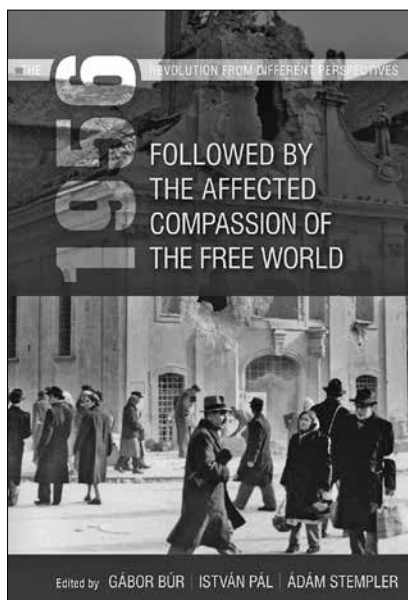


/// Lukács Krajsír

=== ***A Nation's Revolution in New Perspectives***

Gábor Búr, István Pál, and Ádám Stempler (eds.).
Followed by the Affected Compassion of the Free World.
The 1956 Revolution from Different Perspectives.

Budapest: Eötvös Loránd University Press, 2023. Pp 200.



Since the early 1990s, the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 has remained a very popular and sometimes controversial research topic that has always brought novelty to Hungarian historiography. Even though many bookshop and library shelves are dedicated to the subject, gaps in knowledge still very much exist. This is especially true when it comes to the Revolution's international/global dimension. At first, this contention may appear strange. Indeed, many articles, studies, monographs, and books exist that are based on declassified archival sources on the international level. But these writings mostly focus on the great powers (the United States and the Soviet Union) or on Hungary's neighbouring countries. For years, scholars have attempted to answer

many questions, such as: Why did the Soviet military intervention take place? What stood behind Washington's decision not to provide military support to the Hungarian insurgents? Did the leaders of Great Britain, France, and Israel deliberately time their attack on Egypt to coincide with events in Hungary, or was this mere coincidence? How did Austria handle more than 200,000 refugees? What was the reaction of the neighbouring states, where hundreds of thousands of Hun-

garians lived as a minority population, to the events – and did they try to prevent possible spillover effects of the uprising? In contrast, a significant lack of attention becomes clear when it comes to the other countries and regions. Specifically, almost no separate monographs or dedicated volumes have yet been written on the impact of the Hungarian Revolution on the Third World.¹

Now this gap is filled at least in part, thanks to the essays collected in the volume *Followed by the Affected Compassion of the Free World: The 1956 Revolution from Different Perspectives*. In 2021, one of the volume's three editors, István Pál (the other two are Gábor Búr and Ádám Stempler) organised a conference on the subject. The symposium at Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) generated considerable public interest and debates among historians, which unsurprisingly led to the birth of a printed version. As mentioned in the book's foreword, the editors chose the essays based on their "geographic and geopolitical distances."² This also explains why the first paper is related to Poland; the two countries are not only geographically close but also share many historical experiences and perceptions. Miklós Mitrovits, whose study summarises the events in Hungary and in Poland alike, takes care to point out both their differences and similarities simultaneously. The editors have chosen wisely in beginning the volume with Mitrovits' study, as it is his essay that provides the most detailed overview of the Hungarian Revolution. When it comes to the turbulent days of October and November, the historian presents lesser-known aspects of Polish solidarity. For example, he cites the Polish medical support (including blood, medicine, etc.) that reached a value of \$2 million USD, twice the amount of aid Hungary received from all other donor countries combined.³ However, while primary sources have been integrated, they are limited to those from Hungarian archives. As a result, without Polish primary materials the reader may feel slightly unsatisfied after reading this account.

At first glance, the second essay by Gábor Andreides on Italian diplomacy could be seen as the "odd man out," as its topic differs rather significantly from those of the other contributions. After reading, however, it becomes clear why the study has a place in the volume. Italy monitored the events in Hungary very closely, and this activity persisted even once Prime Minister Imre Nagy and his associates were executed. Moreover, Rome's position differed from that of the United States, and

1 == One major exception: Magdolna Tóth, ed., *India és a magyar forradalom, 1956 – Dokumentumok az Indiai Köztársaság Külügyminisztériumának archívumából* (India and the Hungarian Revolution, 1956 – Documents from the Archives of the Ministry of External Affairs of the Republic of India) (Budapest: Argumentum, 2006), 1–223.

2 == Gábor Búr, István Pál, and Ádám Stempler, *Followed by the Affected Compassion of the Free World: The 1956 Revolution from Different Perspectives* (Budapest: Eötvös Loránd University Press, 2023), 9.

3 == Búr, Pál, and Stempler, *Followed by the Affected Compassion*, 26–27.

Italian diplomacy did everything to keep the Hungarian case on the table.⁴ Andreides uses a considerable number of primary sources from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which help the reader to understand why the Hungarian-Italian bilateral relations hit rock bottom after the Revolution and what Italian diplomacy did in Budapest during the heavy fighting. What the reviewer appreciates most is when Andreides writes about Austrian-Italian cooperation on behalf of Hungary, despite the otherwise cold bilateral relations between Rome and Vienna.

The pair of authors Abdallah Al-Naggar and Zoltán Prantner focus on the Arab world. Before reading their essay, many readers may think that the Arabs had their own problems in 1956 and thus neither followed nor took interest in the events in Hungary. Indeed, in October and November not just the Suez Crisis, but also lesser-known conflicts outside the region – such as the Algerian War of Independence, the Israeli-Jordan border fighting, and the Syrian coup attempts – attracted special attention from Arab nations. However, historians have now supplied convincing evidence to prove that these assumptions are incorrect and misleading. Many Arab journalists and intelligence operatives followed the Hungarian events and condemned the Soviet military action. In parallel, Al-Naggar and Prantner also have taken care to examine newspapers, which to a greater or lesser extent agreed with the Soviet invasion or yelled “double standards” on the West and the United Nations.⁵ Moreover, after years and even decades, the Arab media has continued to offer dozens of retrospective analyses of the Hungarian Revolution. This is what makes this paper unique; the researchers do not conclude in the 1950s but rather examine Arabian articles and newspapers (mostly from Egypt and the Gulf region) up to the present day, even putting them in contrast to or in parallel with the so-called “Arab Spring” in 2011. Also, it must be noted that this essay significantly helps to expand the reader’s knowledge of Middle East/Cold War history; every major newspaper, journalist, politician, leader, or event is explained in a separate footnote.

In his work, Gábor Búr puts Africa in the centre. Unlike the previous scholars, Búr confronted a more difficult position; as he writes: “Africa was still predominantly a continent of colonies” and “the echo of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 was perhaps the smallest on the African continent.”⁶ Firstly, he notes that local newspapers dedicated only a few articles on the back pages to the Revolution, and when Soviet troops began to crush the Revolution, the response of the African press was largely confused. Only South Africa acted quickly and widely: by donating money to the UN crisis programmes and taking in 1,500 Hungarian refugees. Secondly, as Búr mentions, there was no Hungarian foreign representation in the key countries of the continent; besides Ethiopia, up until the mid-1960s they

4 = = Búr, Pál, and Stempler, *Followed by the Affected Compassion*, 48.

5 = = Búr, Pál, and Stempler, *Followed by the Affected Compassion*, 59.

6 = = Búr, Pál, and Stempler, *Followed by the Affected Compassion*, 80.

focused mainly on the North African Arab countries. However, while the author may have done well in collecting a considerable amount of secondary literature, the primary sources are still largely absent. It is understandable that it is not easy to obtain permission to access the archives of African countries or of their former colonial rulers, but the researcher could have had luck with the National Archives of Hungary – for example, under the Foreign Ministry fonds. It is true that in the 1950s Hungary has very limited direct contact to the Southern parts of the continent. However, there can still be found some relevant Africa-related information from ambassadors and *chargés d'affaires* who served in Brussels, Cairo, London, or Paris.

Ágnes Judit Szilágyi's paper presents Brazilian reactions to the Revolution. She is largely focused on summarizing two major articles, both of which are fully translated in the appendix. The author clearly explains why she chose those newspapers and introduces the journalists behind them, while also warning the readers to keep in mind that due to many reasons (lack of Hungarian knowledge, proximity of the events, etc.) these articles do contain inaccuracies.⁷ The historian, however, does not correct the journalists' mistakes – at most in a footnote – on topics such as Anastas Mikoyan's true personality, Georgy Zhukov's possible visit, or the events in the United Nations. Here too, upon reading the paper the reviewer feels a sense of incompleteness. How did the Brazilian government see the Hungarian Revolution? What did Brazilian diplomacy do in the United Nations? As detailed in some of the newspaper articles, was it true that serious conflicts arose between the Brazilian population or authorities and Hungarian refugees?⁸ It would have been preferable if the paper had answered questions like these, so that it could become more useful to additional research on the topic that may further expand current knowledge about Latin-American history.

Gusztáv D. Kecskés' paper, titled "The Public Information Activities of the United Nations Family of Organizations Concerning the Hungarian Refugee Crisis of 1956," anticipates the depth and breadth of the subject. Thanks to a wealth of official UN documents from sources like the Archives of the United Nations Office in Geneva (UNOG) and the United Nations Archives and Records Management Section (UNARMS), the author fulfils his undertaking perfectly. This historian's work reveals how difficult it was to convince both the leadership and the public opinion of those countries which admitted a few thousand Hungarian refugees. The complex media campaign needed significant funds, resources, and time to make an impact, but in the end they succeeded. What the reviewer found most

7 = = Búr, Pál, and Stempler, *Followed by the Affected Compassion*, 91.

8 = = This type of conflict has been mentioned elsewhere; for example, see János Dömény, "1956 és a hispán világ" ("1956 and the Hispanic World"), *Eszmélet* 72 (Spring 2006), accessed August 21, 2023, https://www.eszmelet.hu/domeny_janos-1956-es-a-hispan-vilag/.

fascinating was the rivalry not just between the UN and outside actors (for example, the DPI or Austria), but also among UN organisations themselves.

Lastly, the volume ends with a paper by another pair of authors, Pál István and Gyula Hegedüs. They have researched an intriguing topic: how the Hungarian State Security tried to recruit as many collaborators as possible from the ranks of the refugees.⁹ The nicely detailed story of agent “Műszerész” (i.e., “Technician”) – which is full of twists and turns – illustrates the fierce clashes between the Eastern Bloc and the Western secret services. Given the topic, it was essential that the authors conduct extensive research in the Historical Archive of the Hungarian State Security. The 100+ types of archival references prove that the authors have done a remarkable job in reconstructing the entire case. Moreover, Hegedüs and Pál have also used British archival materials as opportunity allowed; thanks to this fact, the reader additionally gains insights into how the famous British secret services worked. That said, the reviewer maintains that this contribution’s greatest strength is also its greatest weakness; it can be challenging for a reader to follow a more than sixty-page-long work properly, and this length also slightly upsets the overall balance of the volume. The reader must sometimes turn back pages to refresh and reorganize the events in their head, while without explanatory footnotes it becomes more difficult to understand the era or to clarify the internal contradictions in archival sources. With even the authors admitting that the issue needs further research, this reviewer concludes that the story of “Műszerész” rather deserves to receive an independent monograph than a paper.

In review, a degree of deficiency in the volume’s editing should be noted as well. The reviewer realizes that it can be challenging to combine so many divergent studies into one book. The editors have generally done a commendable job and there are no outlier pieces in the volume. However, some inconsistencies can be detected, especially when it comes to the references. Only a few authors (Szilágyi, al-Naggar–Prantner) have included papers in English and English titles for non-English books; the others have simply referenced works using the original language, which may be a disadvantage for non-Hungarian readers who are interested in the subject. When something is referenced a second time, there is no common marking; some authors use the form “Ibidem” while others write “Idem.” Also, as mentioned before, the lack of explanatory footnotes makes some papers hard to follow or understand.

On the whole, however, all these pieces of constructive criticism do not devalue the importance of *Followed by the Affected Compassion of the Free World*. Quite the contrary: they rather encourage the continuation of this type of research. This reviewer hopes that it will encourage Hungarian historians to write not just

⁹ = = Búr, Pál, and Stempler, *Followed by the Affected Compassion of the Free World*, 129.

papers but come forth with monographs on the topic in the future. It is a welcome development for Hungarian historiography to show a growing interest in and focus on the so-called “Global South.” With this volume, Búr, Pál, Stempler, and the other contributors have taken the initial steps down this road.

==== Literature ====

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Keywords

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