

The 1956 Hungarian Revolution:



A History in Documents

edited by

Csaba Békés, Malcolm Byrne, János M. Rainer

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The 1956 Hungarian Revolution

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THE 1956 HUNGARIAN REVOLUTION: A HISTORY IN DOCUMENTS

Compiled, edited, and introduced by

Csaba Békés

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PREFACE

Hungary emerged defeated from the two most brutal wars of modern European history. It took part in triggering World War I, and it held out bitterly to the last man in World War II. After the first war, Hungary saw herself as a ravaged victim, while after the second, her self-perception was that of an innocent victim who had only tried to reclaim what she believed to be rightly hers. The law of war, however, gives the victor the right to draw the portrait of the defeated. This picture is no more authentic than the defeated's self-image: both are biased and self-justifying, one simply conceals the other. Our country's name was removed from the ranks of the Western world without apparent anguish outside our borders. Twice-plundered, occupied, deprived of her autonomy, and cast out of Europe, Hungary began a new era of her history after a brief democratic interlude. Just as world public opinion simplistically identified all Russians with Stalin, although it was they who suffered the most from Stalinist tyranny, the picture of the Hungarian nation became identical to that of Rákosi. With the advance of the cold war, however, the world often referred to Hungary as a "captive nation," to be "liberated" sometime in the distant future. These two words, "captive nation," suggests vulnerability, surrender, inertia, and a lack of will power: that is, the image of lost human dignity. An image of a nation which is totally harmless can be at most a source of nuisance for the "enslaver" or a point of reference for the potential "liberator," but never a determining factor in the balance of great powers.

Enslavers and liberators were separated by an iron curtain that ran along the border of the enslaved nations. They both knew each other very well, each side sizing up the vulnerability of the other, weighing momentary changes in balance in their power games, and taking the propaganda slogans directed against each other not so much at face value, but rather according to their actual significance. While this rhetoric presaged danger not only for both sides, but indeed for the entire world, it was at the same time a systematically planned political opium, concealed in portioned-out rhetorical flourishes.

Naturally, all this leaked through the cracks of the iron curtain, resulting in misconceptions on both sides by those who failed to recognize what lay behind the balance of fear. West of the iron curtain, people created a biased and undifferentiated image of communists and the nations under communist rule: an image in which human features were indiscernible. In the East, on the other hand, we were not aware of the community of interests that reached far beyond the virtual boundary of the iron curtain.

Nonetheless, deep inside society lay hidden the explosive reality, even if in a stifled and invisible way. Something that everybody knew but never talked about until the very last moment: the fear that interlaced everything; the lethal and unfounded violence; the contagious and poisonous lies; the Stalinist caricature of socialism, whose nature was, by that time, recognized by both the followers and opponents of socialism. Let it be said to the formers' credit that, due to their position, they were the first who were able to call it by name, although it is true that back then their aim was nothing more than to make improvements. And when the double fuse of the unrest in Poland and the stupidity of Stalinist policy led to the explosion of the revolution, shattering the fraudulent castle of Stalinism into bits and pieces over a turbulent three days—a split second in historical terms—the world was flabbergasted. The vulnerable, paralyzed, inept, and harmless captive nation of Hungary did not wait listlessly to be liberated, but decided to free itself and assert its human dignity, which had been denied for eight long years. Hungarians did not even ask for or expect a predetermined model for their self-proclaimed freedom. The unanimous "NO" (their rejection of oppression) gave the workers enough strength to socialize the state and exert control over the means of production with a single motion. The same repudiation empowered villages to feed Budapest, the capital city burdened with armed conflict, without any central directives or system of forced agricultural delivery. Those who for decades had viewed

the people of the outskirts as a homeless mob, and believed that the youth had completely degenerated, were now surprised to see how working class youths halted Russian tanks, and how female students rescued casualties, blood-soaked Russian soldiers among them, by defying and dodging a lethal shower of bullets. A whole nation became larger than life in a vehement fight for freedom, setting an example for the entire world by showing how human integrity can defy death.

The events of 1956 fundamentally changed the image of Hungary, and this image is still confirmed and maintained in the eyes of the world by the message of 1956.

Official politics and public opinion in Western society were sharply separated after the revolution. Politics followed the ruthless logic of the balance of power, regardless of how much they paid tribute to the Hungarian revolution with beautiful phrases, and gladly acknowledged that most of the progressive forces around the world were grossly disappointed with the fact that Soviet policy had turned out to be dishonest and based upon brute force. But political assistance to the crushed country barely went further than expressions of praise for Hungary and resounding condemnation of the Soviet intervention.

The western public, especially the younger generation, however, backed Hungary's cause with all their heart and soul--perhaps due to the half-hearted political support that came from their governments. Refugees were thoroughly welcomed abroad. Many of today's western politicians, prime ministers and presidents were among those students who at the time demonstrated and protested in front of Soviet embassies and embraced young Hungarian refugees, introducing them to their fellow students or colleagues at work. For them, the Hungarian revolution was a decisive experience of freedom, an uplifting experience that continues to benefit us. For the world, the name of Hungary has become synonymous with freedom and an elementary wish for democracy.

I believe that István Bibó was right when he called 1956 the revolution of human dignity. Our national feelings and desire for freedom are organic elements of our human dignity. What we fought for and achieved, what our youth died for, was no less than the freedom of our nation. The revolution of human dignity consequently includes the notion of a struggle for independence as well. The two are impossible to separate.

Forty-six years have now passed and we have become forty-six years older. Had we not told our children the truth about what happened in 1956, they could not tell their children either. Our grandchildren, however, will unearth the truth for themselves. From archival sources and written memorials. From facts. Mercilessly. Out of the desire for knowledge. Without having lived in that age and breathed the air of those days. It may well be that the story they reconstruct will be more accurate than our own version. Hosts of young researchers abroad and in Hungary are working on that narrative already—as typified by the editors of this extraordinary volume—and I am sure that they will sincerely answer the prevailing questions of "why" and "how". With this outstanding volume, the scholars at the 1956 Institute in Budapest and the National Security Archive in the United States are helping to lead the way in this important historical exercise. We should be aware that in the future our memory will be preserved in both simplistic commonplaces and in objective scholarly works—studies more objective than our own. And this remembrance will also recall the eternal example of a nation—the Hungarian nation—and the memory of a belated but indisputable victory over the violence of a superpower.

Árpád Göncz

Former President of the Republic of Hungary

FOREWORD

The story of the 1956 Hungarian revolution is as complex as it is full of paradoxes.

The revolution's complexity stems primarily from the difference between its leaders and followers. Most of the leaders were members of a disillusioned communist elite, notably intellectuals; the followers were young freedom fighters. True, both leaders and followers sought the removal of Soviet power from Hungarian territory. But the intellectuals and their reformist allies in the Hungarian communist hierarchy, who had prepared the way since 1953 for what eventually happened in 1956, envisaged a peaceful, negotiated transition to a new pluralist political order that would also retain some features of a socialist economy. Showing considerably less patience, the young freedom fighters embraced similar political and economic goals but they had little or no confidence in a negotiated agreement with Moscow and its Stalinist Hungarian diehards.

Paradoxically, a communist, albeit a reformer, was the uncontested, widely admired symbol of this anti-communist revolution. His country's prime minister for two years after Stalin's death in 1953, Imre Nagy occupied the same position again for twelve short days in October–November 1956. Indeed, Nagy's reinstatement was the initial demand of the students whose demonstration on October 23, 1956, sparked the revolution. Yet Nagy was not only a communist; he was a Moscow-trained communist who had spent more than a decade in the Soviet capital before and during World War II. There, like other communist exiles, Nagy almost certainly served as an informer for the Soviet political police. Perhaps for this reason, Moscow did not oppose his reappointment as Hungary's prime minister on October 23–24, expecting Nagy to respect its most basic interests in Hungary. Ironically, then, Nagy was—initially—both the man needed, if not trusted, by the Kremlin and the hero of the freedom fighters as well. Only at the very end of October, after Soviet troops had reentered the country, did Nagy fully understand that the Soviet leadership was not interested in finding a political solution to the crisis. From the communist believer he used to be, this is when Nagy became a Hungarian revolutionary. When he died for it in 1958, he did so without recanting his last, final stance.

What emerges clearly from the documents collected for this immensely rich volume is that both Moscow and Washington were caught off guard by the outbreak of the revolution.

Of the two, Moscow was better informed, of course. Already in mid-1956 it had removed from power Mátyás Rákosi, Hungary's much-hated Stalinist dictator. But the Russians decided to replace Rákosi with another Stalinist rather than with Nagy, because by then they considered Nagy to be too stubborn and too independent. The documents also show that the Soviet Presidium was divided about what to do. At first, military intervention was but one possibility. The man who practically commuted between Moscow and Budapest, Politburo member Anastas I. Mikoyan, clearly preferred to look for a peaceful resolution of the crisis. He seemed to believe that military intimidation and economic and political pressure would be sufficient—over a period of time—to return Hungary to the Soviet fold. To the extent the Kremlin was divided over the course it should follow, it was because it had not perceived such widespread and determined anti-Sovietism to exist in Hungary. Throughout the crisis, members of the Soviet Politburo spoke of the “enemy,” especially the United States, instigating the crisis. The records of the most secret meetings of the Presidium show that no one understood that the Hungarian people themselves—among them students raised in a communist educational environment—wanted nothing to do with Communism or the Soviet Union.

The United States was also unprepared for the revolution. Despite the Eisenhower administration's declared policy of rolling back Communism from Eastern Europe—the policy of “liberation”—there were no specific plans to take advantage of the confusion that came to characterize the Soviet bloc after Stalin's death. While Washington had correctly understood the general significance of Titoism as a realistic phase on the path from Communism to democracy, when the opportunity presented itself to support Imre Nagy, a more gentle version of Yugoslavia's Tito, Washington was unable to come up

with a proper response. Radio Free Europe (RFE), which at the time was official Washington's very influential mouthpiece, kept hammering on the theme that the Nagy government was still pro-communist and that the freedom fighters should wait for a message from József Cardinal Mindszenty (who was freed from a communist jail during the revolution). Thus, instead of encouraging the Hungarians to support the only realistic alternative of the moment, which was Nagy's Titoist formula, RFE egged on its vast audience to press for maximalist demands. Worse yet, RFE's subsequent self-assessment, which is reproduced in this volume, was but an attempt to cover up its historic error.

When Hungary became free and independent in 1989, it embraced the goals of 1956, together with new goals, of course. In important ways, 1989 was not 1956. In 1956, Hungary stood alone in the world. In 1989, by contrast, favorable international winds helped the Hungarian cause. Mikhail S. Gorbachev's Soviet Union no longer opposed Hungary's steps toward pluralism and the free market. The anti-communist momentum spearheaded by U.S. President Ronald Reagan in the early 1980s certainly helped advance the momentous changes happening in Hungary and elsewhere. Meanwhile, within Hungary itself, the so-called "democratic opposition," which became active as early as 1977, kept pressing for the historical truth about 1956. Its *samizdat* or illegal publications kept talking about '56, and even printed parts of the hidden record of the 1953–55 reform-communist era, the revolution itself, and the trials and murders that took place after Moscow crushed the revolution. On the eve of the collapse of Communism—on June 16, 1989, the 31st anniversary of Imre Nagy's juridical murder—some 200,000 Hungarians attended and millions watched a truly historical event: the ceremonial reburying of Nagy and his fallen comrades. Thus, while 1989 might well have happened without 1956, the fact is that it did not. After 1956, and especially after 1977, reform-communists and anti-communists kept alive the memory of what had happened, and it was that memory, combining pain and hope, that contributed so significantly to the eventual end of communist rule in 1989.

Since 1989, historians have had an opportunity to examine the historical records in Hungary, in Russia, and in other countries too. A free Hungary has produced many outstanding volumes about what happened and why. Concurrently, however, political parties and their leaders have also sought to make "1956" theirs and theirs alone. Especially on various anniversaries, such as June 16th and October 23rd (when, in 1956, the revolution began), right wing and even right-of-center politicians keep offering assessments of the revolution that are essentially ahistorical and politically motivated. Generally speaking, these politicians are so anxious to dissociate themselves from *today's* ex-communists that their version of 1956 lacks appreciation for the critical role once played by *yesterday's* ex-communists.

True, studies of 1956 sponsored by the current government led by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, for example, do describe Imre Nagy as a brave man who died as a patriot. But his closest advisers have become non-persons so that the revolution could be described simply as a nationalist rising against Soviet imperialism. While 1956, of course, did witness a nationalist rising against Moscow's rule, it was prepared since 1953 largely by former Muscovites, fellow travelers, and the like. At some time or another in their lives, most of Nagy's closest associates in 1956 had been fanatical communists. For example, Ferenc Donáth, Nagy's political adviser, headed the brutal, Stalinist Rákosi's party secretariat in the late 1940s. At that time he led a vicious polemic against Nagy's views on agriculture. Yet the same Donáth in 1956—together with Géza Losonczy and Miklós Vásárhelyi, two totally disillusioned former communist editors—opened Nagy's eyes to the validity of the people's demands. Political acrobatics? Probably not. Donáth as well as Losonczy, Vásárhelyi, and Imre Nagy himself were part of the 20th century in Central and Eastern Europe; their struggle for a free and independent Hungary in 1956 was fueled by their revulsion over having allowed themselves to be fooled.

This volume is important precisely because the documents speak for themselves. Thanks to judicious selection from an impressive array of sources, the volume reflects the very real complexities of 1956. How better to understand those events than by taking a retrospective look through the eyes of participants themselves—at the time, before they have had the chance to rewrite the history to their own advantage? The 120 top-level, formerly secret records included here not only offer a glimpse into the deliberations of the Hungarians, their fellow satellite

regimes and beyond them the superpowers themselves, they provide us today with the unusual opportunity to watch the revolution unfold from a variety of perspectives—national, institutional and personal—from each of the dozen countries whose documents are represented here. It is an important achievement and one that is made even more valuable by the inclusion of detailed introductory essays, headnotes for each document, a wealth of footnotes, and other research aids that will help student and expert alike place these complex events in a meaningful context.

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Washington, D.C.
October 2001

INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

Forty Years On*

What happened in Hungary in 1956? Here is a fairly typical brief Western summary, from the Columbia Encyclopedia:

On Oct. 23, 1956, a popular anti-Communist revolution, centered in Budapest, broke out in Hungary. A new coalition government under Imre Nagy declared Hungary neutral, withdrew it from the Warsaw Treaty, and appealed to the UN for aid. However, János Kádár, one of Nagy's ministers, formed a counter-government and asked the USSR for military support. In severe and brutal fighting, Soviet forces suppressed the revolution. Nagy and some of his ministers were abducted and were later executed. Some 190,000 refugees fled the country. Kádár became premier and sought to win popular support for Communist rule.

In Hungary itself, the history of the 1956 revolution was obliterated or traduced for more than thirty years, while János Kádár progressed from Soviet quisling to domestic father figure and the West's favorite "liberal" communist. Yet through all those years, Kádár himself seems to have been haunted and driven by the memory of the comrades he had betrayed and, finally, condemned to death. Imre Nagy was his Banquo—and he was always Macbeth.

A part of the true history was written abroad. Another part was gradually rediscovered by independent historians and oppositional writers inside Hungary in the 1980s, interviewing survivors, publishing suppressed writings, and drawing their own conclusions. Then, in June 1989, Imre Nagy and his closest associates were ceremonially reburied. Beside the coffins of the leaders lying in state on Heroes' Square, there lay a symbolic sixth coffin of the Unknown Insurgent. This was the great symbolic turning point in Hungary's transition from communism to democracy. Banquo's ghost was enthroned.

In a free Hungary, the true history of 1956 could surely at last be revealed. A whole institute was established for this single purpose: the Institute for the History of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. Archives were opened. Survivors could now talk freely. Young historians set to work. The 1956 Institute produced a new short history of the revolution, which became the Hungarian school textbook.¹

With the end of communism elsewhere, more evidence also emerged from the Soviet Union, from Yugoslavia, even from China. Not all the evidence, of course, but more. Meanwhile, American, British, French, and other Western official documents became available under the "thirty-year rule." Some, perhaps the most interesting, remained classified, but scholars pressed for further access and, in the United States, used the Freedom of Information Act to demand it.

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Now, forty years on, scholars and survivors assemble in the handsome rooms of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, its high windows looking across the Danube from naughty Pest to haughty Buda. Inside, it looks like just another academic conference.² We might be in London, at a confer-

* This essay was written immediately after a conference organized in 1996 by the Institute for the History of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution in Budapest and the National Security Archive in Washington, D.C., to mark the fortieth anniversary of the Hungarian revolution. It is reprinted here, with the kind permission of the author, exactly as it appears in *History of the Present: Essays, Sketches, and Dispatches from Europe in the 1990s*, (New York: Random House, 1999).

¹ The excellent English-language edition is György Litván, ed., *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956: Reform, Revolt, and Repression, 1953–1963*, ed. and trans. János M. Bak and Lyman H. Legters (London: Longman, 1996).

² Entitled "Hungary and the World 1956: The New Archival Evidence," the conference was organized by the Institute for the History of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, in Budapest, and the National Security Archive and the Cold War International History Project, both of Washington, D.C.

ence about the Suez crisis that so fatefully coincided with the Hungarian revolution. This forty-year moment is an interesting one even in more normal countries: the first and generally the last occasion when reasonably digested findings from the archives can be confronted with the reasonably coherent memories of surviving participants. Thirty years after the event, most of the archives are still closed; fifty years on, most of the participants are no longer with us. Yet in Budapest, the witnesses have survived not just, say, too many good dinners at the Carlton Club in London but a death sentence commuted at the last minute to fourteen years in prison. So the occasion is not ordinary at all.

Being tested here is the central proposition of modern historical writing since Ranke: that with the passage of time we know more about the past. This is supposed to be the case because we have greater distance from the past: because we are (supposedly) more impartial: because we can see the longer-term consequences and therefore the larger historical “meaning” of the events in question: and, above all, because the documents are now available. The subtitle of this conference is “The New Archival Evidence.” Following Ranke, we should now learn “how it really was.” But do we, can we?

In important ways, we certainly learn more. For example, here, from the Soviet archives, are the notes made by V. N. Malin, head of the General Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, on the Soviet leaders’ hectic debates in the Party Presidium.³ We see them dithering and agonizing in the days after the outbreak of the revolution on 23 October: “C[omra]de Khrushchev [says] . . . the matter is becoming more complicated The workers are supporting the uprising.” And, later, “The English and French are in a real mess in Egypt. We shouldn’t get caught in the same company.” And their meetings with Chairman Mao’s emissaries on 30 October. “Cde. Khrushchev . . . there are two paths. A military path . . . one of occupation. A peaceful path . . . the withdrawal of troops, negotiations.”

So might it really have happened differently? What Gorbachev did in 1989, done by Khrushchev in 1956? These documents warn us against what the French philosopher Henri Bergson called “the illusions of retrospective determinism”—against the conviction, so hard to resist, that what actually happened had to happen. For years, most of us have lived with the assumption that the Soviet Union could never have tolerated what was happening in Hungary—otherwise, it would not have been the Soviet Union. But Soviet leaders plainly did not know that at the time. What would have happened if . . . ?

The openness did not last long. On 31 October, Malin records Khrushchev saying. “We should re-examine our assessment and should not withdraw our troops from Hungary and Budapest. We should take the initiative in restoring order in Hungary.” What factors were decisive? How important, for example, were concerns about the unity of the international communist movement, with the Italian communist leader Palmiro Togliatti and, finally, also Chairman Mao urging the “restoration of order?” What difference was made by the assurance given by John Foster Dulles that “We do not look upon these nations as potential military allies?” What was the impact of Suez? “If we depart from Hungary,” Khrushchev goes on, “it will give a great boost to the Americans, English, and French—the imperialists. They will perceive it as weakness on our part and will go on to the offensive . . . To Egypt they will then add Hungary.”

“Agreed: Cdes. Zhukov, Bulganin, Molotov, Kaganovich, Voroshilov, Saburov”—and behind this sentence the Russian historian Vyacheslav Sereda hears a sigh of relief. The notes continue, “We should create a Provisional Revol. Govt (headed by Kádár).” But then, incredibly, “If Nagy agrees, bring him in as dep. premier.”

Another area of old controversy and new discoveries is the role of Radio Free Europe (RFE), the American-run radio station, which broadcast in all the languages of Eastern Europe. Here we have a hitherto unpublished memorandum from William Griffith, then political adviser to RFE.⁴

³ The Malin notes are translated and expertly annotated by Mark Kramer, a Harvard specialist on Soviet-Eastern European relations, in a compendium of declassified documents prepared for the conference by the 1956 Institute and the National Security Archive. A larger collection of documents is due to be published by Central European University Press.

⁴ The memorandum is included in *ibid.*

Dated 5 December 1956, it reviews the Hungarian output of RFE and concludes that there were important “policy violations” by the Hungarian radio journalists involved. One program on 28 October gave detailed instructions to Hungarian soldiers on the conduct of partisan warfare. “In the Western capitals,” a commentary on 4 November declared, “a practical manifestation of Western sympathy is expected at any hour.” Griffith’s own conclusion in December 1956 is that the Hungarian service did not *incite* the revolution and “(with one exception) made no *direct* promise or commitment of Western or UN military support or intervention. Its broadcasts may well, however, have encouraged Hungarians to have false hopes in this respect; they certainly did little or nothing to contradict them.”

Now William Griffith, today a distinguished professor emeritus of political science at MIT, is on the platform, together with other surviving participants. He makes essentially the same argument that he did forty years ago. But a journalist who then worked for RFE’s Hungarian service angrily suggests that the Hungarian journalists are being scapegoated. They were only following American policy guidance, which, in particular, urged criticism of the communist Imre Nagy and support for the militantly anticommunist Cardinal József Mindszenty. An American working in RFE at the time jumps up to support him. He remembers the discussions in the newsroom and quotes from the policy guidance given at the time by Griffith, who was, however, himself subject to policy guidance from New York. An old Hungarian, identifying himself as a listener to Radio Free Europe, emotionally declares that it was to blame for the deaths of thousands of Hungarian youngsters.

Pale-faced, her voice trembling, Mária Wittner, one of the street fighters who paid for her part in the revolution with more than fourteen years in prison, reads out extracts from RFE broadcasts in Hungarian. The interpreter gives us some idea of the fiery language: “The tanks come in . . . invited by the bloody-handed Imre Nagy.” (Basing their judgments too much on official Hungarian radio broadcasts, RFE initially thought Nagy was co-responsible for the first intervention by Soviet troops.) Or, again, “Where are the traitors . . . who are the murderers? Imre Nagy and his government . . . Only Cardinal Mindszenty has spoken out fearlessly . . . Imre Nagy is a base Muscovite.” But afterward there is some confusion. Are these quotations from RFE’s own broadcasts or from Hungarian radio stations taken over by the insurgents—the “freedom stations”—some of whose programs RFE rebroadcast? Jan Nowak, then head of RFE’s Polish service, draws the important contrast with Poland, where both the freshly released Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński from inside and RFE from outside immediately and firmly backed Władysław Gomułka, the Polish Nagy.

After this dramatic confrontation of documents and memories, of written and oral history, we can see the historical picture more clearly. With the best of intentions on all sides, and quite understandably, in a confused and drastic situation, which changed literally minute by minute, both Hungarians and Americans at RFE got it wrong. Not all of them and not all the time, of course. But in the crucial days of late October, their broadcasts attacked Imre Nagy (while the Polish service was supporting Gomułka), and some encouraged armed resistance, with broad hints of imminent Western aid that, in fact, the United States (let alone the Suez-embroiled British and French) had no intention of giving. We can never know what difference this made to the course of events; it probably made little or none to the final result. That does not diminish the moral responsibility.

Here, then, are two cases which seem to justify the implicit, neo-Rankean assumption: that with the passing of time and careful study of the documents we know more about what really happened. Yet this is, on a moment’s reflection, a very odd assumption. It was not shared by historians for more than two thousand years before Ranke. And it is not one we usually make in everyday life. Our rather reasonable everyday assumption is that the closer you are to an event, in both time and place, the more you are likely to know about it. “Well,” we say, “of course you’d know better, because you were there.”

The fact is that so much of history with a small *h*—most of it, in fact—is simply lost. To be sure, in some respects we do know more after forty years; but in others we know less. This is particularly true of times of crisis and rapid change, and above all of wars and revolutions. Tolstoy

reminds us in *War and Peace* of the mystery at the heart of battles. So also with revolutions. Even now—especially now—do we really know how and why it came to the storming of the Bastille?

The Hungarian revolution of 1956 is an event of that kind—perhaps the last in Europe with the popular, violent, and genuinely spontaneous character that we still associate with the word *revolution*. All subsequent European revolutions—Czechoslovakia 1968, Portugal 1974, Poland 1980–1981, the many-in-one of 1989—have to be qualified with an additional adjective: “interrupted,” “self-limiting,” “peaceful,” “velvet,” “negotiated.” For that reason, and because of the subsequent decades of political repression and historical falsification, there is a part of its history that is virtually impossible to recover. It may also be the most important part. It concerns, for example, the experience of the mainly young men and women who took up arms on 23 or 24 October 1956: the workers, students, street-fighting kids who, after all, actually made this a revolution. Without them, it might have remained a high-level political crisis, an attempt at radical reform, an affair largely of the party and the intelligentsia, with the people playing only a supporting role. Why did they act as they did? What was it like for them? What did they hope to achieve? What kept them fighting? What did they think of in the moment before they died?

I read the contemporary reports, watch the newsreels, look at the black-and-white photographs of those smiling boys and girls amid the broken glass, so like the photos of the Warsaw Rising in 1944. I think of Yeats: “a terrible beauty is born.” Then I look at some of the meticulous reconstructions of the street fighting by Hungarian historians, using long interviews with survivors. I talk with Mária Wittner, described to me by another survivor as the revolution’s Joan of Arc. It is a deeply moving conversation. But even she cannot really explain to me how, as a nineteen-year-old girl from a convent school, she came to pick up that ammunition belt and start reloading the guns for the boys on the roof, shooting back at the guards of the Budapest radio station on 23 October. She talks of “something in the air,” of the “vibrations.” But the filters of retrospection are too strong.

She wants to speak for those who can no longer speak: her dead comrades, the unknown insurgents. Much of her life since 1989 has been devoted to that purpose. Yet their experience is lost, irrevocably. We don’t know, we will never know, what it was really like at the eye of the storm. Beside history regained, there is history lost. In history, too, there is always a sixth coffin.

2

The other thing that we are supposed to know more about is the consequences, and hence the larger “meaning,” of the event. For this we plainly have to consider the alternatives. Purely hypothetical counterfactuals can be fun and illuminating too, but more important are the alternatives that were considered seriously at the time. As we have found from the documents, major alternatives were considered—for example, by Khrushchev. What if the advice from Togliatti, Tito, and Mao had been different? What if American policy had been clearer, one way or the other? What if the British and French had not launched the Suez adventure at exactly the same time? Might the Soviet leadership then at least have tried the second path—withdrawal, negotiations—a little longer and more seriously?

But what would have been the impact of that on Poland? For if the Hungarian revolution started with a demonstration beneath the statue of the Polish General Bem, who himself had been a hero of the Hungarian revolution of 1848–1849, the Polish October was hugely influenced by what happened in Hungary. Khrushchev’s “peaceful path” in Hungary would surely have encouraged the Poles to ask for the same or more. If the Soviet Union might just have been prepared to countenance an Austrian status for Hungary—in which, after all, even Stalin had proposed only a fifty-fifty split with the West, in his famous “percentages agreement” with Churchill—it was another thing to countenance that for Poland.⁵ This, in turn, would have meant countenancing it for Germany—the larger, Western part of which was already in NATO.

Or take another if: What if Hungary had stopped at radical reform, rather than revolution,

⁵ See my review essay, “From World War to Cold War,” *The New York Review of Books*, June 11, 1987.

as the reform communists around Imre Nagy would have wished, and as Poland did? What might have happened then? Well, look what happened in Poland, where the hopes invested in Gomulka in 1956 were progressively and comprehensively disappointed. Is there any reason to believe that the same would not have happened in Hungary?

Orwell once remarked that “All revolutions are failures, but they are not all the same failure.” The consequences appear different at different times, and some emerge only decades later. To describe 1956 as “the victory of a defeat,” as the exiled Hungarian historian Miklós Molnár did in his book of 1968, was not merely romantic hyperbole and wishful thinking.⁶ Perhaps the simplest and most direct consequence is one that could be seen immediately but has endured. This is quite simply the sympathy and positive feeling toward Hungary on the part of people around the world who either had hardly noticed its existence before or had had a rather negative image of the country, seeing it as an oppressor of minorities before 1914 and Germany’s ally in two world wars. This basic positive association from 1956, supplanting a negative or nonexistent one, has persisted and remains a national treasure—or asset, to use language more appropriate to the 1990s—as the country strives to join the EU and NATO.

Another consequence that emerged immediately but also endured was the impact on the left throughout the world. This was a moment of bitter disillusionment with Soviet communism, of growing doubts in communist hearts, and the parting of ways between democratic and undemocratic socialists. The Chinese historian Jian Chen argues that it also hastened the great split between communist China and the Soviet Union.

Beyond this, however, someone reflecting on the tenth anniversary of the revolution, in 1966, would have been pushed to find many more elements of positive legacy, of clear gain to set against the obvious loss. On the twentieth anniversary, in 1976, one could already add something more. By this time it was clear that the Kádár regime was, if not more “liberal” than other communist regimes in Eastern Europe—that label was always misplaced—then certainly more cautious, circumspect, indirect, subtle, velvet-gloved in the way it treated its own people.⁷ This could be and was traced back to the trauma of 1956, when the communist party and state had collapsed in a matter of a few days, and perhaps also, more even than we guessed at the time, to Kádár’s personal sense of guilt. On the thirtieth anniversary, in 1986, one might have added the growing importance in Hungarian independent and oppositional thinking of the rediscovery of intellectual and political tendencies of 1956—for example, the work of the distinguished political thinker István Bibó, author of a famous last declaration on behalf of the Nagy government.⁸

The great temptation, of course, is to draw a straight line from 1956 to 1989. There is a very narrow boundary between the historian’s privilege of hindsight and Bergson’s “illusions of retrospective determinism.” Nonetheless, there are connections to be made. For example, I do not think that it is fanciful to make a connection between Soviet policy toward Eastern Europe in 1956 and that in 1989. Top Soviet policymakers, starting with Gorbachev, clearly remembered the political cost to the Soviet Union of the interventions in 1956 as well as 1968. In 1956, the Soviet leaders did not know what to do and therefore used force. In 1989, the Soviet leaders also did not know what to do—but they did know what not to do: use force.

Nor is it fanciful to see Hungary 1956 as an important milepost in what may be described as the cumulative learning process of Central European oppositions and governments, from the sheer outburst of popular fury in East Berlin in 1953, through 1956 in Poland and Hungary, 1968 in Czechoslovakia, 1980–1981 in Poland, to the sophisticated peaceful change of system in

⁶ *Victoire d’une défaite* is the title of the original French edition (Fayard, 1968). The English edition is entitled *Budapest 1956: A History of the Hungarian Revolution* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1971).

⁷ Suitably enough, Miklós Haraszti’s book on the position of artists under Kádárism was entitled *The Velvet Prison* (New York: Basic Books, 1987). See also my “The Hungarian Lesson” in *The Uses of Adversity: Essays on the Fate of Central Europe*, new ed. (London: Penguin, 1999).

⁸ See István Bibó, *Democracy, Revolution, Self-Determination: Selected Writings*, ed. Károly Nagy (Boulder, Colo.: Social Science Monographs, 1991).

1989–1990, which I christened “refolution.”⁹ Moreover, it is undeniable that the largest symbolic event in the Hungarian refolution of 1989 was the ceremonial reburial of Imre Nagy on 16 June, the anniversary of his execution in 1958. The six coffins laid out on Heroes’ Square, the revolutionary flags once again hanging from the lampposts: an occasion unforgettable to anyone who was there. And the past was a catalyst of the future.

However, the emergence of new evidence already slightly changes our view even of that very recent event. Documents found in the Interior Ministry archives by the longtime oppositionist János Kenedi now show how both the party leadership and the still active secret police used all possible means at their disposal—including, for example, “agents of influence” who had access to the American ambassador—to ensure that the reburial and attendant ceremonies passed off peacefully.¹⁰ Kádár’s successors, the new reform communists of 1989, appealed directly and indirectly to Nagy’s surviving comrades, the reform communists of 1956.

The kaleidoscope does not stop turning. Now, in 1996, it is a free Hungary. The president of the republic, Árpád Göncz, was himself imprisoned for his attempts to mediate after the 1956 revolution, having been tried together with István Bibó. Wise, warm, avuncular, he is supremely fitted to mark the anniversary. The famous Plot 301 in a remote corner of the municipal cemetery, where Nagy and his comrades were given indecent burial after their execution in 1958, was a site of weeds and rubbish dumps when I first visited it in 1988 and still a place of freshly turned earth and recent clearing at the reburial in 1989. Now it has neat turf, marble tablets, paving stones, a monument—everything that belongs to an official place of public memory.

So far, so good. But the current government of the country is dominated by the Hungarian Socialist Party, the main successor to the ruling communist party. The socialists were elected, with a landslide majority, in 1994 and govern in coalition with the Alliance of Free Democrats, the main heirs to the liberal-democratic opposition of the 1980s, who now find themselves a junior and uncomfortable partner of the post-communists. And the prime minister, Gyula Horn? Well, he was a reform communist in the 1980s, and as foreign minister he was partly responsible for opening the Iron Curtain to Austria in 1989 and letting the East Germans out later that year—thus beginning the end of the Berlin Wall. But in 1956? No, in 1956 young Gyula, aged twenty-four, was a member of the feared and hated volunteer militias, known on account of their distinctive heavy quilted jackets as the *pufajkások* (roughly, “quilted-jacket guys”), who fought, detained, and beat up those who continued to resist.

He has explained his actions. He was young, and he blamed the revolutionaries for the death of a much-loved elder brother. He has, up to a point, apologized. He has, in a way, tried to make amends—for example, by increasing special pensions for the survivors. But his way of dealing with the problem is deeply ambiguous. For it also involves trying to draw a line under the past—and to claim Nagy’s inheritance. Soon after becoming prime minister, he joined Imre Nagy’s daughter in a ceremony at Plot 301 to mark the anniversary of the revolution. Then, earlier this year, it was Horn who proposed in parliament a special commemorative law to mark the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Imre Nagy. The Free Democrats did not know which way to turn. Of course Nagy should be honored, but at the initiative of a man like Horn? In the end, they abstained. This strange custom of the commemorative law, incidentally, has a history in Hungary reaching back into the nineteenth century. The hero of the 1848–1849 revolution, Lajos Kossuth, for example, was thus commemorated after his death. However, the last person to have been so honored by the Hungarian parliament was Joseph Stalin. And the man who proposed that tribute? The then president of the parliament, Imre Nagy. In Hungary, the ironies and ambiguities just never seem to stop.

How many more turns of the kaleidoscope will we see? As it looks now, Hungary has a very good chance of celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the revolution as a full member of what we

⁹ “Refolution in Hungary and Poland,” *The New York Review of Books*, August 17, 1989.

¹⁰ János Kenedi, *Kis Állambiztonsági Olvasókönyv a Kádár-korszakban* (A small reader on the state security services in the Kádár period) (Budapest: Magvető, 1996).

unreflectingly call “Europe” and “the West.” Of the EU, that is. And of NATO. It will thus become, to recall John Foster Dulles’s words in 1956, a military ally of the United States. But what will those two things mean in 2006? What will the internal condition of Hungary be then, and how will it affect Hungarians’ views of 1956? How much more, and how much less, will we then know about the revolution? It is precisely the mark of great events that their meaning constantly changes, is forever disputed, with some questions never finally answered. Questions such as, What happened in France in 1789?

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EDITORS' INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Hungarian revolution was the most dramatic event in an extraordinarily eventful year. Beginning with Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin and Stalinism in a secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in February 1956, pressures for reform in Eastern Europe accelerated the unraveling of the system of oppression and centralized control that had previously held sway. Nowhere were these broad social forces more prevalent than in Hungary where the process of lifting the lid on social and political freedoms brought widespread expectations for meaningful change—including the possibility of outright independence from Soviet domination.

At first, the Kremlin even encouraged the idea of reform, albeit within the framework of communist rule. Khrushchev understood the need on a number of levels to end the most extreme forms of repression that Stalin's protégés—the leaders of the East European communist parties—had exercised since coming to power after World War II. But he was most keenly interested in finding a solution to the economic crisis that was engulfing the socialist camp and that had been one of the most unwelcome by-products of Stalinism. By granting limited social and political freedoms, he hoped to channel a burst of public energy toward revamping the region's agricultural and industrial base. His goal was always to solidify the socialist community, not to help it disintegrate or to dilute Moscow's control.

But conditions in the camp, especially in Hungary, were too advanced and complex to be responsive to this kind of fine-tuning. When nationalist and democratic impulses finally exploded into a nation-wide revolt beginning on October 23, 1956, the Soviets, after some internal vacillation, finally resolved to crush the uprising before it weakened their position in the empire any further. The impact of this decision affected not only developments in the region but world politics as well, including the superpower rivalry. For more than 30 years, the natural movement toward political independence was put in something of a deep freeze as even public mention of the revolution in Hungary was taboo. This forced suppression of national memory ultimately magnified the significance of 1956 when communist rule finally collapsed in Hungary more than three decades later. Even today, the uprising, which was a far more complex social and political phenomenon than is sometimes understood, is seen by Hungarians as a defining moment in the country's history.

Only after the demise of the communist regimes in the region in 1989 did it become possible to begin to piece together the full story of what happened during the previous 40 years. The substantial opening of most national archives allowed scholars and the public to explore for the first time the internal secrets of their former rulers to try to understand the circumstances, decisions and events that surrounded key crises like the Hungarian revolution.

This volume represents the first major English-language attempt to systematically cull the newly opened archives of all the countries in the region, including the former Soviet Union, as well as presenting key documents from U.S., British and French archives, to produce a multinational account of the Hungarian revolution. There are, naturally, several monographs and many other publications in Hungarian based on similar research, and in recent years there has been one major English-language study of the period in monograph form written by a team of scholars at the 1956 Institute.¹¹ But this volume goes beyond that earlier effort in several ways. Most importantly, it combines two functions—it is both a compendium of recently declassified, primary source documentation, and a detailed description and analysis of the revolution. Moreover, it is the first to reproduce significant numbers of records from the highest levels of the party and state in both Hungary and the USSR, including some of their most sensitive intel-

¹¹ György Litván, ed., *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956: Reform, Revolt and Repression, 1953–1963* (London: Longman, 1996).

ligence and military files, as well as similar materials from seven other national archival repositories giving readers a truly multinational perspective on the subject.

The volume is divided into three sections. The essay and documents in Part I. describe the immediate history leading up to the revolution from 1953–1956 when Moscow's nod toward reform unleashed pent-up nationalist, social, and political feelings in Hungary, which led to the public outpouring that began on October 23. Part II. covers the uprising itself incorporating the local Hungarian, regional, Soviet, and Western viewpoints. It focuses particularly on the complex political and social picture inside Hungary and the wavering of Kremlin decision-makers. Part III. deals with the revolution's aftermath and its impact on Hungary, the region, and the superpowers. The final section is a brief documentary epilogue which presents the post-1989 Soviet and later Russian governments' apologies for Soviet actions in 1956.

As with the other volumes in this series of documents readers, this book is structured to offer readers information in a variety of forms. First and foremost, the 120 documents in this collection are among the most important primary source records available on the events themselves and on the calculations of the key players. They are the core of the book. Secondly, the introductory essays for each chapter provide an analytical framework and historical context for the documents. These concise yet detailed introductions go well beyond standard prefatory accounts and are based on extensive research over a number of years. The editors' aim was to provide an analytical account that could either accompany the documents or stand alone. Another unique feature of this series is the use of "headnotes" at the beginning of each document that give important supplementary information about the events described in the documents, or about the documents themselves and the context in which they were produced. In addition, the editors have provided hundreds of footnotes to flesh out obscure details for a general, international audience about the people, places, and events being covered. Finally, the volume includes glossaries of key individuals, organizations, and abbreviations, a chronology and a bibliography as additional background and as guides for further research. A note on spellings: the editors have followed the original language spellings of most East European names; however, the renderings of those names in original English-language documents have been retained.

Many of the documents included here were first compiled for use at an unusual conference held in Budapest in September 1996. On the revolution's 40th anniversary, scholars from Hungary, Russia, the United States, Canada, Great Britain, France, Israel, Italy, Poland, and Romania joined veterans of the events themselves to recollect and reassess what had happened. Among the veterans were Gyula Borbándi, William Griffith, Miklós Molnár, Miklós Vásárhelyi, and Mária Wittner. The scholars included some of the best known specialists on Hungary and on the Cold War in Eastern Europe. Topics covered included the legacy of the revolution in Hungary, new evidence on Soviet policy toward Hungary, the uprising's impact on Eastern Europe and its relation to the Polish crisis, the impact on the superpowers, the role of Radio Free Europe, and the connections between the events of 1956 and 1989. More than just an anniversary event, the gathering produced an invaluable mix of documented history with oral history—at a point in time far enough removed from the events for a decent written record to be available, but not too many years afterwards so that first-hand accounts were still possible.¹²

The leading organizer of the 1996 conference was the Institute for the History of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. The 1956 Institute was established in 1991 with the mission of conducting research on the previously prohibited topic of the revolution. In the years since then, the organization has become a center for the broader study of contemporary Hungarian history, and has developed a wide reputation in the international scholarly community. The scholarship presented in this volume builds on more than 10 years' analysis and archival research conducted by the staff of the Institute, often in conjunction with fellow scholars in Hungary and abroad.

In 1992, the Institute became a partner of the National Security Archive, a research organiza-

¹² The 1956 Institute published the conference papers in Hungarian in their Yearbook: *Évkönyv V. 1996–1997* (Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 1997).

tion, freedom of information advocate, and publisher of declassified documents, which at the time was initiating a project to promote cooperative research into, and broad public access to, the previously hidden history of the region. The Openness in Russia and Eastern Europe Project involved organizing multinational research groups to explore previously closed archival sources, sponsoring conferences (such as the 1996 event) where new findings could be brought to light for scholars and the general public, and publishing collections such as this volume. Funding for the Openness Project has come primarily from the Open Society Institute, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Smith Richardson Foundation and the German Marshall Fund of the United States. The editors gratefully acknowledge their generosity over the years.

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Numerous archivists and access professionals have played a key, if generally unrecognized, part in establishing the new historical record on Hungary 1956. Those whose role we know of first-hand include: Mária Bozsics and György Lázár at the Hungarian National Archives; the archival staff of the National Archives and Records Administration at College Park, Maryland, the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, the archives of the United Nations, the Library of Congress, NATO Archives, Brussels, the former Center for the Preservation of Contemporary Documentation (Moscow), the History and Records Department of the Russian Foreign Ministry; and the Freedom of Information staffs of the State Department, Defense Department and Central Intelligence Agency.

Key collaborating and supporting institutions for the 1996 conference were the Cold War International History Project at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Budapest (co-sponsors of the 1996 conference), and also in Budapest the Europa Institut, the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Central European University, and the Open Society Archives.

Finally, we are very pleased to continue the publication of this series through CEU Press. Our warm thanks to all our colleagues there, especially to former Director and Editor Klára Takácsi-Nagy for all her kind support and cooperation over the past several years; to her successor, István Bart; and to Mária Magyar, Richárd Rados, Ágnes Sümegi and Martin Greenwald.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ÁVH	State Security Authority, <i>Államvédelmi Hatóság</i> (Hungarian secret police, name adopted in 1948)
ÁVO	Department of State Security, <i>Államvédelmi Osztály</i> (Hungarian secret police, name in use from 1946 until 1948)
BCP	Bulgarian Communist Party, <i>Bulgarska Kommunisticheska Partiya</i>
CC	Central Committee
Cde.	Comrade
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CMEA	Council of Mutual Economic Assistance
COMECON	See, CMEA.
CPC	Communist Party of China, <i>Zhongguo Gongchan Dang</i>
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union, <i>Kommunisticheskaya Partiya Sovetskogo Soyuza</i>
CPCz	Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, <i>Kommunistická Strana Československá</i>
ČSR	Czechoslovak Socialist Republic
DISZ	Union of Working Youth, <i>Dolgozó Ifjúság Szövetsége</i>
FO	Foreign Office (Great Britain)
FPRY	Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
GDR	German Democratic Republic
HPR	Hungarian People's Republic
HWP	Hungarian Workers' Party, <i>Magyar Dolgozók Pártja</i> or <i>MDP</i>
HSWP	Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, <i>Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt</i> or <i>MSZMP</i>
ICP	Italian Communist Party
KGB	Committee for State Security (USSR),
KMT	Greater Budapest Central Workers' Council, <i>Nagybudapesti Központi Munkástanács</i>
MEFESZ	Hungarian Association of University and College Unions, <i>Magyar Egyetemista és Főiskolai Egyesületek Szövetsége</i>
MID	Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <i>Ministerstvo Inostrannykh Del</i>
MP	Member of Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NIE	National Intelligence Estimate
NPP	National Peasant Party, <i>Nemzeti Parasztpárt</i>
NSC	National Security Council (U.S.)
OCB	Operations Coordinating Board (U.S. State Department)
PC	Political Committee
PCC	Provisional Central Committee, <i>Ideiglenes Központi Bizottság</i>
PEC	Provisional Executive Committee, <i>Ideiglenes Intéző Bizottság</i>
PZPR	Polish United Workers' Party, <i>Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza</i>
RFE	Radio Free Europe
RPR	Romanian People's Republic
RWP	Romanian Workers' Party, <i>Partidul Muncitoresc Român</i>
SED	German Socialist Unity Party (GDR), <i>Sozialistische Einheitspartei</i>

SNIE	<i>Deutschlands</i> Special National Intelligence Estimate
SZDP	Social Democratic Party, <i>Szociáldemokrata Párt</i>
SZOT	National Council of [Hungarian] Trade Unions, <i>Szakszervezetek Országos Tanácsa</i>
U.N.	United Nations
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USIA	United States Information Agency
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WTO	Warsaw Treaty Organization
YLC	Yugoslav League of Communists, <i>Savez Komunista Jugoslavije</i>

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN DOCUMENT SOURCE CITATIONS

AAN	Archive of Modern Acts (Warsaw), <i>Archiwum Akt Nowych</i>
AMSZ	Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Warsaw), <i>Archiwum Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych</i>
AMVR	Bulgarian State Security Archives (Sofia), <i>Archiv Ministerstvo Na V`treshnite Roboti</i>
APRF	Archive of the President of the Russian Federation (Moscow), <i>Arkhiv Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii</i>
Arh. CC al PCR	Archive of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party (Bucharest), <i>Arhivele Comitetul Central al Partidul Comunist Român</i>
AÚV KSČ	Archive of the CPCZ CC (Prague), <i>Archiv Ústředního Výboru Kommunistická Strana Československa</i>
AVPRF	Foreign Policy Archive of the Russian Federation (Moscow), <i>Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii</i>
D.	<i>Delo</i>
Dok.	<i>Dokument</i>
FRUS	<i>Foreign Relations of the United States</i>
HL/HM	Hungarian Military History Archive (Budapest)
Ll.	<i>listy</i>
MOL	Hungarian National Archives, <i>Magyar Országos Levéltár</i>
NA II	U.S National Archives (College Park, Maryland)
Op.	<i>Opis</i>
Pap.	<i>Papka</i>
Per.	<i>Perechen'</i>
Por.	<i>Portfel'</i>
PRO.FO	Public Record Office, British Foreign Office (Kew Gardens)
RG	Record Group
TsKhSD	Center for the Storage of Contemporary Documentation (Moscow), <i>Tsentr khraneniia sovremennoi dokumentatsii</i>

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

1953

March 5: Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin dies. A major reorganization of the Soviet leadership follows.

March 8: The Hungarian Parliament passes legislation perpetuating the “undying memory” of Stalin and orders a national period of mourning.

May 17: Parliamentary elections in Hungary take place, following the Stalinist pattern.

June 1: Disturbances break out in Czechoslovakia. Workers demonstrating in Plzeň occupy the city hall and display national and U.S. flags. The movement is suppressed by the special police.

June 13–16: Hungary’s party and state leaders are summoned to Moscow. Mátyás Rákosi’s monopoly on power is ended. He is instructed to hand over the reins as prime minister to Imre Nagy but is allowed to remain as head of the communist party. The main lines of a “New Course” are drawn. The talks, and even the fact that they took place, remains a secret for 30 years.

June 15: The Soviet Union resumes diplomatic relations with Yugoslavia and with Israel.

June 17–18: A workers’ uprising takes place in East Berlin and other cities of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). It is the first major protest of its kind in the Soviet bloc. The Soviet military is called in to suppress the insurrection.

June 26: Soviet secret police chief Lavrentii Beria is arrested in Moscow, dismissed from all his positions and excluded from the party. The move is part of the ongoing Kremlin leadership struggle.

July 4: Prime Minister Imre Nagy, in a speech to the new Parliament, outlines the New Course featuring a general relaxation of centralized political, economic and administrative controls mirroring the attitudes of the post-Stalin leadership in the Kremlin.

July 21: A unified Ministry of the Interior is established in Hungary, reintegrating the ÁVH (security police) into the new Ministry’s structure.

July 25: As part of Imre Nagy’s reform program, a partial amnesty for political prisoners is declared in Hungary.

July 26: The Hungarian Council of Ministers passes a resolution ending the practices of internment and internal exile.

August 8: Soviet Prime Minister Georgii Malenkov announces that the Soviets have successfully tested a hydrogen bomb.

Autumn: Sharp cuts in the size of the Hungarian People’s Army begin. By November 15, its strength has been reduced to 150,000 men.

September 6: The Hungarian government announces wide-ranging price reductions.

September 9: Hungary and Yugoslavia resume diplomatic relations.

September 13: Nikita Khrushchev is elected first secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).

December 11: The U.S. National Security Council re-examines its policy towards Eastern Europe. Described in NSC 174, the new policy provides for a scaled-back approach to fomenting dissent in the Soviet bloc after the June uprisings in East Germany.

December 24: A Hungarian court finds former head of the ÁVH, Gábor Péter, and 17 others guilty of abuse of power and crimes against the people.

1954

May 5: Consultations take place between the CPSU Presidium and a HWP delegation in Moscow. While criticizing both Rákosi and Nagy, the Soviets continue to express support for Nagy’s reform program.

May 24–30: The Third Congress of the HWP is held in an atmosphere of political uncertainty and leadership deadlock.

July 7: ÁVH Lieutenant-General László Piros is appointed minister of the interior, replacing Ernő Gerő. Gerő remains a deputy prime minister.

October 20: The central party daily, *Szabad Nép* (“Free People”), carries an article by Imre Nagy that is unusual in that it makes clear that the party leadership is engaged in serious in-fighting, and offers the first analysis of the reasons for the conflict.

October 23–24: The founding congress of the Patriotic People’s Front elects the writer Pál Szabó as president and the Reformed Church minister Ferenc Jánosi as general secretary. Imre Nagy’s speech on national unity later leads to charges of nationalism against him.

November 8: Soviet–Hungarian joint ventures are transferred to 100 per cent Hungarian ownership in a series of economic transactions.

November 21: An article in *Szabad Nép*, instigated by Mihály Farkas, initiates an attack on Nagy’s policy line and the reform movement among writers and journalists.

December 1: Rákosi reports to the HWP Political Committee on a message received from the Presidium of the CPSU Central Committee. This begins the process of ousting Imre Nagy from power.

December 15: The HWP Political Committee, in Nagy’s absence, passes a resolution pointing out the existence of a “right-wing danger” and condemns Nagy’s policies. There is a purge among the staff at *Szabad Nép*.

1955

January 8: During consultations with a HWP delegation that includes both Nagy and Rákosi, the Presidium of the CPSU Central Committee in Moscow strongly criticizes Nagy’s policies.

January 25: The Supreme Soviet in Moscow issues a decree declaring the state of war between the Soviet Union and Germany to be over.

March 2–4: At a meeting of the HWP Central Committee, the leadership does not annul the earlier resolution of June 1953, but it identifies the “right-wing, anti-Marxist, anti-party, opportunist” views represented by Imre Nagy as the main danger.

March 25: The Petőfi Circle is founded as an adjunct of the Union of Working Youth (DISZ). Following the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU in February 1956, it becomes a center for vibrant socio-political discussion among intellectuals and the general public.

April 14: A resolution adopted at a meeting of the HWP Central Committee accuses Nagy of anti-party activity and factionalism. Nagy, who still refuses to express regret for his activities, is removed from the Political Committee and the Central Committee and deprived of all party functions. By the end of April he is compelled to resign his seat in Parliament and on the Budapest City Council, as well as all other official positions.

April 18: András Hegedüs is appointed prime minister, as proposed by Rákosi.

May 9: The FRG is admitted into NATO, as the Paris treaties come into force.

May 14: The Warsaw Pact is formed.

May 15: The Austrian State Treaty is signed, making Austria an independent, neutral country.

May 26–June 2: A delegation led by Khrushchev, Bulganin, Mikoyan and Shepilov visits Belgrade. Relations between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia are normalized.

July 17: Cardinal József Mindszenty, primate of the Hungarian Catholic Church, is moved from prison to house arrest in Felsőpetény, Nógrád County.

July 18: An article in *Szabad Nép* blames former ÁVH chief Gábor Péter and his “gang” for the deterioration in Yugoslav–Hungarian relations.

July 18–23: The Geneva summit between the Soviet Union, the United States, Britain and France takes place.

November 20 and 22: Two groups of about 1,200 political prisoners return from the Soviet Union. Among them is Béla Kovács, former general secretary of the Smallholders’ Party (FKgP).

December 14: Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania are among 16 new members admitted to the United Nations.

1956

January 1: The ÁVH undergoes a major reduction in size.

January 23: Nikolai Bulganin, the Soviet prime minister, proposes in a letter to President Eisenhower that their two countries conclude a friendship and mutual non-aggression treaty.

February 14–25: The Twentieth Congress of the CPSU marks a turning point in the policy and ideology of the Soviet party and of the international communist movement. The concluding resolution declares that a third world war is no longer inevitable and proclaims “peaceful coexistence” between the two world systems. In a four-hour secret speech, Khrushchev denounces Stalin’s crimes in detail.

March 8: The Hungarian government abolishes the restricted border zone between Hungary and Yugoslavia.

March 12–13: Rákosi reports on the Twentieth Congress to the HWP Central Committee. He declares that the HWP has already been working along the lines prescribed by the congress.

March 17: The Petőfi Circle holds its first major event: an informal meeting of former leaders of MEFESZ (the Hungarian Association of University and College Unions).

March 27: Speaking at a meeting of regional party activists, Rákosi admits that the 1949 treason trial of László Rajk was a show trial.

April 7: The COMINFORM is disbanded.

April 10: Poland rehabilitates Władysław Gomułka, former general secretary of the communist party, who was convicted of anti-communist activities in 1951.

April 27: The guidelines for Hungary’s Second Five-Year Plan are put forward for public discussion.

May 18: Mátyás Rákosi makes what is to be his final public appearance, at a meeting of HWP activists in Budapest.

June 1: Vyacheslav Molotov, a leading hard-line rival of Khrushchev and one of the main opponents of reconciliation with Yugoslavia, is dismissed as foreign minister. He is allowed to hold on to the posts of deputy prime minister and member of the CPSU Presidium.

June 6: A small circle of Nagy adherents, along with a number of prominent public personalities, meets at Imre Nagy’s house to celebrate his 60th birthday.

June 6–14: Soviet Presidium member Mikhail Suslov holds talks in Budapest with members of the HWP leadership, as well as with János Kádár personally.

June 27: A Petőfi Circle debate on aspects of the press and information, held at the Central Officers’ Hall, attracts an audience of 5,000–6,000.

June 28: In Poznań, Poland, 100,000 workers take to the streets calling for improvements in living and working conditions and free elections. Security forces break up the crowds, leaving about 100 dead and several hundred wounded. About 600 demonstrators are arrested.

June 30: The HWP Central Committee drafts a resolution that condemns the “anti-party leanings” of the Petőfi Circle.

July 3: *Szabad Nép* publishes the June 30 CPSU Central Committee resolution on the cult of personality.

July 10: Speakers at a party meeting in the Writers’ Union openly criticize the June 30 resolution of the HWP Central Committee.

July 12: The U.S. National Security Council issues NSC 5608 reconsidering American policy toward Eastern Europe.

July 13: Soviet Presidium member Anastas Mikoyan arrives unexpectedly in Budapest to oversee the dismissal of Rákosi.

July 18: At a HWP CC meeting, Rákosi, citing his “state of health,” steps down and departs for the Soviet Union. He is replaced by Ernő Gerő. András Hegedüs remains as prime minister.

September: Residents displaced from the Hungarian–Yugoslav border zone are allowed to return to their homes.

September 1: The Presidential Council rehabilitates 50 previously convicted social democrats.

September 17: The General Assembly of the Writers' Union demonstrates in support of Nagy.

September 19: The Petőfi Circle resumes its public debates after a break of two-and-a-half months.

September 19: Authorities complete the final stages of the removal of technical equipment sealing the Hungarian-Austrian border.

September 30: Tito and Gerő meet in the Kremlin, continuing the process of political reconciliation between Hungary and Yugoslavia. Gerő reports on their discussions at the HWP Political Committee meeting on October 8.

October: Troop reductions in the Hungarian People's Army continue. The strength of the army at the outbreak of the revolution is 120,000–130,000 men.

October 4: The Soviet government provides Hungary a loan of 100 million rubles for 1957.

October 4: High-ranking ÁVH officers are arrested.

October 6: László Rajk and his associates, executed for treason in a 1949 show trial, are formally reburied. *Szabad Nép* carries a lengthy front-page article entitled "Never Again" about communists who were executed seven years before. A crowd of 100,000 attends the funeral.

October 8: The newspaper *Hétféli Hírlap* ("Monday News") begins publication. It is the first example of a more relaxed style of newspaper to appear since 1948.

October 12: Mihály Farkas, former member of the inner leadership, is arrested on orders of the Chief Public Prosecutor's Department and eventually sentenced to 16 years in prison.

October 13: After lengthy efforts by Nagy, The HWP Political Committee passes a resolution readmitting him into the party.

October 15: A party and government delegation consisting of Ernő Gerő, Antal Apró, András Hegedüs, János Kádár and István Kovács leaves for a week's visit to Belgrade.

October 15: Reacting to the improvement in Soviet–Yugoslav relations, the United States suspends aid deliveries to Belgrade.

October 16: An assembly of about 1,600 undergraduates in the city of Szeged founds the Hungarian Association of University and College Unions, MEFESZ, a student organization independent of the party-sanctioned DISZ and the HWP.

October 19: Soviet leader Khrushchev heads a top-level delegation on an unannounced visit to Warsaw after the Polish party Central Committee votes for Władysław Gomułka to become first secretary. Gomułka persuades the Kremlin not to intervene militarily in Poland, promising to maintain Poland's military and ideological commitments to the Soviet bloc.

October 19: Soviet troops stationed in Hungary are placed on alert in connection with the events in Poland.

October 19: MEFESZ holds a meeting at Szeged University. After accepting demands of a partly political nature, the organization dispatches delegates throughout the country to spread the word about the formation of the organization and the demands that have been formulated.

October 22: A large student assembly from across Hungary convenes at Budapest Technical University and debates the demands put forward by the MEFESZ delegates from Szeged. Several other student meetings take place in the capital during the day. The students adopt the first version of the so-called "16 points," a set of demands that would become the standard reference point for the demonstrations of the following days.

October 23: *Szabad Nép* publishes a front-page article entitled "New Spring Parade," welcoming the demands being put forward by the country's youth.

October 23: The Hungarian party and government delegation returns from Yugoslavia in the early morning. An expanded meeting of the HWP Political Committee is held to discuss the unfolding socio-political crisis.

October 23, 11 a.m.: A student demonstration begins in the university city of Debrecen.

October 23, 12:53 p.m.: Radio Kossuth broadcasts a statement by the interior ministry banning a public demonstration planned for later in the day. However, at 2:23 p.m., the decision is reversed and permission for the rally is granted.

October 23, 3:00 p.m.: A student-led march leaves the Petőfi statue on the Pest embankment, crosses the Margaret Bridge and heads for the statue to Polish General Bem on the Buda side of the Danube. Meanwhile other groups of students march toward the statue along the Buda embankment.

October 23, about 5:00 p.m.: The first protesters arrive in Kossuth Lajos square (5th District). An hour later, the square is filled with a crowd estimated at 200,000. Also around 5:00, demonstrators gather at the Hungarian Radio building in Bródy Sándor street (8th District) to read out the students' 16 points. The force defending the building is strengthened, but some soldiers support the protesters. The siege of the Radio building starts at about 10 p.m. and lasts until dawn.

October 23, about 6:00 p.m.: In Debrecen, ÁVH forces fire on demonstrators killing three people—the first casualties of the revolution.

October 23, about 8:00 p.m.: The HWP Central Committee begins an emergency session that continues until dawn. Ernő Gerő requests that Moscow authorize Soviet forces to intervene.

October 23, 9:00 p.m.: Nagy delivers a speech from a second-story balcony of the Parliament building. Although intended to respond to demonstrator concerns, it falls well short of expectations, leading the crowds to continue their protests.

October 23, 9:37 p.m.: Demonstrators on Dózsa György road (14th District) topple a giant statue of Stalin. There are also attacks during the evening on telephone exchanges, printing presses and several arms factories in various parts of the city. Late that night, rebels also attack police stations and semi-military and military institutions. The offices of *Szabad Nép* are stormed as well.

October 23, about 11:00 p.m.: An order is given for Soviet special forces stationed at Székesfehérvár to pacify Budapest.

October 23: Demonstrations take place in other university cities around Hungary.

October 24, 3:00–4:00 a.m.: The first Soviet armored units enter the capital.

October 24, early morning: Rebel forces occupy the Radio building. However, government broadcasting has already moved to the Parliament building.

October 24, 8:13 a.m.: Hungarian radio announces that the HWP Central Committee has confirmed Ernő Gerő as first secretary. Nagy is to be prime minister, with the incumbent András Hegedűs as his deputy.

October 24, 8:45 a.m.: Hungarian radio declares a state of emergency. Factories and schools are closed. Trains continue to run, and basic food supplies as well as utilities are available more or less continuously during the coming weeks.

October 24, noon: Rebels temporarily occupy the Athenaeum Press about midday.

October 24: ÁVH men open fire on marchers in Roosevelt square near the building of the Ministry of Interior (5th District). Soviet soldiers open fire on demonstrators outside Székesfehérvár Town Hall. Six lives are lost.

October 24, 12.10 p.m.: Speaking on the radio, Nagy appeals for calm and an end to the fighting.

October 24: Fighting continues in the neighborhood of the Radio building. A fire breaks out in the natural history section of the National Museum during the afternoon, burning part of it down.

October 24: The first workers' council in Budapest is formed.

October 24: Groups of rebels come together in Baross square (7th and 8th districts), in the southern parts of the 8th and 9th districts, at Corvin Passage (8th District), and on Tompa and Berzenczey streets (9th District).

October 24: Insurrectionists seize large quantities of arms from the Bem square barracks (2nd District).

October 24: Extra Soviet troops are transferred to Hungary from the USSR and Romania. TASS issues a statement in Moscow announcing the defeat of the “counter-revolutionary uprising.”

October 24, 8.45 p.m.: János Kádár, speaking on the radio, terms the events a counter-revolution.

October 25: Soviet and Hungarian units reoccupy the Radio building in the early morning hours.

The first revolutionary newspaper appears under the title *Igazság* (“Truth”).

October 25: Rebels occupy the main police station in the 9th District.

October 25, about 11:15 a.m.: Soviet and Hungarian forces guarding the Parliament building open fire on some 8,000–10,000 people gathered in Kossuth square. Between 60 and 80 lives are lost; 100–150 people are injured.

October 25, 12:32 p.m.: A communiqué from the HWP Political Committee is read out on the radio announcing that Ernő Gerő has been dismissed and János Kádár, who was imprisoned during the Rákosi era, has been appointed first secretary. Colonel Pál Maléter, in command at the Kilián Barracks (8th District), reaches a ceasefire agreement with the Corvin Passage rebels.

October 25: A Soviet division of reinforcements arrives from Romania as protests break out in villages and towns across Hungary.

October 25: The University Revolutionary Student Committee is established at the Arts Faculty of Eötvös Loránd University.

October 25: Workers councils are formed at the Csepel Iron and Metal Works in Budapest (21st District).

October 25: Serious fighting takes place at the junction of Grand Boulevard (Nagykörút) and Üllői road, in Corvin Passage (8th District).

October 25: Demonstrators carrying “bloody banners” protest against Ernő Gerő, the Soviet intervention and the bloodshed in front of Parliament.

October 25: Rebels fire a mortar at the radio transmitters at Lakihegy.

October 25: The Borsod County Workers’ Council forms in the important industrial city of Miskolc. The major factories and the university of Miskolc send a delegation to Imre Nagy, led by the county’s first party-secretary.

October 26: Demonstrations and fighting continue to spread around the country. In the city of Kecskemét, for example, volleys fired by soldiers claim three lives early in the day while by evening a battle breaks out in which MiG 15 fighters strafe the city’s Gypsy quarter. Rebel forces make considerable inroads despite the number of casualties.

October 26: Various national and workers’ councils spring up in cities such as Győr, Debrecen, Veszprém and Nyíregyháza.

October 26: In the afternoon, rebels occupy the Csepel police headquarters in Budapest (21st District).

October 26, 4:13 p.m.: Hungarian radio broadcasts a statement by the HWP Central Committee promising a new, national government, Hungarian–Soviet negotiations conducted on an equal basis, elections for factory workers’ councils, pay raises, and economic and political changes.

October 26, 5:32 p.m.: Hungarian authorities broadcast an amnesty declaration by the Presidential Council. It applies to everyone who lays down their arms by 10:00 p.m.

October 26: A consignment of blood and medicines sent from Warsaw arrives at Budapest’s Ferihegy Airport. This is the first aid to reach Hungary from abroad.

October 26: Rebel groups form in the Thököly road–Dózsa György road area (7th District) and at Széna square (2nd District). Rebels also occupy Móricz Zsigmond square (11th District) and the Danuvia Arms Factory.

October 26: Border guards at Mosonmagyaróvár fire on demonstrators, killing 52 and wounding 86. Soldiers shoot at protesters in Esztergom, causing 15 deaths and at least 50 injuries. At Zalaegerszeg, police and party functionaries also open fire on the crowd. There are fatalities and injuries in Nagykanizsa from shots fired from the party headquarters, while ÁVH men shoot at demonstrators in Miskolc. In Miskolc and in Mosonmagyaróvár, the insurgents lynch several officers.

October 26: Pope Pius XII in Rome issues an encyclical on the uprising and prays for a rebel victory.

October 27: The United States, Britain and France jointly propose that the U.N. Security Council convene to discuss the Hungarian question.

October 27: The revolution continues to unfold in Hungary. In Budapest and elsewhere, rebels seize or hold onto key facilities such as police stations and local party and government headquarters while mounting sporadic attacks against Soviet and Hungarian army detachments. On the Romanian border, railroad tracks are pulled up to impede Soviet troop advances into the country. Heavily outgunned, the insurrectionists continue to sustain sizable losses. The first shipments of aid from the International Red Cross arrive.

October 27, 11:18 a.m.: Hungarian radio announces the composition of the new government.

October 27: Free Győr Radio begins broadcasting. Other than the Western radios (RFE, BBC), this station becomes the most important source of information for the public until October 30.

October 27: In a major address in Dallas, Texas, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles declares that the American leadership do not regard the Eastern European states potential military allies of the United States.

October 27–November 3: The U.N. ambassadors of the United States, Britain and France hold a series of secret discussions on the Hungarian uprising.

October 28: Soviet forces attack the Corvin Passage unit at dawn, but are repelled. New groups of insurgents form in the capital's 8th District. Across Hungary, slain revolutionaries are buried as rebel attacks and army counterattacks continue.

October 28, 1:20 p.m.: Hungarian Radio announces a cease-fire.

October 28, 2:00 p.m.: The new government is sworn in. It duly approves the government statement put forward by Nagy that seeks to meet many of the revolutionary demands. Besides remedying past grievances the program promises to legalize revolutionary organizations and to bring about the immediate withdrawal of Soviet forces from Budapest. This indicates a fundamental turn in party policy.

October 28, 5:25 p.m.: Nagy announces the new government program in the radio.

October 28: Hungarian party leaders who are the most seriously compromised since the accession of the new government, including Ernő Gerő, András Hegedüs, István Bata, László Piros, Erzsébet Andics, Andor Berei and István Kovács, flee overnight to Moscow aboard Soviet aircraft. *Pravda* reports on the Hungarian revolution under the headline "Collapse of the Anti-People Adventure".

October 28, 10:00 p.m.: The new government lifts the curfew. There is a radio announcement calling on young people to join the national guard that is being organized.

October 28: The Revolutionary Committee of the Hungarian Intelligentsia, the Buda University Revolutionary Committee and the Revolutionary Party of Hungarian Youth are established.

October 28: The free communist Róka (Fox) Radio is established at the 20th District party headquarters.

October 28: The Hegyeshalom frontier crossing into Austria is closed.

October 28: Khrushchev reports on Hungary to the Presidium of the CPSU Central Committee, which decides to reinforce the troops stationed in the country.

October 28: The U.N. Security Council places the "Hungarian situation" on its agenda.

October 28: Hungary receives offers of aid from the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, the GDR, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Switzerland, the United States, Austria and other countries, as well as from agencies of the International Red Cross.

October 29: Further clashes between Soviet troops and insurgents occur in the 8th and 9th Districts of Budapest. The 7th District party headquarters is occupied. The leaders of the Corvin Passage rebels begin combining groups in the area, so that the number of organized rebels reaches 1,000–1,200.

October 29: Revolutionary committees and workers' councils grow in numbers all over the country.

October 29: At Záhony, on the Hungarian border with the Soviet Union, the entrance to a rail station is blown up. Several locomotives are incapacitated.

October 29: Talks with representatives of rebel groups are held at the Ministry of Defense in Budapest. At about 8:00 p.m., cease-fire talks begin in Corvin Passage, and later at Budapest Police Headquarters, between the police and military and representatives of the insurrectionists.

October 29: The Hungarian National Revolutionary Committee moves onto the premises of *Szabad Nép*.

October 29: Hungarian radio announces that Soviet forces will begin to withdraw from Budapest the following day. Hungarian troops begin to replace Soviet guards at public buildings.

October 30, 7:20 a.m.: The Defense Ministry announces on the radio that the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Budapest will continue.

October 30: A fire fight breaks out between rebels and guards at the headquarters of the HWP Budapest Committee in Köztársaság square (8th District). After the rebels storm the building, suffering considerable losses in the process, 23 of the defenders either die in the siege or are subsequently lynched by the crowd.

October 30, 2:30 p.m.: Nagy announces on the radio the end of the one-party system and the formation of a coalition government. Minister of State Zoltán Tildy announces that the compulsory-delivery system for farm produce has been abolished and that preparations are being made for free elections.

October 30: The government recognizes the local self-governing bodies created during the revolution.

October 30: In Budapest, the Széna square rebels occupy the ÁVH barracks on Maros street (12th District), a national guard unit is formed in the 8th District, and several political prisoners are freed from the National Prison.

October 30: The Smallholders' (FKgP), Social Democratic (SZDP) and National Peasants' (NPP) parties are re-established.

October 30: The Újpest National Committee sends out armed men to release Cardinal Mindszenty from house arrest in Felsőpetény. His ÁVH guards disperse and he is accompanied to the barracks in nearby Rétság before a detachment from Újpest arrives.

October 30: Revolutionary committees continue to be elected in more towns around the country while organization of national guards continues in several locations. The free Vörösmarty Radio begins broadcasting in the town of Székesfehérvár. The Transdanubian National Council forms in Győr. A communist "officers' brigade" is set up in Salgótarján.

October 30: The International Red Cross begins relief flights of aid to Budapest. The air bridge operates until the onset of the second Soviet occupation.

October 30: Hard-liners in Moscow are temporarily pushed into the background at a meeting of the CPSU Presidium. The leadership approves a remarkable document, published the next day in *Pravda*, declaring Moscow's intent to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of its Warsaw Pact allies, including Hungary. The prospects for a peaceful settlement of the Hungarian crisis are at their strongest at this point.

October 30: The U.N. Security Council convenes to debate the unfolding Suez crisis.

October 30: Demonstrations and rallies take place throughout Poland in support of the Hungarian revolution.

October 30: A rally of about 2,500 students at Timișoara, Romania, Technical University is dispersed by the Securitate, Romania's secret police. Protests continue the next day, and almost 3,000 students are arrested in the two-day period.

October 30: Austria seals its borders. Only relief supplies and journalists are allowed to pass into Hungary.

October 31, 6:00 a.m.: A procession consisting of soldiers from Rétság and armed rebels from Újpest escorts Cardinal Mindszenty from Rétság, arriving at Buda Castle at 9:00 a.m.

October 31: The Revolutionary National Defense Commission (FHB) is formed at the Defense Ministry.

October 31: Béla Király is appointed commander-in-chief of the national guard and military commander of Budapest. Pál Maléter is named first deputy to the defense minister, and István Kovács chief of staff. The Revolutionary Committee of the Armed Forces (FKB), overseeing the national guard, is established at the Kilián Barracks (8th District).

October 31, about noon: The withdrawal of Soviet forces from Budapest is completed.

October 31: The HWP Presidium declares the party dissolved. A new party, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP), is founded.

October 31: The Christian Democratic People's Party and the Hungarian Peasants' Association are re-established. The National Peasant Party (NPP) is also recreated under the name "Petőfi Party," after the heads of the party reject the leadership of Ferenc Erdei who re-organized the NPP at a meeting the day before.

October 31: A delegation of the Transdanubian National Council negotiates with Imre Nagy and Zoltán Tildy.

October 31: Free Csokonai Radio and Free Debrecen Radio begin broadcasting.

October 31: During the night, additional Soviet troops enter Hungary.

October 31: *Pravda* publishes an extraordinary Kremlin declaration on relations with Eastern Europe on the basis of mutual equality, respect and noninterference. The publication is taken by many, including the U.S. government, as a sign that the Hungarian crisis will be resolved peacefully.

October 31: Notwithstanding the declaration just published in *Pravda*, the CPSU Presidium reverses its position and agrees to a proposal by Khrushchev to intervene militarily in Hungary.

October 31: In Washington, President Eisenhower delivers an address over radio and television expressing his admiration for the Hungarian people. At the same time, he assures the Soviet Union that the United States does not view either the new Polish or the new Hungarian leaderships as potential allies.

October 31: Student demonstrations supporting the Hungarian revolution take place in several Transylvanian cities of Romania.

November 1, 7:30 a.m.: Soviet troops surround Budapest's Ferihegy Airport along with virtually every other Hungarian airfield in the country.

November 1: The Nagy government files a protest with Soviet Ambassador Yuri Andropov at the arrival of new Soviet troops in the country and the encircling of Budapest. The Budapest Armed Forces Command draws up a defense system for the city. Nagy dismisses the idea of leaving the capital for his own safety.

November 1: After Andropov fails to satisfy Hungarian concerns about Moscow's intentions, the government announces Hungary's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact, declares the country's neutrality, and appeals to the United Nations for help. It calls on the four great powers to help defend the country's neutrality.

November 1: At a meeting of the National Security Council, U.S. officials celebrate the apparent turn of events in Hungary as reflected in the Kremlin's declaration published in *Pravda* the previous day. Unaware that the Kremlin has already decided to intervene, CIA Director Allen Dulles calls the rebels' seeming victory a "miracle."

November 1: The Capital City National Committee, the Democratic People's Party, the Christian Hungarian Party, the Christian Front, the National Association of Former Political Prisoners (POFOSZ) and the Hungarian Scouts Association, all organizations whose existence would not have been tolerated under the previous regime, are established.

November 1, 7:50 p.m.: Nagy announces Hungary's neutrality on the radio. The government forbids Hungarian military units from resisting the Soviet troops.

November 1, about 10:00 p.m.: Hungarian radio broadcasts a speech by János Kádár. However, by the time it is broadcast, Kádár is no longer in the country. He and Ferenc Münnich have left Budapest for secret consultations in Moscow which eventually lead to their return at the head of a Soviet-backed regime.

November 1: At night, Soviet troops surrounding Budapest begin to reconnoiter the city.

November 1: Soldiers change sides during a demonstration in Kaposvár and six officers are arrested.

November 1: Khrushchev tells a Polish delegation led by Gomułka at a meeting in Brest that Soviet intervention in Hungary is imminent.

November 1: Demonstrations continue in Romania as students demand democratic rights and full freedom of study. Emergency measures are introduced throughout the country, especially in areas with large Hungarian communities.

November 1: The Yugoslav army is placed on full alert and begins to advance towards the Hungarian border.

November 2, 9:00 a.m.: The Hungarian cabinet meets. Government delegations are appointed to negotiate with the Soviet Union and to travel to the U.N. General Assembly, which is set to convene on November 12.

November 2: Revolutionary and workers' councils decide on a countrywide basis to return to work on Monday, November 5.

November 2: Soviet forces establish their Hungarian headquarters in Szolnok. Marshal Ivan Konev, commander-in-chief of Warsaw Pact forces, arrives from Moscow to take command.

November 2: János Kádár arrives in Moscow and, along with Ferenc Münnich and István Bata, attends an expanded meeting of the CPSU Presidium.

November 2: Khrushchev and Malenkov meet with Romanian and Czechoslovak leaders in Bucharest, then with the Bulgarian leadership in Sofia to brief them on the impending invasion.

November 2, 7:00 p.m.: Khrushchev and Malenkov begin talks with Tito on the Yugoslav island of Brioni. They succeed in persuading Tito to support the invasion.

November 3: The National Government in Hungary is reshuffled.

November 3: At a press conference, Cardinal József Mindszenty calls for political and economic aid from the Western nations, especially the great powers.

November 3, noon: Hungarian-Soviet negotiations on details of the troop withdrawals begin at the Parliament building. The Soviets promise to halt the occupation. Additional Hungarian units occupy defensive positions around the capital.

November 3: The Petőfi Circle is revived.

November 3, 10:00 p.m.: After Hungarian-Soviet military negotiations move to Tököl, outside Budapest, Soviet secret police forces headed by General Ivan Serov arrest the Hungarian delegation.

November 3: Soviet forces surround Debrecen and Győr, occupy Záhony railway station on the Soviet border and close the frontier with Austria.

November 3: The CPSU Presidium works out the details of forming a counter-government headed by János Kádár and Ferenc Münnich.

November 3: The U.N. Security Council continues its debate on the Hungarian situation. U.S. representative Henry Cabot Lodge introduces a resolution calling on the Soviet Union to withdraw its troops from Hungary. But, in accordance with American delaying tactics, it is not put up for vote. The session is adjourned until November 5.

November 4, dawn: Soviet troops cross the Hungarian border from Romania. From Uzhgorod (Soviet Union), Kádár's pre-recorded proclamation is broadcast on behalf of the Soviet-sponsored "Hungarian Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government."

November 4, 4:15 a.m.: Soviet troops launch a general attack. Five divisions under the command of Soviet Major General K. Grebennik move on Budapest. Nagy does not issue an order to resist, yet national guard units and others put up a considerable fight. Heavy casualties are sustained on both sides as the Red Army advances through the country.

November 4, 5:20 a.m.: Nagy broadcasts a short declaration informing the world about the Soviet intervention. It is repeated several times in English, French, German, Russian, Czech and Polish.

November 4, 6:00–8:00 a.m.: Communist members of the Nagy government take refuge in the Yugoslav Embassy. Cardinal Mindszenty is given asylum in the U.S. Legation. István Bibó is the only member of the Hungarian government remaining in the Parliament building. The Soviets occupy the Defense and Interior ministries and surround the Parliament building.

November 4, 7:00–8:00 a.m.: National guard units in the Jutadomb area force the Soviet convoy carrying the captured Hungarian negotiators to turn back.

November 4, 7:57 a.m.: An appeal for assistance by the Writers' Union is broadcast in Hungarian, English, German and Russian.

November 4: János Kádár and Ferenc Münnich are flown from Moscow to Szolnok by military aircraft.

November 4: A meeting of the U.N. Security Council is called in response to news of the Soviet intervention. Through a “uniting for peace” procedure the Hungarian issue is transferred to the Emergency Special Session of the General Assembly, convening the same day. The UNGA adopts a U.S.-sponsored resolution condemning the intervention.

November 5: Soviet forces occupy the Radio building. Resistance continues in Thököly road (14th District), Zalka Máté square, Liget square, 10th (District), around Lehel road (13th District), and in the 9th, 13th and 21st districts. A Soviet attack on Corvin Passage begins at 1:00 p.m.

November 5: There is fighting in the towns of Pécs, Komló, and Veszprém. The Rákóczi free radio station begins broadcasting from Dunapentele (Sztálinváros, Dunaújváros). The Soviets enter Tatabánya.

November 5: The Moscow-supported Hungarian Revolutionary Workers’ and Peasants’ Government in Szolnok appeals for help from other socialist countries. The Soviet Union sends a message offering help.

November 5: Several thousand demonstrators in Krakow, Poland, protest the Soviet intervention.

November 6: The Soviets break the resistance in Széna square (2nd District), Gellérthegy (1st and 11th districts) and Óbuda (3rd District). Almost 300 members of the Corvin Passage group set out toward the Austrian border. The strength of the Hungarian resistance decreases sharply, although rebels in Móricz Zsigmond square (11th District) and Thököly road (14th District) continue to defend their positions as do several hundred resisters in the Buda Castle district, armed with heavy weapons. A Soviet plane is shot down over Csepel (21st District). The Soviets, at negotiations held at the Kossuth Academy, demand unconditional surrender, which the national guard refuses to accept.

November 6: Soviet troops in the Mecsek Hills attack the rearguard of the national guard retreating to Vágot-puszta (Mecsek Hills).

November 6: A Soviet armored convoy carrying János Kádár leaves Szolnok for Budapest in the late evening.

November 7: Soviet armored vehicles carrying Kádár and several members of his government arrive at Parliament. The Kádár government takes the oath of office in the afternoon even though the Nagy government has not resigned. The Kádár government restores the state administrative apparatus that existed before the reforms which began on October 23 and bans the new revolutionary committees. At the same time, Kádár takes several steps designed to appease Hungarians, such as declaring November 7, the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, a working day, lifting the requirement to teach Russian in schools and confirming the disbanding of the ÁVH.

November 7: Some 300 national guards in the Buda Castle district retreat into the National Archives building. The Soviets attack them with tanks and heavy artillery. Red Army forces continue to battle other pockets of resistance in the city and countryside.

November 8: Resistance ends at the Schmidt Mansion in Óbuda (3rd District), in Kőbánya (10th District) and in Thököly road (14th District). Soviet tanks enter Csepel (21st District). Elsewhere in Hungary, the Red Army continues to overwhelm rebel forces.

November 8: In New York, the 2nd Special Session of the U.N. General Assembly continues its debate on the Hungarian question.

November 9: Kádár’s Presidential Council declares the Hungarian Revolutionary Workers’ and Peasants’ Government to be the highest organ of state administration.

November 9: The Kádár government begins organization of the National Armed Force. An Officer’s Declaration is published requiring unconditional support for the Kádár government.

November 9: Sporadic fighting continues in Széna square (2nd District) and Vajdahunyad street (8th District). The Soviets launch a general offensive to recapture Csepel (21st District), with fighter planes and heavy artillery keeping up a steady bombardment.

November 9: Soviet artillery bombards the rebel headquarters in the Mecsek Hills while armored troops fire on revolutionaries fleeing from Budapest towards Austria. Béla Király and the remnants of the national guard prepare to defend themselves at Nagykovácsi.

November 9: The Soviets inform Kádár that Nagy and his associates, who have taken refuge in the Yugoslav Embassy, may not leave for Yugoslavia as the Nagy group had hoped to do.

November 9: The 2nd Emergency Special Session of the U.N. General Assembly passes a further resolution on the situation in Hungary.

November 10: The Kádár government announces pay raises of 8–15 per cent and abolishes the tax on childless adults. The First Special Forces Officers Regiment begins operations.

November 10: Nagy informs Yugoslav Ambassador Dalibor Soldatić by letter that he is not willing to resign as prime minister.

November 10: Sporadic fighting continues in Budapest while the Soviet attack forces the Mecsek rebels to fall back into the Eastern Mecsek Hills.

November 10: The International Red Cross resumes aid shipments.

November 10: Polish journalists posted in Budapest are expelled.

November 10: Members of the Békés County Revolutionary Council are arrested, provoking a strike in the Békéscsaba factories. The national guard in Sátoraljaújhely lays down its arms. The Soviets attack the national guard units commanded by Béla Király at Nagykovácsi. After brief resistance, the rebels retreat westward.

November 10: The Kádár government accepts a U.N. offer of aid. A Swiss government proposal calls for a conference of the four great powers and India.

November 10: The Yugoslav government confirms the right of Nagy and his associates to claim asylum, a matter that increasingly aggravates Moscow's relations with Belgrade.

November 11: The Provisional Executive Committee of the HSWP hears a report from Kádár on his activity during the revolution. Later, he delivers his first radio address since November 4.

November 11: Delegates of the factories and mines in Baranya County endorse a statement condemning the Kádár government and demanding the withdrawal of the Soviet forces.

November 11: Tito, in an unusually forthright speech to party workers in the town of Pula, describes the events in Hungary as counter-revolutionary and justifies the Soviet intervention by pointing to the danger posed to socialism. On the other hand, he also asserts that Hungarian popular animosity toward the Rákosi regime and "Stalinist methods and practice" was an understandable sentiment. The speech further complicates relations with Khrushchev.

November 12: The Kádár government continues to consolidate its position. The official party organ publishes a decree by the Presidential Council dismissing the Nagy government and recognizing the make-up of the Kádár government. Kádár also criticizes the U.N.'s resolutions on Hungary as interference in the country's internal affairs. Meanwhile, various social groups, among them the Writers' Union and the Újpest Revolutionary Workers Council, continue to press their demands and appeals to the population.

November 12: The 11th session of the U.N. General Assembly places the Hungarian question on its agenda. The debate begins on January 9, 1957.

November 13: The Kádár government issues an order permitting the workers' councils to operate. The underground Hungarian Democratic Independence Movement (MDFM) is established. The planned creation of a centralized workers' council is postponed because Soviet tanks block the entrance to the meeting at the Újpest town hall.

November 13: The Soviets capture several rebels in the Mecsek Hills. Workers' councils form in the Oroszlány and Tatabánya coal mines. Rebels blow up the railway line between Dorog and Leányvár.

November 14: The Greater Budapest Central Workers' Council (KMT) is established at a rally at the United Incandescent Lamp Factory (Egyesült Izzó). The same evening, a KMT delegation negotiates with leaders of the Kádár government in Parliament.

November 14: Eisenhower refers briefly to the Hungarian question at a press conference, saying the U.S. would do nothing to encourage the Hungarians to continue to fight.

November 15: The KMT elects Sándor Rácz as its chairman. Further talks between the KMT and the Kádár government take place in Parliament overnight.

November 15: The Hungarian Democratic Independence Movement issues its “Ten Commandments for Hungarian Rebirth” and launches an illegal paper, *Október Huszonharmadika* (“October 23”).

November 15: The Csepel workers’ council calls for a return to work, responding to Kádár’s appeals for a return to normalcy. A few other councils and workers’ groups also decide to resume production.

November 15: A Polish party and government delegation in Moscow wins important concessions in favor of greater freedom from Moscow’s tutelage.

November 16: Kádár, at a secret meeting, agrees with Moscow that the Nagy group should be deported to Romania instead of being allowed to travel to Yugoslavia.

November 16: István Angyal, leader of the Tűzoltó street rebels, is arrested. A journalists’ strike begins in Budapest.

November 16: The KMT issues an appeal for a return to work while reserving the right to strike. Meanwhile, the KMT delegation has further negotiations with Kádár.

November 16: The Mecsek rebels manage to break through the Soviet encirclement unobserved.

November 16: The U.N. secretary-general appoints a committee to investigate the Hungarian situation.

November 17: Kádár calls on the Yugoslavs to hand over Nagy and his associates to the new government.

November 17: The central party daily *Népszabadság* (“People’s Freedom”) goes to press despite the journalists’ strike.

November 18: The Yugoslav leadership insists on honoring the guarantee of asylum given to Nagy and his group, but registers no objection to their leaving for Romania.

November 18: The Kádár government issues a statement denying that mass arrests and deportations have taken place.

November 19: Nagy and his associates declare that they do not want to leave the country.

November 19: Organizations still loyal to the revolution—the KMT, Peasants’ Association, National Union of Hungarian Journalists (MUOSZ), Revolutionary Committee of the Hungarian Intelligentsia, Hungarian Union of Fine and Applied Artists, Hungarian Musicians’ Union and Writers’ Union—address a letter to Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. They call on him to intervene on Hungary’s behalf.

November 19: The KMT issues a call for the establishment of a National Workers’ Council. Work resumes at most factories.

November 19: János Szabó, commander of the Széna square rebels, is arrested.

November 19: A number of Hungarians who have been deported to the Soviet Union are handed over to the Hungarian authorities.

November 19: *Pravda*, commenting on Tito’s November 11 speech in Pula, accuses the Yugoslav president of intervening in Hungary’s internal affairs.

November 19: The U.N. General Assembly again debates the Hungarian question on November 19 and 20.

November 20: The armed resistance in the Mecsek Hills comes to an end.

November 20: An East German delegation holds talks in Budapest on providing assistance to the country.

November 20: Officers who have not signed the Officer’s Declaration are discharged.

November 21: The Kádár government gives a written guarantee to Yugoslavia that Nagy and his associates will not be prosecuted.

November 21: An attempt to form a National Workers’ Council fails when Soviet tanks surround the National Sports Hall, where the rally was to be held. The KMT calls a 48-hour protest strike.

November 21: After a three-day debate, the U.N. General Assembly passes several resolutions on the Hungarian question. Three minutes' silence is observed in Switzerland to commemorate the Hungarian independence struggle.

November 22: Nagy and his associates leave the Yugoslav Embassy with assurances of safe conduct from the Yugoslavs. However, as soon as the group boards a bus outside the Embassy, Soviet security officers arrest them and take them to KGB headquarters in Mátyásföld (16th District). From there they are flown secretly to Romania the following day. The abduction apparently catches Yugoslav officials unaware.

November 22: Talks between a KMT delegation and Kádár take place at night.

November 23: Nagy, his associates and their families are taken from Bucharest Airport to Snagov, Romania.

November 23: Yugoslavia files a diplomatic protest at the abduction of the Nagy group.

November 23: The Kádár government recognizes the KMT as a negotiating partner. The KMT calls for a return to work. After an appeal by the Revolutionary Council of the Hungarian Intelligentsia and the KMT to commemorate the revolution, traffic in Budapest comes to a halt between 2:00–3:00 p.m.

November 24: The Nagy issue continues to demand the Kádár government's attention. An official Hungarian communiqué is issued on the departure of Nagy and his group. Two days later, Kádár delivers a major radio address but then makes no further official mention of the matter for the next 18 months.

November 24: Government commissioners are appointed to oversee operations at the country's larger factories.

November 24: Poland sends Hungary aid worth 100 million zlotys.

November 29: Reflecting ongoing domestic political instability, the All-University Revolutionary Committee and the Central Workers' Council of the Csepel Iron and Metal Works are established, and more than 300 miners at Pécsbányatelep go on strike.

November 29: West Germany sends Hungary food and medical aid worth 10 million marks.

November 30: The Soviets call upon Kádár to begin reprisals, naming at least six revolutionaries (József Dudás and János Szabó, for example) whom they believe should be executed immediately.

November 30: The KMT issues a call for readers to boycott the HSWP newspapers until the KMT receives a press permit. The public-supplies commissioner lifts the ban on alcohol sales.

December 1: The Kádár government publishes a decree granting a general pardon to everyone who has emigrated illegally since October 23.

December 1: A security-force regiment of 2,000 is formed under the Ministry of the Interior.

December 1: A strike by miners in Pécsbányatelep ends without result but work stoppages by miners in Tatabánya and Salgótarján continue.

December 2: A crucial three-day meeting of the Provisional Central Committee of the HSWP begins. The events of October are described as counterrevolutionary, setting the stage for reprisals against participants in the uprising.

December 4: Several thousand women march to Hősök tere (Heroes' Square, 14th District), where they place flowers on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and display the flag of the revolution. There is also a demonstration in Szabadság square (5th District), in front of the U.S. Legation.

December 5: The U.N. General Assembly passes a resolution on sending observers to Hungary.

December 5: The Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party announces that proceedings have started in 674 cases linked with the events in Hungary.

December 5, evening: About 200 members of the intelligentsia and of workers' councils are arrested. The first volume of the 'White Book' (The Counter-revolutionary Forces in the October events in Hungary) appears.

December 6: A KMT memorandum states that its negotiations with the government have failed because of government inflexibility. The KMT protests the successive arrests of leaders of the workers' councils. It calls a national meeting to establish a national workers' council.

December 6: The government organizes communist rallies in several locations in Budapest. Workers at the end of their shifts attack communists carrying red flags. Crowds hurling stones at the demonstrators are dispersed by security forces and the Soviets. Gunfire is exchanged near November 7 square (Óktogon), and security men fire into a crowd of workers by the Western Railway Station.

December 6: There are demonstrations in Békéscsaba, Gyula, Tatabánya and Sarkad. A strike breaks out in Békéscsaba the next day to protest the arrests. Coal miners in Nógrád County also go on strike after workers' leaders in the county are arrested.

December 7: The KMT sends a letter to the Soviet premier proposing direct relations between the KMT and the Soviet government.

December 7: Kádár receives Yugoslav Ambassador Dalibor Soldatić and holds out the prospect of settling the Nagy affair peacefully.

December 7: Demonstrations take place around the country.

December 7: The 14th Summer Olympics in Melbourne close. A highlight of the games occurred when Hungary's water polo team defeated the Soviets on its way to winning the gold medal. Many Hungarian athletes refuse to return home after the games.

December 8: In the town of Salgótarján, Soviet and Hungarian security forces open fire on a crowd of demonstrators. The massacre, which lasts for 8–10 minutes, leaves 52 dead and about 150 wounded. The shooting convinces the KMT to call a 48-hour strike.

December 9: The government outlaws the territorial workers' councils, including the KMT. The workers' council delegates assembled at the headquarters of the building trade union in Budapest are arrested. KMT representatives personally deliver the call for a strike to the major provincial centers.

December 9: Demonstrations and protests take place in a number of towns over the next two days. Numerous arrests are made. Security officials murder two national guard leaders in Salgótarján; several demonstrators are killed in confrontations with Soviet forces in the country.

December 11: The 48-hour strike called for by the KMT begins, halting production, rail traffic and public transport throughout the country. The central workers' council at the Csepel Iron and Metal Works comes out against the strike again, but all factories stop work nonetheless. In response, the Kádár government declares a state of emergency—martial law—and orders the disarming of factory guards. KMT leaders Sándor Bali and Sándor Rácz are arrested at the Parliament building.

December 11: The Hungarian U.N. delegation walks out of the General Assembly following attacks against the Kádár government.

December 12: Hungarian internment camps are reopened. Security forces continue to disperse demonstrations by force.

December 12: The U.N. General Assembly passes a further resolution condemning the Soviet intervention.

December 14: The CPSU passes a resolution on sending Soviet advisers to Hungary.

December 15: József Soltész is executed in Miskolc. It is the first execution of a participant in the revolution.

December 24: In an attempt to win over public opinion, the Christmas issue of *Népszabadság* publishes articles on religious subjects. Authorities lift the curfew to allow worshippers to attend midnight mass.

December 28: A members' meeting of the Writers' Union accepts Áron Tamási's piece "Sorrow and Confession" as a statement of principle, upholding the cause of the revolution.

December 30: A decree of the Presidential Council transfers the duties of the reviled ÁVH to a department of the police.

1957

January 1–4: Soviet, Bulgarian, Czechoslovak, Romanian and Hungarian leaders meet in Budapest. They discuss the draft of a forthcoming Hungarian government declaration that includes the prospect of multi-party elections; they also talk about Nagy's role and its "legal consequences."

January 4–7: The deputy secretary-general of the United Nations holds talks in Budapest on aid for Hungary.

January 5: The government sanctions the death penalty for anyone refusing to return to work.

January 5–7: The emigré Hungarian Revolutionary Council holds its founding meeting in Strasbourg.

January 6: The Kádár government publishes its program, "Statement of the Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government on the Main Tasks."

January 7–11: Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai visits Moscow. He calls for strong reprisals against participants in the Hungarian uprising.

January 10: A Special Committee on Hungary is established by the U.N. General Assembly consisting of the representatives of Australia, Ceylon, Denmark, Tunisia and Uruguay.

January 12: An order is issued introducing accelerated criminal proceedings. A state of emergency, hitherto mainly applied to armed actions, is extended to the act of instigating strikes in factories employing more than 100 workers.

January 17: The interior minister suspends the activities of the Writers' Union. Shortly afterwards, all arts associations are placed under the ministry's supervision.

January 19: József Dudás and János Szabó are executed.

February 2: Kádár, speaking in Salgótarján, accuses Nagy of fomenting a counter-revolutionary uprising and calls him a traitor. The secure border zone along the Yugoslav frontier is restored.

February 18: A legal decree is issued establishing the Workers' Militia.

March and April: Nagy's book, *On Communism: In Defense of the New Course*, appears in Western countries.

March 15: Security forces assert control over Budapest and other larger cities on the anniversary of the 1848 Hungarian Revolution. In Romania by this time, more than 20 prisoners are executed and several hundred arrests are made in connection with the Hungarian uprising. The first issue of the exile publication *Irodalmi Újság* ("Literary Gazette") appears in London.

March 21–28: A Hungarian delegation headed by János Kádár visits Moscow. This is the first official visit abroad by representatives of the Revolutionary Workers and Peasants Government.

April 5: Kádár writes to the Yugoslav government requesting that the "right of asylum" accorded in November to Nagy and his associates be formally annulled.

April 6: The People's Tribunal Council of the Supreme Court is established. It serves on the one hand as the general court of appeals for legal proceedings connected to the retaliation, while on the other hand it acts as the court of first instance for especially important cases, without the possibility of further appeal. The people's tribunals together with the Act of People's Jurisdiction become the primary mechanisms for the legal reprisals that followed the revolution.

April 13: The curfew in force in Budapest for the last six months is lifted.

April 14: Members of the Nagy group who have been arrested are brought back to Budapest from Romania.

April 21: The interior minister dissolves the Writers' Union.

May 1: On the traditional May Day holiday, a mass demonstration of 100,000 is organized at Budapest's Heroes' Square in support of the Kádár government.

May 1: Work begins on installation of the first landmine barrier along the Hungary-Austria border.

May 7: A hunger strike breaks out in the Hungarian refugee camp in Austria after emigration to the United States is halted. Some 100–120 Hungarian students demonstrate in front of the U.S. Embassy in Vienna calling for emigration to be permitted again.

May 9: Parliament meets for the first time since August 3, 1956. The Kossuth coat of arms is replaced by a design for the People's Republic, known as the Kádár coat of arms.

May 23: István Bibó and Zoltán Tildy are arrested.

May 27: An agreement normalizing the legal position of Soviet troops stationed in Hungary is signed in Budapest.

May 28: The interior minister orders a political purge of the police force. Some 25–30 per cent of the force is dismissed.

May 30: The Kádár government calls on the International Committee of the Red Cross to cease its activities in Hungary by June 30.

June 20: The U.N. Special Committee submits its report on Hungary. The document becomes a best-seller in the United States. The Kádár government describes it as interference in Hungary's internal affairs. In September, the U.N. General Assembly formally adopts the report.

October 22: The Hungarian Freedom Association, the Hungarian Writers' Union Abroad, the Social Democratic Party, the Free Hungarian Trade Unions and the British Association of Hungarian University Students hold a ceremony on the eve of the first anniversary of the revolution.

October 23: The Hungarian public commemorates the first anniversary of the revolution in various ways, but no large-scale incidents occur. Nevertheless, several hundred people are arrested. Commemorations also are held throughout the West.

November 3: The system of summary justice is abolished in Hungary.

November 17: Hungarian authorities abolish the factory workers' councils.

December 21: Géza Losonczy dies in the prison.

December 30: László Iván Kovács is executed.

1958

February 5–6: After numerous delays to spare Hungary and the Soviets international embarrassment, the secret trial of Nagy and his associates begins—only to be suspended after two days again at Moscow's request.

April: The Soviet Union introduces economic sanctions against Yugoslavia.

April 2–10: Khrushchev leads a Soviet delegation to Hungary.

April 24: József Szilágyi is executed.

May 24: Khrushchev receives Kádár in Moscow. Sizable cuts are made in the level of Soviet forces stationed in the occupied countries. Kádár opposes this. (Soviet forces are withdrawn from Romania permanently.)

June 9–15: After further delays, the secret trial of Nagy and associates continues. Nagy, Miklós Gimes and Pál Maléter are sentenced to death, Sándor Kopácsi to life imprisonment, Ferenc Donáth to 12 years imprisonment, Ferenc Jánosi to eight years, Zoltán Tildy to six years and Miklós Vásárhelyi to five years.

June 16: Nagy, Gimes and Maléter are executed at the Budapest National Prison. They are buried in anonymous graves.

June 17: The verdicts in the Nagy trial are published. News of the executions provokes protests in several Western countries.

September: The remaining members of the Nagy group, who were never formally arrested, return with their families from Romania.

October 23: Commemorations of the Hungarian revolution are held worldwide.

November 16: The first parliamentary elections since the revolution are held.

December 1: István Angyal is executed.

December 11: The U.N. General Assembly again places the Hungarian question on its agenda. The United States resolves to keep the matter alive until 1962 when Washington finally agrees to drop it following secret negotiations with the Kádár regime.

1959

April 4: A partial amnesty is declared for those serving sentences of less than two years

1960

April 1: A further partial amnesty is declared.

1961

August 26: The Baross square rebels are the last people to be executed for acts committed during the 1956 revolution.

1962

October 20: It is agreed at secret Hungarian-U.S. talks to drop the Hungarian question from the UN agenda in return for a general amnesty for most of those being punished for revolutionary activities in 1956.

December 18: The United States proposes at the U.N. General Assembly that the Hungarian question be dropped from the agenda. The proposal is accepted on December 20.

1963

March 21: Kádár, addressing the opening session of the new Parliament, announces a general amnesty for most of those remaining in prison for their actions during the revolution.

PART ONE

HUNGARY BEFORE THE REVOLUTION

INTRODUCTION

By summer 1952, Hungarian communism had reached a state of crisis. Since the introduction of Stalinist rule just three years earlier, societal pressures had been building steadily under the combined weight of imposed economic rigidity and political excesses in the form of purges, show trials, and other extreme methods of control. The first cases of mass resistance against the system came in the critical agricultural sphere where peasants refused to go along with compulsory agricultural quotas and grain threshers went on strike leading to outbreaks of violence between farmers and local authorities.

Hungarian communist party leader Mátyás Rákosi's instinct for dealing with the crisis was, as always, to imitate his benefactor, Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin. Just as Stalin was then in the midst of his final campaign of political vengeance at home, Rákosi decided to turn the system's repressive apparatus against his own colleagues in the leadership. At the beginning of January 1953, he ordered the arrest of Gábor Péter, head of the State Security Authority (ÁVH), and several other ÁVH officers, as well as a number of leading party functionaries. He sacked two other members of the top-level Hungarian Workers' Party (HWP) Political Committee, István Kovács and Zoltán Vas, and exiled them to the provinces. Their Jewish background suggested the influence of Stalin's own "anti-Zionist" purges. Far from being resolved, then, the crisis that had been bubbling up from below for months was now beginning to take its toll on the leadership. This was the state of affairs when news of Stalin's death arrived on March 5, 1953.

Soviet Policy after Stalin

After the dictator's passing, the new Soviet leadership tried to make significant changes in both the domestic life and foreign policy of the empire. In the late 1940s, the Soviet Union, whose economy had still not recovered from the trauma of World War II, had begun spending heavily in order to keep pace in the budding arms race with the United States. Following the pattern set in the 1930s, Moscow had planned to generate the capital for weapons production by diverting extensive resources from the agricultural and consumer goods sectors of the economy. But the new Kremlin leaders, especially during the premiership of Georgii Malenkov (1953-1955), were sensitive to potential domestic unrest and chose instead to create a more balanced economic structure featuring less emphasis on heavy industry, particularly arms production. However, any cuts in weapons expenditures could only come in the context of a general improvement in East-West relations, which until then had been based mainly on mutual fears of direct confrontation.

As a result, beginning in 1953 Soviet foreign policy adopted a much more flexible stance, exhibiting a willingness to negotiate and compromise with the Western powers for the first time since the closing stages of World War II. This change in Soviet behavior ultimately opened the way to the end of the Korean War and led to such a significant reduction in East-West tensions that the mid-1950s are justifiably referred to as the first period of *détente*.

A distinctive feature of the new Soviet foreign policy between 1953 and 1956 was its emphasis on creating a rapprochement with the West, particularly Britain, France and the United States. During Stalin's rule, the West lived in constant fear of the possibility of a Soviet attack. After 1953, however, the Kremlin's new tack, based on growing parity in the balance of power and mutual respect for the post-World War II status quo, gave rise to a greater sense of security in Western Europe. Yet, even under Stalin, Moscow had never had any serious intention of altering the European status quo. The Soviets respected the Allies' spheres of influence even during

the chilliest years of the Cold War, but their increased penchant for negotiations stemmed mostly from a sense of vulnerability in the military balance, despite having the hydrogen bomb.¹ The Soviet shift to a more conciliatory international policy also had another, more concrete motivation: preventing West German rearmament by creating divisions within the Western alliance.

During this period the Soviets clearly set the limits of the compromises they were willing to make in negotiating with the West, and it was soon obvious that they were most ready to discuss the very issues over which the Western powers were split. Resolving the question of German reunification, for example, was unworkable because the Soviet and Western positions were irreconcilable. When West Germany joined NATO in 1955, the matter was finally taken off the agenda for an extended period. But the signing of the Austrian State Treaty that same year showed that the Soviet leadership was willing to bargain with the West. In exchange for a pledge to withdraw its troops from the country, the Kremlin got the Western powers to agree to Austria's permanent neutrality and to allow the East European countries that were not already members of the United Nations to join the world organization. However, one issue Moscow never considered to be negotiable was the status of the satellite countries; after resolution of the Austrian question removed the legal basis for stationing troops in Hungary and Romania, the USSR moved to tighten its grip on the region by creating a communist bloc military alliance, the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO), just one day before the Austrian treaty's signing.²

Western Attitudes toward Eastern Europe

Meanwhile, the policy of the first Eisenhower administration (1953–1957) toward East-Central Europe featured a peculiar duality.³ President Dwight Eisenhower and especially his soon-to-be secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, had made the peaceful “liberation” of the region a major part of their election platform, firmly believing that the Truman administration's containment policy had been ineffective and that only a more aggressive posture would force the USSR to surrender Eastern Europe. This led the new administration to spend considerable sums to support clandestine radio stations and other semi-official entities, as well as various underground Eastern European émigré organizations. References to the liberation of captive nations were, until October 1956, a staple of most high-level administration pronouncements, which Radio Free Europe, Voice of America, and other propaganda organizations faithfully transmitted to Eastern Europe. Other activities included such spectacular ploys as launching balloons to distribute printed materials to the populations behind the Iron Curtain (Document No. 6). But despite the rhetoric and the unceasing barrage of propaganda aimed at Eastern Europe, there was never much likelihood that the West could unilaterally effect serious change.

In fact, by the time of the 1953 East German uprising, the Eisenhower administration had already recognized that the United States could not dramatically “roll back” Soviet influence except

¹ The USSR would not acquire a reliable intercontinental ballistic missile capability that could threaten North America until the end of the 1950s.

² The Warsaw Pact was established on May 14, 1955, while the Austrian State Treaty was signed on May 15. For recent multi-archival research on the establishment and the early period of the Warsaw Pact, see Vojtech Mastny, “We are in a Bind”: Polish and Czechoslovak Attempts at Reforming the Warsaw Pact,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, no. 11 (Winter 1998): 230–250.

³ For important accounts of Eisenhower administration policy vis-a-vis Eastern Europe, see Bennett Kovrig, *The Myth of Liberation: East-Central Europe in U.S. Diplomacy and Politics since 1941* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973); Bennett Kovrig, *Of Walls and Bridges: The United States and Eastern Europe* (New York: New York University Press, 1991); Richard H. Immerman, ed., *John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990); James David Marchio, *Rhetoric and Reality: The Eisenhower Administration and Unrest in Eastern Europe, 1953–1959*, (Ph.D. dissertation, The American University, 1990), (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Dissertation Services, 1993); and László Borhi, “Az Egyesült Államok Kelet-Európa politikájának néhány kérdése, 1948–1956,” *Történelmi Szemle* 37, no. 3 (1995): 277–300.

through direct military action, an option the president himself ruled out early on because of the unacceptable risk of global war. By late 1953 then, the U.S. had quietly begun to aim only at gaining the “eventual” freedom of the satellites—adopting a more gradual, evolutionary program centering modestly around “sustaining their spirit of resistance to Soviet imperialism” (Document No. 3). Unfortunately, the effort to boost morale relied so heavily on a rhetorical campaign stressing the shrinking of Soviet power that it had the unintentional consequence of creating the illusion, not only in Eastern Europe and the United States but throughout the world, that the liberation of these nations remained a cornerstone of Eisenhower’s foreign policy and of East-West relations in general.

In reality, American foreign policy during this era was based on a clear recognition of the post-World War II European status quo and the prevailing balance of power with the Soviet Union. With Moscow’s acquisition of thermonuclear weapons, the U.S. was even more determined to avoid superpower conflict at all costs. By the mid-1950s, the Eisenhower administration’s attempt to find an acceptable *modus vivendi* with the USSR—on issues ranging from the Korean War to disarmament—would become part of the concept known as peaceful coexistence. One of its main features was the implicit acceptance of the Soviet Union, the world’s other superpower, as Washington’s principal negotiating partner on the world stage. For its part, Moscow had made it clear that it would not consider discussing the status of previously conquered territory such as Eastern Europe.

Thereafter, the West saw Eastern Europe as secondary to the larger imperatives of global security—entirely understandable from an international political perspective. Although they had not given up hope for the peoples of Eastern Europe, by the beginning of 1956 Western officials generally no longer expected any significant change in the status of the satellite states. Despite perceptible fractionalization within the Soviet bloc, reports on probable developments in these countries assumed Moscow’s continued ability to maintain control (Document No. 7). Moreover, the prospects for open resistance were minimal (Document No. 8). Therefore, West European experts, like their American counterparts, stressed the importance of evolutionary changes and concluded that, for the time being, the Yugoslav political model of “national communism” offered the best opportunity for these countries to gain any degree of internal or external autonomy (Document No. 17). This in no way implied abandoning the goal of gradually undermining communist rule, but the east bloc’s more moderate course did encourage some NATO circles to contemplate a somewhat more flexible approach toward Eastern Europe (Document No. 16).⁴

Soviet Goals Regarding the Satellites

One of the new Soviet leadership’s primary objectives after 1953 was to refurbish relations with Yugoslavia. The momentous Yugoslav-Soviet split of 1948 had created serious fissures in the socialist bloc, which Stalin’s successors tried steadily to repair. Finally, in May 1955, Nikita Khrushchev and Nikolai Bulganin traveled to Belgrade to try to make amends with President Josip Broz Tito, blaming Stalin’s policies for the deterioration in relations between the two countries and their ruling communist parties. Throughout 1955 and 1956, the Soviets made several conciliatory gestures toward Yugoslavia, such as giving public sanction to the notion that there could be more than one valid way to build socialism. In fact, Moscow was fundamentally unprepared to accept the Yugoslav model for its East European satellites (Document No. 14). The Kremlin’s real goal was to bring Yugoslavia amicably back into the socialist camp (i.e. under Soviet control) and, more specifically, to make it a member of the Warsaw Pact. Because of its significance for broader satellite policies, the Yugoslavia issue loomed as a constant challenge for the Soviet leadership throughout the period leading up to (and during) the Hungarian revolution.

⁴ For another example, see a report by the British NATO delegation to the Foreign Office on the October 24 meeting of the NATO Council, October 24, 1956, PRO FO, 371 122081 N 1059/9.

Within East-Central Europe, another overarching aim of Soviet foreign policy was simply to maintain stability. In spring 1953, the Kremlin faced the first serious post-Stalin challenge to its domination of the region in the form of mounting social unrest in East Germany. Alarmed at the GDR's decision to press ahead with the Stalinist pattern of "forced construction of socialism," the Soviets summoned top East German party officials to Moscow and instructed them to adopt more liberal political and economic policies. The short-lived "New Course," introduced in June, was marked not only by a reduction in heavy industrial production and a corresponding growth in the manufacture of consumer goods, but by a suspension of the collectivization of agriculture, an end to curbs on religious practices, reduced restrictions on travel abroad, and, for a short time, removal of the word "socialism" from the regime's propaganda vocabulary. Ironically, the New Course backfired. The sudden abandonment of much of the hard-line dogma that had been used to legitimize the regime, coupled with the GDR leaders' refusal to ease production quotas for workers, quickly led to an outbreak of strikes and riots in Berlin on June 17, which immediately spread to the rest of the country.⁵ The turmoil shocked the Kremlin and had a profound effect on Khrushchev's plans for intra-bloc reform.

Hungary was just as susceptible to the economic and social problems that flared up in East Germany. Through a network of Soviet "advisers" stationed at every level of Hungary's state administration, the Kremlin had been receiving bleak assessments of the situation since at least summer 1952. Shortly after their reprimand of the GDR's party leadership, the CPSU CC Presidium summoned top HWP representatives to the Kremlin from June 13–16 (on the eve of the East German unrest), to deliver the same stern message. At one point, secret police chief Lavrentii Beria⁶ told the Hungarians pointedly: "If the great Stalin made mistakes, comrade Rákosi can admit that he made mistakes too" (Document No. 1). The Soviet Communist Party (CPSU) Presidium's recommendations, dictated to the Hungarians at this meeting, were designed both to support a partial change in Moscow's own political line and to avert an imminent economic collapse in Hungary. Their intention was not so much to reform Hungary's socialist system as to prevent an incipient crisis from getting out of control, and to forestall any other developments that might interfere with larger foreign policy ambitions.

Imre Nagy and the New Course

By the spring of 1953, the Soviets could certainly cite some economic justifications for their concern. In its few years of rule since 1948, the HWP had brought Hungary to the brink of economic ruin. Reports reaching Moscow from various sources spoke of heightening tensions and a menacing level of discontent. Real income of wage-earners in 1953 had already fallen by 20 percent since 1949.

After his return to Hungary in mid-June, Rákosi reported to the HWP Secretariat on his instructions from Moscow. At a full meeting of the Central Committee on June 27–28, the leadership dutifully passed a detailed condemnation of past policies, including forced industrialization and the neglect, exploitation, and forcible collectivization of agriculture. These misguided policies, the CC obediently declared, had led to a steep decline in living standards. The leader-

⁵ For recent scholarship on the Berlin uprising, see the primary document compilation edited by Christian F. Ostermann, *Uprising in East Germany, 1953: The Cold War, the German Question, and the First Major Upheaval Behind the Iron Curtain* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2001), and id., *The United States, the East German Uprising of 1953, and the Limits of Rollback*, Cold War International History Project Working Paper, no. 11 (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1994); also James Richter, *Reexamining Soviet Policy during the Beria Interregnum*, Cold War International History Project Working Paper, no. 3 (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1992).

⁶ Lavrentii Beria was people's commissar for internal affairs, then minister of state security from 1938 to 1953, from which post he played the leading role in carrying out the Stalinist terror. Beginning in 1939, he was a candidate member, and later a full member of the CPSU Politburo and Presidium. He was arrested in 1953 and executed.

ship's mistakes—but especially the errors of the four figures at the head of the regime, Rákosi, Ernő Gerő, Mihály Farkas and József Révai—had been compounded by a campaign against society itself through the use of arbitrary administrative methods and mass terror. The whole country, including the ruling party, according to the CC resolution, had in effect been left at the mercy of a handful of men (Document No. 2).

Rákosi, until then the country's undisputed leader, responded in Hungary as he had in Moscow, by going through the Bolshevik ritual of self-criticism and confessing his mistakes—or at least some of them. Far from conceding defeat, however, he did his utmost to restore his authority and resuscitate his discredited policies. He was powerless to alter the Central Committee resolution—which would have amounted to open opposition to Moscow—but he managed at least to prevent its publication in the party-controlled press. Instead, the text informing the party of his errors was turned over to the Political Committee, and the critical resolution did not become public.

Rákosi could not, however, prevent his own demotion, nor a number of other important personnel changes. For his central role in creating Hungary's predicament, he lost his post as prime minister and was replaced by Imre Nagy, whose name soon became emblematic of reform in Hungary. From then on, the posts of prime minister and party leader were split. The size of the government was to be reduced, and younger, intellectual "cadres" who had "grown up" since 1945 were to be involved more directly in the leadership.

On July 4, 1953, a new Hungarian Parliament, elected the previous May, convened. This was the venue Nagy chose to announce the party's more "people-friendly" New Course. Thus the general public learned about the new policy line not from the party, as usually happened, but from the new prime minister over the radio. Aside from its content, his speech was a marked departure in tone and style from the impersonal and flavorless addresses normally heard from functionaries of the party-state. This had a noticeable impact on the population.

Nevertheless, Nagy's task was enormous. He was taking control of the leadership of a country in fundamental crisis and was not adequately prepared for the role. Even his insights into the situation must have been limited. As a member of the HWP Secretariat and a deputy prime minister, he had depended on the foursome at the top of the leadership for the information he needed to carry out his work. All he could trust now, apart from his own convictions, was the judgment and good will of the Kremlin (over which he had little influence), and the sincerity of its professed opening to the outside world. Predictably, this was far too little to allow him to gauge Hungary's true state of affairs and devise a comprehensive policy program for the new government.⁷

The New Course concentrated on five areas of policy. First and foremost was the economy. The absolute priority previously given to industry, especially heavy industry, ended. Industrial investment was curbed and the rate of industrial expansion slowed. This released funds which could be redirected to consumer goods production, housing construction, and agricultural development.

These radical changes caused a number of problems. For one thing, the shift in priorities undermined the officials who had put the old policies into place, leaving Nagy at a disadvantage when he needed to call on them for support. The person most directly compromised was Gerő, who ran the economy and would be someone Nagy would have to rely on to implement his economic program and to form a political alliance against Rákosi. Gerő had shown some willingness to cooperate with Nagy early in 1954—no doubt hoping to exploit the rivalry between his counterparts—but he had quickly pulled back, making it clear to Nagy at that point that he could not count on him. The new economic measures also alienated lower-level functionaries who had been part of the forced development of heavy industry or were closely identified with it: factory managers, party branch secretaries, production managers, local-government officials, as well as powerful members of the central apparatus.

The second area of policy covered by the New Course concerned measures to stimulate agriculture. In industry, the new policy still operated in the old way—through centralized decision-making. In agriculture, Nagy began to shift to a more rational economic approach. He put an end

⁷ On Nagy and the New Course, see János M. Rainer, *Nagy Imre. Politikai életrajz*, 2 vols. (Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 1996–99), 1:509–543 and 2:9–37.

to the forced collectivization of land and gave peasants the option of withdrawing from agricultural cooperatives. Individual farmers were allowed to rent uncultivated land on favorable terms, while the targets for compulsory deliveries of produce were eased. With the involvement of his university colleagues⁸ and other experts, Nagy devised a long-term development program for agriculture. These steps helped to dissolve the immediate crisis, increase supplies to the general public, and provide a foundation for the long-range improvement of the agricultural sector.

Yet these new measures, too, encountered some strong resistance. One objection was that agricultural policy could not be divorced from the economy as a whole. If private farming gained predominance, central control of the whole economy would be shaken. Furthermore, reducing the pressure on the villages would stem the flow of money available for investment in heavy industry. This, according to government operatives affected by the changes, would hurt workers whose jobs could be cut. Even more dire predictions surfaced, including the possibility of urban famine and village “rebellions.” Since the immediate beneficiaries of the New Course policies were the peasantry, especially property-owning peasants—some of whom had previously been discriminated against as “kulaks,” or rich peasants—there were warnings about the imminent collapse of the worker-peasant alliance, which formed the basic foundation of socialism.

The third important set of measures aimed at raising the nation’s living standard. During the earlier period the level of state appropriations had characteristically exceeded what the general public could bear. These funds had fueled the program of forced economic growth, and sustained the regime’s main base of support: the military, police and security forces. By bringing down prices, raising wages, and setting lower performance norms, Nagy hoped to reduce the bloated state bureaucracy and ease the intolerable burden on society. He recognized that no one could expect a strong performance from a famished country or base a socialist society on a harassed, impoverished population. He also realized that if the working class knew its basic needs would be met, then its will to produce, and consequently its performance, would rise. In the longer term, he believed, this would yield the greater accumulations needed to generate a moderately higher level of personal consumption.

In practice, the effect of the price cuts was reduced by a steady drop in the quality of goods produced. Also, the new steps led to generally sluggish deliveries, even though the number of items in short supply dropped. In 1954, there was a marked rise in personal consumption, to a level about 20 per cent higher than in 1950, but this still fell far short of what the growth in national income during the intervening period might have allowed. A similar situation obtained in the government’s housing-construction campaign, eased only a few of the most pressing problems in that area.

The most important, and certainly most spectacular, New Course measures targeted excessive official coercion.⁹ In order to redress years of oppression against society and establish credibility, the authorities would have to curb dramatically the reliance on terror that had played such a key role in running the political and economic system.¹⁰

A major step in this direction was the declaration of a broad amnesty. The authorities released large numbers from confinement, excused fines, or dismissed legal claims. The government also closed internment camps and abolished sentences such as internal exile and the designation of a

⁸ From 1948 to 1955, Nagy taught at the University of Economics and the University of Agricultural Science. A great number of his later adherents and members of the “Imre Nagy circle” were his academic colleagues and students.

⁹ The issue of the repression was already a topic of discussion in the HWP CC Secretariat as early as August 1952. According to a joint report by the justice and interior ministries and the party’s Administrative Department on the period between 1949 and 1951, the courts sentenced 72,300 prisoners in 1949, 98,000 in 1950, and 125,000 in 1951. By the final year covered by the report, the courts found 87,000 of the 212,000 accused not guilty, while the prosecution authorities proffered no charges in 150,000 cases out of 300,000. In the same year, 500,000 penalties had been imposed by police and local administration for petty offenses alone. See, Minutes of the August 27, 1952, meeting of the HWP Secretariat, MOL, 276. f. 54/208 ő.e.

¹⁰ János M. Rainer, *The New Course in Hungary in 1953*, Cold War International History Project Working Paper, no. 38 (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2002).

compulsory place of residence. As the releases from captivity continued, the issue of legal and moral rehabilitation came up, which in turn led to the question of responsibility for miscarriages of justice. Since so many people—mainly communist politicians—were now being declared innocent of any crime, whoever had originally condemned them must logically be at fault. At first, some officials tried to shift the blame onto Gábor Péter, the former head of the ÁVH who had already been arrested. But it was undeniable that Péter, whatever his personal responsibility, had run the ÁVH at the pleasure of the party leadership; he also never exercised authority over the courts or the rest of the power apparatus that had been involved in the repression. Many Hungarians remembered, for example, that Rákosi had claimed sole credit for exposing the “Rajk gang” (see below). Clearly, the real culprits were the top leaders of the HWP and, beyond them, their patrons in the Soviet Union itself.

Hungarian society’s thirst for justice intersected with Nagy’s political instincts. He felt a personal need to point out the main guilty party—Rákosi—by name, while recognizing as a politician that the party chief was also the greatest obstacle to the June 1953 program. Rákosi would have to be removed from power completely before the New Course could develop. If Nagy succeeded, that in itself would be one of the great achievements of the new policy. So efforts to stamp out illegalities, start the rehabilitation process, and carry it through consistently rose to the top of Nagy’s agenda in 1954. Deposing his main rival and trying to build broad popular support for his policies made it seem worth the risk of alienating other officials.

Rákosi, of course, also understood what was at stake and made every effort to prevent Nagy’s “rummaging in the past” and “exorbitant pursuit of rehabilitation.” He charged the prime minister with undermining the credibility of the party’s leaders and the party itself, which he said raised the danger that the socialist system itself might collapse. Rákosi had help from the ÁVH, which had essentially remained intact and was able to play a role in obstructing the rehabilitation process. Also, the official investigating bodies continued to answer to the old leadership and were fully prepared to generate evidence they thought the authorities wanted to see—evidence that, naturally, did not taint Rákosi himself or disclose the Soviet role in the terror campaign. The main obstacle to the process, however, was that the Kremlin had absolutely no interest in a public investigation of responsibility; their idea of reform would be more than satisfied with just the release of communists who had been wrongly condemned. So although Nagy’s crusade managed to rehabilitate many communist detainees, including future leader János Kádár, the most important case of political abuse by the Party—the László Rajk trial—was not reopened until 1956.¹¹ Nonetheless, Nagy’s achievement in reducing society’s fears of regime-imposed terror was probably the most significant development of the New Course. Although it would still be possible to revert to some of the pre-1953 economic policies after Nagy’s dismissal in 1955, there was no way to restore the atmosphere of fear that had existed under Stalin and Rákosi.

The fifth area of Nagy’s activity consisted of measures, especially from 1954 on, to create an institutional, political framework for the New Course. An essential requirement was to break up the HWP’s monolithic power by freeing government bodies from party control. Nagy had the same motive in creating a “popular front” organization: to establish institutional structures to allow for political activity by the majority of the population—who were not members of the HWP—and give them a say in running the country’s affairs. In other words, the front was meant to allow room for a plurality of interests under a relatively democratic structure, albeit within the

¹¹ László Rajk, a high-ranking party official who belonged to the non-Muscovite segment of the communist leadership, was arrested in the summer of 1949. Along with several other officials, he was accused of a variety of implausible crimes, including Trotskyism, Titoism, and espionage, and was executed after a celebrated show trial. While Rajk’s case was an important part of the anti-Yugoslav campaign resulting from the split between Stalin and Tito, Rajk probably also fell victim to Rákosi’s personal suspicions. The trial of the “Rajk gang” was one of several strikingly similar cases that were brought almost simultaneously throughout Eastern Europe at the time. These show trials had their origins in the Stalinist logic of power, according to which continuous purges served as an important means of controlling society and disciplining the party membership. See, George H. Hodos, *Show Trials: Stalinist Purges in Eastern Europe, 1949–1956* (New York: Praeger, 1987).

framework of a government-sanctioned forum operating within a one-party system. The danger of even this degree of decentralization was apparent to Rákosi and his followers, who ultimately managed to dilute the new organization so thoroughly that it was indistinguishable from any of its communist-controlled predecessors. Nagy was also unable to boost the number of reformers in the Central Committee or the Political Committee during the 3rd Congress of the HWP in May 1954. He managed to get Zoltán Szántó elected to the CC, but his other candidates lost. Moreover, the Secretariat, headed by Rákosi, actually strengthened its power over the party.

These setbacks can be partly explained by the Soviet leadership's increasing ambivalence towards Nagy's policies. Although the New Course had brought some important results by autumn 1954, it had not led to any breakthroughs, often because of resistance by the Rákosi group. In the end, a number of Kremlin officials thought Nagy's approach had only brought more turmoil—not the order Moscow had sought. Soviet Presidium member Lazar Kaganovich summed up the ambiguity of the post-Stalin period when, in May 1954, he criticized the Hungarian delegation for following precisely the economic policy Moscow had stipulated: "You are living in greater style than your means permit. You are building socialism on credit" (Document No. 4).

Retrenchment

By late 1954, Soviet dissatisfaction with Nagy's policies had grown to the point where they were ready to withdraw their support. The worsening international climate, particularly Western moves to rearm West Germany and include it as a member of NATO, had only magnified their concerns. Rákosi, coming back from a lengthy stay in the Soviet Union, immediately made the most of this shift in Soviet thinking. On December 1, he reported to the HWP Political Committee that Moscow's views on reform had changed. Although the Political Committee did not retract its resolution of June 1953, it introduced a new one which warned that a "rightist" deviation from communist doctrine represented the main danger confronting the regime. They condemned Nagy's policy accordingly. This was not enough for Rákosi, however, whose ambition was to squeeze his rival out of public life altogether. He proposed that a party delegation travel to Moscow to discuss the Hungarian situation directly with the Soviets, an idea Nagy opposed unsuccessfully.¹²

The CPSU Presidium met with Hungarian party leaders on January 8, 1955 (Document No. 5). The Soviet side was interested in only three things. One was the state of the Hungarian economy, which was still not improving the way the Kremlin had hoped. This topic received the least emphasis at the talks. A second subject, which the Soviets viewed far more seriously, was an article Nagy had written in *Szabad Nép* ("Free People"), the official party daily and the country's largest circulation paper, on October 20, 1954.¹³ In the article, he advocated democratizing the party, castigated the errors brought about by one-man rule, and called on party members to take on independent political activity. Moscow saw Nagy's appeal as an invitation to factionalism, which violated the cardinal principle of party unity and constituted a serious crime. The third item discussed in Moscow was the Soviets' anger at Nagy's stubbornness in insisting that he could not work with Rákosi in implementing the New Course. Although this was the truth, he was directly implying that Rákosi should be dismissed, but this kind of major personnel decision was traditionally a jealously guarded purview of the CPSU Presidium.

In spite of all these problems, Khrushchev did not recommend a complete break with the 1953 program. He insisted only that order be imposed in Hungary once and for all. The economic crisis certainly concerned him, but he wanted to deal with it in a way that would preserve the larger interests of socialism, which meant maintaining agricultural cooperatives and heavy industry in general, especially the arms industry. No rhetorical changes or even shifts in economic policy

¹² Minutes of the HWP PC, December 1, 1954, MOL, 276. f. 53/206. 6.e.

¹³ Imre Nagy, "A Központi Vezetőség ülése után," *Szabad Nép*, October 20, 1954.

could alter the fundamental principle of Kremlin ideology that industry was the foundation of all socialist economic activity, while agricultural cooperatives were the main guarantor of the worker-peasant alliance, and thus held the system together. Khrushchev further directed that Rákosi's leading role be restored but, at the same time: "the authority of Comrade Nagy has to be safeguarded as well"—mainly to retain the image of complete unity at the top of the HWP. Khrushchev was thus offering Nagy an opportunity to remain active in politics, if not in the top ranks, but only if he subscribed to the restored policy and condemned his own mistakes.

Interestingly, neither Nagy nor Rákosi obeyed their instructions after their return from Moscow. Nagy, instead of accepting Moscow's criticisms unquestioningly, tried to salvage certain elements of the New Course while holding on to some degree of personal control over national policy. Rákosi remained determined to claim victory over Nagy and, with the HWP Political Committee behind him, set about drafting a resolution condemning his rival and his policies, a task Nagy made easier by flouting the unwritten rules of Bolshevik discipline.

By 1955, however, Rákosi and the hardliners could no longer pick up the reins of government where they had dropped them in 1953. Neither domestic nor international circumstances were right for doing so. In foreign policy, despite Soviet worries about suffering a number of reverses, East-West détente continued. Furthermore, the Austrian State Treaty, followed by the Geneva conference in July 1955, the first four-power summit since Potsdam, and the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Federal Republic of Germany that autumn (Document No. 9) reassured Moscow of its international standing, and particularly its hold on Eastern Europe. Khrushchev's handling of bloc affairs betrayed a certain ambivalence about revising the reform program, but he was genuinely intent on doing away with some of the excesses of the Stalinist system, like those Rákosi had implemented in Hungary, and his renewed international confidence helped to keep him moving in that direction.

Domestically, the hardliners discovered that Hungary was a different country after Nagy's reforms. Despite Nagy's refusal to be involved in self-criticism, his opponents found it hard to marginalize him, let alone resort to the more radical measures available before 1953. Hardly a year after the amnesties and the start of the rehabilitation process it was already impossible to try the prime minister and imprison him (although Rákosi did raise the possibility). In fact, Rákosi could not even have him dismissed right away. A HWP CC resolution in early March 1955 denounced Nagy's policy, but various domestic and foreign policy considerations intervened, forcing Rákosi to be content with isolating Nagy under virtual house arrest until mid-April—using Nagy's (actual) illness as an excuse. At that point, Rákosi pushed through another CC resolution charging Nagy with anti-party activity and removing him from all party posts and the premiership. (He was succeeded by András Hegedüs.) His expulsion from the party did not come until December 1955, while the hard-liners never managed to put to rest the "Nagy question"—that is, the complete repudiation of his political agenda—by the time the revolution broke out on October 23, 1956.

Convinced he was in the right, the deposed prime minister refused to stay quietly on the sidelines. Instead, he wrote a stream of protest memoranda and polemics to the Hungarian and Soviet party leaderships, which also circulated among a narrow circle of his political adherents.¹⁴ Under the old regime, he would never have been allowed to keep so active politically. Thus, one essential factor behind Nagy's staying power, apart from his perseverance and sense of principle, was the change in the country's political atmosphere thanks to the New Course.

Another important reason for Nagy's survival was the increasingly conspicuous group of supporters that had gathered around him by the end of 1954. This group consisted partly of colleagues and students who had helped him devise a radical reform program for agriculture, and partly of politicians, writers and journalists. They came to be known collectively as the "Party Opposition." Despite the sanctions Rákosi tried to impose against them, the group stayed faithful to the New Course, even after the prime minister had lost his official posts.

¹⁴ These writings were later smuggled out to the West and were published in several languages. For the English version, see Imre Nagy, *On Communism: In Defense of the New Course* (New York: Praeger, 1957).

Nagy's policies also gained ever-wider support in the Hungarian press during 1954. At the end of October, a number of senior employees at a *Szabad Nép* staff meeting came out in support of the New Course and against the forces holding it back—including senior party officials Ernő Gerő and Mihály Farkas as well as the paper's own editors. In November, support for socialist reform came from Miklós Gimes, and later Géza Losonczy who worked for another daily paper, *Magyar Nemzet* ("Hungarian Nation"), which had just become the organ of the Patriotic People's Front.

Meanwhile, prisoners continued to be released from confinement, although not at the pace Nagy had wanted. Among other notables, Anna Kéthly gained her release at the end of 1954, followed in 1955 by Simon Papp, who had been sentenced in the MAORT (Hungarian-American Oil Company) trial, and Cardinal József Mindszenty, followed by József Grósz, archbishop of Kalocsa.¹⁵ In November 1955, Béla Kovács, formerly general secretary of the Smallholders' Party, got permission to return from the USSR with several of his associates. The rehabilitation of Noel Field, who had played a key part in the East European show trials, added impetus to calls to re-examine the Rajk case. After the release of condemned communists, non-communist politicians and defendants in economic trials also won their freedom or had their sentences reduced.¹⁶

The Twentieth Party Congress and the Reemergence of the Reform Movement

The Twentieth Congress of the CPSU marked a turning-point in the politics and ideology of the Soviet party and the international communist movement. Overturning the doctrine that a third world war was inevitable and proclaiming the concept of peaceful coexistence, Soviet leader Khrushchev laid out new tasks for the leaders of the bloc. Although Khrushchev's secret speech revealing the crimes of Joseph Stalin was not to be published in full for 30 years, news of it spread immediately. It confirmed the worst beliefs of Stalinism's opponents, and overcame the resistance of many members of the old guard.¹⁷

The Twentieth Congress placed the Hungarian party leadership in a virtually impossible position. Rákosi, the man most identified with Stalinism in the country, was given the job of spearheading the de-Stalinization process, unveiling the mistakes and crimes of the past, and condemning the guilty. Meanwhile, Moscow unrealistically required that the top party leader (himself) not lose prestige in the process. It is hard to imagine how the Kremlin's rulers thought this could be accomplished.

The Soviets stuck with Rákosi for several reasons. For one thing they worried that a high turnover of personnel would destabilize the leadership and the country even further. The changes since 1953 had already caused enough trouble for the party. For another thing, the Kremlin saw in Rákosi a personal guarantee that Hungary would not follow an independent policy of reform that might clash with their interests. Finally, in their minds there was no suitable alternative to Rákosi on the horizon.

Not surprisingly, pro-reform forces in Hungary gathered strength after the Twentieth Congress. This was the case inside the HWP as well, where calls for real change and a radical renewal of the party steadily widened. The Petőfi Circle, begun as a regime-sanctioned intellectual discussion group, started to take on a more vocal, anti-Stalinist cast. Their public debates

¹⁵ József Grósz, archbishop of Kalocsa, was arrested in 1951 and sentenced after a show trial to 15 years in prison. Although he was released in 1955, he remained under house arrest until receiving an amnesty in May 1956.

¹⁶ Valéria Révai, ed., *Törvénytelen szocializmus: A Tényfeltáró Bizottság jelentése* (Budapest: Zrínyi Kiadó-Új Magyarország, 1993), 215–331.

¹⁷ See, V. P. Naumov, "Bor'ba N. S. Khrushcheva za edinolichnuyu vlast'," *Novaya i Noveishaya Istoriya* 24, no. 2 (1996): 10–31; and Rudolf G. Pikhoya, "O vnutripoliticheskoi bor'be v sovetskom rukovodstve 1945–1958 gg," *Novaya i Noveishchaya Istoriya* 23, no. 6 (1995): 3–14.

went well beyond cautious reformist formulations to include everything but the two topics that remained utterly off-limits: the stationing of Soviet troops in Hungary and the one-party system. The Circle gradually drew broader segments of society into debates about national conditions as audience members took what they heard back to their work places and to the provinces, and started similar discussions.¹⁸ Soon, the authorities began to see the danger involved. Soviet Ambassador Yurii Andropov, after listening to one of the debates, reported to Moscow that it had “essentially degenerated into a demonstration against the party leadership.”¹⁹ On June 30, the HWP CC took action, condemning the debates and suspending the group’s activities.

Undeterred, the reform camp continued to broaden and strengthen its base, and to clarify its program in spite of Nagy’s dismissal. At the same time, Rákosi and his supporters were proving unable to handle the spreading crisis; a succession of half-measures had only further weakened their authority. Many party members who disagreed with the existing system were not so much in favor of reforming it as eliminating some of its excesses—especially the mechanisms of repression. (The main advocate of this was János Kádár.) But the leadership rejected these criticisms as right-wing deviations, examples of Nagy’s corrupting influence, or symptoms of ignorance and backwardness. Significantly, the party’s higher-ups were spared this kind of censure. For example, Kádár, despite his expressed point of view, joined the top-level Political Committee in July 1956.

By summer 1956, Moscow had decided it was time for another political intervention in Hungary (Document Nos. 11 and 14). Unraveling conditions there were raising concerns throughout the socialist camp that “unexpected and unpleasant” events could “happen in Hungary” (Document No. 15). The likelihood seemed to increase after the uprising in Poznań, Poland, on June 28, where security units forcibly broke up a demonstration of workers who were demanding improvements in living and working conditions. The clash cost almost a hundred lives, with several hundred wounded.

To prevent a similar outbreak in Hungary, Anastas Mikoyan, one of the more moderate members of the CPSU Politburo, arrived in Budapest on July 13 with a broad mandate to put an end to the crisis. Mikoyan initiated two measures: a change of leadership and a crackdown on the opposition. Reversing the earlier Soviet position, he declared that Rákosi had to step down as HWP first secretary. In his place, a new, unified group would be appointed to bring fresh blood to the leadership. Officially, the Soviets attributed Rákosi’s removal to poor health and allowed him to keep his membership in Parliament and on the Central Committee (Document No. 15).

But Rákosi’s replacement by the ineffectual Ernő Gerő, whose main appeal for Moscow was his unquestioned loyalty, only made matters worse. The move disconcerted Rákosi’s supporters who had lost their benefactor, and left his opponents dissatisfied over the prospect of another period of no meaningful change (even though they may have had less to fear from Gerő personally). In fact, no other high-level changes took place, which meant that Rákosi’s followers largely retained their influence and the splits within the Political Committee remained. If anything, it became even harder to agree on the most basic questions much less to respond to the country’s growing problems.

Mikoyan’s second measure accomplished nothing either. The authorities never attempted the assault on the opposition. Even Rákosi understood that this sort of tactic would not help, since anyone they arrested would quickly be replaced by other activists. In any event, the shaken leadership no longer had the will to take serious action (Document No. 19). Far from becoming more hard-line, the party actually began showing signs of moderation, readmitting Nagy as a member in October, for example, despite his refusal to practice public self-criticism.

¹⁸ On the Petőfi Circle, see András B. Hegedűs, “The Petőfi Circle: The Forum of Reform in 1956,” in *Hungary 1956—Forty Years On*, ed. Terry Cox, (London: Frank Cass, 1997), 108–134.

¹⁹ “Zapis besedi Yu. V. Andropova s A. Hegedushe,” after June 27, 1956, in *Sovietskii Soyuz i vengerskii krizis, 1956 goda: Dokumenty*, ed. and comp. by E. D. Orekhova, Vyacheslav T. Sereda and Aleksandr. S. Stykalin (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1998), 122.

Another reason for not carrying out domestic reprisals was the regime's decision to focus on long-neglected foreign policy problems. During his three months in power, Gerő spent barely a month in Hungary. High on his agenda was the need to resolve the Yugoslav question—no simple matter since Tito had made clear his unhappiness with the uninspired choice of Gerő. Thus, Gerő spent much of his time away from Hungary in Moscow preparing for the delicate talks with Belgrade (Document No. 18). Meanwhile, Kádár, the second most powerful figure in the party, was also largely absent, representing Hungary at prolonged talks in China. This left the party and the country without the capacity for making vital decisions at a very difficult stage.

Hungary on the Eve of Rebellion

Even without a renewed crackdown, Hungarian society by mid-1956 was feeling the effects of ever more burdensome political and economic demands. Nagy's dismissal in 1955 had led to increased popular resentment that was only compounded by a series of tougher economic policies. In agriculture, a new wave of collectivization accompanied a redistribution of peasant holdings and higher compulsory delivery quotas. Industrial production norms and employees' pension contributions also rose. The combined results were painful. Housing shortages became critical with many people having to live in shanties, or worse. Workers on high-priority, large-scale production projects were forcibly separated from their families and worked under extreme conditions. New industrial towns suffered from severe shortages of basic goods and became breeding grounds for crime. Overall, living standards in 1956 sank below 1938 levels, which was already far from prosperous compared with other European countries.²⁰ By the time the guidelines for the Second Five-Year Plan were released for public discussion in April 1956, Hungarians realized that the regime was going to do no better than continue the same outmoded and failed economic policies of the previous era.

Gradually, Hungarians came to the conclusion that this was no way to live, and opposition forces began to gain strength again. Even before Rákosi's dismissal, Mikoyan was reporting that "day after day the comrades are further losing their grip on power. A parallel center is forming from enemy elements operating actively, decisively, and self-confidently. The press and radio are not under CC control any more" (Document No. 15). Mikoyan's observations were accurate. By autumn, not only writers, journalists and other intelligentsia, but the vast majority of Hungarians had become active opponents of the regime. The authorities, who had shown themselves to be weak and hesitant, had lost the confidence of the people, a fact that local Soviet officials reported regularly to Moscow (Document No. 19). Soon, the final barriers of fear began to crumble as well. It was becoming clear not only that Hungarians no longer wanted to live under the current system, but that the regime no longer had the power to defend it.

On October 6, 1956, a turning point came with the ceremonial reburial in Budapest of László Rajk and others who had been executed with him in 1949. Rajk's rehabilitation had been a long-standing demand of pro-reform elements. Now that Rákosi, who had played a major part in the show trial, was out of favor, the regime had found it easier to seem responsive to the population. At the reburial, following the obligatory party speeches, a former co-defendant of Rajk's named Béla Szász spoke. Capturing the feeling of the crowd of some 200,000, he declared: "As hundreds of thousands pass by the coffins, they are not simply paying their last respects to the victims; they have an ardent desire and an unswerving resolve to bury an era."²¹

The Rajk funeral not only deepened the overall moral crisis of the HWP and strengthened the positions of the inner party opposition (Document No. 21), it also sparked an unprecedented student

²⁰ On the economic situation in Hungary before the 1956 Revolution, see Iván Pető and Sándor Szakács, *A hazai gazdaság négy évtizedének története*, vol. 1 (Budapest, Közgazdasági és Jogi Kiadó, 1985); László Varga, *Az elhagyott tömeg. Tanulmányok 1950–1956-ról* (Budapest: Cserépfalvi–Budapest Főváros Levéltára, 1994), 7–85.

²¹ *Szabad Nép*, October 7, 1956.

demonstration in the streets of Budapest that included displays of anti-Stalinist slogans.²² The march was the first open protest of its kind and set the stage for more demonstrations leading up to the revolution itself. While the party's leadership stayed mired in the old ways, the students had struck out in a radically new direction. On October 16, for example, a student assembly at the University of Szeged decided to withdraw from the communist-controlled Union of Working Youth (DISZ) and reconstitute an earlier students' association known as MEFESZ. This development was not just a stage on the road to revolution, it was revolutionary in itself: for the first time under communist rule, a self-governing organization had been founded independently and had elected its leaders without HWP screening. At the time, no public entities were allowed to function outside of party control. The notion that alternative institutions would be needed to represent differing interests ran directly counter to official ideology, which denied that such differences could exist in a socialist society. By the time the uprising broke out on October 23, MEFESZ had established a nationwide membership.

On October 19, another major development occurred that had a direct impact on the Hungarian crisis. On the eve of its 8th Plenum, the leadership of the Polish United Workers Party (PZPR) had decided to elect the once-discredited Władysław Gomułka²³ first secretary and to exclude pro-Soviet officials from the top levels of the party. The Kremlin reacted with alarm at the implications for Soviet control. Khrushchev and a top-level Kremlin delegation made a surprise visit to Warsaw to confront the Polish authorities. At the same time, Red Army units in the country moved into strategic positions in and around the capital in case military force was needed. In a dramatic face-off, Gomułka convinced Khrushchev to compromise: the Soviets accepted the new Polish leadership, while Gomułka gave assurances that the political reforms in Poland would not threaten either local communist rule or the unity of the Soviet bloc. Hungarian society reacted in different ways to the crisis. The internal party opposition took heart from Gomułka's rise from political outcast to party leader, and especially from his bold defense of a "Polish road to socialism." They hoped that they would also be able to effect meaningful change from within Hungary's existing socialist system. On October 22, the party daily *Szabad Nép* reprinted a speech by Gomułka from the day before describing the successful outcome of the talks with the Soviets.

Hungary's youth learned a different lesson from the Poles. On the same day that Gomułka's speech appeared in the newspaper, a student gathering at Budapest Technical University decided not only to join the new independent organization, MEFESZ, but to formulate a list of political demands inspired by Gomułka's showdown with Khrushchev (Document Nos. 23 and 27). They announced a demonstration of solidarity with anti-regime protestors for the next day. The "Sixteen Points" the students presented broke crucial new ground. They ignored the taboos that the Petőfi Circle had respected in the spring, explicitly demanding the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Hungary and the restoration of a multi-party system (Document No. 24). Neither the press nor the radio would agree to reproduce their demands in full, but the students ruled out any changes. Instead, they made stenciled copies and circulated them around Budapest.

Just one day later, the groundswell of popular frustration erupted into full-scale revolution, sweeping aside the naive hopes of the party opposition for producing reform "from within."

²² The demonstration began at the memorial to the country's first parliamentary prime minister, Count Lajos Batthyány, who was killed by the Austrians after the crushing of Hungary's war of independence in 1849. Because both his execution and that of thirteen Hungarian army generals in Arad took place on October 6, that day became a national day of mourning for Hungarians. Given its dense historical meaning, October 6 might seem like a strikingly unsuitable choice for Rajk's reburial, since it inevitably connected the injustices committed under Stalinism to the theme of lost national independence. Surprisingly, evidence suggests that the communist leaders simply forgot about the significance of the date when they consented to Rajk's public reburial.

²³ Gomułka, a long-time Polish communist, had been accused of "rightist-nationalist deviationism" in 1948, expelled from the party in 1949 and imprisoned from 1951–1954. His political resurrection in 1956 was a serious concern to the Kremlin, which did not trust his loyalty to Moscow. For documentation and discussion of this crucial confrontation, see L. W. Gluchowski, "Poland, 1956: Khrushchev, Gomułka and the 'Polish October,'" *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* no. 5 (Spring 1995): 1, 38–49. Ironically, Gomułka would turn out to be more of a traditional Soviet-line communist than Nagy.

**DOCUMENT NO. 1: Notes of a Meeting between the CPSU CC Presidium
and a HWP Political Committee Delegation in Moscow,
June 13 and 16, 1953**

By Spring 1953, the political, economic and social situation in Hungary had deteriorated to such an extent that the Kremlin had begun to urge Hungarian leader Mátyás Rákosi to implement fundamental reforms. These measures included moving away from the Stalinist economic model of emphasizing heavy industry at the expense of consumer goods, and, in the political sphere, such steps as separating the posts of prime minister and party leader. When the Hungarians failed to comply, Rákosi and several colleagues were summoned to Moscow for “consultations” with the CPSU Presidium in mid-June 1953. Earlier in the month, a similar meeting had taken place with senior members of East Germany’s Socialist Unity Party, whom the Kremlin coerced into formulating a “New Course,” the first program of reform in the eastern bloc designed to correct the “mistakes” of the past.

During their talks with the Hungarian “comrades,” the Soviets proposed discussing three major issues: economic development, “the selection of cadres” and the problem of “authoritarianism.” Although Rákosi would claim that Hungary’s mistakes had already been corrected according to earlier guidelines, the Soviet leaders harshly criticized the Hungarian party’s policies, including the excesses in connection with collectivization, compulsory deliveries of agricultural goods, and the use of extreme administrative measures against the peasants, as well as an exaggerated emphasis on industrialization and an excessive reliance on repression. Beria, for one, strongly condemned Rákosi for his personal handling of the state security apparatus, for intervening in individual investigations, and even for ordering the use of physical violence. He declared that Rákosi would have to resign as prime minister in favor of Imre Nagy. Khrushchev was even more explicit in singling out Rákosi for blame.

The Soviet leadership ordered the Hungarians to prepare a written plan for correcting their many errors, and to compile a list of party personnel changes they intended to make. The Hungarians completed the two documents on the spot. They were then discussed with the Presidium during the second round of negotiations on June 16 (also presented in part below). At this meeting, the Soviets insisted that Rákosi’s, Ernő Gerő’s, Mihály Farkas’, and József Révai’s personal responsibility be explicitly spelled out. The result was the promulgation of the June 1953 resolution of the HWP CC (see Document No. 2), and Nagy’s replacement of Rákosi as premier.

KREMLIN, 13 JUNE 1953.

Cde. Malenkov: There was a discussion recently with Comrade Rákosi about the Hungarian situation. After that conversation, it seemed necessary to discuss certain questions in a wider scope. He recommends as the procedure for discussion that the Hungarian comrades lay out their views primarily regarding three questions that relate to fields where not everything is in order in Hungary:

1. certain questions of economic development
2. the selection of cadres
3. certain questions of state administration (abuses of power).

After discussing these questions, the manner of correcting the mistakes must be discussed. [...]

Cde. Malenkov: We view Hungary’s situation with a critical attitude. We would like the comrades to be critical as well, and to tell us their opinions about the problems. Our impression is that the Hungarian comrades underestimate the problems. Without a thorough debate of the issues, it is impossible to find proper solutions. The facts that we are familiar with indicate that the situation in the field of agriculture is not good. The quality of animal husbandry is not improving; on the contrary, it is declining. Regarding the [agricultural] cooperatives, the situation is not too good there either. As far as we know, 8,000–10,000 families left the cooperatives last year. They say the harvest was bad. That cannot explain everything. There were excessive

orders during the compulsory delivery of the [agricultural levy]. It was not proper to collect the entire sunflower and rice harvest. Many peasants are sentenced by the courts because they do not fulfill their obligations to the state. There are problems in the area of trade as well. They provide few commodities for the population.

Prosecutions were initiated against 250,000 people in the second half of 1952. It is true that 75 percent of the prosecutions were stopped; yet, the number is still rather high. In 1952, they brought sentences in about 540,000 cases of transgressions within 9 months. All these provoked dissatisfaction among the population.

To return to the [question of] cooperatives, there is evidence according to which the income of the cooperatives' employees is less than that of farmers working individually. It is also a mistake that [only] a small sum is appropriated for investments in agriculture. Regarding the cadres. It is appropriate that many [of them] study. But if the leaders are always studying, they are not working. The leaders are virtually turned into students. [...]

Cde. Beria: He agrees with what comrade Molotov said. When comrade Rákosi was here last time, it was brought up that certain questions should be discussed with more comrades. Not that they do not trust comrade Rákosi or that comrade Rákosi does not represent Hungary, but just so that they would get to know more comrades.

Comrade Rákosi himself suggested this on several occasions.

It cannot be said that there is no improvement in Hungary. The positions of the people's democracy are continuously becoming stronger. The point is that the situation should become even better. The international and internal conditions will not always be this favorable. This is exactly why the internal situation must be strengthened now. We must be stronger than we are now.

Let us look at agriculture from this point of view. The collective sector in Hungary could work much more effectively if the Central Committee and the government paid more attention to agriculture. In that case, there would not be 750,000 hectares of fallow land. The situation wouldn't be such that the peasants leave agriculture and move into industry. The situation wouldn't be such that the peasants are significant debtors to the state. This debt constitutes 400 million forints, according to our information. The situation wouldn't be such that the peasants would not know how much levy they had to surrender to the state the following year. Comrade Imre Nagy was excluded from the PC because he recommended that the collective movement be developed more slowly. This was not correct. The comrades who lead the CC and the Council of Ministers do not know the countryside well, and they do not want to get to know the countryside.

The large number of major investments contributes to the bad situation in the villages. Hungarian industry is not small. If Hungarian industry were rectified and broadened a bit, it would be possible to develop metallurgy and certain other industrial branches more slowly. This would allow them to pay more attention to light industry, to the industry that serves the population.

Regarding legality and law enforcement, comrade Malenkov is right. Comrade Rákosi once again misunderstands us on this question. The issue is not that comrade Rákosi mentioned 30-40,000 arrested, and [that] their number is somewhat higher.

Could it be acceptable that in Hungary—a country with 9,500,000 inhabitants—prosecutions were initiated against 1,500,000 people? Administrative regulations were applied against 1,150,000 people within two-and-a-half years. These numbers show that the interior and judiciary organs and the ÁVH work very badly, and the Ministry of the Interior and the ÁVH must merge precisely because of this. A respectful comrade must be placed in the leadership of the Ministry of the Interior; someone who will be able to change the situation that developed there. Several leaders replaced each other at the ÁVH and the M. of Interior; it is not even possible to know exactly what the situation is now. And Hungary will be the object of attention of many capitalist countries, of the USA, and of England for a long time. There is a large and well-qualified group of Hungarian émigrés in the West that keeps in touch with leading foreign imperialist circles. It is to be expected that certain capitalist countries will try to flatter; others will send diversionists to Hungary. They have one goal: to overthrow the existing authorities and restore the capitalists' power. There are many elements in Hungary who could be exploited by the

enemy. And there are many who are unsatisfied with the policies of the party. Why does he treat this question so extensively? Because it has great significance in the relations of the peoples' democracies, but also in the Soviet Union.

There is another way to improve the situation. The personal intervention of the chairman of the Council of Ministers²⁴ or of the party's first secretary in matters concerning the Ministry of the Interior. Comrade Rákosi does that. This intervention is not always appropriate. Even comrade Stalin made a mistake in this question. He directly gave instructions for questioning those arrested, etc. Comrade Rákosi would be even more likely to make mistakes.

It is not right that comrade Rákosi gives directions regarding who must be arrested; he says who should be beaten. A person that's beaten will give the kind of confession that the interrogating agents want, will admit that he is an English or American spy or whatever we want. But it will never be possible to know the truth this way. This way, innocent people might be sentenced. There is the law, and everyone has to respect it. How investigations should be conducted, who should be arrested, and how they should be interrogated must be left to the investigating organs.

Thus, there are two ways to improve the situation. One of the methods: a responsible person is placed at the top of the Ministry of the Interior who becomes the supervisor of the area and corrects the mistakes. The other method: comrade Rákosi directly manages the work of the Interior and ÁVH organs. This latter method is not correct. Comrade Rákosi tells who is to be arrested, etc. This is how we reach the point that comrade Rákosi is never wrong; all the other comrades are wrong. This situation leads to a point where comrade Rákosi will not be respected, but feared. [He] is the party's [first] secretary, the chairman of the Council of Ministers, and the director of the ÁVH in one person.

Cde. Malenkov: Here we are correcting the mistakes that we made in this area.

Cde. Beria: The issue of Péter's²⁵ arrest. Bielkin, a person arrested by Soviet State security, confessed that he spied together with Gábor Péter. Later he withdrew his confession.

Comrade Rákosi said that Péter could not be released because he had other sins.

Two people were beaten at the ÁVH until they died. This [was] a serious mistake. Comrade Rákosi appears as a most important person. It is not right that he does everything. It was not even right for comrade Stalin to be everyone in one person. One person is only one person. When comrade Rákosi says the people would not understand if he were released from his position as first secretary, he overestimates himself. Those comrades who are here and the other comrades at home are not accidental [sic] people either. It would be better if the chairman of the Council of Ministers were Hungarian.²⁶ Comrade Stalin told comrade Rákosi several times that Hungarians should be promoted more. It is said that many of them served Horthy.²⁷ If they are honest people and now they serve us, they must be supported. Today the Red Army is still in Hungary, but it will not be there forever. Therefore, we must prepare and become stronger so that nobody can do any harm to us.

If comrade Nagy becomes chairman of the Council of Ministers, comrade Rákosi should remain at the head of the party as a comrade rich in experience who is faithful to the party's cause. Comrade Nagy would be satisfactory as the chairman of the Council of Ministers (faithful to the party, Hungarian, knows the agricultural sector).

Comrade Rákosi in his telegram misinterpreted the suggestion that comrade Gerő should be the Minister of the Interior.

Comrade Molotov: The comrades had a chance to be convinced that even though we are talking about Hungary, the issue is not only Hungary, but all of the peoples' democracies.

²⁴ That is, the prime minister.

²⁵ Gábor Péter, head of the Hungarian political police from 1945–1953, was arrested in 1953 for “trespasses against socialist legality” and sentenced to life in prison. His arrest was part of the Stalinist purges of the period, and presumably served to lay the groundwork for an “anti-zionist” trial.

²⁶ As opposed to Jewish—a reflection of the prevalence of anti-Semitism at the time.

²⁷ As regent of Hungary from 1920 to 1944, Admiral Miklós Horthy was the head of the country's authoritarian regime during the entire interwar era.