



# The Green International

BY CHARLES MERZ



WITH no blare of trumpets, but a rather heavy tread, a new alliance marches into European politics. It calls itself "The Green International." It numbers several million peasants in its ranks. Its stronghold, to be sure, lies somewhat off the beaten track of European news, and it is young: these two facts may explain why it has attracted almost no attention in the West. But already this new international has demonstrated itself capable of a high degree of solidarity; it has spokesmen in every parliament of southeastern Europe; it flourishes a program well calculated to catch the peasant's eye. Into a world of second internationals, second and a half internationals, third internationals, and other intermediate sizes, steps a new "peasants' international." Its symbol is a four-leafed clover.

Several months ago, traveling down the slightly blue and much more yellow Danube, I wrote those paragraphs for the newspaper editor who had sent me to the Balkans in search of news. Everything that made me feel on first acquaintance that this Green International was altogether the most interesting new factor on the scene in Europe, everything that made me think its rôle grew daily both in interest and importance, has been multiplied by two in the months that followed. The latest exploit of the Green International has been to slip quietly into power in the

most enterprising of the new states created by the war: Dr. Antonin Svehla, unknown to us, but well beloved by the Greens, has recently supplanted the much more famous Dr. Beneš as prime minister of Czechoslovakia. Meantime, still more recently, the Green International on the other side of the Carpathian Mountains seem to have done well enough in Poland's last elections to send one of their leaders to a new assembly as speaker of the house.

This Green International is an active young alliance. Not only has it these two recent triumphs to its credit: it is completely in the saddle in Bulgaria, it has gained strength with each election in Yugoslavia, it boasts the largest membership of any opposition party in the parliament of Rumania. In these five countries, all far away and rather sketchy, but all capable of embroiling the rest of Europe in turmoil, and all pivots in the balance-wheels of European politics, this almost unknown international is rising unmistakably toward the test of leadership.

Glance at the background of this Eastern country if you would measure the interest and significance of a peasant international. Land for centuries has been something in the Danube Valley to support a few families in almost royal pleasure. Take the case of Czechoslovakia as being fairly typical. For three centuries a

small group of a few hundred families has owned one acre in every four. Its estates have averaged twenty-five thousand acres each, and this in a little land whose area is no larger than New England's. Nor has it ever helped to make this situation popular, either before the war or after it, that these powerful proprietors were mostly Austro-Germans.

All through southeastern Europe the great estates have ruled supreme for many years. Sometimes, as in Poland and Rumania, the landed gentry belonged to the same nationality as the toiling peasant. Sometimes, as in Czechoslovakia and Transylvania, the great collector of the rents was an obvious and unadmired alien. In either case the scheme of life was feudal. Serfdom was abolished legally, but in point of fact it survived unruffled throughout wide stretches in these countries. The owners of the great estates comprised a privileged caste. In parliaments and senates they were represented, and not by accident, with delegations out of all proportion to their voting strength. They made and unmade cabinets. They monopolized the machinery for acquiring an education. They were the only caste that ever peeped out into the world beyond the boundaries of their own parish neighborhoods, save for the hopeful emigrants who left home to pick up gold in Bridgeport. Around these mighty figures the life of southeastern Europe has for years been grouped in little feudal knots and bunches as compact and medieval as life was grouped throughout the Middle Ages.

You see that what the Green International tampers with is something even more fundamental than the man-

ner of dividing shares of daily bread; it is experimenting with a whole system that has kept Europe feudal from the Black Sea to the Adriatic and from 1625 to 1922. That is one of the interesting things about it—that and its efforts to reshape Russia, efforts to which I shall turn a little later.

It was the war, productive of a host of varied innovations, that set this peasants' international going. There had been "peasant parties" active in the politics of southeastern Europe long before the war, but what happened between 1914 and 1918 supplied momentum for the new alliance. During these four war years every government in this corner of the world had a substantial problem on its hands in maintaining what is called "morale." This task was especially difficult in view of the fact that Rumania and Serbia, which has now been enlarged into Yugoslavia, were both invaded by the enemy, and Poland and Czechoslovakia were simply uncut parts of larger nations, with a population ready for rebellion. In this perplexity, and with the hope of stiffening resistance, all through southeastern Europe governments began promising their peasants something that had been taboo—the land. The Rumanian Government, for example, had sought refuge in the town of Jassy, three hundred miles from home; then, to keep its people fighting, it declared that if they drove the Germans back, three fourths of all Rumania would be cut up into peasant holdings.

War gave a tremendous impetus to struggling little pre-war parties. For a time, desperately attempting to consolidate their gains at home, they found no time to look across the garden wall. Upon peasant leaders in these

countries the fact then gradually began to dawn that on the other side of frontiers were men who shared their own new hopes and problems, even though they spoke different tongues. In the recognition of this fact arose the Green International. First came a more or less haphazard interchange of inquiries and counsel, then conference, and finally the four-leafed clover and a central office.

This office is in Prague. It acts as a clearing-house for information. Its director, and the chairman of the international, is Dr. Svehla, the same Dr. Svehla who recently stepped into power as prime minister of Czechoslovakia. And allied with the central bureau are the peasant parties of Czechoslovakia and four next-door neighbors, Poland and Rumania, Jugoslavia and Bulgaria.

## § 2

This, then, is the Green International. It is a loose federation. Neither the central bureau nor the conference of national leaders, when it meets, attempts to dictate rules and regulations. To be sure, whenever there comes what Europe calls a crisis, some difference of opinion about reparations or the Turks and Greeks, these agrarian parties rush their leaders into conference and debate the issue as it affects the interests of their own constituents. Thus far they have managed to agree upon a common line of action.

But this is not the real objective. The chief purpose of an international when it's green is apparently to narrow the range of peasant politics, not widen it; to pin politics down compactly on two central and important points.

To break up the great estates, then

divide the land into peasant holdings—that is the program of the Green International. To these two central principles it subordinates all other issues. What it aims at is a democracy of peasants working their own farms. It believes there is no other way to healthy economics in southeastern Europe, no other way to a redistribution of political power on a more democratic basis, no other road from feudalism to the modern state, no other road, ultimately, to peace and understanding between people who have been egged on to fight one another for three generations. “Let the workers of the land unite,” declares a manifesto of the Green International. “Let them join hands to insure the welfare of their own interests, the defense of a democratic society, and the establishment of universal peace.”

It might almost be the Marxian manifesto: “Workers of the world, unite; you have nothing to lose except your chains.” Only, this time, the workers are to be tillers of the soil; and they are being urged to battle not for socialism, but for the rights of private property.

For this Green International is definitely and emphatically opposed to socialization. It may support, and probably will some day, the partial socialization of the means of distribution, as that result is being achieved in many parts of America, through state-owned terminals, warehouses, and the like. But so far as the land itself is concerned, it maintains stoutly that the peasant wants to be his own employer. “Peasants the world over all have the same task, the same love for a piece of ground—that ground where they live, create, and battle.”

Nor has the Green International,

like some of the other internationals, any apparent intention of attempting to hack its way to power by sheer force. It does not propose to seize those great estates which worry it. It proposes to acquire them through the tactics of the ballot-box. And it proposes compensation in all cases for the owner; proffers a program of payment via long-term credit, which it declares is practicable.

These peasants are not even ready for an alliance with "liberals" or "radicals" or "labor." They assert that their movement must remain an independent entity, though it may co-operate at times with other forces in the achievement of some immediate objective. In fact, so stalwart is the central office of the Green International that one wing of the movement, in Bulgaria, is regarded with a disapproving eye as being "too extreme." "The peasant's training gives him little taste for fantasies," declares the central bureau. "For the peasant does not work by the minutes of some clock, ticking out nine hours on a factory wall. His clock is the four seasons. He works slowly, and he *thinks* that way."

### § 3

There is a special interest in observing how these theories work when the Green International comes to defining its own policy toward the most famous of all Europe's "problems," and the greatest of all peasant nations—Russia. In this case the premise from which the international starts is that Russia belongs definitely within its orbit. Russia, it thinks, has the same background of great estates and feudalism, the same aspirations on the part of a great peasantry, landless until

the Revolution. Life in Russia has a texture of the same weight as life in the five countries whose peasants now comprise this international. Russia belongs to feudal eastern Europe, not to the more modern West.

Accordingly, the Green International has organized what it calls a "Russian Section." The leaders of this wing are neither communists nor partizans of the old order, panting for a czar in Petrograd. They are, for the most part, spokesmen of the Russian coöperative societies and the local zemstvos which used to function as local governing assemblies. At their head is a former director of one of the peasant banks in Moscow, I. V. Emelianoff.

This Russian Section lies well outside the Russian frontier; for, preaching private property, its activities are not welcomed by the soviets. It recruits its membership from peasant *émigrés* now scattered through the Balkans, though it tries to work inside the lines as well. It has semi-official delegates in many parts of Russia, some of them members of the old "Green Army" that once acquired a brief fame by demonstrating that it did not want to fight for either Reds or Whites, but to go back home and till the soil.

The Green International, like the Green Army, is anti-communist. It thinks the Russian peasants want to own their land themselves. It is against the communists and wants to see them go. But if it is anti-communist, it is also anti-czar. It does not want the old régime of feudal landlords back in power. It has no liking for White Armies and grand dukes subsidized in Paris. It is not working with these men. It is work-

ing with the peasants, apparently not trying to rouse them to a new revolt so much as attempting to organize them to hold what they already have—the land. Its theory is that if you take care of land, politics will take care of themselves, in Petrograd and Moscow. Soviets may come, and monarchists may go; the land goes on forever.

What the Green International will do in Russia we have yet to see; what it is doing nearer home is already on the statute-books.

Poland, under pressure of its peasant party, has limited individual land-holdings to 445 acres. Rumania has decreed that seventy-five per cent. of the total arable area of the old kingdom shall be divided into peasant holdings, with a system of compensation, to be paid by the new owner, based on practicable terms. Czechoslovakia has enacted laws for purchase by the state of certain large estates, and the resale or lease of them in compact holdings of from nine to twenty acres. All through southeastern Europe legislation of this sort is spreading.

To be sure, many of the Green International's triumphs still remain on paper. There is a long road between enactment of a law and the actual attempt at its enforcement, particularly when the prize may be the ownership of land resting in the hands of one titled family ever since the victory of the White Mountain, four hundred years ago. Nevertheless, the Green International has made more progress toward its goal in the last ten months than the peasants of southeastern Europe made in ten previous generations.

That result is due in part to the leadership of this peasants' union. It is a young movement, inexperienced

and unwieldy; but with the exception of the somewhat eccentric peasant premier in Bulgaria, its leadership is largely in the hands of men who have a realistic grasp upon the economics of reform. They keep their program simplified; they do not attempt the second mile before they have reason to be rather sure about the first. It is a somewhat extraordinary testimonial to their self-restraint that though they call themselves an "international," they try to push their movement forward only where there is good evidence that it is wanted. They do not clamor for the moon; they are not attempting to swing the peasants of France and Italy and England into the Green International at the present time. They are militant only where their own theories really fit, only where the economics of the situation rally to their aid. That is why they stand so good a chance to win.

#### § 4

When you have traced the story of the Green International through war days to recent triumphs there are certain facts about it which seem fairly clear. There is, for one thing, the imposing problem of production. The Green International may come out on top because it has the peasants with it, and potentially the peasants have strength enough to dominate southeastern Europe; but can it stay on top unless it sows as much wheat as the old régime, and reaps it as successfully? Often the great estates, whatever charges the peasants brought against them socially, were in fact far more efficient units of production than the smaller holdings, since they were well organized and well equipped with modern implements of farming.



There is never much reforming done, as the Russian soviets came ultimately to acknowledge, unless some degree of national prosperity is maintained while the reformation is in progress. And if the Green International is to last for more than one short day, it will have to grapple with this problem. Perhaps what is lost in productivity by the break-up of the better-managed great estates will be more than offset by the increased diligence with which the peasants farm land that has actually become their own. Or perhaps the answer lies in a wider resort to methods of coöperative farming. In any case, production is a problem that will test to the last ounce the statesmanship of this new peasants' international.

On the other, there is first of all a substantial gain for Europe in anything that may bring into closer understanding a group of nationalities living in a corner of the world that has always been a war volcano. The Green International of the peasants, in contrast to the ententes and dynastic unions of the politicians, does not perpetuate the alliances of war-time. It crosses battle-fronts. It now embraces the peasant party of one enemy state, Bul-

garia; and shortly, when there are parties organized with which it can affiliate, it will embrace the peasants of two others, Austria and Hungary.

But more distinctive than this, and more important, is the attempt of this Green International to chisel out of stubborn stone the foundations for a new peasant culture. In its effort to modernize a feudal economic system it is attempting to shift the basis of peasant life throughout its square of Europe. That will not happen all at once. It will not happen as the result of a few election triumphs and a little legislation. It is the work of years.

After all is said, that is the important fact about this league of peasants. Back of all its efforts lies what constitutes, for southeastern Europe, a new conception of the peasant's rôle. "The man living on the soil is a constructive factor in the state," asserts the Green International. "He is a creator of the means of life who asks no more than peace and rest, and recognition of the rights accruing from his labor. . . . In a Europe that is bankrupt we are building on the peasant—building on him as the keystone of a new and solid order."

## Song of Night

BY PASCAL D'ANGELO

I am a thought living under the outspread shadow  
Of a winged dream, O night!  
Too soon will this great dream soar up into darkness,  
With my being clutched in its talons limp and white.  
Yet all existence lives gently in your shadow,  
O dream! O night!  
The earth is a blind wanderer,  
Groping amid the unknown forests of time;  
And with folded wings of splendor, calm and eternal,  
The stars are innocent souls sculptured under the crypt of night.