

In Praise of Aptheker's 'Truth About Hungary'

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A great many articles, some books and pamphlets were written about the October, 1956, counter-revolution in Hungary. Possibly more will try to explain the events that led to the uprising against the Hungarian Peoples' Democracy. Regardless of the volume of written words, "impartial" United Nations Committee investigations based on testimony of former Horthy-Hitler fascist exiles in Western Europe and in U.S.A., one fact is now clear; that the aims of the leaders of the counter-revolution was not the elimination of certain abuses of the Rakosi regime for the improvement of the living standard of the Hungarian people. The aim was to reestablish the rule of the landowners, industrialists and international bankers who lost everything after 1945. The phrase "freedom fighter" had nothing to do with freedom.

The "Nepszabadsag" official organ of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party December 8, 1956, explains this as follows:

"Reviewing the entire course of the recent grave events, we must realize that the Hungarian counter-revolution and the action of international imperialism in Hungary has important lessons to teach the Hungarian people. A major lesson is the disguised action of the counter-revolution. In our day and age socialism is the progressive ideal of mankind. With the coming into existence of a number of socialist and people's democratic countries, socialism has become a world system and is exercising tremendous attracting force on the masses of the capitalist countries and peoples struggling against the colonial yoke.

"For this very reason counter-revolution and imperialism are no longer able to appeal to the people under their own banner with the slogans of counter-revolution, capitalism. They had to act in this country too under alien banners in the manner of pirates; in order to win the confidence of the masses, they have to shout slogans which awaken the sympathy of the people. They infiltrate the masses and deceive and mislead them with the slogan of "revolution" instead of counter-revolution, "liberty" and "national independence" instead of imperialist colonial oppression."

Herbert Aptheker's book "The Truth About Hungary" makes a great contribution to a better understanding of the events in Hungary. More than that, for the first time the American readers, among them a great many progressives, will learn a brief history of Hungary. They will learn that during the 1000 years "glorious" history of that country there were no free elections there, even in the limited sense as we understand it here. Exceptions were the 1848 revolution led by Kossuth and crushed in 1849 by Austria and Czarist Russia, the Karolyi regime in 1918 and the short lived Peoples' Republic in 1919 which was crushed by the armies of the West in the interest of the feudal landlords, industrialists and foreign bankers.

Both of us were born in the old Austro-Hungary and lived under the iron rule of the Habsburgs, and after 1919 for a short while under Horthy's fascism. We had the good fortune to visit Hungary after the 1945 liberation. We have

witnessed with our own eyes the great transformation that took place there during the first 5 years after fascism was crushed. We have seen in their new role the Hungarian peasants, the former serfs, who for 1000 years have slaved on the land of the feudal lords, the princes, the counts and on the great estates of the Catholic Church, "from sun-up to sun-down" (in Hungarian "latastolvakulasig") for wages comprised of a pair of boots and a suit of clothes at the end of the year.

The formal education of their children ended with the 3rd grade and if it was too far from the farm they did not go to school at all. After 1945, these peasants, almost a million of them, for the first time owned the soil they ploughed, their children went to schools, up through the universities, and were part of every phase of the social, economic and political life of new Hungary. We have seen slums cleared, wartorn buildings restored, new industries established. A backward agricultural land was transformed into a modern industrial nation. This would never be easy, under the prevailing circumstances it was doubly hard and that in the course of it many mistakes of different nature were made, is also a known fact.

Between 1945 and 1956 a number of attempts were made to undermine and ultimately destroy the Hungarian Peoples' Government and to restore the rule of the nobility. The war criminals who fought on the side of Hitler, the former landowners, the dispossessed bankers, industrialists, the former fascists who had to take jobs to make a living and the Mindszenty crowd, formed a holy alliance within the country and with their exiled accomplices in the West, getting financial backing from the U.S.A. For them October 23 was a day of reckoning not only with the communists but with an entire nation that dared to defy the "1000-year" Hungarian tradition.

Of all this Herbert Aptheker in his excellent book gives a comprehensive historical background. The reader gets acquainted with the special economic, social and political development of Hungary up to 1945, the unsurmountable difficulties the liberating forces found there, the heroic work done to get the country on its feet, its further development in the face of the obstacles raised by the cold war and its allies within the country, the mistakes, shortcomings, violations of socialist law, bureaucracy and the resulting popular discontent during the Rakosi leadership. The effort at changes, the expression of the peoples' will and the part played by the multi-headed counter-revolutionary forces in creating the October tragedy.

The book is well documented and speaks for itself. It has the potentiality of clearing the confusion still existent among many, even progressive people concerning the Hungarian events. We will try to help it fulfill its mission by getting the book into as many people's hands as we can reach. We agree with Comrade Foster, that "The Truth About Hungary" is an outstanding Marxist contribution and deserves to be translated into many languages and circulated the world over.