
Is Hoover Bringing Russia Food or Reaction?

by A.C. Freeman

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Herbert Hoover's professed readiness to extend aid to 1 million children among the Russian famine sufferers is somewhat puzzling. His guiding principle as head of the American Relief Administration has always been: Millions for counterrevolutionary emigrés, but not one cent for the starving children of Soviet Russia. The boast attributed to him that he "never fed a Red" has certainly been borne out in his conduct. As recently as last January he wrote a singularly brutal letter to Dr. Judah L. Magnes, refusing to entertain any thought of relief measures for Russia.

Under these circumstances Mr. Hoover's present expression of willingness to send supplies into Russia upon conditions which were readily accepted by the Soviet government would seem to indicate an altogether unsuspected quality of humanity in his character. Unfortunately a very different interpretation of his motives and intentions is suggested by the amazing story about the overthrow of the Soviet regime in Hungary told in the *World's Work* for May and June [1921] by T.T.C. Gregory, Hoover's personal agent and head of the American Relief Administration in Central Europe during the period following the armistice.

Mr. Gregory shows that, acting under Hoover's orders and with his full approval, he utilized his position as controller of the food supplies of Central Europe in order to carry on active intrigues for the overthrow of the Hungarian Soviet government. Mr. Gregory does not suffer from overmodesty (his picture appears 3 times on one

page and twice on another), and he may exaggerate the significance of some of his personal exploits. But there is little doubt that his account, which is given with an abundance of detail, is substantially true.

In the first place, the author makes perfectly clear Mr. Hoover's dominant motive in undertaking to feed Central Europe. "It must be remembered," writes Mr. Gregory, that he (Mr. Hoover) was feeding and succoring Balkanized Central Europe only as an incident to the fight he was making to throw back the red wave of Bolshevism."

The preservation of millions of human beings from death by disease or starvation was only an incidental and comparatively unimportant item in Mr. Hoover's fundamental scheme of throwing back the red wave. And, in order to realize this scheme, he was just as willing to starve the children of Russian and Hungary as he was to feed the children of Poland and Austria.

The voluntary and bloodless establishment of a Soviet regime in Hungary was a deadly blow to Mr. Hoover's plans of promoting reaction by lavish food distribution. As his henchman, Mr. Gregory, somewhat naively puts the case:

"It was apparent to all in touch with the situation, whether in Paris and London or in the capitals of Southeastern Europe, that the salvation of Central Europe depended, in the early summer of 1919, on the immediate ousting of Bela Kun from his position as Bolshevik dictator of Hun-

gary.”

Mr. Gregory tells us that he “had been instructed to keep out of Central European politics”; but such instructions carried little weight when it was a question of destroying a Soviet government. With the approbation and connivance of Sir Thomas Cunningham, the British military commissioner, and Prince Borghesi, the Italian diplomatic representative in Central Europe, he conceived and put into execution an elaborate counterrevolutionist plot.

General Boehm, the Hungarian Minister in Vienna, was corrupted and won over to the intrigue, together with Agoston and Haubricht, whom the author describes as “two of the most powerful of the labor representatives of the Kun government.” A declaration containing 8 points was drawn up by the conspirators and communicated to the Supreme Council at Paris, through Mr. Hoover. These 8 points, as set down by Mr. Gregory, read as follows:

1. Assumption of dictatorship in which complete powers of government were to be vested. Names to be discussed: Haubricht, Agoston, Gerami, and Boehm.

2. Dismissal of the Communistic Kun government, with a repudiation of Bolshevism and a complete cessation of Bolshevistic propaganda.

3. Dictatorship to bridge over period until formation of a government representative of all classes.

4. Immediate cessation of all terrorist acts, confiscation, and seizures.

5. Raising of blockade and immediate steps to be taken by Entente to supply Hungary with food and coal and to assist in opening up the Danube.

6. Immediate calling of an Entente advisory body.

7. No political prosecutions.

8. Ultimate determination respecting socialization of permanent government.

Points 4, 7, and 8 are peculiarly amusing in

the light of the prolonged and appalling White Terror carried out by the Horthy government.

The 8 points, together with the other details of the conspiracy, were promptly telegraphed to Paris. “There is no doubt,” writes Mr. Gregory, “that Mr. Hoover was the principal agency responsible for the prompt return we received.” Hoover’s insistence prevailed over the hesitation of some of the members of the council; and the Hungarian counterrevolutionists were duly assured of the sympathy and support of the Allied Powers.

One last detail had to be arranged. The success of the plot depended largely upon the prompt shipment of food into Budapest. Mr. Gregory had no food and no means to purchase any. He overcame this difficulty by perpetrating a bit of petty swindling which he describes with the utmost complacency. Up to this time, acting under orders from Mr. Hoover, he had always virtuously refused to sell to the Hungarian Soviet representatives the food which was being so generously given to the populations of the neighboring capitalist states. Now Mr. Gregory sent for the assistant Hungarian food administrator and offered to sell him food, on condition that an initial deposit of \$1 million should be made. The Hungarian, not being versed in American conceptions of business ethics, fell into the trap and paid the money. Whereupon Mr. Gregory used this sum, paid him in good faith by the Hungarian Soviet authorities to secure relief for the Hungary people, to purchase supplies for the benefit of the counterrevolutionists.

The outcome of the plot is well known. Bela Kun was overthrown by the internal counterrevolution plotted by Mr. Gregory and Mr. Hoover, which happened to break out simultaneously with a defeat of the Hungarian Red Army by the Romanians. For a short time there was talk of a Hapsburg restoration. Then Mr. Hoover made his grand gesture, which won him so much naively ignorant praise in “liberal” circles. He indignantly protested against the assumption of power by Arch-

duke Joseph; and his protest, which coincided fully with the desires of the Allied statesmen, was heeded. But the substitution of a Horthy for a Hapsburg did not spare the unfortunate Hungarian working class a single orgy of the White Terror, which practically crushed the trade union organizations of the country out of existence.

Is Mr. Hoover trying to bring about in Russia the same counterrevolution and White Terror which he succeeded in bringing about in Hungary? His whole record, considered in connection with the present situation in Russia, would seem to point to this conclusion. It must be remembered that his right-hand man, Mr. Gregory, openly declares he has always considered the distribution of food and medicines chiefly as a weapon in the fight against Bolshevism. During the last 3 years he has opposed the extension of relief in any form to Russia. Just as he refused to permit his agents even to sell food to the Hungarian Bolsheviks, so he has repeatedly denounced any steps looking to a resumption of trade relations between America and Russia.

Now, as a result of 2 years' drought, blockade, subsidized counterrevolution, and the complete withholding of the relief facilities which were so generously afforded to other stricken areas, there is a severe famine in Russia. Mr. Hoover may well feel that the time is ripe for simultaneously giving Russia food and reaction. It is true that, in his reply to Maxim Gorky's appeal, he engages that

his agents shall not take part in political activities. But we see how well this pledge was kept in the case of Mr. Gregory. The wide powers which Mr. Hoover demands for his relief agents, ostensibly for the sake of securing greater efficiency in food distribution, are obviously open to misuse.

However, Mr. Hoover is very much mistaken if he thinks that Soviet Russia can be overthrown as easily as Soviet Hungary. There is a body in Russia known as the Extraordinary Commission, which keeps a close watch on foreigners with counterrevolutionary propensities. Dzerzhinsky has thwarted the plots of much cleverer conspirators than Mr. Hoover. The experience of the exiled Hungarian Commissars, most of whom are now in Russia, will doubtless be helpful in dealing with American relief agents with ulterior political designs.

The best guarantee that the Russian Soviet government will not be subverted by any of Mr. Hoover's clumsy intrigues is the heroism and devotion of the Russian proletariat. Yudenich tried to bribe the workers of Petrograd to surrender in 1919 by promising food if he should take the city. They gave him their answer with rifles and machine guns. The Russian workers are just as clear-sighted, just as devoted to the revolutionary cause now as they were then. They may swallow Mr. Hoover's bait of food; but they will not be caught by his hook of counterrevolution.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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