

HUNGARY AND THE USSR, 1956-1988

Kadar's Political Leadership

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The Hungarian Uprising of 1956

The selection of the Polish national Communist Wladyslaw Gomulka as first secretary of the United Polish Workers' Party gave the already restive Hungarian students an opportunity to test the limits of the regime's tolerance. To effect changes similar to those in Poland, the student organizations and the Writers' Union called for a pro-Polish demonstration to take place on October 23, 1956. To build support, the organizers sent delegations to factories and asked young workers to join. The students also began to voice a whole series of demands which ranged from mild university reforms to radical governmental changes. Imre Nagy, because of his earlier reform proposals and struggles with Rakosi, was generally envisioned as the Hungarian Gomulka.¹

A front page editorial in the October 23 edition of the Party's² official newspaper hailed the planned demonstration. This appeared to signal the Party's approval of the event, but Radio Kossuth broadcast contradictory messages. At 12:53 p.m., the scheduled program was interrupted by a special announcement from the Ministry of the Interior that stated: "All public assemblies and demonstrations are forbidden until further notice." Twenty-two minutes later the same message was rebroadcast.³

At the same time, handwritten notices and mimeographed leaflets announcing the planned pro-Polish rally and the students' demands were posted on trees, walls and bulletin boards all over Budapest. At the major thoroughfares, students were passing out handbills and soliciting passersby to join the rally. At Party headquarters, prestigious delegations from the newspaper Szabad Nep, the Writers' Union, Zrinyi Military Academy and various universities were beseeching the leaders to permit the planned demonstration. Gero, Kadar and other leaders had just returned from Yugoslavia and had not had a chance to assess the situation. Finally they yielded to the pressure. At 2:23 p.m., the radio announced that the Minister of Interior had rescinded the ban of the demonstration. The radio advised its listeners that Gero would address the nation at 8:00 p.m.

By the time the official approval of the demonstration was announced it could hardly have been stopped. Around 2:30 p.m., a large group of students gathered at the Petofi statue in Pest. After a simple commemorative ceremony they headed to the Bem statue in Buda. The Polish-born Joseph Bem, before coming to Hungary and becoming one of the most successful generals of the War of Independence of 1848-1849, had distinguished himself by fighting for Polish independence against the Russians in 1830 and as a participant of the 1848 insurrection in Vienna. No Hungarian needed an explanation for holding a pro-Polish demonstration at the Bem Square.

This relatively small, enclosed square could hardly accommodate the thousands who assembled there. Work stopped in the surrounding office buildings. The cadets of the Petofi Military Academy, which was also located there, joined the crowd. On that pleasant, sunny, late fall afternoon, the huge good-natured crowd cheered the appearance of the red, white and green national flags on the buildings. These banners enhanced the already festive mood of the people. Numerous speakers addressed the crowd. Some recited poetry and others hailed the developments in Poland. Representatives of the universities read the "demands of the students." Only Peter Veres was recognized by the crowd. He had been a leader of the former National Peasant Party, and now, as president of the Writers' Union, he brought greetings from the writers. Without a public address system the speeches were barely audible, but a general consensus evolved on the demand for the reinstatement of Imre Nagy into the government. To make good on this demand, word was passed: "Let's go to the Parliament!"

The large crowd set out towards the imposing, neo-baroque building of the Parliament, on the Pest side of the Danube River. Along the approaches, people everywhere were displaying the Hungarian national flag. The crowd roared its approval when the Soviet-like emblem was crudely cut out of the center of one flag. Almost immediately others followed suit; within minutes hundreds of flags fluttered in the breeze with holes cut out of their centers. On this balmy October afternoon, people were trying to recapture the spirit of March 15, 1848. The youth of October envisioned themselves as the rightful heirs of Petofi, Kossuth and Bem.

The enormous Parliament Square filled up with a massive crowd of approximately 200,000. The people demanded the appearance of Imre Nagy. Some of the slogans were becoming provocative, but a reassurance from Nagy would have satisfied the demonstrators. Soon word was passed around that Nagy was on his way, but the patience of the people was severely tested. After dark, all the street lights were turned off in hope that this would help to disperse the crowd. But the people were not to be deterred; they responded by making torches out of the evening newspapers and did not budge. While waiting for Nagy, some well-known actors recited Petofi's poems from a lower level balcony of the building. Whenever the crowd appeared restless, somebody began to sing the national anthem. This had a soothing effect, and the people took the melody and sang standing at attention.

Eventually Imre Nagy was brought to the Parliament by his friends,⁵ and he was told by the officials to calm down the people. The crowd cheered when they recognized Nagy, but at the end of such an exciting day his words were anti-climactic. He addressed the people as "Comrades!" This was rejected by the demonstrators: "We are not 'Comrades!'" Only those who were near enough to the balcony were able to hear the speaker. According to a version of Nagy's speech printed later, he expressed his admiration for the demonstrators who persevered and he promised that the government would, through negotiations, "safeguard constitutional order and discipline." Then he bade the people to go home calmly.

Erno Gero went on the air to address the nation at 8:00 p.m., just after Nagy's speech at the Parliament. Gero talked in generalities, downplaying and distorting the events of the day. He condemned those who claimed that Hungarians had not been carrying on an equitable trade with the Soviet Union and that the country's relationship with the Soviet Union had not been based on

equality. He said: "Our independence should be safeguarded from the imperialists and not from the Soviet Union." As late as 8:00 p.m., he did not see the urgency of the situation and promised to call together within the next few days a meeting of the full Central Committee to deal with the problems of the country. Towards the end of his speech he posed the question: "Do we want Socialist democracy or bourgeois democracy?" This question was meant to be rhetorical, but in the streets the people were already rebelling against the Soviet-imposed system.

The huge crowd in front of the Parliament did not hear Gero's speech and was beginning to dissolve after Nagy's brief appearance, when word came and spread like wildfire: "They are shooting at our boys, over at the radio!" The amorphous and leaderless crowd responded, and thousands began to move towards the Kossuth Radio building which was located approximately one mile away from the Parliament. By the time the crowd reached their destination, the narrow streets were teeming with people. Scattered firing was heard, and the acrid smell of tear gas filled the air.

In 1848, the young revolutionaries had seized the press "in the name of the people" to print their twelve-point demands; in 1956, the young people wished to have their demands known to the nation by broadcasting them. These demands were much too threatening to the Communists. Different versions of the demands had been circulating. They had been formulated in the last few days, and although they differed in form, they agreed in substance. "The withdrawal of Soviet troops from the territory of Hungary," was one of the most radical demands. Additional points demanded that Imre Nagy head the government; that the guilty persons of the Rakosi regime, including Rakosi and Farkas, be put on public trial; that new elections be held; that the debasing production quotas be abolished; that the right to strike be guaranteed; that the obligatory farm deliveries be eliminated; that the trade relations with the Soviet Union be renegotiated; that Hungary's newly discovered uranium wealth be openly assessed; that civil rights, freedom of speech, press and assembly be guaranteed; that traditional national symbols such as the Kossuth coat of arms be re-established; that March 15 be again made a national holiday; and that the symbol of tyranny, Stalin's statue, be removed.

Before the day was over, the last demand of the people was accomplished. An angry crowd toppled the statue of Stalin. Parts of the huge, bronze statue were

dragged through the city, and only the boots remained on the pedestal as stark reminders of a bygone era. Groups of people attacked the Szabad Nep building, which also housed a Soviet bookstore. Books were dumped in the street and were set on fire. There were no uniformed police in sight during these disturbances. Later it was learned that Sandor Kopacsi, head of the Budapest police, had given instructions to his men to stay in their stations and not to move against the people.

The most important confrontation occurred at the building that housed Budapest's prime radio station, Radio Kossuth. The shooting that started at the radio station turned the afternoon's peaceful demonstration into a full-scale armed uprising. People had gathered in the vicinity of the radio station since early afternoon. A delegation went in and requested the setting up of an open microphone in the street in front of the building. They were refused. Some negotiations continued, but by evening the crowd was becoming menacing. The radio station was defended by a unit of secret police who began to fire warning shots when the crowd started to break down the massive gates of the building. Tear gas canisters were thrown into the crowd; the people did not disperse but instead started to throw rocks and tossed the canisters back through a window. An army unit was ordered in the area to help the defenders, but the soldiers stayed in their vehicles and, according to some reports, when they heard the shooting they passed out their weapons to the people. Unarmed soldiers from the neighboring Kilian barracks (mostly unreliable troops were stationed there) also joined the demonstrators. It did not take long before shots rang out from the crowd. To obtain additional weapons, students and groups of workers raced off to factories and depots where arms were manufactured or stored. They were able to seize the weapons without much resistance. By nightfall, a full-scale battle developed around the radio station, and shooting erupted in various parts of the city.

At 10:22 p.m., the radio announced that the Political Bureau of the Hungarian Workers' Party had already summoned the Central Committee into session to analyze the situation and to discuss the actions to be taken. In its midnight news roundup, the radio did not comment on the day's events or about the battle raging in front of the building. The population of Budapest did not get much sleep that night. Shooting, the rattling of tanks and scattered explosions were heard throughout the night. The Central Committee held a late night emergency meeting and decided to request the assistance of the

Soviet armed forces to re-establish law and order, since the local law enforcement groups appeared to be ineffective. Consequently martial law was declared.

At 8:13 a.m., on October 24, the radio reported significant changes in the leadership. Imre Nagy and two of his supporters, F. Donath and G. Losonczy, as well as the Muscovite Ferenc Munnich and Marxist philosopher Gyorgy Lukacs, were all elected into the Central Committee. The Political Bureau was also reconstructed; Imre Nagy was included in addition to Apro, Gaspar, Gero, Hegedus, Kadar, Kallay, Kiss, Kobol, Marosan and Szanto. Donath, Kadar and Kallay were named secretaries of the Central Committee and Gero was confirmed in his position as first secretary. The Central Committee recommended that Imre Nagy form a new government with Hegedus as his first deputy.¹⁰ Nagy's appointment, which would have pleased the demonstrators just the day before, made little impression on the armed rebels. Soviet tanks were rambling through the main thoroughfares. They fired at rebel strongholds and were fired upon in return. Some of the tanks were hit with makeshift Molotov cocktails and burned for hours. Appeals for law and order were broadcast all morning.

At 12:00 p.m., Imre Nagy, already the chairman of the Council of Ministers, made a personal appeal on the radio for the cessation of fighting and asked the people to support the new, reform-oriented government.¹¹ Following Nagy, some spokesmen of important organizations and other notables were brought to the microphone. They all asked for an end to the "useless bloodshed." The former Smallholders's leader, Zoltan Tildy, the country's first president to have been forced to resign under Rakosi, was one of the speakers. Gyorgy Szepesi, a popular sports announcer, expressed his concerns about the training of athletes for the Melbourne Olympic Games.

At 1:23 p.m., the radio "in response to requests from the listeners," decided to shed some light on the presence of the Soviet forces in Budapest:

The Soviet troops have been stationed in Hungary in accordance with the Warsaw Agreement. On Tuesday (October 23), the demonstration which was organized by the university students was converted into a counter-revolutionary provocation by enemies of our people, and with their armed attacks endangered the country's order and the lives of its people. The Hungarian government is fully cognizant of its responsibility for the restoration of law and order, and requested the

help of the Soviet troops to curtail the murderous attacks by counter-revolutionary gangs.¹²

By mid-afternoon on Wednesday, it was obvious to the people of Budapest that the Soviet "helpers" had not succeeded in "restoring order." Actually, the use of Soviet tanks and armored troop carries proved to be an ineffective and inefficient way to combat urban "partisans." Borrowing the Soviet term to describe the armed Hungarian rebels is the most appropriate, since many of the armed resisters had learned guerilla-type fighting from the numerous Soviet war movies that depicted the successful resistance of Soviet partisans against invading Fascist armies.

The question of the identity of the armed resisters has not been settled conclusively. Communist and Western studies are in disagreement about the number and the makeup of those who had taken up arms and fought against the Soviets and against the Communist regime. According to Hungarian Communist sources, during the chaotic first days of fighting, only an insignificant number of high school and university students and numerous young workers took part in the street fighting. The majority of the fighters came from the ranks of the lumpen proletariat, street people and other criminal elements. These were joined by former Fascists, Arrow-Cross Party members and officers of Horthy's armies. Communist authors attributed the existence of the large lumpen proletariat to the societal changes that had occurred as a result of the 1948 Communist take-over. The ranks of the traditional lumpen proletariat were swelled by disfranchised members of the old ruling classes. The continuous mistreatment of these people "fueled in them a burning desire for revenge." The events of October 23 provided these individuals with an opportunity to resurface and even to take charge of the fighting to overthrow the system. Later, the Communist sources alleged, Western agents, spies, and returning Hungarian emigrants joined the armed groups.¹³

Western scholars and Hungarian emigrants writing about the uprising have been able to give only an impressionistic picture of the make-up of the armed "freedom fighters,"¹⁴ as these people have been known in the Western world. From numerous studies and on the basis of personal observations, the following composite picture emerges.

In the course of the fighting, numerous armed strongholds were manned by such a vast variety of individuals that generalization would be futile. One

could see among them ten-year-old children and gray haired grandfathers, but the majority of the fighters were young men in their twenties and thirties. They were white and blue collar workers, soldiers, policemen, streetcar conductors and railroad men. A few women also joined them. Command structure evolved naturally; those who appeared to know what they were doing and how things should be done became the leaders. No one asked any questions; whoever wanted to fight just joined or formed his own group. Some obtained weapons and others made and threw Molotov cocktails. People came and went; the groups were amorphous. Mao Tse-tung's depiction of his Chinese guerillas may be applicable: The Hungarian freedom¹⁵ fighters were the fish and the people the water. During the lulls in the fighting, the participants went home to eat and rest.

It was true that street people, released criminals, former political prisoners and declassé elements joined the battle. Some group leaders had shady backgrounds. For example, Jozsef Dudas, head of one of the strongest armed groups, had a checkered past. During the uprising he distinguished himself as the most vicious leader, one who fought not only against the Soviets, but also laid siege on the Party's headquarters and at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For his unchecked violence, he was even taken into custody for a short time, on the instructions of Imre Nagy. Uncle Szabo, an elderly man and an ex-World War II sergeant, directed the activities of a motley group of youngsters in Buda, at Szena Ter (Haymarket Square). Kalman Pongrancz and his brothers, who dominated a strategically important stronghold, were labeled as rough and tough hoods.¹⁶

In addition to the dubious characters who had little to lose, many fine and respectable leaders of the armed fighters emerged. Colonel Pal Maleter of the Hungarian army, a former World War II partisan, joined the rebels instead of attacking them and took charge of the defense of the Kilian barracks, the most important stronghold. Eventually he was made head of all armed forces. On November 3, the final day of Imre Nagy's government, Major General Bela Kiraly, minister of defense and Sandor Kopacsi, chief of the Budapest Police, were selected by Imre Nagy to organize the Hungarian self-defense forces. Kiraly had been arrested in 1951 and had just been released in September 1956. Kopacsi earned Nagy's respect when, on October 23, he instructed the police not to fire at the demonstrators.¹⁷

At the same time, industrial workers at their plants, office workers in their offices and soldiers in their barracks began to organize revolutionary councils. The election or selection of these councils varied from place to place, but Communist-appointed managers and Party and trade union officials were not included; in many instances, these officials were expelled from the premises. In the course of events, the Workers' Councils played an increasingly important role.

The reform movement and the October 23 demonstration had been inspired by the intellectuals and the students, but the ensuing uprising became a genuinely popular nationwide affair. Although the armed confrontation began in Budapest, within days practically the whole country rallied behind the uprising. Imre Nagy, although he became premier as a result of popular demand, was neither the leader of the uprising nor the initiator of the desired changes. When faced with revolutionary demands, he was hesitant and indecisive and acted only under the overwhelming weight of popular pressure.

At dawn on October 25, the radio reported that the counter-revolution, for all practical purposes, had been liquidated. Somewhat later the radio urged people to resume their normal activities.¹⁸ This was easier said than done. Schools were closed, there was no public transportation, streets were torn up and parts of the city were in ruin. Overturned buses and street cars, and burned-out Soviet military vehicles littered the streets. Food supplies were getting short; many people lined up in front of bakeries and other food distribution centers. The resumption of normal activities seemed to be an impossible task. A large but unarmed crowd set out to the Parliament to demand the resignation of Gero.

At that time, the Parliament was defended by Soviet tanks. When the Russian crews saw that the demonstrators carried only banners and not arms, they allowed them to pass. The Hungarians began to fraternize with the Soviet troops, who in return allowed people to climb on the tanks. Suddenly, from the surrounding roof tops machine guns opened fire on the demonstrators. Apparently, secret police units were stationed there to protect the approaches to the Parliament. Eyewitnesses reported that as a result of the unexpected shooting, general confusion ensued. The Soviet tank crews, unaware of who was firing at whom, began shelling the rooftops--in a way protecting the demonstrators. This senseless shooting lasted for about an hour. The total number of casualties was estimated at 170. The New York Times correspondent who witnessed the event later wrote that he saw about a dozen

bodies as a consequence of the shooting.¹⁹ News of the massacre spread rapidly, and people were enraged.

At 12:32 p.m., the radio announced that "the Central Committee of the Hungarian Workers' Party's Political Bureau, during today's session [October 25, 1956], relieved Erno Gero of his duties as first secretary."²⁰ Janos Kadar was appointed to replace him. Had this news been made public two hours earlier, it could have prevented the senseless killing in front of the Parliament. The tragic irony was that Gero's removal from office had already been decided on October 24, soon after the sudden arrival of A. Mikoyan and M. Suslov, representatives of the Soviet Politburo.

The two Soviet dignitaries flew into Budapest by special plane and were immediately transported by Soviet tanks to the session of the Central Committee. There they confronted Gero and accused him of negligence and ineptitude in not carrying out the decisions of the 20th Congress. Gero was also blamed for not bringing Nagy back into the leadership in spite of repeated Soviet urging. In addition, the Soviet delegates stated that Gero's October 23 speech had exacerbated the already volatile situation and therefore Gero should no longer be allowed to speak for the Party.²¹

The radio kept repeating the news of Gero's replacement, which was reported as a great victory for the people. To celebrate the event, the listeners were urged to display the national flag. At 3:18 p.m., Janos Kadar, the new first secretary of the Party, came on the air. He spoke about counter-revolutionary activists who had turned the peaceful march of the well intentioned young people into an armed uprising against the rule of the working class. He promised that order would soon be restored and then "negotiations between the Soviet Union and Hungary, as equal partners, would take place. The problems concerning the two Socialist countries would then be resolved honorably to the satisfaction of both parties."

Nagy spoke immediately after Kadar, and his tone was more conciliatory. He spoke about the accumulation of bitterness as a result of the mistakes of the past, which made a segment of the workers in Budapest join the few instigating counter-revolutionaries in an armed attack against the order of the people's democracy. Nagy asked for a national unity and a joint effort to correct the aforementioned shortcomings. In reference to the Soviet Union, Nagy stated that he would initiate "negotiations concerning the relations between the Hungarian People's Republic and the Soviet Union, including the withdrawal

of Soviet armed forces from Hungary." The removal of Soviet troops from Budapest proper would take place as soon as order was restored.²²

Nagy's speech was very uninspiring. No one knew exactly what he should have said, but the people had expected more radical action from him. Nagy still did not comprehend the magnitude of the people's desire for revolutionary change. As a responsible Communist, Nagy still sought the approval of the Kremlin and the concurrence of the Central Committee before every move. The presence of Suslov and Mikoyan, in addition to the Soviet tanks outside the Parliament, placed him in a precarious position and made him very cautious. During the initial days of the uprising, Nagy's contact with the rebels was severely curtailed. As far as he was concerned, the Soviets were still the masters and pulled all the strings.

In the streets the situation was quite different. Although Soviet tanks were positioned around important government buildings, the freedom fighters roamed freely throughout the city and maintained the established strongholds. In the factories the Workers' Councils and armed militia were in charge. Generally, work did not resume except at medical facilities, bakeries and public utilities. The previous day's curfew was still officially in effect.

The following day, October 26, at 4:30 a.m., Radio Kossuth announced: "The Council of Ministers requested the population of Budapest to stay indoors throughout the day." Only essential personnel would be allowed in the streets to provide services.²³ Although some newspapers were printed, they could not be distributed. Therefore, in addition to communiques, the radio began to broadcast articles from the pages of the Szabad Nep. These articles called for peace, calm, restoration of law and order, and asked the people to trust the new leadership. Imre Nagy was described as a person who "has been incessantly fighting against sectarian mistakes and crimes . . . and a person who has excellent knowledge of Hungarian realities." Kadar, Donath and Kallay, the Party's other leaders, were portrayed as victims of the Rakosi regime--people who "knew the past and understand the present."

Delegations from various regions of the country were arriving in Budapest, wishing to meet with Nagy and making demands on the new government. At 4:13 p.m., a communique from the Central Committee was read on the Radio. The Central Committee proposed the formation of a "new national government." Imre Nagy was given the task

of forming a broadly based cabinet. The Central Committee also gave its approval of negotiations with the Soviet Union to establish relations similar to the newly concluded Polish and Soviet agreements. The Party agreed to the elections of the Workers' Councils. In order to re-establish order and end the bloodshed, the Central Committee supported an offer of complete amnesty for those who "lay down their arms immediately, but no later than 10:00 P.M."²⁴

Hungarians have been long accustomed to interpreting the official news reports. The extension of the amnesty offer actually confirmed that the armed uprising, contrary to earlier announcements, had not been quelled. To learn more about the recent developments, people tuned in to Western broadcasts. Even in the darkest days of the Rakosi era, people had listened to Hungarian language programs of the British Broadcasting Corporation, Voice of America and Radio Free Europe. Due to its obviously propagandist nature, Radio Free Europe had lost some of its appeal among the Hungarians, but it was the most accessible station because it had the strongest signal and the most complete programming in Hungarian.

In October 1956, Radio Free Europe was just as unprepared for an armed uprising in Hungary as anyone else within or outside the country. But when the peaceful demonstration turned into an armed confrontation, the staff of Radio Free Europe rose to the occasion. Already on October 24, 1956, they increased the usual six to seven hours²⁵ of Hungarian language programs to twenty-four hours. The quality of the reporting was also improved. As soon as there were concrete events to report, the inflammatory language of the past was toned down and replaced with relatively objective and factual accounts of developments in Hungary. Through these broadcasts, the Hungarians were able to ascertain the world's reaction to the Hungarian events and, to some extent find out what was actually happening in Hungary. The role of Radio Free Europe diminished as soon as the Hungarian Radio Kossuth changed its viewpoint and began to side with the uprising.

On October 27, at 6:00 a.m., Radio Kossuth reported that the majority of the fighters had laid down their weapons. At 6:52 a.m., this was contradicted by the announcement that the curfew was still in effect for the entire day. At 11:18 a.m., the names of the members of Imre Nagy's new government were announced.²⁶ Despite efforts to make it appear broadly based, the list was quite unimpressive. Zoltan Tildy, the former Smallholders leader and the first president of the

republic, and Ferenc Erdei, a former pro-Communist National Peasant Party leader, were included as non-Communist politicians. In addition, Communists like the Marxist philosopher Gyorgy Lukacs, veteran Muscovite Ferenc Munnich and trade union activist Istvan Kossa, were made members of the Cabinet. Some respected professionals like urologist Antal Babics and agronomist Miklos Ribianszky were also given portfolios.²⁷ The inclusion of Bela Kovacs, the former Smallholder and peasant organizer who had spent years in Soviet prisons for an alleged 1947 anti-Soviet conspiracy, was the only surprise appointment in the new government. The appointment of Bela Kovacs as minister of agriculture was a bid on the part of the Communists for the support of Hungarian peasants.

As mentioned earlier, the uprising was initially an intellectually inspired workers' and students' movement that centered in Budapest. It spread rapidly throughout the country's industrial and mining centers. The agricultural centers followed suit, but there were no reports of peasant restlessness during the early days. To expedite food production for the population, the new government named Zoltan Vas as special commissioner in charge of food provisions and supplies. In 1945, Vas had had similar responsibilities, but his task in 1956 was not nearly so difficult as in the past. As soon as the fighting abated in and around Budapest, peasants began voluntarily to ship food into the capital as an expression of their support of the uprising.

On Sunday, October 28, the general curfew was still in effect. Necessities were to be obtained between the hours of 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. The editorial of the Szabad Nep struck the most conciliatory note so far: It no longer called the freedom fighters "counter-revolutionaries" and explained that the great majority of the participants were workers, peasants, university students and working youth who could not be viewed as enemies of the people's democracy.²⁸ At 1:20 p.m., Imre Nagy declared an "immediate general cease-fire, to halt further bloodshed and to find an amicable solution."²⁹ At 5:25 p.m., Imre Nagy, without any prior notice, made on the radio an appeal to "the people of Hungary."

In his appeal, Nagy called the events of the past five days "the most shocking in Hungary's thousand-year history." He emphatically stated that the government condemns those who consider the current enormous national movement to be a counter-revolution and announced that the Hungarian government had already concluded an agreement with the Soviet government to begin an

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immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops from Budapest. Nagy also pledged the orderly dissolution of the Hungarian secret police and reassured the freedom fighters with his guarantee that no one would be punished for taking part in the armed struggle. To satisfy patriotic aspirations, he proposed the replacement of the Soviet-like national coat of arms with the 1848 Kossuth emblem, and he proclaimed March 15 as a national holiday. In his conclusion, Nagy implored people not to allow the "dark shadows" to completely obscure the accomplishments of the past twelve years.³⁰

Following Nagy's speech came the announcement that the Central Committee, in view of the "extraordinary conditions," had placed the Party's leadership in the hands of a six-member Presidium. "Comrade Janos Kadar was named chairman of the new Presidium with the following members: Antal Apro, Karoly Kiss, Ferenc Munnich, Imre Nagy and Zoltan Szanto." In a follow-up, the radio picked up Nagy's theme and commented on the "national tragedy" that was caused by the "undeserving leaders of the country who could only be swept out of office by gunfire and by the overwhelming anger of the people." Along the same lines, the radio broadcasters confessed: "It is our duty to tell that for a long time, we should say till the very last days, the radio did not assess the situation appropriately."³¹ From that point on, the pro-Communist bias of the broadcasting was replaced with more objective newscasts, and a much broader range of opinions were heard on the radio. News from abroad also lost its previous pro-Soviet interpretation.

At midnight, the radio reported on the Sunday's meeting of the Security Council of the United Nations. On the request of the three Western powers, despite the objections of the Soviet Union, the Security Council placed on the next day's agenda the discussion of "the situation in Hungary." An attempt made by the Soviet delegate for a three-day postponement, was defeated.³² The news of the exploratory action taken by the Security Council confirmed the Hungarians' initial hopes in the United Nations. As the events of the 1956 uprising were unfolding, no reasonable Hungarian expected direct military assistance from the Western powers, but many believed that the United Nations and even a token international police force and world public opinion would prevent the Soviet Union from crushing the uprising.

On Monday, October 29, the victory of the uprising appeared to be a distinct possibility. Practically the whole world was watching the Hungarian developments with approval; the Soviet Union, although it disapproved,

appeared to use restraint. The Szabad Nep rejected the Pravda's allegations that the "anti-people adventure in Hungary had collapsed." "If anything collapsed," wrote the Szabad Nep, it was the "anti-people Rakosi-Gero clique."³³

A special message from W. Gomulka was also read on the radio. He expressed his solidarity with the Hungarian people and expressed Polish support for the fraternal Hungarian party and government. The only discouraging news from abroad came from the United Nations. After a six-hour discussion about Hungary, the debate was postponed because Peter Kos, the Hungarian representative to the United Nations, claimed that he had no instructions from his government, but "he wanted to nail down the fact that Hungary was opposed to the discussion of this topic by the Security Council."³⁴ Evidently, Hungary's representative to the United Nations was still taking his cues from Sobolev, the Soviet delegate.

The generally favorable news from abroad greatly encouraged the Hungarians. Vital food, clothing and medical supplies began to pour into the country. An "air bridge" was established between Budapest and Vienna to hasten the deliveries. Other necessities were shipped by trucks or trains. Around 8:30 p.m., on October 29, the first reports of trouble in the Middle East reached Hungary, but the people were much too preoccupied with their own affairs to pay attention to the development of this new international crisis. According to the midnight news roundup, the entire country was behind the uprising. Throughout the nation, newly formed national committees and workers' councils were taking charge of local affairs and were rapidly establishing contact with Imre Nagy's government. Some of the regional councils adopted radical demands and even threatened the government with general strikes if these demands were not met.³⁵

On October 30, after a peaceful night, people were getting ready to resume work or at least reach their places of employment. At 2:28 p.m., Imre Nagy once again addressed the nation. His message was brief: In order to place the country's government on a more democratic base, the one-party system would be replaced with a coalition of democratic parties, similar to that which had existed in 1945. In line with this change, he announced the formation of an inner cabinet consisting of the following members: Imre Nagy, Zoltan Tildy, Bela Kovacs, Ferenc Erdei, Janos Kadar, Geza Losonczy and a person yet to be nominated by the Social Democratic Party. He then added that the national government had

requested that the Soviet military command immediately withdraw the Soviet troops from the Budapest territory, and he stated that the government had already begun negotiations regarding the complete removal of Soviet troops from Hungary. In conclusion, he said, "On behalf of the national government, I endorse the democratically established local self-governing organs. The national government is planning to rely on them and is asking for their support."³⁶

Tildy spoke after Nagy. After paying tribute to the "revolution," he called on his fellow Smallholders' leaders and organizers to start reactivating the Smallholders' Party. Ferenc Erdei, a former National Peasant Party leader, asked for the revival of the National Peasant Party. Janos Kadar spoke next. He began by expressing the new Presidium's support and approval of the decision that had just been conveyed by Nagy. As a personal comment, he inserted the following, "I am in complete agreement with those who have spoken before me, my acquaintances, friends, and the much honored and respected fellow patriots; Imre Nagy, Zoltan Tildy and Ferenc Erdei." He then condemned the self-serving Communist leaders of the past years, saying that the Party must liberate itself from the burden of the dark shadows of the past. He predicted that the ranks of the Party would be shaken: "I do not fear that any of the innocent, true spirited, honest intentioned Communists will desert us. Only those who have joined us for selfish, private interest, for opportunism or for other reasons, will leave us!"³⁷

Two and a half hours after the conclusion of these speeches, Imre Nagy reported in a brief communique that the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Budapest had begun. He asked people to refrain from any acts of provocation. Soon after his announcement, the following clarification was broadcast: "Imre Nagy had no knowledge of the summoning of Soviet troops into Budapest and was not responsible for the declaration of martial law. Erno Gero and Andras Hegedus were responsible for both decisions." This explanation cleared Nagy from the responsibility for these acts, which ultimately resulted in bloodshed.

The revival of the multi-party system was greeted with great satisfaction throughout the country. Former party leaders began to re-emerge. The Social Democratic Party's representatives--Anna Kethly, Gyula Kelemen and Jozsef Komuves--all of whom had been against the merger with the Communists, appealed to the Prime Minister to authorize the reoccupation of their former headquarters.

So far as their participation in Imre Nagy's government was concerned, the Socialist leaders responded cautiously; first they wanted to reorganize the Socialist Democratic Party itself.³⁸ The revival of the parties was not without controversy. Ferenc Erdei came under attack from former National Peasant Party members who considered him to be a crypto-Communist. Erdei was forced to explain himself and declared that he had only made the announcement about the reorganization of the Party but had no intentions of influencing it.

On the evening of October 31, the Hungarians were encouraged by news from the eastern frontiers of the country, where it was reported that Soviet troops were heading towards Zahony, a city on the Soviet-Hungarian border. It appeared that the Soviet Union was prepared to come to terms with Imre Nagy. This was further evidenced by the Soviet government's declaring the "Principles of Development and Further Strengthening of Friendship and Cooperation between the Soviet Union and Other Socialist States," which appeared in the Pravda that day.³⁹

In this declaration, the Soviet Union admitted to serious mistakes in its relations with the Socialist countries:

The 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union decided that the Soviet Union would base its relationship with other Socialist countries on the strict Leninist principles of equal rights for the people. The Congress proclaimed the need for taking into consideration the history and individual particularities of each country on its way towards building a new life.⁴⁰

In reference to Hungary, the communique explained that Soviet troops were stationed there on the request of the Warsaw Pact: "The stationing of troops of one member's state of the Warsaw Pact on the territory of another state shall be by agreement of all member states."⁴¹ Consequently, the removal of such troops would also require the consent of all the members of the pact. But in general, the declaration approved the Hungarian workers' desire to "improve their economic conditions, to eliminate inadequacies, and to battle against the bureaucratic excesses." The Soviet were only concerned about the infiltration of reactionary elements into the workers' movement. The document urged that the workers, peasants and intellectuals "defend the Socialist gains of the Hungarian People's Government." The Soviets also felt obliged to explain their military involvement in Budapest:

At the request of the People's Government of Hungary, the Soviet Government agreed to send Soviet military units into Budapest to help the Hungarian People's army and the Hungarian government to reestablish order in that city.

Being of the opinion that the continuing presence of Soviet units in Hungary could be used as a pretext for further aggravating the situation, the Soviet government has now given instructions to its military commanders to withdraw their troops from the city of Budapest as soon as the Hungarian government feels that they can be dispensed with.

At the same time, the Soviet government is prepared to engage in negotiations with the Hungarian People's Government and the other signatories of the Warsaw Pact regarding the question of presence of Soviet troops elsewhere on the territory of Hungary.⁴²

Despite the conciliatory tone and the actual concessions made by the Soviet declaration, the Hungarians were impatient and wanted the Soviets out of the country immediately. Spokesmen of armed groups in Budapest and representatives of the newly formed national committees continuously pressed the Nagy government for decisive action in that direction. Concurrently, in the streets of Budapest and throughout the country, extremists were taking the law into their own hands.

The Nagy government officially dissolved the Hungarian secret police, AVH, and advised its members to turn themselves in, so that their guilt or innocence could be ascertained. The regular army was instructed to disarm the units of the secret police. In the streets of Budapest, the pursuit of AVH members was developing into an actual manhunt. As soon as an AVH member fell into the hands of the mob, he was savagely beaten and hanged on a lamppost. Several attempts were made to stop the reprehensible mob actions, and Imre Nagy spoke out against manifestations of "instant justice." However, before the government had a chance to intervene, one of the worst acts of street violence took place at the Communist Party's headquarters at the Republic Square (*Koztarsasagter*).

The Communists, under the direction of Imre Mezo, secretary of the Budapest Party Committee, began to arm reliable Party activists for self-defense.⁴³ Rumors started and rapidly spread that numerous members of the secret police were hiding in the Party's building. It

was also claimed that political prisoners were still held captive in a catacomb-like structure under the building. As a result of these allegations, a huge crowd gathered in front of the building, demanding the release of the prisoners and the surrender of the secret policemen. When the armed Communists inside did not comply, a regular siege began. Members of organized fighting groups from various parts of the city joined the "battle." The bloody confrontation resulted in the death of Imre Mezo, a close friend of Kadar, and two army colonels, in addition to many unidentified military and civilian defenders. Neither the alleged AVH units nor the prisoners were found. For days after the battle, heavy construction machinery was digging up the area in search of the "catacombs." Although the initial stages of this incident appeared to be a part of the manhunt for secret policemen, it turned into a direct attack on the Communist Party. This event, more than any of the previous occurrences, reflected not only the rejection of the Hungarian Communist Party, but it also foreshadowed the possibility of a vendetta against it.

Ironically, it was Rakosi who predicted upon his dismissal in July, "If I leave, everything will collapse."⁴⁴ The events of late October proved him correct. He did not personally witness the collapse. Soon after his removal from office, he was advised to leave Hungary and retire to the Soviet Union. On October 30, 1956, his successor Erno Gero, and Premier Andras Hegedus, both of whom were declared responsible for summoning the Soviet troops into Budapest, were spirited out of the country to the Soviet Union.

Janos Kadar, as the newly appointed first secretary, found himself in charge and responsible for the survival of the demoralized and rapidly disintegrating Communist Party. Kadar's allies in the Party were a handful of home-Communists, left-wing Socialists, working class activists and a few second-echelon Muscovites. Kadar's relationship with Imre Nagy and Nagy's followers was precarious. Before the uprising, Kadar and Gero had allegedly "conspired against the expressed wishes of the Kremlin to keep Imre Nagy out of the Party's leadership."⁴⁵ Kadar had even less rapport with the Communist intellectuals who had lined up behind Nagy.

Kadar absolutely refused to give credit to the intellectuals for the series of events that precipitated the eventual dismissal of Rakosi. In August 1956, Kadar, as secretary of the Central Committee, summoned newspaper editors, journalists and magazine writers to a conference and chastised them for the appearance of certain "anti-

Party views" in the press. In the course of this meeting, he made the following contemptuous remarks:

The writers believe that they were responsible for the changes which took place in July (Rakosi's dismissal). Let them finally understand that this change was initiated by the Central Committee of the Party, by the ordinary members, the workers and peasants. The writers remind me of the fly that settles on the shaft bar and believes that he pulls the cart.

Ironically, in October Kadar found himself at the helm of the Party, sharing leadership with Imre Nagy and his intellectual followers. But Nagy rapidly moved into a national role and became preoccupied with the affairs of the entire nation. Thus Kadar had to shoulder the responsibility for the Party practically alone. After the mob attack on the Party's building, he must have realized that the physical safety and even the lives of the Communist activists were in jeopardy. Kadar blamed the Rakosi regime for the Party's predicament, but he had to act swiftly and decisively to counter the situation.

On October 30, Mikoyan and Suslov, Khrushchev's troubleshooters, appeared in Budapest bringing with them the Soviet government's Proclamation as a peace offering to the Hungarians. Appearances suggested that the Soviet leaders were prepared to accept Imre Nagy as Hungary's new leader and were willing to negotiate with him. Under these circumstances, Kadar saw no other alternative but to cooperate with Nagy. Even before the Soviet emissaries' return to Moscow, the Kremlin had concluded that the Communists in Hungary were in danger of losing control and that Imre Nagy could hardly resist the anti-Soviet tide. Khrushchev raised the following questions:

Should we move our troops back into Budapest, or should we wait and see whether internal forces would liberate themselves and thwart the counter-revolution? If we decided on the latter course, there is always the risk that the counter-revolution might prevail temporarily, which would mean that much proletarian blood would be shed. Furthermore, if the counter-revolution did succeed and NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) took root in the midst of the Socialist countries, it would pose a serious threat to Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Rumania, not to mention the Soviet Union itself.

Nevertheless, before deciding on what action to take, the Soviet Presidium wanted to consult with leaders of the Socialist countries, "first and foremost with the fraternal Communist Party of China." Liu Shao-chi, Mao Tse-tung's personal representative, came to Moscow on the evening of October 30 to confer with the Soviet leaders. Initially, Liu was against an armed invasion of Hungary, but the Soviets argued that the youth in that country was very susceptible to the counter-revolution. This made Liu change his position, but the deliberation continued. At the end of prolonged discussions, it was decided by the Soviet representatives and Liu that the Soviet Union would not intervene militarily in Hungary. But the next morning, Khrushchev still had serious reservations about not intervening in Hungary. He convinced his fellow Presidium members that they must use all means necessary to restore order in Hungary. Marshal Konev, commander of the Warsaw Pact troops, was asked how much time would be necessary to crush the counter-revolutionary forces. "Three days, no longer," responded Konev. "Then start getting ready," he was told.

The entire Presidium raced to the Vnukovo airport to inform the departing Chinese delegate about the latest Soviet decision. Liu assured them that Mao would concur. With their Chinese flank secure, Khrushchev felt that it was also necessary to obtain support from Poland. For this purpose, Khrushchev, Molotov and Malenkov met with Gomulka and Cyrankiewicz near the Polish-Russian border. The Poles argued against the invasion of Hungary, but apparently they were not in a position to prevent it. After briefing the Poles, Khrushchev and Malenkov flew to Bucharest, where they were met by the Rumanian, Czechoslovak and Bulgarian leaders. Especially Novotny and Gheorghiu-Dej favored an attack on Hungary. They had sizeable Hungarian minorities in their countries and feared the spread of the uprising. From Rumania, Khrushchev and Malenkov flew to Brioni Island, just off the coast of Yugoslavia, to meet with Tito. After explaining the purpose of their mission, Tito objected even less strenuously than the Poles. With the West preoccupied with the Middle East crisis and with no serious objections from the Socialist countries, Marshal Konev was given the word to crush the counter-revolution in Hungary.⁴⁸

As early as October 31, unusual Soviet troop movements were observed in Hungary. These strategic moves of the Soviet army were immediately reported to Imre Nagy. Also, word came that new troops were crossing over into Hungary. As soon as the troop movements were

confirmed, Imre Nagy summoned the Soviet Ambassador, Yuri V. Andropov, and demanded an explanation. Nagy considered the bringing of new Soviet troops into Hungary a violation of the Warsaw Pact and the recently concluded agreements with Mikoyan and Suslov. Andropov himself played only the role of an intermediary. On November 1, Nagy met with the Soviet Ambassador six times. Andropov kept giving Nagy evasive responses, but to reassure him about the good intention of the Kremlin with regard to troop withdrawals, he told the Prime Minister to name two liaison conference committees to discuss the political and military ramifications of Hungary's intended abrogation of the Warsaw Pact.⁴⁹ Nagy had few options but to negotiate with the Soviets. He hoped to counter the Soviet military threat by turning to world public opinion for support. He also tried a diplomatic maneuver to get rid of the Soviet troops.

In a speech to a restless crowd gathering near the Parliament, Nagy drew public attention to the probability of Hungary's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact. After this most radical departure from his earlier stance, Nagy told Western reporters that Hungary would actively pursue negotiations for its withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact. In response to a question about Hungary's neutrality, Nagy was evasive: "Sooner or later this problem must be addressed."⁵⁰ At 6:12 p.m., on November 1, it was officially announced on the radio: "As a consequence of Soviet violation of the Warsaw Pact by introducing new military units into Hungary, the Hungarian government immediately renounces its participation in the Warsaw Pact and concurrently declares neutrality." The Hungarian government requested the United Nations and the Four Great Powers to help guarantee the country's newly declared neutrality. After this dramatic announcement, Nagy made a short speech with a conciliatory message towards the Soviet Union. In essence he said that although a neutral Hungary would not and could not belong to any power bloc, it planned to preserve its past revolutionary achievements and continue to live in peace and friendship with the Soviet Union.⁵¹

It was reported that both the Party leadership and the members of the Cabinet had concurred with the above decisions. Only two members of the Party leadership, Gyorgy Lukacs and Zoltan Szanto, voiced objections. Kadar, Munnich, Apro and K. Kiss, who had not been known as Nagy's supporters, did not oppose the decisions. It was reported later that before the announcement, when the entire Cabinet had confronted Andropov about the arrival of new Soviet troops, Kadar spoke most vehemently against

any possible Soviet attack. He declared, "As a Hungarian I would fight against the Soviet troops, if necessary, with bare hands!"⁵²

At 10:00 p.m., Janos Kadar addressed the nation on Radio Kossuth. He began his speech with an attack on the "Rakosi clique" for degrading and making the Party "an instrument of political tyranny and national enslavement." He then gave credit to the "glorious uprising" for shaking off the "Rakosi-reign from the country's back," and thus achieving "freedom for the people and independence for the country, without which there could be no Socialism." Kadar had high praise even for the writers, journalists, students and the members of the Petofi circle, and he called them "The vanguards of the struggle against Rakosi's despotism and political adventurism." But he felt that "now the people's uprising has come to a turning point." He said that he did not want to see a counter-revolutionary rule replace the Rakosi regime and expressed concern about the possibility of foreign involvement that might make Hungary into another Korea: "In these critical hours, those Communists who had been calling for the struggle against the Rakosi tyranny, decided to form a new Party. This new Party, once and for all, will break with the crimes of the past. It will protect the national honor and our country's independence against everyone." In addition, Kadar stressed that the Communists stood for friendship with all countries, land reforms, the nationalized industry, banks and mines, and for the social and cultural achievements of the past decade. Kadar assured his listeners that the Communists in the future would oppose "mindless imitation of foreign examples" and would pursue "a program that corresponded to the historical and socio-economic particularities of Hungary." The new Party, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (*Magyar Szocialista Munkaspart*) would be counting primarily on the support of the "self-confident workers." Kadar proposed calling together a new Party congress and submitted the following names to form a preparatory committee: F. Donath, J. Kadar, S. Kopacsi, G. Losonczy, G. Lukacs, I. Nagy and Z. Szanto. The Party's newspaper was also to be renamed from *Szabad Nep* (*Free People*) to *Nepszabadsag* (*People's Freedom*). In conclusion, Kadar said:

The Socialist Workers' Party will, with all its might, struggle for the nation's Socialist future . . . together with the other democratic parties, primarily with the other workers' party, the Social Democratic Party, for the

strengthening of the government, and will fight off the danger of counter-revolution and foreign intervention. Our people proved by the shedding of their blood that they unfailingly support the government's demand for the complete withdrawal of the Soviet forces. We no longer want dependency. We do not want the country to be divided. We are appealing to every honest patriot: Let us join together for the triumph of⁵³ Hungarian independence and Hungarian freedom!

Judging by his pronouncements during the day and his radio speech in the evening, Kadar was unaware of the Kremlin's decision to intervene until much later that night. Reports indicated that after his radio address, Kadar was intercepted by Ferenc Munnich, who by then must have received word from Moscow about the pending military intervention. Apparently it was Munnich who convinced Kadar to leave the city and meet with the Russians. The location and the circumstances of that meeting have remained a mystery, but there are indications that the Soviet-sponsored Kadar government was formed between November² and 3 in the Carpatho-Ukrainian city of Uzhgorod.⁵⁴

On November 2, not much attention to Kadar's disappearance was paid in Budapest. With the increased threat of Soviet military intervention, the Nagy government pressed its appeal for neutrality to the United Nations. But publicly the Soviet military threat was downplayed. For instance, Pal Maleter, the new commander of the Hungarian Forces gave the following explanation: "The Soviet units have surrounded the airfields to provide security for the Soviet withdrawal." Finally, at 7:30 p.m., the public was informed of the extensive Soviet troop movements when the Nagy government's note of protest that had been given to the Soviet Ambassador was read on the radio. The Hungarian government protested the Soviets' intentional delay of the proposed⁵⁵ negotiations about a complete Soviet withdrawal. The nation was also told that the secretary general of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjold, was notified in a telegram about the unwarranted Soviet military movements and⁵⁶ was asked to intercede in behalf of Hungary's neutrality.

At midnight, word reached the Hungarians that the Security Council of the United Nations voted ten to one in favor of placing Hungary's request for neutrality on the agenda.⁵⁷ Only the Soviet Union voted against the motion. At dawn on November 3, the Hungarians learned

that the American, Cuban and British delegates had spoken in favor of Hungary's request. Sobolev, the Soviet representative, accused the Western powers of using Hungary as an excuse for diverting attention from the Middle East.⁵⁸

At 1:25 p.m., Imre Nagy's new government was announced. Imre Nagy, in addition to the premiership, received the foreign minister's portfolio. P. Maleter was named minister of defense. The following party representatives were named ministers of state without portfolios: Zoltan Tildy, B. Kovacs and I. B. Szabo (Smallholders); Anna Kethly, G. Kelemen, J. Fischer, I. Bibo and F. Farkas (Petofi Peasant Party--formerly National Peasant Party); and G. Losonczy and J. Kadar (Communist Party).⁵⁹ It is noteworthy that the only Communist members remaining in the government were Nagy, Kadar and Losonczy, a Nagy supporter; Munnich, Apro, Kossa and Horvath were no longer listed. The fact that Janos Kadar had not been seen since November 1 was not mentioned.

In the afternoon of November 3, it seemed that Nagy's public protests and appeals to the United Nations were making an impression on the Kremlin. At 3:30 p.m., the radio reported that at noon the Soviet and Hungarian military negotiators had begun to discuss the technical aspects of Soviet withdrawal. The Soviet delegation promised that during the course of the negotiations, it would not bring more Soviet troops into Hungary. The next session of the negotiations was scheduled for 10:00 p.m.⁶⁰

At 8:00 p.m., Cardinal Jozsef Mindszenty, Hungary's Roman Catholic Primate, who had been liberated from his long imprisonment on October 30, addressed the nation. Mindszenty expressed a hope for Hungary to live in peace with all its neighbors and with all the countries in the world, but the immediate future of the country was in the hands of the Soviet Union. He urged the Kremlin not to resort to force to crush his country's aspirations. The Soviets would earn the respect of the Hungarians if they would peacefully withdraw from the country. As for the creation of a democratic Hungary, he advocated the holding of internationally supervised national elections. At the same time, he warned the Hungarians to remain unified and not be divided by internal political strife. Speaking as the head of 6.5 million Catholics, he firmly stipulated that he expected the immediate restoration of religious instruction and the return of the Church's institutions, societies and press.⁶¹

The Primate's speech was neither inflammatory nor unreasonable. He assessed the situation most realistically when he said that the fate of Hungary was indeed in the hands of the mighty Soviet Union. Judging from the sequence of events that followed, the Soviets did not wish to endear themselves and were only intent on keeping Hungary within their domain.

There are few instances in any nation's history when moments of complete national unity may be pinpointed. In Hungary's modern history two such moments can be singled out: March 15, 1848, and October 23, 1956. In both instances, the entire nation felt and acted as one. On both occasions the people, inspired by the intellectuals, acted spontaneously to rid themselves of foreign domination. This researcher, who lived through the events of October 23 and the ensuing uprising, has attempted to recapture not only the facts, but also the national spirit of the uprising.

The facts of the uprising proved that the Hungarians rose to overthrow the Soviet-imposed Communist regime to obtain national independence and a democratic multi-party system patterned on the postwar period. It became evident that the Communists had lost their credibility, even those who had themselves suffered under Rakosi. Imre Nagy was the only exception; he had been thrust into office by the popular demand of the demonstrators. During the course of the uprising, Nagy was able to rise above his own Communist biases and began to act in accordance with the nation's wishes. From time to time even he came under criticism from more radical elements.

Janos Kadar, who became first secretary of the Communist Party during the uprising, was a relatively unknown quantity outside the circle of Party activists. Even as the new leader of the Party and a member of Imre Nagy's Cabinet, Kadar played an insignificant role during the uprising. By the time Kadar assumed his high office, the Party was no longer in control; on the contrary, it was in a desperate struggle for survival. From the evidence presented in this chapter, it is safe to assume that despite Kadar's attempts to reorganize and purify the Party, the future of the Communist Party would have been bleak in a truly democratic Hungary.