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ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT

The 1956 Hungarian Revolution

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The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 was one of the most shocking jolts to the Soviet system in the post-Stalin era. Although the revolution was spontaneous, the massive discontent that resulted in the uprising had been brewing for some time. Hungarians were stifled under the repressive regime of Matyas Rakosi of 1947-1953 and were disappointed when the more enlightened leadership of his successor Imre Nagy, was brought to a halt in 1955. The internal affairs of the Soviet Union in 1956 also had an impact on the satellite states and further fueled the intra-party strife, intellectual protest and massive social unrest that set the wheels of revolutionary action in motion. Thus, an understanding of the event itself is not complete without an analysis of its preconditions and causes. A true understanding of the revolution is also incomplete if one simply analyzes the chronology of the events themselves without obtaining insight into the psychology of both those who were involved in the uprising and those whom such events affected. Eyewitness memoirs of both revolutionaries and ordinary Hungarians alike are thus invaluable. This paper seeks to create a balanced description of the causes, events and aftermath of the Hungarian Revolution by utilizing both factual sources and eyewitness accounts. It is hoped that by focussing on the personal experiences of average Hungarians, a fuller understanding of the event is reached.

The first seeds of the revolution were planted the very moment the Communists took over in Hungary in 1947. The rigged election that brought Matyas Rakosi to power represented the beginning of the Soviet domination that was to characterize Hungary until 1956. Because the new government had no national basis and because Rakosi was a devout follower of Stalin, Hungary's Communist Party was especially dependent on the Soviet Union. This is evidenced by the extent to which Soviet-style institutions and policies infiltrated Hungarian society. The Hungarian secret police, the AVO, was developed under Soviet tutelage and its top leaders were exiles returned from the USSR. Essentially, it was a Soviet institution guided solely by their interests. The army experienced a similar takeover. With the introduction of Soviet advisers in 1948, the Hungarian National Army became a People's Army. In addition to receiving anti-Titoist indoctrination, Hungarian soldiers were armed with Soviet military supplies and followed Soviet regulations. Most devastating to Hungarians was the fact that the Kossuth Crest, a nationalist symbol dating back to the 1848 revolution, was replaced with the red star on all uniforms.<sup>1</sup> A Soviet special corps force was also installed in Hungary after World War II. These changes served to emphasize the alien nature of the current regime.

Matyas Rakosi's government not only religiously followed the Soviet model in its institutions, but also in its repressive treatment of the population. After 1948, Hungary, like other bloc countries, established show trials to purge the government of Titoist elements. In Hungary, this had the effect of eliminating 'home' communists and consolidating the power of the Muscovites, who were Communists that had been in exile

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<sup>1</sup> Bela Kiraly and Paul Jonas eds. The First War Between Socialist States: the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and its Impact. (USA: Columbia University Press, 1984) 8-9.

in the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup> The alien, imposed nature of the regime was again highlighted by these actions. While the Communists' level of power insulted the Hungarians' sense of nationalism, the purges the regime instituted had a more devastating, direct impact on the population. After the government was cleansed, ordinary Hungarian citizens became victims of the purges as they were accused of being 'kulaks', 'class enemies' and 'Zionist agents'. Between 1948-1956, approximately 350,000 people were involved in the purges.<sup>3</sup> In this period, 200,000 people became political prisoners and 2,000 Hungarians were executed.<sup>4</sup> An additional 100,000 urban, middle-class Hungarians endured compulsory resettlement into the countryside in 1950-51. One tenth of the Hungarian population was somehow affected by police terror.<sup>5</sup> One victim of the Rakosi terror was the father of Katalin Morrison (nee Jozsef). An Auschwitz survivor herself, she recalled:

“My father was put to jail and later we found out that he was accused of a conspiracy to kill Wallenberg. My father did nothing all his life but help poor students... [he was] working in a Jewish institution to help set up nursery schools and sponsor university students who came from concentration camps...he was taken away one night and for six months we knew nothing about where he was. We know he was tortured. He could never walk properly after that and our faith in the world changed and it will never recover. Our life was in terror. We never talked about what happened to our family. We never told our friends because that wasn't the kind of thing people talked about. We were afraid and we didn't know who we could trust.”<sup>6</sup>

Andras Jozsef's sentence when compared to his religious background and occupation demonstrates the absolute irrationality of the purges. The lack of trust Morrison emphasized was perhaps the most pertinent characteristic of the regime. Given the Communists' extensive recruitment of informers, it became impossible for one to determine who could be trusted with any information that could be deemed remotely incriminating. In its search for informants, the secret police sought out adults and children alike. One of Hubert Rechnitzer's classmates was picked up by an AVO car one day and the agents inside gave him chocolates in their attempts to recruit him.<sup>7</sup> Children were indoctrinated at an early age that even their parents could not be trusted. It was common practice for school teachers to ask students to spy on their parents.<sup>8</sup> Even those

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<sup>2</sup> Gyorgy Litvan. The Hungarian Revolution of 1956: Reform, Revolt and Repression. (Budapest: CEU Press, 1997), 19.

<sup>3</sup> Gyorgy Litvan. The Hungarian Revolution of 1956: Reform, Revolt and Repression. (Budapest: CEU Press, 1997), 19.

<sup>4</sup> Paul E. Zinner. Revolution in Hungary. (USA: Columbia University Press, 1972), 114.

<sup>5</sup> Gyorgy Litvan. The Hungarian Revolution of 1956: Reform, Revolt and Repression, 19.

<sup>6</sup> Katalin Morrison. *Personal interview*. (01/31/03).

<sup>7</sup> Hubert Rechnitzer. *Personal interview*. (01/30/03).

<sup>8</sup> George and Mari Retek. *Personal interview*. (03/21/03).

who had no contact with the AVO were indirectly affected by the culture of fear the regime produced. Hubert Rechnitzer recalled, “when a car went by on the street at night, you woke up,” adding, “it was a pressure-cooker at that time.”<sup>9</sup>

Clearly, such terror did not affect everyone, but Hungarian daily life before the revolution was still quite repressive, and gradually aroused massive dissent. Communist rule significantly shaped one’s quotidian experiences in education, religion and employment. As in the Soviet Union, the middle-class and class enemies were more or less effectively barred from post-secondary education. Some class enemies, through luck or forgery managed to surmount such obstacles. Peter Nador was branded a class enemy under the regime because his father was a lawyer. He recalled, “I got into university because I was an excellent student. Even at my entrance exam they tried to tell me they didn’t have any room for me. I still don’t know how they actually got me in.”<sup>10</sup> Most middle-class Hungarians were not as fortunate as Nador and were subjected to forced labour in lieu of post-secondary education. An 18 year old friend of Hubert Rechnitzer who endured this harsh labour, told him of the experience that he wanted to see “as much blood running as I have seen sweat roll down my face.”<sup>11</sup> This anger represents an extreme example of the general frustration experienced by many members of the middle-class who were consistently persecuted under the Communists because of their “unfavourable” origin.

Hungary’s religious population suffered as well. In 1949, the State Office for ecclesiastical affairs acquired complete control over religious matters. Hundreds of priests were banned and a core of politically reliable “peace priests” was created. By 1954, there remained only eight Catholic schools, four Calvinist schools and one Lutheran school.<sup>12</sup> Like secular schools, they were not entirely independent of the Communist Party, however, and were certainly not immune to the Party’s meddling. Hubert Rechnitzer’s experience reflects this practice. Rechnitzer attended a Benedictine school, the entrance of which was adorned with marble plates decorated with crosses and the names of alumni. One day, at the age of fourteen, Rechnitzer was approached by a Party official at the school and was informed that he and three other altar boys were to report at the Party headquarters the following Saturday morning. Upon arrival, the boys were taken to their school, given hammers and forced to destroy the commemorative marble plates which had adorned the walls of the entrance for years. The four boys had been specifically chosen because of their high level of religious dedication. The Communists not only sought to control the number of religious institutions in Hungary, but also sought to punish those who demonstrated an intense devotion to any ideology other than that of the Party.

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<sup>9</sup> Hubert Rechnitzer. *Personal interview*. (01/30/03).

<sup>10</sup> Peter Nador, *Personal interview*. (01/30/03).

<sup>11</sup> Hubert Rechnitzer. *Personal interview*. (01/30/03).

<sup>12</sup> Bennett Kovrig. *The Hungarian People’s Republic*. (USA: St. Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), 61.

Those whom the Communists branded as “class enemies” for whatever reason thus had little in the way of social mobility and ideological freedom. Those who were deemed “politically undesirable” were as suspect as the bourgeoisie and religious Hungarians. Joseph Polgar, now the Canadian President of the World Federation of Hungarian Freedom Fighters, tried to escape from Hungary in 1949 with some friends at the age of seventeen. He was caught by the AVO and claimed, “for three days and nights we were beaten up really badly. For six months I couldn’t even talk or not even walk right.”<sup>13</sup> Due to his young age, he was only sentenced for two months, but his politically unreliable reputation followed him everywhere. His record got him kicked out of both Hungary’s compulsory army service in 1951 and the country’s most prestigious acting academy in 1953.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to the repression in daily life as evinced by personal experiences, the country as a whole was suffering as well. Hungary’s economic situation deteriorated in the years between 1948-1956. Real wages fell between 1949-52 as the costs of food and clothing increased. The country’s trading position deteriorated as a result of the combination of the forced development of import-intensive heavy industry and unsatisfactory production in agricultural cooperatives. In fact, at the height of the collectivisation campaign, 1952, agricultural production fell to 70% of the 1938 level and 83% of the 1949 level.<sup>15</sup>

It would be inaccurate, however, to focus solely on this bleak picture as there were of course some improvements under the Communist system. Government mandated subsidies opened up education and better housing to those who had formerly been barred such luxuries, while the state of full employment ameliorated the condition of many poor Hungarians. Despite the fall in wages, the national income had had a growth rate of 5.6% in the years leading up to 1956.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the Communist system held a different meaning to Hungarians depending on not only their economic origins, but also their religious backgrounds. The Communist Party was embraced by many Hungarian Jews, both government employees and ordinary citizens alike. Significantly, Matyas Rakosi and three other leading members of the Party, Jozsef Revai, Mihaly Farkas and Erno Gero, were Jewish.<sup>17</sup> As to why Jews embraced Communism, much of it can be explained by Hungary’s history both before and during World War II. Tamas Deri claimed, “to a Jewish boy, the Russians represented a saviour. I felt no anti-Semitism from 1945-1956...I felt truly Hungarian. For the first time [my religion] was not a question or a matter.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Joseph Polgar. *Personal interview*. (01/30/03)

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Polgar. *Personal interview*. (01/30/03).

<sup>15</sup> Bennett Kovrig. *The Hungarian People’s Republic*. (USA: St. Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), 74, 89.

<sup>16</sup> Bennett Kovrig. *The Hungarian People’s Republic*, 76.

<sup>17</sup> Gyorgy Litvan. *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956: Reform, Revolt and Repression*, 6.

<sup>18</sup> Tamas Deri. *Personal interview*. (01/30/03).

Katalin Morrison concurred, “we felt that maybe the Russians had saved us from the Hungarians, so in a sense a lot of Jews then felt that that [the Russian presence] was a safety because at least now the Hungarians are not going to kill us. In a sense, the Communists promised that we were equal. Everybody was oppressed equally.”<sup>19</sup> Both Deri and Morrison conceded to the existence of certain positive aspects of the pre-revolution era. The former recalls enjoying many sporting events and cultural affairs and the latter claimed that although her family was poor, there was a certain stability in this era. The Communists’ success in assimilating formerly alienated peoples earned them the respect of many Jews. However, due to their small proportion among the Hungarian population, the opinions of Jews can not be deemed representative of those held by the country’s majority population under the Rakosi regime.

The tensions experienced by most Hungarians under Rakosi, were temporarily alleviated after the death of Stalin on March 5, 1953 and the collective leadership it subsequently inspired in both the Soviet Union and Hungary. After the Soviet leadership summoned the leading Hungarian Communists to Moscow in June, 1953 and berated them for their past policies, it was ordered that Rakosi maintain his position as the first secretary of the Party and that fellow Muscovite, Imre Nagy, become Prime Minister. Of the meeting, Nagy wrote that the CPSU believed that Hungary had been on “the verge of catastrophe,” and that the Communists “had a good chance of being summarily booted out unless prompt and effective measures were taken to bring about a change.”<sup>20</sup> Nagy took these observations into consideration when he was Prime Minister, but tensions ensued throughout his one year reign as his moderate approach clashed with the orthodox, Stalinist one of Rakosi.

Nagy’s reign played a significant role in leading up to the revolution. The establishment of his new policies led to a kinder, gentler form of Communism that was more palatable to the majority of the population. The removal of these policies after Nagy was kicked out of power in November 1955 served to frustrate Hungarians who had only recently been given a small taste of freedom and were now forced to rescind it. Furthermore, it is unlikely that the revolution would have taken the form it did had it not been for a weakening of the government caused by the intra-party struggles between moderate and traditional Communists that occurred during his reign.

In July, 1953, Imre Nagy made a speech which acknowledged some of the faults of the Rakosi regime. He admitted that the objectives of the Five Year Plan were beyond Hungary’s strength and that they “vastly overtaxed resources...hampered the material growth of material foundations of the country’s welfare...and resulted in a deteriorated standard of living.” In the same speech he announced his moderate New Course program which was designed to curb the excesses of the Rakosi era. He proposed that the new government should increase the production of consumer goods, decrease the rates of industrialization, slow down collectivisation and allow for the dissolution of collectivized

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<sup>19</sup> Katalin Morrison. *Personal interview*. (01/31/03).

<sup>20</sup> Imre Nagy. *On Communism*, cited in Paul E. Zinner. *Revolution in Hungary*. (USA: Columbia University Press, 1972), 163.

farms where those in the majority desired such a change.<sup>21</sup> In order to reverse the repressive atmosphere of the past he called for greater religious tolerance, the abolishment of internment camps and the revision of sentences of those who had been wronged.<sup>22</sup> Throughout the following year, Nagy's ideas were more or less successfully implemented. The total number of collective farms was reduced by 14% and investments in heavy industry were 41% lower in 1954 than they had been in 1953. Under Nagy, the number of artisans doubled and the standard of living improved as real wages increased by 18%. By the end of 1954, Nagy succeeded in having most of the purged Communists released from prison.<sup>23</sup>

Both Nagy's toned-down version of Communism and the fact that the government admitted its fallibility regarding the purges, weakened Matyas Rakosi and his hard-line Communism in the eyes of Hungarians. Because of Rakosi's damaged reputation, it became especially painful to Hungarians when he benefited from a shift in power in the Soviet Union that gave Party Secretary Nikita Khrushchev prominence over P.M. Malenkov. As before, Hungary paralleled the course of the Soviet Union. In January, 1955, a few days after the dismissal of Prime Minister Malenkov, Rakosi issued a medical bulletin informing the Hungarian population of Nagy's inability to perform duties due to an acute heart condition.<sup>24</sup> Rakosi once again assumed prominence in the Hungarian government.

Imre Nagy's removal from power did not erase the memories of the temporarily relaxed society he had created and in 1955-1956, a consolidation of anti-Rakosi forces occurred both within the government and among the masses. In the months leading up to the revolution, several events demonstrated the growing pressures against Matyas Rakosi. In October 1955, a "Writers memorandum," a document signed by over 50 Hungarian writers was issued. It was a reaction to Rakosi's purges of the staffs of Hungarian newspapers, *Szabad Nep* and *Irodalmi Ujsag* and it railed against censorship and the banning of non-Communist works.<sup>25</sup> Events abroad also served to alienate Rakosi, notably Khrushchev's "secret speech" of February 1956, the dissolution of the Cominform in April, 1956 and the Soviet-Yugoslavian declaration of friendship and co-operation of June, 1956.<sup>26</sup> Each of these acts denounced the society Stalin had established. Since Rakosi was an ardent follower of Stalin and since he owed his rise to power to the very system which was now being denounced, in the light of these recent events, Rakosi was essentially guilty by association. By the summer of 1956, the leader of the Hungarian People's Republic was standing on shaky ground.

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<sup>21</sup> Paul E. Zinner. *Revolution in Hungary*, 164.

<sup>22</sup> Bennett Kovrig. *The Hungarian People's Republic*, 99.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 101-2.

<sup>24</sup> Paul E. Zinner. *Revolution in Hungary*, 173.

<sup>25</sup> Bennett Kovrig. *The Hungarian People's Republic*, 108.

<sup>26</sup> Bennett Kovrig. *The Hungarian People's Republic*, 108.

In the fall of 1956, several demonstrations occurred which were both anti-Rakosi and anti-Communist in nature. On October 6, 1956, Laszlo Rajk, the first victim of the Rakosi show trials, was re-interred and a mass demonstration against the Rakosi clique ensued. A week later, university students throughout Hungary kept up the anti-Rakosi momentum by demanding the reduction of compulsory Marxist-Leninist courses.<sup>27</sup> The leading force in the Rakosi opposition at this time was the Petofi Circle. Formed in 1954 by young staff members of the Hungarian national museum, it was named after Sandor Petofi, an important poet of the 1848 revolution. Nearly all of these intellectuals were party members, though most were adherents of Nagy's 'New Course'.<sup>28</sup> The Circle held a series of important debates concerning the state of Communism in Hungary in the spring of 1956. In June, 1956, over a thousand people heard member Gyorgy Lukacs announce the bankruptcy of Marxism in Hungary. After this speech, the members agreed that the present leadership had to be overthrown and that they were prepared to fight for a rebirth of the socialist system.<sup>29</sup>

The Petofi Circle was significant in the intelligentsia-instigated revolution since the group served as a catalyst for bringing together students with both party and extra-party intellectuals. The group had a major impact on many Hungarians. Intellectuals in most provincial cities modelled their own debate groups after the Petofi Circle. The Circle was even deemed significant enough to merit a Central Committee Resolution in June, 1956, which condemned the "anti-Party manifestations" of the Circle and claimed that the group denied "the leading role of the party of the working-class and advocated bourgeois and counter-revolutionary views."<sup>30</sup> In October, 1956, the so-called "counter-revolutionary" views held by the Petofi Circle swept the entire country.

On the eve of October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1956, the students of the Hungarian technical university in Budapest held a peaceful demonstration for Polish solidarity at the statue of General Bem, a Polish soldier and hero of the 1848 revolution. Anti-Party and anti-government slogans were also voiced and the technical students' organization, MEFESZ, announced sixteen demands. The next day, the demonstration continued in a new location. More than 200,000 students, civilians and soldiers gathered in front of the Parliament. Here, the students' demands were once again put forward. These included the return of Imre Nagy, the removal of Rakosi's circle from power, the rehabilitation of those punished under the Rakosi regime and the withdrawal of Soviet special corps troops from Hungary.<sup>31</sup> The demands were not so much anti-Communist as they were

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 112.

<sup>28</sup> Andras Hegedus. "Mikoyan's Overcoat: Discussions and Decisions in the Kremlin, 1956", in Terry Cox ed. Hungary 1956-Forty Years On. (Portland: Frank Cass, 1997), 111.

<sup>29</sup> Andras Hegedus. "Mikoyan's Overcoat: Discussions and Decisions in the Kremlin, 1956", in Terry Cox ed. Hungary 1956-Forty Years On. (Portland: Frank Cass, 1997), 113.

<sup>30</sup> Bennett Kovrig. The Hungarian People's Republic, 109-111.

<sup>31</sup> Alexander M. Kirov. "Soviet Military Intervention in Hungary," in Jenő Györkei and Miklós Horváth eds. Soviet Military Intervention in Hungary 1956. (Budapest: CEU Press, 1999), 133.

anti-Soviet domination. Regarding the first demonstration, Peter Nador recalled that “nobody ever thought of toppling over the regime...they wanted reforms, [they wanted] Hungary to be more separate from the Soviet Union.”<sup>32</sup> The Hungarian government and its new leader, Erno Gero, interpreted the peaceful event differently. Gero made a radio broadcast at 8pm that evening in which he claimed that the demonstrators were enemies of the people who were undermining the power of the working-class. He denounced the demonstrators’ critiques of both the Soviet’s military presence and exploitative trade agreements.<sup>33</sup> These statements enraged the crowd and served as the catalyst that transformed an otherwise peaceful demonstration into a mass uprising. The crowd dispersed and gathered in front of the Hungarian Parliament, the *Szabad Nep* offices, the central studio of Radio Budapest and the statue of Josef Stalin, which the Hungarians destroyed and toppled over. Violence erupted when the group outside the radio station attempted to have their demands broadcasted and the AVO men guarding the building began firing shots into the crowd. So began the Hungarian Revolution.

The revolution was not immediately recognised as such by all Hungarians in Budapest, nor did it have the same meaning for every citizen. Tamas Deri, a university student, listened to the radio on October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1956 and the announcers spoke vaguely of “incidents” occurring in town and recommended that people stay at home. Later that day, he went to buy bread and saw corpses on the street corner, whose shoes had already been stolen. He only realized a day later that a revolution was indeed occurring.<sup>34</sup> While elation was a common reaction of Hungarians to the news of the revolution, some citizens of Budapest were more cautious. When she came home from school on the first day of the revolution, Katalin Morrison, 16 years old at the time, felt, “it was the first time in my life that I felt I can say that I don’t have to be afraid because we can speak up against the dictators.”<sup>35</sup> Katalin’s mother, Judit Jozsef, had a different interpretation of the events. She refused to let Katalin attend the demonstration because she believed, “in Hungary such things could be very, very bad...whenever there were these types of demonstrations it always turned into an anti-Semitic rally.”<sup>36</sup> At least initially then, the revolution was not embraced by everyone.

The Soviets readily realised the importance of the Hungarian situation and sent two of its highest ranking commissars, Anastas Mikoyan and Mikhail Suslov as well as KGB Chief Ivan Serov to Budapest. As early as July 1956, General Antonov of the Soviet armed forces had been in Budapest as head of a review committee to inspect the

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<sup>32</sup> Peter Nador. *Personal interview*. (01/30/03).

<sup>33</sup> Bennett Kovrig. *The Hungarian People’s Republic.*, 115.

<sup>34</sup> Tamas Deri. *Personal interview*. (01/30/03).

<sup>35</sup> Katalin Morrison. *Personal interview*. (01/31/03).

<sup>36</sup> Judit Jozsef. *Personal interview*. (01/31/03).

preparedness of the Soviet special corps troops.<sup>37</sup> An uprising among the Hungarians was seen as a likely possibility and thus, the Soviet troops were kept on alert. The Soviet counter-attack against the Hungarians, named Operation Wave, began October 24<sup>th</sup> and from the beginning, they had problems. Their plan was faulty since it had been drawn up hastily and it later it had to be changed to exclude the Hungarian troops when they proved to be unreliable.<sup>38</sup> There were also disagreements among Soviet politicians as to how to proceed. The assumption that violent intervention by the Soviets was inevitable is discounted by the fact that Anastas Mikoyan wished to avoid bloodshed and for a while he had Minister of Defense Zhukov and other Soviet politicians convinced that the best course of action was to reinstate Imre Nagy. He told Khrushchev, “by using force we can’t get anywhere. Negotiations should be started and we should wait for 10-15 days. Once the situation is stabilised it will turn out for the better.”<sup>39</sup> Khrushchev disagreed with this logic, believing a swift crushing of the uprising was the only way to proceed.

The Soviets’ mission did not run as smoothly as Khrushchev had expected. They were faced with two major problems. The roads into Budapest had not been blocked, thereby allowing Hungarians from other towns and cities to join the uprising. Also, the troops were instructed not to open fire first on the insurgents and thus, the revolutionaries succeeded in dismantling Soviet monuments and releasing criminals from prisons without interference. According to the Hungarian Minister’s Information Office, by October 31, 1956, 13,286 inmates were released from the country’s prisons, of which 3,324 were political prisoners.<sup>40</sup> One of these prisoners was Jozsef Polgar, who had been arrested in May, 1956 for trying to escape the country for the second time. On October 25<sup>th</sup>, some insurgents broke into the Budapest prison where he was interned and released all the inhabitants. According to Polgar, the freedom fighters suggested to the prisoners, “you go where you want, but if you have any conscience, you’ll join us.”<sup>41</sup> Polgar joined the revolutionaries, whose headquarters was the Corvin Theatre in Pest. Initially, 700-800 fighters were trained there under the leadership of Laszlo Ivan Kovacs.<sup>42</sup> At first, their weaponry was primitive, Molotov cocktails being used most frequently, but later as

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<sup>37</sup> Alexander M. Kirov. “Soviet Military Intervention in Hungary,” in Jeno Gyorkei and Miklos Horvath eds. Soviet Military Intervention in Hungary 1956. (Budapest: CEU Press, 1999), 135.

<sup>38</sup> Johanna Granville. “In the Line of Fire: the Soviet Crackdown on Hungary, 1956-57,” in Terry Cox, Hungary 1956-Forty years On. (Portland: Frank Cass, 1997), 75.

<sup>39</sup> Andras Hegedus. “Mikoyan’s Overcoat: Discussions and Decisions in the Kremlin, 1956”, in Terry Cox, Hungary 1956-Forty years On. (Portland: Frank Cass, 1997), 137-138.

<sup>40</sup> Alexander M. Kirov. “Soviet Military Intervention in Hungary,” in Jeno Gyorkei and Miklos Horvath eds. Soviet Military Intervention in Hungary 1956. (Budapest: CEU Press, 1999), 186.

<sup>41</sup> Jozsef Polgar. *Personal interview*. (01/30/03).

<sup>42</sup> Alexander M. Kirov. “Soviet Military Intervention in Hungary,” in Jeno Gyorkei and Miklos Horvath eds. Soviet Military Intervention in Hungary 1956. (Budapest: CEU Press, 1999), 142-3.

Hungarian army units defected to join the rebels, the freedom fighters received a steady supply of arms and ammunition. Jozsef Polgar used his training as a border guard to teach the younger recruits how to shoot. He explained, “we drew bulls eye circles on the theatre screen and used it for target practice.”<sup>43</sup>

Rifles were in such abundance that they were distributed freely to any Hungarian that desired them. Not all who received the rifles did so out of sheer revolutionary spirit. University students, George Retek and Tamas Deri were among the many Hungarians who took advantage of the rebels’ offer of free guns. Retek was not a budding revolutionary. Rather, he was worried of anti-Semitic reprisals and did not want to be left unprotected as he had been during World War II.<sup>44</sup> According to another Jew, Katalin Morrison, “there was news that in Debrecen, Jews were threatened and that the Rabbi was chased out. We knew that if the revolution stayed much longer, we would be at risk.”<sup>45</sup> While rumours abounded about pogroms in Debrecen, there has never been any documentation to support such claims. Tamas Deri’s mother would not let him in the house with his newly acquired rifle and so he got rid of it. His interest in the revolution was completely lost when on October 27<sup>th</sup>, he was passing by the Rakosi statue and saw Hungarians being machine gunned by the AVO.<sup>46</sup>

Many Hungarians were uncomfortable with the level of violence the revolution brought about. One survey indicated that of those involved with the revolutionary cause, only 55% were actively involved in the fighting. The survey claimed the proportion of active revolutionaries among professionals was 14%, among white collars 2%, among industrial workers 13%, among peasants 6% and among students and others 20%.<sup>47</sup> Those that did fight, however, met with great success. By October 28<sup>th</sup>, the freedom fighters had 100-120 blocks in SE Budapest under their control.

Other Hungarians engaged in less physical, but symbolically important revolts against the Soviets. Institutions that promoted Soviet-Hungarian ties were ransacked. The Soviet-Hungarian Society and the Institute of Cultural Ties were two major examples of this. Soviet books, journals and newspapers at both these locations were burned and the buildings were taken over by two pre-war parties, the Smallholders and the National Peasant Party.<sup>48</sup> Tamas Deri observed people burning the books from a Russian store. He recalled, “they were ripping out the pages and laughing. Things that you were taking

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<sup>43</sup> Laszlo Detre. “20 Years After [an interview with Jozsef Polgar],” in Ottawa Citizen. (10/30/1976).

<sup>44</sup> George Retek. *Personal interview*. (03/21/03).

<sup>45</sup> Katalin Morrison. *Personal interview*. (01/31/03).

<sup>46</sup> Tamas Deri. *Personal interview*.(01/30/03).

<sup>47</sup> Bennett Kovrig., The Hungarian People’s Republic., 120.

<sup>48</sup> Johanna Granville. “In the Line of Fire: the Soviet Crackdown on Hungary, 1956-57,” in Terry Cox, Hungary 1956-Forty years On. (Portland: Frank Cass, 1997), 70.

seriously ten days before were now being laughed at.”<sup>49</sup> Other anti-Soviet acts included cutting the Communist crest from the middle of Hungarian flags and replacing the red star on armoured vehicles with the traditional Hungarian Kossuth crest. The revolution became more and more anti-Soviet and less anti-Communist as Hungarian Communists turned against the USSR since their troops had failed to protect them from the insurgents.

While Budapest was the hub of revolutionary action, resistance occurred throughout Hungary. Many working-class towns such as Jaszbereny and Ozd formed ‘worker’s councils,’ impromptu organizations workers hoped would serve as vehicles for both labour and political reform. Over two thousand of these groups were formed across the country and 28,000 members were recruited.<sup>50</sup> The Soviet presence was felt in many of these towns, although violent clashes were sparse. The south-western city of Pecs is just one example of a country town that experienced moderate revolutionary activity. In 1956, Lajos David was a student at the University of Pecs. After receiving news of the first demonstration in Budapest, he and fellow students went from village to village, spreading news of the revolution. The travelling group emphasized that the revolution would be a peaceful affair and they pleaded with Hungarians, “don’t steal... we don’t want to hang anybody up because it has to be a peaceful event.” The reaction from villagers, according to David, was enthusiastic and supportive.<sup>51</sup> The Soviet troops interrupted life in Pecs as they had in Budapest. David recalled, “from October 23<sup>rd</sup> to November 4<sup>th</sup>, there were three or four tanks that surrounded the student residences and nobody could come out and nobody could get in.”<sup>52</sup> Armed resistance in Pecs occurred in the mountains where the town’s coal mines were. Hungarians that were killed there were dumped in front of city hall.

In Budapest, the clashes were more frequent and brutal than in the countryside. According to Jozsef Polgar, the last important confrontation with the Soviets occurred on October 30th when some of the freedom fighters went to the Party headquarters because they had heard that some fellow revolutionaries were imprisoned there. The armed fighters demanded the release of their comrades. In reaction, the AVO guards “shot out from the windows at us... many, many people died.” In counter-attack, a Hungarian tank

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<sup>44</sup> Tomas Deri. *Personal interview*. (01/30/03).

<sup>49</sup> Jozsef Polgar. *Personal interview*. (01/30/03).

<sup>49</sup> Laszlo Detre. “20 Years After [an interview with Jozsef Polgar],” in *Ottawa Citizen*, (10/30/1976).

<sup>50</sup> Csaba Bekes. “New Findings on the Hungarian Revolution.” In *Bulletin, Cold War International History Project*. (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars, 1992), pp.1-3.

<sup>51</sup> Lajos David. *Personal interview*. (01/30/03).

<sup>52</sup> Lajos David. *Personal interview*. (01/30/03).

secured by the freedom fighters blasted four or five shots at the windows of the Party headquarters, after which those inside waved white flags in surrender.<sup>53</sup>

As these battles were unfolding in the streets, bureaucratic shuffling was occurring behind the scenes. On October 27<sup>th</sup>, a reorganisation of the government occurred, whereby for the first time since 1948, representatives of other parties like the Smallholders and the National Peasant Party, were included.<sup>54</sup> As on the streets of Budapest, inside the Parliament there was a desire to loosen, if not destroy the symbolic ties to the Soviet Union. Imre Nagy returned as P.M. and made a radio broadcast on October 28<sup>th</sup> in which he announced, “the government condemns those views that say that the present mass people’s movement is a counter-revolution.”<sup>55</sup> He claimed that in the future the government would try to rectify the mistakes made and would fulfill the will of the people. Nagy’s reinstatement was met with great enthusiasm as this action had been one of the demands of both MEFESZ and the Petofi Circle. Hungarian solidarity reached its peak at this point and by October 31<sup>st</sup>, all the Soviet troops had pulled out of Budapest.<sup>56</sup> Jozsef Polgar and his fellow freedom fighters were ecstatic. As he described the scene: “you couldn’t move on the streets of Budapest, they were exchanging cigarettes, matches and kissing each other.”<sup>57</sup> Of the expectations held by himself and other Hungarians at the time, Polgar stated, “we were completely hypnotized with joy and excitement. We spoke only of the freedom of the present and the promises of the future which, at that point, looked very bright indeed.” He added, “I, who had risked my life twice to get out, felt I’d never leave now that I had the opportunity to contribute to the good of my country. I felt hopeful and confident. I was ready to participate.”<sup>58</sup>

The elation of Hungarians was to be short-lived as the Soviets had planned an even greater invasion for the fourth of November, called Operation Whirlwind. On November 3<sup>rd</sup>, Jozsef Polgar had gone home to see his dying mother and she pleaded with him not to return to the rebel headquarters claiming, she had a bad feeling. Polgar refused to stay at home and abandon his fellow comrades. Of that night he recalled, “I went back to HQ, I did my duty from 12-2 o’clock...I went to sleep. Around 4am I heard an awful, awful noise...everywhere shooting all over the place. It was the Russians. It was over.”<sup>59</sup> Polgar’s assessment that “it was over” was tragically correct. Operation Whirlwind ran

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<sup>53</sup> Jozsef Polgar. *Personal interview*. (01/30/03).

<sup>54</sup> Bennett Kovrig, *The Hungarian People’s Republic*, 116.

<sup>55</sup> Alexander M. Kirov. “Soviet Military Intervention in Hungary,” in Jenő Györkei and Miklós Horváth eds. *Soviet Military Intervention in Hungary 1956*. (Budapest: CEU Press, 1999), 144-45.

<sup>56</sup> Alexander M. Kirov. “Soviet Military Intervention in Hungary,” in Jenő Györkei and Miklós Horváth eds. *Soviet Military Intervention in Hungary 1956*. (Budapest: CEU Press, 1999), 148.

<sup>57</sup> Jozsef Polgar. *Personal interview*. (01/30/03).

<sup>58</sup> Laszlo Detre. “20 Years After [an interview with Jozsef Polgar],” in *Ottawa Citizen*. (10/30/1976).

much more smoothly than did Operation Wave. The Soviets had 30,000 more troops this time and were conducting no more joint actions with the Hungarians.<sup>60</sup>

The Operation did not officially begin until November 4, but the first new troops had crossed the Hungarian border on November 1, prompting Imre Nagy to complain to the Soviet ambassador, Yuri Andropov. In response to Nagy's queries, Andropov suggested a mixed commission be established to negotiate partial troop withdrawal. The Soviets, however, had no intention of withdrawing and they used the negotiations as a time-buying device while their troops approached the border. The ploy worked on Nagy and he initially ordered Hungarians not to shoot the Soviets for fear of jeopardizing the negotiations. Nagy was not completely duped, however, and instigated a different kind of protest on November 1<sup>st</sup> when he proclaimed Hungary's neutrality and its withdrawal from the Warsaw pact. He claimed, "today our people are more united in this decision as perhaps never before in their history."<sup>61</sup> The Soviets were not threatened by Imre Nagy's declarations and at this point they were no longer threatened by the West either.

Many Hungarians felt that a second Soviet invasion would not occur without interference. Jozsef Polgar claimed, "we believed that the U.N. and even the U.S.A. would not permit an invasion. This was our greatest sense of security. The West."<sup>62</sup> The Soviets, however, had knowledge that these Hungarians lacked. In a speech given on October 27<sup>th</sup>, 1956, Secretary of State Dulles announced that the U.S. would provide Hungary with economic aid, but emphasized that America did not look upon Hungary as a potential military ally. This information was passed on to Khrushchev two days later. President Eisenhower was worried about the ramifications of an intervention. He recalled in his memoirs, "with the determination of the Soviet Union's hold over its satellites, might not it be tempted to resort to extreme measures, even to start a world war?"<sup>63</sup> To the dismay of Jozsef Polgar and his fellow Hungarians, this was not a risk that the U.S. was willing to take. When the Suez Crisis broke out on October 29<sup>th</sup>, the Western powers became preoccupied, thus leaving the Soviets with a free hand over Hungary.

The Soviets thus began Operation Whirlwind on November 4<sup>th</sup>, 1956 and although Marshal Ivan Konev told Khrushchev that the operation would not take longer than three days, intense fighting continued until November 12.<sup>64</sup> One of their first targets in Budapest was the freedom fighters' headquarters, the Corvin Theatre. According to Jozsef Polgar, two tanks blocked off the short dead-end street at the end of which the

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<sup>60</sup> Johanna Granville. "In the Line of Fire: the Soviet Crackdown on Hungary, 1956-57," in Terry Cox ed. Hungary 1956-Forty Years On, 79.

<sup>61</sup> Bennett Kovrig. The Hungarian People's Republic, 118.

<sup>62</sup> Laszlo Detre. "20 Years After [an interview with Jozsef Polgar]," in Ottawa Citizen. (10/30/1976).

<sup>63</sup> Johanna Granville. . "In the Line of Fire: the Soviet Crackdown on Hungary, 1956-57," in Terry Cox, Hungary 1956-Forty years On. (Portland: Frank Cass, 1997), 80-81.

<sup>64</sup> Johanna Granville. . "In the Line of Fire: the Soviet Crackdown on Hungary, 1956-57," in Terry Cox, Hungary 1956-Forty years On. (Portland: Frank Cass, 1997), 82.

theatre was located. They began firing into the people fleeing from the six or eight doors at the entrance. "It was a nightmare," Polgar recalled, "kids were dying like flies."<sup>65</sup> "Until November 9<sup>th</sup>," he reminisced, "about 15 of us were manning that place [Corvin theatre]...how did we stay alive, I still don't know."<sup>66</sup>

Along with the Soviet troops came the arrival of a new pro-Soviet Hungarian Revolutionary Worker-Peasant Government headed under Janos Kadar. Imre Nagy sought asylum at the Yugoslav embassy. After the invasion set in, Jozsef Polgar and his fellow freedom fighters were "hoping that the outside world would do something, hoping that the Russian-installed leadership would come clean and stop the invasion...my hopes were dashed when my friends were arrested or simply started to disappear."<sup>67</sup> The notion that the new pro-Soviet regime would intervene was even more unlikely than the possibility of Western interference. The Soviets thus continued their crusade, uninhibited. By November 5<sup>th</sup> the Soviets had disarmed two infantry corps, five infantry divisions, two mechanized divisions and two tank regiments. By November 6<sup>th</sup> 35,000 Hungarians had been disarmed.<sup>68</sup> Although the Hungarian forces had been weakened, the Soviets greatly exaggerated both the extent of their damage and the Hungarian people's acceptance of the new puppet regime. The November 6<sup>th</sup> issue of *Pravda* stated that "the Revolutionary Worker-Peasant Government of Hungary enjoys the broad support of the national masses...order and peace is established." In actuality, KGB documents of the time noted that revolutionary committees were stockpiling weapons for a second attack, the majority of enterprises were not functioning, printing offices were refusing to print pro-Soviet newspapers and students were distributing thousands of anti-Soviet leaflets.<sup>69</sup> The Soviet population was thus kept in the dark as to the realities of the Hungarian situation.

The fighting subsided on November 12<sup>th</sup> and a new phase of the revolution began as the Hungarian people protested the Soviet occupiers through passive resistance. Several methods were used. Most devastating to the economy was the tactic of refusing to go to work. By November 22, there was an acute fuel and electrical energy shortage. Mikoyan and Suslov reported to Moscow that, "the majority of mines work only at 10-15% of their capacity...despite the daily requirement of 900 megawatts, only 300 megawatts are produced."<sup>70</sup> To compensate, Moscow sent Hungary essential goods and

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<sup>66</sup> Jozsef Polgar. *Personal interview*. (01/30/03).

<sup>67</sup> Jozsef Polgar. *Personal interview*. (01/30/03).

<sup>68</sup> Johanna Granville. "In the Line of Fire: the Soviet Crackdown on Hungary, 1956-57," in Terry Cox, Hungary 1956-Forty years On. (Portland: Frank Cass, 1997), 79.

<sup>69</sup> Johanna Granville. "In the Line of Fire: the Soviet Crackdown on Hungary, 1956-57," 84.

<sup>70</sup> Johanna Granville. "In the Line of Fire: the Soviet Crackdown on Hungary, 1956-57," 86.

resources. In addition to refusing to work, Hungarians distributed propaganda among the invading troops in the hopes of enlightening them. One revolutionary council issued the following appeal: "Soviet comrades! Do not fight the Hungarian people!... [it is] not fascists who you are fighting but millions of workers who do not wish to live in the Stalinist-Rakosi system...Soviet soldiers! At the UN the Soviet delegation states that there are NO Soviet troops in Hungary. So which country are you in?"<sup>71</sup> The pamphlet raised an interesting point regarding the awareness of Soviet troops. According to many Hungarian eyewitnesses of the revolution, a lot of the Soviet rank-and-file were clueless as to their surroundings. Some mistook the Danube for the Suez Canal and believed they were in Egypt.<sup>72</sup> This is not an unlikely misunderstanding considering the fact that at the time *Pravda* and other Soviet publications ran page after page on the Suez Crisis while they devoted little attention to the Hungarian 'counter-revolution.' The Hungarian situation was simply not in the popular consciousness of most Soviets.

As the revolutionary council's pamphlet expressed, the Soviet delegation at the United Nations denied that its troops were in Hungary. The Soviets' declaration of innocence did not convince the UN, but the organization refrained from intervening for other reasons. Imre Nagy had made appeals to the UN to discuss the situation in Hungary at the General Assembly, but after the second invasion, the new pro-Soviet government under Janos Kadar refused to let the organization enter Hungary. On November 6<sup>th</sup>, Kadar sent a telegram to the UN secretary, Dag Hammarskjold, stating that, "Imre Nagy's appeal to the UN to review the Hungarian question is not legitimate... the question belongs exclusively to the sphere of competence of the Hungarian People's Republic."<sup>73</sup> Six days later, on November 12<sup>th</sup>, the UN assembly decided by 62 votes to put the Hungarian question on the agenda.<sup>74</sup> The organization was never allowed to enter Hungary even for observational purposes and thus made its 1957 report on the situation by interviewing eyewitnesses who had fled the country.<sup>75</sup>

The Revolution bore massive demographic, social and economic costs. In 1957, Hungary's Central Statistical Office reported that from October 23 until December 1, 1956, 19,226 wounded were treated in the country's hospitals, surgeries and Red Cross institutions. This number would be even higher if those who were treated at home were taken into account. Of the hospital patients, over 50% were between 19 and 30 years of age and 25% were 18 or younger.<sup>76</sup> The most recent research puts the death toll at over

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<sup>71</sup> Alexander M. Kirov. "Soviet Military Intervention in Hungary," in Jenő Györkei and Miklós Horváth eds. In Soviet Military Intervention in Hungary 1956. (Budapest: CEU Press, 1999), 171.

<sup>72</sup> Peter Nador. *Personal interview*. (01/30/03).

<sup>73</sup> Alexander M. Kirov. "Soviet Military Intervention in Hungary," 163-4.

<sup>74</sup> Alexander M. Kirov. "Soviet Military Intervention in Hungary," in Jenő Györkei and Miklós Horváth eds. In Soviet Military Intervention in Hungary 1956. , 172.

<sup>75</sup> United Nations. Special Report on the Problem of Hungary. (New York: United Nations, 1957), 2.

<sup>76</sup> Alexander M. Kirov. "Soviet Military Intervention in Hungary," in Jenő Györkei and Miklós Horváth eds. In Soviet Military Intervention in Hungary 1956. , 191.

3,000 Hungarians, while, according to the Soviet Minister of Defense Zhukov, the number of Soviet fatalities was 669 men.<sup>77</sup> The damage to Hungary's population was further exacerbated by massive emigration. Approximately 200,000, or 2% of Hungarians, escaped the country in the two months following the revolution. Eighty-five percent of the émigrés were under 45 years old.<sup>78</sup> The desire to leave Hungary was so widespread that, according to Judit Jozsef, "after the revolution, if you met someone in the street, you didn't ask 'how are you, how is your family doing?' You asked, 'do you go or do you stay?'"<sup>79</sup> Escaping the country was quite a risky venture and was only deemed a viable option by young people for the most part. Many did not leave for fear of repercussions. Katalin Morrison, 16 at the time, did not leave because as she recalled, "you never knew what would happen to your relatives. You could not trust a system that if you take off you are not going to be punished for that. I didn't think about leaving ever."<sup>80</sup> A fear for the safety of both one's self and one's family was a popular reason for staying behind.

The economy was also disastrously affected by the revolution. The total losses due to work stoppages, looting, and destruction reduced Hungary's 1956 national income by 9 billion forints. The Soviet Union provided the country with financial aid as well as advisers to help restructure Hungarian society in the wake of the uprising. In the two months after November 4, the Soviet Presidium sent over 70 advisers and three members of the Central Committee. Among these experts were members of the KGB and Soviet Ministry of Internal Affairs who were sent to assist the Hungarian security organs in repressing counter-revolutionaries after the invasion ended.<sup>81</sup>

A massive campaign of arrests began in November, 1956, which was initiated by the Soviets, while the actual imprisonments and trials were executed by Hungarians. Finding the so-called counter-revolutionaries proved to be challenging. Soviets actually searched random apartments in the hopes of finding photographs or film footage of the revolution with which they could identify insurgents.<sup>82</sup> Lack of evidence had never deterred the Soviets before in their pursuit of 'criminals' and thus they arrested tens of thousands of Hungarians without foundation. The numbers reached such heights that a

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<sup>77</sup> Johanna Granville. "In the Line of Fire: the Soviet Crackdown on Hungary, 1956-57," in Terry Cox, Hungary 1956-Forty years On., 82.

<sup>78</sup> Andrew Felkay. Hungary and the USSR 1956-89: Kadar's Political Leadership. (USA: Greenwood Press, 1989), 96.

<sup>79</sup> Judit Jozsef. *Personal interview.* (01/31/03).

<sup>80</sup> Katalin Morrison. *Personal interview.* (01/31/03).

<sup>81</sup> Johanna Granville. "In the Line of Fire: the Soviet Crackdown on Hungary, 1956-57," in Terry Cox, Hungary 1956-Forty years On. (Portland: Frank Cass, 1997), 87.

<sup>82</sup> Johanna Granville. "In the Line of Fire: the Soviet Crackdown on Hungary, 1956-57," in Terry Cox, Hungary 1956-Forty years On. (Portland: Frank Cass, 1997), 88-9.

shortage of internment space ensued. KGB Chief Ivan Serov wrote to Moscow on November 14 of “the absence of prison space where interrogations can be conducted.”<sup>83</sup> All told, 35,000 Hungarians were summoned, 26,000 had trials, 22,000 were sentenced and 13,000 were interned.<sup>84</sup> Between 400-450 people were executed for “crimes against the people’s democracy.”<sup>85</sup>

Among those executed was the former Hungarian Prime Minister, Imre Nagy. He had sought asylum at the Yugoslav embassy when Janos Kadar came to power, but he and his companions were kidnapped by the KGB and taken to Romania on November 23, 1956. His situation remained unknown until the 18<sup>th</sup> of June, 1958, when the Hungarian newspaper, *Nepszabadsag* announced that a verdict had been reached in the trial of Nagy and his associates. He had been accused of conspiracy to overthrow the Hungarian People’s Republic and was charged with high treason. His execution had already been carried out when the news of his trial reached Hungarians. Janos Kadar, the Soviet-installed Hungarian leader had meanwhile been telling the Western media up until March 1958 that Nagy would not be undergoing a trial.<sup>86</sup> Although it was formerly assumed that the Nagy affair was orchestrated solely by the Soviets at Ambassador Andropov’s instigation, recent evidence demonstrates that Kadar’s government was highly implicated in both the kidnapping and the trial. The decision to give Nagy a trial was decided by the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Worker’s Party on December 21, 1957. On February 14 of the next year, it was announced at the Central Committee meeting that a trial in the near future would be inconvenient for the Soviets due to an upcoming summit. The Soviets gave Hungary the choice of proceeding immediately and giving light sentences or postponing the trial and giving harsh sentences as was originally planned. At Janos Kadar’s suggestion, the Party voted for the latter option.<sup>87</sup>

There is no doubt that the revolution weakened the Communists’ position in Hungary. By the end of November, 1956 there were only 37,818 members remaining in the Communist Party. By June of the following year the numbers had reached 350,000 and despite this seemingly radical increase in members, this figure represented only 40% of the Hungarian Worker’s Party before the revolution.<sup>88</sup> The lessening of popular support for the Communists was followed by a gradual weakening of the more harsh Soviet-

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<sup>83</sup> Johanna Granville. “In the Line of Fire: the Soviet Crackdown on Hungary, 1956-57,” in Terry Cox, *Hungary 1956-Forty years On*. (Portland: Frank Cass, 1997), 92.

<sup>84</sup> Csaba Bekes. “New findings on the Hungarian Revolution,” in, *Bulletin of Cold War International History Project*. (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Fall 1992), pp. 1-3.

<sup>85</sup> Andrew Felkay. *Hungary and the USSR 1956-89: Kadar’s Political Leadership*. , 97.

<sup>86</sup> Andrew Felkay. *Hungary and the USSR 1956-89: Kadar’s Political Leadership*., 119-20.

<sup>87</sup> Csaba Bekes. “New Findings on the Hungarian Revolution,” in *Bulletin, Cold War International History Project*, 3.

<sup>88</sup> Andrew Felkay. *Hungary and the USSR 1956-89: Kadar’s Political Leadership*., 90.

inspired policies. Symbolic of this trend is the fact that for the first time since World War II, Hungarians were allowed to have contact with those in the West. While Soviet domination in government became less of an issue, the Soviet military presence remained in Hungary until 1991. The Soviet Union stated the threat of NATO forces as justification for the troops.<sup>89</sup>

The movement for official rehabilitation for those involved in the revolution gained momentum with the fall of Communism in Hungary in 1989. In June of that year, Imre Nagy and his fellow martyrs were reburied in an official ceremony. On May 2, 1990, the Hungarian parliament passed a resolution declaring that in October 1956 a revolution had broken out in Hungary and that a war of independence developed in which the masses took an armed stand against the Stalinist dictatorship. The previously held interpretation that the event had been a counter-revolution was declared invalid. October 23, 2000 marked the forty-fifth anniversary of the revolution. Hungary invited former freedom fighters to participate in a commemorative event. Jozsef Polgar attended the event and was asked to give a speech in front of the Corvin Theatre. He concluded by speculating:

“If, in 1956...if it was not the young Hungarian people’s blood spilled at that time, but from the cobblestones, oil was coming out, the U.N. or especially the U.S. would come to help and that is still true and will be true forever. I remember when President Eisenhower said, ‘we are helping those people who are helping themselves under Russian occupation.’ Well, we helped ourselves, but nobody helped us and that stays with us forever...we never forgot that they let down a very courageous people.”<sup>90</sup>

Polgar’s statement reflected the frustration and resentment that many Hungarians still feel to this day.

The Hungarian Revolution was the result of several factors, both long-term and immediate. Hungarians gradually grew more and more resentful of the repressive conditions of Rakosi’s Stalinist dictatorship. His traditional version of Communism clashed with the more moderate approach of Imre Nagy and when the latter politician was kicked out of office in 1955, some Hungarians continued his cause by consolidating into intellectual groups demanding socialist renewal. These intellectually instigated demands were embraced by the Hungarian masses in a series of demonstrations in October, 1956. The revolution saw both freedom fighters and ordinary citizens alike rebelling against Soviet domination in various ways. The painful lesson the Hungarians learned in the revolution was that, ultimately, the ‘people’ could not change the fate of the People’s Republic.

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<sup>89</sup> Johanna Granville. “In the Line of Fire: the Soviet Crackdown on Hungary, 1956-57,” in Terry Cox, Hungary 1956-Forty years On. (Portland: Frank Cass, 1997), 97.

<sup>90</sup> Jozsef Polgar. *Personal interview*. (01/30/03).

