

TRANSLATED EXTRACTS FROM THE GERMAN OF ISTVAN BIBO'S
MEMORANDUM PUBLISHED IN THE VIENNESE NEWSPAPER "DIE
PRESSE" (8 September 1957) UNDER THE TITLE:
"A PROPOSAL FOR THE SOLUTION OF THE HUNGARIAN PROBLEM"^{1/}

^{1/} The Hungarian text is not yet available.

NOTE IN "DIE PRESSE" ON "THE HISTORY OF THE DOCUMENT"

"The memorandum was written by ISTVAN BIBO, Minister of State in the IMRE NAGY Government and a former University Professor, who is now in a Budapest jail. Mr. BIBO was a leader of the strongly leftist "National Peasant Party". The fact that the document was written by a man who even today is a Socialist and who is languishing in Kadar's jail, makes it significant.

The document was, on the request of the author, secretly given to a diplomat of a neutral Asiatic country. Mr. BIBO has requested that the content of his memorandum be brought to the attention of the world in the hope that his four point programme might serve as a basis for the solution of the Hungarian problem. Mr. BIBO hopes that the Soviet statesmen would be ready to discuss the problem on the basis of his four points. He thinks that his memorandum expresses the wish of the Hungarian people and that it might show a way for a democratic solution without hurting the basic Soviet interests.

The memorandum, which was written a few months after the revolution, reached "DIE PRESSE" from a reliable source. Its authenticity has been checked. Since the memorandum represents important material on the eve of the discussion of the Hungarian Question in the G.A., "DIE PRESSE" was glad to publish this document - although the paper does not identify itself with all statements of Mr. BIBO. Considering that the translation of this difficult text was very hurried, "DIE PRESSE" apologises for its grammatical inequality."

TEXT

» Hungary's situation is a Western scandal. For nearly ten years the Western world has stated that the countries of Eastern Europe did not want the one-party system which was introduced by the Soviet Union and that these states oppose this system. For nearly ten years the population of these countries cherishes the hope that one day there will be another government form that will be selected by themselves. The West has not promised them that in their interest they will start an atomic war neither has the West asked these people to resort thoughtlessly to arms. They were nevertheless encouraged to believe that should the world situation and the resolute action of these people make it possible, the Western world would use its full economic, political and moral strength to help them to resolve their problem.

The Hungarian Revolution created all the prerequisites and the legal title for such a world action. But later it became a fashion for those on the right and those on the left to regret the senseless swing which far surpassed the dimensions of the Polish action. But this regret is illogical because this is a relationship between the Polish and Hungarian situation. The Hungarian events shocked Poland and made it possible for Poland to keep political developments under control. Besides the Hungarian Revolution broke out not as a result of its own unreason but because of the obstinacy and bloodthirstiness of the regime. This revolution, although not prepared and organized in advance, was in fact only an answer to the brutality of the regime, and was surprisingly calm, human and moderate. If subsequently the revolution was shown to be hopeless, this hopelessness was not because it was senseless but because it was abandoned.

The failure of the big Powers.

It is possible that in Eastern Europe there may be another and greater revolution than the Hungarian one, with more arms, more fighting and more sacrifices, but it is improbable that there will be one with such strong legal, political and moral justification to help it get on the agenda of world politics. The Hungarian Revolution swept away a hated, oppressive bureaucratic dictatorship and agreed to the appointment of a convinced Communist to lead the new Government. This man was fully aware that the Communist Party was morally and politically bankrupt. So he had to accept a parliamentary democracy, based on a multi-party system and was forced to declare that the country would not belong to any military bloc.

This was a clearly sufficient reason to call a conference of the world Powers that would offer on the one hand the necessary guarantees to the Soviet Union, and on the other establish the independence and freedom to Hungary. Instead of that, a dramatic discussion of the Hungarian question has continued to rage before the General Assembly accompanied by solemn and ineffective resolutions that hurt the dignity of the U.N. It is well-known that the power of the U.N. is only as great as the five great Powers desire it to have and that without this power the U.N. discussions consist only of big speeches and resolutions.

In such cases it is not the U.N. which has failed but the sense of responsibility and the moral power of the great Powers. . . .

The most disastrous consequences for the West of the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution are that the propaganda and policy they followed for ten years, which was based upon fundamental and moral principles, was not followed through as might be expected and therefore its honesty in the eyes of many people became questionable. . . .

The experiment of a new road.

The Hungarian question also became a world-wide scandal for the Communist camp. The leaders of the Soviet Union and of the Communist ideology since 1953 tried with some success to obliterate the so-called Stalinism from the Communist movement. After Stalin's death, his successors tried to soften Stalin's political practices and following the XXth Party Congress, they decided to discard some of his principles. It was hoped that the Party would now be brought back on the road of socialism. Owing to the events in Hungary from the 4th November onwards, these hopes were shattered. We do not know the motives of the Soviet Union for its step against Hungary. Whether it was due to a political appraisal of the situation created through the Suez affair, due to fear resulting directly from the situation in Hungary, is a matter of speculation. One thing, however, is sure: if the Hungarian situation had been allowed to develop freely, it could have proven that the revolution was not only harmless, but on the contrary, it could have assisted the case for socialism.

Some might say that the Hungarian revolution would have anyway taken place or again that it would have ended differently from what had been planned or again that it would have degenerated into a counter-revolution. The truth is that to everyone's surprise, the long expected change was not of counter-revolutionary nature and did not bring about a restoration of the old regime. All those who fought, the Youth, the workers and that part of the army which joined the revolution, were by a large majority not only socialist-minded, but had also a marxist-leninist background.

During the revolution the forces favouring a conservative restoration came to the fore (certainly not the fascistic forces). These groups, however, were considered a danger only by those who believed that something disappears only if it is forbidden to exist.

At the time of the second Soviet intervention, the situation was about to be consolidated. The mob-law had stopped to rage, resolute and highly respected voices were raised to save the socialist achievements and a Government of national unity was formed which had no cause to be over-zealous or weak toward the right.

Even the casual observer who had not taken part in the revolution had to admit that this was the beginning of a most exciting experiment of the century. This, however, was destined to be destroyed by the

the Soviet tanks. Everything that followed was a timid attempt; instead of an experiment the foundations of a structure were laid which has no semblance to a social system with a promise for the future. . . .

The bureaucracy defends its positions

The present Hungarian regime relied upon a bureaucracy which is aware of its inferiority. This regime has lost its feeling of security but it tries to defend convulsively its position, if necessary by force. The regime knows its opponents, which come mostly from among the youth and the productive intelligentsia.

In history there have been many regimes which fought against writers, workers and school-children, but none could achieve its purpose and - this is important - none of them could be called socialist or revolutionary.

All these mistakes are lugged along by the Communist Party of Hungary, the only Communist Party which has made this fallacy. The structure of all Communist parties consisted up to now of an inward kernel of passionate, ideologically persistent men who were willing to make sacrifices and of an energy of steel. This group was surrounded by a less intelligent but nevertheless a strongly disciplined group of persons, and by many enthusiastic followers who came mostly from the rank and file of the workers. Finally - after the Communist Party has taken over power - came the group of opportunists and the bureaucrats who considered the Party as a security for their existence.

Today in Hungary the centre of gravity of the Party has passed over to the last group of opportunists and bureaucrats. The general staff has narrowed to a small vanishing group. The enthusiastic masses, especially the workers, have ceased to support the party. There exists only one small centre consisting only of the despots of the Party, of the Police and of the bureaucrats who are all worried about their life and existence. A Communist Party with such a low co-efficient of party members from the working class has never existed in the world up to now. . . .

The greatest shame confronting history

The present situation in Hungary makes the idea of a world peace illusory and calls to mind that horrible example of Czechoslovakia: Hungary could be the next to the last act to the outbreak of a third world war as the betrayal of Czechoslovakia was to the second world war. The lesson we get from the Hungarian situation is that Stalinism has been revived.

In reality it never ceased to exist because in fact only Stalinism is the natural form of Communism. A great part of the Communist world draws the same lesson but with a reverse conclusion: that Stalin after all was right and that the Communist camp can be held together only with Stalinist methods. . . .

The starting point of a hope

Is the situation really so difficult and is there really no way out from the political impasse that confronts the world following the events in Hungary? No doubt, the present situation is very sad. But as it is always with great historical events, a balance has to be drawn between the fact and the possibilities. The realization of these possibilities depends on existing needs and also on the goodwill and the effort of everyone.

If we now try and strike a balance, then we can, I believe, reach a more optimistic conclusion.

Hungary's revolution brought hopes to the Western world. The opposition inside of the East European countries and the emigrants from those countries during the ten years have doubted as to the ability of these states to establish a well operating government after the one-party system has been eliminated. It is a well-known fact that these states, before the second world war, were submitted to different kinds of social and national oppressions and to police rule. Half of the emigrants left these countries in despair after having lost the privileges they previously enjoyed while the other half left their country seeking liberty in the West. Many Western politicians and thinkers were of the opinion that South and West of a given line it would be hopeless to expect that true democratic government could be achieved as conceived by the West. Therefore, it should be taken for granted that from Central Europe to East Asia and from the Iberian Peninsula to South America, all the states lived under a sort of strong or mild form of dictatorship and that they would continue to do so in the future. The only difference was that the leftists preferred a Communist system for their lands while the rightists wished to have some sort of a conservative police state. . . .

The events in Hungary and Poland and in the other Communist countries have shown that in these states there is an ardent desire for liberty. And since this desire had never as yet been fulfilled, the longing for it found its expression in a way that was unexpected by the Western states.

The uprising has proved that those wanting a change were not only the victims of the one-party system, but also the youth that had grown up under this system. It must be accepted, therefore, that there was no danger that the uprising could result in a restoration of the old political and social order. It is well known among economists that the misery of one people can infect and endanger another people that is living under conditions of prosperity. This doctrine is applicable also in the field of politics. Thus the Hungarian revolution and the other movements of the East-European peoples require the Western world to shift its policy even though this is non-aggressive.

The policy of the Western world should remain active and enterprising and its aim should be, without affecting their own economic and social system, to win over the East European countries and the Soviet Union step by step in favour of a system of freedom that would reflect the Western pattern. . . .

The Hungarian revolution was also significant - this might sound strange - for as it gave some hope to world Communism. An examination of the original causes of the Hungarian revolution and of the Polish events will show that these movements sprang from the discord in the minds of the Communist intellectuals and the Communist youth. . . .

This discord manifested itself in three instances. First: the Hungarians and the Poles demanded a form of government that would recognise the right to establish autonomous and independent organizations within the state, free from the centralised and dictatorial executive power. Second: they demanded that the truth be publicised in all matters relating to the public spiritual life and opposed the power of the Government to distort the truth for the sake of its own power. Third: they demanded some economic independence as against the Government's economic policy which while stopping the exploitation by private capital, had, under the pretext of building socialism, deferred indefinitely the improvement of the living standards of the population. They were also against this government policy which had given the power to the state to exploit economically the people in a fashion similar to the previous Capitalist system. . . .

The XXth Congress can be considered as the cradle of the Hungarian and Polish events by freeing important moral and spiritual forces.

The Hungarian Revolution has shown that there is a way out of the tragedy by a "Third Way". The West possesses the technical science of freedom, of parliamentary democracy based on rights. The West, by and large was accepted certain universal ethics which are the basis for the operation of these liberties. The West accepts an economic system which we call Capitalism. The main characteristics of this economic system is free enterprise. For more than a hundred years this system has been declared as doomed to die, yet surprisingly from time to time, it shows itself to be adaptable and efficient. However, Capitalism in its present form, cannot satisfy certain principles of ethics. The stumbling block is not the idea of a free enterprise but the fact that Capitalism, not only preserves the social class of owners but also because it makes possible the accumulation of great wealth which can lead to brutality, (though legally disguised), to misuse of state power, expropriation of common property, to corruption and to political intrigue.

But the forces in a free society and though in peaceful social reform are so strong that they are able - even if only slowly - to keep under control the formation of mammoth properties. This means that in the West the poor slowly but surely become richer and the rich become poorer.

On the other hand, in the former colonies and semi-colonial states the granting of independence and the introduction of free enterprise forces the masses, especially the peasantry, to become the involuntary victims of the mammoth properties. In these states the institutions of free enterprise and the parliamentary democracy easily become puppets in the hands of the big landowners, money-magnates and of corrupt politicians. In such states the poor become poorer and the rich richer.

In the Communist state not only were the large properties nationalised but also most of the small properties and all the so-called "bourgeois" enterprises were suspended. This brought about an expansion of the economic bureaucracy. The subjugation of the economic life to a bureaucratic power prevents the raising of living standard of the masses just as Capitalism outwits democratic control. The only plan that provides a solution is that of the neglected and often abused movement of the radical peasants in Eastern Europe: This was the complete expropriation of the big land holding and of the large industrial enterprises while giving recognition to the right of free enterprise within certain prescribed limits. . . .

In the case of Hungary this could be the only possible solution, the more so because the expropriation of the big properties which was carried out in the last ten years by all the political parties, became a historical fact and nobody now thinks of reverting to the past. The revolution did not set such a reactionary claim. Consequently the Hungarian Communist Party has no standing and is morally discredited. The retention of a one-party system in a loose form seems impossible. The only possible solution is the introduction of a multi-party system and the re-establishment of a constitution that would retain all the achievements of socialism. . . .

Since the October events the retention of Hungary within the Communist bloc - aside from military reasons and matters of prestige - is more of a burden than an advantage. In addition the present Communist Government of Hungary must have an alarming effect on the other Communist countries. One should also recognise that there are no serious forces in Hungary which in the case of a sudden political change would drive the country towards a Capitalistic restoration. It is by far more likely - and this could be secured by agreement - that Hungary would remain in the camp of the socialist states.

Finally in Hungary there are political forces at hand who could rely on the whole nation. They declared themselves as representatives of freedom as well as of socialism. They are enemies of any restoration of past systems, they are planning for a gradual diminution of the inflated bureaucracy. They are far from being anti-Soviet and do not wish to transform the country into an anti-Soviet basis and they are well aware of the power of the Soviet State.

This possibility of a compromise would mean that in Hungary, by mutual guarantee of the West and the Soviet Union, a political and social order could be established which might not fully satisfy both sides but

which would constitute the only possible solution of the problem. Should the Powers who are interested venture to put this into effect, it could soon prove that it is not only without danger, but might also be a pattern for the solution of problems in other areas. Such an approach might bring to light hidden possibilities which seemed hopeless up to now because of the strong differences between the East and the West. As in Poland, where the West and the East were anxiously awaiting the outcome of the elections, in the same way Hungary could also show that she could produce results that would satisfy both parties. The giving up of the military positions in Hungary and the neutralisation of Hungary could only be advantageous to the Soviet Union should the Soviet Union receive certain guarantees concerning the internal structure of Hungary and that the country would not be transformed into an anti-Soviet basis. With regard to the strategic balance of power, a compromise solution could be found. I am not thinking of Germany because this problem from the military and social and political standpoint is too large that it can be used in reference to Hungary. But I suggest that Denmark, Norway and Iceland could be relieved under certain conditions - of their membership in the North Atlantic Pact, thus permitting the number of states standing outside of military blocs on the one hand in the North and on the other in the Danube plane, to be increased. Of course the Northern states should remain within the capitalistic orbit just as Hungary would remain within the socialist world.

From all this one can draw the conclusion that the situation in Hungary, aside from the present scandal that confronts the world, carries also many hopes for the future. The question therefore is: what should be done in order that the present scandalous conditions in Hungary be remedied.

This is what should be done:

- 1) It is the duty of the West not to drop the Hungarian question but to continue keeping it on its agenda as the first conditions for a resumption of the discussions between the East and West regarding its solution.
- 2) The adherents of socialism in the Soviet Union as well as in the other states must always keep in mind that the destiny of socialism and with it that of the Soviet Union depends on the complete elimination of the Stalinist political practices. Hungary could be used in the first place to find out if this is possible or not.
- 3) The defenders of the "Third Way" must know that the future potentiality to influence world policy depends on their ability to prove that there is an intermediary way regarding this problem.
- 4) Finally, the Hungarian people, which carries the full glory and the burden of their historical role, has the duty to refuse to cooperate with lies and violence even at the sacrifice of accepting a reduced living standard. It is not the task of the Hungarian people to start another revolution and to provoke a new wave of repressions. But they must, in spite of all slander, and in spite of all forgetfulness, carry high the flag of their revolution which is also the flag of a freer future for the whole of humanity."