

'Workers' councils regain control of the situation' from L'Unità (5 November 1956)

Caption: On 5 November 1956, the Italian Communist daily newspaper L'Unità welcomes the intervention of Soviet military forces in Hungary and highlights the role played by the workers' councils in crushing the revolt.

Source: L'Unità. Organo del partito comunista italiano. dir. de publ. Lajolo, Davide. 05.11.1956, n° 45; anno V. Milano. "I Consigli operai riprendono il controllo della situazione", auteur:Vangelista, Orfeo , p. 1; 7.

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Workers' councils regain control of the situation

From our correspondent

Prague, 4 November. — The formation of the revolutionary government headed by János Kádár, the intervention of Soviet troops at the request of the new government, the defeat of the rebel group which — in the course of the tragedy Hungary has lived through over the last fortnight — ended by installing a reign of terror in the capital and other towns: so runs the list of crucial events that have followed one after another at a dizzying pace over the last 24 hours. The final one has been the despatch broadcast over the wireless maintaining that the last of the rebel groups have been defeated and disarmed with the active support of the people, while order has been restored in the Hungarian capital, as it has in the other towns.

The first indication that the situation was being overturned came with this morning's transmission by Radio Budapest affirming that 'the Soviets are attacking the capital' and in teleprinter despatches to Vienna saying that 'the capital is being bombed'. Throughout the day, a propaganda campaign has been tacked onto those news items — however unbelievable they may be — attempting to present the Soviet intervention as a massive attack on a defenceless population. The information in some of those news items is patently absurd, for example the allegations that the Soviets are using 'phosphorus bullets' or that 'a thousand' tanks are concentrated around the capital.

After the first announcement, attributed to Imre Nagy, Radio Budapest was silent until this afternoon, when appeals by the new government were read out and the news released that resistance by small armed groups had ceased. The radio also announced that the former Secretary of the Workers' Party, Erno Gero, had been assassinated by the rebels. On the other hand, to this were added broadcasts from low-power transmitters whose news items were then retransmitted by 'Radio Free Europe', the Europe-based station under American direction that is responsible for American broadcasts aimed at the people's democracies. Significantly, these were mainly appeals to the United States for immediate military intervention and the sending in of paratroopers.

It was the same station that picked up these radio transmissions, broadcasting them more widely and in as alarmist terms as possible, maintaining that, since this morning, the new government has replaced *de facto* and *de jure* the one headed until yesterday by Imre Nagy. There was also news of fighting between the Soviets and sections of the Hungarian army, but all that was known was that there were centres of resistance organised and led by nationalist officers, by ex-officers of Miklos Horthy and by those who — as the international press has unanimously testified — have recently been guilty of the most atrocious crimes and inhuman reprisals.

Elsewhere in the country, order seems to have been restored at Gyor and Miskole, the two towns where the rebels had taken control of the situation right from the start, while the workers' councils appear to have become active and effective again and the Socialist Workers' Party organisations are swiftly recovering. Szombately Radio for example, now controlled by these councils, asserted this evening that order has been restored in the area and that 'in our province the reactionary forces have been swept aside'.

In Gyor, for all that an American radio said that barricades were being made ready in the streets, there has been no armed conflict, while at the frontier post of Hegyeshalom, two Soviet soldiers and a Hungarian policeman appeared on their own to ask the local garrison to lay down its arms. Moreover, this very evening, rebels who no longer have the heart to face the new situation have had to straggle over the border into Austria and Yugoslavia, where they have been interned.

Going by other news that has reached us in the early afternoon from Budapest, hundreds of other people responsible for atrocities or involved in the wave of terrorism that has swept over Hungary in recent days, together with numerous supporters of the 'swastika' who entered Magyar territory when the frontier with Austria was unmanned or uncontrolled, are now looking for an escape route through the western regions in the direction of the Austro-Hungarian border.

At the same time, we have learned that, over the last few days in Republic Square, Budapest, no fewer than 150 young Magyars have been shot.

As news of the massacres, slaughter and barbarous acts leaks out of Hungary, the image of the 'white terror' installed there by chauvinist and Horthyist bands assumes ever more appalling dimensions.

Perhaps from this wave of terror, from the general disintegration of the country following the steady collapse of the insurrection movements, a new process of rethinking and a new move towards moderation may come forth, but it may also lead to the condemnation and isolation of the Fascist groups and movements.

The build-up of discontent and disaffection that exploded in the forms and in the excesses now known evidently created a situation in which pre-organised counter-revolutionary groups could put their plans for an anti-Communist putsch into effect, bringing the country to the brink of catastrophe. After ten days of bitter fratricidal strife and murder that have threatened to pave the way to a Horthy-style reaction and the restoration of feudalism in the countryside, the peasants and the workers may well have become aware of the danger facing the country and have begun to change their minds as to the aims and methods of the uprising.

Many symptoms have recently come to light in the Hungarian situation to confirm these suppositions: peasants are rejecting the demands of former landowners and preventing their return; workers are affirming openly that they will not give the factories back to their owners at any price, defending the workshops by force of arms against attacks from the rebels, albeit putting forward demands for democratic renewal that are part of the general protest movement, stemming as they do from a situation full of shortcomings and errors.

What is happening is that, after 12 days of bloody skirmishes and political reprisals, a large proportion of the Hungarian people, presumably the more mature part, has had to face a choice: either to defeat the counter-revolution, in other words the Horthyism that had raised its head again, or risk paying in full for the restoration of Fascism for who knows how many years.

Faced with the latter alternative, to which we have referred copiously in recent days, the problem has also arisen of finding, identifying and isolating the enemy. Given the conditions in which the Hungarian people finds itself after a week and a half of disorder and violent conflict, without effective administration or the minimum guidance, it is doubtful whether a new central political leadership could express itself in a direct, immediate and secure manner.

In the extremely confused and unstable Hungarian situation, the initiative could identify with neither Nagy's progressive capitulation, nor with the renunciation policy leading directly to Fascism. Just how the Socialist Party — and therefore Kádár — has managed to regain the initiative is still unclear. Only one factor is sufficiently clear: the Soviets have helped and supported the formation of the new government by action aimed at putting an end to the disorder, massacres and slaughter.

Over the last 48 hours, the movements and relocations of Soviet units in the Hungarian region and around Budapest have taken place without the least incident and without encountering any hostility from the population or even from the rebel groups.

In its most recent messages, the Nagy government appealed to people who are armed and to extremist groups to desist from further political reprisals. Not only were these appeals ignored, but also the Nagy government itself proved incapable of putting an end to the murders.

'All you needed in Budapest in those days was a weapon to become a leader or a commander', a Czech citizen told us today on his return from the Magyar capital.

How could Hungary rise up once more from the abyss into which such savagery had plunged it? The Soviets, after their cautious and passive intervention of the first few days, may be said to have watched and waited until Hungary found its own way, and until the Nagy government managed to establish equilibrium

and calm in the country once more.

But Hungary, under the Nagy government — or rather governments — did not find its own way, and has even been in the process of losing it for ever, throwing open the gates, as has been said before, to the white terror, to a state of chaos out of which someone would have had to pull it later.

Nagy, as is well known, destroyed his own democratic base by allowing the bodies and centres of progressive life to be destroyed. In the space of a few days, he lost the widespread credit he had enjoyed at the beginning. The very entry of counter-revolutionary elements into his government alienated the sympathies of wide popular and intellectual circles in Budapest. Nagy gradually gave in from hour to hour, surrendering to the pressure and blackmail of the counter-revolutionaries and betraying the very ideals for which some of his people had fought, to the point of supporting the uprising himself.

O.V.