

THE ASCENDANCY OF THE PEASANT

BY M. W. FODOR

ONE of the interesting lessons of the many revolutions which the various countries of Europe have experienced during the past seventeen years has been that the revolutionists often profited least from them. In Austria, Hungary, and Germany in 1918, and in Spain in 1931, the revolutions were made by the town workers while the peasants looked on phlegmatically. But where are the Reds of these countries today? Their parties have been annihilated; their leaders shot, imprisoned, or exiled; their trade unions broken up and the property of the socialist organizations confiscated—but the peasants of Central and Southeastern Europe, though not contributing at all to the revolutions, are still in possession of the land and of the political and economic advantages which they gained as a result of the rising of the town proletariat. The peasant, yesterday a serf, is today the master of the Central European situation. He is marching hand in hand with the small bourgeoisie of the cities, another group which took no part in the original revolutions. This small bourgeoisie plays an apparently dominating role in many countries, but the peasants, though their rise was less evident and spectacular, are the real masters of the situation. Even the most autocratic dictatorships can exist only through the silent toleration of this inert yet compelling force—compelling through their number and the position which they occupy between right and left.

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In Central Europe the peasant holds today, to a great extent, the nations' economic and political future in his hands. Yet his emergence on the scene has been so undramatic, so absolutely the result of circumstances which he himself did not precipitate, that students of European politics pass him over with hardly a word.

The peasant class before the war was definitely on the decline. In 1920 Dr. Schlittenbauer, one of the moving spirits of the Bavarian peasant movement, pointed out in a memorandum that the whole tendency before the war had led to the disappearance of the smallholders and the concentration of the land in the hands of a few estate owners. He made a number of suggestions for reversing this process and returning the erstwhile industrial population to the land, estimating that at least five million city workers could thus be given livelihood. Dr. Schlittenbauer's statement regarding the situation in Germany might have been made of every other country in Central and Southeastern Europe. The twenty years before the war had witnessed the decay of the smallholder almost everywhere.

Throughout Central Europe, in the nineties of the last century, and after, the agricultural population drifted into the cities to become industrial workers, and their holdings were often turned into hunting grounds for the aristocracy. This happened especially in the eastern parts of Germany, in Austria, and in many parts of Hungary.

In all these countries the peasants who survived subsisted at the lowest standard of life. They were ignorant to the point of illiteracy (except in Germany and Austria), and nobody attempted to educate them. They were economically exploited by the cities. They worked from dawn till dark, children, wives, and all.

The war, the successive revolutions, the Entente blockade, and inter-state barriers, were all major catastrophes to the city population, but they contributed to the rise of the peasant—the coming into power of a hitherto declining and exploited class. Russian and overseas wheat being no longer available, the Central European countries had to obtain food within their own boundaries. Whereas before 1914 the basis of the economic life of Western-Central Europe was industrial production—and thus politics was in the hands of the aristocrats and of the big financial and industrial interests—the war shifted the economic basis back to food. As a result, a large part of the political power went into the hands of the peasants, and soon this hitherto unrepresented class gained increasing control over the affairs of Central Europe.

It is true that the world crisis has hit agriculture in the first line, and the economic power of the peasant has diminished in consequence; but the other classes have been impoverished even more. Thus the economic-political influence of the peasant suffered only absolutely, not relatively. Political developments in some countries and the rise of dictatorships in others may have temporarily checked the peasant movement, but while suffering a setback in one country, it gained influence in another. Today it is generally admitted that the peasant is the backbone of the political and economic life of every Central and Southeastern European country.

Every parliament and each dictator must court him, and is bound to arrange national policy according to the wishes of this large, silent, only semi-conscious, and yet irresistible force.

The gains which the peasant population attained after the war were multifarious. Their chief acquisitions were: first, the obtaining of political power which they lacked before the war; second, agrarian reform in practically all Central European countries; third, the development of co-operative societies and banking; fourth, the creation of agricultural chambers as part of the vocational representation of the peasant interests; fifth, development of agricultural education; and, sixth, social welfare institutions for the agricultural workers.

Since the World War fourteen countries in Central and Eastern Europe have adopted legislation for agrarian land reform. With this move the most important wish of the peasant, namely to obtain land sufficient to feed his family and to produce a small surplus, has been realized. The former serf has thus become a proprietor. Now the property owner, however small his property may be, evolves a mentality which, in many ways, is closely akin to that of the bourgeoisie. So the land reform acts, which came into existence through the sympathies of the socialists for the oppressed peasants, created a new group which has become an enemy to those who helped the peasants to the possession of land. The landless proletariat was on the way to becoming Bolshevik; the landed peasant, though by no means a fascist, at least willingly tolerated the growth of a movement which, as the peasants believed, was promoting his interests to retain the newly gained private property. Kronos devoured his own son; the peasant is devouring

his brother, the town proletarian, who helped him into the possession of land.

The importance of this increased influence of the peasantry will be realized if one takes into consideration the fact that, of the total population of 98,000,000 people in Czechoslovakia, Austria, Poland, Rumania, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Albania, 68,000,000 (seventy per cent) are agricultural workers. As this hitherto unassuming and neglected class awakens to consciousness of its power, it will become an even more decisive factor in the political, economic, and social life of Central Europe. In the following paragraphs I intend to analyze the progress made by this class in the various countries during the last sixteen years, and especially in comparison with its status in the pre-war days.

II

The Czechoslovak Republic inherited, from the Austrian parts of the old monarchy, the provinces of Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia, while from the Hungarian parts she acquired Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia. The parts which had belonged to Hungary were predominantly agricultural; the provinces inherited from Austria had produced 35% of the wheat, 48% of the rye, and 90% of the sugar beet requirement of old Austria. In the new democratic Republic of Czechoslovakia the feudal system of land-ownership as well as the ruling social conditions were found unsatisfactory, and a decision was made to introduce important reforms. Two thousand large landowners, mostly feudal noblemen, possessed one-third of the country, while two million peasants were landless or owned patches of land wholly insufficient for their existence.

Bohemia and Moravia were considered

pre-eminently as industrial parts before the war, and the influence of the captains of industry, together with that of the landowning aristocrats, prevailed. The masters of the new Czechoslovakia disliked the landowners, who in their eyes were the representatives of a decayed regime. As nationalists they disliked the industrial captains, because these were mostly Germans. To decrease the influence of the aristocrats and of the pan-German industrial lords, the government tried to support with all its power the peasants who were Czech nationalists and democratic at the same time. In the first government coalitions the Agrarians played an important part, and their influence continuously increased, until in October, 1925, this largest amongst the non-Socialist parties supplied the Premier in the person of Antonin Svehla. In 1926 there was a brief period of aristocratic-industrial rule, but ever since then the Premier has come from the ranks of the Agrarians; and in addition, important portfolios such as War, Agriculture, and Education have been filled by members of the same party.

This political dominance of the peasant, supported by the strong democratic spirit of President Masaryk, caused the liquidation of the old feudal system of land-ownership; and a very thorough land reform was introduced in Czechoslovakia. The land reform law restricted ownership of land in general to 625 acres, and at most to 1250 acres. By the survey of the State Land Office ten million acres of land were slated for redistribution.

During the first ten years of the land reform more than three million acres were handed over to new owners. Fifty-three per cent of the partitioned estates passed into the hands of farmers who already possessed land; 23% to landless peasants, and 24% passed into the

hands of people belonging to other professions, many of whom were Czech legionnaires during the war. Under a so-called colonization scheme, 2100 families, given houses and land to the extent of from thirty to seventy-five acres, were settled in 120 already existent parishes and in twenty-eight newly created settlements. The number of people who received land amounted to well over half a million. During the last five years a number of large forest properties have also come under the land reform and been allotted, mostly to various communities or cities.

Those who feared the adverse effects of the Czechoslovak agrarian reform upon the production figures were mistaken. It is true that the measures adopted amounted to confiscation. Though a nominal low price was paid to the former owners in forms of obligations, this sum was swallowed up by fees, duties, and special taxation. The comparatively high prosperity of the peasant then was attained with the help of high agrarian protective tariffs and by export-import prohibitions and licences; but, naturally, this artificial protection of the interest of the agrarian strata of the population has adversely affected the standard of life of the city dwellers who have had to pay the bill.

III

The parts of the Austrian Empire which now constitute the territory of the Austrian Federal State contained a larger peasant class in the pre-war days than was the case in the districts which became part and parcel of Czechoslovakia. When in 1921 the Catholic Clerical (Christian Social) party took over the lead in the bourgeois government coalition, the in-

fluence of the peasant increased accordingly, for this party recruited its voters mostly from the agricultural population. The peasants of the countryside demanded certain reforms which were apt to increase both their political and economic influence. No land reform measure was ever passed in Austria, but the already powerful and numerous peasant class succeeded in pushing through many reforms which benefited the rural population.

Besides being well represented in parliament, the peasants established on February 22, 1922, the Lower-Austrian Chamber of Agriculture, an organization designed to serve as the autonomous representation of the agricultural and forestry interests of the Lower Austrian rural population. Some years later similar organizations were established in seven of the other states. The founder of the first chamber was Josef Reither. His right-hand man, who assisted in its creation, was his secretary, Dr. Engelbert Dollfuss, later Chancellor of Austria.

Dr. Dollfuss was of peasant extraction and remained until his tragic death an indomitable fighter for the interest of the class from which he originated. His clear-cut and energetic policy (which, of course, was highly disadvantageous to the city population) aimed at the moral and material improvement of the peasants. Before the war present-day Austria, like Bohemia, was in reality an industrial country, but Dr. Dollfuss, through the medium of the Chambers of Agriculture, as well as through high agrarian tariffs, aimed to put the peasant in the forefront of Austrian life. Just as Czech agriculture was aided by the establishment of high agrarian customs duties, the Chambers of Agriculture in Austria worked for the increase of agrarian tariffs in their country.

When in May, 1932, Dr. Dollfuss be-

came Chancellor of Austria, the influence of the agrarians naturally witnessed a further increase. Even after the abolition of the constitution in 1934 the peasants' influence remained strong in the various consultative bodies of the new corporative state.

As result of Dr. Dollfuss' pro-agrarian policy the peasants of the lowlands profited enormously by the tariffs, but the lot of the mountain peasants remained pitiful. The chief export product of the mountains was lumber, which until 1931 was exported mostly to Germany. But for various reasons, and not the least among them being the political feud between Nazi Germany and Catholic Austria, the German market became less and less available for the Austrian products, thus delivering a serious blow to the peasants. New trade treaties with Italy, Hungary and France only partially offset the loss suffered by the drop in exports to Germany.

Poland is predominantly agricultural. Under the Russian, German and Austrian administrations before the war, the big landowners were supreme in various parts of the then-divided Poland. After the war the Poles suffered enormously from the vigorous Bolshevik propaganda in neighboring Soviet-Russia, and in face of this danger the Polish parliament in July, 1919, adopted a drastic resolution of far-reaching land reform. At that time there were 16,000 owners of huge estates, while two-thirds of the population possessed less than twelve acres, or no land at all. But an even more drastic land reform law was passed in December, 1925. This law provided for a division of five million acres of land annually, for a period of ten years. A definite scheme for compensation was adopted. By the end of 1930 some 483,000 new farm holdings, covering five million

acres of land, were created, while 240,000 smallholders obtained additional land, amounting to another five million acres.

Until 1926 the political influence of the peasants, represented by the moderate Piast party of Witos and by the more radical Deliverance party, was considerable. From the end of the war until 1926 the peasant leader Witos was three times Premier of Poland. His last government was ousted by the *putsch* of Marshal Pilsudski in May, 1926. But despite this temporary setback and a campaign of defamation against Witos, the peasants of Poland gained enormously, especially if their lot is compared with the pre-war days.

Rumania, another neighbor of Russia, was compelled in 1917 to adopt agrarian reforms on a large scale to prevent the spread of Bolshevism amongst the landless proletariat. By a decree-law of 1918 the expropriation of estates of "foreigners" and the division of the domains of the Rumanian aristocrats began, this latter class obtaining compensation in the form of bonds payable in installments spread over forty years. Altogether fifteen million acres of land were expropriated. Of this, ten million acres were arable, providing land for 630,000 families in Rumania proper, 310,000 in Transylvania, 357,000 in Bessarabia, and 71,000 in the Bukovina. In addition to the land reform, agricultural chambers were formed all over the country to represent the interests of the peasants.

The political influence of the Rumanian peasant has fluctuated during the past sixteen years. The so-called "liberal" governments represented the interests of industries and banking as well as of the city population. Peasant dissatisfaction reached such a point that Rumania was brought to the verge of civil war in 1926 by the

peasants' threats to march on Bucharest. In November, 1928, the Regency was forced to call Julius Maniu, the Transylvania peasant leader, to the helm of the country. From that date until the spring of 1931 the peasant party directed the fate of Rumanian politics; and, after the one-year experiment of Jorga's semi-dictatorial regime came to an end, the peasant party was called upon once more to direct the affairs of the country, and it remained in office until November, 1933. The "liberal" Tatarescu government which followed them did not dare to infringe on any privileges of the peasants gained during the last decade.

The lot of the peasant improved comparatively slightly in Hungary. After the fall of the Béla Kun (Bolshevik) regime in 1919 the peasants became the strongest party in the Hungarian parliament; but after the death of the peasant leader, Szabo de Nagyatad, the feudal Premier, Count Bethlen, succeeded in breaking up the ranks of the peasants and reduced them to an uninfluential wing of his own United Government party. The land reform provided by a special law brought about the division of only a few estates, and the number of peasants who obtained land has not been very large, especially if compared with those of the neighboring countries.

Yet even in Hungary the situation has improved during the last two years. The present Premier, Julius Goemboes, was in the post-war days a champion of land reform and included a conservative yet efficient land reform scheme in his government program. The Agrarian party meanwhile has become the strongest party of the opposition, and they have demanded real land reform. The leader of this oppositional group, Tibor Eckhardt, is an old friend and former member of Goem-

boes's one-time fascist party. A *rap-prochement*, now under way between the Premier and the leader of the opposition, probably will develop into a coalition for the next elections; and if such should prove to be the case, then in Hungary also the outlook for the attainment of more political and economic power by the peasants will have brightened considerably.

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The kingdom of Yugoslavia effected a far-reaching land reform almost in the beginning of her existence. More than three million acres of land were divided among the peasants, benefiting 370,000 families. Politically, however, only the Croatian peasant party played an important part before the dictatorship. The Serbian Agrarian party made determined but almost vain efforts to establish influence among the peasants. The dictatorship abolished all parties. The dictatorial regime, though 80% of the population is of rural stock, does not grant any proper representation to this important class. Yet economically the lot of the South-Slav peasants is, compared with the pre-war situation, much better, especially in Macedonia and Bosnia, where until 1914 a semi-serf system survived from the days of the Turkish rule.

Bulgaria has always been a country of the smallholders, and a land reform was not required. After the war the peasant dictator Stambulisky ruled there. Under his regime the peasants benefited enormously through the establishment of co-operatives, agricultural schools, research institutes, etc. But he was murdered in June, 1923, and a White Terror swept over the country as a result. Despite the terror, however, the agrarians were able to retain most of the advantages gained under the Green Dic-

tatorship. In 1932 the peasants entered the Mushanoff government as partners in a coalition. The *putsch* of May 19, 1934, abolished parliamentary representation, but economically this change effected the agrarians very little.

Albania has also adopted a thorough land reform during the last three years, and almost 4000 peasants and immigrants obtained free holdings. King Zog invited agricultural advisers into the country, and ordered the replacing of the primitive wooden plows by steel.

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We thus see that the peasant class all over Europe, almost unrepresented in politics before the war, has gained great influence in the direction of the affairs of the respective states, though much of the political gain was paralyzed later on by the establishment of Fascist and dictatorial regimes in various countries. But even these dictatorially ruled countries have had to take cognizance of the increasing political influence of the peasants.

This influence holds in store for the whole of Europe both a promise and a threat. The promise is that the improvement of the status of a class which before the war was composed of serfs will become a stabilizing influence. If the agricultural crisis, which appears to be slowly on the ebb, is once overcome and the material prosperity of the peasant is restored, an important strata of the population will become available for the consumption of the industrial products of the world market.

Another promise is that the peasant is fundamentally democratic. Even if today

he supplies the silent support for the various dictatorships, he has remained a democrat in his heart and this latent power may probably help to restore democratic forms of governments, which the different dictatorships have abolished.

Navigating between capital on the one side and labor on the other, it appeared for some time that the peasant would have the decisive word in shaping the destinies of European society. But the agrarian movement has one great draw-back: the peasant masses cannot be organized as, for example, labor has been organized. After the war an endeavor was made to bring the agrarians of Europe together in a Green International. (First meeting in August, 1920, in Passau.) But because of the slow and conservative nature of the peasant the organization proceeded only with difficulties, and the world economic crisis has dealt it almost fatal blows.

At present the peasants are organized, if organized at all, on national lines, and the chief threat they hold over Europe is their jingoism. French nationalism at the bottom is the nationalism of the French peasants. And just as the thrifty, democratic, and yet suspicious French peasant is the real power even today in France, so the same prospects can be expected in Central Europe.

The agrarians in these parts, who obtained land through the reforms, will remain intensely nationalistic. Though pacifists in their hearts, they can be easily convinced that their property, which is more important to them than their lives, can be maintained only with the help of a strong army. And if there comes another serious world crisis, the peasants can easily be persuaded to embark on a war.

PUNISHMENT FOR DISEASE

BY ANTHONY M. TURANO

DURING the Dark Ages every individual was presumed to possess, in his standard kit of organs, arteries and ligaments, a sort of self-regulating carburetor known as a free will. Since the faculty was deemed a part of the indestructible soul, its functions could not be affected by any diseases of the perishable body. Hence philosophers were equally accountable with lunatics for every infraction of the penal code. Even as late as the Eighteenth Century, paranoiacs and monomaniacs were bound with iron chains to teach them not to consort with the Prince of Darkness. In Colonial America, the legal opinion of hysteria and neurasthenia was so enlightened that witch-hunting and wizard-baiting were the respectable pastimes of God-fearing and right-thinking Christians.

In more recent times such customs have been replaced by state hospitals and homes for the feeble-minded. But the distinction between criminality and pathology is still legally uncertain, and the substitution of punishment for medication is by no means a forgotten sport.

Narcotic addiction, viewed without moral indignation, is a definite disease, known to doctors as chronic opium poisoning. The agonies attending the lack of the drug, often resulting in nervous collapse and sometimes death, are well known to every apprentice nurse. The habitual dose of morphia is just as indispensable to the addict as food and water: only with

his accustomed sniff or injection can he approach normality. Without his anodyne he has no more control of his symptoms than a furious maniac has of his reflexes. His will-power to cure himself, without expert treatment, is about as effective as the voluntary efforts of a traumatic patient to replace his amputated leg.

As early as 1916, Dr. M. J. Wilbert, of the United States Public Health Service, pointed out that "the treatment of drug addiction is a psychologic and medical and not a criminal or penologic problem." But as a matter of sober law, the condition is still considered a punishable vice, self-induced and maliciously retained, for which the patrol wagon serves the ends of justice better than the ambulance. In New York City, a standard fine of \$25 is imposed on Chinese opium smokers, as if they were free to go forth, destroy their brass pipes, and puff no more. A San Francisco superior judge complains that nearly half of his official business consists of meting out penalties to victims of drug disease. Some of the prisoners are charged with no other offense than the possession of barely enough opiates to escape pain for a day or two. Others are guilty of the unpardonable atrocity of passing a shot or bindle to an equally addicted companion.

During a four-month period in 1929, a total of 2407 persons in all parts of the country were reported as violators of the narcotic laws. Two hundred and thirty-nine of the cases involved improper deal-