

Matyas Rakosi, How we took over Hungary


Caption: In February 1952, Matyas Rakosi, Secretary-General of the Workers' Party and President of the Council in Hungary, outlines the strategy pursued by the Communist forces so that they may seize power in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

Source: Centre d'Information et de Documentation, Paris. Hongrie. Evolution de la mentalité de la population 1951-1955. 1205/OC. 254016. F 60 BIS 5521.

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URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/matyas_rakosi_how_we_took_over_hungary-en-9a19d06e-4163-4f31-b2c9-1bc9e65a380a.html

Last updated: 12/04/2023



How we took over Hungary

by *Matyas Rakosi*

The general strategy of the Communists in their seizure of power in Central and South-Eastern Europe has long been known in the free world. But this is the first occasion in which a leading Iron Curtain Communist has put on public record the main tactical features: (1) Establishment of Coalition Front Governments; (2) Control of the police and security forces; and (3) Elimination or absorption of the other Front parties. This article by Matyas Rakosi appeared in the March issue of the Hungarian Social Review (Tsarsadelmi Szemle). Originally it was part of an address on 29th February, 1952, at the indoctrination course of the Hungarian Workers Party.

Early in 1945 when our country had been liberated and when, after 25 years of underground work, the Hungarian Communist Party was able to show itself legally and openly in the arena of political life, we soon experienced that a good part of our Communists failed to realise the strategy and tactics of our Party.

What were the strategic aims of our Party at that time?

Like all other Communist Parties in the countries oppressed by Hitler during World War II, the Hungarian Communist Party considered that its most important strategic task was to destroy the German Fascist conquerors. To this end wide anti-Fascist coalitions were set up by the Communist Parties in these countries, according to the directives of Comrade Stalin. These coalitions included peasants, small bourgeois and even elements of the medium bourgeoisie — in brief all those ready to take part in the struggle for national liberation.

The Communist Parties foresaw that the victory in this hard struggle would not only mean the defeat of Nazism, but also the overthrow of the allies of Fascism, the big feudal land-owners, and the capitalists. Victory would therefore result in the redistribution of the land.

It could be foreseen that this victory — while achieving the aims of a bourgeois democratic revolution — would also open the road towards a dictatorship of the proletariat, because it was led by the workers' class which gives power to the people headed by the Communist Party.

We began our work by organising the Hungarian National Independence Front.

The greater part of our comrades, who did not know or failed to understand this strategic plan, accepted this heterogeneous coalition with astonishment. How often did we hear the following reproach: "This is not what we expected of you". They even told us what they expected.

"In 1919", they said, "the Imperialists overthrew the Hungarian Soviet Republic by armed force and restored the dictatorship of the big land-owners and of the capitalists. Now the Red Army has liberated us. Let us take advantage of the opportunity and restore the dictatorship of the proletariat".

These comrades failed to realise that while the Imperialists could overthrow by force — though only temporarily — the Hungarian dictatorship of the proletariat and restore the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and of the feudal land-owners, as long as the Communist Party had not won over the majority of the working class, the core of the working people — and in the Spring of 1945 they had not been won over — a dictatorship of the proletariat could not be set up.

In 1945 we discussed these problems only within the limited audience of Party meetings. At that time we did not discuss the problem before the people because even a theoretical discussion of a dictatorship of the proletariat as our final aim would have caused alarm among our partners in coalition and would have hampered our efforts to win over the majority of the small bourgeoisie, and even of the working classes.

The time had come to clarify, in its entirety and in detail, this problem and to make our Party, and also the working people, understand that the creation of a People's Democracy, as a variety of the dictatorship of the proletariat, became possible only after we had won over the decisive majority of the people of the working

class. We must emphasise how the Communist Party won over the majority of the working class, how it convinced the masses of agricultural workers and how it created the prerequisites of a dictatorship of the proletariat. We must also show how and when we switched from the first period of a People's Democracy to the second period, the proletarian dictatorship, the building of Socialism. The analysis and elucidation of the problems and the realisation of the experiences deriving from them will help us in future struggles and strengthen our power of foresight and security.

First of all let us examine the role of the Soviet Union in the creation of the Hungarian People's Democracy. The Soviet Army liberated us from the terrible selfdom of the German Fascists. With this they opened the road to democratic evolution. It is obvious that the decisive prerequisite — the starting point in the creation of the People's Democracies — was the struggle and victory of the Soviet Union. Without them there would have been no People's Democracies. The Soviet Union protected us from diplomatic interference on behalf of the Western Powers. She supported us during the peace negotiations, and later on when we established our diplomatic relations.

All this naturally helped in strengthening the Communist influence, and the sympathies arising among our working people for the Soviet Union also made our work easier.

During the task of reconstruction, and since then, we have experienced the support of the Soviet Union in hundreds and hundreds of forms. The greatest help, however, is the advice and the directives of our teacher and leader, the great Stalin.

Without all these factors our People's Democracy would not have been created, its evolution would not have been so swift, so strong and so void of violent shocks.

As early as during Land Reform we used the tactics of dividing our enemies or of neutralising them, if possible. For this reason we fixed the lowest limit at 200 Hungarian acres (yokes), thereby leaving the great majority of kulak farms unaffected. This was a great help in the smooth and quick implementation of the Land Reform.

At the beginning of reconstruction we supported that part of the bourgeoisie which — if only temporarily — joined in this work. This proved of great help in putting the technological intelligentsia to work — who at that time followed the bourgeoisie.

When we demanded something, we measured possible reactions carefully, and whenever it was possible we started by putting forward modest claims, thus preventing the enemy from joining and mobilising forces against us. Then we increased demands and used, whenever possible, temporary forms.

For instance, first we demanded only Government control over the banks; later we demanded the nationalisation of the largest banks. Similarly, in industry, we demanded only the nationalisation of the mines; then we gradually increased our demands for the nationalisation of the large machine factories and of the foundry industry. Thus the nationalisation of industry was achieved in 4–5 phases over several years.

When the war was over we tried to turn evolution into Socialist revolution. The Smallholders' Party and the Social Democratic leaders fought for the survival and strengthening of the capitalist system. They joined in the Land Reform only unwillingly.

By the summer of 1945 it became obvious that the elements of the old régime — estate owners, bankers, house owners, Horthyite politicians and officers were assembling in the Smallholders' Party. This Party was also supported by the Church, whose priests filled leading positions in the leadership of the Party, The Imperialists at once established relations with this Party, mainly through the medium of their Budapest diplomatic missions.

The relative strength of the parties was first shown by the November 1945 elections. The Smallholders' Party achieved an absolute majority — 56 per cent. of the votes. The Communist party, which advanced

neck to neck with the Social Democratic Party, got 17 per cent. of the votes. The Peasant Party obtained a little less than 8 per cent.

It became obvious during the weeks preceding the elections that the Smallholders' Party had obtained the majority of the votes of our peasantry, and the majority of the small bourgeoisie.

Nevertheless, the Communist Party made use of the election results in order to strengthen its positions further. Therefore, it demanded the posts of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior, which, after some delay, it obtained. In order to strengthen our influence within the Government, we created the Supreme Economic Council through which we gradually came to influence key positions in economic life. Thus, despite the election results, our Party extended its influence in the most important fields of Government power.

But officers and Horthyite Government officials began to flock back from the West. The purge of Government machinery slowed down. The old land-owners and their lawyers availed themselves of all kinds of legal claims to demand the restitution of their land from the new owners,

Under the impact of this situation, the new land-owners (who totalled more than 500,000) applied to the Communist Party for help.

At the same time we launched a counter-attack. In the villages and the towns we mobilised the masses, and in the form of "popular judgments" and "popular movements" we removed reactionary elements from the administration of villages and towns. Simultaneously with this action our Party launched a drive to unmask reactionary elements in the Smallholders' Party. The Communist Party demanded that the Smallholders' Party itself was to take steps against its reactionary elements to help ensure the result of the land reform, and dismiss from its ranks all the best-known reactionaries. These demands were openly supported also by the Left-wing of the Smallholders' Party.

At the initiative of our Party a Left bloc was formed within the Independent Front early in March, 1946, which apart from the Communist party, the Social Democratic Party and the Peasant Parties, included also the T.U.C. The new organisation — the parties of which won nearly 42 per cent. of the votes at the elections — meant that the influence of the Communist Party on the workers' class and the poor peasantry had increased.

To stress its demands, the Leftist bloc early in March arranged a demonstration of Budapest workers. At the threatening effect of the formidable mass meeting of more than 40,000 disciplined demonstrators the Smallholders' Party had to comply with our demands and exclude 21 of its most compromised deputies. It was agreed that under no conditions must new land-owners be removed; that after the nationalisation of the collieries, oil, and bauxite mines also would be nationalised, that banks would be taken under State supervision, that the Manfred Weisz Works in Csepel, the Ganz factories, the Ozd Metallurgy Works would be taken over by the State and that the committees purging the State apparatus of reactionary elements would include trade union representatives.

So, four months after the election victory of the Smallholders' Party, a new turn came: not yet a general attack on capitalism, but we took vulnerable forward positions, which facilitated our progress towards the proletarian dictatorship.

In continuation of the successful counter-attack in March 1946, the unmasking, elimination and isolation of reactionary elements of the Smallholders' Party continued without interruption. The Smallholders' Party was continually compelled to exclude or eliminate individual members or groups of members thus compromised.

This work we called "Salami Tactics", by which we cut out in slices reaction hiding in the Smallholders' Party. In this incessant struggle we wore away the strength of the enemy, reduced his influence and at the same time deepened our own influence.

The Smallholders' Party turned down a suggestion by the Communist Party to nationalise the flourmills, to make kulaks and landlords pay "crop surrenders", and to institute a property levy.

The Third Communist Party Congress called for the end of September 1946 outlined more resolutely the road on which we set out in March. Its slogans were: "Oust the people's enemies from the Coalition"; "We build the country for the people, not for the capitalists".

The most important target set by the Congress was the establishment of a People's Democracy, because only by means of it could our country proceed towards Socialism without civil war.

Meanwhile reaction gathered fresh hope from the approaching peace negotiations. It reckoned that some months after the conclusion of the Peace Treaty the Soviet troops would leave the country.

The Communists retaliated by uncovering the "Conspiracy". The sharp fights of the 1946–47 winter centred around it. In this the Smallholders were supported by the Social Democrats.

In winding up the conspiracy it became evident that its threads led to one of the ministers and even to the Secretary-General of the Smallholders' Party, Bela Kovacs.

In the course of the liquidation of the conspiracy the Smallholders' Party was again obliged to exclude a number of its members, of whom many were imprisoned as conspirators.

Eventually it was discovered that the Smallholder Premier, Ferenc Nagy, who was on holiday in Switzerland, was the actual leader of the conspiracy. He preferred to resign and remain in Switzerland rather than return to Budapest to face the charges against him.

Three days later the Catholic priest, Bela Varga, the Smallholder President of the National Assembly, who was also mixed up in the conspiracy, escaped from the country.

By unmasking the conspirators we succeeded in freeing a large part of the Smallholders' peasants and the small bourgeois masses from the influence of reaction. Thus the Smallholders' Party began to fall apart.

In this position we left the enemy no time to reorganise and regroup his ranks, but proposed new elections in the weeks when there was the greatest confusion, helplessness and rivalry among the new reactionary opposition parties.

The Western Imperialists now attempted to push the Social Democratic Party into the foreground against the Communist Party.

We struck back with vigour, pointing out that the time was ripe to realise an organic unity of the workers by the unification of the two parties. The Social Democrats were forced to sign a joint election ticket with the Communist Party.

The 1947 election results showed a 40 per cent. increase in the Communist vote, which meant that the majority of the industrial workers had begun to gather around the Communist Party.

After the elections our enemies made yet another effort to oust the Communists from the Government, even demanding the Ministry of the Interior. Our Party energetically rejected these claims.

At the end of September 1947 a new Government was formed, in which, in keeping with the changed conditions, the leading role of the Communist Party became even more conspicuous. We then accelerated the rate of development. The treacherous Pfeiffer Party was dissolved.

This was followed within a few days by a further important step: the nationalisation of big banks, by which a

considerable part of Hungarian industry became nationalised. This deepened still more the influence of our Party on the working masses. It enabled us to strike a decisive blow against the hostile forces hiding in the Social Democratic Party. We set up a special committee for this purpose, unmasking more and more openly and rigorously the machinations with which Social Democratic leaders obstructed the development of our People's Democracy.

The fight for winning the majority of the industrial workers ended with the victory of the Communists and the total defeat of the Social Democratic Party. In June 1948 the two parties were united on the basis of Leninist–Stalinist principles.

Our Party acquired the support of the decisive majority of the working masses and ensured the creation of the proletarian dictatorship with the help of the correct application of Bolshevik tactics. The Communist Party obtained the leading role in the Government, it nationalised the mines, controlled the armed forces, broke up the old State apparatus and started to build a new one from the ranks of the proletariat.

While both our hands were engaged in winning to our side the masses of workers and peasants, we practically adjourned our fight for winning over the Army. We achieved this by preventing the Army from reaching the strength permitted in the Armistice Agreement and the Peace Treaty.

Until 1948 the strength of the Army was only 12,000 men, instead of the conceded 65–70,000, and the majority of even that small force was spread in small patrols along the borders.

In Budapest, where the political fate of the country was decided, there was no military garrison at all, so that at times we had difficulties in selecting a representative company for the installation of foreign Ambassadors.

But even in this small Army, fighting at close quarters went on for every post in the command from N.C.O.s up to General.

When, however, the fight on the political level had been decided, naturally the conditions within the Army changed too. We were then in a position to ensure that the Army became really a People's Army. When in the fall of 1948 our Party took hold of the Ministry of Defence, a beginning could be made with the energetic development of the Army.

A desperate struggle was also going on all the time within the police force, which our Party had taken in their hands.

There was a single position, the control of which was claimed by our Party from the first minute, and where it was not inclined to consider any distribution of posts or any appointments according to the proportionate strength of parties in the Coalition. This was the State Security Authority. We held this organisation firmly in our hands from the first day of its establishment. We made sure it remained a reliable and sharp weapon in the fight for the People's Democracy.