

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AFTER 1956: THE HERITAGE OF THE HUNGARIAN REVOLUTION*

Bill Lomax

'Without the heritage of 1956 there cannot be any real opposition or critique of the regime.'

Mihály Vajda

For many commentators in both East and West, 1981—the year of the crushing of Solidarity and the inauguration of military rule in Poland—was regarded not so much as the twenty-fifth anniversary of the ruthless and bloody repression of the Hungarian revolution of 1956, as the twenty-fifth anniversary of the birth of the Kádár regime, reputedly the most liberal political system in Eastern Europe, or 'the happiest barracks in the camp' as it is often called. At the same time, condemnation of the Polish coup was far more restrained than had been that of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968.

'The assumption of power by the military', declared the former Hungarian prime minister András Hegedűs, a person often regarded as one of the leading representatives of liberal views in Eastern Europe, on 15 December, 'is both politically and sociologically understandable.'" 'General Jaruzelski's intervention', contended an article in the *Financial Times* on 19 December, 'offers the last, faint hope for the reform movement in Poland.'² General Jaruzelski, the press of both East and West was at pains to point out, had made clear his commitment to the continuation of reforms, and his willingness to seek an agreement with representatives of the independent trade unions. Even three months into military rule, the East European specialist of the *Guardian* could write, 'The Polish government still considers itself bound by the Gdansk agreements that launched Solidarity.'³ The best hope for Poland, these commentators suggested, was for Jaruzelski to become a second Kádár, able to obtain for the Poles the optimum possible within the constraints and realities of their given geo-political situation.

*Bill Lomax's study *Hungary 1956* (London, Allison & Busby, 1976) was republished in Hungarian *samizdat* in 1981 on the 25th anniversary of the Hungarian revolution, together with numerous corrections and additions prepared by the translator György Krassó. The present article is a revised and extended version of the post-script written for a new Hungarian edition published by the author in 1982. The author and the publishers wish to express their appreciation to György Krassó for his considerable and valuable contribution towards the preparation of the present article.

The argument at first looked appealing, until the flaw in it was pointed out by those with a little more knowledge of Eastern Europe than the average British newspaper correspondent. The liberalisation Hungary enjoys today only commenced in the mid 1960s. In the immediate aftermath of the revolution's defeat, the **Kádár** regime had been installed through the merciless employment of mass terror and repression. Only after their spirit had been systematically broken, to be replaced by apathy, conformism and careerism, was it possible to entice the population with the lure of economic prosperity. The situation in Poland today, however, differs drastically from that of Hungary in 1956. In the present atmosphere of detente, force cannot be employed with quite the same ruthless brutality as a quarter of a century ago. At the same time, the crisis threatening the Eastern bloc as a whole prevents any immediate alleviation of Poland's economic problems. The two main planks of the **Kádárist** consolidation are thus denied the Polish *junta*.⁴

An interpretation of **Kádárism** that stresses the first six years of bloody and merciless repression can, however, be just as misleading as the more common one that pays heed only to the apparent achievements of the last fifteen years. If truth is to be told, then in the immediate aftermath of the Soviet repression of the revolution, the new Hungarian leader **János Kádár** spoke in terms very similar indeed to those employed by Jaruzelski today—expressing his commitment to the justified aims of the popular uprising, advocating the continuation of both economic and political reforms, and appearing ready to favour the installation, already in the winter of 1956–1957, of the more tolerant regime that came later to be embodied in his now well-known slogan 'He who is not against us, is with us.' Even if the prospects for such a development were heavily constrained by the political and social circumstances of the time, it would be naive to dismiss **Kádár's** position as one of mere expediency and political Machiavellianism. Indeed, a clearer understanding of the circumstances of the implantation of the **Kádár** regime, and of the main lines of its subsequent course, as well as the development of popular consciousness both as to the nature of the 1956 events and to the possibilities for future change, may well prove most instructive to any effort to understand what can be expected from the course of events in Poland after 13 December 1981.⁵

The Origins of the Kádár Regime

It is by no means certain that on the morning of 1 November 1956, when the Soviet Politburo took the final decision to invade Hungary and overthrow the government of Imre **Nagy** formed during the revolution, **János Kádár** was their first choice to be installed as the new leader of Hungary. After all, **Kádár** was the man who had already twice in his career disbanded the Hungarian Communist Party—first in June 1943, amid

somewhat confusing circumstances following the dissolution of the Comintern, and again on 30 October 1956 at the height of the revolution. Announcing the formation of a new Communist Party, the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party, on 1 November 1956, **Kádár** had declared his opinion of the previous days' events as constituting 'a glorious uprising of our people' in which the Hungarian Communists had 'fought in the first ranks'. Earlier the very same day, he had told the Soviet ambassador, **Yuri** Andropov, direct to his face that if the Russians intervened again, he would take his place amongst the Hungarian workers in the streets and fight against the Soviet tanks, 'with my bare hands too, if I have

The Soviets' first choice to head the new Hungarian government was the veteran Communist Ferenc Munnich who, unlike **Kádár**, was known to them personally from his time as a Comintern functionary in Europe in the **1930s**, as an officer in the Soviet army in the **1940s**, and more recently as Hungarian ambassador to Moscow. It even seems probable that negotiations were held in Moscow on 2 November to form a government with Munnich as prime minister, and that it was only the following day—after pressure from the Yugoslavs—that the Soviets changed their minds and installed **Kádár** as head of the government as well as Party leader. Even then, however, Munnich remained the main confidante of the Soviet leaders, and in many respects the person who, as minister in charge of the armed forces and state security, held the real power in Hungary in the first months of the **Kádár** government.⁷

Kádár and Munnich, however, were not the only Hungarian Communists who sought to form an alternative government in November 1956. In a curious and little-known incident, a small group of hard-line Stalinists headed by the Muscovite **Andor Bérei** and his wife **Erzsébet** Andics, who had earlier taken refuge from the revolution on 2 November in the Soviet embassy, established themselves in the town of Szolnok to the east of Budapest where, under the protection of the Soviet garrison, they tried to reform the old Hungarian Workers' Party formally dissolved by **Kádár** on 30 October, hoping that the Soviets would call on them to form the new government. They produced the Party's paper under its old name *Szabad Nép*—published daily from 6 to 11 November and distributed in the town by Soviet troops—even *after* the **Kádár** government had been installed in Budapest and **Kádár's** new party had recommenced publication of its paper *Népszabadság*. The Russians appear to have held them in reserve as a possible alternative to the **Kádár** regime. Only later were they to be arrested by the Soviet forces and deported to the Soviet Union, where they remained for almost one year before being allowed to return to Hungary.⁸

János Kádár had still been a member of the Imre **Nagy** government on 1 November, and had agreed with its decisions including the restoration

of the multi-party system and withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact. In a radio broadcast that night he had called on the newly-formed democratic parties to help in consolidating the Nagy government, and declared, 'Our people have proved with their blood their intention to support unflinchingly the government's efforts for the complete withdrawal of Soviet forces.'⁹ After that, however, he was not to be seen or heard from again until three days later, on 4 November 1956, when he returned at the head of a new government that had called for Soviet help to crush the revolution.

The full circumstances of how Kádár came to defect to the Russians, and of just where and how his new government was actually formed, remain shrouded in mystery. It seems established that late in the evening of 1 November he was prevailed upon by Munnich to go with him to the Soviet Embassy, and that he was flown out of Budapest either that same night or early the following morning, possibly to Prague or Moscow.¹⁰ Just how willing he was at first to collaborate with the Soviets is unclear, but it is perhaps significant that the first announcement of the formation of the Hungarian Revolutionary Worker-Peasant Government, assuming responsibility for calling in the Soviet army, was made on the morning of 4 November—over the Balkan radio station of Radio Moscow—not by Kádár but by Munnich. It was only an hour later, and a good two hours after the start of the Soviet attack on Budapest, that Kádár too went on the radio to express his support for the Soviet intervention."

Official Hungarian accounts report the Hungarian Revolutionary Worker-Peasant government as having been formed at Szolnok on 3 November, while Bérei and Andics' *Szabad Nép* reports Kádár's presence there on 4 November. But there is no independent confirmation of these claims, and it is now widely accepted that on 4 November Kádár and Munnich were still on Soviet territory, and that their government was assembled at the town of Uzhgorod in the Soviet Carpatho-Ukraine. Some of its members had probably been taken there from Budapest, but at least one, the new minister of commerce Sándor Rónai, only heard of his inclusion over the radio, in the Hungarian parliament building on the morning of 4 November. All that is certain is that Kádár and his entourage did not return to Budapest until three days later on 7 November, when the government was formally sworn in by the Hungarian president István Dobi.¹¹

While Kádár's government was established in Budapest under the protection of Soviet tanks, as the Soviet army sought swiftly and mercilessly to crush the remaining centres of armed resistance, there was no question at first of contesting the legitimacy of the revolution. For Kádár, the events had started as a peaceful 'mass movement' with 'noble aims' and 'genuine and legitimate demands'. His government took as its own the demands of this 'popular movement' and in the words of an official

Hungarian publication of February 1957, 'remained true to the government statement of 28 October', in which the revolution had been recognised as 'a great national and democratic movement'.¹³ Kádár expressed his readiness to include in his government 'representatives of other parties and non-party persons loyal to our people's democracy', and his government's programme included commitments to 'national independence' and the eventual 'withdrawal of Soviet troops'. It was also declared that, 'the government will not tolerate the persecution of workers under any pretext, for having taken part in the recent events'. While 'the weakness of the Imre Nagy government' and 'the increased influence of counter-revolutionary elements,' were said to have endangered the socialist system and thus necessitated the Soviet intervention, Kádár would still for several weeks seek to maintain a distinction between, 'the popular uprising of 23 October,' and 'the counter-revolution that began on 30 October'.¹⁴

In this situation not all political freedoms were immediately suppressed, and both the Revolutionary Council of Intellectuals and the Writers Union continued to hold meetings and issue declarations supporting the revolution and condemning the Soviet intervention. New revolutionary journals appeared such as *Elünk* (We Are Alive) produced by the young students who had earlier published the popular paper *Igazság* (Truth), and October 23 edited by the journalist Miklós Gimes who now became a key leader of opposition to Kádár.¹⁵ Workers' councils also continued, and came to take on a far more political role than they had played before.

On 13 November delegations from several workers' councils met with Kádár who said he recognised them as 'the revolutionary organs of the working class,' and told them he too was in favour of 'the withdrawal of the Soviet troops. . . once order has been restored'.¹⁶ As for the former prime minister Imre Nagy, who had taken refuge in the Yugoslav embassy, Kádár said it was completely up to him whether he returned to political life. He was not under arrest, and neither the government nor the Soviet troops had any wish to restrict his freedom of movement. The following day, when Kádár received a delegation from the newly-formed Central Workers' Council of Greater Budapest, he went to tell them that he was ready to, 'give up the Party's monopoly of power,' in favour of, 'a multi-party system and clean, honest elections'. Once again he assured them that no-one would be harmed for having taken part in, 'the great popular movement of the past weeks', and that he would be more than happy to meet and seek agreement with Imre Nagy if only the latter would leave his asylum in a foreign embassy.¹⁷

In these days Kádár met and talked with people of a wide variety of political viewpoints, even receiving the young journalist Gyula Obersovszky—now editing the semi-clandestine journal *Elünk*—to listen to his views on the need for honest newspapers to tell the truth. He continued negotiations with a view to broadening his government by bringing

in representatives of the non-Communist parties or other non-party figures. Hints were even dropped that the government was thinking of offering ministerial posts to leaders of the Central Workers' Council.

The limits of **Kádár's** tolerance, however, were soon to be made clear. While he accepted the workers' councils as organs of factory **self-**management and was prepared to grant them decision-making powers, he adamantly resisted their requests for authorisation as a national organisation. When despite this the workers' leaders did call a conference for 21 November to establish a National Workers' Council, 400 Soviet tanks were sent to prevent it taking place. The value of **Kádár's** promises was also put in question when on 22 November, after the issue of a written note of safe-conduct and assurance that no action would be taken against them, Imre Nagy and his colleagues abandoned their asylum in the Yugoslav embassy—only to be seized by Soviet troops and taken the next day, against their will, to **Romania**.¹⁸

There must be some doubt as to who exactly was in charge of events at this point. **Kádár** is said to have been shaken—even desperate—on hearing of the abduction of Nagy, and that night the Hungarian government went into emergency session. But at least one member of his government must have been aware of the fate awaiting Nagy when he left the Yugoslav embassy, for four days earlier three other members of Nagy's entourage—Gyorgy **Lukács**, **Zoltán Szántó** and **Zoltán Vas**, together with their wives—had left the safety of the embassy only to be seized by Soviet forces and held in custody at the Soviet Military Headquarters at **Mátyásföld**—where they had been visited on the night of 18 November by none other than the Hungarian deputy prime minister Ferenc Munnich. Is it conceivable that the abduction of Imre Nagy could have been arranged between Munnich and the Soviets, behind the back of the Hungarian prime minister?¹⁹

Further evidence for the possible insecurity of **Kádár's** position at this time comes from the report of a meeting he is said to have had a few days later with the Smallholders' Party leader **Béla Kovács** whom **Kádár** advised to go to the countryside and 'lie low'. **Kádár**, it is said, did not want to take action against the leaders of the political parties, revolutionary committees and workers' councils, but he now had no choice but to wind them up. He hoped that later, when the Russians had calmed **down**, many of the achievements of the revolution—even the restoration of the multi-party system—could be realised, but for the moment he had to do what the Russians **wanted**.²⁰

Certainly in the following days **Kádár** was to do what the Russians wanted—stiffening his attitudes and resorting to repressive measures to destroy the remaining organised forms of popular resistance. In a radio broadcast on 26 November, he denounced the strikes and continuing resistance, declaring that democracy did not mean anarchy and disorder

or freedom for counter-revolutionaries, specifically attacking as 'mindless agitators' Miklos Gimes, the editor of *October* 23, and **András** Sindor, one of Gyula Obersovszky's young co-workers on *Elünk*, and calling upon the workers councils either to support the government 'or shut up shop'.²¹ At the beginning of December a special session of the Central Committee finally pronounced on the events of October as having been from beginning to end a 'counter-revolution of Horthyite fascists and Hungarian capitalists and landlords'.²²

The Gloves Come Off

In the first days of December, government forces stepped up their efforts to regain control of the factories, arresting some 200 leading members of workers' councils. On 4 December a government decree abolished all revolutionary committees and similar bodies; on 5 December **Miklós** Gimes was arrested, and on 6 December Gyula Obersovszky. In reaction to this latest wave of repression, calls were raised for a new general strike, and the Central Workers' Council—now meeting in secret—prepared once again to create a National Workers' Council. In reply, on 9 December the government banned the Central Workers' Council, occupied its headquarters and arrested the majority of its leaders.²³

These days also saw several confrontations in the countryside as government forces sought to restore their authority there too. The most serious occurred at **Salgotarján** on 8 December when Soviet tanks and Hungarian security forces fired on a crowd of several thousand miners protesting against the arrest of the leaders of their county workers' council—over 80 were killed and at least 200 wounded, amongst them many young workers and schoolchildren. In the following days similar disturbances and armed clashes occurred in other provincial towns, at Eger, Miskolc, **Ozd** and Kecskemet. On 11 and 12 December Budapest and the entire country was brought to a halt by a 48-hour protest strike against the government's new measures of repression. In reply on 11 December the government declared a state of emergency and banned the Revolutionary Council of Intellectuals as well as all territorial workers' councils. On 12 December a government decree introduced measures of martial law, and on 13 December a further one brought in internment without trial and established special courts of summary jurisdiction with powers that included the death sentence.²⁴ By mid-December the first summary executions under martial law were carried out.²⁵

During November most of the work of repression had been carried out by Soviet military and security forces who took prisoners into custody and interrogated them, and in several cases carried out summary executions. Many prisoners were for a time deported to the Soviet Union, mainly to camps in the Carpatho-Ukraine, but following protests both in Hungary and abroad most of them seem to have been brought back.

From the beginning of December on, however, the new security forces formed by the **Kádár** regime—the notorious 'R-groups' or 'pufajkások' as they were called after their **Russian-style** jackets, many of whose members were recruited from the former state security forces as well as from amongst Greek and Yugoslav refugees in Hungary, and the special security force regiments **formed from** army officers and police units—became sufficiently well organised to take over much of the work of restoring order, and on **15** December the Soviet tank forces were withdrawn from Budapest's streets. By the beginning of January **1957** the Hungarian authorities had completely taken over the tasks of repression.

The more order was restored, **however**, the tighter the screw of repression was turned. In the first days of **1957** the leaders of the **Bulgarian**, Czechoslovak, Romanian and Soviet parties (the latter represented by Khrushchev and Malenkov) met with the Hungarian leaders in Budapest and urged them to yet sterner measures. In a speech on **5** January **Kádár** denounced the Imre Nagy government no **longer** just for weakness but for 'treachery', and declared that his government's main task remained the defeat of the counter-revolution. The same day a new decree restricted even further the rights of the workers' councils—giving the state the power to appoint factory managers and overrule the councils' decisions. In this situation most of the workers' councils still in existence, feeling they were no longer able to fulfil their duties to the workers, voluntarily disbanded themselves. The workers, however, continued to resist the latest encroachments of the state. On **11** January workers of the Csepel iron and steel works demonstrated against the return of management officials they had kicked out during the revolution. The intervention of the police led to scenes of violence in the streets, until Hungarian security forces and Soviet tanks were called in to restore order, opening fire on the crowd to leave at least one dead and several injured. On the same day a demonstration of **2,000** workers of the **Köbánya** vehicle repair works, protesting against the introduction of a new wage scheme, was also broken up by state security forces. The Revolutionary Worker-Peasant government replied to these continuing disturbances with a further wave of workers' arrests, and on **13** January issued a new decree speeding up the procedures of summary jurisdiction, widening the provisions of martial law, and extending the death penalty to striking or incitement to **strike**.³⁶

The regime now also started to clamp down on the intellectuals. January **17** saw the suspension of the Writers' Union, to be followed on **20** January by that of the journalists. Then, on **19** January, two of the more well-known leaders of armed fighting groups during the revolution—the swashbuckling **József Dudás**, and **János** ('Uncle') **Szabó** who led the insurgents at **Széna** Square—were executed. On **26** January several prominent writers and journalists were arrested—amongst them Gyula **Háy**, **Zoltán** Zelk, Tibor Tardos, **Balázs** Lengyel, Domokos Varga,

Sándor Novobáczky and **Pál Locsei**.

Even at this stage, however, several figures who had played prominent roles in the revolution and in the resistance after 4 November still remained at liberty—such as Imre Nagy's minister of state **István Bibó**; the leader of the Revolutionary Council of Intellectuals **György Adám**, and the Central Workers' Council leader **Sándor Bali** (who had been released the day following his initial arrest together with **Sándor Rácz** on 11 December), as well as many active writers and journalists. At several places in the countryside, local leaders of the revolution like **Attila Szigethy** who had headed the Transdanubian National Council at Győr, and **Rudolf Földvári** at Miskolc who had played a leading role in the Borsod Workers' Council, not only remained at liberty but also continued to take an active part in local affairs. Even Imre Nagy and his colleagues, held under strict security at a Romanian Party holiday resort by the side of Lake Snagov outside Bucharest, were being treated with respect and looked after in quite a lavish way, while continuing approaches were made through Romanian Party officials to win their cooperation with the **Kádár** regime and their return to public life in Hungary.²⁷

January 1957 also saw the appointment by the government of an Economic Reform Committee headed by the director of the Central Statistical Office **György Péter** with the job of drawing up a programme for the restoration of the economy on the basis of far-reaching economic reforms. In fact the Committee considered proposals for economic decentralisation that had been drawn up by revolutionary committees within the economic ministries in November–December 1956 and adopted by the Central Workers' Council of Greater Budapest, and though its final recommendations were considerably less radical than these, they had much in common with the ideas of the New Economic Mechanism to be introduced several years later in the mid-1960s.

There are thus several indications that at this time **Kádár** was still hoping to keep open the option of establishing his regime not as the order of open counter revolution that it would now rapidly become, but as one based on the original aspirations of 23 October, seeking to incorporate some of the aims, organisations and even people of the revolution within the post-revolutionary consolidation, and aspiring already in 1957 to the more tolerant and liberal political order that **Kádár** was indeed to introduce several years later. Such hopes, however, were finally laid to rest by the late spring of 1957.

Order was now returning to the streets of Budapest, production was slowly reviving, and though many feared the possible consequences of a new outbreak of rebellion in March on the anniversary of the 1848 revolutionary struggle against the Hapsburgs—symbolised in the slogan MUK: 'We'll begin again in March!'—little more occurred than a few, isolated street disturbances and demonstrations that were easily controlled

by the police and security forces. In the last week of March **Kádár** led a government and Party delegation to Moscow, that negotiated a package of major economic aid to Hungary and agreed to the continued stationing of Soviet troops on Hungarian soil. It seems to have been at this point that the decision to abandon any prospect of a liberal and democratic development in favour of a more hard-line consolidation was finally taken.

April saw the recommendations of the Economic Reform Committee put on one side because the prevailing political conditions, as it was later to be explained, were no longer favourable to their implementation—'Time worked against the reform of the economic mechanism. . . (and thus) the development and introduction of the new economic model was dropped from the order of the day.'²⁸ On 14 April 1957 in Romania, Imre Nagy and his colleagues were arrested by Hungarian state security forces and brought back to Budapest in obvious preparation for their subsequent trial and execution. In Hungary a new wave of arrests brought a number of writers like Tibor Déry into custody, and in May the first trials of writers commenced. At Gyor **Attila Szigethy** was arrested and later committed suicide in prison, while at Miskolc **Rudolf Földvári** was taken into custody and later sentenced to life imprisonment. And 23 May saw the arrest of **István Bibó** who would also, one year later, receive a life sentence.

The consolidation of the **Kádár** regime was formally confirmed with the parliament session of 9–11 May, and the final seal put on it with the special national conference of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party of 27–29 June 1957 which issued the Party's definitive pronouncement on the events as having been from start to finish the result of a counter-revolutionary **conspiracy**.²⁹

Arrests, trials and executions continued for another three years. In the course of this repression more than 20,000 people were imprisoned, or interned in the camps at Kistarcsa, **Tököl** and elsewhere. While intellectuals rarely received prison sentences of more than a few years, several workers' leaders—such as the Central Workers' Council President **Sándor Rácz**—received life sentences, while the **Kádár** regime showed least mercy to those workers who had fought with arms in hand against the Soviet tanks. **István Angyal** and **Ottó Szirmai** who had led the socialist-inspired fighting group in the **Tüzoltó** street, where they had continued fighting beneath a red flag against the Soviet tanks on 7 November, were executed in 1958, as was the 'red-capped' **János Barány** who had formed the Young Workers' League of Csepel and led the fighting group in the **Tompa** street. **László Nickelsburg**, a Jewish factory worker who had headed the armed group in Baross Square, was executed as late as 1961. There are even reports of youngsters being held in camps until they were eighteen when—no longer being juveniles—they could be executed. The total number

executed, including both those sentenced under martial law and those convicted by civil courts, assessed on the basis of information from court proceedings, press reports and accounts of former prisoners, has been put as high as 2,000–2,500.³⁰ While the exact numbers are difficult to verify, it is clear that the reprisals were second only to the events in the wake of the Greek civil war in post-war Europe.³¹

The high point of the trials was the condemnation and execution of Imre Nagy, **Pál Maléter**, **József Szilágyi** and **Miklós Gimes**, officially announced on 17 June 1958. (**Géza** Losonczy had already died in prison while on hunger strike; **Sándor Kopácsi** was sentenced to life imprisonment and the other defendants received prison sentences ranging from 5 to 12 years.) Imre Nagy's execution, however, did not mark the end of the terror, for trials and executions were to continue up to 1 January 1960. (After that, death sentences for political crimes committed in 1956 were only carried out in 'exceptional circumstances'.) In 1959 in a mass trial of 33 members of the **Ujpest** Revolutionary Committee, that had played an important role both in the liberation of Cardinal Mindszenty and in the foundation of the Central Workers' Council of Greater Budapest, seven of the accused were sentenced to death and executed, while the remainder received a total of 300 years imprisonment.

Amnesties were announced in 1959, 1960 and 1963. The April 1959 amnesty related only to those who had received very short sentences, while the amnesty of March 1960 only covered persons sentenced to less than six years (most of them were approaching release anyway). While a number of people were released at this time by special pardon, amongst them the writers Tibor **Déry** and Gyula **Háy**, and Nagy's colleagues Ferenc Donith, Ferenc **Jánosi** and **Miklós Vásárhelyi**, this measure was also used to free the hated secret police chiefs of the Stalinist Rikosi regime—**Mihály** Farkas, Vladimir Farkas and Gibor **Péter**!

In protest against the limited amnesty of March 1960 which was effectively restricted to former communist writers and politicians leaving ordinary workers in jail, and in protest against the release of **Gábor Péter** and **Mihály** and Vladimir Farkas, the several thousand political prisoners in the National Prison at **Vác** entered unitedly into a hunger strike. The strike was put down with most brutal reprisals, and its leaders received further prison sentences. In the so-called 'general amnesty' of March 1963 the majority of remaining political prisoners sentenced for participation in the revolution, reportedly some three thousand, were said to have been released, but in fact several categories of prisoners were excluded from the terms of the amnesty, amongst them all those convicted of murder (which included most of the street fighters), treason or espionage (an almost all-embracing category), and all those with any previous convictions (of whatever nature). At least four or five hundred thus remained in prison after 1963, and while many of these were released towards

the end of the 1960s, some remained imprisoned until the early 1970s.³²

The Police State with a Human Mask

When the Kádár regime launched its much publicised process of **liberalisation** in the 1960s, culminating in the inauguration of the New Economic Mechanism on 1 January 1968, amid the climate of cultural liberalism, wider availability of consumer goods and rising living standards, which for a time marked Hungary off as significantly freer and more prosperous than most other East European states, there were still political prisoners from 1956 in Hungarian jails. Before long they were joined by political activists of a younger generation, following the establishment in 1956 of an unofficial student committee to oppose the American war in Vietnam, that organised a number of demonstrations outside western embassies in 1966 and 1967. The hard core of the movement was made up of a group of left-wing student activists who were arrested at the beginning of 1968 charged with having formed an illegal Maoist party, and tried and sentenced in May 1968 on charges of conspiracy against the state, their leaders receiving prison sentences of from two to two-and-a-half years.³³

In 1969 a young poet, Gyorgy Szerb, was brought to trial and sentenced to eight months imprisonment for writing critical poems. In the spring of 1970 a student commemoration of the 100th anniversary of Lenin's birth was banned before it even took place, when it emerged that it was going to emphasise the 'wrong quotes' from Lenin, and two left-wing student activists, Gyorgy Dalos and Miklós Haraszti, were placed under police surveillance, then subsequently arrested and sent to a labour camp when they refused to comply.

In 1973 the facade of cultural liberalism was further undermined when the most well-known of Hungary's philosophers and social scientists, amongst them **András Hegediis**, Gyorgy and **Mária Márkus**, Ferenc **Fehér** and Agnes **Heller**, **Mihály Vajda**, Gyorgy Bence and **János Kis**, were dismissed from their academic posts, and Hegediis, Vajda and Kis expelled from the Communist Party for their revisionist views. In May, **Miklós Haraszti** was arrested once again, for having written a book entitled *Piece Rates* (later published in English under the rather misleading title *A Worker in a Workers State*) that described his experience working on the shopfloor of the Red Star tractor factory in **Kispest**.³⁴ Brought to trial in the **autumn** on charges of incitement to subversion, Haraszti finally received an eight month prison sentence suspended for three years. In October 1974 the sociologist **Iván Szelényi** and the writer Gyorgy **Konrád** were arrested when the police discovered the manuscript of their study on the intelligentsia as the new dominant class in Communist society, entitled *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*.³⁵ Speedily released after a wave of international protests, they were immediately

pressured to emigrate, which **Szelényi** eventually did.

But it is not only intellectuals who suffer persecution in **Kádár's** Hungary. While it is the case that since 1975 the regime has turned away from arrests and imprisonment to the more subtle administrative methods of sackings from employment and blacklisting from work, by the imposition of a *berufsverbot* and increasingly encouraged, when not enforced, emigration as a means of dealing with its dissidents, and while it is probably true that over the last eight years there has not been a single writer, artist or scholar of repute held in a Hungarian jail for political reasons, this does not mean that there are no political prisoners in Hungary any longer. On the contrary, according to official government statements and statistics in the late 1970s some 2–300 persons were brought to trial each year for crimes of an agitational character, the vast majority of them ordinary workers and peasants, of whom about two-thirds received prison sentences.³⁶ While the number has probably fallen in recent years, in 1981 the Chief Public Prosecutor admitted that **sixty-five** cases of anti-state crimes, the majority of them involving **charges** of sedition, had come before the criminal courts the previous year. Even more recently, however, there have been growing instances of young people sentenced to imprisonment for objecting to compulsory military service on religious and conscientious **grounds**.³⁷

All this means that while Hungary today has travelled far from the Stalinist state it was before 1956, while it is by no means accurate to characterise it any longer as a totalitarian society—in which the state seeks to politicise and regiment all aspects of individual and social behaviour—it is still a police state of arbitrary rule, in which the individual enjoys no liberties as of right, and has no means of self-defence against the arbitrary and uncontrolled powers of the authorities. This situation is well-illustrated by the rights of Hungarian citizens to travel abroad, something which the vast majority of them appear to enjoy to a greater extent than the citizens of most other Communist countries. According to Hungarian law, 'Every Hungarian citizen has the right to a passport and to travel abroad.' This right, however, is not quite what it at first appears to be, for the very same law goes on to stipulate, in a later paragraph, that a passport will be denied to anyone 'whose travelling abroad. . . is deemed to be against the public **interest**'.³⁸

Thus, and without further reason, the authorities can deny the right to travel abroad to anyone whom it suits their purpose. Each year in fact over 10,000 Hungarian citizens do have their requests for travel to the West rejected. Moreover, the person so denied **his/her** constitutional rights and liberties has no right to appeal, nor even to an explanation of in what way **his/her** travelling abroad is deemed to be 'against the public interest'. Indeed, in a recent judgment, the Hungarian Supreme Court has ruled that it has no authority to examine the lawfulness of such

decisions which lie within the sphere of competence of the organs of state security.

The **Kádár** regime thus presents its human face to those it pleases, or rather to those who **please** it. The opportunist, the careerist, the conformist and the coward has now learned how best to work the system, how to gain the benefits and privileges that the regime is prepared to hand down to those prepared to play the game according to its rules, to those prepared to stand in the service of the rulers. But those who are not prepared to abandon their self respect, their personal integrity and moral values, or their solidarity with their fellow men and women, those who seek to lead a life of their own making and deny the conduct of self-alienation demanded by the state, or those whom for whatever reason of its own choosing the regime decides not to smile upon, they can be denied all rights and find themselves faced with the total and arbitrary powers of the monolithic police state.

Since the mid-1970s the rise of a wider democratic movement and, in particular, of a new generation of young Hungarians who have grown up since 1956 without personal memories of the revolution or of the terror and repression both before and after it, has led to an ever wider dissent from the consumer socialism and liberalisation within limits of the **Kádár** regime. Rejecting the conformism of their parents and the compromises made by the older intelligentsia after 1956, this new generation has asserted their right 'to think and behave in a different way' and to enjoy personal freedom and material well-being not on the arbitrary licence of the authorities but as their fundamental and inalienable human rights. As a result the numbers of young persons sacked from their jobs and blacklisted from further employment has grown constantly over the past years while, apart from those particularly well-known in the West, almost all the leading dissidents have been denied the freedom to travel abroad, and many with passports have had them withdrawn.

The number of persons discriminated against in this way has risen significantly over the past two years as a result of the attempt to punish and prevent people from expressing their solidarity with the independent workers' movement in Poland. At the height of the Gdansk strike in August 1980, seven leading dissidents went to Budapest airport in an attempt to fly to Poland and express their support for the strikers. All seven were prevented from travelling and had their passports confiscated. Of others who succeeded in travelling to Gdansk, a further three had their passports withdrawn on their return. Of many more young Hungarians who visited Poland over the following sixteen months, often making contact with *Solidarity*, several had their passports confiscated on their return, and at least one was sacked from his job. Others, who had already made known their support for *Solidarity*, were prevented from leaving Hungary and had their passports confiscated on the border.

On 4 October 1981 another passport confiscation occurred when the 57-year old lawyer Tibor **Pákh**, a veteran campaigner for human rights, was prevented **from** travelling to Poland by train. Tibor **Pákh** had already been imprisoned in 1960 for publicising the cases of Hungarian juveniles executed after 1956, while in spring 1980 he had joined the hunger strike in the Podkowa Lesna church in Warsaw against the imprisonment of the head of the Polish independent publishing house NOWA. Returning to Budapest, on 5 October he lodged a complaint with the Procurator General's office, and on 6 October started a hunger strike in the University Church in the city centre. Three days later he was forcibly taken by the police to the National Hospital for Mental and Nervous Illnesses where he was forcibly fed, and given heavy doses of psychotropic drugs affecting the central nervous system. Already in the late 1960s Tibor **Pákh** had been confined to a mental hospital and given electric shock treatment for his protests against the continuing detention of political prisoners in Hungary. Now he was being administered haloperidol, one of the drugs used to treat political dissidents in the Soviet **Union**.³⁹

After an appeal signed by 57 Hungarian intellectuals, and protests from Amnesty International, Tibor **Pákh** was released on 26 October 1981. It is, however, a telling comment on the progress made by the **Kádár** regime since 1956 that on the very twenty-fifth anniversary of the revolution a Hungarian intellectual should be found confined in a mental hospital, being administered drugs more commonly heard of in connection with the repression of political dissent in the Soviet Union, for the crime of having wanted to travel to a neighbouring socialist country.

Beyond the Bolshevik Model

In the immediate aftermath of 1956 the dual impact of imprisonment and emigration resulted in the fact that for several years there was little or no articulate criticism of the regime. The intellectual figures of the revolution, those who were not executed, were either imprisoned or had fled to the West. Even after the imprisoned were released, many were relegated to silence and their names are still largely unknown to the Hungarian public today.

The more radical and far-reaching ideas developed within opposition circles were also for long to remain unknown. It was only in the later 1970s that the ideas of **István Bibó**, the left-wing political thinker appointed as minister of state in Imre Nagy's final government, began to gain a limited circulation in certain intellectual circles. Even then few knew that in the very midst of the revolution he had produced a critique of the idealist and totalitarian elements in orthodox Marxism that foreshadowed many of the ideas to be advanced twenty years later by the first dissident philosophers to break with the Marxism of the '**Lukács school**'.⁴⁰ The radical critique of the ideology and practice of Marxist-Leninism

developed in the *Hungaricus* pamphlet—written clandestinely in December 1956—was equally unknown, until it was rediscovered and published in samizdat in 1981.⁴¹

It is thus hardly surprising that the first stirrings of opposition to emerge under the **Kádár** regime showed little influence of the revolution in ideas that the experience of 1956 had occasioned in many at the time. The first significant opposition to appear was provided by a hard-line student group of Maoist sympathisers in the mid-1960s who set up a clandestine party organised on strictly Leninist lines, condemning in **neo-Stalinist** terms the revisionism of the Khrushchev era, and charging the **Kádár** regime with the abandonment of socialism and Marxist principles. Despite its orthodox terminology, student Maoism—as the first and only possible focus of dissent—soon became a rallying point for a far wider gathering of left-wing and rebellious youth. Its radical egalitarianism, and its challenge to the right of a small privileged establishment to monopolise the political process to the virtual exclusion of the rest of society, encouraged exactly those democratic and libertarian sentiments that would later come to challenge many aspects of traditional Marxist thought.

A second oppositional tendency developed in the late 1960s when the more moderate or reformist wing of the student movement came to support the ideas and principles of the Dubcek experiment in Czechoslovakia, looking to the newly introduced Hungarian economic reforms as the first steps in a similar direction in Hungary, and struggled to transform their own student bodies into effective forums of direct democracy. When the Soviet invasion of August 1968 put an end to the reform movement in Czechoslovakia, it was the earlier opponents of the Maoists, the defenders of Marxist reformism, who joined with them in attacking the Brezhnev doctrine and calling for a more radical democratisation of socialist society.

The invasion of Czechoslovakia also had a crucial impact on an older generation of intellectuals who had till then provided a 'loyal opposition' to the **Kádár** regime—the so-called 'Budapest school' of philosophers and sociologists influenced by the ideas of Gyorgy **Lukács** and **András Hegediis**—in the belief that existing East European states were essentially socialist in structure, needing only political and economic reforms to turn them into more humane and democratic societies. The crushing of the Czechoslovak experiment, and the halting in turn of the Hungarian economic reforms, undermined the belief that existing East European societies were even capable of further development at all, and cast doubt on the value of the previously favoured ideologies of Marxist humanism and market socialism.

It was two of the younger members of the Budapest school, Gyorgy Bence and **János Kis**—the '**Lukács** kindergarten' as they now came to be called—who, breaking with the almost unquestioning loyalty of their teachers to the central tenets of Marxism, and challenging some of the

ideas of **Lukács** himself, carried out the most far-reaching critique of hitherto prevailing Marxist orthodoxy. Under the pseudonym **Marc Rakovski** in a book first published in the West in 1977 entitled *Towards an East European Marxism* they advanced the thesis that existing East European societies were neither socialist nor capitalist, nor even societies transitional between the two, but class societies of an entirely new type unenvisaged in traditional Marxist theory.⁴² These societies of 'actually existing socialism'⁷—as they now preferred to call them—had proven capable of stabilising and consolidating themselves, of fragmenting and **depoliticising** the working class, and even winning a certain degree of popular legitimacy. This view not only ruled out the possibility that these regimes might be transformed into more democratic or truly socialist ones by **processes** of internal reform; it also rejected any prospect that they might collapse or be overthrown in the immediately foreseeable future. To come to **terms** with this situation, they **argued**, the opposition should step down from the heights of theoretical construction and intellectual judgment, and concern themselves more with the practical everyday problems facing people in the societies of 'actually existing socialism'. In a post-script to their book written two years later, Bence and Kis outlined their ideas further and advocated a strategy of 'radical reformism' having much in common with the ideas then being developed in Poland by **Adam Michnik** and **Jacek Kuron**.⁴³

These concerns were accompanied by a growing willingness to **criticise** the more utopian elements in Marxism, and to reject the belief in universal truths and real social interests, as **opposed** to the particular beliefs and actually recognised interests of existing people themselves. The **democratisation** of thought led in turn to the democratisation of action—to the rejection of **Bolshevik-style** political practice, of the belief that an intellectual vanguard is justified by its advanced consciousness in acting on behalf of, and in the name of, often indeed in place of, the people. This fundamental reappraisal of Marxism and commitment to the most democratic possible forms of action was most clearly expressed by the philosopher **Mihály Vajda** who argued that: 'If we wanted to proclaim a programme without being authorised to do so, we would be no better than the men in power now. Intellectuals are only justified in drawing up a programme when a movement emerges whose demands they can express and formulate.'⁴⁴

The 1970s had already seen the growth of a wider dissident cultural movement that in several respects incorporated many of the values now being discovered by the intellectuals. Partly reflecting the late 1960s' youth and student movement in the West, Hungary had seen the development of pop music and experimental theatre, avant-garde trends in the arts, and even attempts to stage 'happenings' and set up communes. Some of the former Maoist students played leading roles in these activities,

while it was from the members of the younger generation who participated in them that a wider movement began to develop in opposition to the repressive and conservative social and cultural traditions of Hungarian society that the Communist regime had served, if anything, to strengthen. When the government proposed to introduce a new law in 1973 severely restricting the right to abortion, over 1,500 signatures were collected for a petition against it.

When the young writer **Miklós Haraszti** was arrested and brought to trial in the autumn of 1973 for his book describing his experiences on the shopfloor of a Budapest factory, his trial provided the common ground on which the various sections of the previously divided opposition—the Maoist leftists, the reformist Marxists, the disciples of **Lukács**, the dissident sociologists, the counter-cultural youth—could finally come together and publicly express their solidarity in demands for an end to censorship and for greater freedom of expression. The trial also resulted in a **step-down** by the regime—after several postponements, and owing in part to growing international attention, Haraszti was released, receiving only a suspended sentence.⁴⁵

The Haraszti trial created the unity, and the sense of a common purpose, that provided the basis for the growth of a wider movement concerned less with ideological questions such as had so far characterised the Hungarian opposition, than with the assertion of democratic rights and liberties, and a concern for the existential problems of personal and social life in the actually existing social order. Many of the young people who now became involved in this movement were students who had taken part in the late 1960s and early 1970s in sociological researches directed by leading sociologists like **András Hegediis**, **István Kemény** and **Iván Szelényi**, in the course of which they had become well-informed about and sensitive to social problems, and in particular to the situation of the most underprivileged members of the existing socialist order. (Many of them would later become involved in the work of **SZETA**, the Foundation to Assist the Poor, formed in 1980 to raise funds and campaign against poverty in a country where it is officially declared not to exist, but where their own researches had shown at least a fifth of the population to be living below the poverty line.)

Stimulated by the examples of KOR in Poland and Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, this new generation of dissidents gave birth to a fledgling samizdat movement that would within five years develop into a **fully-grown** democratic opposition movement. Less widely known is that one of those who did much to encourage and spur them on was the lifelong revolutionary socialist **Ilona Duczynska**, who had attended the **Zimmerwald** conference of anti-war socialists in 1915, and become a founding member of the Hungarian Communist Party in 1918. Half a century later, attending the Haraszti trial in Budapest, she became acquainted with many

of the younger oppositionists to whom she served as a moving inspiration, and in many ways she acted as a founding member of the Hungarian democratic opposition too.⁴⁶

The samizdat movement continued the ongoing **critique** of previously held political and philosophical standpoints, emphasising the need for a radical democratisation of society and the assertion of human rights, for the rejection of opportunism, self-censorship and reformist compromises. In this regard, **Miklós Haraszti** spoke for many when he declared: 'If a society of free individuals is possible, then at least one thing is certain, that only free individuals can bring it about.'⁴⁷

One question, however, remained as much a taboo for the opposition as it did for the regime and that was 1956, still hardly a topic dear to the opposition's heart. Neither former Maoists, nor reformist Marxists, had stood on that side of the barricades, and many who had opposed the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia had not seen fit to condemn the repression of the Hungarian 'counter-revolution'. The members of the Budapest school, just like their master György **Lukács**, had also been little more than ambivalent towards the revolution. As late as 1978 **Mihály Vajda** could assert that, 'the events in Czechoslovakia in 1968. . . were more important for us than was 1956', while another young philosopher explained that for many in the opposition '1956 is already history' and represents 'only a fiasco which must be forgotten'.⁴⁸

By the summer of 1980, however, it was becoming increasingly difficult to forget about 1956, for not only was the twenty-fifth anniversary of the revolution approaching but in nearby Poland the spectre of an autonomous working-class movement was rising once again to challenge the right of a small, self-appointed elite to maintain its undemocratic monopoly of power and privilege over and above an entire society. In looking towards Poland in 1980-1981 the Hungarian opposition found itself face to face with its own heritage of 1956.

The Return of 1956

In its pursuit of truth and self-discovery the Hungarian opposition was inevitably to find 1956 continually propelled anew into the centre of its interests and concerns. It is no accident that one of the first authors to be published in samizdat should have been a minister in Imre **Nagy's** government sentenced to life imprisonment after the revolution, **István Bibó**, nor that the ideas of this outstanding political thinker, even after his death in 1979, should have continued to provide one of the major sources of inspiration to the opposition movement. **Bibó's** writings and example, more than those of any other Hungarian thinker, most clearly embodied both the spirit of 1956 and that of the new democratic movement of the later 1970s. His attraction for the younger generation in particular is perhaps best explained by the fact that he was almost the

only significant, creative intellectual who, choosing to remain in Hungary after 1956, never made any form of concession to the regime, and never gave way to any form of pressure.

Following Bibó's death in 1979, the samizdat movement undertook its most ambitious project with the publication of a 1001-page *Bibó Memorial Volume* completed in 1980 which assembled articles by 76 authors written in his memory, many of them dealing with issues directly related to the 1956 revolution. Several of the contributors had themselves been imprisoned after 1956 for their actions during the revolution, and one of them, the former Communist politician and close colleague of Imre Nagy, Ferenc Donáth, took the opportunity to argue that Bibó's radical conception of direct democracy, first developed during the post-war democratic coalition period of 1945-48, was also the very essence of the demands of the revolutionary committees and workers' councils in 1956.⁴⁹

By this time, many were coming to recognise that the developing workers' movement in Poland in 1980-1 also had much in common with the more radical features of the Hungarian revolution. As István Kemény, a sociologist who had carried out many studies into the working class in Hungary and emigrated to the West in 1977, now remarked, 'Autumn 1980 is the continuation of 1956,' and in his view, with the independent trade union *Solidarity* the Polish industrial working class had established a sovereign working-class power the like of which had only once before been seen in the Communist world—in Hungary twenty-five years before. **

Within this situation an increasingly open interest in 1956 began to find expression in Hungarian samizdat. Already in 1979 the revolution had been one of the topics discussed in a lively political essay by 'Libertarius' on the history of radical alternatives in Hungarian society entitled *Hungary 1984?* March 1980 saw the appearance of the first samizdat journal, the *East European Observer*, which published a collection of eye-witness reports of the revolution written at the time by East European journalists. Writers like Mihály Vajda and Gyorgy Konrád now also turned their concerns to the issues of 1956, while the revolution came to be a topic inspiring considerable interest and debate in unofficial seminars and at sessions of the highly-successful 'free university' which had been operating in private flats since September 1978. The present writer's study *Hungary 1956* was translated into Hungarian and issued in samizdat, together with many additions and corrections prepared by the translator and other survivors from the revolution. The *Hungaricus* pamphlet, possibly the first ever Hungarian samizdat written clandestinely in December 1956, was also now republished. A new samizdat journal, the *Hungarian Observer*, the first unofficial duplicated journal to appear in Hungary for several decades, had commenced publication in April 1981 and its sixth number in October was devoted to a detailed

chronology of the events of **1956**.

Finally, on **19 October 1981**, the regular free university lecture was followed by the first ever public commemoration of the **1956** revolution. In an introductory address Gyorgy **Krassó**, himself an active participant in the revolution who had been imprisoned for eight years afterwards, declared that in **1956** the Hungarian people had overthrown an anti-democratic ruling clique and attempted to build a new society, thereby demonstrating the truth that it lies within people's power to change the course of their lives by their own efforts, and that social action can indeed have value. The historian **Miklós Szabó** then delivered a short speech in which he argued that, while the demands of the revolution had not been realised, if life was freer in Hungary in **1981** than elsewhere in the Eastern bloc, this was before all else due to the struggles of **1956**. The meeting ended with a poem by the popular but banned poet Gyorgy Petri dedicated to the memory of the revolution.

Hungary 1956–Poland 1980–1

As comparisons were increasingly made between the Polish developments of **1980–1** and the Hungarian events of **1956**, the question also came to be raised whether the Polish events would find an echo in Hungary and whether they might lead to a re-emergence of the spirit of **1956**.

Unlike Poland, Hungary had not seen any major resurgence of working-class struggles since **1956**, this being due not only to memories of the savage repression after the revolution, but also to the undoubted success of the **Kádár** regime, at least till the mid-1970s, in achieving a gradual, if slow and uneven, rise in living standards. It had succeeded in fragmenting and depoliticising the working class to such an extent that the opposition theorists Gyorgy Bence and János Kis had been led to conclude that the workers no longer constituted a potential base for social change. At the same time, however, Hungary's economy, highly dependent on foreign trade, had been severely hit by the oil crisis of **19734**; by **1978** it had attained a record trade deficit, and in **1980** actually experienced negative growth. With living standards starting to fall, the Hungarian working class began to feel the pinch of economic stagnation and the decline of its earning power.

At the time of food price rises in the summer of **1979**, workers of the Csepel iron and steel works had symbolically placed a piece of bread and dripping in the hands of the Lenin statue outside their factory. Following the Gdansk strike in August **1980** there were reports in Budapest, 'that there had been some stirrings amongst the workers in Csepel too'. Other rumours spoke of a three-day stoppage, and that, '**Kádár** himself went there to put things right'. A month later planned price rises in Hungary were withdrawn at the last moment—in the opinion of one worker questioned about the influence of the Polish events,

'because they were scared that there would be some resistance here too.'⁵¹ The spring of 1981 also saw meetings in several Hungarian universities calling for the establishment of an independent student organisation—again recalling memories of 1956.⁵²

Reflection on the Polish events led many people to rethink and reassess the possibilities that might have existed in Hungary twenty-five years before. Though the regime still officially considered the events a counter-revolution, no less a person than the Party first secretary **János Kádár** had in May 1972, on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday, seen fit to question this official interpretation, declaring that:

There is another interpretation as well, one which all of us could accept: what happened was a national tragedy. A tragedy for the Party, for the working class, for the people as a whole and for individuals as well. We took a wrong turning, and the result of this was a tragedy.⁵³

The obvious implication of this reassessment was that if only the right turning had been taken, the tragedy could have been avoided. If **Rákosi** had been replaced in July 1956 not by the equally-Stalinist **Gerő** but by **Kádár**, and if the way had been prepared for a return to power by Imre Nagy, then 'de-Stalinisation' could have been carried out in a controlled way and the tragedy of the revolution would never have happened. This was certainly the view of **Tito** and the Yugoslav Communist leaders in 1956, and by some accounts that of the Soviets too.⁵⁴

At the height of the Polish crisis, a similar view came to be advanced from a rather unexpected quarter, from **András Hegedus** who had been the Hungarian prime minister at the time of the October uprising—and who at that time had condemned the events as a counter-revolution and supported the Soviet intervention—but who had later become an outspoken critic of the **Kádár** regime and of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. If in July 1956, Hegedus now argued, the Hungarian leadership had stood down and handed over power to Nagy and **Kádár**, a compromise could have been reached between the regime and the people, and a peaceful way opened to a more democratic and pluralist society. The Hungarian Stalinists' stubborn resistance to change, however, had led to a polarisation of the situation which resulted in the raising of unrealistic and unrealisable demands for Hungarian withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact and the establishment of a multiparty system, ending in the catastrophe of October and November 1956.⁵⁵

1981 in Poland, for Hegedus, presented a second chance to realise that 'historical compromise' the opportunity for which had been missed in 1956. If the regime would recognise the necessity for sharing power with society, and if the workers' movement would accept the need to reach a working relationship with the authorities, then the stage would

be set for the building of a new model of socialism, avoiding the false alternatives of either the one-party dictatorship or a multi-party system, and creating 'a pluralist political society without a multi-party system.'⁵⁶ The main obstacle to reaching such a historical compromise, Hegedus saw in the collapse of state power and the development of a situation of anarchy that might end either in civil war or foreign intervention. Consequently, when General Jaruzelski declared martial law on **13 December 1981**, Hegedus' first reaction was one of qualified support, declaring that the assumption of power by the army should not be understood as a military putsch but as the necessary restoration of state power that could no longer be assured by the **Party**.⁵⁷

While views similar to those of Hegedus may have found a certain echo amongst more than a few intellectuals who had feared a hardening of the regime in response to the Polish events, and amongst those sections of the population who feared most that a spread of the Polish disease might undermine their own recently **acquired** prosperity, the reaction of **the** Hungarian opposition to the course of events in Poland, both before and after December **1981**, was to be far more radical and uncompromising. For many of them the rise of Solidarity showed that the hopes and aspirations of **1956** had not been merely rash illusions, that the demands and struggles of the Hungarian workers and intellectuals were not only justified but realisable too, that, in the words of Mihály Vajda: 'The liberal absolutism of the **Kádárist** consolidation is not the maximum that can be achieved in Eastern **Europe**.'⁵⁸

Even after the coup, it is still widely felt that—after sixteen months activity—Solidarity will be far less easily crushed than was the spontaneous workers movement in Hungary in **1956**, and that the prospects for a **Kádár** style consolidation in Poland are far from auspicious. 'If we were lovers of the old-time slogans of the Communist International,' declares the opposition journal *Beszélő* (News from Inside) in its first issue since December **1981**, 'we could now triumphantly announce that the proclamation of the state of emergency marks not the end of the Polish crisis, but the beginning of the generalised crisis of the East European system.'⁵⁹

After **1956** and **1968**, argues **János Kis** in a considered analysis of the immediate prospects now facing Eastern Europe, it was enough to re-establish forcibly the authority of the one-party state to restore the status quo, while economic aid **from** the Soviet Union and the other countries of the Eastern bloc was sufficient to restore living standards and make up for the loss of production. In **1982** the Polish situation will not be so easily resolved for now the whole region battles with the same crisis. Nothing will ever be the same as before, for with the military takeover of power in Warsaw, the entire post-Stalin epoch is drawing to a close. In this situation, he concludes, the **Hungarian opposition**

will have to prepare itself to face up to new challenges and to assume new responsibilities.⁶⁰

NOTES

¹Weder Burgerkrieg noch Invasionsgefahr—Ein Gespräch mit Ungarns Regimekritiker Hegedüs, *Die Presse*, Vienna, 15 December 1981.

2. Ian Davidson, 'Jaruzelski: Poland's last faint hope', *Financial Times*, London, 19 December 1981, p. 15.
3. Hella Pick, 'How to repair Poland's shattered dreams of freedom', *Guardian*, London, 19 March 1982, p. 8.
4. See Miklós Haraszti, 'Spectre of Kádár may force the hand of Jaruzelski in Poland', *Guardian*, 27 January 1982; and 'On the Deck of the Titanic?' (Editorial to *Beszélő* (News from Inside) No. 2, samizdat journal, Budapest, Jan. 1982) in *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*, London, Vol. 5, No. 3, Summer 1982.
The present essay does not pretend to be a study of Kádárism as a system, but only to deal with certain selected aspects of it. For attempts to interpret Kádárism in the wider sense, see Ferenc Fehér, 'Kádárism as the Model State of Khrushchevism', *Telos*, St. Louis, No. 47, Summer 1979; Mihály Vajda, 'Is Kádárism an Alternative?' in Mihály Vajda, *The State and Socialism*, London Allison & Busby, 1981; and Miklós Haraszti, 'A Belated Introduction into Kádárism', serialised in *Corriere della Sera*, Milan, June–July 1981.
6. Kádár's behaviour is reported by an eye-witness, György Heltai, 'Imre Nagy au Parlement', in Péter Gosztony (ed.), *Histoire du Soulèvement Hongrois 1956*, Paris, Editions Horvath, 1966, p. 182.
7. It appeared to the Yugoslav ambassador to Moscow who was present at the meeting that took place between the Soviet and Yugoslav leaders on the Adriatic island of Brioni on the night of 2–3 November, 'that the Russians have already formed the government and that Munnich is to be Prime Minister (Veljko Mićunović, *Moscow Diary*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1980, p. 136). Kádár himself later explained that 'it was touch and go' whether he or Munnich would become Prime Minister (*Népszabadság*, Budapest, 29 January 1958), while Khrushchev stated that even after 4 November, 'My own hopes rested with Munnich. I thought I could deal with him better than with Kádár.' (Nikita Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, London, Andre Deutsch, 1971, p. 387.)
8. Little published information exists on the Berei-Andics group, but their paper *Szabad Nép* is accessible in Hungarian archives.
9. Kádár's speech is available in Paul E. Zinner (ed.), *National Communism and Popular Revolt in Eastern Europe*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1956, pp. 464–467.
10. Mićunović, *op. cit.*, p. 133, records Khrushchev having said that he had spoken by telephone on 2 November with Bulganin who had told him that Munnich and Kádár had succeeded in fleeing from Budapest and were in a plane 'on their way to Moscow'.
11. In Zinner, *op. cit.*, pp. 474478.
12. On the occasion of a visit to Uzhgorod with Khrushchev in December 1959, Kádár alleged that it was to this town he had come three years earlier in November 1956 to form his new government (*Népszabadság*, Budapest, 8 December 1959). The account is confirmed by Khrushchev, *op. cit.*, p. 386, though precisely when Kádár was in Uzhgorod remains unclear.
13. Márton Lovas, *Mi történt Budapesten október 23-tól november 4-ig* (What

- happened in Budapest from 23 October to 4 November), Budapest, Kossuth, 1957, p. 126.
14. 'Program and Composition of the Revolutionary Worker-Peasant Government announced by János Kádár on 4 November 1956', in Zinner, *op. cit.*, pp. 474-478. See also Kádár's speech of 26 November in *Népszabadság*, 27 November 1956.
 15. On Miklós Gimes and his role in 1956, see Igor Cornelissen, 'Boedapest 1958: de tragische terechtstelling van een strijdbaar journalist', *Vrij Nederland*, Amsterdam, Jaargang 42, Nos. 47 and 48, 21 November and 28 November 1981.
 16. *Népszabadság*, Budapest, 14 November 1956.
 17. *Népszabadság*, Budapest, 15 November 1956. English translation available in Melvin J. Lasky (ed.), *The Hungarian Revolution*, London, Secker & Warburg, 1957, pp. 262-263.
 18. The circumstances of the abduction, and the suspicion that there may have been a 'deal' between the Soviets and the Yugoslavs, are discussed in Dick Verkijck, 'Kádár en de Hongaarse Opstand van 1956', *Internationale Spectator*, Amsterdam, January 1981.
 19. See Bill Lomax, '25 Years Later—New Light on 1956', *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*, Vol. 5, No. 3, Summer 1982.
 20. See József Kövágó, 'Emlékek, emberek, remények—A Kisgazdapárt a forradalomban' (Memories, people, hopes—the Smallholders Party in the Revolution), *Irodalmi Ujság*, Pans, November-December 1981.
 21. *Népszabadság*, Budapest, 27 November 1956.
 22. *Népszabadság*, Budapest, 8 December 1956.
 23. See Bill Lomax, *Hungary* 1956, London, Allison & Busby, 1976, chapter 5: 'The Workers Councils of Greater Budapest', also published in *The Socialist Register 1976*, London, Merlin Press, 1976.
 24. See *Magyar Közlöny*, Budapest, Nos. 100, 101, 102, for 11, 12 and 13 December 1956.
 25. See *Népszabadság*, Budapest, for 16, 18 and 21 December 1956.
 26. *Népszabadság*, Budapest, 13 January 1957.
 27. See Zoltán Vas, *Viszontagságos életem* (My eventful life), Budapest, Magvető, 1980, pp. 496, 527 and 547; and letter from Ferenc Donáth to Miklós Molnár in Lomax, '25 Years Later', *op. cit.*
 28. *Gazdaságpolitikánk tapasztalatai és tanulságai: 1957-1960* (The experience and lessons of our economic policies: 1957-1960), Budapest, Kossuth, 1976, p. 42.
 29. *A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt határozatai és dokumentumai: 1956-1962* (Resolutions and decisions of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party), Budapest, Kossuth, 1979, pp. 78-99.
 30. Tibor Méray, *Nagy Imre élete és halála* (The life and death of Imre Nagy), Munich, Ujváry Griff, 1978, p. 350.
 31. Fehér, 'Kádárism', *op. cit.*, p. 23.
 32. See Ferenc A. Vali, 'Twenty Years After: Kádár and his rule assessed: 1956-1976', *The Canadian-American Review of Hungarian Studies*, Ottawa, Vol. 3, No. 2, Special Issue: 'The Hungarian Revolution twenty years after', Fall 1976.
 33. On opposition groups in the 1960s, see Bill Lomax, 'A Chronology of Political and Intellectual Opposition under the Kádár Regime: 1956-1978', *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*, Vol. 3, No. 3, July-August 1979.
 34. Miklós Haraszti, *A Worker in a Workers State*, London, Penguin Books, 1977.
 35. György Konrád and Iván Székényi, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*, Brighton, Harvester Press, 1979.
 36. See Marc Rakovski, 'La Hongrie est-elle réellement si différente?' *Esprit*, Paris, No. 7-8, July-August 1978.
 37. See 'Pacifist Movement in the Hungarian Catholic Church', *Labour Focus on*

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38. See Gyorgy Krassó, 'Wenn einer *keine* Reise tut, da kann er was erleben!' Gegenstimmen, Vienna, No. 5, 1981.
39. See the interview with Tibor Pákh in *Beszélő* No. 2, Budapest, Jan. 1982.
40. Bibó's document will be published for the first time in 1983 in Hungarian in the third volume of his collected works edited by István Kemény and Mária Sárközi (István Bibó, *Osszegyűjtött Művei*, Bern, Európai Protestins Magyar Szabadegyetem, 1981-1983).
41. The *Hungaricus* pamphlet is summarised in Lomax, *Hungary 1956*, *op. cit.*, pp. 182-192.
42. Marc Rakovski, *Towards an East European Marxism*, London, Allison & Busby, 1978.
43. Gyorgy Bence and János Kis, 'On Being a Marxist: A Hungarian View', in *The Socialist Register 1980*, London, Merlin Press, 1980.
44. Mihály Vajda, 'The End of Reformist Thought', *Meta*, Toronto, No. 34, 1979. See also the introduction to his political essays: Vajda, *The State and Socialism*, *op. cit.*
45. The circumstances of the trial are described in a postscript to Haraszi's *A Worker in a Workers State*, *op. cit.*
46. See Bill Lomax, 'Hungary 1977-1982: The Rise of the Democratic Opposition', *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*, Vol. 5, No. 3, Summer 1982.
47. Miklós Haraszi, 'What is Marxism?' in Frantisek Silnitsky, Larisa Silnitsky and Karl Reymann (ed.), *Communism and Eastern Europe*, Brighton, Harvester Press, 1979.
48. Vajda, 'The End of Reformist Thought', *op. cit.*, and Gabriel Becker, 'The Left in Hungary', *Critique*, Glasgow, No. 9, 1978.
49. Ferenc Donát, 'István Bibó and the Fundamental Issue of Hungarian Democracy', in *The Socialist Register 1981*, London, Merlin Press, 1981.
50. István Kemény, writing in *Magyar Füzetek*, Paris, No. 7, 1980, p. 79.
51. Miklós Haraszi, 'Voices from Hungary', *Index on Censorship*, London, Vol. 10, No. 3, June 1981. See also 'Hungarian Perspectives', *Telos*, St. Louis, No. 47, Spring 1981.
52. See Martin Steinert, 'Versuche zur Gründung einer unabhängigen Interessenvertretung der Studenten in Ungarn', *Osteuropa-Info*, Berlin/Hamburg, 1982, No. 1, March 1982.
53. János Kádár, 'Reflections at Sixty', *New Hungarian Quarterly*, Budapest, No. 48, Winter 1972, p. 5.
54. According to the Albanian Party leader, citing personal meetings with Suslov in the summer of 1956 and unpublished correspondence between the Soviet and Yugoslav leaderships towards the end of 1956, the Soviets had already wanted Kádár, not Gero, to replace Rákosi in July 1956, and had 'tried, as early as the summer of this year, to ensure that Kádár would become first secretary', while by the end of August 'they were preparing Imre Nagy, thinking they would master the situation in Hungary through him'. See Enver Hoxha, *The Khrushchevites*, Workers Publishing House, London, 1980, pp. 272, 275 and 288.
55. András Hegedus, 'Ungarn 56', *Gegenstimmen*, Vienna, No. 6, December 1981.
56. András Hegedus, 'Polen heute', *Wiener Tagebuch*, Vienna, November 1981.
57. *Die Presse*, Vienna, 15 December 1981, *op. cit.*
58. Mihály Vajda, 'Perspektiven der ungarischen Intelligenz', *Osteuropa-Info*, Berlin/Hamburg, 1982, No. 1, March 1982, p. 53.
59. 'On the Deck of the Titanic?' (*Beszélő*, Budapest, No. 2, Jan. 1982), in *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*, Vol. 5, No. 2, Summer 1982.
60. János Kis, 'Thoughts on the Immediate Future' (*Beszélő*, Budapest, No. 3, Summer 1982), in *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*, Vol. 5, No. 5, Autumn 1982.