

Landreform.

Throughout the interwar years and after the war as well, there were 2 extreme solutions contending on the Hungarian political scene, the idea of socialized large units, and the idea of Garden-Hungary. A parallel ~~bone~~ ^{bone} ~~guak~~ of contention was whether wheat, as the main stay of Hungarian agriculture, waste be ^{abandoned} or not? On the one hand, continuation of wheat production as a major branch of Hungarian agriculture was understood to necessitate the maintenance of large landholdings, and possibly the formation of further large units out of existing small ones. On the other hand, the viability of small units could only be assured by a switch towards vegetables, fruit and other branches of intensive agriculture and the virtual ^{abandonment} ~~abundantment~~ of grain production. In the event, the "solution" of the land problem which was "found" in 1945 ignored the mutual exclusiveness of these alternatives and involved the worst of both worlds.

The Russians in 1945 came with a cut and dried draft law. Bela Zsedenyi, who died in prison in 1954, feeling his death coming, related the background of the 600/1945 decree in the ^{presence} ~~prisons~~ of Jozsef Kovágo, Pal Almásy and myself. He told us that the draft law, already printed, arrived in a Russian plane at ^{the seat} ~~the seat~~

of the first provisional government in Debrecen. Even the serial number of the decree (600/1945) was printed on it,- it was an arbitrary number. Zsedenyi told us that his secretary Ubul Verö, who later became a police major, saw the arrival at the airport. It was a very sketchy and loşelxy worded bill.

The Russians realized that the prompt introduction of socialism in Hungary was not feasible, hence they resorted to land reform as a transitional measure,- it involved a step bakward. In its ~~EXECUTE~~ execution, there were so many illegalities and so many anomalies , that the coalition partners were thaselves dissatisfied with it. At the same time, the problem of laying down the main lines of political organization for the peasantry became the subject of sharp and protacted negotiations between the coalition partners late in 1945 and early 19~~45~~⁴⁶. The Communists wanted a single peasant union, dominated, needless to say, by them. As opposed to this, we (the Smallholders) and the agrarian section of the Social Democrat Party led by Ferenc Szeder argued in the following way: it is well known that the minimum family subsistance in Hungary requires about 10 hold of land. The average allotment under the landreform averaged 2.5 holds. This means that the new holdings are patently not selfsupporting, the new owners must rely on some outside employment.

for the major part of their subsistence, being self employed on their own land at the same time. Side by side with the new peasants, there exist old peasants who are selfsupporting or more than self supporting on holdings of 10 hold and larger. In other words the Hungarian peasantry is economically not homogeneous. It would be anomalous to unionize it, when a part of it must rely on outside employment and another part on outside labour. Instead, we proposed a peasant federation to embrace both peasant employees and peasant employers. The creation of such a federation had enormous political significance. One could not in Hungary conceive of a more powerful political force than such a federation. In January and February of 1946, confidential talks were held between the coalition parties on what I might call the reform of the land reform. Béla Kovács B. Szabó and myself presented the Smallholders Party, Ferenc Szeder acted for the Social Democrats, Lajos Józsik for the Peasant Party and Ferenc Donath for the Communist Party. We met 2 or 3 times a week for 2 months, discussing each others' proposals. The main thesis of Donath was that while the land reform destroyed feudalism in Hungary, the small units it created were not fit for economic development, and the obvious solution is to collectivise them. Our stand on the other hand, was the right solution is to let natural selection take its course. We proposed to eliminate the clause in the

600/1945 law that newly ¹ allotted land is not alienable for 10 years. We argued that free transfer (purchase and sale) of land should be allowed, and thus more viable units will emerge in the hands of the most efficient new farmers. To avoid the kulak bogey, we proposed a 50 or 100 hold~~ers~~^{ceiling} as the limit to anyone persons permissible holding.

These talks led to an unprecedented event in post 1945 parliamentary history. Sandor Kiss moved an amendment to the land¹reform law which was not agreed beforehand by the coalition parties. The amendment was aimed at eliminating the clause prohibiting the alienation of newly ¹ allotted land. The motion for debating this amendment was passed by a large majority in March 1946. Ferenc Nagy was not present when the vote was taken.

He had doubts, ^{but} he was told by the other small-
holder leaders to push it through Parliament. The Russians then stepped in, declaring flatly that if the amendment is allowed to go through, no more Hungarian prisoners of war will return from the Soviet Union. Ferenc Nagy then offered his resignation to the Smallholders Party, and the Party beat a ~~xxxxxx~~ retreat. The motion for debate was withdrawn. This was the great defeat of the smallholder -Social Democrat agrarian policy. The life went out of the Peasant Federation after this, and we just had no peasant policy any longer.

Extradition of Béla Kovács.

From early 1945, we (the smallholders) had one and only one candidate for the post of Minister of Interior, Béla Kovács. As late as July 1945, even ^{the} week kneed Tildy insisted on him in the strongest terms. We pushed the fight with the Communists to the point of threatening to dissolve the coalition and going into the elections on our own. Despite this apparent determination, Sviridov's strong intervention made the Party retreat. Sviridov promised that once the elections are over, the question will be favourably reconsidered. This we reluctantly accepted. However, Béla Kovács was henceforward regarded as public enemy number 1 by the Russians. The Smallholders often are and were accused of softness. Our tactics were to secure a Peace Treaty as soon as possible, then dissolve parliament and make a clean start without an occupation army. This was a mistaken policy, because we should have foreseen^e that the conclusion of a Peace Treaty will not mean Russian non interference in our affairs. On the other hand, we do have some excuse for making this mistake. Anglo-American policy, whether deliberately or not, consistently misled us, They failed to make it clear to us that the intent and real interpretation of the Yalta Agreement implies Soviet influence of indefinite duration over Hungary. Had the Anglo-American representatives in Budapest informed us

and had they not evaded the unpleasant issue, we would probably have chosen a non-compromising line, and would have forced the issue. We would have gone down with flags flying, defeated by a putsch rather than by formally correct "democratic" methods. This would have been infinitely better both for the self respect of the Hungarian nation and for its international standing. Béla Kovács used to say "I will serve my country even if they spit me in the face", - he did not mind personal humiliations and defeats so long as the time of the conclusion of the peace treaty was drawing nearer. On the other hand, the Russian refusal to conclude a peace treaty, Russian intransigence at the international round table engendered by Hungarian political intransigents at home, would have been the end of all our hopes. Meanwhile, Lajos Dálnoki Veress committed the mistake of starting to prepare for the event of the Russian evacuation after the peace treaty by organizing the ~~xx~~ nuclear ^{US} ~~xxx~~ of future internal security forces. Béla Kovács connived and condoned this preparatory work. Needless to say, the Russians promptly detected it, and they began to sit and wait. Another mistake was committed ^t by the Magyar Közösség (Hungarian Community), which should have come out into the open in 1945 claiming credit for its 1943-44 activities in the resistance. Instead, they remained underground, which was as good as a confession

of guilt, and lent a handle to the NKWD. Through Domonkos Szent-Iványi, Bálint Arany, Pál Jaczkó, and György Donáth, the Magyar Közösség was linked with the military conspiracy of Lajos Dalmoki Veress. Béla Kovács allowed himself to be advised by Domonkos Szent-Iványi on plans ~~at~~^{for} the time immediately following the peace treaty. This sealed his fate. It was useful for the Russians not to "discover" this until just before the next general elections, so as to give a salutary shock.

His arrest was organized in ~~in~~ 2 stages. First, the state defence department (AVO) proceeded along constitutional lines, asking parliament to extradite him. Béla Kovács walked to Andrassy Ut 60 with 5 fellow MPs. This was a few days after parliament decided not to extradite him. He stopped at the gate of Andrassy Ut 60 and offered to be questioned from 10 a.m. to 12 a.m., stating that if he does not come out a free man by 12 a.m., parliament will be told by fellow MPs, - we were sitting at the time and knew that Béla Kovács went to the AVO. He was out by 11 a.m., he was not even asked by the "conspiracy", they had a ~~xxxxxx~~^{purely} formal talk. From that moment onwards he was shadowed by the NKWD. For 3 nights preceding his arrest, he slept in the parliament building. The day ~~g~~ before his arrest, Béla Varga, Béla Kovács

and myself had a talk in parliament about what to do, whether to smuggle him out of the building and have him go to a foreign legation. But the US embassy politely discouraged this idea, and it was also politically undesirable from our point of ^{view} ~~few~~. He got fed up and went home to his wife, and was carried off by the NKWD. The Soviet side argued that he engaged in activity endangering Soviet military security and was arrested under the provisions of the Allied Control Commission. The government officially informed parliament of this Soviet step, - there was absolutely nothing we could do, we were under a military occupation, - there was some talk of all of us resigning our mandate, but this would have done more harm than good in playing into the hands of the Communist Party. If it was possible for the ~~the~~ Allied Control Commission, representing the United States and Britain which also ratified the peace treaty, to allow Béla Kovács to be arrested in its name, then parliamentary politics¹ in Hungary have clearly become impossible. Hungary was clearly delivered to Soviet caprice, and the Anglo-American side within the Allied Control Commission was either unwilling or unable or both to lift a finger in defence of parliamentary democracy. This consideration made both Gyula Dessewffy and myself decide to withdraw from politics from then onwards.

When parliament voted not to extradite Béla Kovács, the O - group (Ortutay and Oltvány) wisely refrained from turning up, lest their adherence to Rakosi should become too aparent. Naturally, they could not have voted with the rest of the Smallholders Party. Perhaps the most disgusting thing in the whole affair was the roll of Jozsef Bognar, who was a member of the Magyar Közösség, and who was the person who denounced its cooperation with the military group of Lajos Dálnóji Veress. His membership of the Magyar Közösség is documented, among other things, by one of the "messages" at the end of a Ludas Matyi pamphlet by Deezsö Szábo. To embarrass him, I once hinted at this message to him in the corridor of parliament, he blushed and fled. It was common knowledge in political dircles at the time that he denounced the Magyar Közösség,- a good enough proof of this is that every one of its members but Bognar was arrested, while he became Mayor of Budapest and then a Minister.