

Extract from the Speech to be delivered  
by Mr. A. Ban, Chairman of the British Hungarian Labour Club.

Ordeal of the Hungarian Social-Democrats.

In Hungary, mass arrests of Social-Democrats are going on for the second month in succession. An anti-Socialist press campaign has been in progress for half a year. Persecution, with the proportions witnessed in present-day Hungary has not occurred in Europe since the time of the Hitlerite terrorism.

As to the background of this terror, one has to be reminded of events as they have been unfolded from 1945, the year of the occupation of Hungary by Russian forces. At the same time the Hungarian Communist Party was formed. Its members were mostly recruited from elements formerly of the extreme right. Those among the working people who formerly opposed socialism, as a result of fascist influence, joined the Communists, and thus became adversaries of the Social-Democrats on the left. Only a small fraction of workers trained in the Social-Democratic Party and in trade unions felt themselves attracted by communism.

Within the factories the skilled workers devoted to socialist ideals and trade unionism retained their predominance. It was under the influence of these organised workers that in the midst of privation after the war a sense of responsibility developed throughout the working class, benefitting production and reconstruction. As long as the workers cherished the hope of building democracy and believed that their efforts for raising production would result in a higher national income, which could be distributed according to principles of social justice, productivity of labour made good progress.

With the forcible disruption of the social democratic party, and its so-called "merger" with the communists at the beginning of 1948, democratic development was halted, and a People's Democracy emerged as a preliminary to a transition towards Bolshevism. Thousands of socialists were then put under hard pressure and lost their jobs. Only a few, sporadic arrests were made at that time, however. The intention then prevailed to maintain the appearance of a voluntary fusion. There also was a reluctance to cause unrest among industrial workers, an over-whelming majority of whom were social democrats.

It was under the Three Year Plan, completed at the end of 1949, that work competition and Stachanovism, as methods to step up production were introduced. The impact of these methods on output was, however, of little consequence. Although the objective was to extend work competition as far as possible, high accomplishments often remained only on paper. Yet excessive premiums were paid in order to induce work people to participate in increasing numbers. Shock workers and Stachanovites came, however, mostly from Communist ranks. Skilled workers of old standing - devotees of Socialism - disliked these new methods, and abstained from taking part in them.

The Five Year Plan, which started in January 1950, had as its primary objective, rearmament, and not the improvement of the standard of living. Production was to be speeded up, as a result, and this, in the opinion of the government, could best be realised by the adoption of Soviet methods. The task to organise this drive on a huge scale was imposed on the managers of national concerns, on trade union and party officials. They had to produce "results" and they, therefore, raised the number of competitors by offering easy methods of increased earnings. 300,000 industrial workers from 750,000, joined at last the drive for higher production. But the pay roll rose quite out of line with improvement in output. Consequently, general confusion arose in the factories, and throughout the economy. Soviet production methods, the application of which should have doubled, or even trebled, industrial production, turned out to be a complete failure. At the same time, Moscow demanded that armament production should be raised considerably outside the realisation of the Plan. The leading Soviet economist, E. Varga, was sent to advise the Hungarian government, and it was decided to apply drastic measures. A piece-work system was reintroduced, which was employed in pre-war times, and then regarded by work-people as a typical method of capitalist exploitation. It is now being applied in support of Russia's military preparations. Within the workshops, Socialist workers were accused of fraudulent wage practices, and hundreds of them have been detained. These accusations proved to be a boomerang. They were closely connected with the enforced competitions, and mostly committed by workers who turned from fascism to communism.



An embittered struggle is going on between Hungarian workers and Moscowite dictatorship. The work-people are aware of the facts that in case of Bolshevik oppression the chance of democratic development is gone, and that they are being exploited in order to strengthen the Soviet Union to fight democracy. The attitude of the social democratic workers is more uncomplaining than ever, and the overwhelming majority of the work-people follow this attitude because the moral superiority of the Socialists is unbroken. The Hungarian people, with few exceptions, are adverse to the present regime, which is based on the methods of a police state, backed by Russian armed forces. The Communist leader, Mr. Rakosi, admitted in his speech of last February that thousands of party officials had to be dismissed in view of the abyss between the party and the masses. In spite of this purge, the Communist party is still disunited as it is packed with Tito sympathisers. In fact, quite a considerable part of Hungarian Communists feel anti-Russian.

In the factories a united front has emerged against executives personifying the new form of exploitation; a class warfare is going on. On the other hand, the Catholic church is not willing to submit to Communist direction. The peasants are definitely adverse to the regime. All this opposition lacks organisation. It only manifests itself in an attitude. Yet this attitude bears certain common political denominators. The political will of the working class, steadily increasing along with industrialisation, expresses itself in social democracy; whilst the hopes of 67% of the population are centred on the church.

In cognizance of all these facts, the Russians demand counter measures from their satraps. Under an increasing pressure, a dual action is being taken against the Social Democrats; an open one, and a secret one. A fierce press campaign is directed against Socialist workers, simultaneously, social democratic policy of the last 30 years is being denounced as a treachery to the working class. Parallel with this campaign, the detention of Social Democrats from Anna Kethly and other leaders down to former party functionaries of minor importance is in progress. The Hungarian government, presumably are preparing some showdown trial, in an attempt to discredit the leaders, and through them, the whole Social democracy. Until now, about 500 Socialists have been arrested. Since resigning their posts in 1948, they have taken no active part in political affairs.

According to official reports from Budapest, negotiations are proceeding with representatives of the Catholic Church, aiming at an agreement, similar to that concluded in Poland. At the same time, the Communist press are accusing the Social Democrats of being in alliance with "clerical reaction". These attacks are directed against both of their opponents, but otherwise the actions taken against them differ distinctly. The Social Democrats are sent into prison. While at the same time it is sought to squeeze out some arrangement with the Catholic Church by negotiations under pressure.

The secrecy about the detentions might have different reasons. It is probable that the winding up of Social Democracy was a foremost programme among the precautionary measures in the event of war. Events in Korea, which have precipitated the necessity for preparedness against Tito, upset, in a way, the timetable.

The fact that negotiations with the Catholic Church are being conducted may also determine the secrecy of the actions against the Socialist leaders. If there is any arrangement with the Catholic Church, the accusations against the Socialists are bound to be revised. No doubt, the Communist government are much worried about disturbances in production, and disquiet among the workers, because of the detentions. Attempts to turn the anger of the work-people against the Social Democrats have evidently failed.

The traditions of Hungarian Social Democracy with a background of 80 years are deeply rooted in the mind of the Hungarian working class, where Socialism and Democracy are inseparable. The history of the Hungarian Labour Movement reveals that Social Democracy and working class are identical. This explains efforts on the part of the Kremlin, while preparing for war, to extirpate Hungarian Social Democracy.