidently without even consultation with the other military representatives in Paris, Foch authorized the changes in the demarcation line.

On May 1, 1919, the Czech and Rumanian armies had established contact. The remnants of the Hungarian Red Army were in full retreat. The Government was on the brink of collapse. It appeared as if the very brief Communist experience in Hungary was over.

Béla Kun asked Lenin for military assistance, for the half million Hungarian POW's who were still held in Russia. Lenin refused.

The only tangible support that Russia gave Hungary was seven reels of film which Szamuely brought back with him in a solo flight to Russia. They did send the documentary movies on the achievements of the Russian Revolution as a morale booster.

The Red Army Takes the Offensive

Hungary's rapacious neighbours were no longer to enjoy cheap military victories. Hungary now fought back. The reorganized Red Army fought with a new determination. The soldiers were filled with patriotic fervour. They were not fighting for the preservation of a minority government but for the defence of their homeland. Officers also distinguished themselves.

A renewed nationalistic spirit inspired the army.

The hastily regrouped Red Army began its counter attack on May 2. By May 6, the Rumanians had been driven back across the Tisza, and the town of Szolnok was retaken.

The Red Army, then massed for a counter-offensive against the Czechs in the North. The initial objective was to drive a wedge between the Czech and Rumanian armies. Once this was achieved, a major offensive would then be launched to drive the Czechs out of Slovakia.

The first phase of the offensive, which began on May 16, met with unqualified success. The two invading armies were separated and the Czechs driven out from Northern Hungary within the first week of the campaign.

All strategic points in Eastern and Central Slovakia were taken in the second week of June 1919.

The loss of most of Slovakia had considerable political impact on Prague. Benes, the Czech Foreign Minister, sent several urgent and frantic appeals to Paris asking for military intervention. He also asked for military help from his Rumanian allies, who promptly agreed to march on Budapest.

The Czechs, Rumanians and the French militarists were not the only voices calling for Allied military intervention. The brief and limited Hungarian offensive shook most political observers out of their complacency. British Military Intelligence suddenly discovered the fragility of the West: "Bolshevism will spread to Rumania, Czechoslovakia and Austria, and once established in these countries there will be little chance for Italy or France". Rattigan, suffering from isolation in Bucharest, expected the outbreak of the world revolution at almost any moment.

The Big Four, in Paris, would not be tricked into military misadventure. They dismissed the military threat that Béla Kun's six divisions posed to the rest of Europe, and totally dismissed the nonsense that a German General could possibly be leading the Hungarian Red Army. Instead, the Big Four decided to invite the Hungarian Soviet government to Paris.

Lloyd George carried the vote by saying that:-

A workmen's government had just as much right to be dealt with as any other ... He did not see why because the Hungarians were called the Soviet they could not be met.

It was agreed that the Hungarian Government would be invited to come to Chantilly. Upon hearing this decision, Pichon, the French Foreign Minister, attempted to persuade the Council of Four to delay the sending of the invitation. He argued that by sending such an invitation the Communist regime would be encouraged to hold on. Lloyd George and Wilson disagreed. Pichon's schemes were dismissed.

Pichon and his group did not give up the battle without a stubborn rearguard action. They held up the delivery of the invitation for so long, that in the end, it was never presented.

The Council of Four discussed this deception, and re-examined events in Hungary in the light of it. Lloyd George set the mood of the meeting with his opening statement: "the whole blame lay with the Rumanians".

He then proceeded to elaborate:

"The boundary line had been crossed by the Rumanians in defiance of General Franchet d'Esperey's orders; who then proceeded to fix a second boundary line considerably in advance of the first. Now, the second boundary line had also been crossed by the Rumanians. At that time Béla Kun was done for ... but the moment the Rumanians began their last advance into Hungary, many of the aristocratic officers of the old Hungarian Army had rushed to Bela Kun to be enrolled to fight ... to stem the invasion. At the same time, the Czecho-Slovaks had also advanced with the object of occupying the only coal bearing area remaining within the boundaries of the new State of Hungary. The result had been a national Hungarian rising against the Czecho-Slovaks.

It would be seen, therefore, that the fault lay entirely with the Rumanians who had been the first to invade the new State of Hungary; and the attack of the Rumanians had been followed by the advance of the Czecho-Slovaks".

President Wilson agreed with Lloyd George's summation in that: "the Rumanians and Czecho-Slovaks were wholly to blame for what had occurred and in considering this matter, it was the duty of the Council to be fair, even to their enemies".

Wilson added that: "under the circumstances it was sometimes very difficult to be fair to their friends".

The stopping of military supplies to Rumania indicated the extent of the Supreme Council's anger.

President Wilson further suggested the sending of a Note to both the Czecho-Slovak and Rumanian Governments to the effect that:-

"If you do not observe the conditions on which a final settlement is alone possible ... we will withdraw every sort of support".

Clemenceau, who had remained silent up till now, rose to the defence of the Rumanians by saying that they had obeyed the Supreme Council in stopping their advance on the Tisza. Lloyd George replied that he thought "it would be more correct to say that they had been stopped by the Hungarian forces".

At the meeting of the Council of Four on the following day, Benes and Bratianu were also present. President Wilson commenced the discussion by summarizing the previous day's debate which thoroughly condemned the aggressive militarism of the Czechs and Rumanians.

To Lloyd George's statement that the Rumanian army was responsible for creating Bolshevism in Hungary, Bratianu replied that: "Mr Lloyd George misunderstood the matter". The British Prime Minister retorted in exasperation that it would take a great deal to convince him that either Karolyi or General Mackensen had been responsible for spreading Bolshevik propaganda in Rumania. Bratianu then replied that he "regretted that he could not convince Mr Lloyd George." This was a matter on which probably his information was better than that of Mr Lloyd George. President Wilson interrupted at this point, probably in an effort to save the Prime Minister from an embarrassing outburst of violent temper. He concluded his arguments by saying that:-

".... the Rumanian troops had no right in Hungary, and if he himself had the misfortune to be a Hungarian he would probably be up in arms against them, and so would anyone".

The wrath of the Big Four was then turned upon the Czechs. Benes defended his people by saying that "Czecho-Slovakia had always been loyal and always on the defensive". Lloyd George had little sympathy for the Czech Foreign Minister. On a previous occasion he had accused Benes of "ignoring or minimising facts".

"He was full of profusions of moderation, modesty and restraint ... He larded his speech throughout with phrases that reeked with profusions of sympathy for the exalted ideals proclaimed by the Allies ...".

The British Prime Minister had had enough of Paris and its Balkan Allied. In a conversation with the English journalist, Ashmead-Bartlett, in June, he is reported to have said:

"The Rumanians are a perfect nuisance and have got us all into trouble". In fact L.G. had not a good word to say for any of our Allies. He abused in turn the French, the Italians and the Czecho-Slovaks, and added: "Yes, I think the Hungarians are the best of the lot out there. They are the most powerful race and have always kept the others in order".

The Big Four had reached the conclusion that the only way they could bring peace to Eastern Europe was to establish permanent political boundaries immediately. The Armistice lines and temporary arrangements of the preceding eight months had proved "thoroughly unsatisfactory". Consequently, the Council of Foreign Ministers was charged with the responsibility for doing so immediately. The Council of Foreign Ministers did not take long to reach their decision. The work of the territorial committees was already completed.

Ethnic considerations had already been abandoned in the preceding months. Wherever possible, the Czechs and Rumanians were favoured and the frontiers were drawn with their strategic, economic and military considerations in mind. The Kingdom of Hungary was reduced to 29 percent of its pre-war area and retained only 41.6 percent of its previous population. The territory that was awarded to Rumania was larger than that left to Hungary. Hungary's frontiers were essentially those which it formally accepted in the Treaty of Trianon signed on June 4, 1920.

The recommendations of the Council of Foreign Ministers came before the Supreme Council on June 12, 1919. The Big Four approved all of the new permanent political boundaries.

A communication was sent to Budapest, Prague and Bucharest, informing them of the new frontiers and ordering each of the states to retire behind their respective boundaries.

The telegram from Clemenceau to Béla Kun was despatched on June 13, 1919. It stated that the permanent frontiers separating Hungary, Rumania and Czechoslovakia had been settled, and consequently, Hungarian military forces would have to withdraw from Czechoslovak territory. As soon as this was done, Rumanian forces would withdraw from Hungary.

The Hungarian withdrawal from Slovakia commenced at 5 am on June 24 and was completed within a week. It was well organized and disciplined; Foreign Office reports from Prague had nothing but high praise for the "good order" of the evacuation.

The withdrawal from Slovakia marked the beginning of the end for the Soviet regime. The Red Army was demoralized; troop morale collapsed overnight. Following the publication of the permanent frontiers, the soldiers could see no further reason for continuing the fighting. Any further bloodshed was useless.

Unable to prevent the collapse of morale, Aurél Stromfeld, the architect of Soviet Hungary's military successes, resigned as Chief of Staff on July 3, 1919.

The work of the Peacemakers in Paris, in the meantime, appeared to be over. Following the signing of the Treaty of Versailles by Germany on June 28, 1919, the British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, and the American President, Wilson, left Paris and went home to their respective capitals. It was left up to the Council of Foreign Ministers to tidy up the bits and pieces. One of these bits and pieces was what to do with the gigantic force of 220,000 troops that Marshal Foch had massed into "Fortress Rumania".

In Budapest, the Hungarians became more and more apprehensive. Although the Red Army had withdrawn from Slovakia, the Rumanians had still not commenced their withdrawal from Hungarian territory east of the Tisza.

The Hungarians did not know that Rumania had defied the orders of the Supreme Council and refused to evacuate the territory it occupied. Nor was it known that the Rumanians continued to remain on the Tisza with the blessings of both Foch and Balfour.

Repeated diplomatic protests by Béla Kun to Paris failed to budge the Russians. The Soviet government returned to a military solution. On July 20, the rag tag Red Army attacked the Rumanians.

The Hungarian offensive initially had met with success. After very heavy fighting, the Red Army crossed the Tisza at Tokaj, Tiszafüred, Szolnok and Szentés. However, the casualties were high; after 10 days of further heavy losses, the Red Army had run out of steam. The Rumanian army had been forewarned of the Hungarian offensive, and was kept constantly informed about Hungarian positions and movements. Consequently, the Rumanians were prepared for the attack. Reports from the Rumanian High Command indicated that they were quite confident of being able to deal with the Hungarian offensive.

The Hungarian offensive was annihilated. The Rumanians poured across the Tisza and headed directly towards Budapest.

They entered Budapest on August 3, 1919. The city was looted and the countryside stripped and devastated. Agricultural supplies, livestock and rolling stock were all shipped back to Rumania. The factories were dismantled and even railway tracks were torn up and taken away. General Gorton of the Allied Military Mission complained most bitterly about the acts of wanton destruction:

The Rumanians continue to perpetrate acts which are most discreditable to a Power associated with the Entente.

Army officers, Trade Union leaders, Police Chiefs, and anybody else thought to be capable of offering resistance to the occupation, were all rounded up, herded into freight cars and transported to Rumania as "prisoners of war".

The Rumanians ignored the repeated orders of the Supreme Council to cease the pillage and retire behind their own borders. It was three months before the rape of Budapest was over. The Rumanian army evacuated the capital on November 14. However, in defiance of the orders of the Supreme Council, it failed to leave Hungary. The Rumanian army withdrew as far as the Tisza, which it fortified. It was not until the end of March, 1920 that the Rumanians finally retired behind the frontier. The prestige of the newly formed League of Nations, indeed, did suffer. However, the blows came not from Béla Kun, who had obeyed the Council and withdrew from Slovakia, but from the Rumanians, who defied the Peace Conference for 7 months.

Following the departure of the Rumanians, the White Army marched into Budapest.

Admiral Miklós Horthy became Regent of Hungary. On June 4, 1920 Hungary signed the Treaty of Trianon, by which it recognized the frontiers which had been officially communicated to Bela Kun 12 months previously. Neither Károlyi's resignation nor Kun's military offensive had made any difference to the decisions which the Peace Conference had made about the political frontiers of East-Central Europe. The political wheel had turned full circle. However, Historic Hungary was no more.

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