

## **The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 Viewed from Two Decades' Distance**

Peter Gosztony

When the next generation writes the history of the Hungarian 1956 Revolution many will note the strange phenomena which, like comets, are said to announce the coming of wars, to forewarn the country and its people of the cataclysmic event: floods on the Tisza River and in Transdanubia, earthquake in Pest County, and a strange accident on Margit Bridge in Budapest, where a speeding bus (fortunately not packed with passengers) plunged straight into the Danube. But those aware of the situation in Hungary needed no special warnings about the coming storm.

For seven years the country had been ruled by the Hungarian Workers' Party (the Communist Party of Hungary) under the direction of Mátyás Rákosi. The results of his leadership were disastrous in almost every respect. A regime of economic planning, designed to serve the political purposes of a foreign power, had led Hungary to the brink of economic collapse by the fall of 1956. As one Hungarian party official put it in 1969, "grave economic problems" contributed to the deterioration of the general political situation before October 1956 and increased the people's discontent. The author of this study, Dr. János Berecz, Director of the External Division of the Hungarian Communist Party's Central Committee, is worth quoting at length:

At the end of September it was announced that all long-distance bus service will be suspended temporarily, that because of the lack of coal some 600 passenger trains will be idle for three weeks, and that the fuel supply of state farms will also be decreased. Work was stopped on many large construction projects. It was characteristic of economic management at the time that the head of the country's Statistical Bureau confessed in his letter to the President of the State Planning Bureau: because of the several thousand modifications in the country's economic plan, the Statistical Bureau no longer knows which plan is in effect.<sup>1</sup>

In agriculture the Party's elite had used the methods of forced, "bureaucratic" leadership. Year after year, and often even several times

annually, they increased the farmers' obligations to the state. Compulsory deliveries and heavy taxation had taken away the peasants' incentive. Disinterest in expanding production had grown to the extent that, just to give one example, by 1953 more than 10 per cent of the country's arable land lay fallow!<sup>2</sup>

By the mid-1950's, deficits had become a regular phenomenon in industrial operations. Contrary to repeated Party promises, workers', peasants', and most wage earners' living standards declined steadily. By the early 1950's they had sunk well below pre-World War II levels.<sup>3</sup> But the situation was much worse in the realm of the citizenry's legal rights.

The Communist Party of Hungary exercised complete power not only over the army and police, it also controlled the special internal security force, the *Államvédelmi Hatóság*, the Secret Police or AVH. This agency answered directly to Rákosi and was exempt from all other supervision or control. During Rákosi's seven years in power, the prisons were packed, forced-labour camps were established following the Soviet pattern, and the hangman was kept busy. The watchful eye of the AVH was not reserved for the Party's enemies alone. The ordinary citizen, even the common workingman could also become a "potential enemy" if the Party's interest so demanded. Sándor Nógrády, one of the top political officers of the Armed Forces before 1956, writes the following in his memoirs about the Rákosi era:

It did not take much to imprison someone. It took virtually nothing to expel someone from Budapest, apart from pronouncing him an "undesirable element" there. This could happen even to someone who was born there and had no criminal record!<sup>4</sup>

When, in the 1960's, this same Sándor Nógrády paid an official visit to the by then disgraced Rákosi in Russia, the ex-dictator still defended his policies. This was the natural process of the revolution—he said. "They [the people] must feel—God'amn it—the dictatorship of the proletariat!" He didn't want to hear about the principle of "revolutionary legality": that was "something out of nothing."<sup>5</sup> Nógrády himself admitted that there had been no legal bases for the thousands of arrests and imprisonments. Between 1949 and 1956 trial followed trial in Hungary. These were "show trials" with forged evidence, forced testimonials, and conducted before audiences ordered to attend. Civic leaders, communist functionaries, high-ranking churchmen alike were dragged before these courts. Sentences were imposed on "kulaks" (well-to-do peasants), "economic saboteurs," "spies," and "anti-socialist elements," in total mockery of traditional court procedures. The terror

which accompanied the day-to-day activities of the Party was virtually unparalleled in the history of Hungary. Again it is worthwhile to quote some shocking facts from contemporary Hungarian sources. These are from Dr. Berecz's book:

It is characteristic of the campaign to class-enemies and of the excesses in the administration [of justice] that between 1952 and 1955, that is, in the course of four years, investigative proceedings were started in 1,136,434 cases. Charges were brought against 516,708 people, 45 per cent of those investigated. . . . All this seriously affected many law-abiding and peaceloving working people; and it produced a crisis in citizenship. . . .<sup>6</sup>

Just as the citizen was deprived of his basic rights and was forced to keep silent, so Hungary's cultural life was subjected to the principle of socialist realism, an idea imported from the Soviet Union. The Union of Artists, the Union of Journalists, and the Union of Writers were subordinated to the almighty Party. All the members of these associations were obliged to toe the party line. Whoever refused to accept this state of affairs and objected to it, could consider himself fortunate if he only lost his job and status as writer or artist, and was not handed over to the AVH as a "class enemy." Following is an excerpt from a little-known document dating from 1955:

The degree of the individual's material dependence on the state, which forces him to abandon his convictions and individuality, is incompatible with healthy national life. With us this state of affairs is a wide-ranging sickness affecting the whole of society. The over-centralized economy and political mechanism of a people's democracy is the necessary byproduct of a personal dictatorship. What political morality can prevail in public life in a state where critical thought is not only silenced but is severely punished, where critics are ostracized with utter disregard of the civil rights granted by the constitution, where those who oppose the prevailing political line are barred from their professions (journalists from publishing and writers from writing), where I was deprived not only of public office but of my teaching post and membership in the Hungarian Academy of Sciences as well, making it impossible for me to carry out any activity that would enable me to make a living. What is all this if not the shameful degeneration of political morality? Can one talk of a bill-of-rights, rule-of-law, legality and clean civic life where the conflict of opinions is resolved with such despicable methods. . . . ? This is not socialist morality but Machiavellian politics in a modern form. The all-pervasive material dependence [of the individual on the state], this constant concern about day-to-day survival, is the killer of the noblest of human traits which, in a socialist society, should be encouraged: steadfastness, courage and strength of convictions. In place of these they foster self-abasement, cowardice, spinelessness and dishonesty.

The corruption and degeneration of national life and the consequent destruction of society's morals is one of the gravest manifestations of that moral and ethical crisis which is taking place before our very eyes.<sup>7</sup>

These sentences issued from the pen of a Communist Imre Nagy's December 1955 memorandum to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Hungary. His words were not heeded. The country's masters were so far out of touch with reality and were so vain and full of self-delusions that they did not for a moment doubt the correctness of their policies.

At this juncture the unexpected happened: in February 1956 the 20th Communist Party Congress of the Soviet Union (CPSU) met in Moscow. Nikolai Sergeievich Khrushchev broke the silence on Stalin and condemned stalinist leadership in its many horrible aspects before an audience stunned by the brave words. Although his speech was not meant for public consumption, it soon became widely known through unofficial channels, and not only in the Soviet Union. The first tremours of the destalinization campaign associated with Khrushchev's name were soon felt in Eastern Europe. In June 1956 the earth began to shake under the feet of the Communists in the Polish industrial city of Poznań. By October the situation had become stormy in Warsaw as well. Polish armed forces surrounded the city to prevent intervention by Soviet troops. Khrushchev had to fly to Warsaw so that, with Premier Gomułka's aid he might avert the outbreak of a new Polish-Soviet conflict.

In Hungary the situation was in many respects different from Poland's. In the wake of the 20th CPSU Congress, the country's intellectuals began to stir. Under the aegis of the Union of Communist Youth, the Petőfi Circle was established gathering into its ranks those who, although favouring the continuing struggle for socialism, demanded that the existing leadership be forced to account for its deeds. Although not stated at the time, they also favoured a free Hungary, independent from the Soviet Union. Moscow, which was ultimately responsible for decision-making in Hungary, at first made a few concessions in response to popular demand. On Soviet orders, Rákosi resigned as Chief Secretary of the Communist Party of Hungary and left the country, citing "ill-health" as the reason for his departure. The Russians chose another "Rákosi," Ernő Gerő, in his place. Gerő was not as well known to the masses, but he had been equally responsible for the reign of terror between 1948 and 1956. Such changes could only slow the course of events but could not arrest it. Certain victims of the stalinist leadership were "rehabilitated," some in their graves, as László Rajk and General

Pálffy. A rapprochement was effected with Tito's Yugoslavia, and 474 political prisoners, mainly Communists and Social-Democrats, were released from Hungarian prisons.<sup>8</sup> As it became known later, some 3,000 others remained behind bars. Even though Gerő and his former secretary and the new Premier of Hungary, András Hegedüs, were reluctant to permit formally the re-burying of Rajk's remains, public pressure was so great that they had to yield. Funeral services for Rajk and three others who had been executed with him took place on 6 October in Kerepes cemetery. Gábor Péter, the dreaded AVH chief during the terror, had to be brought out from prison to show where Rajk and his associates had been buried. Now the bones of four men, disinterred from a shallow grave in a winecellar on the outskirts of Budapest, were pronounced to be those of Rajk and company. The funeral turned out to be a gigantic, silent demonstration against the regime. Those who gathered in Kerepes cemetery (their number is estimated at 100,000), were not paying their respects to Rajk: by their presence they voiced, as yet silently, their disapproval of the existing government.

During mid-October, associations of university students on the pattern of the Petőfi Circle were formed in Budapest and elsewhere. On the 16th, the students of Szeged University established the Federation of Hungarian University and College Students, an organization independent of the Communist youth movement and the Party. The very same day, in another part of the country, in the city of Győr the demand for the withdrawal of Soviet occupation forces from Hungary was voiced publicly for the first time at a meeting of the local intelligentsia. After the 23rd demand, "Russians go home!" became a national slogan.

Out of touch with realities, the country's leaders were losing the ground from under their feet. Early in October they had Mihály Farkas, the ex-Minister of Defence, arrested, together with his son, the dreaded AVH colonel. The government figured that by sacrificing these men and a few other AVH agents they would satisfy the masses. On the 14th Gerő, hoping that a treaty of friendship with Yugoslavia would take the wind from the sails of those demanding a new orientation in the country's politics, left for Belgrade at the head of a large delegation. A complete split now occurred within the Communist Party of Hungary—the Central Committee, the leaders, on the one hand, and the members-at-large on the other. Most members identified with the demands of the people: to square accounts with the regime of terror, and to attain a socialist but independent and even neutral Hungary. The minority within the Party, the stalinists, viewed the ever faster pace of developments with consternation.

By the middle of October a situation developed in Hungary which a professional revolutionary, V. I. Lenin, defined in 1905:

For a revolution to happen it is not enough for the exploited masses to realize that they cannot live as they did before and demand a change. For the revolution it is also necessary that the exploiters should not be able to live and rule in the established fashion. Only when the oppressed reject the old order and the rulers cannot live and rule in the old way, only then can the revolution succeed. We can express this truism with other words thus: the revolution is not possible without a nationwide crisis affecting equally the exploited and the exploiters.<sup>9</sup>

Today, even Hungarian Communist historians admit that in October 1956 the country's leaders and the central Party organs were out of touch with the realities of the situation. Blind self-confidence, arrogance, and complacency characterized their behaviour, according to Dr. Berecz. In his book he points out that "certain security agencies" (*i.e.*, the AVH) had twice reported that "opposition elements were up to something in Budapest." Moreover, in their second warning they predicted that 22 October would be the day when disturbances would start. The Party leaders replied: "Nightmares!" When, in the industrial centre of Csepel, one party functionary warned the stalinist Károly Kis, a member of the Party's Political Bureau, about the excited mood of the workers, Kis responded: "Comrade: if some action is started against us we can deal with such outbreak in 30 minutes!"<sup>10</sup> The leaders' directives to the Armed Forces also proved that they were unable to assess the situation correctly. On 20 October the Forces were put on internal security alert, but 24 hours later, in the evening of the 21st, the orders were cancelled.

The students of the Budapest Polytechnical Institute held their general meeting on the 22nd. They announced that they supported the programme of the University of Szeged students, that they would quit the Communist youth movement, and that they would address their demands to the government point by point. It was at this meeting, lasting into the night, that the famous 16-point programme was born, rendering students' views on issues of national concern. The document mentioned not only the extension of democracy and reforms, but also free elections, participation of several democratic parties in the electoral process, and the removal of Soviet troops from Hungary. During this evening the students also decided to stage a peaceful demonstration the next day, *i.e.*, on the 23rd, in order to lend emphasis to their demands.

During the evening and night of the 22nd, the executive of the Petőfi

Circle also met. The participants decided to communicate with Imre Nagy at once, and inform him of the planned demonstration and its purpose. Although Nagy belonged to the group of Communists who returned to Hungary from Moscow in 1945, during the past eleven years he had managed to gain popularity with the masses. The peasants knew him as the minister who redistributed the land, intellectuals recalled his university lectures which were free of stalinist dogmatism; and during the change of government following Stalin's death, Nagy had tried to implement a new party line. In Imre Nagy, the masses saw a Communist who was both Hungarian and a democrat.

The story of the student demonstration of the 23rd is known to all. The capital's populace accepted the students' programme as its own in a matter of hours. Within one day the whole country joined to support the people of Budapest. The tumultuous events at the statue of Józef Bem (the Polish hero of the 1848–49 Hungarian Revolution), in Lajos Kossuth Square, at the Radio Centre on Sándor Bródy Street, and the toppling of Stalin's statue in Városliget, were the highlights of the day. The government's complete inability to deal with developments soon became apparent. Enraged, Gerő demanded from the Minister of Defence that his troops open fire on the masses. By this time blood flowed in front of the Radio building in Sándor Bródy Street. In the evening, the AVH men in charge of security there opened fire on the yet unarmed crowds. Seeing this, the Armed Forces Units arriving on the scene either surrendered their weapons to the demonstrators or joined them. Some commandeered cars and drove to the factories in Csepel and the other industrial suburbs to arouse the workers against the AVH—and they succeeded!

During the night of October 23/24 the Party leaders made a decision which, from their point of view, was the only realistic one: to quell the revolt, they would solicit the aid of Soviet troops. Their request was granted. The first Soviet contingents reached the capital in the morning of the 24th. They were units comprised mainly of tank detachments and had orders not to fire. Their commanders believed that, as in Berlin in June 1953, the "insurrectionists" would be "brought to their senses" by the mere sight of Russian tanks patrolling the city's thoroughfares. But it was not to be so. The freedom fighters, at first sporadically, but later with great determination, opened fire with their primitive weapons on the Soviet tanks moving into the heart of the city. The revolution now entered a new stage: it became a freedom fight, a war of liberation against the interventionist forces of an alien power.

Viewed from a distance, it seems clear that the period between 23 and 29 October constituted the first general phase of the revolution and the struggle for liberation. These days were characterized not only by the manning of the barricades and by street-fighting in Budapest. Insurgent political organizations were materializing everywhere. The various workers' councils, national and revolutionary committees wished to work for a free, independent, and socialist Hungary. The students were in the vanguard of these activities: they published newspapers, organized political rallies, conducted agitation in the countryside, and participated in the negotiations with members of the government. It should be pointed out that during these days three centers of authority evolved in Hungary: the insurgents; the government comprising the party elite (by now completely out of touch with developments); and the general staff of the Soviet occupation forces in Hungary, taking orders directly from Moscow.

In vain did the existing government try to gain control over the situation by granting concessions to the people. In vain did they dismiss Hegedüs as Premier and Gerő as Party Chief, placing in their stead Imre Nagy and János Kádár. Neither of these men could influence the course of events or exercise a moderating influence on the demands pouring forth from every section of society. In Hungary, the type of compromise that had been implemented in Poland with the coming of Gomułka into office, was doomed to failure. After the 23rd, the Communists' authority disintegrated within a few short days. The Party, with its 900,000 members, simply dissolved into thin air.<sup>11</sup> The Units of the AVH had to fight for their lives, while the police and armed forces joined the insurgents. The Soviet occupation troops were completely isolated and had to quit Budapest on the 28th. This same day György Lukács addressed the country's insurgent youth on radio and expressed his sympathies with their demands. He was followed by Imre Nagy, who announced that in a reorganized government several non-Communists had been included and that negotiations had been initiated with the Soviet military command for the withdrawal of Russian troops from Hungary. On the 30th, Nagy made still another announcement: the one-party system of government would end, and elections would be held with the participation of several democratic parties. This was the day when it seemed that the demands and aims of the Revolution had been achieved.



By this time, Imre Nagy had resolved a certain conflict which manifested itself during these days in the leadership of the Communist Party. The fact is that on the 28th the stalinists, led by Ferenc Münnich (who later turned out to be Beria's follower and Hungary's top NKVD agent) attempted a coup d'état aimed at the establishment of a military dictatorship. It is noteworthy what Dr. Berecz writes about this hitherto obscure plan.

During the night of October 27th/28th, the members of the Military Committee of the central organs of the Party worked out a plan for the safe-guarding of the people's power (*i.e.*, the rule of the Communists ) through military means. For the time being the armed forces would assume power, with the political officers taking command within the individual divisions. After order had been restored in the country and the insurgents had been scattered, a new government was to be formed. But this plan was not to be carried out. . . .<sup>12</sup>

It could not be implemented because the Military Command could not find the men needed to execute the plan. By the end of October the Ministry of Defence, the Chiefs-of-Staff, and the commanders of the various branches of the Armed Forces had all endorsed the cause of the Revolution. The National Command of the Air Force even admonished Soviet troops through leaflets to leave the country by a certain date, otherwise the Hungarian Air Force would become actively involved in the fight against the Soviet Army.

\* \* \*

The events in Hungary confronted Soviet government leaders and the CPSU with a grave situation. Two types of opinions crystallized in Moscow. One group (today we know that at first Khrushchev belonged to this one ) viewed Hungarian developments as a process of reckoning with the stalinist past, and would have accepted a neutral Hungary that would not join NATO nor restore capitalism. The other group, led by Molotov and Marshal Zhukov, demanded the immediate crushing of what they called a "capitalist and imperialist mutiny." During the second half of October Mikoyan and Suslov were dispatched twice to Budapest for discussions with Imre Nagy and to pass on instructions to him. But by the time the two Russian emissaries returned to the Kremlin on the 30th, the fate of the Hungarian Revolution had been sealed. The fact is that on the 29th Peking got into the act. Mao Tse-tung and his associates emphatically demanded that the "Hungarian counter-revolution" be crushed. It must be noted that in these historic days China itself was in crisis. It had just experienced its "hundred flowers" move-

ment, the mixing of a bit of liberalization with dogmatism, and the events in Hungary demonstrated that such experiments in freedom could endanger the whole system. This is why the “destalinization” process came to a premature end in China. Mao Tse-tung and associates realized that exposing the “mistakes of the past” could only hurt the Communist system.<sup>13</sup>

But let us return to Hungary. In the early morning of 30 October preparations began in Moscow to crush the Hungarian Revolution. While Soviet troops poured into the country from the east, Khrushchev went on a whirlwind tour of the capitals of Hungary’s Communist neighbours. Everywhere sympathy was expressed for the idea of quelling the revolt by military means. Czechoslovakia’s Communist leaders had been viewing developments in Budapest with concern: they were worried lest the half-million Magyars living in Slovakia be spurred to action by events in Hungary. We now know that on the 27th the Czechoslovak Armed Forces were put on the alert, and sizable forces were dispatched to the Hungarian border. At the same time, Communist organs in Slovakia were instructed to help the stalinists in northern Hungary by all means. Accordingly, propaganda leaflets printed in three Slovak cities were smuggled into Hungary. Refuge was offered to high-ranking Hungarian party officials and AVH officers who fled to Slovakia to escape the vengeful wrath of the people.

In Romania the situation was different. At first, the leaders in Bucharest looked upon developments in Hungary with a certain degree of sympathy. But when Transylvania’s Hungarian population began stirring and, what is more important, enlisted the support of a good portion of the Romanian university youth, they got scared in Bucharest. *Siguranca*, the Romanian secret police, hit upon a brilliant counter-move. With the idea of divide and rule in mind, it had leaflets printed in Magyar, reproducing the Hungarian youth’s 16-point programme. The points were the same as the original ones issued in Budapest, except for the one dealing with university bursary system reform. Instead of this provision they substituted a demand never and nowhere voiced during the revolution: Transylvania’s restitution to Hungary. This Machiavellian tactic isolated the Hungarians of Transylvania. During the next few weeks, Romania’s leaders suppressed the budding Hungarian movement by so-called “executive methods” (unrestricted police action). More important, Khrushchev’s proposed programme for Hungary found complete support in Bucharest as well. Romanian officials favoured immediate Soviet intervention, but when the Russian leader asked for the co-operation of Romanian troops in Hungary’s “pacifica-

tion," he received an evasive reply. Politically, the Romanian army was not strong enough to undertake action abroad without incurring internal damage.

On 2 November Khrushchev met Tito in Belgrade.<sup>14</sup> Soviet-Yugoslav relations were once more strained these days. The Russians knew very well that the idea of following the "Yugoslav example" had no small role in the evolution of events in Hungary. Emulating a socialist Yugoslavia, independent of the Soviet bloc and trusted by East and West alike, held a strong (though in the light of later developments, unrealistic) attraction for Hungarian Communists with nationalist leanings. For several reasons Tito enjoyed a degree of popularity in Hungary, and those who wanted to pursue a policy of "away from Moscow," saw in him the potential leader of a new alignment centered on the Danube Basin. But socialist Yugoslavia, which had welcomed events in Hungary on the 23rd, 24th and 25th (after all, these were anti-stalinist manifestations), viewed the unfolding of developments thereafter with increasing concern. It considered the recognition of the Kossuth insignia as a Hungarian national emblem a sign of reawakening Magyar imperialism. At the same time, the revival of the Social Democratic Party and the other progressive parties, and the increasing isolation of the Communists, aroused in Tito the fear that a general revolutionary movement might spread after its victory in Hungary. This would endanger the future of one-party dictatorship in the already conflict-ridden Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. That is why Tito, who had condemned Soviet intervention in Hungarian affairs on the 24th, changed his mind by early November. He assured Khrushchev that he sympathized with Soviet plans regarding Hungary, and even showed him a telegram just received from the State Department in Washington. The United States was not sympathetic toward governments of countries bordering the Soviet Union which adopted an unfriendly position against the USSR.<sup>15</sup> For Khrushchev, this telegram, couched in impeccable diplomatic language, was a stroke of fortune. It plainly showed that the United States had no interest in the establishment of anti-Soviet governments or systems within the Iron Curtain. Khrushchev could relax on his return flight to Moscow. Revolutionary Hungary's diplomatic isolation was complete, and all that remained was to initiate a military operation to restore order.

Very little was known in Hungary about these developments at the time. The only alarming news came from the East. Following 31 October, more and more Soviet troops poured into the country. From centers in Eastern Hungary, such as Záhony and Nyiregyháza came hourly re-

ports of the Soviet build-up. "It seems," began a message from the Hungarian railway officials in Záhony, "that the Soviet Army wants to bring the whole of Hungary under socialist protection." In vain did Imre Nagy call on the Soviet Minister in Budapest. The answer from the Russian Embassy was that no one there knew what was happening and that a clarification of the situation would be sought from Moscow.

In the shadow of Soviet intervention, Imre Nagy—seeing no feasible alternatives—decided on taking a historic step. In the afternoon of 1 November he announced to a crowd gathered in Lajos Kossuth Square that Hungary would quit the Warsaw Pact and become a neutral nation on the Austrian pattern. It must be emphasized that this announcement met with the approval of the vast majority of Hungary's population and in no way did it constitute an *ad hoc* decision. After all, ever since the outbreak of the revolution on the 23rd, this wish had been voiced most often and most emphatically by the masses. After two world wars and three revolutions, Hungary's people wished to build their future independent of East and West, free of military entanglements, and in sincere cooperation with the other peoples of the Danube Basin. Naturally, such a solution did not suit the Kremlin's scheme of things. As far as the Western Great Powers were concerned, they—just as a century earlier during the 1848–49 Revolution—were not at all concerned with the affairs of the middle Danube Valley.

There are those who fault Nagy for provoking Moscow to premature action, contending that he should have restrained not hastened the course of developments. Those who argue thus are unfamiliar with the sequence of events: the first steps toward a military showdown were taken by Moscow, Nagy only reacted defensively when he cancelled Hungary's membership in the Warsaw alliance; he hoped to deprive the Soviets of any legal pretext for sending troops into Hungary. By pledging the country's neutrality, he meant to convince Moscow that the Hungarian government had no desire to enter NATO or any alignment of capitalist powers. It must be said that Nagy's announcements had no influence whatever on the course of developments during the next few days. Moscow had decided on military intervention and the Hungarians, with their own resources, were powerless to alter the course of events.

For the next few days the Soviet leaders played a two-faced game. They tried to convince Nagy that they still wished to negotiate with him. Indeed, on 3 November, a delegation of high-ranking Soviet generals came to the Parliament buildings to discuss the details of Soviet troop withdrawals from Hungary. Meanwhile, for three whole days, more and more Soviet units crossed the border into Hungary. Later it was

learned that, by the time of the completion of the troop build-up on the 3rd, fifteen Russian divisions, including eight tank divisions, with more than 200,000 Red soldiers were awaiting orders to attack. Moscow also adopted political measures to assure the satisfactory outcome of events. On the 2nd the Russians virtually abducted János Kádár from his Buda residence. They wanted to make him head of the Soviet-backed government that was to replace Nagy's. Today we know that at first his role was meant for Münnich; but it was soon realized that Münnich being unknown in the country, Kádár was more suited for the post: he had languished in Rákosi's prisons and been tortured by the Farkases. Moreover, he was of working-class origin and had not received his political training in Moscow. Thus it happened that, on 3 November, Nagy looked in vain for his comrade, the Party Chief and Secretary of State: Kádár was not to be found in the Hungarian capital. Only weeks later did it become known that, along with a few of his associates (Münnich, Marosán, Dögei, Kossa and Kiss), he was in Uzhorod (Ungvár), in Soviet Subcarpathia, negotiating with the Russians on the setting up of a post-revolutionary regime in Hungary.

What happened thereafter is well known to all. On 4 November the Soviets unleashed their troops on Budapest once more. In the capital fighting endured for four days—elsewhere even longer. Significantly, Sztálinváros (Stalin City), Hungary's foremost socialist centre, was the last to capitulate (November 15th). Nagy and his colleagues sought refuge in the Yugoslav embassy. When Tito announced his support of the newly formed puppet Kádár regime, Nagy left his place of refuge. His pride would not permit him to enjoy the hospitality and protection of a regime which had betrayed him. Nagy had trusted the Russians and Kádár as well; his disappointment in them must have been very deep: in the end, he paid for his trust with his life. Pál Maléter, his Minister of Defence, also became the victim of a trap. He was arrested in the early hours of the 4th by NKVD men at Soviet headquarters, where he had been invited for official discussions under the white flag of truce.

Even though by 8 November Budapest was "pacified" and, under the protection of Russian tanks, Kádár and his government occupied the Parliament Buildings, the Hungarian Revolution could not be quelled so easily. Partisan warfare against the new regime continued well into January 1957, and the slogan MUK (Márciusban Újra Kezdjük – We will start again in March), current in Budapest during the winter, was not an unfounded rumour. The various workers' councils and other organizations, born at the time of the uprising, continued to struggle in the face of mounting persecution. All this must be kept in mind lest

the impression be created that the Revolution was a transitory, passing event lasting only fourteen days.

One more matter must be mentioned. No detailed figures have ever been released by the Budapest government about casualties and damages incurred during the revolution. But we do know that, on the Hungarian side, more than 3,000 persons lost their lives. The number of wounded was around 15,000. More than 200,000 people fled to the West. Some 53,000 returned in the decade following 1956. Western observers estimate Soviet Army losses to be about 100 tanks and armoured vehicles and approximately 2,000 casualties. The lives of an additional 12,000 citizens were affected by the various post-revolutionary terror campaigns and purges. Persons closely affiliated with the United Nations estimate that in the five-year period following 1956, the Kádár regime pronounced death sentences on, and executed 453 individuals, among them Imre Nagy, Pál Maléter, and a host of military and civilian leaders.

In deeming the revolution a human tragedy, no distinction exists between Hungarians abroad or in Hungary. Albeit Hungary's present leaders persist in labelling the event a "counter-revolution," even Kádár, in a speech delivered on the occasion of his 60th birthday in 1971, looking back on 1956, called it a national tragedy.<sup>16</sup> And it is not pure chance that in the two decades since the event, not one of the country's reputable writers, musicians, or poets has used the official terminology "counter-revolution" to describe 1956. Is this the judgement of Clio?

The October Revolution failed to attain its intended goal. To this day, Hungary is under Soviet occupation. Instead of democracy and neutrality, there is Party rule and Warsaw Pact alignment. But we would do violence to reality if we failed to recognize the positive aspects of the present Hungarian situation, in contrast to what had prevailed before 1956. When we consider this carefully, it is not an inconsiderable achievement. And, as far as Hungary's national history is concerned, let me cite Kossuth's 1850 assessment of the significance of his generation's struggle for Hungarian freedom:

We did not triumph, but we had fought.

We did not end the rule of the Tyrant, but we had halted his march.

We did not save the country, but we had defended it.

If they will write about us in the history books, they will be able to say that we had resisted.

## NOTES

The author wishes to thank Professor N. F. Dreisziger for translating this study from Hungarian into English.

1. János Berecz, *Ellenforradalom tollal és fegyverrel* [Counter-revolution with pen and weapons] (Budapest: Kossuth kiadó, 1969), p. 78.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Sándor Nógrády, *Új történet kezdődött* [New history began] (Budapest: Kossuth kiadó, 1966), p. 174.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 177.
6. Berecz, *op. cit.*, p. 30.
7. Imre Nagy, *A magyar nép védelmében* [In defence of the Hungarian people] (Published by the Revolutionary Council, n.p. 1958), p. 25.
8. The *Szabad Nép*, as summarized by the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 23 July 1956.
9. V. I. Lenin, *Lenin válogatott művei* [The selected works of Lenin] (Budapest: Szikra kiadó, 1954), Vol. II, p. 730.
10. Berecz, *op. cit.*, p. 80.
11. "No matter how sad it is to say but the truth is that in the fall of 1956 the Party disintegrated into its atoms, the regime was imperiled, and anarchy ruled in the country!" János Kádár, in *Társadalmi Szemle*, no. 12, 1972.
12. Berecz, *op. cit.*, p. 104.
13. The best among the books dealing with the external aspects of the Hungarian Revolution is János Radványi's *Hungary and the Superpowers: The 1956 Revolution and Realpolitics* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1972).
14. *Magyar Szó* (Novi Sad/Újvidék), 18 July 1976.
15. *The Congressional Record* (31 August 1960, p. 17, 407) cited in John Stormer, *None Dare Call it Treason* (Florissant, Miss.: Liberty Bell Press, 1964), p. 48.
16. János Kádár, "Válasz a születésnap üdvözlésre" [Reply to a birthday greeting], *Társadalmi Szemle*, No. 6, 1972, p. 9.