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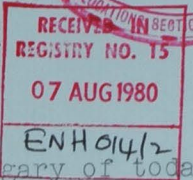
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HUNGARY; 1956 AND 1980



SUMMARY

1. Is 1956 still relevant to the Hungary of today? (Paragraphs 1 - 3).
2. Hungary condemned by geography to be a buffer state; but the Magyars have survived as a nation and have become adept at making the best of an unpromising situation (Paragraph 4).
3. Historical parallels: 1848 and 1956, 1867 and 1968 (Paragraphs 5 and 6).
4. Despite Kádár's desertion to the Russians in 1956, his commitment to national communism is probably genuine. Once the period of repression after 1956 was over, his régime's policies have amounted to the progressive implementation of most of Imre Nagy's objectives (Paragraphs 7 - 11).
5. Kádár's policy of reconciliation has amounted to a continuing effort to achieve a national consensus, for which the experience of 1956 is a powerful motivating force. In 1980, Hungary is still trying progressively to improve its accommodation with the foreign domination which the Hungarian people failed to throw off in 1956 (Paragraphs 12 and 13).

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BRITISH EMBASSY  
BUDAPEST

28 July 1980

The Right Honourable  
The Lord Carrington KCMG MC  
etc etc etc

My Lord

HUNGARY: 1956 AND 1980

A prominent emigré Hungarian journalist whom I met on my way to take up my appointment said that he could summarise his advice to me in one sentence: "The key to everything in Hungary today is to be found in 1956."

2. In the wider international context the continuing relevance of 1956 needs, after the invasion of Afghanistan, no further emphasis. It was Prime Minister Imre Nagy who, in a memorandum dictated in Budapest's Parliament Building on 4 November 1956 during a Soviet artillery barrage, said:-

".....Today it is Hungary and tomorrow or the day after it will be the turn of other countries, because the imperialism of Moscow does not know borders and is only trying to play for time."

His judgement has since been vindicated at 12 yearly intervals.

3. The exact nature of the relevance of 1956 to the Hungary of 1980 is less readily apparent. I had expected that it might show itself mainly as scar-tissue of various kinds: in social tensions; in morbid introspection; in residual bitterness or cynicism, behind the polite smiles, towards both East and West; perhaps in the elevation of national impotence to a virtue or in its use as a permanent alibi. The truth is both more complex and less depressing. After seven months in

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Budapest I am persuaded that the judgement of my journalist acquaintance is broadly correct: 1956 is directly relevant to most of what is happening in Hungary today and this relevance will continue for some time to come. In this and in subsequent reports I shall attempt to say why.

4. Hungary has been condemned by geography to be a buffer state. It has been used as such by the Angevins and the Holy Roman Empire against the Turks; by the Turks against the Hapsburgs; by the Hapsburgs against the Turks; by the later Hapsburgs against the Russians and Greater Serbia; by Nazi Germany against the Soviet Union; and finally by the Soviet Union against the West. Lacking natural frontiers, Hungary has for much of its history been a no-man's land between East and West, across which the tides of invasion - Mongol, Turkish, Austrian, German and Russian - have ebbed and flowed. Although few in number the Hungarians have never, however, been a tractable or readily digestible component of whichever Empire they have for the time being formed a part. Partly through the careful nurturing of their difficult and idiosyncratic language and its literature, and partly through the ruthless suppression of any smaller national minority over whom circumstances have at any moment given them control, the Magyars have not only survived as a nation but have shown themselves remarkably adept at making the best of a bad job.

5. Historical parallels are treacherous, although the Hungarians are given to and draw comfort from making them. In 1848, Hungary rebelled against alien rule, political suppression and (with the exception of the nobility) deepening impoverishment. Within eight months the liberal régime in Budapest had been crushed by foreign (Austrian and Russian) troops and its leaders executed, imprisoned or exiled. After 18 years of restored Austrian

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autocratic rule, during which the Hungarians cautiously tested and prepared to loosen their bonds, the Compromise of 1867 won for them a privileged position within the Empire which they continued, with single-minded and totally selfish dedication, to improve at Vienna's expense and at that of all other national minorities, until 1918. In 1956, Hungary rebelled against foreign occupation, a brutally repressive régime and economic policies which were as unsuccessful as they were inhumane. Within eight weeks, all the leaders of the revolution had been arrested or had left the country; and within three years all those in any way associated with or sympathetic to it had been executed, imprisoned or silenced by the Kádár régime. After a further decade of orthodox but gradually less repressive government, the programme of economic reform inaugurated in 1968 set Hungary on a new course. This has enabled the Hungarians, in effect, to create for themselves a position of greater well-being and privilege within the Soviet empire and has amounted to a steady adjustment in their favour of their accommodation with Soviet power.

6. To an outsider, and certainly to a historian, the parallel may be far-fetched. To a Hungarian, it confirms and sustains his belief in the capacity of his nation eventually to get the better of superior force through resilience and the application of, in his conviction, superior intelligence.

7. We are unlikely ever to know what was in Janos Kádár's mind between 1 November 1956, when he told Yuri Andropov (then Soviet Ambassador to Hungary) that he would fight Soviet tanks with his bare hands if they were not withdrawn from Hungarian territory; and 7 November, when he arrived at the Parliament Building in a Soviet armoured car charged with the re-assertion of Communist,

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and hence Soviet, political control of a hostile population. Kádár's more bitter detractors would accuse him of a cynical act of betrayal, infamous even by Communist standards, designed to restore to the hands of a small minority the monopoly of power which it had let slip from its grasp. His more ardent apologists might argue that he already had a clear vision of the long road of retribution, internal reconciliation, and external accommodation along which he would have to lead his country towards the ultimate goal of national revival.

8. Neither argument lacks factual support. During the weeks following his installation as the puppet ruler of a reoccupied Hungary, Kádár, in a desperate attempt to rally an essential minimum of popular support, promised: the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary; full personal freedom for the individual; the abolition of the Secret Police (AVO); the abandonment of forced collectivisation; immunity for Imre Nagy; and (on 15 November) "a new multi-Party system and clean and honest elections". Few, if any, of these undertakings can have been given in good faith. Kádár reneged on most of them with total cynicism as soon as the dictatorship of the HSWP was once again secure. An indictment of Kádár could not, for example, omit what was virtually the final episode of the revolution when, on 11 December, he invited the two leaders of the Central Workers Council (which had survived in defiance of the régime) to come to the Parliament Building for negotiations, only to arrest and imprison them on arrival. Twenty-four years later, not one of the promises which Kádár made at this time has been honoured.

9. The Kádár régime's record, during its early days, of political amorality and personal betrayal could not be seriously challenged even by Kádár's defenders, who would,

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however, emphasise the significance of other aspects of his past. They would take as their starting point the fact that unlike most of the leaders of the Hungarian Communist Party prior to 1956, Kádár was not in exile in Moscow before or during the Second World War but an illegal Communist who refused to leave his own country and suffered frequent imprisonment as a result. Prior to 1956, Kádár could speak only a few words of Russian. He was imprisoned and tortured by the Rákosi régime. There is no firm basis for questioning the sincerity of his support for Imre Nagy's programme when he joined the Cabinet formed by Nagy on 30 October 1956. In a broadcast two days later, Kádár proclaimed that the Revolution had achieved "freedom for the people and independence for the country, without which there can be no Socialism". In an interview at the same time, he stressed his commitment to "Hungarian national Communism".

10. Despite his desertion to the Russians in 1956, I believe that Kádár's commitment to national Communism is and always has been profound. It is unlikely that, at the crisis of the 1956 Revolution, he had any clear plan in his mind, either reprehensible - to secure power for himself on the backs of the Russians; or virtuous - to lead his country through mortification to salvation. He had, probably, no more than a powerful intuition concerning the limits of what the Soviet Union would tolerate. Significantly, the one promise which he never gave in trying to conjure up support for his régime was that of neutrality or departure from the Warsaw Pact. He seems to have realised that if the concept of national Communism was to survive, there had to be Hungarians whom the Russians would trust at the head of Hungary's affairs. The only visible alternative was continuing defiance, inevitable defeat and the transformation of Hungary into a Soviet province. The Soviet response, in Czechoslovakia in 1968, to a much less direct challenge, which fell

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far short of revolution, confirmed that Kádár's instinct twelve years earlier had been well founded.

11. In October 1956, Kádár aligned himself at least tacitly with a revival of the Nagy "New Course" of 1953/55. The Nagy programme, based on a consciously flexible interpretation of Marxist theory, emphasised the more rapid development of the consumer industrial sector; the modernisation of agriculture; some revival of private enterprise, both in agriculture and in the service industries; government by a democratic coalition rather than by a single Party; national unity and national independence; and neutrality. The Revolution and its aftermath swept some of these objectives - notably coalition government and neutrality - off the agenda for several decades, if not for good. Inevitably, the suppression of the revolution inaugurated a period of brutal tyranny aimed at consolidating the power of a small elite, wholly dependent on Soviet support, and at restoring Hungary's deformed and crippled economy. But once this period was over, the Kádár régime's policies have in effect amounted to the progressive implementation of Imre Nagy's remaining objectives.

12. The policy of national reconciliation, the so-called "alliance policy" symbolised by Kádár's coining in 1961 of the slogan "he who is not against us is with us", was not merely a short term expedient designed to bind and heal the wounds of 1956, but a continuing effort to achieve a national consensus, reflected most recently in the widespread involvement of non-Party members in the preparations for the 12th Congress of the HSWP this year. The HSWP is deeply and constantly aware that it is the successor to the only ruling Communist Party in the Soviet bloc to have been ousted from power. Both in its continuous campaign to broaden its support and in its pursuit of flexible policies

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designed to maximise the material well-being of the population, the memory of 1956 is a powerful motivating force. The New Economic Mechanism, on which Hungary's economic policies have been based since 1968, and which in 1980 is being further refined, has some of its roots in Nagy's ideology as well as in sound economic theory. In agriculture the forced collectivisation, which Nagy opposed and Kádár promised to eschew, has been ameliorated both by a liberal approach to private agricultural activity and by technologically advanced policies which have brought relative prosperity and an acceptable quality of life to the State farms and co-operatives. In the service and construction industries, the private sector accounts, with the active encouragement of the régime, for a significant and growing proportion of activity. In its cultural policies and in its attitudes towards the Hungarian Churches, the Hungarian emigré community and Hungarian minorities in neighbouring countries, the régime has been careful to demonstrate its respect for and sympathy with the concept of Magyar nationhood, the requirements of socialist internationalism notwithstanding. Nagy's "New Course" has survived after all.

13. In 1980, for the second time in its history, Hungary is still working away, with characteristic single-mindedness, at the steady and progressive improvement of its accommodation with the foreign domination and occupation which the Hungarian people failed to throw off in 1956. Against the betrayal and retribution of that period must be set the extent to which, in the succeeding quarter of a century, the régime has been able to secure for the Hungarian people the highest level of material, cultural and social existence which is feasible within the Soviet empire and under Soviet occupation. Lacking legitimacy, the only claim which the Kádár régime has on

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the support and loyalty of the population is the degree of success which it can achieve in the working out of the second great Compromise. In subsequent despatches on the various elements of the Compromise, I shall try to assess the strength of this claim and the extent to which the régime has been able to atone for its origins - without necessarily accepting Gibbons' judgement that "while the aristocracy.....protects the happiness it is superfluous to enquire whether it be founded on the rights of man".

14. I am sending copies of this despatch to H M Ambassadors in Moscow, East Berlin, Warsaw, Prague, Bucharest, Sofia, Belgrade, Vienna, Washington, Bonn and UKDEL NATO.

I am My Lord

Yours faithfully

*Bryan Carridge*