

David Irving

UPRISING!

One Nation's Nightmare: Hungary 1956



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David Irving is the son of a Royal Navy commander. Incompletely educated at Imperial College of Science & Technology and at University College London, he subsequently spent a year in Germany working in a steel mill and perfecting his fluency in the German language. Among his thirty books, the best-known include *Hitler's War*; *The Trail of the Fox: The Life of Field-Marshal Rommel*; *Accident, the Death of General Sikorski*; *The Rise and Fall of the Luftwaffe*; *Göring: a Biography*, and *Nuremberg, the Last Battle*. He has translated several works by other authors including Field-Marshal Keitel, Reinhard Gehlen and Nikki Lauda. He lives in Grosvenor Square, London, and has raised five daughters.

By the same author (up to 1981)

The Destruction of Dresden

The Mare's Nest

The German Atomic Bomb

The Destruction of Convoy PQ17

Accident — The Death of General Sikorski

The Rise and Fall of the Luftwaffe

Hitler's War

War Path

Trail of the Fox: The Life of Field-Marshal Erwin Rommel

Translations

The Memoirs of Field-Marshal Keitel

Breach of Security

The Service — The Memoirs of General Reinhard Gehlen



Introduction

IN *The History of the Russian Revolution*, Leon Trotsky wrote a chapter on the art of insurrection. In it he defined: “Historians and politicians usually give the name of spontaneous insurrection to a movement of the masses united by a common hostility against the old regime, but not having a clear aim, deliberated methods of struggle, or a leadership consciously showing the way to victory.”

What happened in Hungary in October 1956 was not a revolution but an insurrection. It was an uprising. When it began it was spontaneous and leaderless, and it was truly a movement of the masses bound by one common hatred of the old regime. Yet it was an anti-Communist uprising like no other. Many of the rebels held Party membership cards. Most were workers or peasants. The uncanny feature was that it resembled the classic Marxist revolution, it was fed by conditions which Karl Marx had always predicted would result in revolution, and it was led by the workers, the very stratum which he had expected would take the revolutionary lead. The parallels with what happened in Poland in the late summer of 1980 are striking; the exception is that this summer the workers were subdued by blandishments and promises of reform, while in past decades the Marxist governments have invariably turned their machine guns on the workers from whom they villainously claim to draw their mandate.

The Hungarian uprising of 1956 was crushed by a man who became instantly one of the most reviled men in his country. That same man is today one of Hungary’s most genuinely popular citizens, János Kádár. His life has sprung many contradictions, which cannot only be explained by his subservience to

Moscow's fickle whim. Initially, he identified himself with the uprising, served in its government, and referred to its origins even one month later, in a broadcast on November 26th, as a "mass movement"; but by February 2nd he had shifted to harder ground, and declaimed to Party activists at Salgótarján, "A counter-revolution began in Hungary on October 23rd, 1956, in exactly the same way as it did on August 2nd, 1919." He put the country through a period of savage repression, which culminated in the execution of the (other) "accomplices of Imre Nagy" in 1959. By that time, in fact, such a barbarity was quite superfluous, because the storm's force was long spent: his subjects had finally accepted that there was to be no escape from the Soviet empire, that the Western powers had written them off and that they must make the best life they could for themselves under Marxist bureaucratic rule.

Kádár played his part in this, declaring as his aim in the early 1960s, "We must win over every section of our people for the reconstruction of our country." The Party's monopoly on high office was abolished. Once, he told workers at the Ikarus omnibus plant in Budapest, "The West attacks us because of our one-party system. They are right. We Communists must work as though there was a twenty-party system, with a secret general election every day. That's the only way to win popular support." He made a clean sweep of a quarter of the Party *funkcionáriusok* – the "funkies" – for incompetence, and in 1962 he dismissed twenty-five former Party hardliners from the membership and began the rehabilitation of 190 victims of the Rákosi years. That year the Party published a declaration squaring up to the blame for the uprising. (Dr. Peter Rényi, editor of the Party newspaper, *Népszabadság*, and a close friend of Kádár, warned me: "But you will never, ever get to see the document on which it was based".) The Central Committee ordered, "The criterium of a person's social origin was a necessary tool in this last epoch. But today expert knowledge and competence are the only basis for assessing any person's qualifications for offices and functions." More important, Kádár's party adopted a policy of ideological *laissez-faire*: "Anybody who is not against us, must be for us," he said. In 1963 the last street-level participants in the uprising were amnestied. In 1970, the ministry of the interior gave notice that the police were no longer to act as "ideological watchdogs", and nowadays most Hungarians are freely able to obtain

passports and visas to travel to the West. In short, but for János Kádár as leader Communist Hungary's lot could have been worse.

True, but for Communism the country's lot would have been much better. But the Marxist leaders are the first to deny this; there are none so blind as those who won't see. A few months ago I recorded a long interview with the widow of Dr. Francis Münnich, Kádár's chief executive in crushing the uprising, and subsequently, Hungary's prime minister for many years. After two hours the widow pointed baffled at my midget recorder and asked if I should not long ago have changed the tapes or batteries. (She was only familiar with the Soviet bloc products.) She, and all the people like her, have been so thoroughly duped by the Marxist swindle that they are incapable of grasping that other systems – and in particular the capitalist system, with its handy profit-motive – work far better. Even after sixty years of full-scale experiment with entire nations, Marxism has never once succeeded, yet the swindle is still perpetrated in country after country. More and more gullible and unwary folk fall prey to its allures, like the citizens who innocently believe the crafty inventor who claims to have perfected a motor engine that runs on water. All human experience is against it. Scientists unanimously predict that it will not work. In country after country, the Marxist water engine fails to fire, but the inventor and his mechanics are growing richer and so the fraud continues. Each time the miserable passengers protest, their tormentors adopt knowing grins, and dismiss a prominent funky or even two: in effect, they have just changed the offside front wheel, to camouflage the fact that their whole scientific premise is unsound. Meanwhile they continue to sing its praises, because they know the fate of those who “deviate”.

There is no justice in socialist legality. As Budapest's own police chief during the uprising, Alexander Kopácsi, told me: “Which man is prosecutor, and which man stands in the dock, is purely a matter of casting.” Or, as his fellow Hungarians used to have it: “We are a three-class society: those who have been there, those who are there, and those who are heading there.” By “there”, they meant prison. This sense of public grievance, of impotence at the hands of the funkies, powered the initial phases of the uprising.

It was obvious to me that the industrial workers, with their sense of deprivation and their unrequited yearning for better living standards and free trade union activity, had powered the uprising, just as in Poland in 1980 they have caused

their overlords the biggest headaches. To delve into their minds at this distance in time would not have been easy were it not for the access I was granted to two revealing and broad-based series of scientifically conducted interrogations of street-level refugees. The Oral History project of Columbia University, New York, to which Professor István Deák granted me full access, consists of thousands of pages of such interviews; I am grateful both to him and to Professor Richard M. Stephenson, of Rutgers University, for access to the similar series of interviews expertly conducted by sociologists and psychiatrists on behalf of the CIA. These reports, compiled only weeks after the failed uprising, leave no doubt as to why these men and women, mostly in their twenties and thirties, conspired, organised, fought and indulged in other revolutionary activities, and finally fled their native country: the workers felt cheated, betrayed, deprived and persecuted by the funkies imposed on them by Moscow, by the speed-ups, wage frauds, unsafe and insanitary working conditions, and arbitrary penalties, by the burrowing of spies and informers and exhausting work methods. The University and Polytechnic students whose youthful eloquence and zest started the mass movement into the streets, did so out of a sense of justice, but also because of disgust at the degradation inflicted on their country behind a façade of cultural pretensions, and at the indigestible alien patterns of life being imported from across the Soviet frontier. The writers and other intellectuals joined the clamour later, belatedly making audible the long-suppressed rage of the workers and students.

These thousands of pages, when analysed, confirm what a US State Department intelligence report stated at the time:

It is important to note that economic factors were not among the primary roots of the revolt. Economic plight created despair, resentment, apathy and hatred; but it did not create that unity and that revolutionary spirit which came to be the key to the crystallization, outbreak, and initial victory of the revolt. As in past instances of popular uprising through nine centuries of the national existence of the Hungarians, the ingredients of decisive importance were political and emotional in nature. It is also to be observed that no revolution had ever taken place in Hungary except at times when the weakening of the power center became evident and simultaneously some

prospect or illusion of outside assistance emerged. In 1955-56, both the outer (Soviet) and the inner (Hungarian Communist) power center showed unmistakable signs of major weakening. Moreover, events within the orbit and pronouncements by Western statesmen – always adjusted by Hungarians to conform to their innermost desires – created illusions of prospects of practical outside assistance.

Having studied the origins of the Hungarian uprising of 1956, I turned to a field of no less importance: the reactions of the Western powers and United Nations. How was it that Dwight D. Eisenhower, despite his frequent campaign promises in 1952 to liberate the Soviet satellite nations, offered nothing beyond pious expressions of his nation's sympathy when the uprising began? What was the role played by Radio Free Europe and similar CIA-financed transmitters? Why did the US delegate at the United Nations deliberately delay UN action?

Documents newly released under the Freedom of Information Act from the secret files of the State Department, the National Archives and the Eisenhower Presidential Library have helped me to fill in some of the answers. Most illuminating were the banal telephone conversations between the White House and State Department during the crisis. It appears that, just as in May 1940 the miracle of Dunkirk occurred because it never dawned on Adolf Hitler until too late, that the British army was decamping, so in November 1956 the complete breakdown of communications from Budapest left Washington in the happy belief that the uprising had triumphed, that the Russians were pulling out.

Frank G. Wisner, the leading CIA official responsible for Central European operations, hurried from Washington to Vienna on November 7th, stayed there five days and optimistically reported to Vice-president Richard M. Nixon: "From many quarters today comes the dismal pronouncement that we failed to save Hungary, that Hungary *lost* the revolution. Tragic though it was in its immediate effects, the brutal use of Soviet force to crush the brave rebellion of the Hungarian people against their oppressors has stripped the Communist system of its last pretense of respectability and has taught the free world lessons which it will never forget." This was pure whistling in the dark, and Wisner knew it. For a long time he worried about how the West had muffed this opportunity, then he took his own life in depression. There never had been a "pretense of respectabil-

ity” about the Soviet Union: the whole Communist advance is based on conspiracy and intrigue, and Party members relish and revel in it. If the Western powers hoped too for an effect on the Third World, they were disappointed. The virile and resolute face which Nikita S. Khrushchev had shown to the West resulted in an enormous *increase* in Soviet prestige in Asia and the Middle East. He told a Yugoslav diplomat on November 12th, “The Soviet Union is not thinking of going to war, but our latest threats of war were correct and necessary.” In others words, the Kremlin bluffed the West and won. Conversely: on no occasion since the end of the Second World War have words or diplomatic actions alone persuaded the Kremlin to abandon a military intervention on which it has decided.

Some of my conclusions will disappoint my readers. Despite eloquent arguments advanced in particular by Professor Nicholas (Miklós) Molnár in Geneva, and by one of Nagy’s “accomplices” in Budapest, Nicholas Vásárhelyi – to whose personal courage I otherwise bow in admiration – I cannot find that the Communist intellectuals played a glorious role either before or during the uprising; of the effectiveness of their self-advertisement after it there can be no doubt. Nor am I tempted to shed tears over the fate of Imre Nagy who found himself cast willy-nilly in the role of rebel premier. Unlike the Western journalists who heaped praise on him in 1956, I have read back through the CIA files of his utterances in the years after 1945 and find little that distinguishes him from the other faceless Communists who were carried into power from Moscow exile, and sustained there by the guns of Soviet tanks. For students of revolution and insurrection, it will be of interest to see here confirmed that it was the sudden and unexpected possession by the demonstrators of arms and ammunition – captured from arsenals or handed over by disloyal troops – that destabilised an otherwise not unmanageable situation on the night of October 23rd, 1956. Finally, having talked with many of the leading Communists who took part, I am left with the vague and undemonstrable impression that they take a masochistic pleasure in having been incarcerated for large parts of their lives either by their enemies or by their fellows; further, that the Communists who joined the rebellion seem to have attracted more vicious punishments than the non-Communists.

The men of the “Imre Nagy conspiracy” have talked freely with me without exception. I must mention in particular Nicholas Vásárhelyi, Francis Donáth,

Mrs. Julia Rajk, Peter Erdős, Peter Rényi, Nagy's daughter Mrs. Francis Jánosi, and Zoltán Vas, who all still live in Budapest, and the unforgettable late Dr. Stephen Bibó; Béla Király and Joseph Kóvágó in the United States, the late Julius Háý in Switzerland, and Alexander Kopácsi in Toronto. Regrettably, several of the leading participants still in power declined to assist, including Mr. Kádár in Budapest and General Yuri V. Andropov in Moscow, although I was able to talk to General Pavel Batov about the Soviet military interventions. Of Kádár's entourage, only George Marosán had the courage to talk at length with me; others, including both gentlemen named Stephen Kovács, indicated a willingness to assist but were prevented by their authorities. However I was privileged to interview at length Dr. Andrew Hegedüs, the prime minister at the time of the uprising. Many other Hungarians assisted me, of whom I mention Dr. Ervin Hollós, Dr. Andrew Révész, Professor Peter Hanák, Professor Thomas Nagy, Vilmos Zentai and Zoltán Zelk in Budapest, and Béa Szász, Béla Kurucz, Frederick Rubin, János Bárdi and Robert Gati. In Munich Dr. Stephan Erdélyi allowed me to see his collection of newsreel film. Dr. Elek Karsai of the Budapest National Archives and Dr. Peter Gosztony of the Swiss East European Institute in Berne gave me valuable archival advice. At the level of diplomatic affairs, I was fortunate to obtain the diaries of Gaza Katona, political attaché in the US legation, and of Fabrizio Franco, Italian minister in Budapest, to both of whom I express my gratitude. Bill Lomax provided me with many of the fruits of his own researches, and a number of Western journalists including Noel Barber, Jeffrey Blyth, Alberto Cavallari, Astrid Ljungström, Dr. Hans Germani, Lajos Lederer, Paul Mathias, Ilario Fiore, Bruno Tedeschi and Fritz Molden gave material assistance. On a practical level it would have been impossible to encompass the work and produce this history without the efforts of my interpreters Erika László, Susan Gorka and Carla Venchiarutti, and of Dr. Nicholas Reynolds who conducted some of the preparatory interviews.

The staffs of the US National Archives, the State Department, the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Libraries afforded tireless assistance; the staff of the Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library of Princeton University enabled me to use the Dulles papers, including impor-

tant oral interview material, and I was able to see certain personal papers at Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire as well. The archivists of newspaper libraries and photographic agencies too numerous to mention have also helped to make this book possible, as have a number of other people whose names it would be impolitic to mention.

Over the six years, I have assembled a considerable documentation on this uprising, much of it unique. As with my earlier books, this has – with certain necessary deletions – now been microfilmed by E.P. Microform Ltd., East Ardsley, Wakefield WF3 2JN, Yorkshire, England, and is available without restriction from them.

Twenty years after the armies of Western newspapermen who roamed through revolution-torn Hungary, I found myself in Vienna about to drive down the same road to Budapest, equipped with a starter-kit of addresses: the ringleaders who had survived or evaded deportation, and escaped the hangman and the firing squad. That the present government, although aware of my intentions, allowed me in was an indication of progress in Hungary. I was also to meet their own historians, who have not so far, despite much pre-natal muscle-flexing, managed to give birth to their own narrative of the uprising; and initially no attempt was made to prevent me from visiting whomever I chose. (Once or twice, hints would be dropped that in a man's "own interest" I ought not to visit him.)

The first name on my list was in fact right here in Vienna. It was a name which its owner at once invited me to forget. I shall call him Jules. He was ostensibly a Belgian newspaper correspondent; more probably that was a cover for something else. He invited me to lunch at the Regina Palace Hotel at one p.m. The clock showed ten past as I sat down beside him at a white, linen-covered table under an awning; a short, dark-haired, Gallic fifty, Jules had already ordered. I noticed a bulky envelope next to his plate: from its faded brown colour I guessed it to be over twenty years old. While I dictated my own order, Jules cleared aside his cutlery and shook out five flat notebooks, like biscuits from a packet.

He beamed like a successful conjurer, pleased by my curiosity. The first biscuit was an identity card of Matthias Rákosi – there were the Hungarian dictator's bald cranium and evil features leering out of the photograph at me. The second item was Rákosi's railway pass, Number 000257, issued on June

1st, 1949. I began wondering how Jules had got them. The next two items were the Party IDs of a not unattractive woman; she had the high cheekbones of a Mongol and some kind of ornament skewering her hair. The Russian script in one showed her to be Theodora Kornilova, born in 1903 at Olekminsk; she had signed the other as Theodora Rákosi, and painstakingly emulated her new husband's script. Hers was the kind of solemn beauty that admirers of the Orient would say makes time stand still; while Matthias was fat and unattractive; indeed, ugly enough to stop a clock. I meant to ask Jules how he had acquired these treasures, but the sight of a fifth biscuit squelched the question before I could level it at him.

It was a small pocket book bound in red leather cloth: a neatly printed personal index, gold-embossed "No. 1"; it listed all the dictator's cronies and their telephone numbers, including their secret K-line numbers. I had heard about the K-line, called the *kisbúgó* or "little-buzzer" because of its distinctive soft ringing tone; that was the Party's own telephone network. The first page listed all the super-elite, the names of Apró, Acs, Bata, and of the hated Party chief Ernest Gerő, who I knew was at that time still alive somewhere in Budapest, but unseen since his humiliation in 1956 and now half blind; listed too were Hegedüs, Hidas, Kovács, Matolcsi, Mikes, Piros, Szalai, Vég, and of course Rákosi himself.

I riffled through the pages. Here was Elizabeth Andics, and her husband Andrew Berei, notorious hardliners who had separated for ten years, then been reunited, although she insisted on addressing him even at home as "Comrade Berei". When the rebels came to get them, they fled into an inner room, and emerged brandishing passports showing them to be Soviet citizens. They were escorted to the Soviet embassy. The Rákosi telephone index also listed the Soviet ambassador Yuri V. Andropov – who is now a full general and chief of the KGB, the Soviet security service – and half a dozen others with Russian rather than Hungarian names.

Some of the less fortunate had had their names inked out by Rákosi; others had merely been deprived of their K-line phones. The index also revealed the numbers of the secret luxury villas on Lake Balaton, of the Party headquarters and of the newspapers.

Jules chuckled, and pointed to one entry under “S”. The giant Stalin statue in Budapest had had two business phones and one top-secret K-line number, “358”, as well. The waiter sidled over. I settled the bill, and drove on towards Budapest. I idly wondered who would answer if I could dial 358 today.

David Irving

Who Was Who In Hungary

The ages are as at the time of the 1956 uprising. As in the bulk of the narrative, forenames have been anglicised where practicable. In the Source Notes, Hungarian forenames are also used.

Áczel, Thomas – 35, Jewish, Stalin prize-winning author, journalist and Communist Party secretary to the Writers' Union; escaped to USA.

Andics, Elizabeth – 54, Jewish, dialectician, director of the Party School, married to Andrew Berei, 56, Jewish, economist, chairman of the Planning Office. Both alive in Budapest.

Apró, Antal – 43, Jewish, Communist trades unionist who became deputy prime minister. One of Hungary's most durable politicians. Still serving.

Bata, Stephen – 46, former bus conductor, chief of the general staff from October 1950 to July 1953 when he became minister of defence.

Benke, Valéria – 36, Jewish, director of Hungarian radio broadcasting; now Politburo member, Budapest.

Benjámín, Ladislás – 41, Jewish, former factory worker, poet.

Bibó, Stephen – 45, professor of law, member of National Peasant Party, minister of state for one day in Imre Nagy's final Cabinet, the only member who refused to flee when the Russians invaded Parliament. Sentence: life imprisonment. Amnestied in 1963, died in Budapest, 1979.

Boldizsár, Ivan – 44, Jewish, diplomatist, professional journalist, editor of *Monday News* and other Party journals. Born survivor, still writing in Budapest.

Brankov, Lazarus – Yugoslav chargé d'affaires, framed, tried with Rajk in 1949 and sentenced to imprisonment.

Déry, Tibor – 50, Jewish, prize-winning novelist and long-serving Communist. Sentence: nine years.

Dobi, Stephen – 64, fellow-travelling Smallholder politician, appointed chairman of the presidium (President) in 1952.

Donáth, Francis – 41, long term member (and prisoner) of the Party. Sentence: twelve years.

Dudás, Joseph – rebel commander, editor of rebel Hungarian *Independence*. Hanged.

Erdei, Francis – 45, Jewish, a deputy prime minister under Nagy; briefly kidnapped by Soviets at Tököl when uprising was crushed, then released. Street named after him now. Died in bed, 1971.

Erdős, Peter – Jewish, radio journalist, now prosperous Budapest manager.

Faludy, George – 45, Jewish, poet, once Rákosi's prisoner, escaped after uprising to Toronto.

Farkas, Michael – 52, Jewish, Stalinist minister of defence under Rákosi.

Fazekas, George – Jewish, leading former Soviet partisan, Party journalist, lives in Budapest.

Fekete, Alexander – 29, journalist on *Free People*, member of Petőfi Circle. Four years served in prison.

Gerő, Ernest – 58, Jewish, many years in Soviet exile, machinations in Spanish Civil War, ministerial posts in Hungary after the Second World War, deputy

prime minister 1955 to 1956, succeeded Rákosi in July 1956 as general secretary (leader) of the Hungarian Communist Party. Escaped during uprising to Moscow, returned in disgrace in 1960. Died in reduced circumstances in Budapest, 1980.

Gimes, Nicholas – Jewish, young journalist on *Free People*, saw the light, became leading agitator in Imre Nagy group. Hanged.

Haraszi, Alexander – 59, journalist, long time Party member, imprisoned under Rákosi. Joined the Imre Nagy “conspiracy”. Sentence: eight years.

Háy, Julius – Jewish, Communist playwright, spent wartime exile in Moscow, repented rather late, became a vocal motor behind the popular discontent in 1956. Sentence: six years. Died in Switzerland 1975.

Hegedüs, Andrew – 34, sociologist, well-educated, Politburo member since 1951, one of Rákosi’s closest circle, became deputy minister of agriculture then prime minister in 1955 under Gerő, still holding that post at the time of the 1956 uprising. Escaped during the uprising to Moscow, returned in 1958 to Budapest and still lives there.

Heltai, George – Jewish, a local Party branch secretary in Budapest; later official of the foreign ministry, acted as Nagy’s unofficial foreign minister during the uprising, after which his path to the United States was smoothed by Kádár’s Party, glad to get rid of him.

Horváth, Martin – 50, Jewish, editor-in-chief of *Free People*.

Illyes, Julius – 53, poet, playwright.

Jánosi, Francis – Calvinist, former head of army political commissars; Imre Nagy’s son-in-law, friend and adviser.

Kádár, János – 44, engine fitter, leader of underground Party in wartime Hungary, Rákosi's minister of the interior 1948 to 1951, and inspector general of the ÁVO, then Rákosi's prisoner, freed by Imre Nagy in 1954; became chief of a Budapest Party branch, joined Nagy's rebel government, abandoned it on November 1st, 1956, and returned three days later with Soviet fire-power to take over Nagy's post himself. Now widely respected as Party leader in Hungary.

Karinthy, Francis – 45, writer.

Kende, Peter – 39, one time columnist on *Free People*; escaped to Paris.

Kiss, Karl – 53, Jewish, undercover Communist activist, leading Party organiser, Politburo member and minister and deputy prime minister under Rákosi.

Kopácsi, Alexander – former Soviet partisan, Budapest police chief 1952 to 1956, effectively joined Imre Nagy's cause. Sentence: life imprisonment. Amnestied in 1963, now lives in Toronto.

Kovács, Stephen – chief of the general staff in Imre Nagy's rebel government. Kidnapped by Soviets at Tököl, sentenced to prison. Lives in Budapest.

Losonczy, Géza – Party member, journalist, imprisoned under Rákosi. Politburo member under Imre Nagy, arrested, died in 1957 in captivity, allegedly as a result of force-feeding.

Lukács, George – 59, Jewish, Marxist philosopher; became Nagy's minister of culture, kidnapped to Romania with the Nagy group, but returned early to position of moderate prominence under Kádár. Died 1971.

Maléter, Paul – former Soviet partisan, colonel in Hungarian army, appointed by Nagy as minister of defence. Kidnapped at Tököl by the Soviets, imprisoned by Kádár, tried, and hanged.

Marosán, George – 48, Social Democratic leader, sold out his party to Rákosi and the Communists, was soon afterwards jailed by Rákosi, reinstated to the Politburo in 1956 and became Kádár's strongman. Lives in Budapest.

Márton, Ladislas – 22, Jewish, student leader, escaped to England. Lives in Paris.

Méray, Tibor – 42, Jewish, staff journalist on *Free People* for nine years from 1947. Escaped to Paris, still lives there.

Molnár, Nicholas – 38, Jewish, journalist, drama critic of *Free People*, editor of *Literary Gazette*. Lives in Geneva.

Mindszenty, Cardinal Joseph – leader of Hungary's huge Catholic population, deputy head of State until his incarceration in 1949.

Münnich, Francis – top-ranking NKVD agent, Hungarian ambassador to Moscow, then to Belgrade; appointed minister of interior in Nagy government, then of armed forces in the Kádár government which suppressed the uprising.

Nagy, Imre – 60, Calvinist, old guard Communist; wartime exile in Moscow, first post-war minister of land reform, then briefly minister of the interior; became prime minister 1953 to 1955, then again during the uprising of October-November 1956. Kidnapped by the Russians, deported to Romania, tried by Kádár government, sentenced to death.

Oberszovsky, Julius – editor, rebel newspaper *Truth*. Sentence: death, later commuted.

Péter, Gábor – 50, Jewish, chief of ÁVO, Communist secret police.

Piros, Ladislas – 39, Jewish, minister of the interior.

Rajk, Ladislas – born 1909, minister of the interior under Rákosi, hanged after a notorious show trial in 1949, rehabilitated just before the October 1956 uprising with a state funeral.

Rákosi, Matthias – 64, Jewish, leader of Hungarian émigrés in Moscow 1940 to 1944; general secretary (leader) of Hungarian Communist Party 1944 to 1956; prime minister 1947 to 1953.

Révai, Joseph – 58, Jewish, wartime exile in Moscow, editor-in-chief of *Free People* from 1945 to 1951, then propaganda minister; chief theoretician during the Rákosi administration.

Révész, Géza – Communist partisan.

Szilágyi, Joseph – police colonel in Budapest, then leading rebel on Imre Nagy's staff. Hanged after separate trial, before Nagy trial.

Tildy, Zoltán – Calvinist, former president of Hungary, imprisoned by Rákosi, joined Imre Nagy's Cabinet. Sentence: six years.

Vas, Zoltán – 56, Jewish, exile in Moscow during the war, directed Hungarian partisan school.

Vásárhelyi, Nicholas – journalist; Imre Nagy's press chief during 1953 to 1955 New Course, then again during the uprising. Sentence: five years.

Zelk, Zoltán – Jewish, poet.

1 The Engine Room

THE GLASS CRUNCHES and slithers beneath his shoes as he prods open the polished door marked “Minister” with his sub-machine gun. He pads across rich Persian rugs to the ornate writing-desk. From the way the wall facing him curves outwards, he knows he has reached one corner of the building. Its three big casement windows overlook a side street and the river.

It feels strange for Ladislav Szolnoki, a trained historian of twenty-eight to be holding a gun in his hands. But this is November 1956, the revolution is one week old and he has been detailed by the revolutionary command to inspect this forbidding fortress of dictatorial power: the ministry of the interior.¹

Down in the side street a benevolent policeman has been posted outside the heavy bronze doors set deep into the square pink granite portico. The entrance hall and twin marble staircases groan silently with neo-baroque pomposity and splendour. Once this magnificent structure was the Commercial Bank, a head office designed to impress visitors with its affluence and authority. The authority is still all-pervading – the wrought-iron grilles over the windows are evidence of that – but everywhere in this city the one-time affluence has flaked away.

Everywhere, that is, except up here in the minister’s own chambers. The chandeliers, the gilt and carpets, are present in abundance.

Szolnoki pauses and lights a cigarette. He has probed through scores of rooms thrown into frantic disorder by the scurrying servants of the ousted dictatorship. Machine guns have been hastily set up on polished desks, ammunition cases broken open and preparations made for a long siege. Why did they not fight? Discarded khaki uniforms – the uniforms of the security police – litter the rooms.

They must have changed into regular blue police uniforms, because there are several blue jackets and new leather police boots scattered around too. Their newness would have roused suspicion in the vengeful mob still hounding through the city's streets.

The whole block seems to be empty. Can the London financiers who built this pile of stone and brick fifty years ago ever have dreamed of the infernal engines and electrical contraptions that would be installed here in the names of Marx and Lenin? Can they have envisaged the expressionless and imponderable officials who would tread its parquet floors?

By probing along one first-floor gallery Szolnoki has stumbled upon these ministerial chambers. On one desk he has found an album of candid-camera pictures of Western diplomats, captioned with their personal backgrounds and weaknesses. ("Inclines towards Bevanism", is the caption beneath one British official's photograph; his other weaknesses in the catalogue are of a more intimate kind.)

What panicky conferences have these walls witnessed as a nation of ten million rises in holy anger against these men; what schemes have been laid at this very council table, how many of them have already failed – and how many are still running smoothly, geared into some Machiavellian plan?

If this ministry was the engine room of the police state, then this writing-desk was its control panel. Rifles and pistols lie scattered around the costly fin-de-siècle furniture. Somebody must have been here before him. The locks of the desk have been forced; in the drawers are only trivia – routine chits and memoranda.

He feels eyes glaring at him and swings round nervously. But the eyes are set below the cruel low forehead of Joseph Stalin, and are leering at him from a smashed picture frame leaning against the wall. How ironic: this minister's regime had joined in the raucous outcry against Stalin, and it had ousted its own Stalinist tyrant, Matthias Rákosi, too: yet the portraits of both men have, until now, continued to hang in the privacy of his rooms.

Then a footstep behind him stirs the broken glass. Szolnoki is too startled to grab his gun. But it is only a boilerman standing in the doorway.

"Me and my mate are the only ones left," the man introduces himself, wiping his oily hands on his dungarees. "You'll find this oak panelling in all the

deputy ministers' offices as well," he comments with a smile. "After the Twentieth Congress they all got the same perks as their minister. No cult of personality here!"

And he kicks the Stalin portrait to show what he means.

Wearing rebel armbands and carrying weapons, Szolnoki and a few helpers scour the building for three days following rumours that somewhere there are security police officials still hiding out – perhaps aloft in the unsearched attics. There are several subterranean levels too, and a labyrinth of inner courtyards. Several times, Szolnoki comes up against gates padlocked from the inside.

As he explores, he begins to form a puzzling picture of the building's layout. In one wing there are hundreds of identical small rooms, like a rabbit warren, linked vertically by staircases and to one another by short corridors – access from one corridor to the next can be gained only through three or four interconnecting rooms. Their steel partitions are new. A great deal of money has obviously been spent on the wall-to-wall carpets, modern desks and unfamiliar technical equipment. The mystery is that each room is identical to the next down to the very books displayed on the shelves.

Everywhere there are telephones, sometimes four or five on a desk. One of them suddenly shrills as Szolnoki walks past; his hand has already jerked towards it when an image flashes before his eyes, from a Soviet war film, in which Nazi officers occupying Kiev are blown to pieces when lured into answering telephones in empty buildings. He lets it ring.

The doors of the safes in most rooms are swinging wide open, revealing recording tapes and film. The electric lights everywhere are still burning. Once again he gets the odd feeling that eyes are watching him – that this building is not empty and abandoned at all, and that he is the unwitting actor in some drama, of which the final act has to be portrayed.

"See these steel safety doors and these bells out here?" calls the boilerman from the corridor. "My mate used to collect his pay here. He was told exactly what time to go, and not to go anywhere without permission. He had to keep one eye on the lamps. And if a particular lamp lit up, he had to turn back."

The boilerman sees that he has an audience. "Then there was this electrician friend of mine. And he told me that his part of the building was chopped up into

sub-sections, and he was only allowed to do routine maintenance work in each at certain times. And if he got called in on an emergency job, then he had to keep an eye on these lamps too.”

He drops his cigarette butt and stubs it out with his boot. “And if a bell went off everybody had to clear the corridor and go back to the room they had just left.”

A policeman has joined them, and leafs through a book culled from one of the shelves. It contains some kind of recording device. The same book is in all the little rooms.

Szolnoki begins sketching the layout of this labyrinth. Every twelfth room is a little more elaborate, perhaps a section chief’s. It has a safe, two cupboards, several tape recorders, a couch, a desk, a bookshelf and a picture of Felix Dzherzhinski. He was the father of the Soviet secret police – and the only one so far to die in bed.

With a stick of chalk, Szolnoki numbers each staircase and marks symbols on the corridors. It is November 3rd already, and it is obviously going to take weeks to investigate the whole building. He asks the Central Archives to take over the documents. But the director croaks at the mere thought of ripping out the files from this ministry. So Szolnoki settles down to screen them here instead.

The documents are remarkable for their lack of the stifling jargon that poisons the regime’s official journals. The authors are clearly professionals, writing for professionals. In fact, the tone of these secret reports is realistic and businesslike.

Some of the ministry’s departments had evidently begun to putrefy weeks earlier. Everywhere Szolnoki finds empty champagne and liquor bottles. He grins at the incongruous spectacle of Lenin, Stalin and Dzherzhinski frowning impotently from their smashed picture frames at liquor-sodden heaps of pornographic photographs, of American girlie magazines, and of spy-photos of diplomats and visiting Western businessmen.

There are thousands of magnetic tapes and these, he reflects, will present headaches for generations of future historians. The entire operational activities of the security police and of the nation’s government seem to have been re-

corded by hidden microphones. He plays a tape selected at random. It is of a trivial office conversation.

In the typing pool, soft music is still trickling out of the loudspeakers. From an open safe he scoops out half a dozen loose dossiers. The very first item has him rooted to the spot for an hour – he is looking at transcripts of telephone conversations that have been, judging from the paper, very *recently* typed up: but the actual conversations had been recorded nearly ten years earlier between Matthias Rákosi, at that time only the country's Marxist deputy premier but already manoeuvring for absolute power, and its legation in Switzerland.

The then prime minister, Francis Nagy, had been visiting Switzerland and the recorded dialogue concerns the payment of 300,000 Swiss francs requested by the frightened non-Communist premier as his price for never returning – for “defecting” to the West. As the historian Szolnoki knows, it was this defection that opened the way for Rákosi. But the intriguing question also remains: why have these transcripts been typed up so recently?

By November 3rd, his team has penetrated upstairs to the third floor. It is not unlike a radio factory. Down the centre of a low hall run workbenches with about twenty-five seats on either side; there are steel cabinets on them, smelling of warm plastic and emitting a constant hum. Coloured lamps are still blinking on the equipment. Along one wall are more mysterious steel cabinets, with ventilation gratings. Are they computers? Code-breaking machines? Telephone intercept systems? Tomorrow students from the Polytechnic will try to dissect the equipment and discover its purpose.

In a side room Szolnoki finds even more puzzling contraptions: for instance, a long, low console equipped with model aeroplanes at the end of levers.

On the top floor, overlooking the inner courtyards, he locates a telephone exchange. Inside each steel cabinet are six long cylindrical columns, each containing thirty recording tapes. The reels are slowly turning, recording conversations – but whose, and where? And where are the papers, the files?

Down in the brick-lined bowels of the building, the old bank vaults, Szolnoki finds about eight hundred yards of shelving, but the shelves are empty. Elsewhere he discovers two heaps of files dumped from coal trolleys, ready for burning; one heap has already been soaked with paraffin. They contain some dossiers on police informers and surveillance operations.

Late that afternoon, he returns to the vaults to begin sifting through the heap. He and his colleague lose their way and, as they retrace their steps, in one of the tunnels they hear distant footfalls seeming to follow them all the time. Several times he has noticed men loitering around whom he has not seen before.

Around ten p.m. the Polytechnic experts look in to say they are locking up for the night. Szolnoki is also tired, and walks upstairs to the street exit. In the lofty, square-columned entrance hall there is yet another stranger pacing up and down, as though waiting for him to leave; and there is another man hovering behind the main double staircase, as he lets himself out into the side street.

Tomorrow should bring many answers. Szolnoki has located one of the building's electricians, and the man has promised to come in and explain the wiring and whatever else he can of the strange mechanisms. Tomorrow will be November 4th, 1956.

For this revolution, tomorrow never comes.

On the night of November 3rd-4th, as the Russians began rolling back, Paul Mathias, the tall, elegant foreign correspondent of *Paris-Match*, flew out of the encircled capital in a small Austrian Red Cross plane. It had not been easy getting to the airport.

The French minister had refused to help. But Jean-Paul Boncour had married a big blonde Brünnhilde of a woman, Mausi von Kleist, who was as brave and formidable as he was effete. She had been brave enough to carry a bottle of cognac through Budapest's midnight streets to Mathias's mortally wounded photographer Jean-Pierre Pedrazzini in hospital. The photographer had not known how badly he was hit; he had forced a smile and said, "I may still make a good photo editor yet!" Shortly after, the hospital's street door burst open and armed insurgents dragged in a safe pulled out of the wrecked Communist headquarters; they had blasted it open with grenades and now they wanted to dole the cash among the casualties here in the hospital.

Truly it was a remarkable revolution. Boncour, gazing moodily out of the legation window on the crowds rampaging through the streets, had observed to Mathias: "That's not a bourgeois revolution! You can see for yourself what kind of rag-tag mob they are; they're just a rabble!"²

"They are the people," Mathias had replied.

Now the Russians were coming back. Accompanied by the Italian vice-consul, Mausi drove through the night in a little convoy of three cars to the airport. The stretcher bearing Pedrazzini was wedged into the cockpit of the Red Cross plane. His stomach had been torn open by the gunfire in the battle for the Communist headquarters on Republic Square. A medical student held up a bottle of blood plasma, silently glad that this flight was saving his own life too.

In the hospital in Budapest, Pedrazzini had seemed at first to be mending. He had asked Mathias anxiously, "Where's the car? *Paris-Match* will never pay compensation if it is damaged."

But now he was fading into a coma.

Once he murmured, without opening his eyes, "Is Mathias there?"

He must have heard again the cultured voice of their friend, the actress Philippine de Rothschild, pleading with him by telephone a few days earlier: "Don't let Mathias go in!" She was Paul's best friend. Pedrazzini had comforted her: "Don't worry, I'll bring him back alive to you."

"Is Mathias there?" he said again, and the student reassured him: Mr. Mathias was in the plane with him. Jean-Pierre drifted off again; in a way he was bringing back his friend just as he had promised: alive.

On the day that Pedrazzini died, the French President Coty sent for Paul Mathias, and asked him: "Monsieur, you are now a French citizen, but once you were a Hungarian. Tell me what happened?"

Mathias replied, "In Budapest, a city of two millions, the people just forgot what fear was."

"And in what spirits are they now?"

"It would be wrong to speak of a nervous breakdown, it was a break-up, Monsieur le Président. They just went wild. An entire city, a whole country went mad with exasperation!"

2 Liberation

POOOR HUNGARY! A thousand years of history had ended. Compressed into 36,000 square miles of rolling plains, their country disembowelled by rapacious neighbours after two world wars, these ten million had seldom enjoyed any but the briefest respite from repression and enslavement. They prided themselves on being the farthest outpost of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism in Eastern Europe, and on having introduced parliamentary and constitutional government into Eastern Europe centuries before their neighbours; their eastern frontier marked the traditional divide between German materialism, Latin romanticism and Slav sub-culture.

The twentieth century had seen Hungary shrivel like a battle-torn flag to a tattered remnant of its former self. In 1914 Budapest still controlled 109,200 square miles of the vast and ramshackle empire of Austro-Hungary. The vicious treaty signed at Trianon in 1920 left Hungary with only thirty-six per cent of these territories, and with only forty-two per cent of her former population. It was the greatest of her national catastrophes: the Yugoslavs seized 25,000 square miles and a half a million Hungarians in the south-west; Czechoslovakia carved off 24,000 square miles and 700,000 Hungarians in the north; and Romania tore out the meatiest chunk of all: 40,000 square miles with two million Hungarians in the south-east.

The Hungarians see themselves as individualistic, light-hearted, impulsive, and even hot-headed, but also with a certain deliberation in their national stride: a people who, once they decide on a particular course of action, are not easily deflected. They speak a rare and awkward language bearing testimony only to

their tribes' origins in the remote Finno-Ugric family of nations. They have nothing in common with their neighbours, except that they are all in the same boat – they are all satellites of the Soviet Union. In fact, thanks to Trianon, they will never be able to live amicably together as neighbours, whatever the Communists' assertions of fraternal feelings between the nations of the Soviet bloc.

Non-Slav and non-Orthodox, the Hungarians have always joined an adversary of Russian power. From 1938 onward, her last vainglorious regent, Admiral Nicholas von Horthy, egged on Adolf Hitler in personal letters to invade the Soviet Union. In June 1941 the Nazi Wehrmacht did just that. In 1944, however, Hitler's war spilled back on to Hungarian soil, and the invading Russians made the city of Debrecen their temporary occupation capital. There, on December 21st, 1944, they set up their first provisional parliament.

In 1954, when the country's portly prime minister, Imre Nagy, celebrated the tenth anniversary of that Parliament, a lavish ceremony was laid on at Debrecen.¹ "The victorious battles of the glorious Soviet army liberated our country from the inferno of the Second World War," he pronounced, "and they brought about the historic moment in December 1944 when – standing on the ruins of the Horthyite fascist Hungary – we could unfurl our national standard, the symbol of our freedom and independence. Here it flies in the breeze from the walls of Debrecen, from whence the lofty cause of freedom, independence and people's democracy started on its final triumphant march."

To many these bombastic words might have sounded sarcastic. The national standard Imre Nagy thus praised now contained the Soviet emblem. But Nagy had weathered the war years in the safety of Moscow, and he meant his words sincerely. "What would have become of our country and culture and of civilisation the world over without the Soviet army?" he appealed, again without conscious irony. "It was the Soviet army that saved the world and ourselves from this fate." And he sat down to prolonged applause, never suspecting that just two years from now he would be cursing the Soviet army, and that no speech would spare him from the hangman's noose.

Hungary's "liberators" never left. The Red Army commanders deported 110,000 men for slave labour from Budapest and half a million more from the rest of the country. At the radio building in 1956 there would be a minor official

called Várkonyi, who had been parachuted from the Soviet Union into Hungary in 1945. He had buried his parachute and marched to the nearest town with a railway. He reached it, exhausted, as a transport of deported Hungarians was passing through. One prisoner had just escaped, so the Russians seized the first able-bodied male to fill the gap – Várkonyi. He spent the next seven years in Siberia.²

The Russian troops were the uncultured products of the Steppes. Hungarians watched astounded as their invaders tried to wash fish by flushing them in the toilets (the fish vanished, the baffled Russians beat up the homeowners in revenge).³ The soldiers looted and pillaged and murdered.

For many of Hungary's beautiful and lissom girls the first useful Russian phrase was one that anguished parents taught them: "I've got syphilis and TB." A typical Hungarian motor-car engineer learned that his pretty secretary and her daughter had been raped by twelve Russians; and in a relative's villa they raped a woman and gunned down her mother and child when they tried to protect her.⁴ This one man's personal knowledge of what Imre Nagy and the other Communists so fluently called the "liberation" was multiplied a million times throughout the country. Workers grimly joked that their country had now known three disasters – their defeat by the Tartars, their conquest by the Turks, and their liberation by the Russians.

Communist careerists found it easier to forgive the Russians. A capable journalist working on the Party newspaper *Free People* (*Szabad Nép*) would explain even in 1957: "One could forget what the Russians had done during the siege. Afterwards there were always reports about how the Russians were helping us with our reparations and sending us wheat. Also the Russian folk-singing groups were marvellous, and Russian artists and pianists like David Oistrakh came and played for us."⁵

All the violinists in the Moscow Conservatoire could not serenade away the suffering left by the Soviet visitation. Take this typical case-history related to American psychiatrists at Cornell University in March 1957, that of Mrs. Bondor, an attractive, brilliant woman.⁶

She is an only child, she is pampered and happy, loving her horse and her dog. Her father is a well-to-do, book-loving Catholic who has studied mechani-

cal engineering and still grouses at his humble position as a low-paid foreman in a steel factory: he had always hoped to put his learning to better use.

In 1944 she is just twenty-five, working in Budapest's rationing office. She has fallen in love with a well-educated young army officer and on December 1st she marries him. After only four weeks, the Hungarian fascists arrest him for plotting against the Germans. He is awaiting execution in the Castle when the Russians storm the city. He escapes but at his home the Russians are waiting for him – he had been fighting against them in Transylvania – and he is again taken away.

This time eleven years will pass before she sees her husband again.

Later, American sociologists will ask her to compare the Nazi and the Russian occupation forces. "My first impression was that the Germans were very arrogant and very strict. Somehow they treated the Hungarians as if we were inferior."

She reflects, then adds: "But I think life would have been better under the Germans than the Russians. The Germans are highly cultured and civilised. They would never have done the barbaric things that the Russians did to us. The Germans wanted to improve the living standards and the culture of the Hungarian people. Perhaps the Hungarian factories would have worked for the Germans, but the Germans would never have interfered with the family life of the Hungarian people."

She is asked: "How did you feel about the Russian troops when they came to Budapest in 1945?"

Her brow darkens, her tone changes, her voice rises sharply. "My impression of the Russians was abysmal – disgusting." She turns slowly away from her examiners, unable to look squarely at them. "I had heard things like this about them, but they were to introduce themselves in a very cruel and crude fashion. I was surprised such people could even speak – they acted lower than animals." She shudders, and repeats: "*Animals* are better than them!"

She is obviously concealing something. Her fists clench until the knuckles go white. She whispers: "When the Russians came, their clothing was indescribably grimy. They were filthy. It was not just because of the war, they were dirty from nature. They smelt – they stank. They acted like animals. They would burst into an apartment and throw in a hand grenade without warning. They

could not talk, just grunt. They pointed their guns at people and if they didn't get the desired response, they just shot them. Some had stolen uniforms from the Germans, but uniforms could not change them – the dirt was skin deep. It made you puke just to look at these soldiers. They thought that toothpaste was some kind of jelly and they spread it on their bread. They drank eau-de-Cologne. The telephone scared them and they fired their guns at it. They washed in the toilet. They did not know what a bathtub was for. They were so scared of the water running out of the wall that they shot at the shower.”

“Did you have any personal contact with the Russians?” Tears come into her eyes, as she recalls the nightmare of the spring of 1945, weeks that she has never told anybody about before.

After they take away her husband the Russians post four sentries inside and outside the apartment to guard Mrs. Bondor and her placid thirty-two-year-old housemaid, a mother of two children. For three weeks the Russians hold them prisoner. They tear the apartment apart and violate the two women repeatedly. Mrs. Bondor is terrified that these stinking, disgusting soldiers may have infected or even impregnated her. From domestic disinfectants she concocts a vitriolic liquid with which she doctors herself; the acids destroy one ovary and ravage the other. She will never be able to bear children if her husband does return. An excruciating inflammation develops, and each passing year is agony.

She has fits of melancholy, she hates everything and everybody, she can feel warm only towards her pets – three ducks and three cats. “Animals are also helpless creatures,” she reasons.

This is one woman in Hungary after 1945. She becomes withdrawn and turns to classical music for solace. She communicates only with the wives of other missing prisoners, women who have shared her fate. Three times a week they meet. The government is powerless or unwilling to intercede on their behalf. Zoltán Tildy, a non-Communist, is president, but he is weak and vacillating: “Tildy was for ever turning with the wind,” Mrs. Bondor tells her interviewers. “He became president only because of circumstances, not because of any intrinsic ability.”

Once, Prime Minister Francis Nagy does receive her, but this meeting only worsens her depression: “He did not have the ability to be a prime minister. Nor was he intelligent enough or mature enough. He was a coward, too. He was

afraid of the Russians and of the Hungarian people. As soon as he had taken care of his own future, he just left the country.”

In 1950 the new Communist regime declares all missing prisoners dead, and she is formally notified to this effect. She does not believe the letter can be true. By night, she dreams of only one man – her missing husband, the handsome army captain whom the Russians have taken from her. She has a recurring fantasy that he returns home and that it is as if he has never been away. He comes to her room, lies beside her and acts more like an ardent lover than a husband. Sometimes in her dream – so she confesses to American psychiatrists who are probing her motives in taking up arms against the regime – the imagined sex act is quite perfect. By day, unemployed and harried by the Communists, she wonders if her husband is still alive, somewhere in Siberia.

3 Rákosi

AT YALTA IN February 1945, the Allied leaders Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin had affirmed in a declaration on liberated Europe “the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live”.¹

In Hungary, the Russians side-stepped that. The Allied Control Commission was headed by a Russian, Marshal Kliment Voroshilov, with powerful forces at his disposal. But since Stalin was anxious not to antagonise the Western powers while they still maintained large armies on European soil, he did not proclaim an immediate “dictatorship of the proletariat”, as he might otherwise well have done.

When the first elections were held on November 4th, 1945, several parties contended and there was therefore a secret ballot. The result was a stinging rebuff for Moscow: the Smallholders’ Party polled 2,700,000 votes, well over half (fifty-seven per cent) of the total. The Social Democrats and the Communists polled only seventeen per cent each, and most of the rest went to the National Peasants’ Party.

Stalin swallowed this defeat calmly. He could afford to take his time. But the handful of true Communists in the country – there were probably not more than six hundred Party members in 1945 – were demoralised by this humiliation.

Julius Hágy, a Hungarian playwright who had flown back from Moscow after ten years collaborating with the Soviets there, would recall: “The defeat was annihilating . . . We came down to earth with a bump. Who could have expected

such ingratitude? How is it even possible that they think so little of us? Don't they like us? Don't they want us?"²

And another dutiful Communist working on the Party newspaper would admit: "I was dismayed and shocked in 1945 when the Party received only seventeen per cent of the votes." He unblushingly added: "At that time I told myself that what was needed was a 'slight dictatorship'. I felt that the people who voted for the Smallholders and for the Peasant Party must be fascists and anti-Semites and former members of the Horthy regime . . . I thought that one reason why we didn't receive more votes was the propaganda that the Communist Party was going to organise collectives – I was sure that there would never be any collectives, otherwise why would the Communists have divided up the land in the first place?"³

Hungary got more than just a "slight dictatorship".

Stalin gave the job of colonising Hungary to one of the twentieth century's most evil despots, Matthias Rákosi, the shrewd, vengeful and poisonous boss of the Hungarian exiles in Moscow. Born "Matthias Roth" on March 9th, 1892, the son of a Jewish grocer, he had studied banking in Budapest, and had visited Hamburg and London on a scholarship. Captured by the Russians in the First World War and interned in Siberia, he had become a Communist and actually met Vladimir Lenin in Petrograd in 1918. Lenin sent him to Moscow, where he became an expert on the organisation of underground cells, and then fed him back to Hungary in 1919, where a weasel-faced Béla Kun was just setting up a Communist regime.

The country would not easily forget the 133 days of Kun's "Soviet republic". Organised murder gangs, of which a later Reinhard Heydrich or Adolf Eichmann would have been proud, prowled the country on the orders of Otto Korvin and Tibor Szamuely, liquidating "counter-revolutionaries" without trial. In the same year Kun and his followers fled to Moscow, where they split into several rival factions. Rákosi, who had been one of Kun's officials, opted for Austria; he outlived his welcome there in 1920 and returned to Moscow. The new regime, led by Admiral Horthy, liquidated the rest of the Communist leaders in what came to be known as the White Terror. Since Kun and all his cronies had been Jews, the pogrom had unmistakably anti-Semitic overtones.

Thus began Rákosi's colourful career in exile. He travelled widely as secretary of the Comintern, a position that gave him undeniable clout; but he had the tact of a kosher butcher and, after falling foul of his chief, Gregory Zinoviev, the Comintern packed him back to Hungary in December 1924 with orders to rebuild the shattered Communist Party – but this time underground. Nine months later he was arrested and summarily sentenced to death, but after a wave of international protests his sentence was commuted to eight years' imprisonment.

Like Anna Pauker and Ernest Thälmann, he became a *cause célèbre* during his prison years. And like Antonin Novotny, the later Czech leader, and other top Communist prisoners, Rákosi survived by transferring his allegiance to the prison administration, because by becoming a “trusty” he gained access to the prison library and could continue his self-education.

Before his due release date, Rákosi was again put on trial in 1935, this time charged with complicity in the execution of forty political enemies during the Kun regime. Years later, he reminisced: “I endeavoured to make use of such limited publicity as a trial in a fascist court would afford.” This made him world famous. Rudolph Szántó, who was then secretary of the exiled Hungarian party in Moscow, started a “save Rákosi” campaign (largely to offset the damaging propaganda against Stalin's own purge trials in 1937); during the Spanish Civil War, a Hungarian battalion in the International Brigade was named after him. On October 30th, 1940, Horthy finally released him in exchange for the return of Hungarian battle flags captured by the Tsar's forces in 1848. Three days later Rákosi crossed the border eastwards into the Soviet Union, his sixteen years of imprisonment for the workers' movement finally over.

In wartime Moscow Rákosi was not at once a popular exile because of allegations that he had incriminated his own comrades during his 1935 trial. Nonetheless, it was Rákosi whom Stalin appointed leader of the Hungarian émigrés. It was a logical move, because the money invested in campaigning for Rákosi's release had made him a figure of international standing, while the others, who had fought in Spain or underground in Hungary, were not known at all. Slaving for revenge against the country that had persecuted and imprisoned him, Rákosi worked for “Radio Kossuth” a Soviet transmitter beaming propaganda into Hungary. And it was Rákosi who would sit at the right hand of Stalin at the victory banquet in 1945.

He returned to his country late in 1944, and took over as the new Communist Party's secretary-general, its leader, although the tiny cell that had remained in the country and fought the Nazis from underground had been run by Ladislav Rajk. Bald, potato-headed and dumpy, the émigré Rákosi was painfully vain; with hooded, lidless eyes, goblin-ears and round, fleshy features that sometimes opened in a taut, nervous smile to reveal discoloured teeth, he was no beauty. His bullet head seemed to sit on shoulders with no neck at all. He was coarse and boastful. To the "bourgeois" parties – the Smallholders, the Peasants and the Social Democrats – he bragged: "We're going to slice you into little pieces, bit by bit, just like a salami, until nothing is left!"

He applied these salami tactics ruthlessly, and made no secret of them at all.

An organisation man like Matthias Rákosi attracts the morbid curiosity of analysts of power. He was cruel, but no brainless puppet; he was master of ten tongues including several Slavonic languages. He spoke good English too, and used it when invited to visit the Tennessee Valley Authority in 1946 to slip out at night and interview the "America proletariat".

One man who got to know him well was George Heltai. As branch secretary of Budapest's Party organization in 1945 and then as an official of the foreign ministry, Heltai saw him daily; he found him congenial and understanding. Typically, Rákosi would agree with Heltai's proposals, but would ask: "Do you think that our *friends*" – meaning the Russians – "will like this?" His rapport with Stalin was still not good. Visiting the Kremlin with Rákosi, Heltai – who now lives in exile in the United States – was astounded that Rákosi had to wait while a visitor's pass was issued to him.

I knocked on the rickety door of Heltai's tumbledown house in Charleston, South Carolina, on a humid May evening and asked him more. In this house it was obviously his dogs, and not George Heltai with his Einstein mane of flowing hair and white moustache, who were the masters: our conversation was punctuated with their barking, and a kindly look creased his ruddy, Central European features as they pawed all over him.

Chain-smoking, and wagging his head from side to side to emphasise his words, Heltai reminisced: "Rákosi? I was absolutely fascinated by him. He was superior to all the others who came back from Moscow." His thickly-accented

voice rose to an admonishing, lecturing tone. “He read foreign newspapers like *The Times* every day. He even spoke Turkish, because at the commercial college before the war he was obliged to learn one oriental language. Russian too – with a good Hungarian accent! You know, he had something of a Western outlook. He loved England, although he had only spent a couple of months there in his youth. Stalin regarded him – and it was Imre Nagy who told me this – as an English spy. We spent some days together in Paris once and we went out sight-seeing. Really, he was like a nineteenth-century Hungarian *gentleman*: he was charming, always wanting to impress people, and very *funny*. He even went to see some of the big couturiers’ houses in Paris. My wife said, ‘They will throw us out when we don’t buy anything!’ And he said, ‘But I’ve always wanted to see those mannequins!’”

Heltai reflected again, and groped back thirty years into the recesses of his memory. “At the beginning he did not have that cruel image,” he said. “But he knew that Stalin did not like him. He knew that the purges were coming . . . Stalin hated the Jews.”

4 Salami Tactics

UNTIL 1948 RÁKOSI burrowed and weaved, infiltrating and undermining the ruling coalition. He had spent years in exile planning for just this. “The Hungarian party had already worked out the broad outlines during the Second World War,” he boasted later¹; and as early as October 1944 the Communists had tricked the Social Democrats into agreeing on a popular front.

He moved cautiously but deliberately. In the earliest Debrecen government there were only three Communist ministerial positions, but the allocation of the ministry of agriculture to Imre Nagy gave the Communists power to enforce the 1945 Land Reform Act which was designed to bribe the peasants into supporting them. At this time, the Catholic Church still owned about one and a quarter million acres, while 303 aristocratic landowners shared five million acres and 1,600,000 peasants had only just over eleven million acres between them; another 500,000 day labourers had no land at all. So the Land Reform was powerful medicine for the peasant vote.

Four years of scheming and manoeuvring lay ahead of Rákosi even so. Of the 409 parliamentary seats in the November 1945 election, the Smallholders’ Party had scooped 245; they seemed impregnable. He had little hope of making Communism palatable to an electorate who still remembered Béla Kun’s regime, but he had one big trump: he had the backing of the Soviet army – “It was the Soviet army which made it *ab ovo* impossible for the forces of reaction in Hungary to make armed attempts upon us such as those of Dennikin, Kolchak and other White Guardist generals at the time of the Russian Revolution,” he later triumphed.²

Joseph Révai, his chief theoretician, quite openly admitted in an article published in the spring of 1949 that they were able to worm their way into power because they had obtained “decisive control over the police forces” and because “the force of the Party and of the working class was multiplied by the fact that the Soviet Union and the Soviet army were always on hand to come to our aid”.³ Rákosi surpassed even Révai’s admissions in his later boasts. In fact he could quote Lenin’s works freely and he knew Stalin’s *Problems of Leninism* by heart. By following the advice and directives given to him by Stalin in Moscow during the war, Rákosi knew how to act as he did just now.

Many of his comrades failed to grasp what he was up to. The wide-spectrum coalition that initially resulted from the 1945 elections was not what they had had in mind at all. “Now that the Red Army has liberated us,” they said, “why don’t we seize the opportunity and restore the dictatorship of the proletariat!”

But Rákosi was too wily for that. The working class still had to be won over to the Communist Party. In a cynical indoctrination talk – one of the most important and revealing speeches of his long career – to the Party College on February 29th, 1952, he would brag: “As early as during the Land Reform we resorted to the tactics of dividing our enemies or neutralising them where we could. That was why we fixed the lowest limit at 200 acres, which left the great majority of ‘kulak’ farms unaffected. This was of great help in the smooth and quick implementation of the Land Reform.”

All the Party’s demands began on a modest scale, and were then insidiously increased. “For instance,” Rákosi bragged, “first we demanded only ‘government control’ of the banks; only later did we call for the outright nationalisation of the three largest banks.” He used the same stealthy tactics against the mines, the machine factories and the foundries.

“Desperate struggles,” admitted Rákosi in his secret speech, “had to be fought for the control of the armed forces, the army, the regular police force and the security police.” (The state security section of the police was the later notorious *Államvédelmi Osztály* or *ÁVO*.) The powerful Church authorities also had to be eliminated.

Thus at eleven fifteen on February 15th, 1946, the phone rings in the office of János Péterfalvy, a thirty-five-year-old Greek Orthodox bishop in Budapest.⁴

A woman pleads with him to come and administer the last sacrament to her dying mother. "My brother will come for you in a car," sobs the caller.

Down at the gate, the bishop finds a large black Russian-built car. It takes him to 60, Andrásy Street, the security police headquarters. The car's occupants courteously advise him not to try to escape: "We have orders to shoot."

The interrogations that follow are less well mannered. He is beaten with a rubber truncheon until his lower left jaw has no teeth left; three days later he is charged with being an American spy and he is thrown into a cell filled with a foot of icy water, where he remains for more days than he can remember.

After three weeks the bishop is turned over to the NKVD, the Soviet secret police, with thirteen other Hungarian prisoners, among whom he recognises Francis Szabolcs, head of the Hungarian telegraph office, and a county official. Again the bishop refuses to sign a confession that he is an American spy. His toenails are ripped out and psychological pressures are applied. "Your father is old and infirm," whispers the NKVD major. "Do you want to inconvenience him, too?"

Next day they inform him that they have now pulled in both his aged parents, so he signs the confession. He is sentenced to twenty years' forced labour.

The last that we see of Bishop Péterfalvy for some ten years is lying on the floor of a sealed freight-wagon, one of thirty making up a trainload of prisoners bound for the Soviet Union. There are endless halts. Once they hear a wheel-tapper working his way along the tracks singing softly in Hungarian: "Are there any Hungarians in there – if so, cough and let me know!" But nobody dares make a sound, and the train lurches off again.

It halts at the former Jewish ghetto in Lvov, but this is only a clearing house. Here the survivors parade naked for a doctor to inspect them, he feels their muscles, kneads their buttocks to assess the thickness of their flesh, and scrawls a code-number on each man's back so that he can be forwarded like a piece of luggage to the Urals, to west or central Siberia, or to the Mongolian border.

Thus Matthias Rákosi fragmented and eliminated the opposition.

With one more parliamentary seat than the rival Social Democrats, the discouraged Communist Party became nominally the second largest party and grabbed the posts of deputy prime minister and minister of the interior for Rákosi

and Imre Nagy respectively; on November 15th, 1945, this wolf-and-sheep coalition took office.

The Smallholders controlled half the remaining ministries and launched a determined assault on the Moscow-dictated Land Reform Act. The Communists noisily counter-attacked, demanding the dismissal of the more capable Smallholder leaders as reactionary, claiming that they had been Horthy's collaborators and were even now British and American spies. Faced by these tactics – and intimidated by the Soviet occupation forces – the Smallholders' Party backed down and agreed to expel twenty-one of their MPs from the Party.

“After 1946,” recalled Rákosi, “the unmasking, elimination, and isolation of the reactionary elements within the Smallholders' Party continued without interruption. Again and again they were compelled to expel individual members or groups of members thus compromised. By means of these precision methods, these ‘salami tactics’, we smoked out the reactionaries lurking in the Smallholders' Party.”⁵

Rákosi knew that the Smallholders were only waiting for the peace treaty (it was eventually signed in February 1947) when they would dissolve Parliament and make a clean start, holding free elections without Soviet interference. But although the treaty provided for a Soviet withdrawal within ninety days, substantial Russian forces would still remain legally in Hungary – ostensibly guarding the supply lines to the Soviet army then occupying Austria. Not realising this, the Smallholders played for time and were duped into compromising with the Communists; some even prepared actively for the period after the Russians withdrew.

This was their undoing. Béla Kovács, the most outstanding of the Smallholder leaders, had campaigned so forcefully for the vital toehold of minister of the interior in the 1945 Cabinet that he was regarded by the Russians as their number-one enemy. His tactical mistake was to establish contact with an underground organisation preparing secret security forces for the period after the Russians withdrew; this organisation had originated in the Hungarian Community,⁶ a wartime resistance network which had been resurrected by General Louis Dálnoki-Veress, a Transylvanian-born monarchist and anti-Communist released from Russian captivity in April 1946.

Rákosi later said: “In winding up the conspiracy it became evident that its threads led to one of the ministers and even to the secretary-general of the Smallholders’ Party, Béla Kovács.” The upshot was Eastern Europe’s first post-war show trial. Everyone concerned was charged with armed conspiracy; one was hanged. The general was reprieved, having signed all the confessions demanded of him, and the way was clear for Rákosi in February 1947 to take his knife to Béla Kovács himself.

Parliament, still a sovereign body, refused to strip Béla Kovács of his parliamentary immunity and Kovács himself took a courageous and characteristic step: he strolled into 60, Andrásy Street, after telling five fellow MPs to wait for him outside and inform Parliament if he had not re-emerged in two hours’ time. Not many men had done that. An hour later he walked out again. Not many men had done that either. The interview with the security police had been a formality, he said.⁷

He guessed that his freedom was not likely to last long. He took to sleeping in the stone-halled Parliament building itself, and he discussed with friends whether to take refuge in a foreign legation. The Americans discouraged the idea. Finally he resigned himself to being arrested and went home to his wife. The Soviet NKVD pulled him in immediately, alleging that he had engaged in activity endangering Soviet military security.

Béla Kovács, the most hard-nosed opponent of the Communist takeover of Hungary, vanished into the Soviet Union for the next nine years. The Americans made only token protests. This, if nothing else, was proof that the Western powers had delivered up this country to the Soviet caprice.

The silencing of Béla Kovács was the first notch marked up by Rákosi’s new minister of the interior, László Rajk. Rajk was a tall, sinisterly handsome young man with the features of an Abraham Lincoln – high cheekbones and a domed forehead. He had fought in the Spanish Civil War in the “Rákosi” battalion, and had organised the underground Communist movement inside Hungary during the Second World War.⁸

As the father of the security police, no fate could be more ironic or more fitting than that which would shortly befall him at the hands of Rákosi. On his orders many Smallholder members were arrested and tortured as “conspirators”. “From their confessions,” claimed Rákosi, “it became apparent that the con-

spiracy's aim was to re-establish the old capitalist landowner regime to restore the land to its former owners, to deprive the workers and the peasantry of their acquired rights, and to put these plans into effect with armed and bloody terror and with the help of foreign imperialists."

Thus Rákosi progressively re-wrote history to suit his Party. Matters came to a head in May 1947, when the Western powers successfully forced the Communist parties out of the governments in France, Italy and Finland. "To pave the way for the same measures in Hungary," said Rákosi, "they called the Smallholder prime minister, Francis Nagy, to Switzerland. While he was away in Switzerland, evidence was developed in this country revealing that Francis Nagy was the actual leader of the conspiracy." Rákosi – so his version continued – indignantly called on him to return and face the music, but he decided to quit as prime minister and stay in the West. (The truth was, of course, that Rákosi had bribed Francis Nagy heavily never to return, as historian Szolnoki later learned from those tapped telephone transcripts found in the "engine room".) Incidentally, we now know that Rákosi had promised, too, that the former premier's son would be safely allowed to join his father in Switzerland, and that he could keep the car that Stalin had given him.

Quite correctly, Rákosi calculated that, by seeming to have deserted the battlefield, these craven leaders would sow dissension among their lower ranks. Moreover, in the spring of 1947 Rákosi would boast, "The fact that he [Nagy] did not return made it clear to everybody that the charges we laid against him were true."

Three days later, on June 3rd, 1947, Béla Varga, the Smallholder president of Parliament, followed Francis Nagy to the West. Rákosi swiftly exploited the consternation that these defections caused in the opposition ranks. "We left the enemy no time to reorganise and regroup," he bragged. "We called new elections in the weeks when there was the greatest confusion, helplessness, and antagonism inside the new reactionary opposition parties." Probably the Communists rigged the results. At Győr the local police chief smelt a rat and ruled out all blue absentee vote papers.⁹ From the results he deduced that the Communists had probably cheated with these blue ballots throughout the country. When the national votes were counted, Rákosi could indeed lick his lips: his party had apparently overtaken both the Social Democrats and the Smallholders.

The demoralised Smallholders regrouped under a new leader, Stephen Dobi, a spineless habitual drunkard of fifty-five; and since he and his cronies had argued ever since 1945 for collusion with the Communists, the Smallholder threat to Rákosi expired.

But this still left the Social Democrats. As soon as the new government met in September 1947, Rákosi turned his talents to eliminating the “treacherous Social Democratic leaders”.

Basically, the party divided into four in 1945, ranging from a right-wing faction led by A. Valentini and Karl Peyer and not unlike the British Labour Party, to a left-wing faction headed by George Marosán and Paul Justus, who were fronting for the Communists. Nearer the centre was a faction led by Anna Kéthly, Anthony Bán, Francis Szeder and Joseph Takács – the latter two died in jail – a group trying to modernise Marxism; and a corrupt faction led by Árpád Szakasits, who was trying to play off both ends against the middle, engaging in a balancing act between Rákosi’s party and the other left-wing groups.

Rákosi divided, split and harassed these hapless factions until each fried away to nothing, like knobs of butter in a frying pan. First he called on the Social Democrats to repudiate their more right-wing leaders such as Anna Kéthly: late in 1947 the Communists accused several leading Social Democrats of collaborating with “fascist or imperialist spies”. According to Rákosi’s later version, the trickle of indignant members transferring their allegiance to his Communist Party became a torrent: in one week in February 1948 forty thousand new members applied for membership. The leftists tried to cut their losses by convening an open meeting on February 18th and expelling the “more compromised” leaders. This left on the party’s executive committee only Marosán, a burly, foul-mouthed former bakers’ union leader, and the party’s secretary-general, Szakasits, an ex-stonecutter of sixty.

It was obvious that they were planning to sell out to Rákosi. When Szakasits visited Győr in February 1948 for the opening of a new Party headquarters, he spoke of “co-operation for ever, a merger never!” In June 1948, however, the shot-gun wedding took place, and a united “Hungarian Workers’ Party” was born.¹⁰ Backed up by the security police created by the odious Ladislav Rajk, the Communists purged the Social Democrat membership. In Győr the mayor

and several others were forced to resign, and hundreds of former Social Democrats experienced the physical attentions of the security police – torture, the prison cell, or the scaffold.

But that was unimportant in Rákosi's eyes: in June 1948 the unity of the working class, under his “benevolent leadership”, became a fact in Hungary.

5 The High Profile

RÁKOSI'S MARXIST RESTRUCTURING of Hungary bruised the feelings of ordinary people most. Since it was essentially these ordinary people who fought the street battles of the 1956 uprising, and not the intellectuals or the defeated politicians, we must cast our spotlight on them too: what possessed a man to take a gun into his hands; why did a woman brave the cruelly impartial hail of bullets; why did one man put on the hated uniform of the security police, and why did another elect to stay indoors and hide behind the curtains of his mother's home? Enough of these rebels have been psychoanalysed by neutral agencies to enable us to state with certainty what ideas coursed through their minds, what dreams and nightmares impelled them to their desperate actions, and what effect environment, parental upbringing, social status, and place of employment had in shaping their decisions.

Take the case of a twenty-six-year-old Jewish graduate engineer.¹ Interviewed in the United States in August 1957, he admits to having been a young Communist activist at secondary school at sixteen. In 1946, the youth organisation was called the Student Confederation – the Party had stationed branches in every school and classroom. He was the secretary of a class sub-branch. “Most of the boys in my class were anti-Communist,” he reflects. “We engaged in a lot of discussions. I never abused the confidences of my classmates. I was the Communist with whom you could speak. I used to whisper about the good things of Communism. My connections with the Party helped me in my relationships with my classmates. For example, whenever I wanted to plan a discussion or an

excursion I went to the Party secretary for financial assistance. This was one way for me to make the Communist Party seem attractive to the boys.”

He is asked: “What were your impressions when the Communist Party came to power in Hungary?”

“I was happy about it. I thought that by gaining power we would at last be able to do some good for the people.”

“Did anyone try to persuade you that Communism was not a correct belief system?”

“Yes, there was one neighbour. But he was clearly a class-alien – he was a factory owner, and it was obvious that his factory was bound to be taken away from him sooner or later. In all the discussions I had with the opponents of Communism, it was I who had all the arguments because I had gone into Communist theory deeply and they only had general ideas. I could always back up my thoughts with some sort of scientific proof.”

They ask him if he as ever had any close friends, and he shakes his head: “Not really. I could not say I had any close friends.”

“Could you tell me how your disappointment began?”

“It started from the moment I entered the University in 1948,” he explains. “The strongest base of my Communist beliefs was my father’s influence. As things in general went from bad to worse and I saw things which I couldn’t explain, I turned to my father for help. But he only told me about even more things, things that he had found out. My disillusionment was actually a step-by-step retreat. There were the arrests and the maltreatment of the Social Democrats who had been so welcome to the Party at the time of the fusion. The dishonest means to which the Communist Party resorted became more and more apparent; Russian influence was obvious and everywhere. After a while I came to the conclusion, *with my father’s help*” – words which the analyst later underlines in pencil – “that the Russians were compelling us Hungarians to fall below their own living standards. For a long time we had read about how superior the Russians were; now we defended the Russian soldiers with some embarrassment. We were told that Russian industry and agriculture were the finest in the world. But my father was a professional man and so was I, and we knew that these claims were not true. We saw through the *contradictions and the lies*. At the same time, the arrests began, the arrests of politicians and other people. Then

my own father was arrested, and this really brought home to me what was going on. I had heard before about waves of arrests, but they had not meant anything to me. By the spring of 1949 my disillusionment with Communism was complete. I no longer tried to rationalise. I was a broken man, and *became totally passive.*”

University life completed his disillusionment. He was regarded by his fellows as an outcast. “I liked nice modern suits,” he explains, “I shaved every day and wore fresh shirts and neck-ties. But according to my fellows, a good proletarian never wears a nice suit and never, never wears ties. These orthodox Communists had an unwashed appearance. It meant a lot to me, my ambition was to be a neat young man. My way of dress was not the way of the Party. Slowly, I realised that what I wanted did not exist. I had been misled.”

For one substantial group of Hungarians, opting for the Communist Party came quite easily. Since the end of the war in 1945, the nation had been split along invisible religious lines which coincided closely with the front lines drawn by the political parties.

This factor, willingly omitted from many histories of the 1956 uprising, added a crude dimension to the smouldering resentment against the regime: of the nine million citizens in 1939, over seven hundred thousand were Jews. In newspaper caricatures they were shown with beard, earlock and kaftan; they had overrun the more lucrative liberal professions. Under Nazi occupation Hungary began deporting the provincial Jews to the extermination camps, while those in Budapest itself were herded into labour camps. Only about two hundred thousand Jews survived the war, and they understandably greeted the Soviet army as liberators, a posture which only fuelled the flames of the public's historic anti-Semitism.

Here's how a student leader during the uprising, the son of a Party functionary, rationalised his father's decision to join the Communists in 1945. “He was fundamentally a petty bourgeois,” he said when interviewed by sociologists at Oxford afterwards. “He joined the Party for *security*. This desire was very intense, as was the desire to avenge the death of families and loved ones killed by fascists. My father thought that Communism would solve the entire Jewish question. This is the tragedy of the Jewish intellectuals in Eastern Europe,” he added.

“Besides, my father thought that when the Communists obtained power he would be promoted.”²

Spice was added to the poison by the perception that Rákosi’s leading henchmen returning from Moscow were Jews.

There was Ernest Gerő, the slim, vulpine, black-haired organising genius, aloof and friendless, an intense bundle of nervous energy. Born “Ernst Singer”, he had served Béla Kun’s regime and gained notoriety in the Spanish Civil War. It was he who recruited Ramón Mercader, the man who would assassinate Trotsky in 1940.

Then there was the ex-printer’s apprentice Michael Wolf, who became Michael Farkas, Rákosi’s sinister minister of defence after September 9th, 1948. He too soldiered in the Spanish Civil War, spent ten years organising a Communist youth movement in Czechoslovakia, became a full NKVD officer in Moscow and never completely shed his sing-song Slovak-Jewish accent. The fourth man in this quartet, the journalist Joseph Révai, became dictator Rákosi’s “Dr. Goebbels” – his propaganda minister.

The regime’s high Jewish profile caused deep popular resentment, as Jay Schulman, an American sociologist who investigated the phenomenon, emphasised: “The Communist leaders were perceived as Jews by almost 100 per cent of the people we have seen.”³

There was ample proof in their interviews. One well-educated engineer remarked in injured tones that the Jews had brought Communism to Hungary and were the people who were the least injured by it. Jews seemed to him to have landed all the plush jobs. Nearly all the Party’s *funkcionáriusok*, the “funkies”, were Jewish. More important, the senior officers in the hated security police were Jews. He said, “We had no Jewish question before in our town. But after the war we saw them destroy the Hungarian parties . . . That was the beginning of the rising antagonism against them.”⁴ Another man, an assistant professor of economics at the Polytechnic University in Budapest, stated that since the Jews dominated the committee responsible for assigning professors, “Jews always got these positions”.⁵

Paradoxically, the anti-Semitism generated by the Communist activities was so pervasive that many Jews were themselves infected by it. The “big Jews” in the Party leadership trampled on so many small Jewish businessmen and manu-

facturers – these Jews were robbed, expropriated and humiliated – that they forgot their own Jewishness and joined the general outcry. Jews who had been wealthy manufacturers were reduced to ordinary craftsmen, skilled workers or tailors. The sons of the Jewish intelligentsia found themselves denied university admission. Thus the Jewish honeymoon with the Communists lasted only until about 1950, although many Jews remained “good understanders”⁶ – they could rationalise and excuse even the worst excesses of the regime.

A thirty-four-year-old Jewish paper-cutter had been a Social Democrat for ten years until the party merged with the Communists in 1948, whereupon he left. He said, “What the Jewish Communists did stuck in people’s memories. The people connected their miseries with the Jews . . . The people saw only the twenty Jews who were among a hundred Communist Party members, not the other eighty.”⁷ He himself turned into such a violent anti-Semite that he killed a Jewish security police officer with his bare hands during the uprising. He loathed his fellow-Jews for, as he put it, “using their positions for revenge”. He watched the creeping anti-Semitism grip the country, but could not see Rákosi’s cronies doing anything to reduce it. “It was a funny thing,” he testified in 1956, “in the last years people didn’t see an ÁVO [security police] uniform or a Communist Party official – but only Jews.” He dreamt of the day when some tidal wave would engulf these oppressors, and he could start up his own printing business.

To a significant extent the refugees interviewed after the uprising were anti-Jewish. The basic revulsion was not hard to find beneath the cultural veneer of even the demurest refugees. Sometimes the sociologists had to probe a little deeper, but the worm was always there, waiting to be hooked out and displayed wriggling on the analyst’s notepad.

Thus on February 5th, 1957, at Cornell University, psychiatrist Dr. Richard M. Stephenson interviewed young Erika Szalay, a religious and attractive girl.

“All the key jobs were held by Jews,” said Erika. “I used to wonder why Catholics and Lutherans couldn’t get these jobs. There were lots of Jews in Pápa, but none of them did physical labour and none of their wives worked either.”

She began looking round uncomfortably as though to make sure that none of Stephenson’s staff could overhear her remarks.

He asked: “Why do you think the Jews were at an advantage? Did the Jews support the regime more?”

Erika shrugged. “I don’t know, but because the Jews had the key positions . . .”

Her voice tailed away unconvincingly. She began again. “The boss of my factory was a Jew.” Then: “They *must* have supported the regime! Otherwise, how could they have got there?”

They found many different ways of saying it, but the underlying reproach was always the same. An engineer, comparing the factories with the Soviet-style co-operative associations, mentioned: “The leaders of these co-operatives were always Cohens and Schwarzes.” Questioned as to whether he knew of any Jewish workers on the shop floor of his medical supplies factory, he replied: “No. The Jews always worked in the office.”⁸

Another Hungarian described pathetically how he wept once when he met an older Jew, because he saw in him the likeness of his childhood friend, the man’s son who had never returned from Nazi deportation.⁹ But under closer questioning he admitted defiantly: “It is a well-known fact that the Jews are in the political foreground.”

The American analyst glanced up questioningly at him and saw “pogroms in his eyes”, as he vividly phrased it in his report. The man confirmed his definition: “*I hate their guts!*”

Ironically this public perception of the “favoured Jew” was often quite untrue. Béla Szász, who was on the committee selecting candidates for induction into Rákosi’s Foreign Office, recalls: “Rákosi specifically told me in 1947 or 1948 not to take on Jews.”

The Jews who had been excluded from the privileged niches in the Communists’ new society developed powerful defence mechanisms. They learned instinctively how to steer clear of trouble.

In this typical case Hungarian fascists threw a thirty-two-year-old lawyer into a labour camp in November 1944; they took away his two sisters too, but rejected his mother as too old to work: voluntarily she joined her daughters and starved to death with them in 1945. When American troops liberated Mauthausen camp he was a fifty-eight-pound living skeleton. He regained his health, became a six-foot-two law student and passed top of his class. But as soon as the border began leaking – during the uprising of 1956 – this man fled his native

country. His seventy-three-year-old father wept to see his only son desert him, but the son rationalised to himself: “I can help him with more money if I go abroad.”

The psychiatrists studying him in the United States were intrigued by this case. When they asked him: “Whom do you hate more as a Jew – the Nazis or the Communists?” he equivocated.

On March 22nd, 1957, a panel of specialists confidentially discussed him. Dr. Lawrence E. Hinkle Jr., an expert on Communist brainwashing techniques and associate professor of Clinical Medicine at Cornell Medical School, reported: “One of the most remarkable things to me about this man is how he has developed the technique of survival.” The lawyer could not be tempted into expressing an emotionally-charged opinion on even the most sensitive topics. “For example, he not only discussed dispassionately what the Germans had done to the Jews, but he could also give you the argument which the Nazis had advanced for their anti-Semitism, and give it a certain ring of credibility.”

6 Takeover

THE INITIAL PERIOD of political elbowing and shin-kicking lasted three years. While this parliamentary in-fighting was still going on, Rákosi had defused the parallel struggle for control of the armed forces by keeping them below the strength permitted by the 1947 peace treaty. There were sound tactical reasons for this: his Party already controlled the wealthy ministry of the interior and thus the powerful national police force. But the defence ministry was controlled by a Smallholder politician, Eugene Tombor, so the regular army was held at only twelve thousand instead of nearly seventy thousand. This enhanced the Communists' small toehold in the army; and Soviet-trained officers used every trick to subvert it to Moscow's interests.

"Orientation officers" were introduced under first the former Horthyite colonel Stephen Belezny (who would hang in 1951) and then Major Francis Jánosi, a former army chaplain converted to Communism in Soviet captivity, who was now the son-in-law of Imre Nagy.¹ In addition "D"-officers, or security police, were introduced into the army units with the Counter Intelligence Corps type role of hunting down war criminals. Nobody was more active in using these units to mop up the leading combat-experienced officers, who had fought most gallantly against the Soviet Union, than the "D"-officer commander Lieutenant-General George Pálffy. Pálffy, born "Georg Österreicher", on September 16th, 1909, had been cashiered in 1940 by Horthy's army for becoming engaged to the niece of Tibor Szamuely, Kun's notorious Red Terror chief; he had slid into the ranks of the Communist underground. Aided by his chief of staff Colonel Dezső Németh and generals Gustav Illy and Ladislav Sóllyom, he purged

the army of every potentially anti-Soviet officer. Thousands were arrested, executed, or handed over to the Soviet Union.

The Communist takeover battle in the army was cruelly fought. Defence minister Eugene Tombor died at his desk in 1946; his successor, General Albert Bartha, fled into exile in September 1947, and his successor, Peter Veres, the writer and woolly-minded leader of the left-wing Peasant Party, was bent only on collaboration with the Communists when he took over. A weak and fawning defence minister, Veres played straight into Soviet hands, and even appointed Pálffy inspector-general of the army that summer. A Soviet-style army academy was opened, the Kossuth Academy, under General Kálmán Révay, who had been a secret Communist all along.

After Rákosi's final parliamentary victory on September 9th, 1948, the hard-line Communist Michael Farkas presided over the first military parade of the new People's Army as the new minister of defence.

The Hungarian army had never seen the like of the men who were now packaged into its proud old officers' uniform. Former tram driver Stephen Bata stepped into a colonel's regalia. He had served with Rákosi in Moscow, he held Soviet citizenship and would become chief of staff. Stephen Szabó, agitator; Karl Janza, labourer; and Michael Szalvay, former bricklayer commissioned during the Spanish Civil War, would all become lieutenant-generals. Béla Székely, teacher; Tibor Berczelli, electrician, and a shambling throng of even less probable candidates would become major-generals. Rákosi recalled nostalgically in 1952: "The officers were recruited from workers and peasants . . . and as they visited their former factories or native villages, they demonstrated by their mere presence the shift in the balance of power between the classes."²

All this only increased the disgruntlement of the educated classes. A twenty-six-year-old engineering graduate would later describe what he experienced when he was conscripted for three years' service in 1953: "Most of the 'officers' were the sons of peasants and workers. I had to do the work of the officers. The whole army of the People's Democracy was kept in shape and supported by middle-class chaps like myself, instead of the officers . . . The officers merely signed the communications."³

Farkas tightened the Communist screws on this army. The orientation officer became a "political officer", modelled on the Soviet commissar. These

political officers had to countersign every order and could overrule the regular commander of their units; they came from proven Communist cadres, and were schooled at the Petőfi Military Academy in Budapest. In November 1948 the first Soviet “advisers” arrived. Soviet regulations, accommodation standards, salutes, eating habits and – in 1951 – Red Army uniforms were introduced.

What the dictator also termed a “desperate struggle” had gone on within the police. Rákosi gloated: “There was one position on which our Party staked its claim from the first minute, and here we were not disposed to consider any allocation of posts or appointments according to the proportionate strengths of the other parties in the coalition. This was the State Security Section, the ÁVO. We took a tight grip on this organisation from the very first day it was set up.”⁴

The unloved security police force had been spawned in December 1944, when the provisional government at Debrecen sent twenty-two men for training as political police. The ÁVO had been created in 1947 from this embryo police force, with headquarters at 60, Andrásy Street in Budapest.

The boss of this force since its birth, a forty-year-old former underground Communist, Gábor Péter, was the man who had hooked young Kim Philby for the international Communist movement in pre-war Vienna, using the young divorcée Litzi Friedmann as bait.⁵ Born “Benjamin Auschpitz” in Eastern Hungary, this tailor’s assistant became one of Stalin’s most zealous terrorists. With a characteristic tailor’s stoop he was often charming and always cruel. Péter required that his ÁVO be staffed at officer level primarily by Jews. Many were Hungarian-born citizens; most had been trained by the NKVD, Stalin’s own secret police. Permanent NKVD officers were on hand to advise the newcomers at every level. Eventually every Hungarian police precinct would have its ÁVO section, and the ÁVO attached *elhárítók* (counter-intelligence officers) to every army battalion.

Péter took his orders directly from Lieutenant-General Theodore Bielkin, a sadistic NKVD chieftain who headed Soviet security operations from quarters outside Vienna, until the tongue of Stalin’s anti-Semitic passions flickered and extinguished him in the Fifties.⁶ The ÁVO’s brief period of subordination to the Hungarian ministry of the interior ended on December 28th, 1949, when it became an independent body with ministerial rank, re-named the *Államvédelmi Hatóság* or ÁVH.⁷ The new body controlled both the security police and the

military frontier guards, and it reported directly to the Council of Ministers, Rákosi's Cabinet. But the martyred people never forgot the original agency, and referred to the security policemen as "ÁVOs" to the end.

Eventually the ÁVH would number some 35,000 men. Its personnel was screened by the NKVD, paid inflated salaries and a special bonus, given free food and cheap accommodation. At Andrásy Street the ÁVH and NKVD nerve-centres were linked by one narrow iron door. The fortress-like building always seemed to be swarming with construction men endlessly adapting its innards. But the gaunt façade always remained the same.

The agency used methods of legendary horribleness. What matter how true the allegations were? They were willingly believed by the public. "My second cousin," recalled a sixteen-year-old schoolboy, "was drafted into the ÁVO. He was twenty-five but he said his nerves were ruined by watching ÁVO methods . . . Sometimes he mentioned things like: 'What a fine place 60, Andrásy Street is – it's very handy for the Danube and for making people disappear.' He told me they had a grinder for the bodies."⁸ (The ÁVH's "body-grinder" figured in a significant number of post-uprising interviews.)

"In 1948 or 1949 my wife was arrested," recalled one bus driver.⁹ "She hadn't reported that a friend had tried to leave the country."

"How long did your wife actually spend in prison?"

"A year and a half."

"How was she treated?"

"The bones in her wrists were broken. She spent thirty-three days with the ÁVH and as a result she has no teeth. All of her teeth are false. She also contracted pneumonia in prison. She was told over and over again that if she is a good citizen she is obliged to report people who wish to escape from a people's democracy."

Rákosi's office at Academy Street was a labyrinth ruled over by the soft-spoken young wife of Gábor Péter, Joan Simon. The day would come when she, too, would be cast into Rákosi's dungeons and tortured.

Rákosi himself sat noiselessly behind padded doors, plotting further details of his takeover. The press was purged, and a network of security police, internment camps and informers unfolded across the helpless captives of this country.

The people starved, shivered, and feared. The Communists changed the currency and introduced a catastrophic Three-Year Plan. It was replaced in 1949 by the “Molotov Plan”, under which Moscow controlled Hungary’s economy, dictated production targets and deliveries, and stated the Soviet right to buy from Hungary *below* world prices and to sell to her *above* them. It was a mad recipe for bankruptcy. Hungarians, whose land had been one of agricultural surplus under earlier regimes, now stood in queues outside the foodstores for the first time. Consumer goods were almost unobtainable.

The country’s bosses were oblivious to this misery. Imre Nagy, who had his office in another wing of the Party headquarters overlooking a side street, spoke once on the beginnings of this grisly regime and on the ensuing years of “trial and error”. He blamed the errors on unnamed internal enemies, and tactfully did not mention trials at all.

George Orwell could not have put a more eloquent apologia into the mouth of one of his characters in *Animal Farm* than Nagy’s speech: “It has been the most ardent desire of millions of Hungarians to live to see the day when they could spend their time in honest labour and enjoy its fruits undisturbed. But the enemies of the people, the followers of the old regime, instigated a desperate fight against our democratic achievements and against the peaceful life of the working people. Instead of creative, constructive labour, the energy of the new democracy had for years to be diverted to the struggle against the internal enemy, until our working class gained complete mastery.”

The most dangerous of these internal enemies were the Churches. Under the 1947 peace treaty, they had seemed inviolate: “Hungary,” defined that treaty, “shall take all measures necessary to secure all persons under Hungarian jurisdiction, without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion, the enjoyment of human rights and the fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression and publication, of religious worship, of political opinion and of public meeting.”

One could almost hear Rákosi guffaw, as he spoke about his new salami tactics in 1952: “The Churches fought almost united against us from 1945 to 1948 . . . First of all we broke up the reactionary united front of the Churches. By making use of the democratic possibilities in the Reformed Calvinist and Evangelical Lutheran Churches, we were able to mobilise the believers who

sympathised with us. On their demand, an agreement was reached in 1948 in the spirit of mutual indulgence and understanding, which ensured the peaceful co-existence of the People's Democracy and those Churches."

The Catholic Church had been the most powerful force. Two-thirds of the country was Catholic. But this Church remained implacable. At the time of the land reform enforced by Imre Nagy in 1945, the Catholic Church had owned about 1,235,000 acres and this was now robbed from them. Rákosi nationalised the Church schools, confiscated their property, and told the security police to harass church-goers: attending a religious ceremony was entered on cadre-cards as a black mark.

Nearly all the monasteries were confiscated, the nuns and monks were deported to distant villages and dumped on peasants to generate fresh hatred against the Churches. Vicious literature was printed, promoting an image of the clergy as either sexually perverted or living in concubinage with their women servants. Nuns were made the object of ridicule, and if a sick man wished to see a priest, he had to make an application in writing.

One towering figure personified the might of the Catholic Church in Hungary – the Prince Primate, ranking traditionally second to the head of state. Since September 17th, 1945, this man was Cardinal Mindszenty.

Born Joseph Péhm on March 29th, 1892, in the humble village of Mindszent from which he later adopted his name, the cardinal was a striking personality: strong-willed, quixotic, old-fashioned and impractical, of dark complexion and stubborn, aquiline features, there was perhaps even a hint of the fanatic about him. He had been known for pronounced anti-Semitic views as Bishop of Veszprém, and for failing to protest at the deportation of Jews in 1944 – or so a US intelligence report from Budapest stated confidentially in November 1945.¹⁰ But he had helped the anti-Nazi resistance through a Count Pálffy, and this count used his Vatican connections to see that Mindszenty was raised to Prince Primate. "There is little doubt that he is bitterly anti-Communist," the American report had confirmed. "He will not find it easy to steer a judicious course for Catholicism in the uncharted seas of Hungary's social revolution." In a pastoral letter two days before the November 1945 election, the cardinal had urged Church members to vote against the labour parties.

Over the next few years, the regime's campaign against him took effect. In his earthy, blunt language, Rákosi discussed without any inhibitions how he eliminated this crusty old opponent: "After unmasking the reactionary leaders of the Smallholders' Party as agents of the American imperialists, and . . . after the treacherous Social Democratic leaders and also the Pfeiffer people had shared the same fate, it was the turn of the anti-democratic leaders of the Catholic Church . . . The Hungarian People's Democracy, however, was on the alert and brought Cardinal Mindszenty to trial, and this threw light on his own activities and those of his companions, and it revealed that under the cover of the Church they had not only planned to restore the old landlord-capitalist order but also the hated Hapsburg regime."

The secret police came for the cardinal in December 1948. He had evidently been tipped off by a high-ranking Party funky, and his chaplain Béla Ispánky urged him to burn all his papers; but the cardinal placed some of the more precious items in a metal cylinder and hid it. That cylinder was an exhibit in the trial that followed. On February 8th, 1949, the cardinal was sentenced to life imprisonment for treason, for espionage and for currency violations – largely on the basis of forged letters to the US envoy, Selden Chapin, who was thrown out of Hungary.¹¹ Rákosi derided the American and United Nations protests and scoffed at the opinion of the International Court of Justice that Hungary was bound to abide by the peace treaty.¹²

Two years later Archbishop Dr. Joseph Grösz, the leading surviving Catholic dignitary, and the Lutheran Bishop Ladislas Ordass were also arrested, tried and confessed.

A darkness meanwhile descended around Cardinal Mindszenty, and it would take a national uprising to restore him and the other martyrs to the light of day.

7 The Tortured Silence

SOMEbody ONCE ASKED the difference between a democracy and a People's Democracy, and got the answer: "It's the difference between a jacket and a strait-jacket."

Rákosi put democracy into that strait-jacket.

On May 15th, 1949, he held new elections. There was a single slate of candidates – a popular front. Ninety-four per cent of the electorate voted for them; there was no alternative. The country collapsed into the crudest dictatorship.

Rákosi was to claim in 1952: "The working people accepted undividedly the leadership of our Party . . . The election was conducted with unprecedented enthusiasm, and the parade of five million voters before the polls became a gigantic pageant, a stormy joint demonstration of liberated workers, which did not fail to impress even the enemy." This, he scoffed, was what his opponents slandered as "the oppressive dictatorship of a minority".¹

After this contrived electoral landslide, the new Parliament approved a Soviet-style constitution. But the real power lay in the hands of the Party – its 120-member Central Committee, and its august Politburo. And inside even these bodies, as Rákosi's rivals like Imre Nagy privately recognised, power was no longer in the hands of the Party's elected organs but in the sinister "Jewish quartet", as Rákosi and his henchmen Gerő, Farkas and Révai were known.

In fact this foursome was further narrowed to an actual leadership by Rákosi and Gerő alone [Nagy wrote]. They failed to inform the secretariat and still less the Politburo about important matters. They made decisions

and took action in matters outside their jurisdiction. They formed opinions in advance on various questions and then had these opinions passed as resolutions. They did not regard the other members of the Party's elected organs as equals – they looked down on them.²

Elsewhere in his furtive writings Imre Nagy would criticise:

The corruption of power and the rise of Bonapartism could not have occurred without the degeneration of Party life – that is, the cliquish Party leadership became a personal dictatorship. Rákosi put himself above the will and the opinions of the Party membership and he ignored the decisions of the Party. He subordinated the Party to his will and, with dictatorial methods – primarily with the aid of the security police – forced the Party to dance to his tune.

A tortured silence now cloaked town and country alike. It was the silence of the graveyard.

Domestic and foreign enterprises, large and small, were taken over, while Rákosi forced through an unrealistic crash-plan to convert this backward peasant country into an industrial power.³ Under this Five-Year Plan, announced in 1950, immense and painful migrations of labour and human beings were enforced. The urban labour force nearly doubled. In some counties the increase in industrial labour at the expense of the land population was staggering. Six hundred per cent growth in Komárom County, 560 per cent in Fejér County, 540 per cent in Pest, and Bács-Kiskun.⁴

Too many sections of the community were hurt in the process: the peasants were given parcels of land, admittedly, but found that they were denied the capital needed to develop them; soon after that, collectivisation, another Marxist shibboleth, was enforced and the peasants were hit even harder.

Under the new regime, the industrial workers found themselves reduced to slaves. They were allocated work-norms that they could never fulfil. Since one wage packet no longer sufficed for a family, the womenfolk had to go into the factories too, and families felt this as a personal insult. In this way millions

were alienated by the men returning from Moscow, and the muted muttering began.

“What is the difference between Communism and slavery?”

“Easy. At the time of slavery there was no telephone or radio.”

The memory of sour riddles like these haunted those who fled in 1956. Take the case of a fourteen-year-old boy from the Kőbánya slums, learning machine patterning. In 1950 a factory on Csepel Island, in south Budapest, needed labour, so it plucked him out of training and put him on a production line instead. He soon found out the truth behind the Marxist slogans. The factory had “Stakhanovites”, hand-picked workers who allegedly produced many times their set norms.

“Look at that one, he takes home 3,000 florins a month, he has a house and everything he wants. All that could be yours too!”

By a superhuman effort, a worker might then manage to exceed norm by perhaps 180 per cent. But the very next week he would find that this 180 per cent had become his new norm. In this Communist system of the constantly upgraded norm, the workers were like rats in a speeding treadmill, galloping, galloping all day long.

Every pawn in this gigantic power-game had his own rating, marked on a secret dossier – his *káder lap*. Under Rákosi's rule the word “cadre” lost its teutonic military origins and took on terrifying connotations. It defined a man's class-origins, and these in turn ruled inexorably over his future: his eligibility for higher commission as an officer, high-paid jobs, the length of prison sentences.

The entire Hungarian population became obsessed with its cadre-rating, inscribed on the top of the dossier, ranging from *M* for *munkás*, worker, and *P* for *paraszt*, peasant – the two most exalted ratings – right down to the finely differentiated *É* and *E*, denoting *értelmiség* and *egyéb* for the mistrusted “intellectual” and “et cetera” respectively.

Nobody could aspire to a higher rating than *M-I*. These were the sons of miners, of metal workers, of high Party funkies or of ÁVH officials.

But even an *E* could look down his nose at somebody, because beneath him came a sub-rating, a non-class category of mortals: woe betide the man or woman whose dossier was endorsed with a letter *X*. These were the *déclassés*, the “class-

aliens”, born the sons of former officers, noblemen or servants of the Horthy regime, or members of once-wealthy families. The letter *X* was a sword of Damocles dangled over each of them, a permanent threat to their rights and liberties.

The cadre-dossier would hound a man and defeat his dreams and aspirations. It was a shadow over which no man could jump all his life long.

The new Soviet-style constitution gave the Communists the power to terrorise the recalcitrant arbitrarily.

Before Rákosi's takeover, the basis of the law had been the *BTK*, or *Büntető Törvény Könyv* of 1878. It was objective and unambiguous: people knew where they stood. That did not suit the Marxist game at all; Rákosi wanted a flexible system, whereby a landowning peasant or a kulak who had decided to fry bacon for breakfast in a field could be sentenced to death for “endangering the crops”. That was a quick way to eliminate the enemies of his new society.

At first the executive power of Rákosi's new state was wielded by the Public Prosecutor. His office was above even the ÁVH, as the security police now became. While the new laws were short, the subjective rules whereby the judges were to interpret them were laid down in bulky secret bulletins which even the lawyers did not receive.

The prosecutor could reject a witness requested by a defendant as “harmful to the interests of the state”. Cases of a political nature were handled by a special section of the prosecutor's office, “double-zero”, headed by the ÁVH officer Paul Bakos; and his job was to allow only lawyers on an approved double-zero list to handle the prosecution or defence. In double-zero cases, even the indictment was a state secret which neither prisoner nor attorney was allowed to see.⁵

Supervisory power over the new ÁVH rested in the hands of the Minister of the Interior, but only in theory. Just as Stalin directly controlled his NKVD, so Rákosi – and to a lesser extent Gerő and Farkas – dictated over the minister's head to the ÁVH.

By 1949 the minister of the interior was János Kádár, a self-effacing grey man in a grey suit which always seemed one size too large for him.⁶ Kádár had replaced his wartime resistance friend and idol Ladislav Rajk as minister on August 3rd, 1948. He was a big man with thinning mousy hair, brown eyes and

an intense face; a sad, ascetic figure who shared none of the other funkies' predilections for food, drink and expensive clothing. Born in Fiume in May 1912 of a wandering Slovak peasant girl after her brief encounter with an enlisted soldier in that port, Kádár had earned a living delivering newspapers in Budapest, and then, after leaving school at fourteen, as a toolmaker's apprentice. He had spent his evenings reading or playing chess by the light of a streetlamp. By nineteen he was a Communist youth worker answering to the name of "János Barna". When Moscow ordered the national Communist Parties to infiltrate the other working-class movements in 1936, he slid on to the committee of a Budapest branch of the Social Democratic Party. He joined the wartime Communist underground and struggled to keep it together when the Party's two top leaders were caught and hanged in 1942.

Under his new name of János Kádár, he took over the whole Party when Rajk, his friend and partner, was arrested in 1943. He dissolved it, replacing it with a wartime front, the "Peace Party". In April 1944 the new party decided to establish contact with the émigré leaders in Moscow via Marshal Joseph Tito's partisan forces in neighbouring Yugoslavia. Kádár was captured while attempting to cross the border river but escaped and returned to Budapest.

After the Soviet occupation of the city, he worked hand-in-glove with Gábor Péter on the organisation of a police force, became its deputy police chief, and took on the job of first secretary of the Budapest Party organisation.

The views expressed by János Kádár were unequivocal. "Power, comrades, is of supreme importance in the class war," he told workers at Salgótarján. "If one class in society has the power it can do anything it wants. Therefore the aim in class war must always be – Power!"⁷

Announcing his appointment as minister in 1948, the Party newspaper *Free People* ended its ritual eulogy on Kádár: "Our people are thus blessed with a minister of the interior who has raised himself from a simple worker's son to this lofty niche among the leaders of the Party and the country."⁸

Kádár did not attempt to court popularity. After he crushed the 1956 uprising with Soviet military assistance illicit wallposters appeared, which announced: "Wanted: Premier for Hungary. Qualifications – no sincere convictions; no backbone; ability to read and write not essential, but must be able to sign documents drawn up by others." This under-estimated the man's own ability and his single-

minded determination to fight “revisionism and bourgeois nationalism” with what he called “all the intolerance of Lenin and the Bolsheviks”.

His manner was rough and proletarian. He was a moving public speaker and because of his apparent sincerity he was very effective. He saw no need to mince his language. Once, after the uprising was crushed, he explained: “A tiger cannot be tamed by bait. It can be tamed and pacified only one way, by beating it to death.” Weeks later, as the defeated revolutionaries mounted the gallows, Kádár would declare unblushingly that the time had come for the proletarian dictatorship to show its “punitive ability”.

The prison population began to swell. The notorious ÁVH remand prison in Budapest’s high street – Fő utca – became the first post to hell for hundreds of thousands. Built in an age when prisons were still prisons, Fő utca reeked of a century of penal history, from the porter’s armoured cubby hole to its impenetrable masonry and its low, vaulted gangways lit by coloured bulbs.

Shuffling groups of frightened men softly padded past in felt-soled slippers, while warders whistled prearranged signals to denote their charges’ priority: who should pass on and who should get the sudden order: “Stop! Face the wall and don’t look round.” It was an important element of terror that next-of-kin never learned what had happened to their vanished relatives.⁹

There was hardly a family in Hungary which had not been scarred by an encounter with the hated “ÁVOs”.

A Budapest mushroom farmer of fifty was arrested in April 1949 soon after his youngest daughter.¹⁰ She was pulled in first, by mistake, when ÁVH men swooped on two youngsters in the same railway compartment at Győr; the two youngsters had evidently been planning to escape. At the remand prison she had to stand up to her waist in cold water all night, until after three days she was too ill for further interrogation. Of course there was nothing she could confess to, so they broke her left arm and imprisoned her for a year.

When her equally innocent father was arrested a few days after her, he was taken to the ÁVH headquarters. “I was not told why I had been arrested, but I was taken to a soundproof room where my hands were tied and the rope was strung through a ring in the ceiling. I was pulled up to the ceiling and my shoes were taken off and my legs, back and feet were beaten with a rubber hose.”

This was repeated over three or four days. At no time was he even questioned. On December 19th, 1949, he was freed, again with no explanation.

The ÁVH was a law unto itself. The whole country knew, or believed it knew, of its methods. Some rumoured techniques were probably true: the glass catheter tube, inserted into a man's penis through the urinary tract then smashed with a blow of the fist, figured in many prisoners' stories.

Less fortunate funkies, such as the secretary-general of the Hungarian United Nations association, George Pálóczi-Horváth learned the truth at first hand.

Arrested in the summer of 1949 and thrown into a tiny refrigerator of a cell lit day and night by a naked bulb, he was kept brutally awake for three weeks to make him more pliable. (The ÁVH required his confession that the UN association was a spy organisation.) The thousands of empty minutes dragged past, while the screw was turned. He did not know that so many ways existed to torture mind and body.

"Sleeplessness, hunger, degradation, filthy insults to human dignity, the knowledge that we were utterly at the mercy of the ÁVO – all this was not enough," he wrote in 1956. "They told us they would arrest our wives and children and torment them in front of us. We heard women and children screaming in adjacent rooms. Was it all play-acting for our benefit? I still don't know."¹¹

Thousands went permanently out of their minds. The victims of these mental disorders baffled American psychiatrists. They at first thought them clever liars preying on Western sympathies, like the former "victims of Nazi concentration camps" who turned up in thousands to trick gullible Jewish relief agencies out of funds – a comparison made by Cornell psychoanalyst Dr. George Devereux after a sixteen-hour interrogation of one Hungarian "freedom fighter".

This twenty-eight-year-old had told a tale of personal heroism and leadership, while biting his finger nails and smoking heavily. He gave his name as János Szabó, a name evidently robbed at random from one of the rebel leaders, who was being executed in fact on that same day in Budapest. He described his childhood poverty, and yet his mother had employed a housemaid and cook. During the uprising he once set off on a daredevil errand on "a bicycle"; by the time he arrived it was a "motorbike".

Devereux was inclined to see in him an extreme neurotic in an almost hypomanic stage, needing urgent therapy. “He weaseled around on whether or not he himself had actually executed a traitor, or had ordered the execution – or what.”¹²

And yet wisps of truth did shroud his story: his initial arrest by the ÁVH on October 20th, 1950, had occurred after an illegal border crossing from Yugoslavia. He had actually walked into the ÁVH post at Szeged and surrendered, the characteristic act of a scared spy. He claimed not to have been working for the American “CIC”, an espionage organisation.

“I think he was involved in something somehow,” reported another analyst, Sigmund Mezey. “Maybe he *was* a spy.”

In ÁVH prison the man had become fascist-minded: he talked openly about “these dirty Jews, they run this whole organisation”, meaning the ÁVH. He referred to the jailers as animals, who only carried out the orders given them by the Jews.

He described the engines of torture used by the ÁVH in Fő utca prison, ranging from a “torture box” that was too short to stand in but impossible to sit in and a room of mirrors, to a water-filled cell and a chair bolted on to a trap door set to plunge a captive to instant death and dismemberment in a giant meat-mangle.

His listeners at Cornell became frankly sceptical, and yet he did bear the marks of torture: his fingernails had been pulled out, and his upper and lower molars were missing, replaced with clumsy dentures.

Loyal Communists hoped that all these atrocity rumours were just “enemy propaganda”. One former Party journalist – later an editor on the revolutionary tabloid *Independence (Függetlenség)* made this plain to the American interviewers in 1956.¹³ Thirty-seven, a nervous-looking, wiry male of about five-foot-six, dressed meticulously in sports jacket and flannels, he smiled intensely at them.

“As a Communist journalist,” he began, “I was convinced that I was right. I liked to debate with journalists of different persuasions. But after 1949 the Social Democratic Party and the other parties were destroyed. Even the uniform of the Hungarian army was changed. I could no longer write about what I wanted . . .

“In the meantime I had a girlfriend who had joined the wartime resistance and fought in Tito’s partisan army too. I only later came to realise that in the eyes of my Party she was a kulak, she was treated very badly, and merely because her family had been very rich before the war and she herself had been educated in Switzerland and in France. The first time that she was harassed by the Communists she made up her mind to leave the country. But she was caught by the ÁVH and sent to prison . . .

“She told me later what they did to her in prison. This was the first time that I became aware of what was going on in the country.”

8 Trial and Error

LATE IN 1949 Hungary's dictator Rákosi staged his most spectacular show trial, probably on orders from the Kremlin. His victim was Ladislav Rajk, architect of the police state, whom Rákosi probably had good grounds to envy and fear. Stalin had decided to purge the indigenous Communist leaders in all the Iron Curtain countries, in favour of those, such as Rákosi, who had "wintered" in Moscow.

In its cold-blooded conception and diabolical execution, the Rajk trial is still without parallel. In the Party's rank and file it induced a psychological crisis: his friends could scarcely believe that Rajk had committed such infamous crimes, yet when he came to trial he publicly confessed them all.

When the secret police smashed into Rajk's home before dawn and took him away on May 30th, 1949, Rajk was just forty. Born in 1909 in Transylvania, son of a shoeshop owner, he had been imprisoned for Communist agitation in 1932, and wounded fighting in Spain; in 1944 the Hungarian fascists had interned him. His credentials on his release from Dachau concentration camp in May 1945 therefore seemed impeccable. But there were two blemishes — he was not Jewish and, unlike Rákosi, he had not been an émigré in Moscow. The élitist camarilla around Rákosi treated Rajk with contempt.

His wife Julia was arrested at the same time. Their little boy was taken away from them. For four months she heard nothing but the stomping of the jailers in Budapest's Central Prison. Then one night she heard a tumult in the prison yard, followed by a solemn silence suddenly broken by the terse command: "Géza, let justice take its course!"

A stool clattered over.

There were more muffled sounds, then a gruff voice announced: "He is dead."¹

The wheels of this extraordinary intrigue had started whirring after Yugoslavia formally broke off relations with the Soviet Union. Marshal Joseph Tito favoured establishing a Balkan confederation independent of Moscow's influence, with Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania. Rákosi was deeply envious of Tito — his own prestige as a pre-war top dog in the Communist International was waning, while Tito's fame as a wartime partisan commander was worldwide. When Tito came to Budapest at the end of 1947, Rákosi avoided meeting him by going to Moscow. Afterwards he acted the typical agent provocateur, secretly encouraging Tito's disloyalty and then sending him a virulent letter in May 1948, backing Moscow. The Belgrade Communists replied with a stinging rebuke, denying Rákosi the right to interfere in their private dispute with Moscow. Rákosi flew into a theatrical rage and called Tito treacherous, vicious and renegade. Four years later he would attack him in a speech, saying: "We can see every day how the misery of the Yugoslav workers is growing, how the independence of the country is being whittled away, and how the country is becoming more and more a satellite and slave of the warmongers."

The arrest of Rajk was Rákosi's way of taking revenge. Had not the great Stalin predicted that as the struggle intensified the defeated class-enemy would establish an active bridgehead inside the Communist Party itself? Thus Rákosi's crusade against "Titoism" in Hungary began that same year, in 1948. Thousands of suspects were arrested and deported or executed.

Rajk headed his black list.

Béla Szász, one of his friends, describes how Rákosi began to set the stage. On May Day 1949, instead of taking his place on the big reviewing stand for the military parade, Rákosi joined Rajk on a small saluting base, as though to honour him: "It was a dramatic contrast," says Szász, "Rákosi, ugly Jewish dwarf that he was, and the elegant, handsome young minister at his side. It was typical of Rákosi to make a big fuss over his victim in the last days of his liberty."

Of course, it was all just a blind to conceal his real intentions. This was why, as early as August 1948, he had appointed Rajk foreign minister instead of minister of the interior. The intended victim was thus promoted just before his “unmasking”, to underline its total unexpectedness.

Simultaneously Rákosi hatched an elaborate plot to frame Tito. A Yugoslav student had been murdered in Budapest, and the police now announced that the Yugoslav press attaché, Zhivkov Boarov, was the murderer. Under pressure he signed a confession. Evidently the intention had been to coerce this unfortunate diplomat into implicating Tito himself. This plan was dropped in favour of framing the ambassador and ultimately – as the ambassador was recalled – his chargé d’affaires was secretly selected as scapegoat instead.

That man is Lazarus Brankov – thirty-five, a former Serbian lawyer, journalist and partisan officer.² He admits to having had many long, private talks with Rajk in his apartment or on hunting trips. No doubt Rajk’s flat has been bugged by police experts, because transcripts of these conversations will later be shown to Brankov.

Brankov thus becomes a key witness to the inside story of the Rajk trial. As he will escape during the uprising of 1956, his lengthy testimony is available in American files. It proves an unsavoury, tapeworm’s view of the inner entrails of a police state.

It is October 1948, when Rákosi orders the kidnapping of Brankov. Belgrade never protests because Rákosi plants reports in Moscow newspapers that Brankov really has “defected”. (This version will be widely believed in Budapest even many years later.) In his tiny ÁVO cell there is just enough room to sit upright. The interrogations will last nearly a year, increasing in brutality and devilry like successive scenes from a Kafka drama. The ÁVO is grooming him as a star witness: he is to testify that Tito personally sent him to plot with Rajk to assassinate Rákosi, Gerő and Farkas. Only the watchfulness of the ÁVO has preserved the infant People’s Democracy from this cruel bereavement.

Months pass.

Brankov’s entire world is this cramped cell.

The chief torturer assigned to his case is ÁVO Lieutenant-Colonel Louis Lombos, who escaped death in a wartime Jewish labour battalion by feigning madness. Now he is getting his revenge on humanity. The ÁVO tell Brankov

that they have proof that it is he who ordered the press attaché to kill the student. He is confronted with the attaché, the alleged “murderer”: Boarov cannot look him in the eye, and withdraws his allegation.

More interrogations follow. The screw is twisted tighter, An elderly plain-clothes official reproaches him: “We *believe* you! You didn’t put up Boarov to this murder. But you are an intelligent man, you must realise that we can’t simply set you free – not after all this.” And he adds almost apologetically. “We can handle this whole affair quite easily without you. You have a double and *he* will do everything we ask of him. Nobody will be any the wiser!”

He snaps his fingers, and the double is led in. The resemblance is amazing, although the man is perhaps slightly taller.

Brankov finally succumbs and agrees to announce that he *is* a defector. Under guard he is taken to join other real defectors; he is driven to films and lectures, and escorted on walks. They want him to be seen. Meanwhile other “witnesses” are being lined up. Béla Szász, who knew Rajk at college but spent the war years in Argentina, is required to confess that he was an “imperialist agent” sent back to Hungary in 1946, and that he blackmailed Rajk – whom he “knew to be a Horthy police spy” – into supplying secret documents to the British.

It is all fiction, but gradually the case against Rajk is cemented together. The question is, how will the ÁVH get him to play ball too?

When Lazarus Brankov is sent back to 60, Andrassy Street they tell him they have proof of Tito’s plotting, and that they have arrested the arch-criminal Rajk himself. They tell him that Rajk and General Pálffy have admitted everything. “It will be quite useless for you to deny your guilt.” They show him what purports to be Rajk’s signed confession, they ask him what part Joseph Révai has played, and what part Révai’s brother-in-law Zoltán Szántó while he was Hungary’s envoy in Belgrade.

The whirling vortices of this intrigue grow ever more intricate. The cast grows longer. Dr. Tibor Szőnyi, Andrew Szalai, Béla Korondy are all implicated, as is the radio chief Paul Justus. Brankov proves a difficult prisoner, so the ÁVH blindfold him and drive him over the river to Varázs Street, where they have three special villas.

Here his cell is ankle-deep in ice-cold brackish water to discourage the prisoner from trying to sleep on the one narrow bench. After several days Brankov is dizzy with exhaustion, but still he refuses to sign any documents.

“Why ruin yourself like this?” the voices say. “Everybody else has confessed. Your denials won’t be believed at the trial, because Rajk and the others have confessed.”

He only wants to sleep, he can think of nothing sweeter. But when they come to get his signature, for some reason which he cannot even explain himself, he still keeps saying, No, No.

The ÁVH chief General Gábor Péter and his deputy, Colonel Nicholas Szücs, are always there. They confront Brankov with Rajk who coolly admits to the most fantastic crimes. Brankov stares at him in blank consternation.

“I was in the plot to murder Rákosi,” chants Rajk. “When I met Yugoslav officials on the train, we hatched the details.”

Doubt and panic cloud Brankov’s fatigued brain.

“Whatever you say,” he finds himself retorting. “But it is the first that I’ve heard of it.”

So the weeks drag on. He is losing weight, but the beatings no longer seem to hurt him.

To his astonishment, he finds that the “Governor” of these torture villas is the Soviet lieutenant-general known as Theodore Bielkin – in real life probably V. S. Abakumov, Beria’s Number Two. How often Brankov has danced with Bielkin’s wife, when the general was on the Allied Control Commission. Now the Russian NKVD general is lolling in front of him, with thinning reddish hair, a runaway paunch and bandy legs. He wears a Stalin tunic of soft silver-blue cloth.

He is often scornful, he shrugs a great deal and breaks into heaving hoots of laughter, while his Hungarian imitator Colonel Szücs chimes in with discreet, servile sniggers.

It is like a nightmare. At one interrogation, Brankov finds himself hallucinating – Bielkin’s puffy, pallid face is growing lion’s teeth, he has a lion’s tail that is thrashing and flailing, stirring up a cloud of dust, and in the middle of that dust cloud he can see a Lilliputian figure, Lazarus Brankov himself. Per-

haps he is already being treated with mind-distorting drugs, in anticipation of the big public trial to come.

But when will that trial take place? It is obviously imminent.

All the witnesses have begun learning their scripts. Only when each section is word-perfect are they allowed to sleep. The drug doses are varied, evidently to assess how much to use when the day comes. (During the Mindszenty trial earlier in 1949 the drugging operations were conducted by Dr. Emil Weil; but that physician is evidently a man of many talents, because he has been posted as Hungary's envoy to the United States, and George Bálint, an unhealthy obese doctor, is directing the drugging in the Rajk trial.)

One day, Brankov tries to escape. They manhandle him badly after that, but the next time that he is taken to the lavatory, he carves a message into the wall with his fingernails. He knows that Rajk, Pálffy and Justus all understand French. So he writes in French: "At the trial, tell only the truth!"

Dress-rehearsals begin. Once, Brankov courageously resists, denouncing the proceedings as a frame-up, in the belief that this is the real trial at last. But it is only another rehearsal, even though the court president, Dr. Peter Jankó, and the lawyers are all there, giving the charade a final run-through.

Sometimes, in their clear, unbefuddled moments, the other prisoners also shows signs of resistance. Once the drug dose is too strong, and Rajk and Brankov start parroting their prepared answers to the wrong questions, resulting in a cross-talk that would be hilarious under less macabre circumstances. Only General Pálffy makes no attempt to resist, but just sobs, while Justus occasionally hams like a cheap actor, chanting his lines so outrageously that even the dimmest spectator must see that he has had to memorise them. "Yes, I am the Hungarian Trotsky!" he booms.

It is all a blur in Brankov's mind. He cannot distinguish faces, the drugs leave him drowsy, like coming out from under the dentist's gas. When they say that he put his press attaché Boarov up to murder, he does dimly sense personal danger, and tries to protest; but he slumps back into a zero-gravity state of emotional detachment before he can speak.

"No, it's not true," he hears himself slur, but he is unable to go on.

Rajk has a long and complicated part to recite, which Brankov finds he cannot follow. His mind dozes off. He loses all sense of orientation. When his own

attorney – a former Soviet partisan – levels accusations against him, Brankov heaves unsteadily to his feet and tries either to lunge at him or to answer, but by the time he is upright he has already forgotten which and slumps back on to his chair while guards restrain him.

Rajk rouses himself to no such display. He proclaims: “We need no mercy!” This fragment of script swirls around in Brankov’s brain like a rock looming past a ship circling in a fog. Once they have to read from scripts for a radio broadcast of the “trial”. On another day Rajk whispers to his neighbour, Justus, “My confession was not true!”

Brankov is curious to see how Rajk will act when the real trial begins. On that day he will make his own protest about this frame-up.

But suddenly it is all over – a jail wagon transports him to the central prison. The last “rehearsal” has been *the* trial, without his having realised it, and Brankov cannot even remember what sentence the judge has pronounced on him.

“What is your date of birth?” demanded the court’s president.

Rajk answered: “March 8th, 1909 . . .”

The trial had begun. It was September 16th, 1949, and the People’s Court – that sweaty, shirt-sleeved horror-chamber of the Iron Curtain countries – was in session in the marbled hall of the Iron and Metal Workers’ Union in Budapest. The eight defendants sat in line abreast, with uniformed guards interspaced between them on the bare parquet floor.

The public prosecutor, Dr. Julius Alapi, shuffled his script.

“It is not just Rajk and his consorts who are in the dock here today,” he intoned, “but their foreign paymasters, the imperialist ringleaders in Belgrade and Washington.”

There was a murmur among three hundred hand-picked factory workers and funkies arrayed behind the red rope barrier. The world’s pressmen began to scribble – Serge Karsky of *Le Monde*, L. Erdős of *France Soir*, Michael Burns of *The Times*, Joseph Kingsbury Smith of the International News Service in New York, Richard Clark of United Press, and Stephen Wise from the Paris edition of the *New York Herald Tribune*, sitting next to Wilfred Burchett of the *Daily Express*. So that was the tactical objective of the trial!

“It is a peculiar feature of this trial,” declaimed Alapi, “that it is not Ladislas Rajk and Co. who are really in the dock at all – but Tito and his gang!”

In Alapi's speech there were echoes of Andrei Vishinsky, Stalin's chief prosecutor in the Moscow show trials; but there were strains too of Kádár's uncompromising views on tiger-taming: “There is only one sure defence against mad dogs,” thundered Alapi, “and that is to slay them!”

One by one the prisoners contritely admitted to their guilt. Rajk, Pálffy, a foreign diplomat, a police colonel, the radio vice-president – all confessed to having been agents of Tito and the Western imperialists, and asked for their murder plot against Rákosi, Farkas and Gerő to be taken into consideration against them.

Rajk claimed that he had joined the Communist Youth Movement purely on the instructions of Horthy's police. Later he explained: “I went to Spain with a double mission. I was to find out the names of the men in the ‘Rákosi’ battalion, and I was to reduce the battalion's fighting efficiency by political subversion from within . . . And I might add that in addition to this I conducted Trotskyist propaganda in the ‘Rákosi’ battalion.”

And so it went on: Rajk's clandestine meetings with Yugoslavs as early as 1939 in French internment, then with officers of the Deuxième Bureau, then with a Gestapo major “whose name I can't recall”; this Nazi had read out to him a list of his Yugoslav collaborators, and these names Rajk *could* recall – all of them had since turned up among Marshal Tito's closest colleagues, as fortune would have it.

Two years ago, confessed Rajk, he had been contacted by Tito's espionage service while visiting Abbazia, a Yugoslav resort.

“It was here that I first realised that not only Rankovic” – the then Yugoslav minister of the interior – “and other men who had been in Spain were pursuing Trotskyist policies and that they were working hand-in-glove with the American intelligence agencies, but Tito too, the prime minister of Yugoslavia!”

The court president glanced at his papers. “And how far did they succeed with all these plans?” he asked.

Rajk chanted: “They failed because the government reshuffle here in 1948 rooted out all the people we had infiltrated into every walk of government life, into the public and state agencies, the army – everywhere. And the propaganda

work of the Catholic reactionaries led by Mindszenty, on which Tito had also been counting, came to nothing, because the mighty central government of our People's Democracy dashed one of their most important instruments out of their hands by nationalising the Catholic schools. That was a crippling blow to the whole plan!"

Rajk was almost word-perfect.

Only once did he falter. After the president had extracted from Pálffy the admission that he had once borne a Jewish name, *Österreicher*, he turned to Rajk. Rajk admitted irritably, "My grandfather was born in Saxony, and did spell his name 'Reich'."

But he added: "On this point, let me make it quite plain that my origins are purely Gentile!"

It was almost comical to see Rajk, who had drowsily accepted far more sinister allegations, bucking at this harmless jibe.

None of the other prisoners bucked.

Dr. Tibor Szőnyi exclaimed in his closing statement: "Tito and his clique! In their dealings with us and their own accomplices, they dropped their mask and spoke openly of overthrowing our People's Democracy. They would have stopped short at no crime. Honourable court, I too, offered my services for these wicked plans. And my crimes are no less heinous when compared with the offences committed by the arch-criminals of the pernicious Tito gang."

Andrew Szalai smugly announced: "I await a severe sentence from the court."

General Pálffy bewailed: "I reproach not only myself, but the Tito clique too – and their bosses, the US imperialists!"

Béla Korondy was no less abject: "My job would have been to arrest the government and exterminate the ministers Rákosi, Farkas and Gerő. I beg the court to take this into consideration when passing sentence on me."

When Rajk's turn came he admitted to having been an instrument of Tito – "Tito, who followed in Hitler's footsteps and is continuing Hitler's policies in the Balkans and Eastern Europe." Then Rajk swallowed and continued: "So I find myself in agreement with most of the Honourable Prosecutor's statements."

Dr. Alapi's jaw sagged. *Most?* What kind of cavilling was that! But already Rajk had returned to his scripted part in resignation – "... And that is why I declare now, in advance, that I consider the court's sentence will be a just one."³

One night some weeks later – it is October 15th, 1949 – Lazarus Brankov, Rajk's Yugoslav co-defendant, is lying awake in the Central Prison listening to the clamour rising from the prison yard.

Gradually it dawns on him that a mass execution is being prepared. To drown the scuffling the guards have started up lorry engines, and metal tins are being banged.

“Géza – let justice take its course!”

There is a clatter like a stool being knocked over. There are footsteps outside his cell, doors banging open and shut, and the scuffling sounds are repeated.

Suddenly his own cell door is flung open. Both arms are pinioned behind him and he is frog-marched into the prison yard. Floodlights bathe the whole scene. A few feet from a brick wall, Brankov numbly sees tall wooden posts set into the ground, each with a meat-hook on top. No drugs this time, he can see everything that is going on as they drag him towards one of the posts. In those few seconds he suffers the entire hanging in his mind.

Then an officer runs out and shouts: “Stop! Not him! Take him back to the cells.”

So Lazarus Brankov survives. And when the uprising begins, when the worms turn against the funkies, he will be there.

A few weeks later, Rajk's young widow Julia sees the official Blue Book on the trial. When she reads her husband's first reply a sad smile flickers across her angular, handsome face. Ladislav Rajk has beaten the system after all. Despite the violence, the drugs, and the dress-rehearsals, he has left a clue for posterity right there in his first words.

“When were you born,” the court had asked.

And Rajk had answered, “On March 8th, 1909.”

But that was not true. It was *May* 8th. How could any man make such an error unless to leave a hidden message to the world outside that all was not as it seemed?

9 Into the Darkness

SOME OF THESE relics of Hungary's recent ignoble past are still alive. Over the five years I spent investigating this uprising, I visited the country many times to locate them. Some were elusive. Several refused to talk without seeing written permission from the Party. Many were apprehensive or changed their minds.

While some live quite openly, their names printed in the telephone directories, others skulk behind anonymous doors unrecognised by their neighbours: I would have liked to talk with Ernest Gerő himself, but nobody could pinpoint for me precisely which street was his in the Rose Mount (Rózsadomb) suburb. Some Party officials nervously agreed to meet me – after hours. Others were reticent, even though now living in the United States or Switzerland. Alice, the widow of Nicholas Gimes, one of the three ringleaders executed after the rebellion, invited me to see her in Zürich, but changed her mind when I arrived there and refused to see me without offering any explanation.

Typical of my investigations was the visit I made up the winding lanes to Orsó Avenue, in the once-wealthy hills of Buda, the part of Budapest lying west of the river. I wanted to look up Professor Elizabeth Andics and her economist husband Andrew Berei, a legendary Party couple. I knew that they had separated for ten years when Berei went to the West, but they were now living together again (although she addressed him even in private as “Comrade Berei”, it was said).

When the uprising reached its climax, armed rebels scouring their neighbourhood for hidden security policemen found this couple brazenly staying on

in their villa. She emerged flourishing passports that established them both as Soviet citizens; the insurgents' leaders advised their angry men against any rash act that might provoke the Russians. The couple were delivered to the Soviet Embassy instead.

At the height of his powers as chairman of the Planning Office, Comrade Berei employed three thousand experts controlling the country's economic life. Now I found them both still living in the same house, not far from the villa from which Imre Nagy had set off on October 23rd, 1956, along the path that led to the new premiership, and ultimately to prison and sentence of death.

Further up these hills was the house where Rákosi had lived. The folk that I passed now must, as children, have cowered into doorways as the curtained convoys of black, Russian-built limousines swept past them every day.

The Andics household was unguarded and badly needed a lick of paint. The front garden was overgrown with weeds. An aged female retainer opened the door and fetched the couple.

I was startled to find them both so short, having read so much about the power they had wielded after their return from Moscow in 1945. Berei was seventy-eight, with a sour, shrivelled crab-apple for a head. His wife seemed more alert than he, appearing to lip-read with big round eyes as I spoke. Just when I thought I had persuaded them to talk, she cut her husband short and suggested I return again in a few months' time, and that I submit my questions in advance. Old habits die hard.

I called on Marosán instead.¹ George Marosán is as garrulous as these two old Marxist birds are mute. A garish seventy-year-old ex-Social Democrat, Marosán was the man who sold out his party to Rákosi in 1948 only to be jailed by him a few months later. He would be reinstated in the Politburo in 1956 and would find himself nominated to the puppet government that crushed the uprising. Six years later, he would publicly quit after accusing the regime of hypocrisy and of repeating Rákosi's error by creating a cult of personality. "We are again in power, and yet we are not interested in the masses," he would rebuke Kádár.

Marosán is a wild, unruly character of half-Romanian extraction, rattling off broken verbless sentences with verve and fire that leave listeners with the uncomfortable impression of a man with an open knife in his pocket. His grandfather

was middle-class, but his father had sunk into the proletariat. Marosán himself has remained an outsider all his life. Many Social Democrats during the war were “double-card carriers”, belonging secretly to the Communist Party too. Not Marosán. The entire left wing of the Social Democratic Party was Jewish at that time too: but again, not Marosán.

He received me in the living room of his suburban semi-detached house. He has an unlisted telephone number and shelters behind a door with no name-plate, a wise anonymity as he has more deaths than Judge Jeffreys on his conscience. The rooms are newly decorated, with modern furniture, a varnished parquet floor, potted plants, striped wallpaper and bright cotton upholstery.

He himself is a well-built man; the reddish tinge to his rugged features contrasts vividly with the snow-white hair left by Rákosi’s jails. He rises at four, works out in a gymnasium, then swims a mile before breakfasting and smoking his first cigar.

“It is only on rare occasions that I receive visitors like you,” he begins, mangling my extended hand. “I am always suspicious of Western historians. They turn my words upside down.”

He has three volumes of memoirs on the lap of his loud-check, grey suit; the fourth volume, which deals with the troubles of 1956, will never be published. “I have always been a difficult person,” he sighs.

For three hours he soliloquises about his past, trying to justify his career. “After the anti-fascist coalition was dissolved, the question emerged, what now – what internal forces exist capable of making further progress towards democratic socialism? Only three factions existed: two million people in the trades unions, the Social Democratic Party and the Communist Party.”

He emphasises each point by slicing the air with hands that are large slabs with stubby fingers and well-manicured fingernails.

“Take your Denis Healey. In 1946 he came here, because the Labour Party wanted to find out whom they could trust in Hungary. I took Healey home, and he asked me if I meant to take co-operation with the Communists as far as amalgamation. I asked him what alternative he had to suggest – should the Social Democrats join forces with Cardinal Mindszenty? At that he gave up!” says Marosán.

“As a matter of honour, I granted passports to all those leading Social Democrats who did not want to join the new set-up. They were free to go. They emigrated legally and they were all given funds . . . So we amalgamated and the new party had over 1,100,000 members. To my surprise, they started purging the party of ‘undesirable elements’. By March 1949, two hundred thousand people had been expelled from the new united party. The union movement was reorganised so as to smash the shop-floor committees of the union. It was then that I realised that Rákosi and his fellow Muscovites regarded an organised movement of the shop-floor unions functioning along democratic lines as a *threat*. The showdown came with the arrest, right after the May 1949 election, of two people: Tibor Szőnyi and the Social Democratic sociologist Professor Alexander Szalai.”

At the end of May 1949, Rajk too was arrested.

“That was my mistake,” Marosán says. “I realise now that I should have left, I should have left at that point. If Rajk could be arrested, then so could I. I am no fool. I kept thinking, I ought to escape. But then I said to myself, I am enough of a tough guy (*vagány*) to escape and no ÁVH can catch me. I know four escape routes, and two are dead certs. But in which direction to flee? To the Soviet Union, or to the West? Neither would have done me any good. My arrest was certain sooner or later and I knew it. Four times I verbally offered my resignation as minister of light industry to Rákosi. Rákosi would not accept, so I had to stay at my post. I was arrested on August 5th, 1950.”

For the rest of this Sunday morning, Marosán talks of his role in crushing the uprising.

He did not recommend moderation, and ordinary Hungarians now react to his name like Ghengis Khan’s. “All my life I have hated the gentry, hated the scholars,” *Newsweek* once quoted him as saying, “because every one of them is a rotten, no-good counter-revolutionary, and I would like nothing better than to hang them from the nearest tree on a rope woven from their own intestines.”

He is still a rough-spoken man and enjoys his reputation as a *vagány*. As we leave, his wife, a wiry peasant woman, comes out of the kitchen. (Newspapermen reported in December 1956 that after she joined the mass demonstration of women mourning the Soviet suppression of the uprising, Marosán bawled, “What do you expect, she’s just another whore like the rest of them!”) Now he jerks a

thumb at her and jokes in Hungarian: “You see, in this house I am still under the dictatorship of the proletariat!”

Zoltán Vas, whom I visited a year later, had also broken with the Party. He was one of its grand old men, having been imprisoned for sixteen years with Rákosi. He had shared with Rákosi the honour of being exchanged to the Soviet Union in 1940 for the Hungarian battle flags held by Moscow.

When I eventually ran him to ground, after three years of fruitlessly knocking at his door in Buda, I joked that no doubt when he and Rákosi returned triumphantly from their Moscow exile in 1944, they had the decency to send the flags back again. Vas, a heavy, thick-set man, born “Weinberger” seventy-seven years ago, cupped a hand round an ear to catch my remark and broke into a fit of coughing and laughter.

He too has written memoirs which will probably never be published. The typescript spanning his extraordinary life is heaped idly on a window ledge; it is passed from hand to hand around Budapest’s cognoscenti, but it probably reveals too much to be palatable now.

“I take a dim view of Marosán,” Vas remarks at one point. Then his memory flicks seamlessly back to 1922, when he, as a twenty-year-old, heard Lenin himself speak in Moscow, and forward to Stalin’s seventieth birthday when he was chosen to bear Hungary’s gift to the Soviet dictator.

It was Zoltán Vas, wearing the uniform of a Soviet colonel, who ran the partisan school outside Moscow during the war, re-training captured Hungarian officers for combat duties behind their own lines. Vas, accompanied by Gerő or the writer Julius Háry and “General” Béla Illyés – all wearing Soviet uniforms – regularly toured the prison camps.² For obvious reasons, they considered their fellow Jews captured from the Hungarian labour battalions to be particularly promising material: thus George Fazekas, a tall, bony ex-journalist captured in 1942 on the Don front, became one of the delegates of the short-lived Hungarian National Committee set up under General Ladislas Zsedényi and the reserve officer Nicholas Répási in a Marxist school in Moscow; however, after Stalingrad the plan was dropped and Fazekas and many others were enrolled in partisan school and returned to Hungary in Soviet uniforms.

It was in a prison camp that Vas first set eyes on Paul Maléter, a towering young lieutenant taken prisoner in 1944. “Maléter had character,” reflects Vas mistily. “He was a good socialist too and, I dare say, something of a Communist as well.”³ His first wife Maria lives in the United States, his widow Judith is in Budapest, wife of a foreign airlines executive.

“Maléter,” testified a young Jewish engineer in August 1957, “was divorced. His first wife was working at the same place as my mother. She was a cultured woman, and this was a bad mark in the eyes of the Communists. Maléter took a lot of flak from his superiors because his wife was not the same as the wives of the other Hungarian officers. She was too neat, and he didn’t dare take her to officers’ parties.”⁴

Born of Huguenot stock in September 1917 in a part of Hungary sliced off by Czechoslovakia three years later but restored by Hitler’s favour in 1940, Maléter knew what nationalism meant. His background was super-bourgeois: his father was a law professor, his father-in-law – he had married Maria, an attractive brunette six years younger than himself – was a hotel owner. But he had evidently dreamed of an army career since his youth. His last ADC, Captain Louis Csiba, glimpsed among his belongings a toy sword that had evidently been a childhood gift. In 1940 he entered the famous Ludovika Military Academy as a cadet, passed out two years later, was commissioned a Panzer lieutenant and posted in April 1944 to the First Army on the eastern front, where he was taken prisoner on May 2nd, in the Kolomea sector. In fact it was the Soviet anti-tank gun commanded by George Fazekas that crippled Maléter’s armoured car. Maléter was wounded but proudly snapped at his Hungarian captors: “If I had a pistol I would shoot myself!” Fazekas proffered him his pistol (it was not loaded) and left Maléter to think things over. He drew Zoltán Vas’s attention to this remarkable man and did not meet the striking tank officer again until October 1956.

For whatever motives Maléter accepted the offer when “Colonel” Zoltán Vas came recruiting. Vas recalls asking the lanky lieutenant why he was still wearing his Russian campaign medals, and Maléter stubbornly told him: “I am a Hungarian officer. It is only natural that I should have fought to my last bullet. If I had a gun I would go on fighting even now!”

Vas was impressed and invited the lieutenant to join the anti-fascist ideological school at Kraznogorsk near Moscow. The food and accommodation were better there. Maléter completed the course in July and was dropped behind German lines in Transylvania in September.

There was by then little hard fighting to do, but he was decorated by the Soviet marshal Rodion Malinovsky; he joined the Communist Party, profited from the army's reorganisation under the Debrecen regime and was appointed captain of the frontier-guards at Balassagyarmat. In May 1945, his name figured among the leaders of the Hungarian Partisan Comrades Federation along with Alexander Nógrádi, Zoltán Vas, Michael Farkas and Géza Révész. When the Calvinist pastor and Smallholder politician Zoltán Tildy was installed as Hungary's president in 1948, it was Maléter who commanded his élite guard.⁵

This was the start of Maléter's troubles. When Rákosi disbanded this élite force, Maléter found himself chairbound under Michael Farkas at the defence ministry. He became gloomy, fearing that he was on the shelf. Other partisan comrades outstripped him; several were made generals.

And the shadows of Communist dogma lengthened across the marriage. He had promised Maria, a devout Catholic, never to join the Party; but that put him at a disadvantage. She found out that he had secretly joined. He even began repeating the slogans to her: "Every man must have his share of the good things. That may cause individual hardships, but the misfortunes of the few are necessary to ensure the good of the many!"

After Rákosi's final takeover she saw her husband growing edgy and pacing up and down, looking at his watch for no reason. He jumped at the slightest knock at the door.⁶

The Party began turning the screws on Maléter, as on thousands of others who did not fit its mould. He was shadowed, and stool-pigeons were sent to test his loyalties. When his adjutant tipped him off that he had been asked to keep an eye on him, Maléter did the shrewd thing: he reported the adjutant.

Once, the doorbell rang and a stranger handed him a letter signed by an old Ludovika Academy classmate: "Paul Maléter, we have not forgotten you. We are in the free world, fighting for Hungary's freedom." The letter invited him to engage in espionage activity. Maléter took out his service revolver and marched

the stranger off to the police. The man turned up next day in ÁVH uniform and congratulated him. It had been a trap.

For convent-educated Maria, these methods seemed despicable. When she tried to save her marriage by learning the Communist ideology, her stomach rebelled at “dialectical materialism” and the double-think it implied. She left the course and refused to join the Party. Her anguished husband failed to convert her.

Once she apologised to dinner guests for the stale potatoes; the colonel jumped up and railed at her: “You’re only saying that because you’re a reactionary, you want to denigrate our Communist way of life!” After the guests left she became hysterical. “I’m being suffocated by this atmosphere.”

In the spring of 1953 he moved out. Several times the ministry of defence sent for her – she was now working in a photographic studio – and spoke of her “unsatisfactory cadre-rating” and her refusal to join the Party. They said she was blighting her husband’s prospects. “Comrade Maléter, your husband is leading an irregular life that we cannot tolerate in a Communist colonel. Either he returns to his family, or he must remarry.”

Alone and distressed, she spent a melancholy September 1953 vacation alone in the Mátra mountains where she and Paul had spent their honeymoon. Here she received a letter from his lawyer: as she was not capable of bringing up their children fit for a People’s Democracy, he had started divorce proceedings. But next day he telephoned, and he arrived with his blue-grey eyes burning with rage and tore up the letter.

They resolved to make a fresh start. They found a new home and Paul had it repainted with army paint. But in November 1953 the Party dictated that if he moved back in with her again then her mother must move out; her cadre was unacceptable and she was held to blame for the daughter’s refusal to join the Party. Maria refused to throw out her seventy-two-year-old mother. It drove the final wedge into the crumbling marriage.

The colonel’s behaviour after the divorce was callous and unforgivable. He snatched their seven-year-old son Paul from her flat while she was at work one day and placed him in an orphanage where Maria, distracted out of her mind, found him only after turning Budapest upside down.

She appealed against the colonel's action in the courts. He appeared in person but she barely recognised him. He defended his actions with hatred in his voice: "I took away my son," he snapped, "to remove him from the bourgeois influence of his mother."

Next day he telephoned her, as mellow and friendly as when she had first known him. Perhaps his courtroom manner had just been play-acting for the benefit of his cadre-dossier.

She did not see Paul Maléter again. He married again, Judith, a girl who had been approved by the Party. He was hanged in 1958. She lives in Budapest today. She was too frightened to see me.

For the first few years the loyal Communists stomached it all. One such man in 1949 was a thin, nervous-looking journalist of thirty-two on the Party newspaper *Free People*,⁷ who kept his unhappiness to himself. Though he considered his own country to be a prison, it was quite a comfortable confinement for him: he earned 3,000 florins a month, and had bought a car at a State discount store because of his Party allegiance. His newspaper was staffed only by dedicated Communists like himself, but misdeeds committed in the Party's name were already registering subliminally.

"The courts began to inflict terrible sentences: a butcher was imprisoned for ten years because he slaughtered a pig," he recalled. "Everything became so humiliating. We had to attend Party conferences and seminars, and cheer the name of Stalin twelve or thirteen times in one afternoon. A man who had been dismissed three or four years earlier as a bad journalist, now became my editor merely because he was regarded as a better Communist than the rest of us. (I was the best reporter on the newspaper.) I could no longer choose my own topics. I was only allowed to write about statistics or Party news. After 1949 I couldn't bear to read my own newspaper, it had become so dull and tedious."

In 1949 he transferred to another newspaper. It was his undoing. Here he met real journalists, men who paid only lip-service to Communism. The editor was a well-known newspaperman of the old school, married to the country's most famous actress. He still had some of the old world charm that characterised the older generation.

“One day,” reminisced the journalist later, “we went hunting. I invited him to ride with me in my car. As we were driving along he told me, ‘It’s a terrible thing, but there’s going to be a ten per cent wage cut!’ I said: ‘That’s impossible! The Communist Party will never do that!’ He shook his head: ‘Wrong – they won’t do it under the name of wage reductions, but under the guise of State loans.’ At our next staff meeting, he stood up and made a speech saying how happy he was about this wonderful opportunity to buy State bonds, and we had to write in the same terms in our columns. What we were forbidden to write was that it was compulsory.”

He began to feel trapped. “I could not bear the thought of never seeing France or Italy again,” he said. He attempted to escape to Czechoslovakia, was caught, tortured and thrown into Recsk internment camp.

Life in the quarry was the final dénouement: “I had no idea that people were being arrested for their opinions,” he admitted. “I was living in such a small circle that I didn’t know that people were so afraid of me that they would not tell me what was really on their minds. In prison I met people who had been arrested back in ’46 and ’47. I thought to myself, ‘This is terrible – I did not even know they had been arrested!’ I had been living in an ivory tower, only meeting the people at the ministry, and at night I was with my friends. True, I had a girlfriend who was not a Communist, but she was very rich and had no cause to complain. In prison I had the opportunity of meeting people I had never met before. From them I pieced together a pretty good picture of the state of the nation, because just about everybody was in prison – engineers, teachers, office workers. The horror of the entire system became clear to me.”

Rákosi’s remaining opponents vanished from the face of Hungary. Over one hundred Social Democrat politicians were arrested on trumped-up charges – politicians like Andrew Révész, sentenced to death for “spying for Denis Healey”. The sentence was commuted.

The turn of Árpád Szakasits came on April 22nd, 1950, some months after the Rajk trial. He was the country’s spineless president, a reward for having sold out his party to the men from the Kremlin in 1948.

In April 1950 Rákosi invited him over. Rákosi was surrounded by his cronies. He slid a document across the desk and Szakasits found himself reading

his own confession.⁸ “My dear Szaki,” smirked Rákosi, attempting a fatherly tone. “This has to be done. If you don’t sign, you’ll get what Rajk got! But if you do sign, you’ll be given a fine villa just like Zoltán Tildy.” Szakasits refused, but not for long. Rákosi brandished a second document at him. “Read this then!” It was a police report by a wartime police chief on how Szakasits had helped him to suppress a certain labour dispute. “You *co-operated* with the Horthy police,” paraphrased Rákosi pointedly. Gábor Péter then entered with three of his ÁVH officers, and they removed Szakasits.

“Árpád,” called Rákosi after him, “it’s black-coffee time for you now!” – a reference which every Hungarian understood. The invading Turks had invited the Magyar leader Bálint Török to come parley with them over black coffee; they had arrested and deported him instead.

The ex-president was transported to one of the ÁVH villas across the river and ordered to write out a detailed confession. He was puzzled to find his wife guilelessly waiting for him there.

“You’re early,” she welcomed him. “What was your bag?”

He looked blank. His ÁVH escort grinned knowingly.

“Gábor Péter called and gave me Rákosi’s message,” she continued. “You know – about you both going shooting, and telling me to come and wait here for you.”

So they had trapped her too. But still he refused to toe the line. Uglier methods were therefore employed by the ÁVH professionals. A glass tube was inserted in his private parts and crushed. Then he was dragged before Gábor Péter and his aide Vladimir Farkas – son of the defence minister, and son-in-law of Elizabeth Andics – and the coercion was stepped up.

He could faintly hear a woman screaming. “Your wife,” the Jewish torture officials confirmed. He wrote the confession they demanded.

His fellow renegade George Marosán was next.⁹ “Gábor Péter and his whole gang came for me,” he told me. “But I was a difficult customer. For three and a half months they did everything to me – I’ll leave the details to your imagination. I fought tooth and nail. They levelled three charges at me – that I was an agent of the Yugoslavs, that I was a spy for the British and that I had been an informer for the Horthy police. I said: ‘Prove it!’ They said, ‘Prove you weren’t!’ I was interrogated by all their top people. When it became obvious that they

weren't getting anywhere they said, 'Either you sign this document or we bring in your wife, your mother and your children tomorrow! Do you understand?' I said, 'How do I know that if I sign you won't do that anyway?' They replied, 'Comrade Rákosi and ourselves are your guarantee!'"

Marosán too signed his "confession".

Sentenced to death, he was thrown into Budapest's military jail in Conti Street.

"For six months the death sentence hung over me, and I steeled myself for that 150-yard walk. I was living on borrowed time anyway, as I could easily have been put to death during the Horthy regime. Then one night I had a visitor. From his Hungarian I judged he was not a native. He kept asking me who were my high-level contacts with the Soviet Union. I named Marshal Voroshilov, Ambassador Pushkin and the rest. The conversation lasted seven hours. As he stepped out, he called me 'Comrade Marosán', and said *au revoir*, not goodbye. A week later the Jankó council – our Supreme Court – commuted my sentence to life imprisonment."

Marosán's eyes watered as he told me this. "For five and a half years after that nobody spoke to me. I had nobody to speak to anyway. It was very hard for me, because I had already come to terms with my death sentence, while life imprisonment . . ."

His voice tailed away. Then he said, "There were two ways you could emerge, either sick and embittered or healthy and fanatically determined. I came out the second way."

In Hungary they say, "Being a Communist is a *sedentary* vocation." There were few Communists of note who had not sat in prison at some time. It became a test of courage. The rest of Rajk's "Titoist" colleagues were rounded up, imprisoned and treated with great ferocity.

Géza Losonczy, a humourless but honest parson's son who had joined the Party in 1938 and the resistance movement in 1942, was one of the most notable. A clever, cultivated man, Losonczy had been an editor on the Party newspaper since 1945 and distinguished himself by his dynamic journalism. He was outspoken, with the kind of eyes that glow – a born leader, although possessing none of the leader's normal physical attributes. In fact he was rather nonde-

script to look at, clean-shaven and spectacled, the kind of slight, dark-haired figure whom one would not normally grant a second glance. A fellow writer was to say of him, “This young man was a fiercely dedicated Communist to the last breath in his body.”¹⁰ Imprisoned in 1951, he went half out of his mind and contracted tuberculosis. Unlike Marosán, Losonczy would emerge embittered. He thirsted for revenge.

He was followed into the dungeons by his father-in-law, Alexander Haraszti, a seasoned journalist who had served the Party for thirty years and had seen the inside of Horthy’s prisons too. As secretary of the Hungarian-Yugoslav Society he was sentenced to death, and waited seven hundred days and nights in Death Row, listening for the hangman’s tread: nobody told him his sentence had been commuted. Francis Donáth and Julius Kállai, who had studied with Losonczy at Debrecen, were also thrown into prison.

The total number of purge victims topped two hundred thousand. A typical lesser case was the Smallholder MP for Tolna County.¹¹ On October 1st, 1949, he was arrested for alleged espionage and thrown into solitary confinement. He too signed a confession to put an end to the torture and uncertainty.

“On several occasions I heard my wife screaming for help in the next room,” he testified. (This was evidently a favourite usage of the ÁVH interrogators.) After fourteen months he was put on trial with four other “enemies of the people” – including Joseph Kővágó, the former mayor of Budapest; Paul Almássy, a retired military attaché in Berlin; Géza Rubletzky, a director of the radio, who had been a Smallholder MP since 1949; and Béla Zsedényi, the former president of the Hungarian Parliament. This source learned the name of his own lawyer – Vadas, the brother-in-law of Zoltán Vas – only by chance; the judge, the villainous William Olti, denied his application to consult with his lawyer. He recited his memorised “confession” and was sentenced to fifteen years.

“We know perfectly well that you never worked for the British secret service,” a Russian interrogator had explained to this Smallholder politician just before the start of his trial in August 1950. “The real reason is this: the peasantry in Tolna County still has great respect for you and it would listen to what you say. If Communism gets a firmer hold in Hungary, say by 1955, then you may yet be released.” He duly vanished into the penitentiary at Vác. As his was

a “double-zero” case, no lawyer could even get the information needed for an appeal.

Thus ten million Hungarians found themselves journeying into a tunnel of darkness, at the end of which they could see no light.

10 The Stone Quarry

PRISON IN RÁKOSI'S Hungary was not easy. Troublemakers were locked into a box-like cell for four hours at a time. Severe offences against prison discipline were punished by the “short iron” (*kurtavas*), a short chain passed from one wrist under one knee to the opposite ankle. Escape attempts were punished by the *lánc*, a fifty-pound chain clamped to the ankles.¹

As the prisons filled, the penal structure was expanded, overhauled and brought into line with the Soviet model. Some aspects of Rákosi's Five-Year Plan could only be fulfilled by forced labour, and so on March 15th, 1950, the ÁVH took over the prisons from the Ministry of Justice and Soviet techniques were introduced. Numerous ÁVH officials had been to Moscow to study them.

The experiences of the political prisoners were all broadly the same as those reported by Zoltán Száray, a thirty-nine-year-old economist, who had campaigned against the Communist regime ever since its takeover.² From the ÁVH cells at 60, Andrásy Street, he was shifted first to the internment camp at Kistarcsa and then to the stone quarry at Recsk. Here at Recsk he joined the hundreds of lesser Social Democrats who had been rounded up in July 1950 and interned, like himself, without trial.

In 1950, nobody had heard of Recsk.

The internment camp was in a prohibited military region. It sprawled near the village of that name in Heves County, north of the Mátra mountains. The north face of Csákánykő, a volcanic summit, was a three-hundred-foot wall of andesite waiting to be quarried. The stone was urgently needed to ballast the

new railway tracks, so twelve hundred men slaved with their bare hands fifteen hours a day, seven days a week, in this godforsaken corner of their fatherland.

The families had long given them up for dead, or believed them deported to Siberia. For the 400 ÁVH guards the posting to Recsk was also something of a punishment, and they took what revenge they could on their captives. The prisoners were taunted, manhandled, and confined in slime-filled pits. After each beating the men had to doff their caps and demonstrate their gratitude by shouting: "Thank you, Mr. Overseer, that has done me a lot of good."

Seven men did once attempt a desperate escape, on May 20th, 1951. A prisoner donned a stolen ÁVH uniform and marched six comrades out of the main gate, whipping them mercilessly to make it more authentic. The whole camp paid for their success, being paraded all next day without food, while thirty lorry-loads of troops scoured the countryside for the fugitives. Six men were recaptured, but the seventh was said to have made it to Vienna.

The inmates at Recsk are of interest, because they would be in the forefront of the rising against the regime. One of them was Dr. Paul Jónás, a young music-loving former student leader: he was twenty-five when he was arrested in 1948 on the usual charges of espionage and conspiracy. He was thrown into Recsk. For five years he would be held without trial, for ten years after that he would suffer nightmares about the rock avalanches in the quarry.³

One in ten of the prisoners died in this foul hole before it was closed down in 1954. "There was no organisation among the prisoners and we were kept strictly segregated," Jónás recalled in 1957 to American psychiatrists. "But I was able to find a group with similar outlooks and sometimes we were able to communicate while working or exercising together. Talking was forbidden, but you could converse in whispers if two prisoners lay very close together. The one good thing about the whole prison experience was that there was no indoctrination. Once, while I was in the prison camp, I had to clean the ÁVH toilets and I found a bit of a Communist newspaper. I was discovered with this and severely punished. That's how my right arm got injured."

Jónás paused, groping for words to explain his feelings. "Many of us established everlasting friendships," he finally said. "These friendships in turn represented a new political force after we were released, and contributed to the uprising."

When the mass demonstration began in October 1956, Paul Jónás would be in the front ranks, marching with his fellow inmates from Recsk prison camp, linked arm in arm.

Ironically this modern Red Terror was no respecter of rank. The Rajk trial had already shown that. Now it was János Kádár's turn. Late in 1950 Gábor Péter, the ÁVH chief, minced into Szakasits's cell brandishing a document. "We've exposed Kádár as an imperialist agent," he exclaimed. "And you're going to testify against him!"

The Social Democrat thought, "Let them gobble each other up!" and signed.

It was a cruel blow against János Kádár. He had done all that could have been demanded of a loyal Communist. He had returned his Yugoslav decorations after the break with Tito and he had helped to stage-manage the trial of his closest friend, Rajk. One enduring, but in no way endearing, legend has it that Kádár had assured Rajk in his cell that the whole trial – the confessions and death sentences – would be just a charade and that nothing would really happen to him, provided that he played the game. According to Nicholas Vásárhelyi, Kádár told the prisoner: "I can assure you that everything I have just told you is straight from Comrade Rákosi."

However, these very conversations with Rajk would now figure in the evidence against Kádár. He was arrested in April 1951 and thrown into prison without trial. The chief funkies were summoned to the Party headquarters and told that Rákosi had accused Kádár of being an imperialist agent, and that Kádár had of course tried to escape. In the courtyard they were shown the actual bullet-riddled car in which Kádár had, so it was said, tried to crash through the frontier. Two top Party officials, Karl Kiss and Stephen Kovács, were said to have witnessed the confrontation between Rákosi and Kádár (this was news to both of them, but both tactfully refrained from refuting the story).

In prison, Kádár was spared no indignities. He was tortured to unconsciousness and came to his senses with the ÁVH colonel Vladimir Farkas – son of one of Rákosi's top Jewish cronies – urinating over his face. When Kádár was ultimately released three years later a CIA agent would report: "The fingernails are missing from his left hand. They interrogated him in the cruellest ways imaginable, allegedly on the personal orders of Michael Farkas."

Of course not all the prison population had been framed. After the Communist takeover several clandestine organisations had sprung up. Most of them were naïve, and fell easily into ÁVH traps. “There were two that I knew of,” recalled Jónás. “One was a sabotage organisation of young students in touch with an ‘English officer’ who later turned out to be an ÁVH man. He provided them with explosives and then they were arrested and executed. The elder brother of one of them was a Smallholder MP.”⁴

The government’s propaganda myth that West Germany was preparing an army to invade Hungary was eagerly believed by large parts of the population. Young Paul Gorka, a student, went down for life in 1950 for collecting for British Intelligence the kind of detailed information that invading armies would need. Using special white carbon paper to imprint secret messages invisibly between the lines of innocuous letters, Gorka reported regularly to a contact address in Vienna (“Herr Johann Wiesen, Wörtinger Straße 12”); but in 1950 one of his cell’s couriers was shot on the frontier, and papers found on him enabled the ÁVH to break the network.⁵

The regular penalty for disseminating the truth was about twelve years’ jail. Twenty-year-old Imre Erős and his fellow students at Sopron, distributed a news-sheet based on Western broadcasts and also plotted to assist any Western armies that might invade. He was tried in 1951 with three of his lieutenants and sentenced to twelve years.

Truth is the weapon that all Marxists fear most.

In Budapest, Rákosi appointed a new chief of police. For psychological reasons he wanted a short man, and not a Jew: so he called for the dossier on Alexander Kopácsi. Kopácsi was only twenty-nine, but he got the job and was promoted immediately to colonel. He would play a curious role in the revolution five years later.⁶

He had spent his youth as lathe operator at Diósgyőr, a northern tangle of stockyards and panting locomotives whose sulphurous skies blazed by night in the glare of steel furnaces. He was stocky, and had a firm but humorous mouth. His mother and father were active in the working-class movement and he himself became involved in an anti-fascist group at Miskolc at the age of thirteen. He married Violette, a dark-haired, round-faced fellow partisan, who fought

alongside the Red Army in the South Carpathians in 1944. These partisans were transferred to the new republic's police force. Kopácsi possessed great physical courage. In 1946 he had to outface starving miners brandishing sticks of dynamite, bent on lynching the wife of a police official suspected of maltreating detainees. Gábor Péter came in person to congratulate him after that; with him came Rajk and a tall, mournful figure, János Kádár.

Kopácsi did not look back. In 1949 he was promoted to the Central Committee's headquarters building. His immediate boss there was another of the stars of the subsequent uprising, Joseph Szilágyi. Szilágyi was a big, broad-shouldered police colonel, born of peasant stock. He had spent three years in prison during the war for belonging to the illegal Party. Like Kopácsi, he could recite the dogmas of Marxism-Leninism in his sleep, a harmless enough foible; his mistake was to believe in them. Colonel Szilágyi was one of the thousands disillusioned by his inside knowledge of the Rajk affair.

In mid-1949 police captain Alexander Kopácsi was given the internment camps section of the ministry of the interior. He found that the internees had never been formally sentenced; most were accused of petty crimes such as stealing cattle or sixty pounds of corn, or slaughtering a pig, or that they were class-aliens. A three-man committee decided each case for parole or prolonged detention: Kopácsi, ÁVH-Colonel Julius Décsy and a lawyer, Bodonyi, inherited from Horthy's civil service.

Kopácsi chose Kistarcsa camp to inspect. It took him three days, according to his memoirs. Deep inside was another camp guarded by khaki-uniformed ÁVH. In it he found Rákosi's political prisoners, including ex-partisans and the fellow-Socialists of the late Paul Justus.⁷ A month later Kopácsi was posted to the Party school, a former girls' convent on City Park, directed by the formidable dialectician Elizabeth Andics. Here young funkies were brainwashed into becoming merciless, unthinking automatons; they learned to handle Hegel and the sub-machine gun, they became experts in double-think and self-criticism.

For a time, Alexander Kopácsi too would unthinkingly fulfil the duties required of him as Budapest's chief of police. As everywhere else, Soviet advisers had been assigned to him, two colonels of the NKVD whom he knew only by their code-names, Petófi and Magyar. Petófi had suffered from high blood-pressure ever since the Nazis' murderous siege of Leningrad; his face was violet-hued,

and he could not bear closed windows. Their criminological expertise had a certain antique charm; it dated from the age of Dzhherzhinski.

Rákosi scoffed loudly at the Western powers' claims to represent pure democracy, but he could scoff only as long as his Party controlled all the organs of the press and armed repression. In his famous "salami tactics" speech on February 29th, 1952, he would heap scorn on the rigged elections in France and Italy, and on the way that American high finance selected the two most amenable presidential candidates.

"It is for these two candidates that American voters may cast their votes 'freely'. As these billionaires control the press, radio, film, schools, Churches and most of the leaders of the trades unions, they are able to deceive a great part of the American people."

Rákosi hooted with laughter. His velvety grey eyes momentarily lost their deceptively benevolent, humane allure as he went on: "Such is the rule of the democratically elected majority in the stronghold of the 'free world' – from where we may hear every day through the radio and press that our People's Democracy is the 'terroristic rule of a dwarfish minority'."

The Hungarian dictator drew himself up indignantly to his full height, which was not great, and vividly recalled the slave revolts in the colonies of the imperialists – Korea, Malaya, Vietnam and Egypt.

"We cannot open a capitalist illustrated paper without seeing pictures of such 'sensational events'," he triumphed in his sonorous bass voice. "The Voice of America would give anything if it could produce even one single instance in which tanks were used against the masses in countries building Socialism!"

Just four years later there was not one Marxist leader in Europe who would dare repeat that jibe.

As Rákosi's regime consolidated its grip, hardship spread like a bloodstain across the country.

To meet the Five-Year Plan of January 1950, the industrial labour force had been expanded by over six hundred thousand at the expense of agriculture. Food-stuffs vanished from the shops. Inflation began to bite. While the regime announced wage increases of twenty per cent in December 1951, inflation had

already jacked up food prices by eighty-five per cent; and clothing was so expensive as to be almost unobtainable.

The Marxists' agricultural policies ruined the peasants. In October 1950 Soviet-style councils were installed at local level to enforce Marxist policies. By 1951 the number of collective farms had doubled to 4,652 and by early 1952 there would be 5,110. Uncharacteristically, this drive to collectivise the independent peasants was not enforced as ruthlessly as in the Soviet Union, however, and the independent peasant still remained the country's main supplier of farm produce; by 1953, they were still farming over sixty per cent of the country's total arable land.

In applying his repressive measures, Rákosi had fallen between two extremes. While Lenin had recommended: "Rely on the poor peasant, enter into alliance with the middle peasant – and smash the kulak!" and while Stalin had liquidated his kulaks without mercy, Rákosi merely oppressed them by taxation, legislation and ruinous compulsory crop-deliveries.⁸ Meanwhile, nearly half (45.8 per cent) of the country's total gross investment went on heavy industry; only 10.7 per cent was allotted to agriculture.

The upshot was that the peasants remained broadly hostile to the Rákosi regime – the kulaks outlawed as "class-enemies", the small and medium peasants seething over the collectivisation which had by December 1952 forced 446,000 of them into a total of 5,315 collective farms without producing any upswing in food production. Despite the feather-bedding by the regime, the collectives suffered from over-centralised bureaucracy and inefficient managers. Neither they nor the remaining private sector found any incentive to produce. Ten per cent of Hungary's arable land was not even planted.

In 1952 the crop failed, and by the spring of 1953 the food crisis reached its highest point. Hungary, formerly a major food exporter, began to starve.

This agricultural failure exposed the basic weakness of Marxism. Its calculations overlooked basic human foibles: guile, laziness and greed. Like all ideologies, it presupposed the ideal man. And Hungarian peasants were anything but ideal. In a typical case, a farmer was obliged to sell his sound apples to Gyümért, the fruit export agency, at only two florins per pound; but since he was allowed to unload rotten leftovers on to the home market at eleven florins

per pound, he decided to use fewer insecticides next year to ensure a defective crop and larger profits.⁹

Poor Hungarians! Their misery was enhanced by the heartless enforcement of nationalisation. Private shops were closed down and their stock confiscated by the state. If the shopkeeper tried to shield his stock from this legalised theft, then *he* was punished for “stealing state property”. A man’s radio shop was nationalised by order of the Budapest city council; he appealed, so he was roughed up by the ÁVH.

Former owners of businesses were not permitted to return even as employees. Former craftsmen were dragooned into the mass-production lines in factories, or shanghaied into “co-operatives” – what a mockery of a word!

If a man’s home had more than five rooms, then the state confiscated that too, and made him pay rent to live in it; if the home was smaller, he was luckier – he had only to pay a monthly tax and “maintenance” charges, whether or not any repairs were ever effected.

As a further bovine insult to human dignity, Rákosi began mass deportations of “bourgeois and hostile” elements from the cities in April and May 1951. The victims were given twenty-four hours to leave their homes. They were allowed less baggage than a modern airline passenger and were freighted to distant and unappealing parts of Hungary.

Maria Novák, a thirty-one-year-old opera singer, would testify in 1956: “The owner of the apartment building in which we lived was among those deported. His apartment and its museum-piece furniture was confiscated. He was sixty-five and unable to do any kind of labour; he died a couple of months later in some remote part of the country. He had written to one of his friends for a wooden toilet, saying he didn’t feel human without one.”¹⁰

The deportations created a climate of fear – a nightmare or *frásznapok*; in fact widespread medical disorders resulted in even the unaffected surrounding population. A typical motor-car engineer of forty-eight became so emotionally disturbed by the deportation of numerous friends that he developed symptoms of gastric hyperacidity which he was never to lose.¹¹

The harsh fate of the Zsengellér family – the widow Zsengellér and her beautiful daughter Margaret of twenty – was typical of many.¹² How they both silently

cursed the late Professor Zsengellér, Margaret's grandfather, for having thoughtlessly bought this apartment in Thököl Street! Zsengellér, a famous orientalist and voyager, had left it to Margaret's father who had later disappeared in 1944 after being seized as a hostage by the fascists. But this property sufficed for the fateful letter X, denoting *osztályidegen*, or class-alien, to be stamped indelibly in her cadre-dossier. She was refused entry to University, to the Conservatoire, and to the High School of Theatre and Cinema, and in 1951 she knew deportation to be inevitable.

"Little by little we gathered details," described Margaret. "First of all we found out that the notices were delivered Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and that the trucks came to pick up the people next day. Seeing the unhelpful attitude of our porter, whose son and son-in-law were both *ÁVOs*, and seeing the growing number of new lodgers in the building, my mother and I got worried. Each Monday, Wednesday and Friday was a new day of nightmares. One Monday came and went, and then another. On the Thursday we went to see an Italian opera movie, *Pagliacci*. It was a bad movie but we saw the star Lollobrigida for the first time. We went to bed, still on tenterhooks. If only grandfather had thrown away his money at the racetrack, instead of investing it safely in a fine house! 'If only he'd squandered the money,' I cursed for the thousandth time as I tossed and turned in bed. 'What demon possessed Professor Zsengellér to dabble in real estate? How dare he trifle with posterity like that! Did I ever bother you, Grandfather, on your voyages?'"

At three A.M. the Zsengellér doorbell rings. The policeman is polite, he is sorry to disturb them, but he has to deliver a paper to them and get their signature for it. For Margaret and her mother it is the day of the *frász*. The nightmare has come true. The paper is the size of a postcard. The minister of the interior informs them that they have twenty-four hours to leave Budapest, giving up their property in exchange for one room near Eger. The village's name means nothing to them.

Two thousand people are in the lorry convoy that loads up next evening, including Elek Gráf, carpenter, whose sole misfortune is that his surname means Count. The lorries take them to a railway yard near New Pest. On the train they have reserved seats and armed guards. The heat is overpowering and the fifty-mile rail journey takes two days (the train is not permitted on the main lines).

The local funkies at each station have been forewarned and squads of them turn out to spit and hiss and hurl insults at the groups of shaken deportees who de-train.

By his slavish adherence to the doctrines dictated to him from Moscow, Matthias Rákosi was heating up a pressure cooker, with the valve screwed firmly down.

The operations were kept secret, but everybody knew somebody who had been turfed out of hearth and home like this. What had Sári Déry – one of Budapest's loveliest young actresses – done to deserve deportation? Was it because her husband was a count, or had she over-bravely rebuffed some funky's advances? She was hounded out of the capital and harassed, forced to work as a labourer, washerwoman, and kitchenhand, and finally died from lack of medical attention.¹³

And here is another of Rákosi's enemies, sitting in the consulting room of Dr. George Devereux of Cornell University. She is twenty-four, daughter of Countess Serényi, and niece of Prince Paul Eszterházy, the owner of vast estates. Her father led the fight against the fascists in Slovakia, but he had been taken prisoner by the Red Army in 1945.¹⁴

Now this pleasant girl is studying economics in New York. She radiates good breeding with every word she speaks. "In the cellar where I was hiding on our estate another girl was raped, and we were all robbed. My mother was shot through the hip, and father was sent to Siberia. He died a month ago, in prison."

"In Siberia?"

"No, he was returned to Hungary in 1949."

She describes how she trekked to Budapest with her mother and brother in 1945, and how they rebuilt their ruined town house only to see it nationalised by the Communists in 1948. They billeted three other families on them. Refused admission to University as a "class-alien", she was working as a typist when the ultimate humiliation, deportation, was sprung on them in April 1951.

She and her mother, the countess, were transported to a remote village and dumped with other class-aliens on a peasant family. For three years they lived in fear of deportation further east, to Russia. The countess suffered nightmares – the *frásznapok* – and screamed when anybody knocked at the door. In 1952 she

was put into an asylum where she died, and her daughter was imprisoned as a “danger to the republic”.

In the prison camp this girl found former MPs, aristocrats and wives of dispossessed industrialists. It was an entire sub-nation of forgotten peoples.

Outside this consulting room, it is April 18th, 1957. It is New York, NY. It is spring.

Inside, it is suddenly the bone-china world of the Austro-Hungarian aristocracy. Devereux, exploring the depths of this young woman’s character, is startled by her reaction to his standard question about erotic dreams. She says, “I imagine personally that if one hasn’t ever had any sex experience, one can’t have real sex dreams – one only dreams of kissing. And those are the kind of sex dreams that I have.”

Devereux is speechless. He enquires why, unlike most women at twenty-four, she has had no sex experience.

“It was impressed on me in childhood that one should not until one gets married,” she explains in tones of gentle reproof. “Besides, from 1951 to 1953 I was in jail, so I wasn’t exposed to sexual temptations.

“Of course,” the level-headed young countess continues, “*here* I am no longer in prison. And yet I do not do it. I am saving it for marriage. The fact is that if I could go through such hard times and stay a good girl, then I can stay one now as well.”

It is barely comprehensible that a modern Marxist state should have felt mortally afraid of such “enemies” as these: but then again, perhaps it is not so incomprehensible after all.

11 All Things Bright and Soviet

AN ATTRACTIVELY DRESSED medical student is telling American sociologists about her reasons for leaving Hungary.¹ She was the only child of a notary: that alone made her a “class-alien”, although he had died long ago. She was living with her aunt when the uprising began. The six-man medical team that she joined was captured by the Russians, and she has not seen them since.

Like nine out of ten Hungarians she was never a Communist. “Did you have any acquaintances who were?”

She nods, but adds: “I didn’t like them. I was afraid of them. They felt it more comfortable to believe in Communism – and they wanted to have better pay.”

“Who were these people?”

“Fellow students at the University. They got a great deal more money, and everything they needed for their study.”

“How did you deal with these acquaintances?”

“They didn’t bother me very much. I wasn’t a good person to bother with. I was a ‘class-alien’. They knew my family background.”

“What was your cousins’ and aunt’s impression of the regime in 1948?”

“They had believed a little in Communism. The Communism they had read about in books was a beautiful thing. But in practice it was not so nice.”

A cynic once remarked that there is nothing so tragic as the murder of an ideal by a gang of facts. Marxism was such an impracticable ideal, and it was ripe for murdering.

Sociologists would spend years trying to identify the spark-process that actually ignited the marsh-gasses of discontent bubbling up in captive Hungary. One American sociologist likened the violence patterns to those familiar from prison riots. It was an apt comparison. Another expert² traced the suppressed rage to the social isolation created by the police state and all its engines: the taped conversations, the cadre-dossiers, the informants, the torture chambers, and all the other paraphernalia that had been deemed necessary to screen the change-over from the mixed capitalist economy of 1945-1949 to enforced industrialisation, collectivisation and the planned economy.

One small episode documents this sense of suppressed rage. Since 1946 a gang had been going round robbing citizens while posing as security police officials, and none of the victims had even reported them, because they never noticed any difference from the behaviour of the real security police. It would be 1958 before the gang was brought to justice.³

The people felt isolated. They became too dispirited to communicate with each other. Inter-personal relationships were avoided, except between trusted friends and the immediate family. Said one fifty-one-year-old civil servant: "My best friends have died and one of them disappeared. After 1945 time was so scarce and people were under so much pressure that there was no way of keeping a circle of friends going. The only escape for the Hungarian intellectual from bitter reality was after nine p.m. when he extinguished the light and pulled the blanket up to his eyes . . ."4

The Rajk trial had left a numbing feeling throughout the Party. "I was astonished," recalled a leading Party journalist in 1957. "So many of my acquaintances were involved. I thought to myself, 'How odd that I've been with them so often yet I never saw anything remarkable in their behaviour.' It was impossible for me to think that if the Party said that he was a sinner, then he might not be. I remember having gone on a hunt two months before with some Party officials. Rajk and some other high-ranking funkies were present. They all seemed so friendly to one another. I couldn't believe that these same men would have killed one of their best friends without due reason."⁵

But even the top Party funkies were never wholly at ease. Close friends vanished overnight, never to surface again. Over the years the fanatics realised that their country was falling behind its non-Marxist neighbours. But as Dr.

Paul Kecskeméti of the Rand Corporation explains, a psychological “blur” played its part in the Marxist intellectual, who whispered to himself: “No matter how it strikes me, what the Party decides is right. Because the Party represents the great collective force of the proletariat.”⁶

The writings of the Communist prime minister Imre Nagy, who succeeded Rákosi briefly in 1953, provide a classic example of this refusal to accept that the Marxist system itself was a lemon. He blamed all the economic misery on the Jewish foursome.

Following June 1953, for almost two years, the country’s entire working force laboured to correct the serious damage inflicted by the “leftist” excess in all branches of the national economy . . . If all the material, political and moral strength which was used to undo the damage wrought by the so-called “foursome” had instead been used to build Socialism, Hungary would now be a cheerful country living in prosperity. Unfortunately we inherited a very heavy burden.

Numerically, the Party swelled from its three hundred furtive members of 1945 to 865,000 before the uprising. “The only thing that counted was whether you were a Party member or not,” said the civil servant. “If you were not, you were looked on as a stray dog, without any basic human rights at all . . . When I was working as a stoker,” he reminisced, “there was a gipsy woman with four illegitimate children. She joined the Party and was sent on a four-month course in education – before that she had not had any schooling at all. After finishing the course, she was appointed lecturer in education in the VIth precinct of Budapest!”

The Party created mass organisations which became the “transmission belts of Communism”. Everybody had to join one. There was the Hungarian-Soviet Friendship Society, nesting in the old Smallholder Party headquarters on Semmelweiss Street. Membership entitled members to a free weekly, *New World* (*Új Világ*), which went straight on to a hook in the latrines like most of the Party’s publications.⁷ There was a women’s association which provided “crowd extras” for the rallies on May Day. There was a Writers’ Union, and a trades

union organisation: but after a new labour code was enacted in February 1951 the latter existed only to screw more out of the workers for even less reward.

It was the Federation of Working Youth, DISz (*Dolgozó Ifjúság Szövetsége*) whose ineffectiveness as a mouthpiece contributed most to the later student unrest. In 1950 it had replaced the Young Workers organisation, which was Communist but romantic; while the new DISz was as dry as the bones of the Marxist martyrs, and about as supine and lifeless as well. It offended the brighter students by its bias, its dogmatism, and its rejection of individual values.⁸

From press announcements in 1952, its role seems to have been to whip Hungarian youth to ever greater efforts in the scrap metal collection drives, under the Korean War slogan: “Scrap Metals Ensure Peace!” In a speech on June 28th, 1952, Michael Farkas blamed the DISz bureaucratic leadership for the “chauvinism and anti-Semitism” found in its ranks, and he complained that the older youth, over twenty, was unwilling to join.⁹ In 1955 an American intelligence report would summarise:

Significantly, even the Party’s youth organisation (DISz), repository of the regime’s highest hopes for the future, has failed . . . Despite some seven years of intense indoctrination and disciplinary pressure, youth has not become a dependable source of future intellectual cadres for the Party. It continues to be widely affected by cynicism and apathy, and the Party had been forced to admit that the situation is both baffling and dangerous.¹⁰

Eighteen months later, this youth would be hanging ironic placards, “Scrap Metals Ensure Peace!” on the wreckage of Soviet tanks and guns around their capital.

The Communists had never managed to capture the souls of young Hungarians. “My child started school at six,” said a bus driver. “He received a religious education at home from us. He went to church every Sunday. He automatically knew not to repeat what was discussed at home. I never prohibited my son from talking about what he heard at home – he understood from our attitudes and from the attitudes of other schoolmates . . . The little boy knew that our origins were not convenient to the government – for instance that his grandfather had been a career officer in the Tsarist army. So when they asked him about his

grandfather he would say that he was an engineer. He was like a little old man; if he was asked, 'If your grandfather was an engineer, then how come your father's only a chauffeur?' he would reply, 'My dad likes cars.' The boy had an inborn political instinct. My son was no exception – there were many, many children of this type.”¹¹

Unable to follow the normal guidelines of bourgeois ethics, the funkies could only follow the decisions of the Party leadership.

The Party official in the factory became an object of silent contempt. He wore immaculate overalls, he ate bacon from a drawer, and drew an effortless 1,500 florins a month for his sinecure job in the personnel department. His vocabulary had been clipped out of Party brochures, so he was fluent in the jargon. He could say “right-thinking worker” (*öntudatos munkás*) at the drop of a hat and he would admit, “Of course there are still mistakes, comrade, but . . .” And he also talked mostly in the subjunctive, because it sounded more proper to his proletarian ears: *tudhassák, láthassák*. A Jewish factory worker who was anxious to become a journalist for the official news agency MTI, knew how to succeed: “When I made my first speech at an MTI Party membership meeting,” he said, “I included all the illiterate subjunctive phrases I had heard the funkies use at my factory.”¹² The proper tone became one of pompous self-importance. Whereas in 1945 the Party men below Rákosi were on first-name terms, and many of them wore peaked caps to demonstrate their solidarity with the proletariat, in 1948 the directive filtered down the grapevine: “You are the *ruling* party, comrades! You must shave every day and wear ties.” By 1951, porkpie hats had become the order of the day.¹³

Those on the fringe were thrown into agonies of uncertainty about the proper etiquette. Twenty-five-year-old Peter Kende, a Jewish journalist on the Party newspaper, had to play-act for years: “Anybody intelligent who looked as if he had read three books came under automatic suspicion.” So he overstated his identification with the proletariat. One of his friends recalled a reception at the opera where Kende appeared with uncombed hair, wearing a yellow suit and a dirty open-necked shirt. “Everybody else was dressed in dark suits and they marvelled at him and said, ‘Now that is a good cadre for you!’”¹⁴

Rough justice met any journalist who fell out of line, as János Bardi, who worked on the Social Democrat *Daylight* (*Világosság*) found. When the propaganda ministry official Nicholas Vásárhelyi – who would play one of the more stirring roles in the uprising – lectured the newspaper staff shortly before the party amalgamated with the Communists, Bardi allowed himself the sardonic remark: “There can be no doubt of the educational value of the Soviet army’s presence in a country because the voters there have always made the ‘right’ choice, while in the countries occupied by the Allied armies they have always voted differently!” Bardi survived that *faux pas*, but not his next. He was duty chief on the mass-circulation daily, *Latest News* (*Friss Újság*), when a big “peace demonstration” was staged in the capital. To everybody’s agony the front-page photograph next day showed in the front row giant photographs of Stalin and Rákosi flanking a placard demanding: “Hang the War Criminals!” Everybody was dismissed; Bardi himself, the chief editor, the photographer, even the typesetter. Bardi was grimly advised by Vásárhelyi, a family friend: “I think some further political education in the working class is called for.” Bardi found himself conscripted as a welder into the local shipyards where he stayed for the next three years.¹⁵

This contact with the real proletariat was a harrowing experience for intellectuals. Alexander Kiss, the Smallholder leader, found that the workers in the brick factory – to which he was paroled in 1953 – openly swore at Rákosi and his system.¹⁶ A Communist student sent to work in the Matthias Rákosi ironworks near Budapest found only hatred of the regime – by 1953 the workers were ready to destroy it.¹⁷ Said a fifty-year-old cutter in a shoe factory: “The workers did not believe in anything the Communists said, because they had welshed on their promises so often.”¹⁸ And a worker from Csepel said: “They promised us everything, but at the same time they subjugated us and dragged us down to the depths of misery.”¹⁹

Csepel Island, Budapest’s permanently smog-shrouded industrial suburb, where 36,000 workers in sixteen major factories produced arms, ammunition, and heavy machinery, had become something of a showpiece of socialist achievement. It was Rákosi’s own constituency. Its MÁVAG locomotive and machine tool factory was on every foreign diplomat’s tour itinerary. Visitors were shown

the new housing project with four thousand workers' homes equipped with refrigerators and bathrooms.

Csepel should have been a Communist stronghold, yet it was not. The workers preferred football or the pub to politics, said one. Apart from a few "bloody mouthed" Communists, they were all Social Democrats. Communist propaganda officials tried to whip the workers into two-hour Party seminars; to the agitators it was a matter of both kudos and extra salary. More obstinate workers were harassed by the funkies at their workplaces. But the standard opener, "By the way, do you read the newspaper?" was more often than not met with the bland answer: "I only read comics."²⁰

A twenty-six-year-old Budapest engineer explained, "When the Party secretary at the factory spoke to me, he would enquire what I thought of a London strike, for example. I would reply that it was a very good thing . . . The worker would always reply in a positive way. I don't suppose that the leaders of the Communist Party in Hungary knew of anything of the masses' true opinions. Everyone in the Party hierarchy wanted to protect themselves, and reported that everything was fine at their level of activity. When the summaries were made at the top level, things must have looked quite good."²¹

Perhaps the local funkies in Csepel never reported their massive failure to higher echelons. Take this typical seventeen-year-old tough who has worked in Csepel's docks and haunts the sailors' taverns, captivated by their yarns of high life in Italy or France.²² The boy no longer believes in the exploits of the Soviet admirals, he devours every book he can lay hands on about Admiral Horatio Nelson and his great sea battles. His father, a tired factory electrician, scolds him for always dreaming of the sea.

"Being a sailor requires a lot of discipline," the youngster will later wistfully explain, "and I always tried to have a lot of discipline. I always kept my shoes very clean and every evening I would put all my things in order." But his uncle is an ex-army officer, and so the Communists have dashed his hopes of ever entering a marine training school. "You are out of class, comrade!" they told him, with an air of finality. What now? "I felt very lost in my last year at high school," he will recall to questioners in April 1957. "I felt that I was in an utterly hopeless situation."

So he lodges with his parents in their one-room slum in Csepel, and nurses his disappointment with his two best friends, a would-be priest, and a classmate who is planning to be a mechanical engineer. Both of them are “lemon-and-lime” types, he says disparagingly, but they share his passion for hiking and fishing, and also a strange fascination for sawn-off shotguns. Girls are out; they are always demanding expensive entertainment. But guns – they are a man’s hobby! The three lads buy up old Second World War rifles and cut them down to an easily-concealed pistol length: it is the trainee priest who perfects the technique of sawing almost right through the barrel and then firing the gun inside a tub of water to snap the barrel cleanly without damaging the rifling. The technique becomes all the rage in Csepel. The boy tells his boxing-club pals, they come to see how it is done, and everybody stows away the resulting deadly weapons in case they ever get a chance to shoot their way out of this hopeless dead-end alley. In October 1956 that chance will present itself.

12 The Treadmill

IN DECEMBER 1956, an opinion poll was conducted in the refugee camps around Vienna.

A sample of one thousand refugees was chosen so that their backgrounds matched those of the entire Hungarian population, and they were asked about their attitudes, opinions, and motives for taking flight.¹ They blamed their *discontent* equally on the desperate economic situation and on “political” factors: the ÁVH and Soviet terror methods and the restrictions on personal liberties. The pollsters concluded that no specific event had triggered the uprising. “People were just at the end of their tether – they could not stand all the frustration, the deception and so on.”

This was what the complaining was about. The refugees considered themselves deprived by the advent of the Communist regime. They had set themselves goals in life, and they blamed the regime for not letting them attain these goals because they were not Party members or had unsatisfactory cadre-dossiers. Promotion was often dependent on the whim of the Party. And even those who struggled on to the pinnacles of success felt cheated by the realisation that Party funkies or those who had “wintered” in Moscow had got there before them relatively effortlessly.

It was not only the big things that stuck in people’s craw. One man catalogued the irritations: “The tortures, the fact that you could be arrested, tortured and imprisoned for years without ever having done anything. Having to say what you didn’t believe. Another irritation was getting a glass of beer: you had to queue up, and when you got it, it came in a dirty glass or the glass wasn’t full,

and there was nothing you could say about it. You had to queue everywhere. The buses were overcrowded. The elevators didn't work. You couldn't buy ham, even if you could afford to."²

This disaffection with the regime was both ineradicable and deep-seated, particularly among the skilled.

Take the nervous, petite young woman doctor being interviewed by Dr. Richard M. Stephenson, a sociologist, at Rutgers University on March 15th, 1957. She is twenty-eight, carelessly dressed, and tense – a rather dark woman preoccupied by the uncertainties of her new future. She was working in a Jewish hospital with more than the usual quota of Communist physicians. Since the research institute employing her husband was also crawling with Party members, both were treated as outsiders.³

Her husband is a brilliant doctor trained in the detection of congenital cardiac anomalies, but he is of Sudeten German birth, and she finds that she cannot stand Germans. ("They have been the spark of every war in Europe, they look down on other nationalities, they are not friendly and never have been," is what she thinks.)

Inside her family there was an unusual problem. "My brother," she explains, "was born in my mother's first marriage and is half-Jewish. He was harassed a great deal during the Nazi regime in Hungary. So he sympathised with the Communists. He said that under the Communists religious differences did not make any difference. My family were very sad about the way he felt, and were a little bitter about his outlook."

Stephenson asks if she has heard from him since fleeing her country.

"My brother didn't like us leaving . . . He wrote telling us that we were just looking for adventure and that if we were good Hungarians we would not have left."

"What would you say were your principal objections to the regime?" enquires Stephenson.

She ponders, then reels off a string of reasons for her embitterment. "Individuality was not possible. The Communists poked their noses into everything, from love to work. A person couldn't live his own life. I was very bitter about the fact that jobs were given on the basis of political views and not qualifications. My husband was very well qualified, but he had to work for three years in

a country hospital before he was able to get to Budapest . . . Only the Party members got good jobs.”

The public rage at the incompetent Red “expert” was deeply felt, personal, corrosive. The Americans later interview a masculine, hard-muscled, thirty-seven-year-old toolmaker, who will rise against the Communists when the time comes and personally drag out a colonel at Republic Square who is then lynched by the mob. The Reds have robbed him of his motorcycle shop, the ÁVH have falsely arrested and imprisoned him and released and goaded him. He seems level-headed until he describes how he lost both his children at birth, one at eleven days, the other in a premature delivery. “The baby drowned in the blood,” he sobs to an interviewer. “I nearly killed the doctor – he was Communist. He could not be bothered to come down at one A.M., he just went back to sleep. They are an indescribable gang. That is why the revolutionaries killed so many. Every one of them deserved to die a hundred deaths.”⁴

Every University student has to take examinations in Marxism. “You cannot be a good doctor unless you are a good Marxist!” is the slogan. Only the fanatical Communists are regarded as reliable surgeons.

A typical surgeon of thirty is by 1954 an assistant professor at Budapest University. He has to join the Party to get ahead. But the Party’s demands on him are so intense that he has developed a peptic ulcer. He has to attend Party classes three nights each week, or attract menacing remarks like, “Comrade, you are being too *passive!*” At these classes Party funkies, ranking from physician to kitchen-hand, dictate the Party line to him. There are daily communal readings of *Free People*. He and another Party member are required to make surprise weekend visits to unsuspecting families to lecture them on world affairs and the blessings of Marxism; after all, people trust doctors. Afterwards, each man has to write up a behaviour report on the other, to go into his cadre-dossier.⁵

The worst cadre-files were those of the “class-aliens”. These were citizens who had incurred the Party’s disfavour, or who came from a non working-class background, or who had been officers in Horthy’s armed forces, or who had the wrong politics or had relatives or friends in the West, for example. They were harried, bullied and interned. To employ more than three people was enough for

the fateful cross to be marked in the upper left corner of the cadre-dossier: “class-alien”.

Businessmen, landowners, and aristocrats found themselves down-graded to floorsweepers, lorry drivers, and lathe operators. A typical class-alien is the thirty-three-year-old Budapest bus driver George Bastomov. The bus company always needs drivers, and has turned a blind eye on his less than immaculate cadre-file. His father was a colonel in Tsar Nicholas’s household guard, and fled to Hungary after the Bolshevik revolution. His wife has no teeth; that is a legacy of thirty-three days in ÁVO custody in 1948. Once he was chauffeur to a Party dignitary, but when his boss made him wait without lunch for two days running, he rebuked him, “You want to spread the gospel of Communism this way?” and walked off the job. That *lèse majesté* earned him a six-month prison sentence. “Under Communism,” Bastomov philosophises to his fellow drivers, “you’ve always got one foot in jail and the other in the grave.”⁶

The workers felt cheated and betrayed. A skilled toolmaker explained how the workers got their own back on the system: “I had to figure the material which was to be used for the month and to make reports. Sometimes we got much more material than was needed – there was a lot of poor planning – so we just used to destroy this material. A tremendous amount of material was destroyed this way. This happened in other factories too. We might take some home if we were able to. I tried to do everything I could to ruin the Communists.”⁷

Rákosi’s industrialisation drive alienated every worker. It called for the coercion of the labour force and the use of a wage system based on piecework “norms” – norms which were periodically adjusted upwards so that the workers could never improve their standard of living, however hard they worked. To live above the breadline, workers cheerfully falsified output figures in a way that made a mockery of the planned economy. Restrictions were placed on the workers’ ability to choose their place of work, severe fines were enforced for even minor infractions of rules and there were frequent “drives” in honour of various special events. There were seven in the eleven months preceding February 1951 alone, commemorating the “Liberation”, May Day, Korea Week, Rákosi’s release from jail, the Russian October revolution and innumerable further occasions of Socialist rejoicing. All involved the workers in unpaid overtime.

In the five years up to 1954, their real take-home pay would fall by twenty per cent: even in 1956 their average pay would be only 1,212 florins per month.⁸ Only fifteen per cent of the country's families lived above the regime's own declared *minimum* standard of living; fifteen per cent of the workers had no blankets, twenty per cent had no winter coats.

They promised that in the course of the first Five-Year Plan they would increase the workers' living standards by fifty per cent [wrote Imre Nagy later]. In actual fact, although industrial production – taking 1949 as 100 – grew between 1950 and 1954 from 180 to 300, living standards steadily declined until 1953, and then increased by fifteen per cent solely as a result of the policies of the new period. In comparison with 1949, the workers managed to double industrial production, to increase labour productivity by sixty-three per cent, and to decrease costs; but in spite of all this their wages remained on the whole on the 1949 level.⁹

Meanwhile, the Marxist treadmill spun ever faster. The workers worked and the funkies looked on. Workers were forced to buy Peace Bonds, on penalty of dismissal or even arrest if they did not. When one man, Mr. Gál, started in a factory, he found that every autumn the workers were expected to buy Peace Bonds worth an entire month's salary. Gál was a former gardener's apprentice who had migrated to Budapest and had been working previously in a small artisans' co-operative making bicycles. He only earned one thousand florins a month. He decided to buy only three hundred florins of bonds; the factory director threatened to cut his pay, and finally sacked him for his refusal.¹⁰

In factories, offices, universities, museums, everybody had to clock in. Time-clocks were sometimes installed even before the plumbing went in. A late-comer's name would be posted with a life-sized caricature of a Neanderthal man with a slogan ballooning out of his vampire-toothed mouth: "Today I helped the imperialists."

A typical factory, MOFEM, at Magyaróvár, had employed four hundred men before the war, supervised by ten foremen and ten administrative officials; under the new Marxist regime it employed three times as many workers, but saddled them with *ten* times as many non-productive overseers, and the substructure

was overloaded with thirty “trade union officials”, fifty Party funkies, and thirty factory policemen.¹¹

In factory and farm, this bureaucracy killed initiative. State control of production resulted in bad quality, because nobody cared. Private enterprise was stifled. In Óvár there were a couple of private shoemakers left, but they received barely enough leather even to repair shoes.¹²

Consumer goods were few, expensive and shoddy. A drab suit would cost two or three thousand florins, over two months’ pay for the ordinary worker. A pair of boots cost 280 florins. (The same boots had cost seventy-eight florins to manufacture, and would be sold to the Soviet Union for less than sixteen.) Hungarians could not yet buy clothes made of synthetic fibres, or nylon stockings, or refrigerators or washing machines. A limited experimental TV system existed, but served only the Politburo members and selected ministers. Furniture trickling out of the factories met only a fraction of the nation’s requirements: in 1953, 7,500 kitchen suites and 7,000 bedroom suites were produced to meet the country’s entire needs and export requirements as well.¹³

Private cars were virtually non-existent. Between 1949 and the uprising only 6,846 cars were imported, adding to the 12,000 already in the country. Assuming 20,000 cars by 1956, this amounted to one car per 500 people, compared with one per eleven in Britain and one per ten in France.

The side-effects of all these shortages were serious. The thousand-bed state hospital at Angel Fields (*Angyalföld*), a slum district of Budapest, suffered badly. Although the former Kodak factory at Vác still manufactured X-ray film, it was for export only and X-ray film was almost unobtainable in Hungary. The hospital ran one elderly second-hand pick-up van but no cars, although it had an obstetrical ward. The doctors knew of the latest foreign medicines but could not obtain them. A special commission of doctors had to decide the allocation of streptomycin in each hospital. Bed sheets had to be ordered through “frame contracts” placed with a hospital supply firm. The contracts were reviewed by the local health authorities – a process which took months – and then the hospital had to accept whatever the firm could manufacture, which often bore no relation to what was actually needed.¹⁴

Gradually, the country sank into squalor and poverty. While by 1949 the country had made good most of the war damage inflicted on housing, only

103,000 of the 220,000 dwellings set by Rákosi as a target of his Five-Year Plan were built; and most of those were built on private, and not state, initiative. At the same time 42,500 dwellings became derelict. Few homes had more than one room, and only one in five had running water. From 1949 to 1955 the country's population increased by 7.1 per cent, while the number of dwellings rose by only 3.9 per cent. For every hundred rooms, Hungary had 264 inhabitants. In Budapest itself – as new industrial workers were shoe-horned into the capital – the situation became acute; by July 1954 the average citizen would have only 10.2 square yards of total space to live in; less than a railway compartment. Unable to buy houses of their own, young couples set up home with their parents or rented dingy rooms.

The Party leaders and other funkies escaped this hardship. Rákosi, Gerő, Farkas and Révai had villas of sumptuous luxury on the city's outskirts, on Freedom Hill, protected by ÁVH guards and bloodhounds; the villas had cost twenty-six million florins. The ÁVH were paid specially high wages and expense allowances.

And the Communist writers were also feather-bedded: the books of hard-line Communist authors like Béla Illyés, who had spent the war years in Moscow, enjoyed multiple printings but went straight from the bindery to a warehouse where they were pulped after a decent interval. During 1951, nearly sixty million books were printed, over twelve thousand different titles; but since a newspaper reported in September 1952, when the first Book Festival Week began, that the best-seller in Hungary since the 1945 "Liberation" was the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* the choice cannot have been a wide one.¹⁵

1951 was the year when Joseph Révai unveiled in Budapest an outsize bronze statue of Stalin: "A statue," he triumphed, "which springs from the soul of our nation . . . A Hungarian statue." Stalin's boots rested on a plinth of red limestone towering thirty feet above the square. In a way it was symbolical: the Soviet big brother was everywhere. Colleges taught Soviet Party history. Soviet textbooks were consulted. Law schools studied Soviet law. Learning Russian was obligatory. When one medical student fell ill and was unable to study more than two hours a day, the dean of his medical school advised him to devote the

time to Russian language and Marxism.¹⁶ No work could be published on Shakespeare without awed footnote references to Soviet experts on the Bard. Such experts were often of questionable pedigree: a professor of Marxism at the city's new Lenin Institute turned out to have been a former PT instructor at Eriwan.¹⁷

Meanwhile Soviet culture was rammed down Hungarian throats. By March 1952 six million copies of Soviet authors' books had been published in Hungary. An unknown Mongolian writer would have a first edition of ten thousand copies, while a native novelist would be fobbed off with only three thousand. "The derisive smile on our teachers' faces," one rural pupil recalled, "betrayed more often than not what they were really thinking." Pupils ventured cynical remarks like, "No doubt *this* was a Soviet invention too!" and earned approving sniggers from the rest of the class.¹⁸

All of this did grave insult to Hungarian intelligence. It injured their national pride.

Equally serious was the economic blight inflicted by Soviet experts. At Rákosi's behest a monstrous steel mill was built at Dunapentele, a little riverside town south of Budapest; the town was renamed "Sztálinváros" – Stalin city. The ore had to be imported from Kraznogorsk, USSR, and the resulting pig iron cost more than finished steel goods in Austria.¹⁹

From bricklayers to locomotive engineers, Russians were brought in to teach Hungarians how to perform faster. Russian bulls were mated with Hungarian cows. Soviet experts dictated how wide the Hungarian combination-harvester should be, despite protests that the Hungarian terrain demanded a narrower bite. The whole agricultural system was thrown out of joint: the enforced livestock reduction resulted in insufficient soil-fertility.²⁰ The Soviet system was to deep-plough, but on Hungary's shallow soil this killed the humus. Tractor repair stations were installed, but sited primarily to act as Russian tank repair depots in a future war.²¹

Rákosi spent money for Moscow like water. The Russians ran the railways and controlled the bauxite and uranium mines. Thirty million florins were invested in a madcap plan to grow rubber from the Russian *koksagys* plant: after two years' work and the commitment of six thousand *hold* (7,520 acres) of land, the entire project had yielded less than four hundred pounds of rubber. The rubber scheme was wound up and its luckless chief was shifted to cotton pro-

duction. After one lucky cotton year, Rákosi doubled the cotton acreage, but insisted against all expert advice on a Russian cotton seed; all other traditional crops, like onions, maize and paprika, were ruthlessly cutback. The next two years were wet and the cotton crops were virtually unpickable. The cotton scheme was abandoned in 1954.²²

To conceal the unpalatable truth, the regime progressively fudged the production statistics – about the only “progressive” feature of Marxism. On January 13th, 1952, Ernest Gerő announced that industrial production in 1951 had been 30.1 per cent higher than in 1950; the announcement met with hollow laughter from unseen mouths. The laughter turned to rage when, that same year, the workers’ norms were increased so that they now had to put in fifty- and even sixty-hour weeks.

A typical item in *Free People* on July 6th, 1952, announced that threshing work had begun, and that “accounts will be settled on the spot” for those peasants who do not meet their surrender obligations within forty-eight hours.²³ Impotent in the face of these ruinous crop deliveries, the peasants truculently reduced farm output. In hungry cities the shoppers stood in queues outside the emptying food stores.

Worst of all was the lack of leisure time, or the people’s freedom to work when they liked. Everybody had to have a work-book proving that he was gainfully employed. “I remember being in an espresso bar with a girlfriend shortly before the uprising,” said a forty-year-old hotel manager. “Suddenly there was a police raid by eight plain-clothes men. My girlfriend did not have her identity card with her. The plain-clothes men wanted to arrest her on the spot.”²⁴

The ordinary citizen’s waking hours were consumed with running from one place to the next. “I had no time to read newspapers,” apologised a seventeen-year-old locksmith to his interviewers. “My work took up all my time.”²⁵ Women had to work in a factory and then do the housework as well. They were dishevelled and discontented; they lacked the little luxuries that made life bearable.

Money was scarce, but the streets and restaurants were full because people’s homes were too small and overcrowded to spend their time in. The Budapest tram system was squalid and infrequent. It was so overloaded that it was often impossible to get on at intermediate stops.

What else was there for the factory worker to do with his spare time? There was the lottery, there were football matches, there was angling on the Danube – and there was alcohol. Public houses mushroomed across the country: in the popular tongue they were called “Fathercraft” stores.²⁶ And the regime encouraged drinking. Alcohol was a useful “anaesthetic”, and it paid a fifty per cent profit to the state wine monopolies. By 1951 enough wine was being sold for every Hungarian to down ninety litres per year.²⁷

Sexual morality became lax. While during the first years of the Communist rule standards had been puritan, these soon changed. Procuring an abortion had been punishable by life imprisonment, couples were arrested for kissing in public, hotels were raided to root out unmarried couples. As a twenty-three-year-old female factory worker scornfully apostrophised: “They preached water – but they drank wine.”²⁸

Most of the prominent funkies kept mistresses, and official policy slowly shifted until immorality actually flourished.²⁹ A car industry worker said: “About eighty or ninety per cent of the women in the factory were available.” The birth-rate slumped and had to be promoted by unusual means.³⁰ Childless couples were penalised with extra taxes, and girls were encouraged to enter into casual sexual relationships. In clinics throughout the country posters dropped a broad hint: “To give birth is a girl’s glory and a wife’s duty.”³¹ Until about 1953 unmarried mothers were rewarded with two thousand florins for each bastard child born. Early divorces were frequent and facile: marriages could be dissolved by either party if for example there were held to be “irreconcilable ideological differences”.

Simultaneously, prostitution increased. A staggering proportion of Hungarian males questioned in confidence by American sociologists admitted losing their virginity to prostitutes.³² “One night,” said a hospital official of fifty-four, “I was sitting in an espresso bar on Saint Stephen’s Boulevard. A good-looking girl sat down at my table, and after a few moments she told me that for fifty florins I could come up to her place.” She turned out to be a country girl, drafted to the capital to work on the till in a state-run store for a monthly pay of only 720 florins. Prostitution flourished, although illegal; the brothels were closed down in 1950, and the girls were re-trained as taxi-drivers (and used as informers by the security police). “The result was that in Budapest nobody dared to

take a taxi driven by a woman,” said Dr. Paul Hoványi, a fifty-one-year-old civil servant, “because she wouldn’t know how to drive and wouldn’t know the streets either.”

It all eroded the traditional family ties, just as the Party intended. Parents had less time for their children. Children spent more time with other grown-ups, became independent and ill-bred.³³ Daughters might marry into different social and wealth strata, causing envy between the families. If the young husband was good cadre material, he might advance to be chief engineer at only twenty-three, producing still more envy from his parents-in-law.

As religious teaching in the schools was abolished and church-going declined, the quality of life deteriorated. The folk-heroes were those who could “beat the system”, those who could evade the official norms and controls. Stealing, lying, and cheating increased. Embittered workers pilfered tools and materials to set up illegal home businesses. People felt compelled to thieve because of their own poverty, but they had no pangs of conscience: “Theft from the state was not considered immoral,” said one workman. “Everyone did it, including the Communists.”³⁴ “During the building of the ÁVO palace at Jászai Mari Square, on the bank of the Danube, the night watchmen and the police collaborated in carting away the costly parquet by the sackload for firewood. And other workers stole anything they could lay hands on,” said Hoványi.³⁵

Stealing from the state was even regarded as a slap in the face of the dictatorship: amplifiers, sodium, alcohol, sausage meat, baked goods, shoes, table lamps, even the beds from hospitals vanished.³⁶ “Nowadays,” said a fifty-four-year-old purchasing agent at a big Budapest state hospital ruefully, “even nailing it down is no guarantee against theft.”³⁷ Copper was stolen from shipyards. (“I do it and my mates do it, and nobody says a word to anybody about it,” said one foreman.) In the Közért state stores, the employees sold short weight and stole the rest. If their own families came in, check-out girls asked payment for half a kilo and gave ten. Because butter was wrapped, and could not be short-weighted, Közért managers would not order much; the result was an apparently chronic but purely artificial butter-shortage.³⁸

It was as if the whole Marxist economy had been devised to provide the maximum number of indirect ways for enraging the man in the street. One of the first outward symptoms of this repressed rage was raw nerves; courtesy and

a sense of service were things of the past. The polite title *úr*, Sir, fell into disuse; non-Party members disliked using its official replacement, *elvtárs*, comrade, so everybody became *szaktárs*, colleague. The kissing of hands stopped. Waiters and sales staff were offensive to customers.³⁹

A frail Greek Orthodox bishop, returning from ten years' exile in Siberia, ordered first one small beer in a Budapest restaurant, and then another: "Same again, please."⁴⁰

"Why didn't you order a large one in the first place?" snapped the waiter.

But it was the tram journey that brought out the worst in people. Budapest's urban population had doubled, the tram was always jam-packed. Every other minute there were exclamations and rebukes: "Jackass!" "Cows!" and the like. If a pregnant woman clambered on, the people sitting down looked the other way. There was bickering with the conductor, the passengers took sides, and so the tram screeched and rattled on until everybody aboard was shouting and blaspheming.

As yet, nobody dared openly criticise the regime.

13 Uncle Imre

ONE EVENT IN the spring of 1953, as predictable as time itself and yet still startling by its sudden onset, seemed to turn the fortunes of the Iron Curtain countries: Joseph Stalin died.

While whole continents rejoiced, in Budapest Rákosi winced at the news. Elizabeth Andics, director of the Party school, dressed from head to foot in mourning; and Michael Farkas supported her on his arm at the commemoration ceremony, as one does a widow at her husband's funeral. Rákosi's power had flowed from Stalin's mantle. As the old Georgian's mortal remains were slow-marched into the mausoleum on Red Square it was as though Rákosi's own private sun had been extinguished. Journalist Tibor Méray wrote later: "The Rákosi gang lost that feeling of total certainty with which it had killed, cheated and murdered."¹

This uncertainty extended through many countries, and the proletariat noticed the slackening of the grip. In June there were labour riots in Pilsen, Czechoslovakia. On the 17th of that month, building workers struck in Communist East Berlin and it took Soviet tanks to put the riots down. The disturbances slopped over into Poland, and Soviet tanks were again sent in.

In Budapest, twenty thousand workers at the sprawling Matthias Rákosi steel-works in Csepel – formerly the Manfréd Weiss concern – struck in protest at the pitifully low wages, high labour norms and food shortages; and as Imre Nagy confirmed in a secret memorandum two years later there were simultaneous tremors in other industrial centres including Ódz and Diósgyőr, and mass demonstrations by peasants on the Great Plain.² The possibility of a revolt by the

working class against its “own” regime briefly haunted the Party headquarters in Budapest. Nikita S. Khrushchev himself said a few days later that if prompt steps had not been taken, Rákosi and his cronies might well have found themselves “summarily booted out”.

Stalin’s heirs blamed Rákosi for driving the country to the brink of this catastrophe. They criticised his Stalin-like one-man rule. They summoned the Hungarian camarilla – Rákosi and Gerő – like miscreant schoolboys to the Kremlin, and obliged them to appear before the presidium. Georgi M. Malenkov and his new henchmen Khrushchev and Vyacheslav M. Molotov dictated harsh terms to them. Rákosi must resign and be replaced by a collective leadership like their own, with Imre Nagy as prime minister.

The dramatic confrontation was engraved in Imre Nagy’s memory, and he referred to it in glowing terms in his secret memoirs: Anastas Mikoyan, the deputy premier, scathingly referred to the “adventurous spirit” displayed by Rákosi in creating an iron smelting industry in Hungary, a country producing neither iron ore nor coke. Malenkov pointed out that they had as recently as May attempted to get Rákosi to separate the leadership of Party from state. Rákosi had raised objections to every name that was put forward. Malenkov had been appalled and concluded that Rákosi wanted a premier who would have no weight in the decision-making process.

At the June 1953 confrontation in Moscow Khrushchev underscored this.

“What is at stake,” he ruled, “is that leadership of Party and state should not be concentrated in the hands of one man: this is not desirable.”³

Rákosi and his unwholesome colleagues were ordered back to Budapest, and “advised” to convene their Central Committee and to revise their ruinous agricultural and industrial policies: in particular, they were to allow the collective farms to dissolve, if their members so wished.

Rákosi, Farkas and Gerő were also ordered to give up their present government posts. (Gerő became minister of the interior.) All the rising anti-Semitism of the post-Stalin era welled up against these three men. Lavrenti Beria, Stalin’s old police chief, snapped at Rákosi: “Listen, Comrade Rákosi, Hungary has had Hapsburg emperors, Tartar khans, Polish princes and Turkish sultans, but she has never yet had a Jewish king, and that is what you are trying to become.”⁴

Rákosi's successor as prime minister was his old rival, Imre Nagy. Nagy himself revealed with some relish that it was the Kremlin who interceded to insist on his appointment. "For the sake of truth," he recalled, "it must be stated that it was not Matthias Rákosi but the Soviet comrades – Comrades Malenkov, Molotov, and Khrushchev – who recommended it. Comrade Rákosi and all members of the Hungarian delegation voiced their approval."⁵

It remained for the Central Committee, meeting in Budapest on June 27th, 1953, to rubber-stamp the Moscow decisions. The resolution that it passed was a powerful condemnation of Rákosi's misrule.⁶ But he was still the Party leader, and his power was still enough to prevent the publication of the resolution.

And so Parliament assembled in its vaulted marble and gilt chamber on July 4th, 1953, to hear about the new course which Imre Nagy proposed to steer. It was a great moment in his life. The newsreel film shows Nagy rising with an almost lordly air, a handkerchief in his top pocket, clipping the donnish pince-nez spectacles lopsidedly on to the bridge of his nose, tucking his chins into his chest, and producing a sheaf of papers from which he then reads his promises of reforms.

Sometimes Nagy nods his head forcefully; Rákosi, scowling at him from the first row of the seats that rise in semi-circular tiers behind him, is not nodding. Nor is Gerő, sitting only two paces away, with his chin cupped in his hand and an ironic glint in his eyes. The chamber is walled with paintings of great moments in the country's history; by the end of his speech, everybody has the feeling that they have just witnessed another.

Who is this Imre Nagy, this humourless, pedantic man on whom Moscow's favour now briefly falls? Can even he foresee that the men to whom he is speaking in this lofty hall will one day place him in the prison tumbrel? It is unlikely. He has performed the rituals like the best of them.

Indeed, there is still little to distinguish him from his heartless predecessor. On December 21st, 1954, he will cynically claim in a jubilant speech on Parliament's tenth anniversary: "We have created a new country, and a happy and free life for the people." He says this at a time when thousands of political prisoners from Cardinal Mindszenty to George Marosán are still rotting in labour camps throughout the country.

And he will earn dutiful applause by remarking, without a vestige of conscious irony:

One sorry chapter that has recurred all too frequently in our country's history shows it being subjected to a foreign oppression that thwarts all economic and cultural progress for generations and sometimes even for centuries. Ten years ago, for the first time in Hungary's ancient history, things took a different turn: because the Soviet army entered our country not as a conqueror, but as a liberator!⁷

Nagy himself was not an eye-witness to Hungary's oh-so-fortunate liberation by the Red Army: he had been in Moscow with his family since 1930.

In 1956, when he was dragged on to the centre of the stage, few of the Western world's claquers would recall such facile outpourings as these, or his remarks to the Third Party Congress⁸ in May 1954: "The magnificent achievements of the worldwide struggle for the peace of mankind waged under the leadership of the Soviet Union on the one hand, and the warlike efforts of United States imperialism and their policy of supporting reactionary and counter-revolutionary forces on the other, have clearly revealed to our people the great historic significance of the fact that our fatherland was liberated by the armed forces of the Soviet Union . . . To this we owe the independence and sovereignty of our country . . ."⁹

And this same Imre Nagy, who knew how the Communists had faked and forged and bullied and blustered their way into power, blandly asked the Party to show indulgence towards the dim-witted and ham-fisted "local councils" set up in 1951 to enforce Rákosi's policies, apologising that to require faultless administration from a social class which had been oppressed for centuries would be expecting too much. Indeed, Nagy publicly called on the ÁVH and these local councils, as "the organs of the dictatorship of the proletariat", to wage an unremitting struggle against the class-enemy: "The class-enemy – the compromising gentry of the Horthy regime, the lackeys of the old anti-popular system, the kulak elements and the capitalists – have not yet been annihilated."¹⁰

Yes, this will be how Imre Nagy speaks, this man on whom the press of the entire Western world will soon gaze with fervent awe. Here he is, in mid-1953,

fifty-eight years old and unexpectedly presented to ten million Hungarians as their new prime minister.

With his porky frame and rolls of fat bulging over his collar at the front and back, Nagy becomes for an entire nation its “Uncle Imre”, the walking promise of softer times to come. There is a rolled-up gamp hooked over one arm, and a porkpie hat wedged squarely on to his balding head. His rounded, irregular face leaves the odd impression of a crop of haemorrhoids sprouting a Joseph Stalin moustache; the eyes squinting through the pince-nez eye-glasses betray distant Mongol ancestry. He favours old-fashioned fawn suits of the three-button style, a sober plum-coloured tie, and shirts of a quality not often seen on representatives of the proletariat. With his bushy eyebrows and bonhomie he could be mistaken for the typical *csikós* or horse-herd. He likes to taste the local wine, he will dance a brisk *csárdás* at arm’s length with any maiden who cares to partner him; and with his soft, Trans-Danubian accent he exudes the unmistakable air of his peasant origins.

Imre Nagy – it is pronounced “Nudge” – was born in 1896 amidst the rolling wheatfields of Somogy County, the son of devout Calvinist peasants.¹¹ The local pastor, the Reverend Martin Csertán, had hoped to see a possible clergyman in him, but Nagy’s schoolteacher, a left-wing agitator named Ladislav Hudra, claimed his interest first, and Imre Nagy was committed to socialism from his earliest youth. He trained as a fitter in a farm implement factory. In the First World War he was wounded in the Isonzo battles, in which a few miles away the young lieutenant Erwin Rommel was winning his medals. Captured on the Russian front after that, Nagy joined the Bolsheviks in 1918. In the following year, he was assigned a minor position in Béla Kun’s brief Soviet regime in Budapest. Like Rákosi, Nagy fled in 1919; he returned two years later to organise the peasants of Somogy into an illegal Communist Party.

In 1930 he again took refuge in the Soviet Union, and Moscow became his second home. He was thirty-four. He adopted Soviet citizenship, learned Russian, and worked for the Agrarian Institute. From time to time his name appeared in the Moscow émigré newspaper *New Voice* (*Új Hang*), as the author of learned articles on agricultural problems.¹² Speaking to his fellow countrymen from Moscow after the Munich agreement of 1938 he advised against displaying chau-

vinism as “that might cost them dearly later on”. During the Second World War he contributed to Moscow’s propaganda broadcasts to Hungary.

One Communist novelist who shared his Moscow exile recalled: “We had to collect and collate material on the directions of Rákosi and – at the other end of a telephone – Imre Nagy. We were only allowed to deal with him by phone, and we were never permitted to mention his name. We had to act as though we did not know who the man was, although we had to telephone a particular number at the same time every day. It was all rather comic. The whole thing was typical of the secretiveness that was all the rage in Party circles – and perhaps not just then either.”¹³

As the Red Army’s tidal wave crashed over defeated Hungary in 1944, Imre Nagy and the rest of this Muscovite flotsam were deposited back on their native countryside, like a hard-caked scum left by a river flood. The hot-tempered and tyrannical Rákosi grabbed the plum job of Party secretary; while Nagy, the phlegmatic, unambitious theoretician, became minister of agriculture.¹⁴

His wife Margaret and his daughter Bess – who could speak only Russian fluently – helped him. Born in Kaposvár in Somogy County in 1927, her first memory of her father was at two and a half, when she and her mother visited him surreptitiously in Vienna, where he was living underground. Bess was as unorthodox as her father; as slender and attractive as a photographic model, she married a curly-haired, corpulent, jovial Communist ex-army chaplain Dr. Francis Jánosi, eleven years her senior. A snapshot of their little son Frank was always on Imre Nagy’s writing desk. “He will follow in my footsteps,” Nagy told newspapermen, not realising what tragic paths his career had yet to follow.¹⁵

Under Marshal Voroshilov’s supervision, Nagy enforced the land reforms with gusto. In a speech on March 29th, 1945, beneath the Árpád statue at Pusztaszer, he smacked thick lips beneath his tobacco-coloured walrus moustache and declared: “Let us begin with the land distribution: let us knock down the pales! And with every blow we hammer more nails into the coffins of the big landowners!”¹⁶

He had been working towards this land reform for most of his life. He reminisced two years later: “It was the happiest time in my life. Our dream, our goal for which we had been fighting so long, was coming true; I shall always be proud to have had a part in it.”¹⁷

But then the intense professional rivalry between Imre Nagy and his boss Rákosi flared out into the open. Rákosi sensed that his rule was threatened by rivals like Rajk and Nagy. Nagy fought back, piously basing his opposition on Lenin's teachings, citing the New Economic Policy (NEP) as being more applicable to Hungary's immediate economic problems after her "liberation" than Rákosi's helter-skelter policies of industrialisation and collectivisation.¹⁸ In his book *Problems of Agriculture* Nagy extolled the private ownership of land – at least by the "medium" peasants, those farming two and a half to six acres – and in the Party's secret sessions during 1947 and 1948 he spoke out against Rákosi's other methods too. Of course, Nagy was always careful to argue along proper Marxist-Leninist lines; but it was the nuances that counted, and by these Nagy unmistakably pleaded for the retention of private markets for agricultural and consumer goods during this transitional NEP period.

Rákosi still enjoyed Stalin's full backing, however. NATO had been founded in April 1949 and Stalin needed an integrated satellite empire as a buffer zone. In September 1949, the same month as Rajk's show trial, Rákosi's Central Committee carpeted Nagy for "anti-Marxist" views. Nagy clung to his support for a free "medium" peasant economy. When the Party gave Nagy the thumbs-down, he dutifully performed that gruesome Communist rite of public flagellation known as "self-criticism"; it was the only way to stave off an uglier fate in those days.

"Instead of working out for the Party the difficulties which the private ownership of land would involve," he admitted, "I argued that the ownership of property by small peasants could be harmonised with collective farming. The conclusions I drew were of course *false*, because in essence they meant that private farming by the peasants – and that meant ultimately agricultural capitalism – could be retained."¹⁹

Nagy was let off suspiciously lightly. His banishment from the Politburo and the Central Committee was only brief. In May 1950 he was already back in Rákosi's Cabinet as minister of crop collection. Probably Rákosi's purpose was to blight Nagy's growing popularity with the peasants, because the new post made Nagy responsible for exacting the forced crop-deliveries from the peasants.²⁰

Nagy was therefore also one of Rákosi's ministers at the time of the ruinous upward revision of the Five-Year Plan in 1951. Was he driven by sheer opportunism, as his Marxist critics later claimed? Had Nagy really become a Rákosi-ist, an anti-peasant fanatic? Or had somebody in Moscow – where his present protector was Lavrenti Beria himself – intervened to demand his rehabilitation?

Whatever the answer, until 1953 he behaved impeccably. In typical speeches he is heard denouncing the West's aggression in Korea, praising the Soviet Union and praying for the collapse of capitalism. And it will be "Uncle Imre" who lumbers sorrowfully to his feet in Parliament and delivers the fulsome funeral eulogy for Stalin, calling him a "great leader of all humanity".

It is July 4th, 1953, the day of Nagy's great speech in Parliament.

Far from Budapest, toiling on a hot and flaking country road, Professor Zsengellér's granddaughter Margaret is brooding to herself, "Why couldn't he have put his money in a Swiss bank where nobody would ever have found it?" She has been thinking this ever since her family's deportation from Budapest in 1951. But this afternoon one of the other navvies in the road gang sidles up to her as she is stoking the fire under the tar boiler and murmurs: "They've been talking about you on the radio."

That evening the deportees hear snatches of Imre Nagy's speech on the loudspeakers set up on dusty street corners round the village – the speech in which Nagy admits the travesties of Rákosi, the misdeeds of the ÁVH, and the existence of secret internment camps, and in which he promises to release the deportees: "The government wishes to dispose of the issue of resettled people, enabling them to choose their residence in compliance with legal provisions applying to all citizens."

So Margaret Zsengellér returns, ill, to Budapest with her mother and takes up her music studies.

When the day comes, she too will fight, and not necessarily for Imre Nagy. Why? She will answer, "So that we can once again break bread without the Russians taking the biggest portion, and without some policemen preventing us from eating in peace the morsels that remain."²¹

In announcing his New Course in Parliament on July 4th, 1953, Nagy's intention was to appease the angry peasantry, and in particular to stop the persecution of private farmers: their inclusion in "kulak lists" with a consequent exclusion from credit and fertilisers and other essentials.

Such had been the Kremlin-inspired resolution passed by the Central Committee at the end of June. Even two years later, Nagy's memory was quite clear on this: "The fact is that when we discussed our anxieties about the question of agricultural collectives at the June 1953 conference in Moscow, it was Comrade Molotov (and not Beria) who reassured us by saying, 'The collectives should not be disbanded by government decree, but if they choose to disband voluntarily that should not be hindered either. No harm will come of it.'"

Therefore Nagy now pronounced the fatal words in Parliament: "My government will enable member farmers to withdraw from the collectives – *after* the harvest is in – if that be their wish."²²

Nagy also announced that licences would be granted for small businesses, and that better consideration would be given to professional people.²³

The first effects of the New Course were felt immediately in the shops. For six months butter had been virtually unobtainable; four days after Nagy's speech, on July 8th, 1953, it suddenly appeared in the shops in unlimited quantities. Large amounts of pork were brought out of the cold stores and put on sale, and on the same day the trade minister Joseph Bognár promised that the price of flour and potatoes would be slashed, that the popular white bread which had been replaced in December 1952 by a coarse dark loaf would be on sale from August 1st and that a whole delicatessen of previously unobtainable sausage and meat products would be on sale by the autumn.

Rákosi fought tooth and nail against this heresy. At a meeting of Budapest activists on the Saturday after Nagy's speech, July 11th, he slyly undid much of its effect, while appearing to condone the criticisms of his earlier mistakes. "We have violated the basic law of the building of socialism," he admitted, "which calls for a steady rise in the standard of living of the working masses and especially of the industrial workers." But simultaneously he called on the Party members in the villages and on the tractor drivers and combine operators to close ranks in defence of the co-operatives: "We shall not stand idly by while

the enemy is trying to undermine the results thus far achieved.” He branded those peasants stampeding to leave the co-operatives as “dodgers” and “lag-gards”.

One writer who was present at Rákosi’s speech as “Agitprop” secretary of the Writers’ Union recalled: “We sat there, pale and bewildered, wondering what on earth was going on.”²⁴

The speech brought out into the open the top-level split in the collective leadership between Imre Nagy in Parliament and Rákosi at the Central Committee headquarters in Academy Street.

Nagy had many supporters, but a number of old-guard funkies were confused by it all. An official was heard saying: “Under the Horthy regime I was just a day labourer; under Rákosi I felt fine, because then I had no doubts. But now life is full of uncertainties, and I don’t like it.”²⁵

This unstable atmosphere of latent crisis would prevail for the next year. Meanwhile, catastrophe overtook the farms. The peasants had interpreted Nagy’s speech as a go-ahead to kick over the traces. They began to divide up the collectivised land, equipment, and livestock among themselves, without waiting for the end of the harvest. The collective system began to disintegrate.²⁶ By the end of the year, the number of members dropped from 446,900 to 263,070.

Now swords were beaten into ploughshares. Arms factories were converted to the manufacture of such farm machinery as tractors, fertiliser spreaders, hay elevators, grass mowers and beet cutters. Nagy wooed the peasants. To stimulate agricultural production, he wiped the punishment slate clean, he cancelled fines totalling 445 million florins for “non-fulfilment of delivery obligations”, and he lightened the peasants’ tax burdens by 500 million florins.

From the statistics that Nagy later publicised the new economic trends were obvious: government investment was switched from heavy to light industry and to food and consumer goods production such as flannel, men’s shirts, boots, raw meat, fats, butter and sweets. Nagy wanted to promote local industry, artisans and private craftsmen. In fact, he aimed to increase consumer goods production by twenty per cent in 1954, and to improve quality and distribution.

Window-dressing after his July 1953 speech, Imre Nagy had released government stocks of consumer goods and ordered two major price reductions: in September 1953, he brought down the prices of some food and manufactured

goods, and in March 1954, he cut the prices of meat and fats. "The public are entitled to expect a civilised commerce, public service, and high-quality goods for their money," he would define in a speech on January 23rd, 1954.²⁷ To this end he planned to open 1,500 new shops in 1954. Wages were selectively increased, a programme of house repairs and construction began at twice the 1952 rate, and he planned to build 4,000 new houses in 1954.²⁸

Nagy improved working conditions too, he gave better benefits for pregnant women, he restricted overtime, he abolished the fining of factory workers, and provided instead for the punishment of managers.

In education, he tried to restore popular patriotic feeling. The national language and traditions were to be fostered, Hungarian fairy tales were to be printed, plays were to be selected with greater emphasis on Hungarian national character.

All this did not go down well with the Muscovite Rákosi. In public he tried to put on a good face, and that was not easy for him at the best of times. In private he agitated and conspired against Nagy. There was an early editorial in *Free People* indicating this change in emphasis, from investments in heavy industry to more punitive measures: tougher labour discipline, more socialist competitions and the rigid fulfilment of Marxist economic planning.²⁹

During July and August 1953 the press began to back away from Nagy's programme for an immediate new course to promises of a more distant and nebulous kind.

An American intelligence report summarised two months after Imre Nagy took over: "[Rákosi's] continued decisive role in the formulation of policy appears assured at least for the time being, despite the eclipse of some of the top Moscow-trained Jewish leaders and the rise of young non-Jewish elements."³⁰

The Third Party Congress had been scheduled for the spring of 1954, but Rákosi stalled for time, arranged for the Congress to be postponed and tried to fly to Moscow without Nagy, so that he could appeal to Malenkov. "The Soviet Comrades felt that this would be wrong and refused to give him permission," triumphed Nagy in his secret memorandum.

When Rákosi did go to Moscow in May 1954 with Imre Nagy, he complained that it was unjust for him to suffer since Beria had now been unmasked as a traitor. Nagy later wrote:

As the Central Committee members know, Matthias Rákosi has tried on countless occasions since 1953 to get the June resolution revoked by referring either to Beria, or the international tension, or my alleged errors and excesses, and so forth. But Comrade Khrushchev ruled quite clearly as follows: “In June 1953 we correctly passed judgment on the Hungarian Party’s leadership and that assessment is still correct today. There’s no hiding behind Beria, as Rákosi is trying to do. We were there too when the errors were ascertained, every one of us! We were right and what we decided then is equally valid today. This should have been acted on already!”

So the Kremlin leaders turned a deaf ear on Rákosi. “Thus,” wrote Nagy with some satisfaction, “all Rákosi’s attempts in 1954 came to nothing.”

Rákosi returned to Budapest thwarted, and resumed his covert campaign to sabotage Nagy’s New Course.

Over these two years Nagy developed into a statesman of stern and proper ethics. He had announced in his July 1953 speech that greater tolerance would be shown in religious questions, and that the government “will not permit administrative and other coercive measures” to be applied against the Church. (Cardinal Mindszenty and the other Church leaders stayed under arrest, however, until the people’s uprising.)

But he had recoiled from the brutality of the Rákosi years, and in his speech he had promised to remedy the injustices inflicted by Rákosi’s police agencies. He had promised that his government would crusade against the excesses of the ÁVH; he would review individual cases, abolish the internment camps and liberate political prisoners. Nagy had remarked that “greater reliance upon Parliament” was among his plans to streamline the regime. In an unprecedented move the Hungarian Parliament had on July 4th *elected* somebody to fill the long-vacant office of attorney-general: Dr. Kálmán Czakó, a former minister of justice of apparent integrity.³¹

By October 31st, 1953, a general amnesty had been proclaimed. “We have abolished the system of placing people in police custody and we have ended the institution of police courts,” he said.³² Nagy shook up the secret police, de-

prived the ÁVH of its independent status and booted the ministry of the interior out of its fine modern palace on the Danube and into the dingy old head office vacated by a big commercial bank.

In private, Nagy's views about the Rákosi gang were severe. He would later write:

It is not compatible with public morality to have still in leading positions the directors and stage managers of fabricated mass trials, people responsible for torturing and killing innocent men, instigators of international provocations, economic saboteurs and squanderers of national resources who through the abuse of power have either perpetrated or procured serious acts against the people. The public, the Party and the state must be purged of these elements.

Gábor Péter, the murderous boss of the ÁVH, had already been stripped of all his offices and thrown into prison as a "Zionist agent", by Rákosi, who was planning a trial that would outclass even Stalin's Doctors' trial.³³ Stalin's death had temporarily reprieved Péter; in May 1953 Imre Nagy had him sentenced to life imprisonment. "The institution of internment," Nagy had announced in his July 1953 speech, "will be abolished and internment camps dissolved." The jails and prison camps were opened, and the political prisoners stepped out into the sun again – but by no means all of them, because Nagy was not all-powerful as long as Rákosi remained Party leader.

Rákosi had put in charge of the rehabilitation programme none other than Julius Alapi, the public prosecutor who had prosecuted Rajk in 1949; he ordered Alapi to take his time. The mills of amnesty ground very fine indeed: there was the case of the man who had been jailed for sending a postcard to his brother in Yugoslavia. His wife now appealed to Nagy for his release. Nine months later, Nagy's new justice minister Francis Erdei told Professor Stephen Bibó: "I regret to say I still have not been given the papers on the case!"³⁴ Nagy was preoccupied with his economic reforms, but he did obtain the release of Anna Kéthly, who had been incarcerated after the Social Democratic Party was amalgamated with the Communists.

The Communists whom Rákosi had persecuted were readmitted to the Party; they made no secret of their discontent.

A powerful corrosive action began. As yet, the malcontents lacked the leadership and even the boldness to stage outbursts of popular defiance. As the American army attaché estimated in December 1953: “There are no organised resistance groups in Hungary; the population does not now, nor will they in the future, have the capacity to resist actively the present regime; but the Hungarian people . . . will continue to resist passively the present regime.”³⁵

Like the drip, drip, drip of the acid in a slow time fuse, this discontent would trigger real violence little more than two years later, when the people’s uprising began.

14 Mightier than the Sword

THE COUNTRY'S BLOOD pressure was rising. It took only minor grievances to bring out violent feelings. In the summer of 1954, Hungary lost the World Cup to Germany. People demonstrated noisily outside the *Free People* newspaper building and at the radio building in Alexander Bródy Street; they wanted to take over the transmitters and broadcast that the game had been “sold to West Germany” for hard currency.

In all the jostling the gates of the radio station were forced in and the crowd swirled across the courtyard on the far side of which was the entrance to the studio building. ÁVH men stood in front of the plate-glass doors, jittery and nervous as the mob pressure grew; only the noise of breaking glass as a window was accidentally smashed by a swinging gun butt brought a hush to the crowd.

Two ambulances drove up, and people fell back to let them through; but when a lorry swung across the main gate to the courtyard a rush to escape began. The ÁVH men cleared the courtyard in a practised riot routine, swinging their guns by the muzzle at knee-height. For two days after that tensions still ran high: a Russian in a baggy brown suit and a panama hat was seen on the corner of Rákóczi Street and Joseph Boulevard shouting orders to a police colonel in Russian, and people were being rounded up and bundled roughly into the National Theatre.¹

The popularity of Imre Nagy's 1953 New Course was only relative. Dr. Lawrence E. Hinkle Jr., a Cornell University sociologist, analysed a representative cross-section in 1957 and stated: “There was . . . essentially never any acceptance of the regime or Communism in the ten years of their experience with it.”²

But they were still isolated from each other. Their misery remained personal and undocumented because of the unwillingness of the cowardly Party intellectuals to challenge the censorship authorities and the press monopoly.

The country's newspapers were tedious, orthodox and devoid of human interest. The only accepted form of literary expression was socialist realism: novels centred around workers or peasants building socialism. In an extreme form, a play might reveal the emotional struggle of a factory worker who has been rejected by his fiancée for failing to keep his output at 125 per cent of the norm, while she herself was doing 132 per cent. No theatre box-offices were stormed by eager people in their rush to see such works.

Works by good non-Communist writers like Laurence Szabó and Ladislav Németh were banned. Most of the published writers and journalists were odious opportunists who spun like weathercocks whichever way their instincts of self-preservation took them.

They had some reason, it must be admitted: of the leading Communist writers, most had suffered under the anti-Jewish laws, and it took longer for them to recognise the similarities between fascism and Communism than it took their less cultivated fellow citizens.

After Stalin's death editors became jumpy: there was no visible leader whose word could be looked upon as "law". At newspaper offices the "reading editors" would spike anything that seemed remotely non-kosher. One writer said: "If anything *did* seem controversial, you might as well make the sign of the Cross over your article. The Party Centre would not even read it. Even scripts by Cabinet ministers were put on ice so that no one could be blamed later for having let them pass."³ As a result, the press lost all credit. A literature graduate at Szeged, whose father had perished as a Jew in the war, wrote of 1953:

The living standard was declining and yet the papers and radio kept on saying that we never had it so good. Why? Why these lies? Everybody knew the state was spending the money on armaments. Why couldn't the state admit that we were worse off because of the war effort and the need to build new factories? . . . At first I thought that there must be some hidden reasons. I searched and searched in my own mind and in the world around

me, but I couldn't find any such reasons. I finally arrived at the realisation that the system was wrong and stupid.⁴

All this did not stop these same blinkered editors and writers from later pronouncing each other the heroes of the uprising. They have been doing so (in exile) ever since. Most of them were convinced Communists, who haunted the late nineteenth-century building of the Writers' Union in Gorky Avenue. In this villa, with its romantic central courtyard, was located the editorial office of their weekly *Literary Gazette* (*Irodalmi Újság*). Some people believed the Union "non political"; in fact it had merely atrophied. More than one analyst has seen in the unhappiness of these Jewish intellectuals, as they regularly met in the president's ground-floor offices, a special element of bitterness at finding themselves *outsiders*, cheated of the rewards of wealth and power which their comrades and brethren inside the Rákosi clique enjoyed. However, they did have a special advantage: the Union was a Party agency, so they were still operating from within the Party fabric and this special feature rendered these intellectuals less vulnerable to the Party's terror apparatus.

There is thirty-year-old Tibor Méray, a pipe-smoking journalist on *Free People* since 1947, whose bald cranium, ill-trimmed toothbrush moustache and wart gave him the air of a bank clerk about to be caught with his hand in the till. When Méray speaks, he jerks his undersized head about to add the emphasis and expression that his shifty, apprehensive eyes alone cannot. He later admitted that Nagy's liberalisation programme had been an eye-opener for him: "We thought we had been building socialism. We discovered that we had been erecting a jailhouse built of blood and agony."

In 1954 Méray is still away reporting the Korean War – it is he who propagates the story that the American forces are using bacterial warfare – and Thomas Aczél stands in for him as Party secretary of the Writers' Union. Aczél has shrewd features, small ears, and baggy, frowning eyes. He is a mediocre novelist who joined the Party at twenty-three. He has written odes to Stalin; in 1947 he published a striking novel about a young worker-hero of the post-war reconstruction and his love for a beautiful but, alas, bourgeois young lady.

In 1952 *Pravda* announced that Aczél had been awarded the Stalin Prize for the novel. Some critics suggested that Stalin made the award because *acél* means “steel”; others, that Stalin just picked the first name on the alphabetical list handed to him. With the 25,000 roubles prize money he bought a cream Škoda 1200; with its registration number CA-900 the car became a familiar sight in Budapest’s otherwise empty streets, as Aczél sloppily manipulated the steering wheel. This car would play its part in the first hours of the uprising.

Next in this “Hero’s Gallery” is Tibor Déry. Hungarians with long memories know that the famous novelist son of a Jewish lawyer has dedicated half a lifetime to Communism; he too had fled abroad after Béla Kun’s overthrow, returned in 1937, and miraculously survived Adolf Eichmann’s liquidation programme with the aid of a faked Central American passport.⁵

His massive 1947 novel, *The Uncompleted Sentence*, was praised by his philosopher friend Georg Lukács as “one of the finest novels this century”; the 952-page volume earned Déry the national Kossuth Prize. But he, too, has written ballads in praise of Rákosi and Stalin. He is a darling of the regime but in no sense popular. Asked about Tibor Déry privately, an eighteen-year-old Jewish schoolgirl will exclaim with all the spontaneity of youth: “I had to read his idiotic poems and dramas in school.”⁶ His face is kindly and expressive. His eyebrows rise alternately as he speaks, and when he finishes a remark he nods as though planting a full-stop at the end of a paragraph. When he is writing, he chomps silently away at nothing, like a pensive rabbit in a hutch. His mournful face with its wild, grey hair frequently features in the regime’s newspapers.

Tibor Déry will also write himself into the front ranks of the insurgents, although with more justification than his colleagues, because at the age of sixty-one, when it is all over, this man of letters will bravely keep from his ailing mother the truth that he has been imprisoned; instead he writes to her about a cruise that he is taking – the Mediterranean, the fishing ports and the sunsets all being figments of his imagination.⁷

And then there is Julius Háry, a burly, balding playwright born as the world joined the twentieth century. An old lag of the Communist Party, he has spent most of his life in exile in Germany and Moscow. He was sitting next to Rákosi in the creaking train which evacuated the Comintern leaders from Moscow in

October 1941, and he broadcast for Rákosi from Moscow in 1944. For ten years he has worn the same zip-fronted blue pullover and dark blue winter coat. He speaks clearly, with rare gesticulations, but the beady eyes beneath the bushy eyebrows avoid looking at the person he is speaking to.

For years he, too, had hedged his bets: to repudiate the horrors of the Rákosi system would have been to repudiate his own life's work as well. Háy has written a play that is so anti-Western in tone that even Joseph Révai, the most Stalinist of Rákosi's cronies, finds it too crude. In the spring of 1952, one of his pupils at the Academy of Film and Theatre Arts submits a one-act comedy about an unsightly female funky who uses her authority to procure men for herself; Háy carpets the young man and erupts with indignation that anybody can speak contemptuously of a Communist Party secretary. Until 1953, Háy has been a blind Communist. Only now has Háy realised the evil inherent in the system.

The mind of all these great writers was captive.

They had indoctrinated themselves to believe that this was how socialist writers should write. Nobody had commissioned the inoffensive poet Zoltán Zelk to write his poem to Stalin; but Zelk's friends remember that when he had just finished a particularly good line he used to telephone them to recite it to them.⁸

The air of 1954 was already oppressive with the stench of prison life as the men amnestied from Rákosi's dungeons and internment camps whispered about their awful experiences.

George Faludy, a forty-five-year-old poet, was released from Reck after four years, in October 1953. He and other former prisoners were lodged in the Writers' Union summer resort, a contrast in luxury which was not without effect on either the ex-prisoners or the writers. One evening Géza Losonczy's wife was talking about her father, Alexander Haraszti, who had been a senior defendant in the Kádár trial and would stay in prison until 1955. Thomas Aczél, Haraszti's secretary at the time of his arrest, affably admitted: "You know, on the day after that I threw a cocktail party at which we danced and drank and sang our praises of the ÁVH for having been so vigilant in uncovering his treason!"⁹

In 1954 the writers still have a tradition of opportunism to overcome. Even Imre Nagy will belatedly remark on this in his secret memoirs: “In the period before June 1953 Hungarian writers . . . were seriously at fault. They twisted reality and truth. Literature, art, and music became a distorting mirror in which the people could see no reflection of their own daily lives.”

After Nagy became prime minister the writers’ cowardice ebbed; late in 1953 Ladislav Kónya, the Marxist secretary of the Party caucus inside the Writers’ Union, decided to send the writers round the villages to urge the peasants not to leave the collective farms. The writers welcomed the chance to get out to the villages. Nicholas Molnár, a former editor of the *Literary Weekly* and the chief editor of the monthly *Star (Csillag)* both agreed that it was a magnificent idea. Molnár asked Peter Kuczka to go to Nyírség County and write up a detailed report. This sudden contact with the misery of village life was a belated but very real shock to the Party writers. Kuczka wrote an epic poem, “Nyírség Diary” instead, putting words to the hatred nursed against the regime by the peasants of north-east Hungary.¹⁰

Afterwards, there was a three-day post mortem at the Writers’ Union. Each writer delivered a “village report”. Ernest Urbán, a *Free People* newspaperman since 1947, pleaded that he had already sent forty memorandums to the Party on conditions in the villages. Feelings ran high. Andrew Sándor, a writer of thirty, spat out his disgust: “Hungary is not a dictatorship of the proletariat, but a dictatorship of bootlickers!” That jibe cost him his Party membership – that, and an unpublished short story about the ÁVH, with anti-Semitic undertones.

The Americans will subsequently interview many thousands of refugees from the villages. Let one man speak for them all, a forty-two-year-old peasant from Nyíracád, a country township of about six thousand people in Nyírség County, five miles from the Romanian border. The output required from the farmers of this sandy soil is the same as from any village farming the finest land. The area is religious, Greek Orthodox, and the Communists have never wholly managed to subdue it. On big red-letter days like May Day and April 4th the villagers show their feelings. They stay away while the funkies and employees from the agricultural co-operative march; by the time the “parade” reaches Petőfi Square

the non-funkies have slowly melted away and nobody at all remains to hear the speeches. When the Party holds a local rally the entire village goes into hiding.¹¹

Out here, the hatred of the Jews is intense. "When they returned to Hungary in 1945, they didn't have a penny," says this peasant enviously, "and in a year they were all doing very well for themselves. I don't know how they did it."

Now most of the local funkies are Jews: the manager of the local co-op shop, the agricultural lecturer at the town hall, two heads of branch shops.

"The regime was *theirs*. It was the Jews who caused the greatest trouble in Hungary. The peasants in my village felt that the Jews helped the Communists to power, and they were the leaders of Communism. We didn't have a single decent Jew in the village."

Communism has brought these earthy countryfolk none of the rewards promised by Marx and Lenin. It has turned Debrecen, the nearest big city, twenty-five miles away, into a second Moscow with Russian street names, shops and schools and with major garrisons and an airfield.

Worse, it has landed eighteen or twenty of this peasant's friends in prison cells. He will relate, "Mostly they didn't talk about why they had been taken away. They didn't even know themselves why they had been arrested." One man weighs fifteen stone when arrested in 1955, and only eight stone when he comes back a year later.

There is only one rule in this peasant's view: "Don't talk politics. Politics is a trade too – it has to be learned just like a machinist or wheelwright learns his trade."

What do these simple village folk care about the Writers' Union? They have never heard of it. "There were teachers in our village," he ruminates. "I had some friends among those teachers, and the doctor was my friend. He never said anything about it either." He himself bought the Party organ *Free People* because it was compulsory and the country newspaper *Hajdúság* because it had juicy stories of local accidents.

"I was sick and tired of all that stupid talk of collective farms," says the peasant. "I never heard of the *Literary Gazette*. The village intelligentsia did not read it either."

When the revolution comes, this community will burst into flame like petrol-soaked straw. If a farmer in the collective cannot fulfil his delivery quota

each Wednesday he knows that the Communists will give him three days, then send round a ten-man “transfer brigade” of gipsies as bailiffs. The gipsies are paid a hundred florins a day to break into the delinquent peasants’ homes and strip them of whatever they can find of value in payment of taxes – a sewing-machine perhaps or livestock and cattle. They have to be gipsies, because no local man is willing to do this to his neighbour.

This economic misery has begun in 1948, and has grown steadily worse. Often the delivery collectors cannot bear the cruel system either, and if they know that a transfer brigade is coming they tip off the peasants to give them time to take the cattle into the woods and save them.

Worst of all are the scrap collections. Every village has a certain quantity of scrap iron to collect each quarter. Farmers grow frantic as the date approaches. They hide their ploughshares down wells, but still they get stolen. Youngsters are encouraged to break into homes, water taps and doorhandles vanish, bells are robbed from chapels, shields from trees, iron gratings from gardens.¹²

Imre Nagy’s brief office made no noticeable difference to the lot of the peasant. His measures were attacking only the symptoms, and not the root cause of the disease, the Marxist master plan.

In Hungary, nobody can escape the deliberate infection with the Marxist virus. The compulsory indoctrination classes continue. There are, however, side benefits. A typical student at the Budapest Polytechnic has to spend three months at the partisan training college, a villa expropriated from a vinegar manufacturer in Ménési Street in Buda. This schooling in weapons and guerrilla tactics will come in useful during the uprising.¹³

One of the first journalists to see the light is Nicholas Vásárhelyi. He will become one of the leaders in the secret movement fighting the Stalinists.¹⁴

In May 1954, at the age of thirty-seven, he becomes deputy chief of Nagy’s press bureau. Technically he comes under one of Nagy’s Moscow chums, Zoltán Szántó, but Szántó is over sixty; Rákosi banished him as a troublesome critic to various diplomatic posts in Belgrade and Paris and he has been out of touch with things in Budapest since 1945. “Szántó had the clout, but I had to mind the shop,” Vásárhelyi will later say.

Nagy has kept an eye on this young man, Vásárhelyi, for several years. He was active in the populist “March Front” at Debrecen University before the war and joined the illegal Communist underground in 1939. By 1944 he was commanding a tough little band of partisans in Budapest harassing German tanks and assassinating fascist collaborators in the Angel Fields slum. After the afternoon newspaper *Freedom* (*Szabadság*) was founded in Red-occupied Budapest in February 1945, he joined its staff. It spawned the official Party daily *Free People* two months later, with the fearsome Joseph Révai as editor-in-chief, and Vásárhelyi moved on to its foreign desk. He clung on until 1949, when he was engulfed in the aftermath of the Rajk trial and fired.

“I have paid the price in advance, so I can talk,” Vásárhelyi greets me. His son has told him of the English car that has unexpectedly drawn up outside, and he is curious to meet his visitor.

Born, like Kádár, in Fiume, of Italian-speaking parents, Nicholas Vásárhelyi is a good-looking, thick-set man who looks at least five years younger than his age. Five years is about how long he spent in prison. I comment that he seems unembittered about losing so many years of freedom, but he just shrugs cheerfully, while his twinkling eyes slant upwards in a distinctly Oriental configuration. He smooths his greying hair back over his temples with noticeably trembling hands, moistens his lips and begins to speak about the past. His flushed complexion contrasts with his light grey suit and shirt – Mrs. Vásárhelyi chides him for putting on a shirt that she has just cut all the buttons off. But he has been driving back from Czechoslovakia all day, and he has not been expecting me.

The flat is modestly furnished; unmatching furniture, a large blank television and loose rugs on a bare wooden floor. Unlike George Marosán’s apartment, there is a name-plate on Vásárhelyi’s front door. And while Marosán addressed me like a factory-gate meeting and probably would not have noticed if I had tiptoed out, Vásárhelyi listens attentively and answers freely and without evasion, although he warns that even now he cannot discuss some sensitive matters like the details of the trial of Imre Nagy: that is a state secret.

He was once – he admits – a blind Marxist like all his colleagues. Even when friends began to disappear it never occurred to him that the Party might be wrong.

“Every day I could read the British, French and American newspapers, and I should have made comparisons. But I did not,” he now says. “I cannot rationalise it. I used to think that although everything was not completely right, our great ideals were so wonderful that it would all turn out right in the end.”

He ruefully admits: “There is nothing I can say in self-defence.”

Similarly, although his privileged position as foreign editor took him frequently to Western countries, he remained blind to his country’s backwardness. When he returned Rákosi often telephoned to ask shrewd questions. “He was interested in my personal impressions,” recalls Vásárhelyi, “but then again he was the kind of man who, when I began to report, would interrupt me after half a dozen words and tell me what *he* thought about the United States. In my eyes he was absolutely right, because he was the top Communist,” says Vásárhelyi with a chuckle. “He was much cleverer than me, because I was so very . . .”

He holds up his hands narrowly on either side of his face like blinkers to illustrate the word he cannot find. “Purely for my benefit,” he continues, “he *acted* as though he was no cleverer. But in reality he knew much more than I did. Rákosi probably laughed up his sleeve over my *naēveté*. He was a remarkable man.

“He, Gerő, and Révai too,” concedes Vásárhelyi. “The three of them. Though in different ways. Gerő was a brilliant organiser, while Révai had an immense grasp of literature. Révai knew that socialist realism was not worth tuppence and that Thomas Mann was the best novelist. But he toed the official line.”

After the Rajk trial, Vásárhelyi lost the Party’s confidence. He was contaminated beyond cleansing. He drifted in 1952 into editing a glossy Russian/English propaganda magazine, *Hungary*; there he got to know Nagy’s daughter Bess very well. She had joined the Party relatively late, in about 1951; she was a journalist like him, and the intellectual programme of the Communists appealed to her. She was the journal’s Russian editor.¹⁵ Meanwhile his own disillusionment with Rákosi became total. He began expressing critical opinions at Party meetings, regardless of the danger to himself, his wife and three children. He had passed the point of no return.

I ask: “Can you put your finger on the precise reason for your decision to come out into the open in 1953, with the critical views that attracted Nagy’s attention?”

“I was very naēve,” says Vāsárhelyi, explaining his decision to come out into the open like this. “But I began to read books that I had not read before. For example,” he amplifies, smiling sheepishly and revealing a gap between his upper front teeth. “George Orwell! I had known about works like Orwell’s before, but being a ‘good Catholic’ I had not shown any interest in them.”

It was quite a revelation. Orwell, an Englishman, had written two great satires on authoritarian systems, *Animal Farm* and *1984*. So Orwell’s writings had impelled Vāsárhelyi to take his life in his hands and oppose the regime. Later other rebel Communists, like Writers’ Union official Nicholas Molnár, would admit to me the role that Orwell’s forbidden prose had played in rousing them. Truly the pen is sometimes mightier than the sword.

I ask him where he got the Orwell books.

He hesitates, barely perceptibly. “From friends,” he finally says. Perhaps he is alluding to Rajk’s vengeful widow, Julia, who worked in a library.

“From friends. Over the years they had often told me that I was on the wrong path. But until then they had not dared to lend me the books.”

15 Fan Language

NAGY STEERED HIS New Course only until early 1955. During 1954, Rákosi's counter-attack began. At the Third Party Congress the split came out into the open, as Rákosi stated quite bluntly: "We must end the liberalism that infects many of our Party and state organs."

Nagy's hands were tied. He knew of the criminality of Rákosi, Gerő, Farkas and Révai and yet, perhaps in the name of socialist unity, he did nothing to punish or expose their crimes. Rákosi controlled the Party apparatus, and with it effectively the ÁVH secret police as well, and so he could neutralise Nagy's power at every turn. The public was still not told the precise terms of the anti-Rákosi resolution of June 1953.

Rákosi hedged, prevaricated and sabotaged Nagy's efforts. It was a dangerous game for Rákosi to play, because he still lacked Moscow's support. At the Kremlin the Soviet leaders in fact secretly rebuked him early in 1954 for his obstructionism. Kaganovich caustically observed: "The relationship between heavy and light industries is almost unchanged." Malenkov complained: "The faults that we called attention to in June are being remedied too slowly. Rákosi has not taken the lead in remedying these faults."

Gerő also came under fire from Khrushchev: "Gerő has displayed no self-criticism and no sense of responsibility for the serious mistakes committed in economic policy."

The Kremlin gentlemen expressed particular anger – according to Nagy's triumphant later account – over Rákosi's failure to rehabilitate the purge victims. "The prisoners are being released too slowly," complained Khrushchev. "This is Rákosi's fault." And in May 1954, Khrushchev secretly commented to

the Hungarian leaders visiting Moscow: “Rákosi was responsible for the arrests! That is why he does not want to release them – because he knows he is as guilty as hell he will be compromising himself.”¹

Rákosi obstinately returned home and continued his ferreting and burrowing against Nagy’s New Course.

After Moscow’s intervention more political prisoners were released. Rákosi’s Communist victims were rehabilitated first, and many were readmitted to the Party. Géza Losonczy, Alexander Haraszti, Francis Donáth and Constantine Újhelyi were given prominent jobs by Nagy on their release. The Communist writers began to accept now their own share of the blame. Ladislav Benjámín dedicated a poem to his friend Haraszti, admitting in one line: “I am guilty, because I believed that you were guilty!”²

No publicity surrounded the amnesty. On the contrary, Béla Szász, Rajk’s former press officer, had a typical experience: let out on September 1st, 1954, he was handed a little note “confirming” that he had been detained from August 31st – the previous day!³ Imre Nagy made amends where he could. He gave audiences to those who had been released, or called on those too ill to come and see him. He particularly wanted to win János Kádár for the coming battle against Rákosi. Kádár had emerged from prison in July 1954, weakened and febrile, to be made secretary of Budapest’s XIIIth district Party branch, Angel Fields. Nagy invited Kádár to see him in Parliament. This, their first encounter, was not very fortunate. Kádár haughtily rebuffed him: “Rákosi is the leader of our Party and the Hungarian worker cannot imagine life and the history of Hungary without Rákosi!” As they parted, however, Kádár held out his hand to the prime minister: “I’d like to thank you for securing my release!” Imre Nagy replied tonelessly, “Comrade Kádár, I hope that when my turn comes you will do the same for me!”⁴

Most non-Communist prisoners continued to languish in prison, however. A US State Department intelligence summary remarked on February 1st, 1955:

A number of former political leaders of minor stature – Social Democrats, Smallholders, as well as relatively unimportant Communist purgees – have been released from prison; but principals such as ex-Presidents Tildy and Szakasits have not yet reappeared. More than a year has passed since

the much heralded appointment of a Supreme Prosecutor or Attorney General to safeguard the rights and interests of citizens, but there is no sign that his office is effectively operating toward the avowed objective.⁵

Meanwhile, under Nagy's New Course the country's economy was approaching ruin. Inflationary pressures mounted. Red tape snagged the whole bureaucratic system. In the first quarter of 1954 the ministry of finance issued 387 different regulations; Szolnok County received 1,328 agricultural circulars during the first half year and issued about the same number.

"The ministries," boomed Nagy in a scarcely-heeded speech, "are sending out streams of instructions on problems that need not be dealt with at all."

In a speech to the Academy of Science, on June 14th, 1954, Nagy accepted that socialist planning was failing, but blamed this on the fact that the economic forces operating under socialism had not been adequately investigated; so he was going to set up a research institute and found a scientific journal to mull over the theory once again.⁶ It was as though the pilot of a plummeting airliner had announced to his passengers: "This is your captain speaking. We have decided to revise the laws of thermodynamics and send this fuselage back for wind-tunnel tests."

Agency chiefs were sacked and new ministries created, but production did not rise. In July 1953 Nagy had replaced the president of the National Planning Office. Now, in October 1954, he replaced him again. At least five of its vice-presidents would also be dismissed, which only compounded the office's notorious inefficiency.

Meanwhile the root causes of public unrest remained: the standard of living had risen – on the Party's *own* figures – by only fifteen per cent since 1949, although industrial production had risen 240 per cent. Nagy's solution was to raise the workers' purchasing power and increase consumer-goods production. Rákosi and Gerő wanted quite the reverse: they argued that the economic difficulties could be overcome by *reducing* living standards – by raising prices, cutting wages, and increasing taxes.

The stark truth was that by late 1954 even Imre Nagy's premiership had brought largely *negative* long-term economic results.

The workers had responded to the new liberal atmosphere by slacking: during 1954 worker absenteeism and labour indiscipline grew to a chaotic extent.

The runaway inflation and the food shortage overshadowed everything. Over half the farmers had left the collectives as a result of Nagy's New Course and they had resisted wheat production anyway because the revised tax and delivery obligations made that crop unremunerative. The peasants had seen little incentive to produce more as there were still few consumer goods they could spend money on. To cap it all, bad weather during the first half of 1954 had ruined even this small grain harvest.

Industrial output slumped as well. According to official figures released in January 1955, the previous year's coal and steel output had fallen below the 1953 level. Work stopped on Sztálinváros steel town and on the new Budapest underground under the Danube, and slowed down on the hydroelectric plant at Inota.

By the autumn of 1954, popular support was growing embarrassingly thin even for Nagy's style of government, and he resorted to the old "popular front" tactic, organising a "People's Patriotic Front" to drum up non-Party support. New laws obliged mass organisations such as the trades unions, Churches, DISz, women's organisations, to join forces within the PPF as a grand popular façade, masking the unchanged authoritarian face of the Party, which was in itself a mask for Moscow's rulers.

This move put his Party rivals on what might be termed "Red alert". They feared a loss of power to non-Party officials acting within the PPF. Rákosi even shrilled that Nagy was setting up a "second Party".

This in-fighting came to a head on October 1st, 1954, when the Central Committee convened in plenary session. For three days Imre Nagy harangued it and demanded its support. There was open war between Nagy's faction and Rákosi's cronies. Rákosi's men claimed that if Nagy's New Courses were converted into fact right across the board, the masses would demand ever greater power and in the end rise openly against the Party's leadership. Nagy's faction argued equally hotly that the alternative was total economic disaster anyway. Nagy frankly blamed the country's situation on Rákosi's ignorant one-man leadership and he complained forcefully that, despite the June 1953 resolution, little had yet been done to reorganise industrial production.

In contrast to his speeches in January, Nagy now claimed that there had been virtually no increase in investment in light industry or the food industry. He blamed this on Rákosi's machinations. And, he said, the purchasing power of the villages had been deliberately cut, not raised.

The Central Committee upheld Nagy's view, and this time he managed to get extensive press coverage for his speech in *Free People*. On October 22nd the newspaper published the resolution itself: "The only proper and possible path to socialism in our country," it said, "is the policy of the New Course."

On October 20th, the newspaper had also carried an attack by Nagy on his opponents, entitled: "After the meeting of the Central Leadership." The article made front-page news around the world. In the *New York Times* Rákosi found it headlined: "Budapest Leader hits Dictatorship."⁷ Nagy's target was clear. He wrote of the "faults originating from one-man management", and criticised Rákosi's lack of "knowledge, experience and foresight".

Warming to the attack, Nagy spoke a few days later to the People's Patriotic Front. He appealed to them to continue to support his New Course "through thick and thin". His speech was not exactly Joseph Goebbels stuff, but the audience roared, "Yes, yes!" and applauded for "many minutes" as *Free People* reported next day.

After that Nagy called nationwide elections for new local councils on November 28th, 1954. For weeks the newspaper columns were choked with slabs of grey, zestless "campaign" speeches. If only Western trades unionists would have the chance to read such speeches, and could imagine themselves forced to attend and listen!

"Dear Comrades!" began Imre Nagy in a typical speech to workers at the MÁVAG locomotive plant in Budapest.

Dear Comrades! In a few simple words I should like to express my thanks for the confidence you have shown in nominating me as a member of the municipal council of our capital. I welcome it for two reasons: firstly, because I have been nominated by the MÁVAG workers, and because MÁVAG is a plant of which Hungarian industry is particularly proud because you are the workers who responded to the appeals of the Party and government by making a great effort and, catching up on your arrears left over from the

first half-year and over-fulfilling your production plan for the third quarter to the tune of 114. 8 per cent so that you have been able to eliminate your export arrears, and to over-fulfil your plan by six per cent . . .

The production results of the third quarter show that, if the labour drive to mark these elections is carried out with the same enthusiasm and vigour as the revolutionary shift that was worked in honour of the Great Socialist October Revolution, and if management and workers can get the same improvement in worker discipline – in which there are still grave deficiencies – as in production, then MÁVAG will be able to take its place amongst the ranks of the élite plants.⁸

This was Nagy in his heyday, a paragon of respectability and pompous complacency. What real candidate in a real election would have the effrontery to talk to oil-grimed workers in language like that! Of course, we need to visualise the porky figure standing at the microphone, with his Stalin moustache, multiple chins and silk handkerchief tucked into the pocket of his dark suit, and the battalions of well-fed funkies backing him on the platform to savour the resentful mood generated by such rallies as these.

So he droned on for three hours. He reminded the workers of the “teachings of the immortal geniuses of the international revolutionary workers’ movement – of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin”, and he recalled the “militant lives of Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg, Hegel”, to which the workers owed their *promise* of a better future, that same promise which always has to play so large a part in Communist propaganda. “We have a big lead over the workers’ movements of the capitalist countries,” he crowed. “In our country we have *attained* all those things for which a bitter struggle is still being fought in those countries. Is that not a gigantic success, comrades?”

The MÁVAG workers filed out silently, to go home to their overcrowded single rooms and their mean and hopeless lives. They wondered how much longer it would go on.

There were changes, too, in cultural life.

While in January 1952 nineteen of the twenty-two films and four of the nine stage plays showing in Budapest had been of Soviet origin, on December 15th, 1954, there was not one.⁹

A secret jazz cult had begun too, and the young Hungarians enjoyed the subversive connotation of listening to forbidden music. Take the case of a twenty-six-year-old former Jew, working in an office designing chemical engineering equipment. He had been an enthusiastic young Communist at school, and even now maintained his *surface* connections with the Party, although long since disenchanted with its ideals. In private he has become a hedonist, fun-loving, with a string of girlfriends. When he first arrived he instinctively established contact with others like him in the drawing office by softly whistling jazz melodies. This helped the others to realise that he was a Communist in name only. He told American psychiatrists later: "It was not good to be found listening to jazz, and it was not a good idea to talk about jazz. I used to listen in secret."¹⁰

From November 1954 onwards, the ideological battle between Rákosi and Nagy sharpened.

Rákosi's position appeared to be strengthening but the CIA again drew attention to the dangerously high Jewish profile of the regime.

A State Department intelligence summary would comment on February 1st, 1955:

It is also noteworthy that although realignments of party and government leadership under the "New Course" have resulted in a lessening of the pronounced Jewish character of the regime, Hungary remains the only satellite in which Jews still hold a relatively large proportion of high positions. This fact is partly explained by the presence of a Jewish population second in size only to that of Romania among the satellites. A more plausible reason is that no replacements fully satisfactory to Moscow are as yet available for such top figures as Rákosi, Gerő and Farkas, the country's oldest Communists . . . As long as this situation prevails, the traditional anti-Semitism of the masses buttresses other motivating factors of antagonism toward the regime.

It did not escape Nagy's attention that certain members of the Politburo, and particularly Michael Farkas, were actively pursuing a different line from the pro-Nagy resolution adopted by the Central Committee in October. Nicholas Molnár, editor of the *Literary Gazette*, recalled: "Late in 1954 the Rákosi fac-

tion grew much stronger and Rákosi and his men even tried to muscle in on the entire press and literature. Rákosi telephoned me several times in person and threatened me. Soon after that I met Imre Nagy. He told me: What's the point! We're in a fistfight, and in a fight you give a few, but you've got to take a few too."¹¹

If the writers hoped that Uncle Imre would give as good as he got, they were disappointed. They followed him to Debrecen in mid-December 1954 to hear his speech celebrating Parliament's tenth anniversary, but it was weak and trashy, in Thomas Aczél's view. It overflowed with dutiful praise of Moscow's wise and benevolent leadership. The main writers were all there – the “decent but dim-witted”¹² poet Benjámín, a former factory worker who had lived several years in Vienna; Méray, Kónya, Boldizsár, Urbán, and Vásárhelyi.

Soon after this, events took a downturn for Nagy. Rákosi left for Moscow, ostensibly for health reasons. (He had begun suffering six months earlier from hypertension and rising blood pressure.) For several complicated reasons Malenkov's star was waning in the Kremlin firmament, so this time Rákosi found more willing listeners.

Nagy was summoned to Moscow on January 7th, 1955, and rebuked for having “wrecked” his country's economy. Later that month he suffered a heart attack. Nagy's illness gave Rákosi the chance to plunge his knife even deeper into the fat premier's ribs. Kálmán Czakó, the attorney-general appointed by Nagy as watchdog over the penal system, was summoned to Academy Street and shifted to take up a position as manager of the big brewery in the suburb of Kőbánya.¹³

Delicate but unmistakable signs, the “fan language” of Communist high society, told the experts that Nagy's days of office were limited. John MacCormac of the *New York Times* cabled from Vienna: “Mr. Nagy has been notably absent from important public events in the last two weeks.” On the 20th, Budapest radio announced that he had developed coronary thrombosis. The Politburo called for a medical report, a suitable report was concocted, and Nagy was isolated and silenced.¹⁴

He knew what was afoot and protested indignantly.

On February 18th, he personally requested Rákosi to keep him informed on the Politburo discussions, but he received no reply. He wrote in hurt tones to the

Central Committee one week later: “It is obvious that they want the Central Committee to meet without me, so that I won’t have any opportunity of putting my views across.”

On March 2nd, 1955, the Central Committee met without Imre Nagy. The resolution which it passed two days later – and broadcast almost immediately to the country – paid only lip-service to the New Course.¹⁵ It accused Nagy of holding “dangerous Rightist views” and of being the “chief preacher of anti-Marxist ideas”; it blamed these ideas for causing the ruinous drop in production, and it charged him with “duping the working classes by demagogic promises”. On Nagy’s popular front tactics it added: “Certain opportunists sought to build up the Patriotic People’s Front into a leading and even controlling organ of our government, and to make it mightier than the Party.”

That was no fan language, those were words spoken with a crack like a firing-squad.

Nagy hotly denied later that he was up-staging the party: “It was the Party that pushed itself into the background by adopting the passive attitude inspired by Rákosi,” he wrote.

While the Central Committee had never published the June 1953 resolution launching his New Course, and even the October 1954 resolution had not yet percolated down to the lowest levels, this March 1955 document, accusing Nagy of “right-wing deviation”, was already printed and Elizabeth Andics, one of Rákosi’s senior advisers, read it out with a gloating voice to Méray, Aczél and the other writers that same night. Vásárhelyi, Nagy’s press chief, confidentially told them that it had been printed even before the Central Committee met.

In former times, Imre Nagy would have been cast forthwith into some forgotten dungeon. But while he himself was no Abraham Lincoln, he had left his mark on the public at large. He had acquired the image of the blameless martyr.

The Kremlin also hesitated, because at the beginning of April 1955 Nagy was still actually prime minister. The Muscovites were not popular, even among their comrades. Police chief Kopácsi has described the first partisan reunion held at the Police Academy on the tenth anniversary of the Liberation, April 4th, 1955: very many had only just been liberated from internment, because anybody who had fought in Spain or Yugoslavia came under suspicion after the Rajk trial.¹⁶ Kopácsi heard the deep bass voice of former partisan Paul Maléter

intervening with Imre Mező, the benign Budapest Party official, on behalf of some veteran of the Spanish war.

One miner and ex-partisan was shouting, “This regime has knowingly destroyed its most reliable organisation. Gallows, jail, internment, imprisonment – they treated us as if we were mad dogs. Horthy knighted those who helped him to power, he gave them land, loans, building sites. He never forgot even those who lived in the remotest villages, he arranged annual parades and reunions for them and honoured their descendants. He treated them a hundred times more decently than our system treats us.”

Ten days later the axe fell on Imre Nagy. The Central Committee again met and sacked him. The resolution accused him of holding opinions militating against the policies of the Party and the interests of the working class; he had slowed down the big socialist projects like heavy industry and agricultural collectives, he had tried to elbow the Party’s leadership out of the limelight, and he had tried to put Party and state at loggerheads against each other.¹⁷

“These anti-Marxist, anti-Leninist, anti-Party views of Comrade Nagy . . . have caused serious damage to our Party, our People’s democracy and our whole socialist structure.”

It does not require much imagination to see Imre Nagy, head buried in his hands, sobbing at these wounding allegations: he, Imre Nagy, anti-Marxist! He, anti-Leninist! He, anti-Party!

“For sticking to my guns I shall have to put up once again with being ignorantly slandered, politically persecuted, socially ostracised, and deeply humiliated,” he wrote in terms of abject despair in his secret memorandum.

There was one ray of hope. The resolution had mentioned that his case would be reviewed when he was better: he settled down to wait for that promise to be fulfilled.

16 Man in a Porkpie Hat

THERE IS AN unmistakable bounce in his stride, as ex-prime minister Imre Nagy steps out from the little villa where he has been living since 1945. His porkpie hat is tilted at a rakish angle, and there is something of a twinkle in his eye.

It is the late spring of April 1955. The new regime has reverted to all the old policies of terror. A new ice age is descending on the country. But he knows that he has the people behind him. As the security police begin to recover their lost ground, the country looks in mounting despair to him. It is an unusual feeling for Nagy to be wanted like this, and it makes up for the rage and injury of being rejected by the Party he loves.

Initially, he has suffered alone; he has sat at his desk and brooded, while for months not even the journalists who will later form his Pretorian Guard dare to visit him. He is a music lover, and the composer Kodály has been a frequent visitor in earlier times, as have members of the opera company – the building of the Opera House has been close to Nagy’s heart – but a morgue-like silence has descended on the villa in Orsó Avenue. Thomas Aczél is among the first to pay his respects, in May, and after that he comes regularly. “It was awful for him,” Aczél will later tell his interviewers. “He was a soul completely isolated.”¹

Now he just fusses around his garden, or takes snapshots of his grandchildren with the Zeiss camera that Willi Pieck, the East German president, had given him on a visit to East Berlin, and waits for word from the Central Committee to come.

During those first weeks of his new regime, Rákosi and Gerő summoned the chief members of the Writers' Union – Déry, Aczél, Molnár, and the rest. It was an attempt to win over these Communist intellectuals. It failed. The row lasted from four p.m. until after midnight. The rebellious writers threatened trouble if Rákosi continued to dismantle Nagy's policies.

Aczél begged: "I am an old Party member, that is why I'm speaking up now."

When he spoke of the country-wide unrest caused by Nagy's dismissal, Gerő pointedly asked: "You don't agree with the March resolution, then?"

Aczél flung back at him: "As a Party member I submit to it, but I cannot agree with it."

Rákosi angrily taunted them: "If you have any hopes that Rajk will ever be rehabilitated, you can forget them. He was *guilty!*" His tirade was leavened with the usual anecdotes, but it was arrogant too and offered the writers no hope.

It was no coincidence that the brave men who now grouped around Imre Nagy were newspapermen rather than these intellectuals. There was the ex-political prisoner Géza Losonczy himself, his broad humourless features hardened by an iron determination to have his way; there were other journalists like Haraszti, who had been released from prison about the same time, and George Fazekas and Vásárhelyi and Benjámín.

Out there, among the people, the intractable opponents of the regime also multiply: a tractor station engineer of twenty-seven is one; he has been tempted by Nagy's New Course to start a business manufacturing buttons – the button is one of the victims of the socialist planned economy. "I sank all my capital into it," he will recall with evident bitterness. "I lost the lot when the Nagy government came to an end."²

Another is an economics student whose father was liquidated by the Gestapo, and who has been a Communist since fourteen.³ He used to relish every moment of it. ("You are an accomplice in a Great Conspiracy when you are a Communist," he will rationalise to his interrogators in Oxford in 1957.) But he has become disillusioned.

"Take Hungary: who was the enemy? For Rákosi and his gang the enemy was us, the Hungarian people. They believed that Hungarians were innately

fascist. This was the attitude of the Jewish Communists, the Moscow group. They had nothing but contempt for the people.”

It was Rákosi who deported the young girl with whom this young man was deeply in love in 1951; he himself has been declared “a person of bourgeois-capitalist origin”, with grave consequences for his University career. During Nagy’s recent premiership, this young man had become a Budapest student leader, and had written a bold article analysing the catastrophic economic decline under Rákosi entitled, “The Five-Year Plan”. But the Party ordered the entire edition of the University newspaper to be pulped and now, with Rákosi back in power, he is expelled from the Party, declared a “class alien”, and may as well pulp his University degree too.

The year 1955 sees him punching a time-clock as a lowly lens-grinder in an optical factory.

Nagy realises that he is gaining powerful support, and support where it counts: in the press and in magazines. So what does it matter that he has been expelled from the Central Committee, sacked from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, fired from his professorship at the University, vilified? He now has a body of Party members continuing to support him against the hierarchy.

At long last a timid revolt by the Communist intellectuals is beginning. Nagy will ponderously concede a few months later: “The contributions of Thomas Aczél, Tibor Déry, Alexander Erdei and Julius Háry are real steps forward in the clarification of important questions in Hungarian literature. I agree with the line they are taking on principles.”

The writers grow outspoken. At a reception Rákosi asks writer Peter Kuczka his verdict on Nagy’s downfall. Kuczka’s sardonic answer is to gather up two bananas from the richly-endowed buffet. “Comrade Rákosi,” he says, “do you mind if I take home these two bananas for my little boy. He’s seven and he’s never seen one.”⁴

And that is half the trouble. The funkies have lost touch with the people.

Martin Horváth, the chief editor of *Free People*, does not know the price of ham.

Michael Farkas is challenged by Zoltán Zek: “When did you last ride a tram? Try taking a trip with me on the No. 6 at six p.m. along the Boulevard.”

Farkas sneers: "You seem to think that life is lived only on the Boulevard."

When the writers point derisively at a gaudy picture of a *honvéd*, a traditional soldier, in his room, Farkas defensively says: "I brought it back from the Soviet Union. My servant liked it a lot."

Tibor Déry plays that ball straight back at him: "Comrade Farkas, so long as it is Russian domestic servants who make aesthetic judgments, Hungarian literature won't be worth two figs!"

The little villa given to Nagy on his return to Hungary in 1945 has three rooms upstairs and one downstairs, quite attractively furnished by Mrs. Nagy. Aunt Maggie (*Maca néni*), as they call her, is a handsome, upright, grey-haired woman, rather slightly built. She is a good house-keeper, but has no interest in politics whatever; she is not even a Party member. She plays no part in the discussion groups.

Some afternoons quite a crowd clusters into the primly-furnished double-sized room downstairs while she flusters round them with pastries and drinks.

Among the people who begin to foregather here is Nagy's former press chief Vásárhelyi who has now found a modest job in a little publishing house. He often walks over to Nagy's villa in Orsó Avenue.

The meetings are not clandestine or prearranged. "We knew that everything we said was probably being reported or tape-recorded," Vásárhelyi now says.

Nagy's ill-assorted supporters sit round the large dining table, or slumped in easy chairs: Haraszti, Losonczy, Louis Fehér, and Jánosi who lives with his wife, Nagy's daughter Bess, near by. In later months they will be joined by George Fazekas, Francis Donáth and Constantine Újhelyi. Most of them will share Nagy's tribulations, and some of them will share his savage end as well.

The most unforgettable of them was Nicholas Gimes. Stoutish, thoughtful and pullovered, Gimes was thirty-eight and going bald on the back of his head; like so many of these "conspirators" he had a wife and child – Miki, a son of five. His parents were dead: Jewish psychiatrists, they had baptised themselves Unitarians in a vain attempt to avoid wartime persecution.

Gimes was typical of the eager young intellectuals who fleshed out the Communist power-structure after 1945; without them, the handful of woolly-minded

Muscovites like Rákosi and Nagy could never have filled all the voids and interstices of their new regime.

Moody but brilliant, Gimes had impatiently dropped out of his medical course at University and abused his talents by writing essays and theses for other students instead. For a time he regarded himself as an all-round loser, a failure – prevented from joining the International Brigade in Spain, and brutally strung along by a beautiful married woman to whom he paid hopeless court; she left Hungary in 1950, and lives today in Paris.⁵ Romantic dreamer, articulate and cultivated, this gifted young man chose to become a Communist agitator, using his intellectual agility to perform the mental contortions necessary in every writer who must pattern his thinking on the Soviet line while never letting the seams show.

Gimes had been drafted with other Jews to a compulsory labour camp in Transylvania late in the war. He sought comfort in Western literature and shrugged aside the guards' reprimands and threats. Once his guard commander marched him at gunpoint into a forest to shoot him; he reappeared an hour later meekly following Gimes back to camp, carrying his Shakespeare for him. The returning prodigal enlightened his comrades: "I told him that the Germans have lost this war, and that I have friends who will personally avenge my death sooner or later." After that Gimes escaped from the camp, and tried unsuccessfully to join Tito's partisans in Yugoslavia. He returned to Hungary in 1945 with only one idea: to trace his father, who had vanished into the Nazi maw.

He befriended a wispy, shrewd, loquacious blonde actress, Alice Halda. She now says of him, "I never met anybody as pure as Nicholas. He was basically a moralist. He came from a left-wing intellectual family, his parents were members of the Galileo Circle, his mother was in close contact with Endre Ady, a left-wing poet in the first quarter of this century. He turned to the Communist Party out of the rage caused by the death of his father, which created powerful anti-fascist feelings in him, right at the beginning of 1945. "

After the Communist takeover, Gimes accepted the need for rigid Party discipline but remained an anarchist by temperament; the two chiefs of the Party's propaganda machine, the evil genius Révai and the newspaper editor Martin Horváth, harnessed this erudite young man to the Party's cause. Alice Halda continues: "He always knew the difference between right and wrong. Gimes

began to re-think at the time of the Rajk trial. He found it very difficult to get over the hypocrisy. When the rehabilitations started during Nagy's New Course and the prisoners came out and told him what had happened to them, about the torture and the deprivation of sleep and so on, he was aghast."

Thomas Aczél, one of his colleagues on *Free People*, later recalled: "He was a passionate Communist. But once his illusions were gone, he became an equally passionate champion of the multi-party system, and one of the leaders of the spiritual revolt in the editorial offices."

To the fury of the Stalinists – who complained that others would have been slung out of the Party long ago for such "brutal offences against Party discipline" – Nagy retained his Party card.

He had been succeeded as prime minister by a young funky, Andrew Hegedüs. Son of a wealthy farmer, Hegedüs was only a Stalinist stooge – a tough economics graduate who had started as Gerő's secretary in 1945 and had risen to be minister of agriculture. His bald head was too large for his short frame, he was as unhandsome as he was brainy, but Hegedüs was the highest-ranking non-Jew, and this was a useful sop to Khrushchev, whose anti-Semitism was notorious. Besides, there was rumour of an important forthcoming speech by Khrushchev denouncing Stalin, and the Kremlin had begun wooing Rákosi's arch-enemy Marshal Tito.

All that autumn of 1955 the loosely-knit opposition group of journalists met at Imre Nagy's villa. Sometimes they asked Uncle Imre about his thirty years in Russia. The Muscovites seldom talked about their voluntary exile and when they did they were more eloquent than honest. Nagy tried to satisfy their curiosity.

Vásárhelyi says of these cabals: "We were all sure that we were going to get back into power, because we had truth on our side!"

Tibor Méray would recall: "I used to visit Nagy at his home after he was sacked as prime minister. He was embittered, not because of having been sacked, but because Rákosi had thrown him out of the Academy of Sciences too. He said to me: 'He had no right to exclude me from the Academy. I earned that post by my scientific work.'" Méray deduced from these words that Nagy was far more professor than a professional politician.

Nagy had begun writing something. They saw him covering sheet after sheet of paper with mysterious handwriting, like Captain Nemo in *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*. At first nobody knew what he was writing.

His mind was bulging with an untidy mélange of ponderous facts and theories and with the corresponding quotations from Lenin. His common sense wanted to scream that if the regime made impossible promises it was bound to destroy the people's already bruised faith in the Party and – oh horror! – in “the correctness of Marxism-Leninism”.

His brain heaved and squirmed with workmanlike pedantic phrases like “leftist deviation” and “worker-peasant alliance”, it smouldered with righteous anger at the way his detractors hypocritically alluded to Marxism to justify their own sordid actions.

Nagy knew what he wanted: the Central Committee must permit a full debate on principles. His pen wobbled from theme to theme, without cohesion or coherence, and the pages that accumulated contained many a juicy revelation about the power struggles inside the Communist worm heap – fragmentary remarks by Khrushchev, Malenkov and Kaganovich in the Kremlin – and inside Academy Street here in Budapest as well.

Nagy's memorandum was virtually complete by September 1955, but the Party leadership refused to accept it for discussion, and launched a new attack on him instead, evicting him in November 1955 from the Party altogether.

This widened the rift in the Party still further. The Stalinists protested that the resolution excluding Nagy was not preceded by the requisite “unmasking” in the ideological field.

Nagy fought back with his pen: by early 1956 he added four more chapters to his memorandum. Occasionally he passed drafts around his friends for them to comment on.

They showed one thing clearly: that Imre Nagy remained in fact a Marxist. As the heap of manuscript soaked up his outpourings of repetitious jargon – because he had never spoken any other language – so it solidified into incomprehensibility. He was an elderly gentleman wriggling in a Hegelian-Marxist-Leninist straitjacket, and unable to get out.

Nagy's men cast around haphazardly for moral support.

Tito was a possible source. Imre Nagy was not over-fond of him, and he muttered unflattering comparisons between Tito and Hermann Göring when he saw pictures of the paunchy marshal in his gaudy uniforms. But any enemy of Rákosi was a potential ally, and in his memorandum Nagy capitalised on Rákosi's history of muck-raking against Yugoslavia and her Party leaders:

The Rajk trial and the executions, all artificially built up and long since unmasked as total lies; the mass arrests, the persecution, the unbridled inflammatory speeches and writings of Matthias Rákosi, Michael Farkas, Ernest Gerő, Joseph Révai & Co. – all the anti-Tito, anti-Yugoslav literature, including the pamphlets, pronouncements and parallel activities of the press and radio, and all the endless economic and political sanctions adopted against Yugoslavia – all these are well-known and irrefutable facts.

Thus the Nagy group put out cautious feelers to the Yugoslavs. Fortuitously, after Khrushchev's olive-branch visit to Belgrade in 1955, Tito's interest in this part of Europe had also revived. Unofficial diplomatic contacts were the upshot of these feelers. After it became known that Vásárhelyi had been sacked from his press job in June, Milan Georgiević, the Yugoslav legation's first secretary, invited him round and they agreed to meet privately thereafter.⁶

Now, during the autumn, he asked the Nagy group to transform this relationship into a secret liaison of a more furtive nature. There were nine or ten such trysts, in a corner café in Nyúl Street. But little came of them.

Georgiević also cultivated Gimes, and obtained through him an introduction to Francis Jánosi, Nagy's son-in-law, who in March 1956 furnished to the legation copies of Nagy's later scriptures. Altogether the Yugoslavs gained two hundred pages of Nagy's secret memorandum, including chapters he had added since his expulsion from the Party entitled: "The Five Basic Principles of International Relations" – it argued for the withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact – and "Morals and Ethics".

Vásárhelyi now confirms all this, though he puts a more harmless sheen on the meetings than the prosecutor at his trial: "We deluded ourselves that we were not in contact with the Yugoslav *government*, but with the Yugoslav Party, and that we were acting as representatives of the Hungarian inner-Party opposi-

tion. The envelopes were never addressed to the Yugoslav government, but either to Tito as leader of the Yugoslav Party, or to the Central Committee of the Yugoslav Party.”⁷

It seemed an important distinction to Vásárhelyi. He adds: “We never got an answer.”

But, in a sense, the legation did come up with an answer – unexpectedly, one night early in November 1956.

Buried among the sheafs of manuscript passed from hand to hand among Nagy’s friends, like *samizdat* broadsheets, were words that revealed the transformation which was coming over Imre Nagy – words showing that he wanted history to know that he cursed these men and disavowed their methods.

In the chapter on “Morals and Ethics” he had written:

The abuse of power and the use of illegal devices has reached alarming proportions during 1955, and has exceeded even the worst practices of the period from 1950 to 1952. Most of the workers have come to believe that they are at the mercy of illegalities and that there are no laws guaranteeing their rights as human beings and citizens; that a people’s democracy is synonymous with anarchy; that such a democracy leaves plenty of room for violations of the law; that in such a democracy the life of the individual is overshadowed by constant insecurity and fear.⁸

Nagy characterised Rákosi’s aides, the funkies, as careerists, sycophants and bootlickers.

They have no principles or opinions of their own. They will declare without compunction that black is white. In every case they curry favour with those in a position to assure them a better place in Party or state affairs, greater prestige, more income, broader authority, and – above all – a limousine.

And he added a prophetic warning of the ruin that Rákosi’s methods might yet wreak on Hungary. “The burning question of the moment,” predicted Nagy, “is the endeavour to restore the old order of affairs . . . As a result, the Party will

find itself divorced from the people; this may well have unforeseeable consequences, not only within the country, but abroad too.”

17 Run, Rabbit, Run

IDLING ALONG THE pavement opposite the British legation, a woman in a striped jersey and corduroy jacket pauses and fiddles with her shoulder bag as somebody steps out on to the Gothic-columned portico. There is a hole the size of a penny in the bag, behind which is the lens of a hidden camera. The woman is a plainclothes ÁVH agent. So is Ladislav Nagy, one of the legation's drivers; so for that matter is every other member of the legation's locally recruited staff.¹

By late 1955, the security police have matured from their truncheon and torture-chamber days.

The ÁVH has developed sophisticated intelligence-gathering techniques. Every man, woman and child emerging from these diplomatic buildings is under surveillance. Concealed in the letter *O* above the Patyolat dry-cleaning shop is a telephoto lens that records every visitor emerging from the legation opposite. There are hundreds of these spy photos at the ministry of the interior: in the background of some is a bald-eagle insignia over a door, that of the United States legation.

In an ÁVH laboratory all Western diplomatic mail is opened, photocopied, and re-sealed. Every legation telephone conversation is tapped and recorded on green flexidiscs with square holes, the diplomats are tailed everywhere they go, listening devices are planted in their homes; one will be found between the twin beds of a Western diplomat and his wife.

When the film of Queen Elizabeth II's Coronation is shown at the British legation, ÁVH lorries are waiting outside to pull in the visitors for questioning.²

The ÁVH – the state security section authority of the ministry of the interior – fought an increasingly paranoid campaign to protect the infant People's Republic from the CIA and from an imaginary “army” being raised by Konrad Adenauer in West Germany.

The first six months of 1955 would see military courts set up, a Budapest trial of a “counter-revolutionary organisation” headed by two Franciscan monks in which sentences ranged from two and a half years to life; the trial of a “counter-revolutionary gang of conspirators and traitors”, of whom five were executed; frequent press announcements of the arrest of “CIC” (Counter Intelligence Corps) and Radio Free Europe spies and saboteurs; the arrest of Mr. and Mrs. Endre Márton, respectively the AP and UP reporters in Budapest, and of two Hungarian employees of the American legation, Béla Kapotsy and Kornél Balázs, for “spying and other anti-state criminal deeds committed on behalf of a foreign power”.³

By 1955, the ÁVH had some cause to develop its mind-control techniques. Since 1948 the United States had stepped up its under-cover war in the Iron Curtain countries. A newly created Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had been directed to start harassing Moscow's satellite regimes.⁴

On April 14th, 1950, the CIA had been specifically directed to stir up revolts in the satellite countries. Since the beginning of the Korean War the CIA had channelled staggering funds into propaganda, blackmail, and electoral interference operations – \$82 million in 1952 alone. Its main political arm was the Free Europe Committee Inc., operating from a skyscraper in New York; this committee, ostensibly funded through appeals by figures such as a future US president, Ronald Reagan, channelled largely CIA funds to Radio Free Europe (RFE) and the “Hungarian National Council” established in New York under Monsignor Béla Varga and other defectors. Millions of balloons were sent streaming eastwards across the Iron Curtain, discharging leaflets that talked of a resistance movement being raised in Hungary by “Colonel Bell”, a fictitious officer invented by CIA staff.

Operating from headquarters in Munich, and using powerful transmitters near Munich and Lisbon, RFE had been broadcasting ever since 1950. Its tabloid format of music, news and views gave it an audience appeal that was lacking

in the more strait-laced BBC and Voice of America broadcasts; a reliable poll of Hungarian refugees in late 1956 would reveal that seventy-nine per cent of them had listened regularly to RFE.⁵ When Voice of America went on the air at eight p.m., said a Hungarian countess, millions clandestinely tuned in: “You could set your watch by the sound of the street windows banging shut.”⁶

Asked whether she listened, a girl who had once been a Communist admitted in August 1957: “Sometimes I did. For a time I thought it was all just lies. But later on I began to think and I tried to work out what was true and what were lies.”⁷

What gave these CIA broadcasts their credibility breakthrough were rumours in 1951 that the Rákosi regime had engaged in large-scale deportations. The news was suppressed in domestic radio broadcasts. People had nightmares, *frásznapok*, about the deportations and about the Black Maria that stopped before the houses to remove deportees. “One heard rumours everywhere,” the girl said. “The first clean, clear-cut description of the deportations came from Western broadcasts. My father used to listen every day.”

Small wonder that the propaganda got under Rákosi’s skin, and that even Imre Nagy would curse the Americans for it. “Neither news without foundation, nor the balloons that constitute the subject of humour and jokes have been able to mislead our people,” Nagy huffed in November 1954. “Of course our enemies have not buried the war hatchet, and we must be on the alert, because, as the saying goes, the Devil never sleeps.”⁸

The CIA official directing these clandestine operations in Washington was Frank G. Wisner, a wealthy and influential lawyer of great physical energy.⁹ He had worked in Central Europe for the OSS and served under Allen W. Dulles in Germany. Wisner’s representatives contacted thousands of émigrés and defectors, and marshalled hand-picked refugees into camps in Southern Germany, where they were trained in guerrilla war techniques. But the time was not ripe for intervention. Perhaps nobody liked thinking that far ahead.

Meanwhile the CIA kept tight rein on broadcasts by RFE. “Exile speakers,” a policy adviser there secretly ruled on November 30th, 1951, “are warned not to yield to a natural impulse to bring hope to their compatriots by promising intervention by the West . . . Such talks may *not* be broadcast by RFE.”

In 1952 war hero Dwight D. Eisenhower was swept into the presidency on a strident anti-Communist platform. To gain election, he and his team had talked freely of freeing the Eastern European countries. Campaigning for him, John Foster Dulles – Allen Dulles's elder brother – used the emotive word “liberation” frequently, in Pittsburgh on May 15th, in Denver a short time later, and again addressing political scientists in Buffalo in August, where he explicitly stated that “the liberation policy of Eisenhower” would include the supply and co-ordination of patriotic resistance movements by the CIA.¹⁰

In Denver, one prophetic critic predicted that the “liberation” policy might result in a series of “little Warsaws”, an allusion to the uprising by pro-Western guerrillas in August 1944, which had been crushed when the Western powers wretched on them. Governor W. Averell Harriman was also critical of Dulles's “liberation” speeches and told him so in several public debates. On television he warned Dulles to his face: “Foster, if you follow this policy, you are going to have the death of some brave people on your conscience.”¹¹

It was a very narrow path that RFE broadcasters were treading. Edmund O. Stillman, a Free Europe Committee executive, explained in June 1957: “Their chief function was to keep alive alternatives, and to impair the *sense of isolation* of the individual.”¹²

Under President Truman the guidelines had been rigorously enforced. On September 2nd, 1952, the RFE policy adviser, faced with the tempting campaign statements by Eisenhower and Dulles on “liberation”, again issued cautionary guidelines:

We of RFE . . . cannot comment upon these statements with unqualified optimism, for to do so would be to deceive our listeners by inspiring in them exaggerated hope of Western intervention . . . Not one word in these statements can be used to encourage militant anti-Communists to go over from passive to active resistance in the expectation that such resistance will be supported by Western elements.

This prudence was thrown overboard when Eisenhower was elected. A few months later, in February 1953, the extrovert, pipe-smoking Allen Dulles be-

came director of the CIA headquarters buildings, sprawling along the Reflecting Pond in Washington. He soon set his stamp on the agency.

The CIA reached out in 1953 and toppled Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh in Iran, and it overthrew the Guatemalan president Jacobo Arbenz Guzman by paramilitary action.

Famed aviator General James Doolittle summarised a secret survey of the CIA's anti-Kremlin operations, a report approved by Eisenhower:

It is now clear that we are facing an implacable enemy whose avowed objective is world domination by whatever means and at whatever cost. There are no rules in such a game. Hitherto acceptable norms of human conduct do not apply. If the United States is to survive, long-standing American concepts of "fair play" must be reconsidered. We must develop effective espionage and counter-espionage services and must learn to subvert, sabotage and destroy our enemies by more clever, more sophisticated and more effective methods than those used against us.¹³

The strategic options open to Eisenhower were, however, dramatically narrowed by words that Malenkov uttered on August 8th, 1953: "The government considers it necessary to report to the Supreme Soviet that the United States no longer has a monopoly of the production of the hydrogen bomb."¹⁴

In fact the Russians would *not* explode a prototype H-bomb until November 1955, and would have no aircraft capable of carrying it to the United States until 1956. But Malenkov's bluff left Eisenhower haunted with the awesome spectre of thermonuclear war against North America's cities.¹⁵

The result was a studied ambivalence, a dualism in American foreign policy. While Eisenhower tacitly drifted towards accepting the status quo in Europe, his public posture remained unchanged: the day of "liberation" would come. Talk like that went down well during the Cold War. John Foster Dulles, who had become Ike's secretary of state, bragged constantly of turning the screws on Moscow. But in private he had no active plan to overthrow the Marxist regimes. "We knew," reflected one US official, "that we could never send American boys across the Curtain to help liberate any of these countries . . . The American public wouldn't stand for it."¹⁶

That then was the situation by late 1955.

When a twelve-year-old Hungarian boy attending the state camp at Kismaros goes for a stroll across the meadows that summer, he notices white things fluttering down out of the sky.¹⁷ He catches one. It is a fold-out picture series, giving tempting details of the life of the American workers. The other leaflet is a cartoon of the Stalin statue in Budapest; it is toppling over on to dictator Rákosi, who is running with arms outstretched to escape. The caption is a line from a popular song: Run Rabbit Run.

A typical twenty-four-year-old student will recall: “We drank in the Eisenhower and Dulles speeches, and we falsely drew the conclusion that an intervention was in the making.” Why else, reasons another student, does the United States invest so heavily in this propaganda effort?¹⁸

“RFE gave great impetus to conspiracies,” he will say.

Of one thousand refugees to be expertly sampled in December 1956 as to why, given that the uprising was triggered by other causes, they personally joined in, *ninety-six* per cent will state that they expected the West to come to Hungary’s aid, and seventy-seven per cent will say that they anticipated actual military intervention. Asked why, one-third will spontaneously point out that it was “promised” in Western broadcasts. An American opinion analyst summarises: “We now think – as a feedback, from what we have heard the respondents say – that there *were* statements made that could be called promises.”¹⁹

Of course, when the balloon goes up, both Dulles and Eisenhower will indignantly deny responsibility. On December 2nd, 1956, in Augusta, Georgia, Dulles comes under fire from newspapermen about his election campaign speeches. (“You will recall in 1952 during the campaign, when you first came to Denver . . .”²⁰) Pressed to reply to allegations in Europe’s newspapers that he and Ike had *encouraged* the Hungarians to rise, Dulles will give only evasive answers.

Without even a flicker of conscience, Dulles will refer to this vexed “subject of so-called liberation”.

Four men, a former army officer and three close friends, are playing bridge in a country village. From a bookshelf, a hidden loudspeaker is softly whisper-

ing Radio Free Europe newscasts. The announcer begins reading out a warning list of known ÁVH informants. At the mention of his own name, the officer wordlessly folds his cards, quits the table and leaves the village.²¹

Life is like that in Hungary. People cannot always rely on their sixth sense to tell them who the ÁVH informers are. If a man is let out of prison early, or if an ex-prisoner immediately gets a job, his friends ostracise him: he has probably been bought.

When Countess Anna Nádasdy hears of the unmasking of the card-playing officer she cannot reproach him: she is employed by the American legation, and she too has been recruited by the ÁVH. She is of course a “class-alien”. Her little boy comes home from school with his jacket torn and spat on by the workers’ children, or sobbing because his family’s noble name has been held up for contempt in the new history books.

“Do we have to take it lying down?” he asks. “Can’t we ever do anything?”

On the last day of her vacation in 1955, the ÁVH arrest her for illegally residing in Budapest after her return from deportation. Under threat of throwing her back into jail, they recruit her as an informer. And so on her next journey in a legation car, when she feels safe from prying eyes and ears, she beseeches her American employers, “Please don’t leave any documents lying around where I can see them.”

In Budapest, the ÁVH operated girl taxi-drivers, prostitutes and night clubs like the Poppy in Budapest’s Váci Street. It had dirty-tricks sections of which the CIA would have been proud. Section B-29’s job was to trace defectors and persuade them to return, usually by “setting out” friends who had been recruited by the ÁVH for this purpose.²² Thus they persuaded opera singer János Jaray to return in 1955, without his even suspecting the ÁVH connection. Typical of the new ÁVH sophistication was the logic behind their retrieval from abroad of the notorious fascist Anthony Pager early in 1956, as a nasty means of currying favour with the public, while also putting emotional pressure on the largely Jewish opposition tumour forming inside the Party. It was Rákosi’s crude way of hinting that pogroms could always happen; and when Pager arrived back he was given every opportunity of scraping on these raw nerves.

Disinformation techniques were equally intricate. The ÁVH used spent double agents to smear defectors living in the West. A telegram was sent in a code

known to have been cracked by the Western powers to a Hungarian legation in the West, indicating that Béla Varga, the chairman of the exiled Hungarian National Council was secretly working for the ÁVH. Spent ÁVH agents were sent to visit him on harmless errands, to put flesh into the smear. Then a “code” reply was sent to Budapest, confirming that Varga had provided the long-awaited material.²³

To defend the People's Republic from invasion, powerful Soviet forces were already stationed in the country, and Hungarian armed forces were also being raised. Moreover by early 1956 the security police (ÁVH) numbered some 35,000 men and women.

These ÁVH men were lavishly paid, they could buy scarce goods in a PX-style shop in Gorky Avenue in Budapest's VIth precinct, and they got other perks as well. A young economist, jailed for ten years, later said: “Among the members of the ÁVH the women led the way in performing acts of sadism.”²⁴

Like any of the other grisly Communist organisms, the ÁVH had its Plan to be discussed in pettifogging detail, and production targets to be achieved. Its khaki-uniformed officers, with their blue-banded peaked caps, blue piping and blue cardboard-stiffened epaulettes and collar-tabs, were a familiar sight in Hungary. The officers wore good-quality leather boots and so did the ÁVH regulars; men drafted into the ÁVH directly from the army or civilian life wore only canvas boots – not that the mob would draw any distinction when the violence began.

By 1955 the ÁVH had reared a colossal octopus of secret informers. There were over forty informers in one small village on the frontier near Magyaróvár alone. Informers became ensnared through their own incautiousness. In June 1955 a nineteen-year-old youth stole a harmonica; in return for the dropping of charges, he was enlisted as an ÁVH informer, eavesdropping in espresso bars. Another young man was sentenced to five years' prison for underground activities, but was offered a reduction if he would become a stoolie in the prison yard.

The net result was that between 1952 and 1955 no fewer than 1,136,434 Hungarians were put on trial and 516,708 or forty-five per cent of them sentenced to prison terms. Not even the Central Committee members – about 120 chosen funkies – learned of official figures like these. As General Alexander

Nógrádi wrote in his memoirs, “Rákosi held the view that there was no such thing as ‘revolutionary’ legality. ‘Let the people just learn that here we’ve got the dictatorship of the proletariat!’ he used to say.”²⁵

The unremitting police terror disturbed Imre Nagy. Writing to the Central Committee, he pointed out:

The corruption of power and the moral decline is indicated by the fact that at present [December 1955] more people are in prison than ever before; the number of persons sentenced is so excessive that many thousands cannot even begin serving their sentences because of lack of space. But the most alarming fact is that the majority of those convicted are industrial workers.²⁶

Under Rákosi the country’s cultural life had ossified.

Ernest Schubert, his director of the School of Fine Arts, had ordered all the Greek statues in the building thrown down into the courtyard, for “not conforming to Socialist Realism”.

The newspapers were unreadable. Nepotism flourished. The main requirement in an editor now was “Party-mindedness”.

In the theatre it was the same story. Stephen Kende, a long-toothed old Bolshevik, was in charge of the theatre division of the ministry of people’s culture. Shakespeare’s *Richard III* was proscribed for some years because of its suspected anti-Communist overtones; *Hamlet* was axed because the hero was a “feudal reactionary”; Shaw’s *The Devil’s Disciple* came under the chopper because it dealt with the Americans’ “fight for liberty”, which Marxist historians did not recognise.²⁷

For the writers, the last straw was the prohibition of the production of classical Hungarian drama like Imre Madách’s *The Tragedy of Man* and even Béla Bartók’s ballet *The Miraculous Mandarin*. Arthur Miller attracted the Party’s favour, but only after falling foul of the House Committee on Un-American Activities. The deputy minister of culture, George Nón, a relative of Rákosi’s, would earnestly exhort students at the Music Academy in the spring of 1956: “Be inspired by the example of Michelangelo, the great Italian composer.”

That September 1955, Nón ordered the confiscation of the latest *Literary Gazette*. The nine-man presidium of the Writers' Union threatened a mass resignation. "Our resignation will have nationwide repercussions," they warned. "It will tell everybody about our resistance." A month later Rákosi asked to see them; this time they refused to see him, another unheard-of affront.

The upshot was that in November the literary Communists backing Imre Nagy composed a stiff open letter to the regime.²⁸ Morally speaking, they were by no means blameless themselves: Thomas Aczél, with a wife and year-old daughter, admitted to a mistress, while Francis Karinthy and Tibor Déry were no saints either where women were concerned. But this letter showed that they had moral fibre of another kind. Déry was the first to sign the letter and throw his prestige behind it.

Its contents were trivial: it was ostensibly a protest at Party interference in cultural affairs, it was a "great scream in the night"²⁹ as Tibor Méray called it. Alexander Haraszi drafted it, with the help of Vásárhelyi and Losonczy. When Aczél began driving round collecting the sixty-three signatures, Imre Nagy actively spurred the writers on, although he would not let any of the writers expelled from the Party, such as George Fazekas, sign it; that would be a breach of Party discipline. He quoted Lenin's norms as the proper course of conduct. Haraszi and Aczél delivered it to Academy Street, the Party headquarters, on November 14th.

It was a sensation. Méray said: "Everyone in Budapest knew about it. People didn't have the text, but that only made it all the more exciting."

What stung Rákosi was the openness of this stand against the government. Méray explained, "We wanted to raise dust!"³⁰ But the Party blew a full blizzard and systematically applied pressure on every one of them to retract their signatures. On December 6th, the more militant writers discussed these threatened consequences at Géza Losonczy's home – among them Haraszi, Vásárhelyi, Déry, Újhelyi, and Aczél. They decided to stand firm. Vásárhelyi reported this to Nagy, and Uncle Imre beamed approval.³¹

An ominous silence descended on Academy Street for the next two or three weeks. On December 22nd, the writers were "invited" by telephone to a literary debate at the Metal Workers' Union³² – the same echoing hall where Rajk, Brankov and the others had been tried seven years earlier – to debate a resolu-

tion of the Central Committee. The resolution had already been printed, with the title, “The problem of hostile rightist forces manifesting themselves in literature”.

Some writers feared their arrest was imminent. Losonczy and Aczél drove to Visegrád that morning to fetch Zoltán Zelk and Ladislav Benjámín.

Benjámín had written a speech, but his nerves were shot to pieces. “I can’t come,” he pleaded. “You take my speech, you read it!” Aczél glanced at it, saw that it called Rákosi and his gang “murderers”, and decided on balance *not* to put it to the meeting.

As they approached the union building, they saw it was surrounded by the funkies’ cars, the two thousand cars of the “proletariat” of Greater Budapest. One of Rákosi’s bodyguards thrust the printed order-paper at them. Halfway down it Háý caught sight of his own name in bold type: “Julius Háý makes capital out of the idea of Freedom of Literature.” Aczél caught him by the arm and muttered, “Gyuszi, we are in for trouble.”

Five other writers were similarly honoured with bold print. The resolution condemned them for “rightist deviations in literature”, and denounced them as “standard-bearers of enemies of the state”.³³

Béla Szalai, a big blond Politburo member with fleshy features, started the ball rolling; the other funkies each gave it a push.

The audience was hostile and restive. Aczél decided to leave his speech in his pocket. Háý waited for the other writers to speak up, but nobody did, so he stumbled to the podium. But he got only as far as saying, “Comrades . . .” before Rákosi had him laughed off the stage.

“*Comrades*, he says!”

Like a floor-manager at a TV show, Rákosi evinced every jeer and catcall that he needed from the angry audience by barely visible twitches of his eyebrows. When the writers finally slunk out, there were catcalls and shouts of: “Look, the ‘Comrades’ are doing a bunk!”

They tottered helplessly into Losonczy’s home on Rose Mount around ten p.m.

Karinthy spluttered to Méray: “Well, they sure landed us in it this time!”

Méray knew without asking that the writer did not mean Rákosi – he meant Uncle Imre and Harasztí. They laughed in a distracted way, and helped them-

selves to slugs of liquor from Losonczy's cabinet. Aczél downed a bottle of cognac and went home to bed.

Triumphant again, the Party wrote a stern warning to all those writers who had refused to retract their signatures. They were expelled from the Party and deprived of their livelihoods as writers. Aczél found himself reduced to ferrying actors around the provinces in his Škoda, at a thousand florins a trip.

In February 1956 the writer Peter Erdős was actually arrested. A balding journalist with foxy features, clever eyes and a twinkling, easy-going manner, Erdős was thirty-one and blasé about political prisons, having already languished in them before; he had been liberated by the Americans from Buchenwald in 1945, and by Imre Nagy from Rákosi's prisons in 1953, after three years' solitary confinement for refusing to confess to being a British spy (he was not). Erdős was known as a man who spoke his mind. Loping down the Lenin Boulevard in 1954 he had told Losonczy: "Conspiring against Rákosi in total silence isn't the right way to go about it. We must come out into the open and attack him, we must try to demolish the wall of silence that surrounds him."³⁴

Nicholas Gimes grew a beard in protest, he said, against his expulsion: he declared that he would not shave it off until the Party took him back again.

For some months an icy silence settled around them again.

18 Vicious Circle

IT WAS THE bleakest winter that Moscow had known for years. For weeks the thermometer stalled at thirty degrees below zero and the snow lay four feet deep.

In the Kremlin, Nikita S. Khrushchev was opening the Twentieth Party Congress. His six hours of opening oratory were already a savage attack on Stalin and all that he had stood for. Only yesterday such remarks would have been punishable heresy. But on February 16th, 1956, Khrushchev was saying the unspeakable; and when the congress ended on February 25th, speaking only a stone's throw from the Lenin mausoleum, he delivered a secret speech that would have had Stalin's embalmed remains bellowing with rage if the lifeless ears could have heard it. Khrushchev described how under Stalin the cult of the individual flourished; he called Stalin's economic theories defective and dishonest, and he accused him of having purged the greatest men of his time.

The Twentieth Congress started avalanches rumbling down the foothills of the Soviet empire. Rákosi stumbled back from Moscow to Budapest in a daze. In Hungary a twenty-seven-year-old political officer in the army spotted Khrushchev's speech on the desk of the Russian adviser attached to the defence minister.¹

The CIA also obtained the secret text through General Reinhard Gehlen's secret service in West Germany. Seen from Washington, it looked too extraordinary to be true. But both Frank Wisner and the CIA station chief in Vienna, Colonel Peer de Silva, who was in Washington for routine consultations, were

sure that Khrushchev had spoken these words and the State Department issued it on June 4th. Convulsions in the Communist world were inevitable. Frank Wisner sent De Silva back to Vienna with instructions to step up operations in Hungary.²

In Budapest anti-Soviet feeling had been running high throughout 1955. The European basketball championship was staged in Budapest and when the Soviet team padded out into the arena there were catcalls from the audience; there were many arrests, and news of the demonstration grapevined all over the country.³ In the universities and the espressos – the coffee shops that had mushroomed along the capital's boulevards and back streets – the muttering against Moscow began again.

While Moscow had clearly signalled the end of the Stalin era, Rákosi was still slow on the uptake. For a month there was no reaction from Budapest. In a declaration to the Central Committee, Rákosi still underlined “the well-known great merits of Stalin”. He did formally repudiate the cult of personality as “alien to Marxism”, but he would go no further towards self-criticism than conceding that Stalin's “methods of individual leadership” through the years had been “nefarious”.

On March 27th, however, Rákosi grudgingly conceded the injustice done to Rajk; speaking at Eger, he blamed the trial on Gábor Péter. That day, Budapest's police chief Kopácsi was handed a speech to deliver to his police officers, 1,200 men packed into the police academy in Böszörményi Avenue. Kopácsi ignored the text and spoke instead of the Party's need to regain public confidence. “Rákosi is refusing to perform self-criticism,” he said. The audience shifted uneasily, then broke into applause.⁴

Among the political prisoners now released were the surviving Social Democrats like Andrew Révész. On March 29th, 1956, George Marosán suddenly found himself a free man. In Belgrade there were no more “chained dogs”, Tito was “Comrade Tito” again, and Gábor Péter was himself in prison. Marosán's hair was now snowy white and he could hardly speak after five years of solitary confinement. To keep sane, he had immersed himself in the prison library and re-read Marx and Lenin (evidently different organisms respond to different panaceas). Browsing through Susan Túry's novel *Little French Girl in Budapest* in the prison hospital he had found out that Joseph Stalin had died in 1953.

“Within twenty-four hours of my release I was taken to see Rákosi,” says Marosán. “I had never thought he would have the cheek to receive me again.”⁵ He was driven to Party headquarters in Academy Street, and received by Rákosi in the presence of Prime Minister Andrew Hegedüs.

Rákosi apologised with a toothy grin, “I am so sorry that Péter and his gang did this to you!”

Marosán flung at him: “Let’s not talk about that gang. They would not have dared arrest me if they hadn’t had the word from you!”

The Party paid him two hundred thousand florins’ compensation for wrongful imprisonment, and they fetched him by car twice a week to Academy Street for political discussions.

However, in Moscow the power struggle was evidently not over. Stalinists like Rákosi were not immediately sacked. In fact, on April 4th, Liberation Day, Marshal Bulganin sent him a fulsome telegram calling him “that tested veteran of the revolutionary movement”.

Several foreign diplomats in Budapest saw storm signs coming. Dalibor Soldatić, the forty-five-year-old Yugoslav ambassador, informed his foreign ministry that something would happen if the situation was not rapidly stabilised. Rákosi and Gerő would have to be replaced by Nagy and Kádár – otherwise, he predicted, a revolution might take place with unpredictable consequences for the entire Soviet bloc.⁶

The Kremlin’s attitude to Imre Nagy was unclear. At times the Russians seemed to be almost wooing him. A CIA agent claimed (perhaps erroneously) that Mrs. Nagy was invited several times to well-stocked dinner parties at the Soviet embassy in Budapest.⁷ And when Uncle Imre celebrated his sixtieth birthday on June 7th, 1956, Communist ministers like Alexander Czottner, the Minister for the coal-mining industry, attended, as did composer Zoltán Kodály and popular writer Julius Illyés and toyed with the chicken paprika and Tokay.⁸ At his trial, Nagy would be accused of turning an over-lavish birthday celebration into a political demonstration. When Rákosi rebuked Peter Veres for having attended, the writer-politician retorted: “I am a Magyar. If I am invited to a party, I go!”

Khrushchev’s Moscow speech triggered unrest throughout the Soviet bloc. In Poland, where an international fair had opened, workers staged riots which armed police had to quell. There were many dead and injured.

In Budapest, too, dissident pressure built up against Rákosi. At a Party meeting in the seedy Angel Fields suburb, a young teacher called George Litván stood up, pointed an accusing finger at him, and declaimed that he had forfeited everybody's confidence: "You are guilty! You should resign."

While Rákosi is once again unable to venture out without armed guards, Imre Nagy has become a symbol of better times to come.

The CIA reports that he is more popular now as an "outlaw" than he ever was as prime minister. As a private citizen visiting the opera, he rises to acknowledge the applause of the audience. He strolls around the city in his green hat and glacé gloves, while complete strangers approach him to shake his hand and ask: "Comrade Nagy, when are you coming back?"

A neighbour will recall: "I remember him doing something shocking for a leading Communist. He got on a bus, dipped his hand into his pocket, fished out a florin and actually bought a ticket!" While embarrassed ÁVH men pretend not to hear, an old woman walks the length of the No. 5 bus to Nagy and announces: "God bless you, when are you coming back? We just can't stand that Rákosi any longer!"⁹

In the city centre he eyes the pretty girls and doffs his hat to them; and he is the only man who dares doff his hat to George Heltai's wife; George Heltai is still in prison at this time.

The Party was already grappling with its own hamfisted liberalisation efforts. A radio programme began called "Saturday Afternoon", a conversation among four card players, one of whom adopted the brash "Alf Garnett" opposition line; however, his tone gradually grew bolder. In Budapest, two theatres had opened with satirical cabaret shows; night after night the audiences in the Gaiety Theatre and the Little Theatre rocked with laughter to shows with titles like "Where Does the Shoe Pinch?" – a merciless four-hour attack on the system.¹⁰

Vásárhelyi says: "After the Twentieth Congress and the Khrushchev speech, the wind was blowing into *our* sails – or so we thought!" The trial of writer Peter Erdős, set for April 11th, was abandoned and he was released. In June he was allowed to freelance for the radio. His support for Imre Nagy was vocifer-

ous and he became a familiar figure at the radio building in Alexander Bródy Street.¹¹

Imre Nagy began to perceive the strength of his position. When Tibor Méray was offered the editorship of the 150,000 circulation weekly *Peace and Freedom* (*Béke és Szabadság*) in May the Old Man urged him to accept: “The time has come to lay hands on every position we can,” he said. “Take the job.”

But when Géza Losonczy and Nicholas Gimes hinted that they should go further and set up a committee to co-ordinate the opposition to Rákosi, Nagy took fright. He still saw his spiritual homeland in the Party, in the labyrinthine grey building in Academy Street, and he would have no truck with any threat to Party unity. Gimes was particularly persistent. Nagy recalled him suggesting the committee idea twice to him: once when they were alone and once in the presence of George Fazekas and Paul Lócsei. It all sounded very “incorrect” to the prim and legalistic Imre Nagy.

His friends were puzzled and exasperated. Once, leaving Nagy’s villa, Gimes burst out to Alexander Haraszti: “We can’t extend the struggle effectively unless we win over the masses – and not just intellectuals.” He repeated, “What we need is an organisation.”¹²

That turbulent spring of 1956, the Petőfi Circle went a long way towards providing the nucleus proposed by Nicholas Gimes.¹³

It had been created several months earlier by Party stooges and appended to the youth organisation DISz as a Wednesday evening group for carefully staged discussions. It took its name from Alexander Petőfi, the poet and leader of the abortive 1848 revolution.

At first the public paid little heed to the Circle. It met on the premises of the Kossuth Club – an intellectual grouping founded early in 1955 – but its secretary Gábor Tánczos and its speakers were perceived as fawning Communists, and the early debates gyrated endlessly around Marxist-Leninist topics. As a former airforce officer commented, “The Hungarian public at large did not sympathise with either the Petőfi Circle or the writers, because they had served the Communist regime.”¹⁴ A non-Communist writer and three-year inmate of Reck put it more irreverently: “You can’t make butter out of shit.”¹⁵

The Circle’s earliest soirées in August 1955 had been attended by only twenty or thirty friends. But as it came under the influence of Nagy’s group, the debates

switched to more topical subjects, and the growing audiences moved to the economics faculty. There was a beerhall atmosphere about the meetings. Nagy's henchmen Donáth, Újhelyi and Losonczy often took the chair. The regime watched with chagrin as the Circle became, first an informal free Parliament, and then the riotous meeting place for an articulate, virulent and nationalist opposition to Academy Street.

Soon the Petőfi Circle meetings had to be switched from the University to the elegant Officers' Club, a large building of the Secessional period dominating Váci Street, the capital's "Fifth Avenue".¹⁶ The club's theatre could seat 800.

At a debate on May 30th, 1956, speakers openly denounced Rákosi's wasteful policies. Five days later, the topic was Hungarian history.

Elizabeth Andics began, "In the last ten years we have made a lot of mistakes concerning Hungarian history –"

"– *Haven't* we!" echoed the audience.

Purpling with fury, the Party worthy tried to go on: "In fact, we made some very severe mistakes."

This brought catcalls and shouts of, "Why not tell us exactly what they were!"

By June the meetings were the talk of Budapest. On June 14th, the main speaker was Georg Lukács, unmistakable with his wrinkled features beneath the bald and bony cranium. In clipped, restrained tones he criticised what he called the "assembly-line production of philosophers".

Never without a chunky cigar and a box of matches to keep it alight, while his bony fingers jabbed the air to make each point, Lukács had been the regime's most respected philosopher. Born seventy years earlier to an ennobled Jewish banker, he had turned against his bourgeois literary contemporaries and become an active Communist fighter in 1918, escaping death often by a hair's breadth. Now he had joined the Imre Nagy camp, but he would never entirely foreswear his Marxist and Hegelian origins.

At next day's meeting the school teachers held the floor. By word of mouth the public learned where each meeting was to be held and when. Popular interest was intense. Many of the bewildered ÁVH agents sent to cover the meetings found themselves agreeing with the rebels. Some even signed a memorandum to ÁVH headquarters to that effect.¹⁷

More than once the Circle asked Imre Nagy to speak but Nagy always declined.¹⁸ He was highly conscious of Party discipline. Vásárhelyi says, “He was a dyed-in-the-wool Communist. He was no longer a member of the Party, but when we spoke about something, he told us: ‘You can’t do it, it is not Party-like – not *pártszerű!*’ He was a simple monk-like man. From the age of eighteen to sixty he had always been a militant, always a Party worker.”

It was all rather like the final grand procession in *Peter and the Wolf*. Out in front marched the industrial workers who had suffered from the Marxist bungling and persecution. Close behind followed the students, and behind them shambled the Communist intellectuals, bleating that they had only just realised the horrors of the Rákosi regime. Imre Nagy egged them on, quacking like Prokofiev’s duck from the middle of the pond – though none too loudly. His motives were personal rather than patriotic. He was getting impatient with the lack of progress the Party was making with his “case”.

He had wearied of sending his memorandums direct to the Central Committee, pleading for his own rehabilitation. He rebuked the group of writers clustered round him for not having launched a campaign to get his dismissal from the Party revoked. To Losonczy and Gimes he remarked that while the journalists were very vociferous in private there was no echo of their opposition in the press. Vásárhelyi would later testify to Nagy’s shortness towards him and his fellow journalists, particularly when the Central Committee approved their own rehabilitation in July without bending its mind to the far more important case of Imre Nagy.

During the second half of June 1956 the Petőfi Circle meetings took wing.

Late on the 19th, 2,000 former partisans met to hear a discussion on “The Old Illegal Communists and the Young Intellectuals of Today”.

At first hoary old Party veterans dominated the floor and rambled on about the Spanish Civil War, and their years of prison under Horthy. But then a voice challenged them from the audience: “In the five years of Stalinist dictatorship from 1948 to 1953 more Communists were imprisoned, tortured and murdered than during Horthy’s entire twenty-five year reign!”

A pained hush followed, out of which grew thunderous applause as Ladislav Rajk’s tall, gaunt widow Julia walked to the microphone. She turned to the

white-faced, foot-shuffling funkies on the rostrum: “Comrades, after five years of prison and humiliation I stand before you shaking with emotion. Not only did you kill my husband, you took away my baby boy from me. Not only did you criminals murder Ladislás Rajk, you killed all decency in our country.”

She rounded on the audience: “Where were the members of the Party when these things were happening? How could they allow such degeneration to take place without rising in holy anger against the guilty?”

She concluded: “I will not rest until every one of them – the men who have ruined this country, corrupted the Party, liquidated thousands and driven millions to desperation – have received their just deserts. Comrades, stand by me in this struggle!”

She sat down amid tumult.

“Down with Rákosi!”

“Down with the guilty men!”

“Long live Hungary!”

On June 24th, *Free People* paid grudging tribute to the Petőfi Circle as a “shaft of sunlight”, and recommended state employees and Party leaders to join in its discussions.

The editor soon regretted this recommendation, because three days later the Petőfi Circle debated the press.¹⁹

The meeting was due to begin at seven p.m. The air was humid, and it began to rain. By four thirty p.m. the 800 seats were already full. More and more people pushed in, crowding the aisles and balconies, until 6,000 people were there, including civil servants, factory workers, and even regular policemen and soldiers in uniform.

Géza Losonczy, Nagy’s left-hand man, chaired the meeting as editor of the People’s Patriotic Front newspaper, *Hungarian Nation* (*Magyar Nemzet*).

The main speech of the evening was to be made by a tieless Tibor Déry in an open-necked shirt, a speech calling for “action” against the “germ carriers”. Déry hinted: “It is not enough to attack merely the symptoms.”²⁰

Turning to Martin Horváth, editor of the *Free People*, who had spoken first, Déry said: “We’ve heard a lot about censorship here. Let’s get down to basics. Let’s start with Horváth himself, sitting right here. Now, he doesn’t stand for

himself at all, and sometimes it's hard to say whether he even stands for the Party. First he's right, then he's left."

It was one of the hottest days of the year. Amid mounting applause, Déry asked: "What lies at the root of our troubles? It's this: *We don't have freedom*. I hope we've seen an end of the police terror. I'm an optimist and I hope we'll be able to get rid of our present leaders too. We must never forget that we are only debating here by kind permission of Authority. They seem to think it's a good thing for us to let off steam. But we want deeds *and* words."

Déry was perspiring freely: "We've got to take action. Fifteen hundred or two thousand people, always the same faces, go from one debate to the next! . . . Where is all this getting us? Are we going to sell our right of action in return for being able to hold a few paltry debates?"

The orderly meeting began to get out of hand. Tibor Tardos, a rebel journalist on the *Free People* staff, called for the occupation of the printing works – that was the only way to fight for the "liberty of the press".

By nine p.m. Váci Street was blocked from pavement to pavement with crowds trying to get in. Word about the extraordinary meeting ran round the whole city. Loudspeakers were rigged so that the overflowing crowds could hear.

An extract from the shorthand record shows that the people were growing bolder by the hour. Alexander Nógrádi, chief of the Party's Agitprop section, had to shout to make himself heard.

I must, if the comrades will permit, object to the radical viewpoints expressed by Comrade Déry and in many respects by Comrade Tardos too. (*Loud interruption.*) Patience, comrades, if you please. I'm delighted to hear the applause, and I am quite pleased to hear your abuse too (*Hear, hear!*), because they show that a new March, a new Revolution is necessary. (*Yes, yes!*) Patience, comrades! I believe that our Party, our Communist Party, has, together with its members, together with the public, recognised the tragic errors and grievous mistakes it has made, and it will know the best way to set about correcting them. (*Loud interruption.*) . . . It is our tragedy, but if you will permit me, I will speak in your names too . . . (*No, no!*) . . . It is our tragedy that we thought in the way we did!

And when Zoltán Vas lumbered to the podium and declared that to dismiss Rákosi would be a personal tragedy for such a veteran of the workers' movement, there were shouts: "Better a one-man tragedy than a tragedy for an entire nation!"

Midnight passed. Horváth was slanged down. "How dare you insult the Party!" he screamed.

"The Party!" came the menacing reply. "We are the Party!"

Somebody's voice boomed, "Why not rake Rajk's corpse out of its ditch and give him a solemn funeral!"

A block of applauding listeners rose and began chanting, "Down with the regime. Long live Imre Nagy!"

When the rebellious and unforgettable meeting closed it was after three A.M.

The result was uproar. Tardos was expelled from the Party, and so of course was Déry. On June 30th, the Central Committee belatedly branded the Petőfi Circle "counter-revolutionary", and denounced its members as fascists, imperialists and paid agents of the Americans. The official resolution alleged, "This open opposition to the Party and to the People's Democracy was organised mainly by a certain group around Imre Nagy."

Cowed by this stinging language the Petőfi Circle withdrew into its snailshell. Its next meeting, scheduled for July 29th, was postponed for a week, and then "until October".

But blind support for Nagy at street level was growing. The regime called a mass workers' meeting to condemn the Petőfi Circle. The workers refused to comply. This encouraged the Writers' Union to refuse to recognise the expulsion of Déry and Tardos from the Party.

This had never happened before.

The new mood was graphically illustrated by American journalist Simon Bourgin writing from Budapest on July 5th: "They are all saying that Rákosi has to go, that this is the minimum of what the people would stand for. This is the sort of talk I hear from mechanics in garages and middle-class people and hotel porters." But he added, "Although Nagy has a certain stubborn popularity with some of the people who associated with him personally and with the public

who remember that brief, short-lived breathing period that he gave them, I wonder whether he is popular in general.”²¹

Rákosi did not want to find out. He could see that time was running out. He drew up a list of 400 opponents for immediate arrest.

Imre Mező, second in command of the Budapest Party headquarters on Republic Square, and one of Nagy’s secret supporters, told Vásárhelyi that he had found out about it from his chief, Stephen Kovács, a Politburo member. Imre Nagy and János Kádár topped the list.

Budapest police chief Alexander Kopácsi was also shown the list. “Some old comrades are going to need somewhere to lie low for a few days or weeks,” said one official. Kopácsi tipped off his partisan comrades in north-east Hungary to stand by to harbour János Kádár if need arose. It was probably this act which spared Kopácsi’s life two years later.

The Kremlin could not ignore these subterranean rumblings in Hungary. The loss of this country would mortally gash the Soviet Union’s western flank. Michael Suslov, the Kremlin’s expert on satellite affairs, flew to Budapest to inspect the situation at first hand. Returning to Moscow, he recommended that Rákosi remain in office for the time being. Khrushchev explained to the astonished Yugoslav ambassador, “We Russians haven’t any choice in the matter.”

But he sent his deputy premier Anastas Mikoyan to Budapest to follow up the Suslov mission. Not surprisingly, Rákosi’s blood pressure was causing his physicians anxiety. Seen at a French reception he looked shrivelled, worn and emaciated.

Mikoyan reached Budapest as Rákosi was addressing the Party’s Central Committee on July 17th.²² His proposed mass arrest of 400 leading opponents was high on the agenda. According to Kálmán Pongrácz, the mayor of Budapest, Mikoyan allowed Rákosi to finish, then enquired pointedly of him: “What do you think of the Petőfi Circle, Comrade Rákosi?”

“A movement organised by enemies of the Party!” answered Rákosi.

Mikoyan observed dryly: “That’s interesting. In Moscow we have heard that the Party has been repeatedly acclaimed at the Petőfi Circle meetings, often for minutes at a time. That sounds like a remarkable bunch of enemies of the Party!”

Ernest Gerő, Rákosi's lieutenant in eleven years of cruel hegemony, scented danger. He swung to his feet. "Might I suggest to our beloved and wise father of the people," he leered with a trace of sarcasm, "that mass arrests are not reconcilable with our new brand of socialist legality."

The vote went almost unanimously against Rákosi.

He blanched and went next door to telephone Khrushchev. His voice was heard rising from the next room: "The Party needs me! If I go, it will just cave in!"

Around nine A.M. every newspaper was instructed over the K-line telephone network to hold the presses for an important announcement. Tibor Méray, by now editor of *Peace and Freedom*, sensed trouble. "They are going to announce the arrest of Imre Nagy and his accomplices," he thought.²³

But ninety minutes later, the news came: Matthias Rákosi had finally been deposed as general secretary of the Party – he had retired "for health reasons" and been replaced by Gerő. Michael Farkas had also been expelled from the Party, and had lost his army general's rank.

On July 21st, Rákosi secretly left Hungarian soil. A Russian plane took him from the military airfield at Budaörs and flew him to Moscow for "treatment". He snarled a grim prophecy at his dwindling supporters in Budapest: "Without me, everything we have created so far will go to the dogs. Just you see!"

Two days later the Central Committee began rehabilitating Rákosi's purge victims, describing them in cloying terms. Among those thus restored by Gerő to the bosom of the Party were Francis Donáth, János Kádár and Géza Losonczy and the former Social Democrats George Marosán and Árpád Szakasits; some were elected to the Central Committee, but there were several whom the hangman's noose had robbed of this satisfaction: among them were Ladislav Rajk, George Pálffy, and Tibor Szőnyi.²⁴

Pensions were now offered to their widows. The minister of justice offered Julia Rajk 200,000 florins' compensation, which she refused. She did not want money. She wanted revenge.

From their unmarked forest graves on the main road between Budapest and Lake Balaton, the ghosts of the Party's victims began marching, to haunt the Party bosses beyond the grave.

19 In Which Voices are Raised

THE CHOICE OF Ernest Gerő to succeed Rákosi caused anger and resentment. The people rightly savoured Rákosi's overthrow as a victory, but now one Muscovite Communist was stepping into the boots of another – one Jew was replacing another.

Gerő was a puritanical, fanatical Stalinist. He never acted out of private interest, he was incorruptible in the ordinary sense; but if the Party's interest were at stake, he would display the moral compunctions of a viper.

Like Rákosi, he was not photogenic: his curly hair defied his efforts to de-kink it; and with his slightly protruding eyes, thick lips and long ascetic mouth Comrade Gerő had the kind of mean face that gets only the black-hat parts in cowboy films. A *Free People* writer would perversely admit: "I liked him better than Rákosi. Rákosi disgusted me. I thought of Rákosi as ugly, as an enemy to be loathed; I hated to see his picture everywhere. But Gerő was like a technician, he betrayed no emotions; I thought of Gerő as an enemy whom one hates but honours."

Spain's soil was stained with the blood of Gerő's victims: code-named "Pedro" while acting as NKVD police chief in Barcelona, he had contrived the liquidation of rival leftist elements there by staging a rally that was to end in an ambush and a massacre. He had a hand in the murder of Andrés Nin, president of the Catalanian Republic.

He made no secret of his distaste for the Petőfi Circle. On July 19th, 1956, he sneered at Western claims that its mutinous press debate was a "little Poznan" – a reference to the riots of the previous day in Poland – but he labelled the sub-

group that had begun to form around it as a dangerous challenge to the Party's Central Committee: he reserved real venom for Imre Nagy and his disruptive faction. In a September speech Gerő swung into the attack: "There are instances," he carped, "of serious right-wing deviations in our Party." And he defined: "The main representatives of right-wing deviation are Imre Nagy and certain anti-Party or erring elements around him."

Shortly, friends inside the Party hierarchy passed a warning to Imre Nagy that Ernest Gerő was planning to stage a deliberate provocation, which would give him all the excuse he needed to liquidate the opposition. It was his Barcelona tactics all over again. The question was, what kind of provocation was he planning, and when?¹

The canner intellectuals saw the coming storm and trimmed their sails in time. Julius Háý, the wealthy playwright who had spent ten years in Moscow, was one: he had lived a cocooned existence, but the rising protest of the country's youth impressed him.

"For years I held readings and spoke at meetings of young intellectuals and workers. I began to feel that everything I was saying was old hat to them. I kept thinking, how is it possible that while we in the older generation are doing our utmost to give Hungary a future, the younger generation neither cares nor respects us for it? I began wondering whether *we* might be wrong while they were right. So I began to denounce the red tape and all the distortions of socialism. And the more blatantly I did so, the more I found myself being carried forward on an irresistible wave of sympathy by these young people."

Háý wrote a candid essay called "Pact with the Truth". But it was another essay, "Just Why Don't I Like Him?" that fired public imagination. He began to read it out at public meetings in provincial cities. The audiences started asking critical questions and Háý found it tricky to answer them.

In Győr, a listener called out: "Tell us what's happening with Hungary's uranium?" Uranium ore of good commercial quality had just been found near Pécs.²

Háý had to admit that he had no idea: "But I agree that I ought to know what is happening to our uranium, and *you* all ought to know too. You are quite right to ask, and you ought to keep on asking."

In the event, rumours of these rich uranium deposits bulked very large in the folklore of the country. One typical Hungarian reasoned like this: “If we take a risk now, the West will be prepared to take some risk too.”³ Not even the chairman of the atomic energy commission, Professor Louis Jánossy – illegitimate son of philosopher Georg Lukács⁴ – knew the terms of the uranium contract enforced by the Soviet Union. “When we recently went to Moscow to deal with our Soviet colleagues,” he would complain in June 1956, “it turned out they knew far more about the Hungarian uranium deposits than we did!”

In the politicking of these summer months, Imre Nagy looked beyond the rigid frontiers of the Communist Party. In January 1956 he had written a memorandum on “Some Topical Questions”, advocating a coalition government formed jointly with non-Communist parties. A leading Communist journalist released from Recsk three years before now talked with one of Imre Nagy’s associates: “He said that Nagy was no longer a Communist,” he recalled a year later, “that he didn’t believe in the dictatorship of the proletariat and that he wanted to create a socialist Hungary and do everything possible to raise living standards. My friend said that Nagy wanted a coalition government. What he didn’t realise was that the formation of a coalition government would spell the end of Nagy himself.”⁵

Nagy planned to revive the People’s Patriotic Front when the time came. So he began putting out feelers to other politicians.

He sent Nicholas Vásárhelyi to establish indirect contact with Béla Kovács, the Smallholder leader recently returned from Soviet captivity, and invite him to lead the Front; but Kovács was a sick man after eight years in prison, and he was reluctant to go as high as secretary-general.⁶

Nagy also sent Losonczy and Haraszi to talk to Anna Kéthly, the dogmatic old Social Democrat, but she would not have any truck with Communists, however penitent, and sent Nagy no answer to his feelers.

Another faction in Nagy’s calculations was the old Peasant Alliance grouped around Dr. Alexander Kiss.⁷ Kiss, thirty-eight, had been arrested by the fascists in December 1944 for sabotaging German transports; he was condemned to death with sixty others but escaped and became a post-war Smallholder MP at the climax of the struggle against Rákosi’s takeover. He was imprisoned for “treason” in 1947 and only his Calvinist faith had kept him alive. After his

release, branded as a “class-alien”, Kiss had worked in road building. Nagy’s overture now to the quietly-spoken, well-dressed politician consisted of obtaining the release of some thirty former Peasant Alliance MPs from prison. (These were only some of the 474 political prisoners – mostly Communists and Social Democrats – now freed, while three thousand remained in prison.)

Among the Communists paroled on September 5th, 1956, was Lieutenant-General Béla Király, one of the army’s senior officers.⁸ A few days later a delegation acting for Nagy visited him too. He was only forty-three, but he had changed sides more often than the Italians had in both world wars. After a period as ADC to the last fascist defence minister in 1944 – Király was the son-in-law of a former fascist prime minister – he had deserted to the Russians with eight thousand troops and offered to fight his government’s allies, the Germans.

Király had joined the Communist Party after 1945 evidently more out of *Realpolitik* than out of real conviction. By 1948 he commanded the country’s land forces. When Michael Farkas took over as defence minister, Király was elbowed out and downgraded to commandant of the War Academy. He was arrested in August 1951, and sentenced to death on the usual trumped-up charges. Upon his release, Martha Sárközi gave him a job as gardener. Until 1949 she had run *Answer (Válasz)*, the semi-official organ of the Peasant Party, along with such intellectuals as Julius Illyés, Paul Jónás and Stephen Bibó. It was through Martha Sárközi that Imre Nagy’s delegation found him.

They explained the nature of the Imre Nagy group. “It has secured footholds in the Petőfi Circle, in various Party agencies and ministries. There is a Nagy man in every ministry except the ÁVH – we don’t want to infiltrate the ÁVH as it’s going to be abolished – and the army.” They took Király to see Nagy, and the politician informed him: “You are to be our man in the army.”

However, the general pleaded that he was not one hundred per cent fit after his prison ordeal, so Nagy arranged for his immediate admission on October 10th to a military hospital.

Nagy had also made discreet overtures to George Marosán.⁹ The renegade Social Democrat was still licking his wounds after prison, and his wife begged him not to go into politics again. But the temptations were strong, and many

factions were wooing him. The Social Democrats hinted: “Now you can get revenge!”

Marosán turned Nagy down, and eventually, in July 1956, joined forces with János Kádár. Kádár and Joseph Révai were the two men he trusted most. Kádár’s group had been forming for several months. A CIA agent had already reported to Washington in the summer of 1955: “Kádár is regarded as the charismatic leader of the opposition to Rákosi. His tight clique is made up of rehabilitated victims of Stalinism.”¹⁰ The report had added, “The secret followers of the Imre Nagy line belong to the second main faction within the Party.” These two factions formed an absolute majority in the Party leadership, noted the CIA, while the orthodox Muscovites were more and more in the minority. In April and June 1956 the agents rumoured Kádár to be heading a faction seeking “a stronger voice in the direction of Party and Hungarian affairs”; among his factions were listed Joseph Köböl, Alexander Nógrádi and Zoltán Vas.¹¹ On July 3rd the CIA had logged a report, TDCS-97246, on Kádár’s extensive talks with the Kremlin’s envoy Michael Suslov and Suslov’s finding that Kádár’s complaints about Rákosi were justified; on August 12th Kádár had given his first major political speech since his rehabilitation to twenty thousand steel workers at Salgótarján and on September 9th he headed the delegation to the Chinese Party Congress in Peking. His star was obviously rising.

In June there is a pathetic reunion which must have been typical of many that year in Hungary; Captain Bondor walks back into his apartment and tries to pick up where he left off with his young bride eleven years before.¹² He had been among nine hundred army officers repatriated by the Russians on November 19th, 1955. But Rákosi’s secret police met him at the frontier, and threw him back into jail until now.

Both have changed since their country’s “Liberation”. She is consumed with the terrible secret of how the Russians ravaged her and how she furtively treated her venereal sores with household disinfectants.¹³ The continuing conflict with the Communists has humbled her; she has become quiet and withdrawn. In 1953 the factory employing her discovered her “kulak” background, paraded her before 500 workmates and accused her of robbing an honest person of a job.

How she has cursed these aliens who stole her husband, corroded her body and injured her pride as a Hungarian by claiming to bring culture to her country. She is nauseated at the way the funkies have renamed Budapest's most famous streets and boulevards – which she memorised at infant school – in honour of their own tin-pot heroes. Now thirty-six and childless, she is frigid and plagued by the fear that she may be incurably ill. She has lived only for her husband's return – she has never wanted anybody else.

In 1950, they officially notified her that he was dead. She has never believed it, and when the first prisoners returned from Russia in 1955 she grilled every one that she met: "Have you seen this person?" One of them recognised her husband; he even knew the camp's address. Ecstatic with happiness, Mrs. Bondor wrote a letter and two months later she had a reply.

Now it is June 1st, 1956, and at last she sees him again. Her husband is now forty-one, and shorter than her wedding-day memory of him. But even now they cannot greet each other alone. As he walks into the Budapest apartment, he finds four strangers waiting for him. They tell him that an underground movement is being organised from former political prisoners, like himself returning from Soviet prison camps, and that they are going to try to contact leading émigrés like the Smallholder ex-premier Francis Nagy and to establish espionage cells, in readiness for a revolution. In Budapest, for instance, Captain Bondor learns, a transport manager in the central market is hiring former officer prisoners as lorry drivers; and these men are surreptitiously observing Communist troop positions for him to report to people in Austria.

So Bondor is up to his eyes in conspiracy again.

He has lost all feelings towards his wife. He is a stranger to her, nervous and suspicious, restless and aggressive. The handsome young Captain Bondor of 1944 was refined and socially correct; the man who has returned has the eating habits of an animal. They live in crippling poverty while her relatives begin scrimping to buy him a presentable suit. He is vindictive and uncouth, reluctant to have a bath and change his sweaty clothing. He sometimes insists on sexual intercourse twice a day; it is agony for her, and nothing like the recurring fantasies she has had while he was away.

She curses the Communists for doing this to them. He too lives with fantasies – of revenge against the Russians. ("I would leave everything – my wife,

my career, everything – to do something for the West and for Hungary,” he will confidentially tell American officials in March 1957.)

He prays for a revolution, he spreads whispered rumours, he connives with old prison comrades. Of course it will take them a year or two to get everything ready. Perhaps they can catch the Soviet Union flatfooted during a political crisis somewhere else. Then he and his “3,500” comrades will seize the three western counties of Hungary, so that the Western powers can transport in supplies through the frontier.

A few weeks after Bondor’s return, on August 20th, the CIA station chief in Israel, Stephen Koczak, had a caller.¹⁴ Koczak had been attached to the Hungarian legation until the Rákosi government declared him *persona non grata* in 1949 and threw him out. Now a trade delegation from Budapest was visiting Israel, and one of its members passed to Koczak the news that there was going to be an uprising in Hungary. He listed about forty leading Hungarians who were going to be involved.

“There’s an underground organisation of former political prisoners,” the man told him, “They’re going to stage a coup.” Koczak passed the information on to CIA headquarters in Washington. He himself heard nothing more, but three months later CIA director Allen Dulles would brief political leaders at the White House: “I and others in this country are thoroughly convinced that Poland and Hungary are definitely anti-Communist,” and he added that in August his agency had indicated that trends were setting in that might be “irrepressible short of force”.¹⁵

Just what form Hungary’s ultimate trauma would take was still unclear. Encouraged by Rákosi’s propaganda, many Hungarians expected a West German army to invade, no less. A twenty-seven-year-old student would say, “We felt that if Germany was not re-armed the Hungarian question would never be solved. When we escaped to the West we found that Germany was not as strong or as fully armed as we had been led to believe.” And another young man would explain his puzzlement: “When we escaped and crossed the frontier, we expected huge armies to be marching back and forth.”¹⁶

All that summer certain publications fed the smouldering flames of popular resentment, if only indirectly. It was the kind of spiritual preparation that the Encyclopaedists (Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, Montesquieu) had effected in preparing the French Revolution. The Writers' Union's *Literary Gazette* was in the vanguard of this activity. It sold about 150,000 copies a week. In its pages could be found a sarcastic comparison by Alexander Novobáczky between the posturing Party funkies and the Roman proconsuls in Ancient Greece. ("The Greeks were peace-loving and respectful, and they bowed when they encountered them, but after they had passed they turned back full of hatred.") The public was puzzled that the issue was not confiscated.¹⁷

Typical of its contents was George Pálóczi-Horváth's cynical article, "What a Communist Must Believe from Morning to Night", and Judith Máriássy's piece, "Delicate Questions", published in the *Literary Gazette* on August 4th. Julius Háý and Géza Losonczy were frequent contributors both to the *Gazette* and to the rather more entertaining *Educated People* (*Művelt Nép*). In this latter journal appeared Karl Ákos's article, "A Professor and the Lunatic of Debrecen" and Nicholas Molnár's translation of the last scene of Albert Camus's satirical play, *Caligula*. Then too, there was Karl Jobbágy's masterpiece, "Mudville", in the *Star* (*Csillag*), a polished small-circulation weekly also put out by the Writers' Union, and a widely-praised poem by George Faludy, written in Reesk in the form of a love-letter to his wife, "From Prison to Susan".

The publication of these journals had an important sociological effect: people found that they were not alone. In 1953, when Francis Reményi, a former sergeant now an engineer of thirty-seven who lived with his two small children on Gellért Hill, heard of Stalin's death he and his wife celebrated with wine for dinner for the first time in years.¹⁸ A year later, he had seen his little boy of six off to school for the first time with the words, "My son, at school you must never breathe a word of the things you hear at home – because if you do, they will put your Daddy in jail!" So on the first day of his school he had had to tell his own son how to lie. That was what Communism had inflicted on his little family in terms of human dignity.

Francis Reményi had been the first employee to walk into his engineering office in Váci Street carrying the *Literary Gazette*. That was in January 1956. By March, all his friends too were reading it furtively at lunchtime. By August,

the articles were being openly debated. Long queues waited at the news-stands on Sunday nights for the next edition. Copies changed hands at two or three times the regular price. Police had to draw their truncheons more than once to keep order.

The Party was in a dilemma. They had uncorked a genie, but they lacked the old ruthlessness needed for a reversion to Stalinism. The writers tartly refused to accept any form of censorship, pointing out that theirs was the official journal of a Party mass organisation, the Writers' Union.

So the publications went on. One article scoffed at the "big dogs" of the Party. The public was astounded and perplexed.¹⁹ Then Déry wrote a blasphemous satire on a funeral oration for a bigshot being buried at Kerepesi, the cemetery reserved for the Party nobility. Novobáczky topped it with a piece entitled "Peculiar People", slating the Party membership. When Stalin prize-winner Thomas Aczél published an exposure of the summer resort at Öszöd on Lake Balaton, where the funkies kept lush villas behind ÁVH patrols, Louis Ács, one of the Party's senior officials, commanded him to go and see him about this article. Aczél snubbed him.

"We were big shots," he reminisced that autumn, "and we knew it."

After a further dispute with Gerő there was another confrontation. "I was insolent," recalled Aczél. "I told them that they were stupid, limited, impotent. I told them that the defence minister, Bata, was such an idiot that I wouldn't entrust even a tram to him. I told him they ought to have listened to us writers three years ago."

That summer, a new rip-roaring magazine called *Monday News (Hétfői Hírlap)* hit the news-stands. It was established in the New York Palace, a grimy, gaunt office block built by an insurance company fifty years before. The magazine's maverick editor, Ivan Boldizsár, declared in his famous first leader that he was only going to publish the truth. He would later improbably say: "I never knowingly wrote anything which I did not think correct and true at the time."²⁰

Boldizsár was an opportunist if nothing else.²¹ But he was larger than life and good humoured. He had been a bystander to many great moments of history – a student in Berlin on the day that Hitler took power, newspaperman in Vienna and Prague as the Nazis marched in, and soldier at Voronezh when the advance

into Russia turned into a retreat. Deputy to Rajk as foreign minister, he later claimed he had tried to leave when he realised Rajk had been framed but Rákosi had told him, “Nobody resigns round here, comrade. You only get booted out.”

Being married to a Frenchwoman he had had to toe the regime's line. Yet he was not craven: his father, a soldier in the Great War, once told him, “Listen, son, a bullet's got a *nose*. If you're scared, you sweat and you smell. The bullet picks up the scent and goes for you. So try hard, and don't get scared.”

In 1956, Boldizsár did not. It was an irony that the most momentous events were yet to come, and that he has never since written about them. When I last saw him it was in April 1980: I had flown and driven a thousand miles and finally ran him to ground at Öszöd, that same exclusive luxury resort for the funkies on Lake Balaton. Boldizsár, a stooping old man clutching a soft felt hat, was fetched out to see me. His face was tired and melancholy; over the years the flesh had receded beneath the skin to leave successive tidemarks of overlapping wrinkles. He was not helpful. “I have no interest in the truth being published,” said this one-time crusader. As he hobbled back into the prison-like holiday compound, with its spiked gates of green-painted steel, its cloth-capped guards, and its barbed wire, I felt that all the fight had gone out of him.

How different is the Ivan Boldizsár of 1956! From its first issue on September 7th, 1956, *Monday News* is a battler. Word of its contents rampages through the capital. At the news-stands around the National Theatre, men with strong lungs read out his outspoken editorial “Tiszta Lap” (“Clean Sheet”) to the crowds milling round.

In later editions, Vásárhelyi writes a stinging attack on this “People's Democracy” – mocking in words that will later be flung at him in court: “It has never seen either democracy or liberty, because it tramples underfoot the finest ideals of humanity.” And a young journalist, Matthias Sárközi, dares to write a hostile review of a Russian film, commenting that Hungarians have had enough films about singing Russian peasants driving combine harvesters around the countryside.²²

Nobody reads the paper with greater fervour than the political prisoners now streaming back home. Standing in the queue for the latest *Monday News* is an emaciated priest in Greek Orthodox robes: Bishop János Ödön Péterfalvy.²³ The

left side of his jaw is crumpled, his eyes have borne witness to ten years of terror in Stalin's prison camps.

He and his fellow prisoners were transported to the border and handed over to Hungarian officials. About eight hundred were allowed home, the remaining 664 were transferred to Jászberény national prison, including the bishop. On July 1st, 1956, the ÁVH released him too.

Now the bishop must report to the police each day like a common felon. The police captain is a kindly old fellow who leans across the desk and whispers: "Tell me, what's it like in Russia?" He adds hastily: "Don't talk too loud though, we don't want everybody to hear."

In simple language the bishop unfolds his story: about the 1946 train journey from Lvov to Stalinsk, in freight cars that halted for the cadavers of dead prisoners to be thrown out. From the railhead at Stalinsk onward they were marched with wild dogs tearing apart the prisoners who stumbled and fell, until they reached the middle of a primeval forest in the Altai mountains, where they had to build a wooden stockade and then a gulag, a labour camp.

"Out of the first 1,200 men who arrived," recalls the bishop with tears in his eyes, "only sixty men survived the three years. Every week fresh prisoners arrived. There were prisoners from the Baltic states, there were Russians, Uzbeks, Tartars, Armenians."

In 1950 he was transferred to another gulag where the convicts included Russian generals and newspaper editors. "There were bishops, priests, Baptists, Roman Catholics, Japanese, Belgians, Frenchmen, there were two Americans there – one of them was a man from Chicago who had gone to visit his family in one of the satellite countries." This gulag sprawled over 150 square miles and housed 300,000 men.

The policeman listens attentively. "Last autumn," the bishop concludes, "I was taken to a concentration point and we were issued with mattresses and even toilet soap and toothbrushes and given meals the like of which even the camp officers had not seen. We were shown four films a day, we had concerts, radio, meat every day, we even got wine and whisky. They told us how much they cared for us and said that they hadn't known how badly we had been treated – that had all been Beria's fault. Now he had been eliminated all that would be changed."

So now he stands on the street corner, buying the latest *Monday News*. Only a few days ago the ÁVH restored him to the human race and informed him that he is the equal of every other man. How is he to know that in his identity papers the ÁVH have perforated an almost invisible mark that will tag him for ever as an “enemy of the state”?

Throughout that summer the steam pressure had built up.

Rákosi had re-enforced a “voluntary” collectivisation programme in 1955. It had enraged the entire farming community, but this time they had a voice. In September the magazine *Star* published an article by Stephen Márkus, a rural sociologist, exposing the plight of four typical villages in Somogy County and proposing sweeping reforms.

“During the autumn of 1955,” wrote Márkus, “a ‘brigade’ arrived at the village of Som consisting of funkies from the Province, County, Party and Government. For an initial phase lasting the first few days their agitation took a relatively mild form. Some peasants toed the line, but most did not.” In the third week the brigade changed its tack. The peasants were fined, interrogated until after midnight, intimidated, and browbeaten until they agreed to rejoin the collectives.

The Petőfi Circle debated his article on September 25th. “The hall was jam-packed,” reported *Free Youth (Szabad Ifjúság)*. “Scientists, collective farm chairmen, writers, agricultural experts, and the leaders of village councils attended . . . The discussion lasted until after midnight. The speakers all, without exception, took the position that collectivisation was necessary, but they criticised its defects.”²⁴ There were calls for the abolition of compulsory crop-deliveries. When the funkies objected that this would cost millions of florins annually, a voice boomed: “Then let’s get the Soviet troops out of Hungary. That will more than make up the cost!”

Zoltán Tildy, the feeble, white-haired Smallholder politician who had been president of post-war Hungary and had spent years in prison, stood up. “As you may know, I’ve had quite a lot of time for thought,” he said with a wry grin. “And I’ll never forget the day an old peasant told me, ‘We’re done for – our village has just become a socialist village!’”

Tildy's words sank in. But it was not what was said that mattered at these meetings, so much as the discovery that people could speak and congregate despite the ÁVH, and without subsequent arrest.

This forgotten feeling of freedom fingered through the audience like an infection. Ever larger crowds packed into the meetings, eager for the contagion.

The "prison warders" were jittery. Thomas Aczél later observed that from now on Hungary was like an "ownerless country". The terror apparatus no longer functioned properly. The funkies were unable or unwilling to curb the intelligentsia. The old hierarchy and the press monopoly were crumbling.

Nowhere was the humiliation of the Stalinists more complete than at the general meeting of the Writers' Union at City Hall on September 17th, 1956.²⁵ The Stalinists were so roundly defeated in the elections that one of them went home in tears. The writers voted to demand Imre Nagy's rehabilitation by the Party, and they passed a resolution by Alexander Lukácsy that selected writers should tour the fifteen biggest factories to inform the workers of these decisions. The *Literary Gazette* which reported the meeting sold 70,000 copies in half an hour. In its next broadcast, on September 19th, Radio Free Europe gloated over the vote, and praised the Writers' Union for having taken the first step towards a "showdown".²⁶

Those were breathtaking weeks, the last weeks before the uprising. The funkies were on the run, and indiscipline and uncertainty gnawed at the ÁVH security police.

The official Party organs put on a brave face. Not since Hitler's *Völkischer Beobachter* graced its final edition on April 30th, 1945, with an article headlined "May in the Vegetable Garden", had editors searched so frantically for anaesthetising trivia to publish. On September 29th, 1956, the front page of *Free People* featured articles on crop-collection competitions, on processing powdered coal reserves and on People's Army Day – a parade for which the regime rapidly kitted out a number of newly-rehabilitated generals to occupy front-row seats.

Four thousand miles away, in Washington, the CIA put final touches to its own analysis entitled: "Will Imre Nagy return to power in Hungary?"

Throughout Hungary the people were asking the same question. They were waiting for Nagy to come down, like the legendary Emperor Barbarossa, from his mountain cave and save their country in its hour of need.

20 Humble Pie

IT IS NEARLY noon, October 25th, 1956.

In Budapest, machine guns are hammering bullets into panicking crowds mobbing the Parliament building.

In London, the *Daily Mail's* chief foreign correspondent Noel Barber is ambling around a famous London store, clutching a shopping list.¹ He is buying clothes for Simonetta, his baby daughter. Clothes are more expensive in Switzerland, where Barber has a farm on Lake Geneva. Forty-six, tall and suave, with shrewd, beady eyes enlivening his ruddy features, Barber has been an international journalist ever since he filed a cable to Fleet Street starting with the memorable line, "British Honduras is a colony forgotten by everybody but the exporters of gin".

Since then he has been knifed in Casablanca, has flown round the world in eight hours, has covered the Korean War on the opposite side to Tibor Méray, and has interviewed diverse princes from Rainier to Hussein. He has dropped in on the South Pole. In three days' time he will crumple in the driver's seat of a rented car, its windscreen perforated by Russian tommy-gun bullets, while his blood spatters the same slick blue suit that he is wearing this morning on the first floor of Harrods.

He is packing his purchases into a grey Samsonite suitcase when the store's loudspeakers page him: the *Mail* is on the telephone. "You've got a telegram from Hungary, from the new prime minister: 'Have ordered legation in London issue visa for Hungary immediately.'"

Barber hails a cab and throws the suitcase into the back.

A long shot has paid off. Two weeks ago he picked up a new blue Firebird at the Geneva motor show and drove to Yugoslavia to interview Tito. On the way back he planned to show Sacher's in Vienna to his young Italian wife Titina, but a British legation official telephoned him at Budapest's Danube Hotel, and passed him this tip: "There's a fellow here you ought to see – Imre Nagy. He's just been reinstated in the Party."

The name meant nothing to Noel Barber. But after lunch that Sunday, October 14th, he found himself listening to Imre Nagy in Gerbaud's, the café where Uncle Imre indulged his taste for sweet pastries. Barber smiled politely, thought: "A typical big-moustachioed Hungarian bore" and duly sent a despatch to Fleet Street. His editor spiked it.

But then this same Imre Nagy was swept to power on the crest of a popular uprising and Barber did what he always did in the circumstances – he sent him a telegram, a thousand words of blarney at *Daily Mail* expense. He has long discovered that acolytes dare not intercept and suppress really long cables.

Now Nagy's reply has come. By noon, Barber is on the second floor of Northcliffe House talking to Peter Hope, the *Mail's* young assistant foreign editor. Hope, tall, moustached and good looking, is the dynamo behind the newspaper's foreign operations. Behind glass walls partitioning his foreign desk from the rest of Editorial, he reigns in shirtsleeves next to banks of chattering teleprinters.

He pokes triumphantly with his cigarette holder at Nagy's telegram.

"It's going to be very tricky," Barber says in his educated Yorkshire drawl. "The most important thing will be to have lots of ready cash."

He telephones Lawrence Davis, their man in Vienna: "Have a good car waiting for me at Vienna airport by eight p.m. with international papers, spare jerricans of petrol, boxes of cheeses – you know, the sort wrapped in foil – and two bottles of whisky. And get ten cartons of American cigarettes. I'll need them for tipping."

It is this attention to detail and logistics that distinguishes the professional newspaperman.

At 35, Eaton Place, the white-painted Hungarian legation is besieged by journalists. An official with a black pencil-line moustache is barring the doorway: "No, no visas for Hungary! No visas for anybody except Mr. Noel Barber!"

The officials stamp his passport, a taxi from the *Mail* arrives with an envelope containing seven hundred dollars and an air ticket, and he is on his way.

At this moment on October 25th Imre Nagy and the Party leadership are cornered in the Central Committee building in Budapest's Academy Street, preparing to escape. There are bloodstains in the entrance hall, and a dozen Russian tanks standing guard outside. There are pitched battles raging across the entire country between rebels, Soviet troops and security police. All airports are closed, and Imre Nagy's telegram to Barber must have been the last to get out of the country.

Barber picks up his snap-brim hat and Olivetti and tells the cabbie to take him to London Airport. In his other hand he still clutches the suitcase of Harrods baby clothes.

At Vienna, Davis is waiting with a Borgward Isabella coupé. Davis has fixed a big union flag on to the roof. It has only three thousand miles on the clock, and Barber never does find out how to open its hood. The rental firm has asked for a hefty deposit, which proves a wise precaution. From Vienna, Barber sets off towards the border, a manure-strewn Austrian village called Nickelsdorf. The last that Davis sees is the car's red tail lamps disappearing down the road, into that darkness which is revolutionary Hungary.

A long, dry month had preceded the Hungarian conflagration. That summer the Party grudgingly reinstated the journalists it had expelled. Nicholas Vásárhelyi's readmission was back-dated to September 1939, a gratuitous honour that impressed even the cynical journalist: "Maybe I was no longer a Jesuit," he later paraphrased cheerfully, "but I was still a member of the *ecclesia sancta romana*."²

But the attempts to woo Nagy himself had failed. "Recently," wrote American journalist Simon Bourgin from Budapest on August 31st, "Nagy was called to Gerő and asked if he would take a cabinet post on the government's terms. That would of course have implied his recanting his previous 'mistakes'. Nagy declined." The Party's terms included the disbanding of the "Nagy group" and his dissociation from them. Everyone was convinced that, if he waited long enough, Nagy would be returned to power on his own terms.³

Khrushchev began mending fences. On September 19th he flew with his family on a private holiday to Yugoslavia. On the 27th Tito repaid the visit on Soviet soil, seeing Khrushchev in the Crimea. "There was no shortage of alcohol at lunch," observed the Yugoslav diplomatist Veljko Mićunović. After three boozy days there was an unexpected gatecrasher: the Hungarian party leader Gerő – rather to Tito's surprise. Tito later wrote: "[Gerő] put on sackcloth and ashes . . . and promised to make amends for all previous mistakes." Khrushchev was evidently hell-bent on patching over the differences between the two squabbling neighbours before the entire Soviet empire burst asunder. The upshot was that Tito reluctantly extended an invitation to the Hungarian Party leaders to visit him in Belgrade soon.⁴

All this was very much what Imre Nagy had preached, as his verbose memorandums show. He was an opponent of all super-blocs: "The alliance of states into power-blocs must sooner or later lead to armed conflicts," he had written. He argued that the famous "five principles" on neutralism recently elaborated at the Bandung conference of Afro-Asian countries were equally applicable to countries like Hungary, which should be able to "advance towards socialist society on a road different from the Soviet road". This was dangerous language. In fact Nagy went further, mentioning Yugoslavia specifically as a model. His ideal was a free socialist federation of Central and Eastern European nations.

Of course, Imre Nagy recognised the vice that his country was in. There would be no profit in abandoning Moscow's orbit entirely. "It would be a historical error," he wrote, "an irreparable mistake, to try to limit the close neighbourly relations developing between Hungary and the Soviet Union in every field, or the mutual co-operation whose development is so much in our country's interests."

Nagy was highly satisfied with these writings, although he knew they contained dynamite. At his trial one of his group explained that the Old Man had hinted, "It would not be opportune for the Party to get wind of my actions." He cautiously showed them to politicians who visited his villa in Orsó Avenue, and he had them circulated by Vásárhelyi, Gimes and Fazekas. It was from Fazekas that Budapest's police chief Alexander Kopácsi got his copy of Nagy's eye-opening exposure of the regime's corrupt morals and ethics, during September 1956, so Kopácsi later testified.

The secretiveness was not in character with Nagy: even in October 1956 he still regarded the Central Committee as his only home. Just as Mrs. Bondor had dreamed all those years of the return of her missing husband from exile, so Nagy now had one abiding dream: that he would return in triumph from his own exile, and re-enter the Party's fold. On October 4th, Nagy formally applied for reinstatement in the Party. His letter was verbose, sanctimonious, and repetitious; on the first page he used the phrase "Party unity" eight times! Like Tatiana's letter in *Eugene Onegin*, it would probably have sounded better set to music. He demanded an end to the "so-called Imre Nagy affair", a public debate of the charges against him, and the withdrawal of all those shown to be unfounded. "I for my part," he wrote airily, "will be willing to admit any real mistakes that are established."⁵

The split within the Party was in fact widening. One faction wanted Rákosi to stage a come-back. Some men in the Central Committee had already drafted an article for the press: "Welcome home, Rákosi!" Another faction sought the salvation of the Party in still wider liberalisation. Newspapermen and writers vied with each other to scoff at the Party and its history. On October 6th, one of the most famous barbs, a mordant satire by Julius Hágy, appeared in the *Literary Gazette*. It was called, "Why can't I stand Comrade Kucsera?" The essay was an orchard of gorgeous adjectives, exposing the middle-grade funkies in all their mediocrity and cruelty, their ignorance and arrogance. The name Kucsera took root in the language, and hundreds of unfortunate real-life Kucseras applied to have their name changed by law.⁶

The regime also tried to defuse popular agitation by allowing a macabre ritual, the formal reburial of Rajk and his hanged comrades. The date chosen, October 6th, was the anniversary of the execution of thirteen Hungarian generals in 1849.

On the day before, Imre Nagy telephoned the *Free People* office, trying to locate Julia Rajk.⁷ Nagy's call was put through to the editor's secretariat, and taken by deputy editor Peter Renyi. "I am profoundly worried about tomorrow," Nagy said. "Julia Rajk wants to demand a lying-in-state for her husband and a funeral procession through Budapest. What do you think?"

Renyi was aghast at Nagy's naïve question.

“Do you want a revolution? If there is a procession through the streets there is no way of knowing how it will end!”

For the former political prisoners gathering here at the Kerepesi cemetery it was their first big display of strength.⁸ Perhaps if the weather had been hot or humid, the uprising would have been triggered there and then. But the day was cold and blustery, and although two hundred thousand citizens turned out, converting the Party's macabre charade into an intimidating show of popular hostility, the crowd's attitude was relatively harmless: “Let's just go and see the regime make an ass of itself.”⁹ Even so, the air shivered with pent-up aggressions: “The funeral was a fake,” said a disgusted student leader. “It was disgusting. We students went in the hope that something would happen.”¹⁰

The security police kept a low profile. Evidently the government feared that the khaki uniform of the ÁVH might spark a real conflagration, so the cordons were manned by regular army officers, apparently unarmed, but in fact concealing pistols in their uniform pockets. Other troops had to bring arms and ammunition, but left them stacked up out of sight, in case of eventualities. Normally only senior officers were trusted in public with guns. Said one twenty-eight-year-old army officer, “I had to leave my gun in the barracks and couldn't take it out except with permission for cleaning, and even then only for an hour at a time.”¹¹

The funeral was like a scene from Shakespeare. As the drizzle turned into a downpour, the drenched funkies took turns to mount the guard of honour, their dripping faces set in grim lines like the hired mourners at a pauper's funeral.¹² They delivered funeral orations reminiscent of Winston Churchill's valediction for General Sikorski after his convenient death in 1943. (“Soldiers must die, but by their death they nourish the nation which gave them birth!”) That very morning *Free People* had cynically eulogised:

Many Hungarian Communists have proved by their martyrs' deaths that for a Communist there can be nothing more sacred than the interests of the working people and the freedom of his fatherland. The real tragedy of Rajk and his comrades lies in the death sentence uttered in the names of socialism and the people, against men who remained loyal soldiers of the Party, people and socialism – loyal even unto death.¹³

Few Hungarians had shown affection for Rajk in his evil lifetime, except perhaps his widow, standing in mourning black with her little boy, next to Imre Nagy. One top Communist gazed out over the shifting sea of sullen faces as sunlight shafted briefly through the rainclouds, and muttered: "If Rajk could have seen this mob he would have turned machine guns on to them!"

Now the martyr was lamented by his murderers. Dr. Francis Münnich, ageing NKVD agent and ex-ambassador from Moscow, spoke the first lurid epitaph: "Comrade Rajk was killed by criminal sadists who crawled out into the sun from the stinking bog of a cult of personality." On behalf of the Party leadership Münnich promised: "Those in whose name I utter this farewell to Ladislav Rajk will fight for a strong and invincible democracy in our land and for socialist humanism and justice!" After him Antal Apró, deputy prime minister, made a trite speech. He had voted with the rest in 1949 for Rajk's execution.¹⁴

Afterwards, many trudged through the city to the memorial to Count Batthyány, who had been prime minister in 1848 and was executed by the Hapsburgs. Somebody recited a defiant poem by Attila József, and the crowd dissolved – except for several hundred students who filed through the city's rain-sodden streets, shouting slogans. The ÁVH naturally assumed that any demonstration on this scale must have been authorised too, and did not intervene. It was all something of a dress-rehearsal.

On the way back from the cemetery, Mr. Gáza Katona spotted his ÁVH shadower and sighed.

Born in Pittsburgh of Hungarian parents, Katona was attached to the American legation, a five-storeyed corner building with paint-peeled roller blinds, fronting on to Liberty Square in central Budapest.¹⁵

For some months there had been only a chargé d'affaires here, N. Spencer Barnes, a tall, neat, mild-mannered foreign service officer. With his no longer fashionable pencil-line grey moustache, Spencer Barnes would once have made a good model for pin-stripe suits. He was not given to talking, but he was a good listener and he had an intelligent idea of what was brewing in Budapest.

He and his British colleagues had two good Hungarian contacts. One had informed them of a Kremlin letter dated September 3rd to the satellite regimes

warning against emulating Tito's example.¹⁶ Another report said that Gerő had offered Nagy the Ministry of Agriculture, but that Nagy was holding out for his old job of Prime Minister again; Moscow had agreed that Imre Nagy ought *not* to get it. Dr. Münnich would probably become Prime Minister, predicted Spencer Barnes, Nagy's appointment having evidently been opposed by Kádár, "who presumably sees Nagy as his main opponent for Gerő's job", that of Party leader.

On September 21st this sage American diplomat further tipped off his government that "the Soviets either had been, or shortly would be, faced with a dilemma in respect to their future influence and role in Hungary".¹⁷ There was not much time left for the Kremlin to act, said Spencer Barnes, if the rot was to be stopped.

Something was definitely in the air. In part it seemed to be a new-found public sense of confidence: at a meeting in a film theatre in Kaposvár a thousand hard-faced local peasants began jeering the country's president after his first few words. "Sit down!" they jeered. "Stop lying to us!" Stephen Dobi slumped back into his chair in a daze.¹⁸

But guiding hands also seemed to be at work: the ÁVH reported that opposition elements were up to something in Budapest.¹⁹ Shortly after the Rajk funeral restrictions were imposed on travel, on the pretext of the fuel shortage. A few days later, on October 14th, the visiting Yugoslav political analyst Dr. Vlado Begović made this prophecy in a letter to Belgrade: "People refuse to live in the old way, nor can the leadership govern in the old way. Conditions have been created for an uprising."²⁰

That was the day that the Budapest newspapers announced Nagy's complete rehabilitation by the Party. He had won on every point: the Party's resolution conceded that "although it may well be that he committed political errors, they did not justify his exclusion from the Party".

It did not escape Nagy's critics that his "provocative" speeches and articles had gone unpunished. His friends noticed and relished it. *Monday News* wrote: "Our feeling is that his rehabilitation has given satisfaction not only to a politician, but to the ideas closely linked with his name in Hungarian public opinion as well." And the BBC commented: "Imre Nagy has won respect because he has not exercised self-criticism despite having been instructed to do so several times."

In short, Imre Nagy had cocked a snook at the leadership and had got away with it. This really was humble pie for Gerő to eat. It was now that Nagy was tipped off by three supporters on the Central Committee – his fellow Muscovite Zoltán Vas, the *Free People* chief editor Martin Horváth, and the deputy head of the Budapest Party branch Imre Mező – that Gerő was cooking up a diabolical plan to provoke some kind of uprising like Poznan.²¹ Nagy was to be implicated in it, and charged with “counter-revolution”, to use the turgid Marxist description of any activity against their regime.

Those were exciting days. On the 12th, *Free People* had announced the arrest of Michael Farkas and his son, the ÁVH officer Vladimir Farkas. On the 13th, nine of the generals hanged in the wake of the Rajk trial were now reburied in his wake too, at a military funeral at Farkasréti cemetery. General Béla Király was wheeled out of hospital to escort the widow of one of the victims, Lieutenant-General Gustav Illy.²²

Perhaps unaware of the tip-off about Gerő, Nagy’s followers fanned out into the provinces and spread his gospel. Kossuth prize-winner Julius Háý arrived at Győr for a routine literary debate on October 16th and found over a thousand listeners packed into the Jókai Theatre to hear him.²³ Several students spoke, demanding – for the first time anywhere – the withdrawal of Soviet troops. Háý agreed: “The Russians are welcome here as *guests*, but the stationing of Russian troops in Hungary is unnecessary.” He suggested there should be a public trial of Michael Farkas, even if his puppet-strings should trace right back to the Kremlin. “We are living in an era of great changes,” proclaimed Háý: he saw no reason why relations with Moscow should not be amended. “Yugoslavia has succeeded in safeguarding her independence, and Poland and China are also building socialism their own way, in tune with each country’s peculiarities and history.” (But when somebody demanded the restoration of Cardinal Mindszenty, Háý answered more evasively – the Red blood-cells in him still rejected any notion of religious freedom.)

The audience swirls out of the Jókai Theatre in a mood of suppressed excitement. Among them is a man of forty-four, weak and white-haired, the former Yugoslav attaché Lazarus Brankov. He was a well-built young man when the ÁVH kidnapped him while concocting their case against Rajk in 1949.²⁴ He was freed on April 3rd, 1956, and given a job in Győr county library. For a while he

has planned to escape Hungary perhaps by rubber boat: Rákosi has gone, but the regime will never let him return home alive as a witness of the crimes of the NKVD and ÁVH. But today he has heard Julius Háry say: "I am willing to be arrested and to suffer martyrdom for my beliefs."

Brankov decides to wait and see what happens next.

That same day, October 16th, University students took the first concrete step towards the rising. Three thousand students meeting at Szeged, a hundred miles south of Budapest, voted to leave the Party's youth organisation, DISz.²⁵ The rebellion spread like a medieval plague, only thousands of times faster. Three days later in Budapest, students of the Building Industry Polytechnic met in a hostel and formulated various demands which DISz had refused to adopt. The demands related to purely student affairs, except for one, a demand for a public trial of Michael Farkas and his associates.

Elsewhere, Imre Nagy's admirers were still drumming up support. Losonczy, Donáth and Szilágyi organised a conference in the provinces, at Hajdúböszörmény.²⁶ Losonczy announced that Imre Nagy was on the point of assuming a leading position. He referred to the present leaders as "illiterates". There was much talk of the need for national independence, a multi-Party system, and free elections.

On October 18th, the Russian garrison troops in Hungary were put on alert, as was the Budapest ÁVH headquarters: day and night, five extra officers were attached to the ÁVH operations section. The troops now had to sleep with weapons at the ready.

On October 20th the Party alerted the country's armed forces. At nine A.M. the bar of the Danube Hotel was already crowded. The hotel was a favourite haunt of journalists, and Nicholas Gimes found several *Monday News* men there.²⁷ Shortly, a Hindu journalist who had arrived the night before from Moscow walked in and remarked after a furtive glance around: "There's something cooking in the Kremlin. I saw lots of Russian tanks moving west between Kiev and Kolomea – it doesn't look at all good for you."

Next day a newspaperman in Mátészalka, a town twelve miles from the Soviet frontier, telephoned the *Monday News*. "Can anyone tell me what's

happening?” his voice came down the line. “I’ve counted over eleven hundred motor vehicles arriving here.”

On that day Russian troops were coming up to full alert everywhere, and not just the three divisions stationed under the Warsaw Pact in Hungary. At Odessa on the Black Sea they loaded tanks on to railway flat-tops for a journey that would end for some of them six days later, when they were killed or captured in street-fighting near Nagyvárad Square, a square halfway down Budapest’s Üllői Avenue: they had been told that they were fighting fascists in Berlin.²⁸

Nagy’s supporters staged a further meeting on October 20th at Kecskemét, a large city south of Budapest.²⁹ An enraged municipal official later testified that when he arrived at his council chamber at five p.m., he heard a raised voice belonging to former police colonel, Joseph Szilágyi: “A revolution doesn’t hesitate, it takes action!”

Another witness, a state farm manager, heard Szilágyi call for “revolutionary change”. Francis Dallos, a local official, asked him: “What precisely do you understand by ‘revolutionary change’?”

Szilágyi did not mince his language: “Power has to be turned over to new forces – positive forces!”

To another Doubting Thomas he protested: “What kind of a revolutionary is it who takes fright at the mere thought of revolutionary happenings!” All these words would be weighed against him at the later trial.

This ferment in Hungary was overshadowed by an historic upheaval in Poland. There was fresh rioting, and Vladislav Gomulka, a national Communist who had been imprisoned and – like Imre Nagy – thrown out of the Party was elected Party leader. A Soviet “delegation” dashed uninvited to Warsaw early on October 19th, but failed to prevent it. The delegation had all the subtlety of a Stalin tank. Khrushchev, flanked by Molotov, Kaganovich, Mikoyan and thirteen Soviet generals blustered to the Poles: “We fought for you, and now you sell out to the Americans and Zionists!”

Simultaneously with their arrival, Marshal Konstantin Rokossowski ordered twenty tanks of the Polish First Mechanised Division into Warsaw’s suburbs, and Soviet warships menaced the port of Gdynia. When these moves failed to awe the Poles, the Russians rattled their own troops around inside Poland – an

armoured and a mechanised division. But these tactics had no lasting effect. Gomulka called their bluff and the Russians had to climb down.³⁰

On October 20th, the American legation cabled Washington that Gomulka wanted a picture of Polish defiance projected outside the country. This suited Washington well. At the sprawling headquarters building of Radio Free Europe in Munich, officials decided to try to cross-infect Poland's neighbours, including Hungary. On October 22nd, RFE staff were congratulated in an internal memorandum on their "prudent, vigorous and unquestionably effective" treatment of the Polish question, and told to ensure "exhaustive and precise cross-reporting to other target countries of events within Poland".³¹

The head of the film studios, fifty-eight-year-old Andrew Rodriguez, an elegant, silk-shirted refugee from the pre-war Budapest of boulevards and pavement cafés, scents real-life drama approaching.³² He assembles his studio cameramen and orders all work on feature films to be stopped while they fan out over the city to film whatever is happening in the streets. "This is history in the making," he tells one protesting actor.

Spool upon spool of exposed film comes back to his studios. Rodriguez has several prints made and locks the master negatives away. This film, smuggled out to the Fox Company in West Germany, will eventually become a newsreel masterpiece: "Hungary in Flames".

Most Sunday evenings now see tumultuous scenes as the latest weeklies roll off the printing presses. On October 21st, Peter Kereszturi goes out after supper to wait for the latest *Monday News* to arrive at the Western Railway Station kiosk.³³ A big crowd is already waiting, lit garishly by flashes from arc welders repairing the track. The magazine has not yet come.

At about the same time, the city's police chief Kopácsi telephones the *Monday News* offices: "I've been instructed by the ministry of the interior to prevent crowds gathering when your edition comes out. I've been told to send squad cars to check IDs and make arrests."

He pauses barely perceptibly. His voice changes in tone: "You come out just the same," he says. "I'm not going to pass on those instructions to my officers."

At the Western Railway Station a cyclist delivers the bundle, and the vendor begins to chant: "*Monday News!* – Gomulka speech! Read all about what's happening in Poland!" Another newspaper seller on the corner of Rákóczi Avenue

and the Boulevard is seen running for his life shortly after the bundle arrives.³⁴ Elsewhere, a newsvendor is mobbed for copies of the *Monday News*. He is pushed against a shop window which caves in, gashing him badly. “He dropped the bundle in terror,” a young store-keeper from Csepel docks will later describe. “A fistfight began over the magazines and the police were called out to restore order with their truncheons.”³⁵

On this Sunday, crowd scenes outside the *Literary Journal*'s office are so riotous that the police squad cars withdraw. One newsvendor is chased up the statue of Peter Pázmány when the *Literary Journal* arrives. The magazine reported the course of events in Poland, and how the Warsaw regime had avoided open confrontation only by granting concessions.

The student agitation gathered momentum. That Sunday saw meetings in the main University cities whose very simultaneity suggested that these unofficial student leaders were probably concerting their actions by telephone. Most of the student organisations decided to leave DISz and set up a free youth organisation under the name of the extinct student organisation MEFESz. In Budapest an embryo central student leadership began to take shape, and statutes were drafted that paid lip-service – but only lip-service – to “building socialism”, and to Marxism-Leninism as an ideological foundation. Further big meetings were scheduled for Monday, October 22nd.³⁶

While there were still no open clashes with authority, a concentric shift of Soviet force towards the capital was clearly perceptible. On October 22nd, Soviet troops were seen moving through Székesfehérvár towards Budapest. Late on Sunday night Soviet forces began building pontoon bridges over the river forming the frontier at Záhony. Alarm bells were ringing through the Soviet dominion. At Timisoara, in Romania, Soviet troops were put on alert; some would still have Romanian money about them when searched in a Budapest morgue six days later.

The ÁVH now warned that disturbances were probable in Budapest, beginning on October 22nd.

When Karl Kiss, a Stalinist Politburo member, visited Csepel, a funky warned him of the growing discontent among the workers.

Kiss growled: “Comrade, if anybody starts anything against us we can deal with it in thirty minutes!”

The Budapest eruption would catch the principal actors flatfooted. General Reinhard Gehlen, the elusive chief of West Germany’s secret service was in mid-Atlantic, bound for a meeting with the CIA director. He would learn the dramatic news from the ship’s newspaper, cancel the meeting and fly straight back from New York.³⁷

Gerő and his henchmen (Apró, Hegedüs, and Kádár) had left for Belgrade on the 15th. (Hegedüs now says, “The journey’s object had been to establish goodwill with the Yugoslav government. Of course it had domestic as well as diplomatic significance. We believed it would give our government a veneer of legitimacy – a somewhat Utopian idea.”³⁸) Imre Nagy had left to be a guest at the wine-harvest in Badacsony, on Lake Balaton. His supporters were widely scattered: Vászárhelyi had left Hungary for the first time in seven years to watch the big soccer international in Vienna.

“In one sense we were prepared for the events,” he reminisces now. “But in another we were not . . . We expected a change in the leadership of the Party, but we did not expect any change in the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, or in one-Party rule, or in socialism, and we certainly never spoke about any change in Hungary’s position in the Warsaw Pact before October 23rd.”

21 The Big Pageant

THAT SAME AFTERNOON, October 22nd, 1956, saw a rendezvous eight hundred miles from Budapest that had nothing and yet everything to do with Hungary.

A British military plane landed in gathering fog at Villacoublay, a French military airfield, and the British foreign secretary, Mr. Selwyn Lloyd, was driven in an inconspicuous car to Sèvres near Paris. In a secluded villa with one stubby square turret, secret talks began with the French government; a deputation of Israelis including David Ben Gurion and Moshe Dayan revealed that they were about to attack Egypt but wanted French fighters and British bombers in support: the Egyptian airforce would have to be eliminated before Israel's ground troops could plunge in.

It was midnight as Selwyn Lloyd returned to London. He had committed Britain to nothing – yet. But in the Eastern Mediterranean British and French forces were poised to strike at Egypt, and could not wait much longer. How were these three furtively conspiring allies to know that more than the fate of the Suez Canal would soon be at stake?

Joseph Blücher is twenty-seven, engaged to be married, and an assistant professor at Budapest's Polytechnic, a sprawling hundred-year-old building on the Buda side of the river.

Blücher is a puzzled man this afternoon, October 22nd, as he walks into the Great Hall.¹ At least half of the Polytechnic's ten thousand students have packed into this hall, although the meeting has been officially called by the Party's

unpopular youth organisation, DISz, and students usually have to be coerced into attending official meetings.² But that is not all, the students are stamping and cheering: not the *Sta-lin, Sta-lin* rhythm of the early Fifties, but full-throated roars of approval and anger. Since three p.m. a real debate has been going on.

The meeting will still be going on at one A.M. And a piece of paper will have emerged, a piece of paper that makes history.

In Budapest, the Party is on the run. The meeting has been called by DISz functionaries, in an attempt to take the wind out of the dissidents' sails.

But the DISz secretary has been shouted down after his first few words. The Party secretary, Mrs. Ladislav Orbán, is hustled away from the microphone to an uncouth chorus of catcalls. The Budapest students roar acclaim of the Szeged decision to leave DISz, and vote to re-establish their old organisation, MEFESz, in its place.³

While a five-student delegation takes these tidings to DISz's headquarters, the meeting proceeds to graver business.⁴ The original student topics are forgotten, and a list of more deeply-felt complaints takes shape. Two American diplomats, who have been invited by students by telephone to come and observe, will describe the atmosphere as "stormy". A student shouts: "The truth is that the Russians exploit us worse than a colony." A rhythmic chant begins: "Russians go home!" There are hostile references to Gerő's talks with "second- and third-rate politicians" in Belgrade. And there is more applause.

There is no trace of revisionist agitation; one lone voice does suggest that this is the birth of a new "Spirit of Szeged", the slogan under which Horthy's troops had marched against Béla Kun. He is howled down.

"Innocent people are rotting in this country's jails and nobody dares speak up for them," one student shouts. Another adds: "They talk a lot about how our living standards are constantly going up, but the plain truth is that they're lower now than they were in 1948."

"It is a sad thing," comments one student into the microphone, "but here in Hungary we have to get the real news from foreign broadcasts! That's the only way to find out what's going on at this very moment in Poland!" He reports Gomulka's sensational appointment, announced during the night from Poland.

A voice from the audience confirms: "These foreign radio stations do generally transmit the facts very accurately." It is the voice of former police colonel

Joseph Szilágyi, who will shortly become one of Imre Nagy's lieutenants.⁵ Later Szilágyi intervenes again: "We already have a means of getting our way: *Imre Nagy to power!*"

In the uproar that follows, there are suggestions that they should hold a demonstration next day, camouflaged perhaps as a demonstration in sympathy with the Poles. The students care little for the Poles but, as one third-year student later observes, the need is to find a reasonable pretext to demonstrate legally.⁶ The decision is taken: next afternoon they will march to the statue of General Bem to lay a wreath; Joseph Bem was a Polish general who fought on the Hungarian side in 1848.

On a scrap of paper ripped from a student's notebook ten extraordinary demands are scribbled down: they included demands for a new government under Imre Nagy and for economic, labour and penal reforms.

There are shouts of, "Let's get our views printed!" And, "No, let's get them broadcast!"

Professor Stephen Pribeky offers to drive a delegation over to the radio building in his Italian Topolino. The students accept. Before reaching the building he asks to see the list of demands, frowns a bit and edits them down to the points that really matter.

He waits outside until the students come out again. They are seething with fury. "They won't broadcast everything. They won't include the demands about the uranium remaining in Hungary, or about the Russians having to get out!"

At the University, on the city side of the river, a similar meeting began. George Gömöri, a fourth-year student at the philology faculty, recalls that they tended to look down on the Polytechnic, and that the University took the leading role in staging the demonstration while the Polytechnic just talked endlessly. He believes that the whole thing was provoked by a false rumour. "Somebody had heard a BBC announcement that Russian tanks were surrounding Warsaw, but by this date Gomulka had already come to an agreement with the Russians and was Party secretary. We looked for Polish flags, but we couldn't get any. The people in the Polish Cultural Centre were so scared that they would not let us in. So we got hold of some Czech flags, took out the blue stripe in the middle and left just the white and red of the Polish colours."⁷

An engineering student later described to American questioners the haphazard way in which the Polytechnic meetings came about.⁸ “An announcement of a meeting had been posted in the student dining room. It was crowded and noisy. It was decided to listen to anybody who wanted to speak, but for only five minutes each. We wanted four or five points to submit to the minister. [For instance] There was an advert in that day’s paper for a street-cleaner for 1,200 to 1,300 florins, and one for a chauffeur for 1,500 – while a graduate engineer only gets 950! We made a demand for better pay. A fellow next to me wrote down some demands and others just kept adding to them.”

At the meeting in the history faculty, there was an uneasy feeling.⁹ Some people suspected a deliberate intent by the ÁVH to provoke something. There was also disagreement over the precise kind of march: the Polytechnic engineers wanted a silent demonstration, but Fine Arts said that was impossible. A Solomon-like decision was adopted: there should be two processions; the marchers on the Buda embankment would stay silent, and those on the Pest side would chant slogans.

Unaware of the rebellious tide lapping through the city, some of Imre Nagy’s supporters met at about six p.m. to formulate a programme for when he returned to power.¹⁰ Losonczy would later recall: “We all agreed to meet again on Friday evening [October 26th] at my house, and to bring in Donáth and Haraszti as well.” Each of them would have drafted a section of the programme by then: Gimes on foreign policy, Losonczy on the Patriotic Front, and Donáth on the proposed agricultural policy.

After that Losonczy moved on to writer Ladislav Kardos’s home; Kardos had arranged a discussion that morning by telephone.¹¹ Gábor Tánczos, the secretary of the Petőfi Circle, told them that the DISz leadership was calling an emergency meeting next day and was planning to co-opt most of them on to its committee.

The Polytechnic meeting dragged on all evening, led by “everybody and nobody”, as an engineering student would describe.¹² “The meeting lasted fourteen hours . . . In the meantime parents were getting worried because the students had not come home. They telephoned round the hospitals and police to find out what was happening.”

By late evening, the whole city knew that something was brewing. At seven fifty p.m. a radio newscast tried to damp down speculation: “Constructive programme work is in progress at the meetings, in a lively spirit, without provocations or demagoguery; a few exaggerated voices are heard at times, but there is no inclination by the majority to become anybody’s tool.”

Later that evening the Petőfi Circle leaders also met, summoned by telegram.¹³ They decided to try to superimpose their own antiseptic demands on the next day’s demonstration – ten wordy demands, wood-wormed with Marxist jargon (Farkas was to be tried “according to Socialist legality”). They made no reference to the presence of Soviet troops, or to the insistence on free elections; they merely called upon DISz headquarters to “take note of these demands at its meeting”, scheduled for next day, October 23rd. The Petőfi Circle tamely announced that it placed its trust in the Central Committee – which the document reverently mentioned six times – to revive “socialist democracy”, which it mentioned twice, and “socialist legality” and “the Leninist principle of complete equality”, each of which rated one mention.

By now the Polytechnic students had enlarged their ten points to fourteen. The final list included: Nagy’s reinstatement; free elections by secret ballot; economic, agricultural, and penal reforms; a public trial of Michael Farkas; freedom of the press; the withdrawal of Soviet troops and Moscow’s open recognition of Hungary’s independence.

While this student meeting was still in progress, the professors also put their heads together at about eleven p.m., and decided to support the next day’s demonstration.¹⁴ Nagy’s representative, Géza Losonczy, joined in the discussion as did Dr. Ladislav Orbán, the deputy minister of education, whose wife had been shouted down, and Lieutenant-Colonel Stephen Marián, chief of the Polytechnic’s military defence department.

He urged caution: “How do we know that these rumours about Poland are true?”

Losonczy assured him they were. To prevent undesirable elements joining in – ÁVH provocateurs or political extremists – they also decided to allow only people with student IDs to enter the gates; moreover the students would be told to march ten abreast as in all Marxist demonstrations, and to link arms so that

nobody could gatecrash carrying provocative placards or shouting unauthorised slogans.

When students are seized of an idea, they can move mountains. These students are now thus seized. They work all night to spread the Fourteen Points, and the plans for the demonstration. One snag is that without Party permission nothing can be printed or duplicated; the rector of the Polytechnic takes fright at the radical demands and refuses permission. So the students telephone around, calling in every available typewriter so that the list of demands can be typed and retyped. Hundreds of carbon copies are made. It is rough and ready but effective. Thereby the ripples of revolution are spread, although that word had not yet been uttered.

As afternoon turns to evening, students begin pinning the typescript sheets to trees or pasting them on to walls. Curious knots of pedestrians form. Students commandeer one department's duplicating machine and begin skimming out thousands of the leaflets, each one as lethal as a silver bullet engraved with Gerő's name. Before dawn the packets of inflammatory leaflets are convoyed out of Budapest to the provinces by car, taxi, bus, and milk-lorry. Bundles are rushed round to the factories, and nightshift workers are invited to send delegations to a mass meeting at two p.m. next day in the Polytechnic's courtyard, the meeting that will launch the silent march. "Delegations!" They will come in their thousands, as the factory gates open next afternoon.

October 23rd, 1956, dawns – one of the last gloriously sunny days of the early autumn.

As the sun rises above the spires and boulevards, Budapest's citizens are still just ciphers, statistics on Planning Office charts. They trudge to work or elbow their way on to overfilled trams, silently cursing the Party for all their ills, from the burst waterpipes to the price of the synthetic rum served in the city's all-night bars. Few have had the time or appetite to study the Party's soggy newspapers. Those who have picked up a *Free People* this morning can see its front page turning a brave if incredulous face towards the rising storm winds: "Our Party and its newspaper stand by Youth," flutes the editorial.¹⁵ "We approve these meetings and wish every success to these wise, creative conferences of youth . . . We greet this tremendous democratic pageant of youth."

The lead story is the return of Prime Minister Hegedüs and Comrade Gerő from Belgrade. Microphones and cameras are already being paraded at the railway station and batteries of funkies are grouping there, ready to smile dutifully upon their return.

In Munich, the microphones are also ready. Secret guidance sheets are being circulated by messengers to Radio Free Europe's news scripters: "The developing Hungarian situation seems to be offering continuing opportunities to draw parallels with Poland, implying potential for similar developments through the orbit."¹⁶

There is one Communist slogan that runs: "The Party is our wits, our guide and our weapon."¹⁷ But early this October 23rd, the real brains are not yet back from Belgrade and the lesser funkies are floundering. The ball is beginning to roll and they do not know how to stop it. When student delegations arrive with bundles of leaflets at the factories, bewildered Party officials let them in; the leaflets do after all have the rubber stamp of DISz. A twenty-five-year-old student architect returns from one such delegation to the Polytechnic at nine A.M. and reports that excited factory workers have devoured the Fourteen Points. Only at "Red" Csepel have hard-nosed factory guards barred the way.¹⁸

Higher echelons have evidently resigned themselves to making concessions, because the anodyne slogans generated overnight by the Petőfi Circle and the Writers' Union, proposing Imre Nagy's restoration to office, are widely reported in the early radio bulletins.¹⁹

By nine A.M. the Petőfi Circle's premises are buzzing like an army headquarters before a battle.²⁰ Its officers have suddenly realised that they may even be missing the bus. According to radio reporter Aaron Tóbiás, a never-ending stream of student delegates arrives to pick up leaflets and arrange assembly points for the demonstration. Secretary Gábor Tánczos is heard telephoning Géza Losonczy and agreeing to steer the demonstration towards the more harmless slogans of the Petőfi Circle. These slogans, which urge everybody to trust the Central Committee, are broadcast in full.

The city comes to life. Shops open, trams rumble by, office staffs settle into their routine. But there is a nervousness in the air. The pavements seem busier, and people are quite openly reading sheets of typescript. As János Gura walks

past the Arms Factory in Soroksár Road he sees two students by the gates distributing leaflets. He can hardly believe his eyes: the leaflets broach subjects that have always been taboo. All along Joseph Boulevard he sees the same leaflets plastered on shop windows, trees and buildings.²¹

At police headquarters on Francis Deák Square, the stocky little police chief sluices his hands in the closet next to his office, circles back round the long conference table and selects the red K-line telephone from among the half-dozen phones parked on his desk. Colonel Alexander Kopácsi is the sharp-witted chief of the city's regular police force: twenty-one precincts and 1,200 overworked police officers in blue uniforms.²² A tough ex-partisan from the industrial north-east, Kopácsi has a first-floor room overlooking the square, furnished with carpets, antiques, priceless lamps and crystal chandeliers. He too has become secretly attracted towards Imre Nagy's brand of national Communism. At his trial it will be held against Kopácsi that instead of Lenin, Rákosi and Dzhherzhinski, he has recently hung framed portraits of the country's revolutionary heroes, Louis Kossuth and Alexander Petőfi, on his walls.

Kopácsi has had a call from the *Free People's* editor. He calls him back; he spins the dial of the red phone: two-five-seven. Martin Horváth sounds jumpy. He says there are mounted police in the streets, and he wants to know what the hell Kopácsi means by provoking public feeling. Kopácsi grins, displaying a mouth full of unevenly capped teeth. "That's just our police riding school, Comrade Horváth," he says. "They're out for their regular Tuesday morning trot."

Kopácsi takes a nonchalant view. When Lieutenant-Colonel Theo Végh, chief of the bustling Budapest VIII precinct, telephones that people are out distributing leaflets, he drawls: "The police are not to interfere."

At the railway station, Gerő and his government delegation have arrived back from Belgrade. He speaks a few words into the waiting microphones, then steps into a curtained limousine. Not until he reaches the Central Committee building in Academy Street does he grasp that something is afoot. Hegedüs now says: "We returned from Belgrade around eight-thirty A.M. An endless meeting started that continued all day." Gerő reports on Belgrade, then George Marosán raises the question of this planned student demonstration. Marosán's nostrils

flare, and he announces: “There is a whiff of counter-revolution in the air!” He makes two blunt recommendations: the Politburo must ban the march and the people’s forces must open fire if this ban is defied.²³

There is nothing unusual in such a recommendation: down through modern history Marxist regimes have continually turned the machine guns on their workers, a crime which not even the Nazis committed. Troubled by Marosán’s advice the venerable Marxist philosopher Georg Lukács enquires: “Suppose your suggestion is accepted and they do open fire. How many dead and injured do you reckon with?”

Marosán estimates: “A hundred dead and a thousand injured.”

The Politburo opts for a half-measure: it decides to ban the demonstration, but refuses permission to open fire. As the minister of the interior, former butcher’s boy Ladislav Piroš, leaves to take this edict back to his staff, Marosán is shaking his head.

Nameless hands have this morning started Soviet troops shunting around inside Hungary, just as in Poland three days ago. T-54s of the Ninety-Second Soviet Armoured Division at Kecskemét and Szolnok begin lumbering slowly north-west towards Budapest; one tank force remains at Szolnok to guard the bridges over the River Tisza. Elements of the Second Mechanised Division begin rolling east from Székesfehérvár and Győr, also making for Budapest.

At twelve fifty-three p.m. the gipsy music on the radio is interrupted with the announcement of the ban on the demonstration. The Politburo also announces that there will be no meeting of the 120-strong Central Committee until October 31st. But the ball is already rolling. Fifteen thousand students are packing into the Polytechnic’s courtyard. A rostrum and loudspeakers have been set up, and Piroš’s ban has been announced to them, met by derisive jeers. The windows of surrounding buildings are crowded with onlookers. Everybody knows that a confrontation is looming. There are rumours that soldiers have come by motor-bike from distant units to get copies of the students’ Fourteen Points.

The start of the big pageant of youth is not far off. The chief of the Polytechnic’s military section, Lieutenant-Colonel Stephen Marián, pushes through the crowd to the rostrum. Marián is thirty-one; he has been a Communist since

1941, but a study tour of the USSR in 1955 has given him second thoughts.²⁴ He is wearing a Russian-style uniform but his cheeks are flushed with unmistakable excitement as he reads out messages of support from other colleges. Among them is one from the airforce officers' school. The crowd rustles with applause.

Colonel Marián calls for a vote: "Do you accept Piros's ban, yes or no?"

The students bellow their reply: "To the streets!"

Delegations are despatched to Academy Street and Parliament to announce that the students have democratically decided to go ahead and flout the ban. A confrontation is now inevitable.

At this time Imre Nagy is only half in the picture.²⁵ The tremors have caught him unawares. He has only returned last evening from Lake Balaton to confer with his friend and confidant Imre Mező, deputy chief of the Budapest Party branch.²⁶ Now Géza Losonczy invites Nagy and the rest of the group to his flat in Otto Herman Road by telephone; Vásárhelyi, Haraszti and Gimes speak in favour of the student march, but add: "The demonstration will slip out of our hands if you don't do something." In fact Nicholas Gimes urges Nagy to march at the head of the demonstration. However, Imre Nagy and Újhelyi are against it. Nagy is frowning: "This may be a Stalinist provocation," he says at one point. "It might end with a blood bath!"

Losonczy will later testify: "We agreed unanimously that the situation was ripe for changes to be pushed through."²⁷ The Stalinists would have to go, and a new Politburo elected including Nagy, Haraszti, Donáth, Zoltán Szántó and Losonczy; the new Central Committee should be broadened to include these men, and in addition Joseph Szilágyi – the young ex-police colonel who was vociferous at the Polytechnic meeting – Joseph Schurecz, Vásárhelyi, Kardos, Tánczos, Jenő Széll, Lukács, Novobáczky, Alexander Fekete, Gimes and Louis Konya. There is quite a lively discussion.²⁸ More names are added: those of the writers Julius Háry and Alexander Erdei, and of Nagy's son-in-law Jánosi and Rajk's widow. A brief discussion develops over Nagy himself – should he ask to be prime minister or first secretary of the Party? Losonczy deems the Party leadership crucial, but Nagy objects: "The public knows me as prime minister," and that settles it.

Shortly, news reaches them that the University is also going to stage a demonstration at two p.m. At this the meeting breaks up. Imre Nagy goes back up the road to his villa, while Vásárhelyi, Losonczy and the others make their way over the river to the Petőfi statue to see what happens. They are going very much as spectators, because events are gaining momentum of their own.

Inside Academy Street a delegation of troubled *Free People* staff is waiting for Gerő. At the newspaper building this morning Party officials have held a meeting to discuss the students' demands. Martin Horváth, the chief editor, tells Gerő that there will have to be top level changes before a storm blows up. Gerő receives the newspapermen with Marosán and Kádár. He refuses to be panicked. "You've all lost your nerve. You underestimate the strength of the proletariat. We've got all the means we need to keep a few rebellious spirits in order."

Somebody asks: "Suppose the students don't obey the ban?"

It is the former Minister of Culture, Joseph Révai, who screams the reply. One of Rákosi's original Jewish camarilla, he is one of the Politburo's elder statesmen. He has suffered a stroke and his right arm dangles shrivelled and useless at his side. But he still has fight in him. "We'll open fire!" he screams. "Open fire! Open fire!"²⁹

The leaders of the new MEFESz student organisation arrive, bringing an urgent appeal to Gerő to lift the ban.³⁰ They fare no better. Gerő now also threatens, "If the demonstrators go ahead, we will open fire."

Révai is sent over to the *Free People* building to keep an eye on its next edition.³¹ He gatecrashes a staff meeting with the words: "Well, who's going to write the article – the one denouncing the counter-revolution!" He snaps his fingers for a shorthand-typist. The appearance of Révai, this spectre from their own Stalinist past, increases the trauma for the edgy newspapermen. Many of them are still under his spell. But this is not the most opportune moment to print articles about "counter-revolution". His snapping fingers are politely ignored.

Back at the fortress-like ministry of the interior overlooking the river, Piros calls an emergency conference. His five deputies troop in, followed by his new Soviet adviser. His regular adviser has just been replaced by a slim, blue-eyed Russian who does not introduce himself; months later he will be introduced to

city police chief Kopácsi – who arrives late at this meeting – as none other than General Ivan Serov, supreme chief of the Soviet secret police.³²

Piros invites Kopácsi to explain how his police will enforce the ban on public gatherings. The police colonel shrugs; it is his favourite gesture. He warns that his men have no riot-control weapons like sabres, only machine guns and rifles.

“Rifles have butts, don’t they?” snaps Piros.

Kopácsi does not consider the remark very helpful. He volunteers instead a blunt simplification: “The basic error is to have converted a political problem into a police problem.”

Serov glares, but the five deputy ministers nod agreement. There is no realistic alternative – the ban on the demonstration will just have to be lifted.

Piros puts a call through to Gerő. The conversation lasts several minutes, then Piros puts down the red phone.

“Yes, Comrade Gerő. Your orders will be executed.”

22 Critical Mass

IN FIFTEEN MINUTES THE comrades will be coming out for a break,” says Prime Minister Andrew Hegedüs, grinning from ear to ear.¹ The likeness to Rákosi is almost irritating. “Comrade Gerő will see you then.”

It is October 23rd, 1956, the day the dam will burst in Budapest, and another posse of worried Party officials has arrived at Academy Street. The Writers’ Union have picked Julius Háý as their spokesman, because Háý and Gerő had got on well together as émigrés in wartime Moscow.

When Gerő emerges, his eyes seem much older than Háý remembered them. The Party leader enquires: “What do you want, comrades?”

Háý tells him they have had a brainwave: “We want to invite the Party leadership to march in the front rank of the demonstration!” Gerő shakes his head emphatically.

The playwright chides him: “This demonstration has been in the air ever since the Rajk funeral.”

“You mean, ever since your damned article about ‘Comrade Kucsera’!” Gerő angrily retorts.

At the Polytechnic, Colonel Marián has marshalled the students into marching order. At three p.m. the big pageant will begin, in defiance of the regime’s ban on public gatherings. Banners have been distributed, and stewards provided with armbands. Some delegations are still arriving from factories: workers from MÁVAG and Ganz and two busloads of workers from the Pestvidéki aircraft engine factory. There are 800 cadets from the Petőfi Officers’ Academy too.

The great gates of the Polytechnic courtyard have been swung wide open, and the first ranks are about to move out, when a black government limousine slides to a halt outside and two men jump out: Colonel Kopácsi and Ladislas Fekete, one of Piros's deputy ministers, wearing a dark suit.² The loudspeakers crackle a sardonic welcome and Colonel Marián announces, "We have decided – that is, the students of Budapest have decided: the march will take place – with or without permission!"

As Kopácsi climbs the rostrum in his police chief's uniform, accompanied by Fekete, the whistling screeching is deafening. Fekete reaches for the microphone. "The reason I'm here," he shouts, "is to tell you all that the ban has been lifted. The demonstration can go ahead!"

A silence descends on the yard. To cut the ice, the minister adds: "My name's Fekete, not Piros." (The names mean "black" and "red" in Hungarian.) There is nervous laughter, the kind that patients utter when told that the X-rays show no malignancies. Then a rolling thunder of applause lifts off the walls round the yard.

As the huge throng strains towards the gates, Kopácsi returns to his car. His neighbour, ex-police colonel Joseph Szilágyi clasps at his arm. "I just phoned home," he says. "The children are safe back from school, they're playing with your Violet." Neither of them senses that one will be hanged, the other sentenced to life imprisonment for the drama that is about to begin.

From college to college, from school to school, the word has spread. Ildikó Lányi has slipped out of Attila József secondary school during lunch and telephoned her friends on the new secondary-school student committee elected a few days earlier: "There's going to be a demonstration! Get your pupils out on the streets as soon as school is over."

"Where?"

"Meet at the Museum, at the Poly or at the Rókus hospital – three p.m.!"³

In the American legation on Liberty Square the chargé d'affaires, Spencer Barnes, listens to his two officials reporting on the marathon Polytechnic discussion of the night before and he reads the watered down text published in *Free Youth* (*Szabad Ifjúság*). To Barnes it seems that Washington has its big chance to challenge the continued Soviet military presence in the country. At two p.m. he sends off a three-page cable to Washington to alert US newspapers

to the crisis. “Legation recommends that coverage be fast so that maximum advantage be taken of ever-mounting demands of Hungarians.”⁴

One by one the city’s offices close. Party officials warn that employees leaving early will be fired. Few heed them: the mutiny is beginning with sounds as soft as the laying down of a pencil on a draughtsman’s desk, the snapping shut of a briefcase and single footfalls leaving down cement corridors towards street exits. Occasionally voices call into rooms: “If you are Hungarians, come with us!”

By two p.m. a big crowd has also formed at the medical faculty building in Üllői Road. With their professors at the head, they march school by school, faculty by faculty in ranks of eight or ten abreast, to the National Museum a few blocks away. By this time next day the museum will be a raging inferno, its priceless exhibits consumed by fire-raisers. This historic square has not been idly chosen as the rendezvous. It was from these museum steps that Alexander Petőfi declaimed his famous poem on March 15th, 1848, and ignited the uprising against the Hapsburg monarchy.

From a second-floor balcony an elderly woman is seen to be unrolling a lone flag in the national colours, red, white and green. It is the first leaf of a new spring.

Word spreads that the radio has formally announced the lifting of the ban, and that Gerő will broadcast in person at eight that night.

At the radio station, a labyrinth of buildings round a courtyard off Alexander Bródy Street, there have already been disturbances. Some staff members have compiled their own demands and backed them up with a strike threat. Colonel Nicholas Orbán, chief of the Budapest security police, has sent round two officers, Captain János Mester and Lieutenant Michael Varga, to investigate and to telephone in at ten minute intervals to Major Mézes, his deputy chief of staff. The two officers are issued with forty tear-gas grenades and forty smoke bombs, just in case.⁵

With the lifting of the ban on public gatherings the tension eases at the radio building, and the reporters begin discussing how best to cover the demonstration. But the sudden change of policy rouses suspicions at the University. Deans Zoltán I. Tóth and Tibor Kardoss are scared, and with good reason: one of them

will not survive the next two days. One student leader, Ladislas Márton, suggests that they call off the march while they still can. "I think Piros is going to allow the march to go ahead, and then order the ÁVH to open fire," he says.⁶

But the march goes ahead, and he joins the three other newly elected MEFESz leaders in the front rank: Paul Wald, Imre Maté, and George Gömöri. Their first station is the Petőfi statue. Behind them march the professors and the rest of the University, because that is the *ordre du jour*. At the statue, Professor Dominic Kosáry encounters his fellow historian Dr. Peter Hanák. He remarks to Hanák, "We couldn't do anything even in 1848. What these people want to do is impossible, but try telling them that!"⁷

The crowds are growing by the minute. Not everybody feels that he can join in. Actor Tibor Molnár is thirty-six, a *matinée* idol who is opinionated, extroverted and somewhat exhausted too, having just given what he immodestly confesses to have been a very *mature* performance at a dress-rehearsal of *Pirandello* at the National Theatre on Lenin Boulevard.⁸ A studio limousine is waiting to rush him over the river to the film studios in Pasaréti Avenue. But he has waved a hand at the chauffeur and commanded, "Don't rush me."

He slips into the espresso bar across the boulevard and has just ordered a double coffee when a woman bursts in: "Revolution! There's a revolution!"

The tables empty around Molnár. But he stays where he is, still hearing the audience's applause in his ears.

It is three p.m. Just across the river, the other march is also beginning. The sombre students pour slowly out of the Polytechnic gateway as glutinous and silent as black treacle; they flow past Gellért Square and along the embankment. It is a spectacle the city has not seen before nor will it see again. Ten abreast, with red flags and the national tricolour at the head of the procession, the fifteen thousand youngsters forge along one bank of the Danube, until their procession is three miles long.

Just before they reach the Bem statue, a gaggle of worthies hurries past them – the leadership of the Writers' Union. The morning's newspapers have printed an indignant denial by the Union that they have any part in the planned demonstration. Now they are suddenly anxious to appear in the front rank. The students indulgently let them in. Peter Veres, the writers' president, is clutching the seven

points that have been hatched in the tobacco-clouded rooms of the Writers' Union building in Gorky Avenue and published in a special broadsheet *Literary Gazette* a few hours earlier.

At key points in the city Rodriguez's newsreel cameramen capture the pageant as it begins its stately progress, forty abreast, down the boulevards, carrying printed or hand-painted placards on poles. A lens glimpses a blonde girl on a balcony, waving a flag and tossing streams of tricolour ribbon down to the crowds two storeys below.⁹ Youngsters dart forward to grab the fluttering ribbons. Long lines of trams are wedged into the good-natured throng, unable to pass through. The shambling crowds are hatless, they wear light autumn coats, and sometimes they wave papers at the cameras. From different sections drift strains of traditional national hymns, the half-forgotten songs and incantations learned in school or family homes long ago. People are chanting Petőfi's poem, with emphasis on its last line: "We vow we shall no longer be slaves."

The news leaps on ahead by telephone; the windows gape and people crowd on to the pavements, while national flags sprout everywhere, flags deliberately folded or knotted so as to obscure the Communist emblem in the centre.

The town-centre pavements are solid with more multitudes watching this extraordinary spectacle of students on the march. It is like a Fifth Avenue tickertape parade, only without the Irish cops to keep the onlookers behind police lines. "I was a steward," recalls a twenty-two-year-old Jewish student, "but I couldn't keep the people out of the lines of marchers." The older folk are frequently in tears. They are fighting back emotions and trying to find the courage to take that trembling step across the kerbstone, the threshold between onlooker and marcher. This day an entire city will step off the pavement, and begin marching and counter-marching, refusing to disperse, oblivious of what lies ahead.¹⁰

One squall of rain, one gust of biting autumn cold, would have driven these crowds home. It might all never have happened. But today the sun is rising high and the people are out too.

Nobody says it yet, but nobody doubts it. It has been a twelve-year nightmare, but now it is coming to an end, this regime and all it has stood for: the screams of wives from the next-door torture cells, the boulders falling from the rockface of Reck stone quarry, the *frásznepok* of deportation, the drug injec-

tions, the hallucinations of General Bielkin's whirring lion's tail, the forced Russian language lessons, the work-norms, the *kurtavas* short-iron, the Communist doctors too lazy to come to a childbirth, the fathers teaching their children how to lie at school, the gipsy transfer gangs sent as bailiffs into peasants' homes, the workers galloping like rats on a speeding treadmill, the raped woman treating herself with disinfectant, the ÁVH "body-grinder", the endless queues for rotten quality, the interminable drone of Marxist jargon, the class war, the Korean War, the war against the kulaks, and all the voices echoing down from the past, marking this regime and its twisted brand of socialist legality: "Géza, let justice take its course!" "You are out of class, comrade!" "We need no mercy!"

The printed banners being slow-marched to the Petőfi statue are still cautiously phrased. "Long live the youth of Poland!" and, "For freedom in the spirit of the friendship between Bem and Kossuth." The marchers chant only the authorised slogans like "Yugoslavs and Poles, we are marching with you!" and "Poland shows us the example, we will follow in our *Hungarian* way!"¹¹

But when crowds this size gather, discipline is rare. When engineer Francis Reményi leaves his office on Váci Street, he finds Rákóczi Street already so crowded that it is difficult to make headway.¹² He is swept along by the huge multitude which is plunging like a human piston down the centre of the street, heading for the embankment.

The diminishingly moderate slogans – "Hang out the national flag!" "Let every nation's soldier go home!" – are replaced by others as grease-stained workers join in. Reményi finds at his side a workman who wipes his mouth with the back of a grimy hand and bellows hoarsely, "C'mon, lads, let's beat the scoundrels to death!"

In Andrásy Street, still name-plated "Stalin Street", a limousine is trapped in the crush and the passenger climbs out. "It's Tibor Molnár!" shouts a voice. Another voice shouts: "Tibor, come with us!" He is flattered, but shakes his head: his studio needs him. He can see marching past him many old friends like young Joseph Gáli whose parents died in Auschwitz. He tries to recall how Charles Laughton addressed the multitudes as Caesar. "Darlings," he apologises, "no *time*. I've simply got to be at the studio!"

“Come on, Tibor,” the crowd encourages him. “Jenő Pataky, Francis Bessenyei and Imre Sinkovits are going to recite patriotic poems at the Petőfi statue!”

Molnár winces enviously, but time is pressing. He sits on the fender of his car and pleads: “My colleagues and a score of technicians are waiting for me.”

Finally they let him drive through. But not the car right behind: in it glowers George Marosán, who has recommended just four hours earlier that the police should be ordered to open fire on this very crowd.

It is only a brief and simple ceremony at the Petőfi statue on Eskü Square.¹³ After the crowd has chanted the national hymn,¹⁴ actor Imre Sinkovits recites Petőfi’s poem “Arise Hungarians!” It is as though he hopes to release the spell on the poet-hero himself. But the statue remains petrified, its arm upraised. Shortly, the Petőfi Circle gets its loudspeaker equipment working and it splutters a few words of greeting. Somebody suggests that everybody march to the Bem statue and join the Polytechnic demonstration there. The crowd has swollen to about five thousand. As this mass deluges on to the embankment and makes for the Margaret Bridge it begins chanting its own bold slogans: “Independence!” and “Freedom!” and “In Pest-Buda the question is – where has the Hungarian uranium gone?”

Veteran British journalist Sefton Delmer has witnessed the drama unfolding at the Petőfi statue.¹⁵ Alerted by an advance tip from friends in Radio Free Europe, he has flown to Vienna on Sunday and driven here only yesterday. He has seen élitist students from the Marx-Lenin Institute approach from a side street brandishing red banners and yet be swept along by the enthusiasm of the rest. Now he is in a dilemma. The journalist in him wants to stay and watch but the professional in him has a holy awe of deadlines, and so he doubles back to the Danube Hotel and telephones his story through to Fleet Street first. Not even in Poland has he seen mass hysteria building up like this.

“As I telephone this despatch,” he shouts into the telephone, clamping a hand over his other ear, “I can hear the roar of delirious crowds.” He coolly predicts that Nagy will soon be prime minister again. Delmer’s will be the only story to get out of Budapest before the telephone lines go dead.

Imre Nagy's attractive daughter Bess (Bözske) has just been to a hairdresser's in Andrásy Street.¹⁶ As yet she has seen nothing unusual, beyond the appearance of leaflets on trees all along the avenue. As she emerges the demonstration has reached the boulevard and no public transport seems to be running. That is a nuisance – she will have to walk home. Crossing Margaret Bridge she also finds herself swept along by the immense throng shambling towards the Bem statue. But shortly her own path diverges towards Moscow Square, and she manages to catch a bus from there. Back home in Orsó Avenue, she drops in to see her father at No. 41. She finds her parents gossiping with one of their friends, the widow of János Gyöngyösi, who was foreign minister of the government set up at Debrecen in 1944. And she wonders why the telephone keeps ringing.

By four thirty p.m. there are already twenty thousand people gathered at the statue of General Bem. The Polytechnic and University students are joined by thousands of sightseers and workers, who have just come off the morning shift.¹⁷ And there are many soldiers, including eight hundred students and staff from the Petőfi – ex-“Stalin” – Military Academy. It is one huge sea of faces, among them hundreds of the regime's most implacable enemies, political prisoners and former internees like student leader Paul Jónás;¹⁸ there are Nagy's leading henchmen like Vásárhelyi and Losonczy; and there are members of the British and American legion staffs sent to observe. The crowd overflows into neighbouring streets and backs up over the Danube bridges.

A forty-nine-year-old professor of botany, Stephen Szabados, is watching from a window.¹⁹ All his hatred of the Marxists boils up inside him. He recalls Professor Potapov, Moscow's “adviser” at the University, who rejected his life's work on water-movement in the soil, unread, within twenty-four hours. He thinks of the repulsive woman upstairs, Michael Farkas's mistress, who has denounced three score people to the ÁVH. As his wife unfurls a flag at the window, the professor thinks too of how they treated his old colleague, Professor Kovavic: ordered to resume work where Heinrich Himmler had left off on the *koksagys* rubber plant, a Russian dandelion species, Kovavic established that cross-fertilisation would always destroy the plant's rubber content, and so was thrown in jail for “economic sabotage”; he had only recently been proved right and reha-

bilitated. Professor Szabados hands the scissors he uses for opening letters to his wife. “That flag,” he says, “cut out the Rákosi emblem.”

There is no need to dwell upon what happens at the Bem statue: what is important is not that the Fourteen Points and Petőfi’s poems are recited as though their very utterance is an act of defiance to the dictatorship. Most people can neither hear nor see the speakers.²⁰ What matters is that fifty thousand citizens have congregated independently of the regime’s wishes for the first time.

Four newsreel cameramen record the scene as the bulky peasant leader and writer Peter Veres, with leather riding boots and a flowing grey moustache modelled on Maxim Gorky’s climbs on to a loud-speaker van, strikes a pose and announces the writers’ Seven Points.²¹ Barrel-shaped loudspeakers boom, but to this immense crowd his words are just a whisper. True these Seven Points are bolder than the Petőfi Circle’s, but they too laud meaningless ideals like “expanding socialist democracy” along “Leninist principles”. And that is precisely the doctrinaire claptrap which has brought out these impatient hordes in protest. The American legation’s observers will call the Veres speech the “one dampening note” of the demonstration.²² However, even he calls for free elections and for the return of Imre Nagy to power.

Mutilated tricolour flags – minus the Communist emblem – have sprouted from many more windows now, including the nearby foreign ministry building and Bem barracks. The British legation’s third secretary, Mark Russell, reports that crowds have begun besieging the barracks and are shouting up to the soldiers: “Come with us!”²³ But the soldiers are confined to barracks by Party officials and locked in. Their excited faces crowd every window.

A flag with the old Louis Kossuth coat of arms is half-ceremonially thrust into General Bem’s sword-buckle, and proceedings seem to be at an end. Somebody announces that the resolutions will now be forwarded to Hegedüs and Gerő. But if the demonstration’s leaders, if Nagy’s lieutenants, expect that the mob will now go home, they are deceived. It is now that the Petőfi Circle and student leaders realise that they have lost control of the crowd’s emotions. Vásárhelyi hears the shout go up: “Let’s all go to Parliament!” By six p.m. Bem Square is deserted.

Slowly the peril dawns on the Party's top echelons. An *ad hoc* committee is set up in the defence ministry consisting of Piros, Bata and Alexander N6grádi to examine ways of using force.

In theory that prerogative rests with the toothy, prematurely-balding prime minister, Andrew Heged6s. Immediately after his return from the railway station, he has driven to his parliamentary offices and begun sifting through state papers. He has realised around four p.m. that the student demonstration is getting out of hand. As he leaves an hour later he sharply catches his breath at the astonishing spectacle of thousands of people swarming over the Margaret Bridge and bearing down towards this Parliament building. He sends for his regular 6VH escort and hurries over to Academy Street, not suspecting that for the next five days he is to become a virtual prisoner within its walls.

By five p.m. all the leading funkies of Party and state have foregathered on the first floor of the Central Committee headquarters. What precisely is this amorphous governing body? Is it the Politburo, the Central Committee, or some agency of state? Heged6s himself cannot define it – as the building is in Academy Street, perhaps it is proper to dismiss the question as academic. He recognises the country's president Stephen Dobi, ex-baker's union leader George Maros6n, and about thirty other worried dignitaries crowding the long desks lining three sides of the Politburo's session chamber and clustering into Ger6's corner office overlooking Academy Street. In this room is Ger6's K-line telephone, and the Ve-Che hot line to Moscow, which he routinely consults every day. Heged6s describes: "The key people were packing into the Private Secretariat. Ger6 sat alone at his desk next door, drafting the broadcast he was going to record for transmission later that evening. Outside, we could hear quite a crowd gathering in the street. And we could hear the shouts of *Vesszen, Ger6!* Get lost, Ger6!"²⁴

One mile away, at its ugly square building fronting on to Republic Square, the capital's Party headquarters has summoned the secretaries of the twenty-two district branches to an emergency briefing.²⁵ This branch's senior officials have been called away to Academy Street, so a senior executive committee member, J6nos Kov6cs, takes charge of the briefing. The branches are ordered to mobilise every old-guard Communist they can and to issue arms to any worker who can be relied on.

There are only three regular police NCOs on the main door, but Republic Square itself is mercifully deserted. News trickles in that immense crowds are forming elsewhere, and that there are disturbances outside the radio building. Grim preparations are made to defend this headquarters. The ÁVH is telephoned for reinforcements and the first-floor council chamber is cleared for the reinforcements to use when they arrive.

By six p.m. the branch's deputy chief, Imre Mező, is back from Academy Street. Lorries pull up outside the nearby Erkel Theatre and two ÁVH platoons shuffle into the Party building under the command of Lieutenant Stephen Tompa: six section leaders with sub-machine guns and forty young enlisted men armed with rifles.

Tompa reports with his number two, Lieutenant George Várkonyi, to Imre Mező and the branch secretary Mrs. Maria Nagy. They tour the whole building for nearly two hours. There are obvious tactical problems if worse comes to the worst: the building lies between the broad Rákóczi Street in the rear and the open, tree-lined Republic Square in front; entrance can probably be forced from the blocks of flats on either side, in Luther Street and Kenyérmező Street. ÁVH guard details are posted on the entrance, on the first and fourth floors, on the main staircase, and in the dining room overlooking the square.

It is still daylight. The multitude begins spilling across the Kossuth and Margaret Bridges and making for Parliament. The air rings with new slogans: "Down with the Stalin statue!" and "Stand Rákosi before the Court!"²⁶ and "Soviet army go home and take the Stalin statue with you!" and "Get lost, Geró!" and "Pour boiling water over Baldy!" (meaning Rákosi) and "We want a Hungarian government, vote for Imre Nagy!"

But it is the legendary Imre Nagy – Nagy the Fearless – whom they want. And Nagy, who is lying low at his villa, enjoying tea with a foreign minister's widow, is still the elderly, bumbling theoretician, the woolly-minded pedant, the disciplined and loyal Party man who has tried and failed before to ease this country's lot.

The remaining shops and offices are closing. Fifty thousand people have already packed into the square that sprawls beneath the grimy, grey Parliament building. Lines of trams stand nose to tail, driverless and empty. A flustered

young laboratory assistant is worried about how to get home. She recognises a friend sitting on a lorry crawling down Saint Stephen Boulevard. He is one of Rodriguez's newsreel cameramen. She cups her hands into a megaphone: "What is happening?" "A revolution!" he shouts back. "A revolution, Mrs. Maléter!"

And Maria Maléter, whose army colonel husband has divorced her three years ago at the behest of this regime, decides to walk back home over the Chain Bridge, against the human torrent, after all.²⁷

For Communism in Hungary the disaster has already, imperceptibly, occurred. The people have found that what sociologists call "inter-personal relationships" are possible again.²⁸ They have publicly gathered, spontaneously talked, interacted, smiled, marched side by side. "This was the first demonstration I was not *forced* to take part in," a sixteen-year-old will explain.

Marching next to them they have found many strangers, but also neighbours and workmates, faces they have known but never really trusted. Now there is an identity of purpose, an inaudible euphoric hum. As they march, they talk, they become as brothers. They aren't marching for Poland's sake at all but for their own, for the right to be free, to form such associations as they choose, and to think the thoughts and write the prose and poetry of free men and women. Woe betide any man who now sets his hand against them!

This fissile, ungovernable, seething crowd is beginning to radiate a power of its own. Twenty, fifty, seventy thousand: still the "critical mass" has not been reached, the dazzling explosion has not occurred. Nobody knows just where that point will lie. "We have no real plans, we have no definite leadership," is how one marcher describes this moment.²⁹ "In every little group the leader of the movement seems to be the man with the loudest voice. We are moving. We know one thing – we can't go home. Something must happen here. We don't know *what*, but we can't go home any more."

23 Nagy Smells a Rat

HIGH ABOVE THE river a late luncheon party at the Egyptian embassy on János Hill is interrupted by the sounds floating up from the embankment. It is like a mighty shuffling of multitudes. The diplomats look inquisitively at each other, then at their host. He folds his napkin and leads them out on to the terrace to see what is happening. It is a stupendous spectacle: two bridges crossing the Danube are blocked by immense, shambling throngs converging on Parliament Square. Fabrizio Franco, the dapper Italian envoy, speaks for all of them: “I’ve never seen so many people together before – and certainly never in Hungary.”¹

The tens of thousands also know that they are making history. Most of them are tramping across the bridge nearest to Parliament, the temporary Kossuth Bridge thrown across the Danube after 1945. A glow of pride and fear stirs inside Imre Nagy’s leading supporters. As they march down Buda’s Fő utca (High Street), Géza Losonczy clutches Nicholas Vásárhelyi by the arm and nods meaningfully towards the gaunt stone prison building on their right, the notorious military prison where they have both spent tortured months of incarceration.² Both men will live to see its cells again.

Another section of the never-ending mass chooses the Margaret Bridge; newsreels show the demonstrators marching slowly, twenty-five abreast, and no longer linking arms. There are Party workers distributing bundles of leaflets urging calm and telling everybody to listen to Gerő’s broadcast at eight, but nobody is reading them. The original printed placards have been cast aside. This multitude wants more than trite references to Hungarian-Polish friendship. Only one fif-

teen-foot wide printed banner is still visible, carried by the stolid Communist organisers of the pageant, unaware of the shift of mood in the hundred thousand heads behind them.

What little traffic there is has become wedged solid in this slow-flowing tide. Fingering the window curtains in a black limousine sits the Soviet ambassador, his silvery hair swept back above features of almost feminine delicacy.³ Behind the rimless spectacles his face is contorted with ill-controlled anger. The mob has recognised the fender-pennant and is yelling anti-Soviet slogans. "Down with the Stalin statue!" "Soviet troops go home, and take the Stalin statue with you!" Police-Colonel Kopácsi steps forward, salutes, and helps the limousine to escape.

On the bridges, too, traffic is at a standstill. Bus driver Zoltán Szabó, twenty-five, resigns himself to reaching the Pasaréti Avenue depot late.⁴ In the Party's eyes he is a kulak; he has not been able to go to university like the thousands of students swirling past his cab, he has been assigned to a labour battalion instead of military service. In fact he has plans to leave Hungary this coming Saturday with two bus-driver pals, Baron Gábor Josika and Joseph Sándor. But right now he is trapped in his No. 39 bus, watching the endless human torrent flow past. It will be six thirty p.m. by the time his No. 39 crawls into the depot, and on the next run to the town centre after that he will find the bridge still blocked and impassable.

As the marchers cross the Danube with its sobering view of Parliament, the chanting gradually subsides. Small groups attempt to resume the slogan chanting, but others hiss them into silence. "The mood," one student architect will later say, "was one of nervous, fearful anticipation. It was too late to be afraid."⁵

As they march past the Red Star printing works, a copy of the student demands is thrown up to the print workers leaning out of the windows: "That's the last copy we have!" Ten minutes later bundles of the leaflets are thrown out, with the ink still sticky, and are carried triumphantly onwards to Parliament Square.⁶

Some people now leave, because they have seen all they want to see. Others have homes or families to go to. It is six p.m. when a typical student gets home and tells his parents that he has been in a real demonstration.⁷ He will relate: "I felt I had been an eye-witness to an historic moment in the history of Hungary.

I felt exhilarated.” That evening he idly tunes in to Radio Free Europe, but the Munich newscasters are lagging behind the rush of events. His father is despondent: “Do you think the Russians are going to turn a blind eye on all this?”

Two hundred thousand humans are now glaring at the cheerless façade of the Hungarian Parliament on Kossuth Square. Professor Kosáry, who has arrived here from the Bem statue with fellow academics of the philosophy faculty, eloquently terms it a “darkness of people” covering the square. Soon he is quite lost and separated from his colleagues. The multitude spills over the stone pavements, tramples the lawns and clings to the plinths of the monuments. Nobody seems to know what will happen next. The building’s windows are blank and darkened, the ceremonial doors are locked. Loud-speaker horns erected all round the square remain mute. A stupefying wait begins.

As daylight turns to dusk the full-throated chanting begins again.

Some men divine and stand in awe of what is about to happen. At the *Free People* building Oscar Betlen, the unloved outgoing deputy editor, has cleared his desk and advised his closer friends to get out while they still can.⁸ Belated security measures are being taken quietly around the main government and Party buildings. By twos and fours ÁVH reinforcements are slipped into key buildings. An ÁVH major arrives at the radio building with a whole company of security troops.⁹ Advance news is telephoned to the building of crowds heading that way. By six p.m. the narrow street outside is so crowded that access is all but impossible.

The defence ministry also takes precautions to prevent arms falling into the wrong hands. Arsenal are double-locked, ammunition boxes are stowed away. Up at his office on Castle Hill Colonel Paul Maléter decides to put through a call to the George Kilián Barracks, a massive building on the corner of Üllői Road and the Outer Boulevard, where two labour battalions have been billeted since the summer along with several hundred homeless workers.¹⁰ Maléter is in command of a brigade of these troops: they are used largely as a reservoir of manpower for coalmines or construction projects. The troops have arms only for guard duties, and have received little weapon training. Still, around six p.m., Maléter telephones the barracks’ commander, Captain Louis Csiba, and orders him to call in all weapons and lock them away.

The crowds are still packing into Parliament Square. Now they are chanting the name of Imre Nagy. Nothing that the funkies can do will persuade them to disperse. The square is plunged into contemptuous darkness as a hidden hand switches off the street lights.¹¹ Somebody rolls a newspaper and lights it. With a rustle, like a spreading grass fire in summer, other torches are lit. In this guttering torchlight the building becomes a medieval castle under siege.

"It was an unforgettably beautiful moment," a student concert pianist will say. "One felt a kind of 'cosmic shiver', one clearly knew that history was in the making and at the same time it happened to be aesthetically the most beautiful tableau."¹²

"Imre Nagy, show yourself!" thunders the crowd. The roar rattles windows all round the square. But even if he could now swoop across the square in a purple cape and settle bat-like on that main balcony, there is little that Imre Nagy can say that will still the crowd's growing thirst for rude action against their disdainful masters, deemed to be lurking inside these very walls.

The red star, mounted three hundred feet above the square, clicks tactlessly into light. The crowd choruses: "Down with the red star!" After a while the light is extinguished. Another small victory. Now the crowd starts new refrains: "The government must resign!" and "Let's hear Imre Nagy!" One galvanising speech from their hero, and this multitude will follow Nagy to the ends of the earth.¹³

An hour or more passes. Peter Veres, Tibor Déry, Géza Losonczy, Nicholas Vásárhelyi are just scattered molecules in this ferment. Ernest Pongráz, a young worker who has hurried from his workplace to the square, asks Veres impatiently: "Why doesn't somebody go in and demand that they do something?"¹⁴

Veres nods importantly. "Good idea. You try. And if you find somebody for us to talk to, come back and tell us."

The young worker hammers on the main door until it opens. An official asks brusquely what he wants. The young man replies that he wants to see the prime minister, Hegedüs.

"He's not in," is the reply, "but Francis Erdei may be willing to receive two of you."

He turns on his heel, and Pongráz and a student follow him in. Upstairs, Pongráz recommends to Deputy Prime Minister Erdei that a flag with the Communist emblem removed should be unfurled in front of the building. Erdei

willingly agrees to this and also to switch on the lights inside, so that the immense crowd can know that the building is occupied – a further small concession.

Meanwhile the Party's evening newspaper *Evening Budapest (Esti Budapest)* has appeared. It omits the most important of the demands: the demand for a Russian withdrawal, the removal of the Stalin statue and a halt to uranium deliveries to the Soviet Union.¹⁵ Tired of being short-changed, several students decide to take the complete list to the radio building to demand its publication.

The nervous excitement is contagious. By six p.m. huge crowds are milling round the main boulevards and Rákóczi Street. Lines of driverless and abandoned trams have been shunted together along Lenin Boulevard. Back at the Pasaréti Avenue depot, bus driver Zoltán Szabó has a busload of students who refuse to get off. The students haggle with the despatcher and insist that every available bus be used for ferrying demonstrators to the town centre. The depot's Party men do not approve, but while they are still arguing there is a diesel roar as buses are started up and rumble out with students at the wheel. Szabó joins the convoy, and the other drivers, no friends of the regime, follow his example. A student jumps aboard: "Make for the radio building!"

The crowds on Parliament Square are still shouting for Imre Nagy to make a speech. Journalist Peter Erdős also decides to go to the radio building for a loudspeaker van. He asks the driver of a small van to take him there. The driver just says, "Of course." It is indicative of the pent-up emotions being released that the driver never even asks who he is or why he is going to the radio. Erdős tries to give him a tip, but he refuses to take it. There is something strange, unreal, dreamlike about it all. In Alexander Bródy Street there is already a crowd of young people, evidently fascinated by the unwonted spectacle of milling crowds and security troops. As yet the radio's entrance gates are still open and Erdős is let in.

Thirty miles from all these events, at about six p.m., American diplomat Giza Katona has to ease his foot off the accelerator and brake hard.¹⁶ He and his wife Wally are returning from a shopping outing to Vienna; they need these escapes from their monastic existence in the American legation in Budapest. A woman of about thirty-five is flagging them down.

"I'm trying to get to Budapest," she apologises. "The buses seem to be snagged somewhere. None are running out of Budapest and none are heading in."

She turns out to be a minor Party official. In his mirror Katona can see her frowning as they enter the capital's suburbs. There is something odd going on. The closer Katona gets to the centre the denser the crowds grow, but the people are moving in the wrong direction for this time of day – towards the city centre.

His own flat is near City Park. He parks the car, climbs the stairs, and unlatches the door. His youngsters are playing, and his cook is brewing some hot soup. He snaps on the radio and turns up the volume, because the crowd-sounds from the park are growing louder. The tumult seems to be coming from Stalin Square, the big open space on the park fringe dominated by the hated Stalin statue.

Across the town in the Parliament building, muted officials stand around in frightened knots, listening to the thunder from the crowd outside. Ernest Pongrátz, the young workman, has suggested telephoning Imre Nagy. Francis Erdei has agreed, but it is taking some time to find the number.

"I'm down in Parliament, Uncle Imre," apologises the minister. "The building's under siege by demonstrators. They're demanding to hear you!"

The crowd's earlier gaiety is evaporating. Deputy premier Joseph Mekis and Francis Erdei attempt to speak to the sea of faces from the balcony. Their words are lost in the whistles and catcalls. Pongrátz himself tries, but fares no better. A section of the crowd begins shouting: "Let's all go to the radio building!"¹⁷

That makes sense. Geró's broadcast will shortly begin; perhaps the Party leader is inside the building now.

Such long frustrating waits are fateful in a revolution. The fluid mass of people undergoes imperceptible changes. But it is from such an angry mood as this that the popular revolt begins. Dr. Paul Zinner – author of a standard work, *National Communism and Popular Revolt* – will call it intriguing that the revolt occurred at all: "It shattered a long-standing myth which held that revolutions in totalitarian systems were impossible." How can an unarmed people overthrow a ruling élite that is alert to this very danger and controls all the means of coercion? What is happening this evening is certainly unplanned and unpremeditated, and yet it does not come from nowhere.

It is an unruly crowd. Less than a quarter are students. Women are in the majority, the older ones being particularly vocal in their anti-Russian slogans. A

highly-paid university-trained engineer finds himself shouting alongside women with pensions of perhaps only 260 florins.¹⁸ Sensing coming trouble, he phones his wife and suggests she comes too. “It’s the children’s bedtime,” she reproaches him. “You’d better come home.” There is a note of anxiety in her voice, and he obeys.

In Imre Nagy’s villa in Orsó Avenue, there is a stream of visitors – Losonczy and Haraszi are among them – and people keep telephoning for him to go down to Parliament. “My father did not want to get involved,” his daughter will describe. “He had only come back to Budapest to meet Imre Mező that morning . . . Later there was a telephone call from the Politburo member Valeria Benke, pleading with my father to come down to Parliament Square. She was one of those who had supported Imre Nagy within the leadership in 1953 and 1954 . . .”¹⁹

Among those who arrive at the villa is George Fazekas. He is a former Moscow-trained partisan and well-known journalist who fell foul of Rákosi in 1954, and was expelled from the Party and demoted to tram conductor, although the Party had not even trusted him to take a tram out into the streets. He had been in bed for a week with pneumonia, and only left the hospital at eleven A.M. this morning; Imre Nagy had twice visited him there bearing welcome bottles of cognac. While being driven home, Fazekas saw the excitement in the streets, and early in the afternoon he decided to come up to Uncle Imre’s villa. There is a constant coming and going, and there are delegations of young people and writers like Peter Veres and Tibor Déry. Nagy can hear people chanting slogans and poems outside the villa and shouting his name. He tries to remain composed, but a feeling of agitation is overcoming him.²⁰

Down near Parliament Square, the writer Thomas Aczél has driven through the crowd flashing his press card and parked his Škoda. He finds the veteran Korean War reporter Tibor Méray and other Party journalists huddled in a worried cluster. As the crowd’s fever rises, the blood in the veins of these Communist stalwarts begins to turn to ice. “Somebody had better fetch the Old Man here – fast,” shouts Méray above the din. Aczél runs to where he has parked his Škoda, and drives off to get Imre Nagy.²¹ At No. 41, Orsó Avenue he finds the Old Man already surrounded by his acolytes. Nagy looks tired. Voices are urging: “You must go down there immediately!” But Nagy is still obviously hesitant.

Aczél says: “For God’s sake, why wait? If you don’t set out immediately, something awful’s going to happen. You may already be too late!”

“Late?” snaps Nagy. “Too late? For what?”

Aczél cannot answer: none of them has been through an evening like this before, nobody can predict how it will end. That a country of ten millions cannot shake its fist for long at a neighbour of 200 millions is obvious: but perhaps Nagy’s statesmanship and cunning can salvage something from the mob energy fireballing in Parliament Square.

The telephone keeps ringing. Several calls come from Halász, secretary of the Cabinet, pleading with Nagy to come and speak. George Fazekas tries to talk Nagy out of going down to the square. The whole situation is too volatile. What can an Imre Nagy offer such a crowd? He is no demagogue. “Let the men who have whipped up mob feelings clear up the mess first, and then step in to take control!”

Nagy asks, “But what are we to do now, then?”

Fazekas replies, “Let’s go down to the cellar! You’ve food and wine – we can lie low until the hue and cry dies down and *then* we start negotiating!”

Sandwiches are brought in, drinks are handed round, and Imre Nagy vanishes upstairs. He has decided to compose a speech in writing. That is the way a disciplined Party man would act.

After a while he comes downstairs, calls for silence, and reads it out. One minor alteration is suggested and agreed. Shortly, Halász arrives in the presidential car to drive Nagy down to Parliament Square. Nagy is visibly nervous. His wife asks Fazekas and her son-in-law Jánosi to join him in the back of the car: “Don’t let him out of your sight!” she begs.

The car is a Russian-built Zim, as black and big as a Mafia staff car. Even so it is still a tight fit for the three men in the back: Fazekas, hunched against one window to prevent any would-be assassin’s bullets from hitting Uncle Imre; Jánosi, and the equally portly Imre Nagy. Halász sits in front with the driver. As they drive down through the patchwork lanes of Buda, Nagy cannot see much. It is now completely dark. As they cross the river lorries rattle past crowded with people shouting slogans. Nagy has never seen anything like it and begins to fear for his life. He clutches his notes tightly. The bridge itself is snowed with trampled leaflets and discarded placards, like the debris of a passing army.

That army is now drawn up on Parliament Square and waiting for its leader.²² Nagy frowns as his eyes focus on an unfamiliar flag, mutilated by a hole where the Communist emblem used to be.

“How big is the crowd?” he asks.

“Two hundred thousand,” guesses somebody.

Nagy’s eyes glaze. From Moscow during the war he must have broadcast to millions, but he has never spoken to live people before, only to drummed-up Party audiences. He mops at his brow with a silk handkerchief, glances at his gold Schaffhausen watch, and lapses into silence. After that nobody says a word until the car stops a hundred yards from Parliament’s main entrance. Here the crowd is so dense that they have to get out and walk. The two men press close to Nagy’s side. Others help them to jostle their way to the door: “Let them through! It’s Imre Nagy! He’s going to make a speech!”

Narrow as the borehole through which the spark reaches the gunpowder in a cannon, Alexander Bródy Street escapes the main boulevard, Museum Boulevard, and vanishes into a maze of other back streets. There are a few run-down shops behind rusting roller shutters: a hairdresser’s, a graveyard furniture store, a one-room cobbler. Barely twelve yards wide from wall to wall, Alexander Bródy Street is the kind that motorists avoid.

On the right is a four-storey brick building plastered to look like masonry. The half-windows at ankle level and the ground floor windows are covered by vertical steel grids. This is the radio building, centre of the national broadcasting system.²³

Few people who pause now, twenty-five years later, to fumble for identity passes in the dingy ten-foot-wide entrance tunnel, glance up at the memorial stone set into the wall to their right. It is topped with a quotation from Petőfi, and the inscription:

Homage to the heroes who gave their lives for the People’s Power in
Defence of the Radio building on October 23rd, 1956.

Colonel Ladislav Lukács

Lieutenant-Colonel József Fehér

Lieutenant-Colonel Gyula Kiss

Lieutenant-Colonel Ladislav Kovács
Lieutenant-Colonel Ladislav Mátya . . .

As radio journalist Peter Erdős hurries through this same tunnel, none of the forty-two people named on that tablet realise that the minutes have begun ticking away before the last battle of their lives.

Facing him across a quadrangle is a glass-walled pagoda-type structure used as a coffee shop by the radio staff. He runs upstairs to the director's offices. Valeria Benke's office is about fifteen feet square, and overlooks the pagoda. Low cupboards and shelves line the wall facing the window, and there is a long conference table in front of them. Her own desk is in a corner by the window, with a red telephone on a small table next to it. Next to this office is another room with a balcony overlooking Alexander Bródy Street, from where there is already a rising tumult.

Valeria Benke is in fact close to Nagy's way of thinking; she has attended the Petőfi Circle's famous press debate in June. But what do the hundreds jamming Alexander Bródy Street know or care about that? The teeming crowd has resumed its chanting, and in this narrow street it reverberates intimidatingly from the walls. A red flag is found and set on fire. Mrs. Benke steps out on to a balcony to ask the people what they want but her very first word, "Comrades", provokes angry shouts: "We are Hungarians!" Ruffled by the jeers, she steps back inside and ponders what to do next.

The mob is yelling: "Let's have a microphone out here in the street!"

Mrs. Benke and the guard commander agree to play for time by sending out a recording van to record the students' demands. But this crowd cannot be fooled. They shout to local inhabitants, "Switch your radios on! Let's hear if they really broadcast our demands!"

A young woman in a red coat recites their demands into the microphone. But the radio continues playing music, and the crowd shows that it is in no mood to be trifled with. The sound engineers and the ÁVH officer accompanying them barely escape back into the building. The more sympathetic radio journalists hovering behind the upper windows can see a young red-headed girl among the demonstrators, signalling up to them; but they are powerless to respond.

As Peter Erdős steps into Mrs. Benke's crowded room he recognises George Szepesi, the regime's favourite sports reporter and Francis Vészics, the chief of the radio secretariat. There are also five young men in plain clothes; he assumes that they are from the department responsible for short-wave foreign language broadcasting. They later turn out to be senior officials of the operations branch of the ministry of the interior, sent round to check internal security at the building.

At the conference table sit several "grey sectarians", Moscow veterans who were denied Rákosi's complete confidence, while still enjoying considerable power and prestige. One characteristic of these department chiefs is that when anybody asks about their life in exile in the Soviet Union, they become furtive, almost paranoid. Their consensus opinion is that an uprising like that at Poznan is in progress but that it, too, can be crushed. Their main concern is to avoid becoming scapegoats for all these highly improper scenes. Thus, as Peter Erdős walks in, all eyes fasten on him with something approaching relief. Word of who he is rapidly passes round the room: he is known to be a leading supporter of Imre Nagy. The ideal fall guy has arrived. Within ten minutes Erdős finds himself unofficial leader of the building.

He is still poised between Valeria Benke's desk and the conference table, when a round-faced, corpulent major with the green shoulder tabs of the ÁVH walks over to introduce himself as Major Ladislav Fehér, in charge of the building's security.

"I'm worried that the crowds outside may try to break in," says Fehér. "I'm trying to avoid violence at all costs. What is your advice?"

The grey veterans at the conference table interrupt: "Those people outside are hooligans, they're just a mob! The people, the Hungarian people, are with us!"

Fehér nudges Erdős, and murmurs, "Let's move away to where we can talk!" Almost as an aside he enquires, "Do you have any arms?"

"All I've got on me are my prison discharge papers!"

Ten minutes later Fehér returns with his personal 7.65 millimetre Walther automatic: "Take this."

Shortly after that the crowd spills through the entrance gate into the quadrangle. Security police force shut the tunnel gates, trapping a dozen people in the yard. A few minutes later a man comes into Mrs. Benke's office carrying several booklets in his hands. There is a puzzled look on his face. "These are the IDs of the young men we caught," he announces. "These men are all workers, men from the Lang machinery factory and the arms factory!"

At the same time there is another angry outburst between guards and demonstrators at the entrance gate. Valeria Benke decides to allow in a delegation to relieve the pressure. A dozen students and young toughs are led into the council chamber where she and Peter Erdős receive them seated at a long table.²⁴ They demand a microphone in the streets so that they can broadcast their list of demands.

"We will be willing to broadcast your Fourteen Points with certain modifications," says Mrs. Benke. "We have already broadcast similar resolutions adopted by University meetings this morning and last night. But we can't interrupt the programme. We'll include these points in our next news broadcast, or when we broadcast a report on the demonstration."

Erdős vehemently opposes the idea: "There is no guarantee that they will not say things that will confound every ideal of our movement. The Soviet Union is too strong to be openly provoked in this manner."

One of the rougher men in the deputation, evidently the ringleader, an ill-dressed middle-aged man with squint eyes, jumps to his feet: "We're not moving from outside until the radio is in the hands of the people," he shouts.

Erdős points out that the building is full of ÁVH men who will not hesitate to shoot.

The man retorts sullenly, "They are Hungarians like us, they won't shoot."

Erdős replies: "I know them better than you. They will."

While the argument continues, stones and bricks have begun to fly at the building. Rumours spread that the delegation has been forcibly detained, and when they try to emerge from the building the mob pelts them with stones too. Understandably the guards are reluctant to re-open the gates. Apart from the man with the squint most of the deputation is unable to get out. An ÁVH officer points out to Erdős, "Shouldn't we escort them outside? Otherwise we're going to be accused of holding them against their will."

It is significant that the thousands ramming into Alexander Bródy Street are primarily young people, age groups who have never seen battle or bloodshed. The middle-aged are still staying well clear. Typical of these is a gynaecologist at the city hospital.²⁵ He has behind him the same routine-weary day. A woman of forty-five has to be screened for breast cancer, she has feigned bashfulness in the bright clinic lights and joked: “Doctor, can’t we do this in the dark?” He has mechanically traded his standard reply: “We could, but we don’t call it screening for breast cancer then, comrade!”

This doctor is sophisticated, multifaceted, clear-sighted. But he has been up all night handling a difficult delivery. A girl student has just told him of this demonstration, and he goes along for a quick look. Then he hurries home to listen to Gerő on the radio. His wife gets home five minutes later. “The streets round the radio are crowded,” he tells her. “It smells of trouble, big trouble.”

By this time a frantically worried Imre Nagy has been hurried into the Parliament building. He can hear the crowd’s roar through the metre-thick stone walls. Francis Erdei pilots him towards a balcony on which a microphone had been installed. He and Fazekas each take one of Uncle Imre’s arms to prevent him accidentally toppling over the low balustrade. Next to them crouches Aaron Tóbiás, the radio journalist, ready to dictate a running commentary on to tape.

It is at this moment that something inexplicable happens: cars arrive down on the square with people shouting: “Everybody to the radio building,”²⁶ and, “The ÁVH has opened fire on the students!”²⁷ One girl student, Ildikó Lányi, is mistrustful, suspecting a typical Communist ploy to empty the square.²⁸ Historian Ladislav Szolnoki is also suspicious. He suspects that Gerő is deliberately provoking a Poznan-type uprising here to prove his own indispensability and settle Nagy’s hash once and for all. Szolnoki scrutinises the motor cars with loudspeakers as they inch through the crowds. They are proclaiming: “Hungarians are being slaughtered!” “Everybody to the radio!”²⁹

“Does anybody know who these characters are?” Szolnoki appeals, falling in beside one of the cars. Nobody does.

It is so dark now that the crowd in Parliament Square does not realise that among the handful of men who have stepped out on to the balcony is Imre

Nagy, the man they have been yelling for all day.³⁰ Then a bulb is switched on behind the balustrade, and the shouting dies away.

With an ocean of faces looking up at him Imre Nagy croaks into the grille of the microphone: “Comrades –”

Nothing happens. Somebody sees what is wrong and switches on the microphone. He repeats the salutation: “*Eltársak* –”

A deafening whistle goes up, like a cup-tie crowd blasting a footballer after an own-goal. Nagy is bewildered, furious. A section of the crowd helps him. “We aren’t comrades!”

He adjusts his pince-nez nervously and tries again: “Compatriots and friends!” The whistles turn to faint cheers. The multitudes savour this millimetre of concession – perhaps they can yet get him to pay out enough rope to hang himself and the entire regime.

Nagy continues with his prepared speech, but does not get to the end. “Good people, be patient,” is his message, “the Central Committee will take care of everything.”

The crowd is restive, disappointed. Clearly Nagy is no Louis Kossuth, he has no nose for the crowd, no lightning instinct. He asks them to sing the “Szózat”, a patriotic hymn by Michael Vörösmarty. It is not the Communist national anthem, another millimetre of concession. He asks them to go home quietly. But the crowd has found its muscle, and likes it. After the “Szózat” – “Hungarians, remain unflinching in your faith in Hungary!” – there are loud voices which defiantly announce: “We won’t go home. We’re staying together.”³¹

Nagy remains briefly on the balcony.

Even as he does so a young literary critic, Alexander Lukácsy, his thin moustache twitching, bursts in to the chamber behind him. “Aczél,” he gasps, “you must tell Nagy that the ÁVOs are shooting demonstrators!”

Down in the square a loudspeaker echoes the news: “To the radio building! The ÁVOs are shooting demonstrators.”

Nagy stumbles back inside, off the balcony. He realises only now just how precarious his perch has been. The crowd begins to disperse; his speech has been greeted by hostile silence. Nobody has applauded. In a small room he rests while a glass of water is fetched.

“We must go about things now in a correct way,” he finally says. “Correct” – that means volunteering his services to the Central Committee.

Over at the radio, the crisis point is approaching. Thousands more are wedging into Alexander Bródy Street and the whole Boulevard is swarming with people, attracted by the rumours of a gunfight. The roadway is covered with broken bricks; there is a house being built on the street corner. The bricks have been thrown at ÁVH reinforcements trying to reach the radio building. The crowd has grabbed the abandoned outside broadcast van and begun hurling it like a battering ram against the locked oak gates.³²

Even though Mrs. Benke’s room is on the courtyard side of the Alexander Bródy Street wing, the mob sounds are deafening. Someone has got to speak to the crowd. Imre Nagy refuses to come, but by telephone Valeria Benke manages to trace Nagy’s right-hand man, Géza Losonczy, to the New York Palace. Losonczy has just arrived there with Vásárhelyi from Parliament Square; the office of their newspaper *Hungarian Nation* is in the building. Losonczy agrees to come straight round to the radio building; he will bring Vásárhelyi with him. It is shortly after seven p.m. as radio employees smuggle the two men in through the rear entrance in Museum Street. Later Zoltán Szántó joins them: he is a Central Committee member.

Mrs. Benke pleads: “Comrade Losonczy, you must speak to the crowd, you must calm them down!” Losonczy tries to explain that this is the kind of crowd that nobody can calm down without meeting its demands – at least partially. He steps out on to the balcony, takes one brave look at the bellowing human herd below and retreats hastily, followed by a shower of bricks.

“Let’s have a look at those points,” he says.

At this moment the main gates are again burst in. The courtyard is filled with shouting as every available guard rushes forward to block the ten-foot width of the entrance gateway, until they are standing shoulder to shoulder and ten deep. Then, using brute force, chains, rifle butts, and tear-gas, they bundle the invaders out into the street again and drag the outside broadcast van into the courtyard. The building’s defenders have begun throwing tear-gas canisters, but the gas drifts back in and Losonczy’s eyes are red-rimmed. A telephone call alerts Mrs.

Benke to the fact that now insurgents are threatening the building from the Michael Pollák Square side as well.

The situation is growing ugly. Petrol bottles are tossed into first-floor rooms, and the furniture in one room catches fire. Mrs. Benke's staff telephone the fire brigade, but no fire engine comes: some thin garden hose and the building's leaky and rotten fire hose are reeled out and both are turned on over the entrance. The crowd grabs them and slashes them to ribbons. Suddenly Peter Erdős hears the rattle of gunfire and sees a man near the main entrance tunnel pointing a rifle at the sky. "Blanks," Major Fehér assures him. "Those are blanks." Erdős asks, "But will they know that in the next street?"

The mob here has begun shouting for Imre Nagy too, and several of the radio staff are nodding vigorous agreement. This time it is Losonczy who telephones the Old Man and begs him to come and quieten the mob. From Losonczy's crestfallen look they can see that Nagy has not the slightest intention of speaking. Party discipline will not permit it. Losonczy thanks him: "Yes, Uncle Imre, I understand." Losonczy replaces the phone and explains that Nagy is reluctant to come unless the Party asks him to. Evidently Nagy suspects some kind of trap.

24 Violence in a Narrow Street

AT THE FOREIGN desk on the second floor of the *Daily Express* in London there was jubilation, then consternation as the voice of Sefton Delmer, chief foreign affairs reporter, came through from Budapest with his well-earned scoop.¹ Deputy foreign editor James Nicoll, five-foot-six of mild-mannered Scottish professionalism, scurried across the main editorial floor to the back bench where Edward Pickering was managing editor: “We’re all right, Pick. We’ve got Tom Delmer on the blower and he’s started dictating his stuff.” Pickering, a tall, hawk-like figure, looked up over the glasses perched on his beaky nose, and grunted appreciation.

Nicoll was quietly pleased with himself. To have beaten the world’s press to the story was a great feat of instinct by Delmer. He picked his way back through the sixty-odd sub-editors, messengers and newsmen who operated this room and got to his own desk at the far end just in time to see the telephone reporter emerging from his soundproof box and snapping his pad shut. (The calls were taken down in shorthand and also recorded on old-fashioned wax cylinders.)

Nicoll screamed. “Good God, have you been cut off?”

“No, Mr. Delmer said to phone him back later!”

“Oh, Jesus!” wailed Nicoll and buried his head in his hands.

“Telephone him back! Hold the line open! Tell him we’re holding the front page.”

But the lines to Budapest had gone dead. Desperate calls went out to other capitals – Geneva, Rome, New York. Cable and Wireless confirmed that the land circuit for cables from Hungary was also dead. From Vienna, Lawrence

Davis told them Delmer had dined with him there the night before, but had not even asked for his phone number. So there was no hope that Delmer would try telephoning the rest of his story to Vienna. That was when Nicoll remembered Sydney Gruson, the *New York Times* man in Prague. Gruson's wife Flora had worked for the *Express* long before in Mexico City. Nicoll called her.

"We're up to our eyes in it ourselves," she said. "But there's a little man here called Francis Polak, he works for Press-Wireless." That was a company which hired post office circuits and rehired them to newspapers. "His number's Prague double-two double-six double-eight," added Flora.

Nicoll beamed. He phoned Polak: "Get Delmer on the line, call me back and phone it through in short bits as you go."

That night Polak would become the vital link between one of the great newspapers of the world, its star reporter, and the biggest news story of the year.

Word of the mounting drama outside the radio building flashed like sheet lightning across Budapest. In the drab everyday of Hungary this was something for the ordinary people to see and savour, perhaps even join in.

The news reached Professor Ladislav Blücher at his girlfriend's flat.² They threw on coats and hurried over to Alexander Bródy Street together. There were rumours that a student delegation was being held inside. ÁVH guards were nervously standing by. A police cruise-car and a fire-engine had arrived, but the police good-naturedly showed that their guns were not loaded.

Young journalist Matthias Sárközi had been sent out by editor Ivan Boldizsár to cover the day's demonstrations.³ Finding the atmosphere in Alexander Bródy Street oppressive, he invited himself into a third-floor flat that gave him a good view. Towards eight p.m. Boldizsár sent twenty-three-year-old reporter Stephen Vajda over to Alexander Bródy Street as well.⁴ Vajda had a little green Opel Kadett, registration CA-319, a saloon car which had evidently once belonged to Rommel's army: it had a tag in it, "Army service depot Benghazi". Vajda parked as close as he could to the shouting, and stepped into the health office on the corner of Szentkirályi Street and Alexander Bródy Street. He produced his press card and asked the woman on duty: "Can I use your phone? What's happened so far?" The woman stuttered nervously: "A to-do! A to-do!"

Vajda phoned a bulletin through to Boldizsár: “It’s eight p.m., chief. There’s a big crowd packing the streets around here and there’s a big to-do in front of the radio building.”

“Keep watch!” said Boldizsár.

A few yards from where Vajda was standing, on the first floor overlooking the radio building courtyard, Mrs. Valeria Benke reminded the officials in her office that it was time to hear Gerő’s broadcast. The radio in one corner was turned on.

Gerő’s mellifluous voice oozed from the loudspeaker. The actual language used was regarded by a few as “quite conciliatory”.⁵ To others, Gerő’s fifteen-minute broadcast was all just the usual Marxist claptrap which had been uttered hundreds of times before without inciting riots. It was bricked together with the usual mortar of meaningless phrases like “peasant-worker alliance” and “Party unity” no less than six times in one paragraph! At one stage he mystifyingly announced: “We are waging a constant fight against chauvinism, anti-Semitism and all other reactionary, anti-social and inhuman trends and views.”

Gerő blamed the current unrest on the “lies spread by enemy circles”. He denounced those who would loosen the country’s ties with the Soviet Union, and he reaffirmed the bonds existing between “our Party and the glorious Communist Party of the Soviet Union – the Party of Lenin, the Party of the Twentieth Congress”. He would go no further than promise that the Central Committee would meet “in the very near future” and would offer plans for “continuing to march unerringly down the road to democratic socialism”.

The speech ended abruptly. There was consternation in Mrs. Benke’s office, as a full forty-five minutes had been allocated for the speech.

“And now some dance music,” soothed the announcer.

Few people heard the speech in full. It was not designed either to pour oil on troubled waters or, for that matter, to pour oil on the flames. But the excitable public willingly believed every rumour and Gerő’s speech lost nothing in the re-telling. One quite educated man would later claim: “We could hear it from the radio sets in the different apartments in the street – only a few fragments, but we later understood that Gerő had called the crowd a ‘mob’, and this incensed

the public even more.”⁶ Loud voices announced that Gerő had called the demonstrators a “counter-revolutionary rabble” – true Marxists are hurt more by the adjective than the noun – and even “fascists” and “vermin”.

Nagy’s group were appalled at the presumptuous, insolent, deprecating, belittling tone of Gerő’s speech.⁷ Somebody snapped off the radio in Valeria Benke’s office. Vásárhelyi now recalls: “Mrs. Benke, Szántó and we ourselves were unanimous that there was nothing more that could be done. We would have to wait and see what happened.” Géza Losonczy spoke: “It would have been better if he hadn’t broadcast at all.” The plainclothes ÁVH officials were furious: one burst out: “This was precisely the way they did it in Spain!” (There had always been talk that the various factions had been deliberately incited against each other so that they liquidated each other.⁸)

Just eight minutes after Gerő’s broadcast the dance music was interrupted: “To correct a mistake: it is within the *next few days* that the Central Committee will meet.”

Valeria Benke blessed small mercies: she blessed the chaos which had prevented the mob in Alexander Bródy Street from hearing Gerő’s speech. Now she suggested that they broadcast to the crowd the words spoken by Imre Nagy at Parliament. A loudspeaker was rigged up over the belligerent street, and sports reporter George Szepesi went on to the balcony: “I’m going to read to you the words that Imre Nagy has just spoken to the youth gathered outside the Houses of Parliament.”

A hush fell on the street. Szepesi began: “Young people! My friends!” He got no further. The mob began to jeer and smashed the loudspeaker. One thing seemed certain: they were out for more than just words. A car had been set on fire, and the smoke from its tyres lingered luridly round the street, mingling with the shoulder-high swathes of tear-gas like a stage fog. The mood was one of triumph. People felt they had got the regime on the run, they felt immortal. Politburo member Zoltán Szántó nervously begged Mrs. Benke to send again for reinforcements. The ÁVH Major Fehér could see disaster coming and demanded reinforcements. Colonel Nicholas Orbán, the city’s ÁVH chief, was unnerved to hear from him that many uniformed police and army officers were in the mob.

Peter Erdős was desperate to cool the tempers flaring in the street. Valeria Benke asked him if he would like to speak to the crowd from the balcony. He fared no better. With the loudspeaker smashed, he could not make himself heard above the tumult. He shouted that he was a member of the Petőfi Circle leadership, but nobody paid any heed. Finally he took out the letter electing him to the Circle and threw it down into the street. The letter was passed from hand to hand and a relative silence settled. He began, "All the elements that have been combating Stalinism in Hungary have triumphed!" and he continued briefly in this vein. "So everybody should go home!" he concluded.

This unleashed fresh screams of protest, followed by a fresh hail of bricks. It was his least successful public appearance ever, Erdős wryly reflected, and fled back into Mrs. Benke's office.

After that Géza Losonczy and Tibor Pethő – founder of the newspaper *Hungarian Nation* – said their goodbyes to Mrs. Benke and got out of the doomed building while they could, leaving through the rear door in Museum Street. Nicholas Vásárhelyi, who had once been vice-president of the radio and knew his way around the labyrinth, paused for a look round, then followed them into the back streets.

The mob in Alexander Bródy Street began to rampage. There was the crash of broken glass as windows were smashed. Professor Blücher saw signal flares rocket aloft from the building's roof. New rumours spread that one member of the student delegation had been shot. One journalist claims to have found himself trampling on loose machine-gun bullets.⁹ The first ÁVH men were injured. Somebody began throwing thunderflashes, and these exploded with sharp rifle-like cracks in the narrow street. Shadows began scaling the window gratings to the upper floors. Raucous voices yelled encouragement: "Seize the radio!" Fehér ordered Alexander Bródy Street to be cleared. His ÁVH troops charged, and threw the mob back to Szentkirályi Street and Pushkin Street, holding their rifles sideways with fixed bayonets. They set up a cordon around the corner. The mob retreated, but kicked out savagely at them and tripped them as they ran. The next time they charged the ÁVH was loosing off rifle shots into the air.¹⁰

On Parliament Square, it was an uncomfortable situation. "There was an unbelievable feeling of expectancy and tension in me," said a university student of twenty, "people were so excited."¹¹

Among the men still lingering on Parliament Square, journalist Peter Kende caught sight of George Litván, the teacher who had challenged Rákosi to stand down some months before at Angel Fields.¹²

Litván looked worried: "What on earth is this?"

Kende, his mind on France's bloody history, replied: "*C'est une révolte! Non, c'est une révolution!*"

Inside the Parliament building that ominous word was also being used to the vacillating Imre Nagy. Thomas Aczél heard someone reproaching him: "Why are you hesitating? This is a *revolution!*"¹³

The crowd in the square had begun to thin out, lured to the radio by the pied pipers in their loudspeaker cars still proclaiming: "They're killing the university students!" Kende heard rumours that the ÁVH was using tear-gas, and the thought did cross his mind: "Suppose the ÁVH is spreading these rumours just to get us here to disperse!"

But he decided to catch a bus to the New York Palace instead, to look for his friends Losonczy and Vásárhelyi. The bus was bogged down in the milling crowds and it took him an hour to get to the building. By then lorry-loads of workers would be rattling past, making for the radio and shouting: "There's a pitched battle at the radio, everybody come with us!"

The air inside and outside the radio building was acrid and explosive. Tear-gas wafted into the open-windowed flats filled with onlookers. An excited shout went up from near the entrance: "Szakasits is here!" Anybody who had been jailed by Rákosi was a hero, even a renegade like Árpád Szakasits.

At about eight fifteen p.m. ÁVH reinforcements arrived in Szentkirályi Street; Stephen Vajda, watching from the health office on the corner, saw them drive up in half a dozen¹⁴ three-ton Csepels and park. Forty armed troops sat in each lorry, identifiable as ÁVH by their blue shoulder tabs, their peaked caps and their Kalashnikovs with 72-shot drums. People began taunting the newcomers.

"Are you Hungarians?" jeered one man.

“Go on – shoot us!” challenged another and bared his chest melodramatically.

Their commander was edgy. On his shoulder tabs he had the three stars and gold braid of a colonel. He purpled with annoyance and snapped an order to his drivers to turn round. Willing hands man-handled the Csepels round in the narrow street. The lorries slunk off out of sight.

Vajda jubilantly phoned Boldizsár, and then his wife: “Eva, something fantastic’s just happened. The ÁVH turned up and were forced to scarper.”

Eva answered: “This I’ve got to see! Come back and fetch me.”

Elsewhere in the city life went on, unaware that death was about to pull on its leather boots and stomp down Alexander Bródy Street.

The radio was still putting out music, Vivaldi’s “Four Seasons”.

In the “Gólyavár”, one of the University’s big lecture theatres, the Petőfi Circle had opened a doctors’ debate: Professor Anthony Babics, the famous urologist, was admitting that Rákosi’s police chief Gábor Péter had been his intimate friend and was actually arrested in his flat.¹⁵ Professor Stephen Ruzsnyák, President of the Academy, was obliged to concede that, yes, it was he who signed the medical certificate which had enabled the Politburo to get rid of Imre Nagy in February 1955. A long technical discussion had begun between the army and ÁVH doctors on medical aspects of forced confessions. One doctor who had been a prisoner of the ÁVH declared that drugging was not really necessary, physical methods alone could soften any prisoner.

It is now eight forty-five p.m.

All the still unwitting victims are now gathered in Alexander Bródy Street, inside the radio building or on the street outside. Professor Blücher and his girlfriend are in the front ranks. Stephen Vajda has just returned with his wife Eva and is about to park his Opel Kadett.

Third-year Polytechnic student Erika has just arrived with her friends; she left Parliament Square around seven p.m., tired of waiting for Imre Nagy, and went to the University canteen.¹⁶ Walking home with friends after supper, she had heard Gerő’s voice floating from the open windows. Then they heard about this hostile crowd massing at the radio. People tell them the latest rumour: “A

delegation is still inside.” ÁVH troops have set up cordons, and there are more lorries edging into side streets, packed with armed men. Erica stays, chanting the crowd’s slogans and taunting the security police.

Suddenly, security police debouch from the building’s entrance tunnel and open fire. Perhaps they are aiming high, nobody waits to find out. For two minutes or more their tommy guns stutter and snap. Professor Blücher staggers as he runs, and thinks he hears screams. He puts out his hand to drag his girlfriend into a doorway. But her hair is wet – she has a bullet in the head. Another woman shot through one eye dies at his feet. A young boy is writhing on the ground, clutching his stomach. As for Erika, the last images imprinted on her memory are of running stragglers, of lurching shadows, of scattered bodies and of the gunmen still bearing down on her. She hears her friends screaming to her from a nearby doorway, and she is scrambling towards them when she, too, is dropped by a bullet in the head. Alexander Bródy Street is suddenly empty of the living, and lit only by the green glare of dying smoke bombs.

The Rókus hospital is only one block away. It sends two ambulances at once, but ÁVH officers refuse to let them into Alexander Bródy Street for fifteen or twenty minutes.¹⁷ The dead and wounded are stacked in them like sardines. Erika will be operated on before midnight. Professor Blücher’s girlfriend finds herself propped with three other gunshot casualties next to the driver; unwilling to be parted from her, the professor clings grimly to a fender as the ambulance U-turns in front of the radio and drives off. He has an impression of grinning faces as he leaves.

Reporter Stephen Vajda had just come back in his Opel Kadett as the firing broke out. He glanced automatically at his watch; eight forty-five. Before he could get his car safely out of the way, people were banging on his roof and shouting, “Don’t go, we’ve got a casualty!”

Four men manhandled a badly-injured young man into the back seat. Vajda had done a story on a big emergency hospital, the Koltói hospital, two weeks earlier. As he drove off towards it, he shouted to the figure slumped on the back seat: “What happened?”

“They opened fire on us. We took to our heels, but I caught it in both legs from behind.”

“Are you bleeding badly?”

The young man nodded. His blood was pumping out over the back seat. Vajda asked: “Where are you from?”

“The Red Star tractor factory,” grunted the man.

Over at Stalin Square the mob had still not had its way with the grinning statue. Laughter gusted across the park, as somebody hung a placard on the dictator’s bronze chest with a crude slogan: “Russians, when you start to flee – I beg of you, forget not me!”¹⁸

The statue had been sturdily built on the site of the Catholic Regnum Marianum church blitzed in the war, a twenty-five-foot Hungarian bronze monument to their own enslavement, cannibalised from the bronze statues of all Hungary’s kings and queens. A medical student in a white shirt had climbed the statue and noosed the first ropes round Stalin’s neck. The ropes had snapped, and he was still up there, leering down at them from his thirty-foot pedestal of red limestone. Somebody hooted: “Toss him a wristwatch, he’ll stoop soon enough!”

An army radio officer of twenty-eight shouted: “You’ll never do it by pulling. You need heavy trucks and cutting gear.”¹⁹ An architect realised it was going to be a long night: “I went home, had dinner, and changed my shoes,” he later recalled.²⁰ By the time he returned, young Daniel Szegő, an engineer with a seven-month-old daughter, had arrived at the square with oxy-acetylene burning gear and was starting to cut through the statue just above the dictator’s bronze jackboots.

A mile away across the park, American diplomat Gaza Katona stepped out of his flat, attracted by the shapeless babble – like a mass of people streaming out of a football ground – and saw crowds hurrying down Voroshilov Road towards the statue. The policeman guarding the Swiss legation next door was shaking his head and murmuring: “It’s incredible!”

In Alexander Bródy Street the battle was just beginning. More and more people were being ferried to the battle scene by lorries which toured the city calling for volunteers. People were telephoning from public callboxes, appealing for ambulances and for the army to intervene against the ÁVH gunmen.

Annoyed by seeing the ÁVH using its guns against civilians, the police and army officers began slipping their weapons to the demonstrators.²¹ As the gun-duel began, the radio building's mutinous staff were locked into the editorial offices.

The ministry of defence had sent a small force of its own to Alexander Bródy Street under Lieutenant János Decsi. Fifty or sixty students milled around the soldiers as they arrived at the Museum with five officers of the Zrinyi Military Academy. Two ambulances arrived and tried to get through to the radio building. The mob forced the doors open and found that they were loaded with ammunition for the ÁVH. The crowd savaged the occupants and helped themselves to the arms and ammunition.

The ÁVH men had put up sandbag positions across Museum Street, and were making free use of their guns. An army major tried to parley with them, and was hit by gunfire – stray, ricochet or well-aimed, in this chaos nobody could tell. He was carried away, his face an ashen grey, groaning: “Animals!”

Professor Dominic Kosáry had hurried over, looking for his teenage son, but he found it impossible to get near to Alexander Bródy Street. As he reached Museum Boulevard he saw marching columns of blue-uniformed regular police arriving from Rákóczi Street armed with rifles. The people began shouting to them, “Hungarians, you are with us!” The columns wavered, then halted and dispersed.

At top level, alarm sirens were sounding, both in this city and in Moscow. At nine p.m. the Hungarian Armoured Division at Esztergom was alerted, and its tanks began moving towards the capital. Inside Budapest, orders were given to military units to issue live ammunition. At the Kossuth Officer School on Üllői Road the seven hundred trainee officers had been paraded at eight p.m. to hear Gerő's speech and they had been on full alert ever since. Now they were lined up in corridors, the armouries were unlocked by duty lieutenants and each man was handed twelve clips of five rounds of 7.65 Russian ammunition.²²

As one of them, twenty-four-year-old Béla Kurucz, checked his rifle, he could see that the officers were scared.

“What is happening?” he asked.

The lieutenant would only reply, “Those are our orders. We don't know any more than you do!”

In the distance there was the sound of something like firecrackers. The lieutenant's face was porcelain-white. Again Kurucz asked: "What the hell is going on?" Now the officer replied uneasily, "It's a fight for the upper hand!" His mouth was quivering. "This is *it!*"

Back at Stalin Square, the nooses were now in place, an immensely satisfying site for the crowd. Police were looking on idly without interfering.²³ Three mobile crane lorries borrowed from the Beszkárt tramway company were slipped into gear, and while the crowd hauled too, chorusing like Volga-boatmen and yelling obscene jokes, the statue barely perceptibly began to tilt.²⁴

American attaché Gáza Katona heard a loud cheer float towards his flat from across City Park. He ran back upstairs and changed into rougher clothes. From the opposite direction, about a mile and a half away, came a crackle of machine-gun fire, octaves above the normal rustle and hum of the city.

By the time he got to Stalin Square the crowd had dwindled to about a thousand: they were slamming away with sledgehammers at something like a prehistoric monster lying prostrate in the darkness on the ground.

Several open lorries pulled into the square. A middle-aged, neatly-dressed man jumped off the back of one; it is odd how the memory clings to details, but it was the "leather coat" that Katona jotted in his shorthand diary afterwards. The man forcefully announced what was happening at the radio. "Fellow countrymen! They're killing people of our own blood! Here! –" he dramatically scattered spent bullet cases into the crowd – "Here are the bullets fired at us by the ÁVH! Come with me!" There was a scramble to get aboard the trucks.²⁵

Katona jogged back across the park to his flat. He got out his car and pointed it towards the distant gunfire. He doglegged down on the Rákóczi Road and parked three blocks from the radio. The scene reminded him of VJ-Day in San Francisco. Girls were hugging and kissing startled soldiers, and many of the soldiers were ripping the Red Star insignia off their caps like scabs.

A telegram would have to go to Washington about this. Katona drove straight on to Liberty Square, ten blocks away. He passed a black Chevrolet, the kind used by the ÁVH for diplomat-surveillance, on its side burning fiercely.

The policeman outside the legation's wrought-iron and glass main entrance had a dazed look. Katona noticed that the scab was already missing from his

cap. "It's happening at last! We've been waiting twelve years for this!" A marine guard let Katona in. Most of his senior colleagues were still attending a social evening at the French envoy's home. After a few minutes the telephone rang and an anonymous caller told him: "Sixty people have been killed." Another caller urged the legation to appeal to Gerő to halt the slaughter. Yet another claimed, "Russian-speaking men in ÁVO uniforms have opened fire on the unarmed public."

Katona sat down to wait.

Inside the besieged radio building, Mrs. Benke is also waiting. Every window has been smashed, and heavy and accurate rifle fire has begun from the street. Three ÁVH men have been hit in the head when they showed momentarily in windows. But reinforcements are arriving through the rear. The mob, which has been driven out of Alexander Bródy Street itself, is attempting to take the building from Michael Pollák Square. Hungarians have learned all this from their own military training: things like partisan warfare, sniping, and the importance of changing position as soon as they have fired.

A long line of darkened trams is halted next to the Café Emke, many with smashed windows. The mob has stopped two cars passing through Alexander Bródy Street and Kalvin Square and set them on fire. People are rushing out of the University grounds, taking handfuls of live ammunition from newly-opened boxes. "This is what the ÁVOs were firing with," they shout, and pass out guns and ammunition to the young people.²⁶

Empty buses line nearby Rákóczi Street. A young man is addressing a huge crowd from the top of one. He is scarcely audible, but every sentence is wildly cheered. Somebody passes the word that the workers from Red Csepel are on the march. This causes a momentary fright, but no workers come. Motorcyclists drive up, pause, are harangued by the crowd, and drive off again waving flags. A newspaper delivery motorbike rattles past with its sidecar full of arms and ammunition. Lorries seized from the TEFU (Truck Transport Enterprise) begin to arrive, swarming with young men and with the national flag fluttering. There are shouts of, "They're firing at Hungarians!" and again the refrain, "At last – after twelve years!"²⁷

Lorries have arrived from the Stalin monument, crammed with so many people that there is no way that they can fall off. Near the radio, an ambulance is ablaze in front of the Museum café. Machine-gun fire whines off the Roman sarcophagus outside the Italian Institute.

From in front of the radio building, where another car is in flames, three people stagger out of the smoke and tear-gas clouds carrying a body.

“Put him with the others!”

They carry the lifeless heap to the little garden street that runs off the Boulevard, part of the Eötvös Lóránd University campus and lay it out next to half a dozen others in the grass by the railings.

A few minutes later, three or four Hungarian armoured vehicles rumble along the Boulevard making for Alexander Bródy Street. These are probably advance elements of the Third Battalion, under Captain Alexander Szabó, coming from Pilicsaba. People step in front waving, and try to climb on to the first one, but an officer fends them off with his legs. The ordinary soldiers react more impulsively: when the crowds hand up national flags to them they hoist the flags on to their tanks. This in turn results in cheers of, “The army is on our side!” This is not what the defence ministry expected at all. A student architect of twenty-five will later describe, “The police were completely inactive. The army refused to open fire and provided cover for the insurgents to get back into Alexander Bródy Street by advancing their armoured cars across the ÁVH’s line of fire; and then the army handed over some of their weapons to the crowd.”²⁸

At the army recruiting centre for the VIIIth district, opposite the Continental Hotel, harassed officers notice TEFU lorries unloading arms at the Hungaria Baths in Dohányi Street, next to the hotel; groups of rebels begin arriving and are supplied with arms and ammunition from this improvised depot.²⁹

At police headquarters, a phone begins ringing. It is the police station sited near the *Free People* calling.

“Comrade Kopácsi, people going past here are carrying guns!”

“Get all your men indoors,” orders Kopácsi. “Barricade yourselves in and put out your lights.”

Along Stalin Street, gangs of youths are ripping down the street signs.³⁰ On Stalin Square soldiers tell the lingering crowd they must get hold of weapons.

Some youngsters only have catapults. Cars and a lorry are commandeered and make for the army recruiting centre. There are not enough weapons there, so the truck goes on to the Kilián Barracks.³¹ Forty-seven-year-old journalist Ludwig Gogolak, whose third-floor flat overlooks the barracks, hears a crowd shouting: “They’re shooting at our children!” “They’re shooting at Hungarians!” “Give us arms!”³²

“We won’t open fire,” the sentries promise.³³ The crowd swirls past them, forces open the barracks’ armoury and streams out; lorries carry them to Alexander Bródy Street, where a gang of a dozen of them enters a flat facing the radio building. An armoured car parked opposite the main entrance gate also provides cover for the rebels to fire into the courtyard.³⁴

The mood in Mrs. Benke’s office is approaching hysteria as the radio building’s guards go down with blood streaming from gunshot wounds. The street shows no signs of running out of ammunition. But still formal permission to return the fire is refused by ÁVH headquarters.

In the midst of this, she is getting angry telephone calls from the Writers’ and Journalists’ Unions. And with little sense of timing the party organ *Free People* telephones to enquire, “Is it true that your ÁVH men are firing on peacefully demonstrating students?”

“The mob is shooting at us!”

Mrs. Benke telephones the ministry of the interior and the defence ministry for help, for a massed infantry attack to clear the street below; but they give only uncertain answers. Several times the journalist George Fazekas telephones her from Kopácsi’s headquarters, with details of fighting breaking out elsewhere. They are on friendly terms; at the Rajk funeral they shivered side by side in the guard of honour, and he lent her his overcoat to cover her thin black costume in the drizzle. Now she tells him of her plight and asks if Kopácsi can help. Fazekas telephones again to ask her if he should come and hew her out; but Valeria Benke replies that it will not even be possible to get through the mobs.

The internal telephone exchange is smashed. Staff men have to crawl on all fours to the two newscasters with the latest bulletins – “The Central Committee has been convened for October 31st” – a date shortly corrected to “the immediate future”, and then “immediately”.³¹

Across the town in Gorky Avenue the writers fleeing into their Union building have the guilty feeling that they are to blame for the bloodshed that is now beginning. During this night they compose four memorandums calling for the acceptance of the people's demands. All four are handed in at Academy Street, and all are promptly thrown out by the Party, despite the fact that the fourth one was watered down by the writers into an anaemic protest.

A five-man delegation is then formed, including the writers Ladislav Benjámín, Zoltán Zelk and the secretary of the Writers' Union, Alexander Erdei.³⁶ They hurry to Academy Street. According to Zelk, minor funkies shunt them into a waiting room; the leadership refuses to be distracted by these woolly-minded intellectuals.³⁷ The writers then send in a handwritten note demanding that the leaders abdicate in favour of those enjoying the public's confidence and again urging a cease-fire. (But not the least of the problems is that no official order to open fire has yet been issued.)

For a brief instant the group glimpses Stephen Kovács – formerly the first secretary of the Party's Budapest branch – and Joseph Révai, their former propaganda chief. Finally they are ushered in to see Hegedüs, who is still prime minister.

"A fascist counter-revolution has broken out which we shall put down by arms," announces Hegedüs, flashing his toothy, sinister smile. "If we are not strong enough, then we shall call in Soviet troops."³⁸

After Nagy made his impromptu speech he remained in the Parliament building for some time. The ten p.m. radio bulletin had referred coolly to the speech, adding: "Comrade Nagy is at present conferring with youth delegates and several deputies." The twenty-two-year-old student leader Ladislav Márton would later describe the talks with Nagy as less than satisfactory, being conducted entirely through intermediaries.³⁹ Nothing was accomplished. Nagy sent for the MEFESz leaders, and asked them precisely what had happened in Alexander Bródy Street.⁴⁰ Márton told Nagy: "You should be appointed prime minister. You should kick out Gerő and the rest of his gang and abolish the ÁVH!" Nagy's reply was candid enough: "I am unable to do what you ask." Márton would later

comment: “Nagy was very apathetic. His trouble was that he took everything he had ever learned about Marxism and the Party deadly seriously.”

It was now time for Imre Nagy to go to the Central Committee’s headquarters in Academy Street. Aczél and Fazekas escorted the Old Man there. His son-in-law, Francis Jánosi, went too – he was as good a friend and adviser as Nagy knew. At the entrance to the Central Committee building senior funkies were waiting to smooth the way for Nagy and Jánosi through the identity checks.

Nagy turned to his friends apologetically.

“Well, my friends, go home,” he murmured. “There’s no need for you to follow. Here, in this building, I am at *home!*”⁴¹

25 Who Are You?

ENTER THE NEW York Café through the swing doors on Lenin Boulevard and you are transported back in time. You are in the main hall of a financial emporium built at the turn of the century. As you step down the solemn staircase to the dining level, you are swamped by the rococo décor and opulent ornaments. Rich clusters of translucent globes hang as illuminators from the ceilings. The ceilings are supported by square columns faced with white-veined marble, and they are oiled with paintings too dark now to perceive in detail. The paneling is brown, the décor a delicate beige picked out with gold leaf and gilt, hung with glass-framed caricatures of the once-famous writers of the day. Somewhere in the building rumble rotary printing presses – the New York Palace is first and foremost the home of Hungary’s more conservative newspapers.

On the evening of October 23rd, 1956, the restaurant was open. Worried journalists of the Imre Nagy group foregathered here because it was about the only place in Budapest that night where people could safely meet. Even so, the atmosphere was unreal. Outside there was a bloody insurrection. Here the Communist journalists, artists, writers and musicians crowded the tables and the lofty room echoed to the pandemonium of their words.

As Professor Dominic Kosáry arrived at ten thirty he found Losonczy, Tibor Pethő and Vásárhelyi – fresh from their harrowing experiences in Mrs. Benke’s office – with Peter Kende, Tibor Tardoss and other journalist friends seated around a big table with a clean white cloth and sparkling cutlery.¹ There was a revolution outside the doors, but here the waiters moved around the tables, serving meals as though nothing was happening. Losonczy had ordered a big fried fish.

From time to time people looked in and shouted things. "They're shooting at the radio station – people are being killed!" "They are shooting at the *Free People!*"

Kosáry signalled for a waiter and ordered a steak. After a while Losonczy turned to him and plucked at his sleeve: "Have you seen those flags," he said, "the flags with holes cut in them?"

Kosáry replied in his barely audible whisper, "Yes."

Losonczy's face was melancholy. "You know," he said, "in a way I'm sorry to see that. After all we made that flag. I am sorry that this emblem has been cut out."

The radio had just interrupted its programme with a fresh announcement: the Politburo was calling an immediate meeting of the Central Committee at Academy Street.

But the real power was already shifting to the street. There was anarchy on the Boulevard. Trams were being overturned, and heretical, anti-Soviet slogans were being shouted. Crowds like these were not to be trifled with. At the National Theatre a police van was hemmed in by the crowds; its occupants, blue-uniformed regular policemen, looked on impassively. It was clear where their sympathies lay.

Outside the *Free People* newspaper building the crowds were also in an unreasonable mood. During the day, student delegations had called here too, but the staff had turned them away.² As the evening now wore on, factory workers joined the crowds, chanting at the building's sightless windows, shouting "Print the truth!" The jam halted traffic on the triangle outside, there were shouted demands for the newspaper's next edition to proclaim a general strike. Rebelious journalists secured partial control inside, and they began printing leaflets supporting the demonstration. At one stage the crowd glimpsed Nicholas Gimes at an upstairs window and demanded that The Beard come down to them. (His black beard was flourishing, because the Party had still not rehabilitated him.) The crowd began burning something – it turned out to be the newspaper's extra edition. Bricks started flying, and soon there was hardly a window intact. The mob advanced yard by yard into the building, smashing and looting. They sacked the administration offices on the first and second floors, but left the editorial offices on the third floor largely intact.

Gimes was one of many former loyal Communists who found themselves drawn to the *Free People* building, angry with the regime and with themselves. They had spent years of their lives promoting this regime, and expended much emotional capital. The former editor of the *Literary Gazette*, Nicholas Molnár, was one who strolled over to the *Free People* building.³ He had spent years in this building as a drama critic. He wandered desolately along its glass-strewn corridors. On the third floor telephones were jangling as the editorial staff and government officials put their heads together.

The plate-glass doors had been smashed. Denied permission to open fire, the ÁVH guards escaped shortly before the mob stormed the building around midnight. The mob set fire to the bookshop, ransacked the storerooms of the Party's "Szikra" publishing house and transferred the stodgy stocks of Lenin, Marx and Stalin to a bonfire outside. The red star was jettisoned from the sixth floor, and the rebels forced access to the loudspeaker system.⁴ A cadaver brought over from Alexander Bródy Street was wrapped in a national flag and dumped on a balcony from which an insurgent wielding a microphone whipped up fresh anger in the mob below. By one thirty A.M. the armed mob had taken over the whole building.

The chaos was indescribable: a woman rebel who stepped momentarily out of a room was gunned down. The more compromised staff fled and took refuge in a doctor's house from where they stayed in telephone contact with Gimes. "Talk your way out," they urged. But Gimes stayed. He and Lócsei helped the printers to defend their precious machinery. Joseph Révai, who had come over from Academy Street to mastermind the ill-fated special edition, was spirited out of the building by a back lift and driven off to safety.⁵

Peter Kende and his colleagues could hear the mounting rattle of gunfire from Rökk Street near the *Free People* building. Bullets were whining round the streets. They decided that their proper place was back in the New York Palace. They found Losonczy sitting where they had left him, still debating at the dinner-table over the remains of his fish.

After his brusque dismissal by Imre Nagy on the doorstep of Academy Street, writer George Fazekas had at first decided to go home to Váci Street. On the way up Bajcsy Zsilinszky Street, however, he saw excited crowds and a man

being beaten up to screams of “Kill him! Kill him!” People shouted that there was a battle raging in Alexander Bródy Street. Fazekas decided to go to police headquarters instead; Kopácsi’s wife was his cousin. He found Thomas Aczél and quite a number of opposition writers at Kopácsi’s modern, white-fronted building on Deák Square.⁶

Upstairs in Kopácsi’s crowded office, Fazekas found police officials streaming in and out, their faces betraying panic, relief or numbed astonishment. Telephones were ringing but police chief Alexander Kopácsi, sitting in shirt-sleeves and braces, with his back to the wallmaps and planning charts, was not paying any attention to them. Fazekas described the scenes in Nagy’s villa and down in Parliament Square to him, and asked, “How much force do you have available?”

“Very little!”

Fazekas suggested that Kopácsi should lose no time in telephoning round the police network and calling in all police personnel to form a strike force of several thousand policemen.

He tried to get Imre Nagy on the telephone, but at Academy Street Stephen Kossa came on to the line. Fazekas and Kossa had attended the same partisan training school in the Soviet Union; Kossa apologised, “Comrade Nagy can’t come to the phone himself. He is in conference at present.”

The telephones were still shrilling. Kopácsi knew without answering them who the callers were – his twenty-one police stations appealing for orders and reinforcements.

He picked up one particularly insistent telephone. “Use force,” he snapped. “Don’t let the mob in! If the mob uses weapons then use yours too!” He slammed the telephone down.

“That’s a counter-revolution going on out there!” Kopácsi shouted to the writers. “I’m ordering my men to open fire on the mob!” His own torment was clear. He had a hunted look. The telephone rang again. He swallowed hard, then ordered: “If the mob attacks *don’t* return fire. Just evacuate the buildings and prevent any weapons falling into the wrong hands.”⁷

About forty policemen arrived from the Vth district. Their station had been ambushed. There were grim reports from the XIIth, XIVth and XIth Precincts. Kopácsi telephoned them and told them to lay down their arms. He ordered the

VIth and VIIth Precincts to report to his central headquarters bringing their arms too.

The police chief's mind was in a turmoil: the evidence of his own eyes was contradicting everything he had learned at the Party Academy about counter-revolutionary forces. A few hours later would find him standing at his window, watching shadows scurrying across Deák Square. Dimly visible in the half light, directly opposite his headquarters, piles of cement, drums of cables and other gear that had been dumped for the construction of the underground were being dragged and rolled away by ant-like hordes of youths; a barricade was being built.

As a police chief Kopácsi felt affronted; as a Communist he found it humiliating. He led out a squad of policemen armed with rifles and fixed bayonets, firing into the air, and had fifteen of the youths under close arrest in his building five minutes later. Kopácsi and Fazekas went down together to see them.

“Who are you?” challenged Kopácsi.

Who are you! The very question betrayed how wide was the gulf between the people and its rulers.

The pale-faced teenagers chorused: “We are for a free Hungary!”

Their papers were searched. Kopácsi was baffled: most were factory workers, several were young Communists. It did not add up, and that worried Kopácsi.

His worry was only a fraction of the panic that now seized the Party. That night the leaders cowered behind armed guards at the Central Committee building in Academy Street. Hectic, confused top-level sessions continued.⁸ Their setting was the big Politburo council chamber on the first floor. From here Gerő and Hegedüs were linked by K-line telephone, shortwave radio and sophisticated telecommunications gear to the rest of the country and to Moscow. From here the leadership of the fast shrinking Communist Party would try to reverse the torrent of terrifying events outside.

Alerted by Gaza Katona, other American diplomats had fanned out over the riot-torn city. Colonel James C. Todd, the military attaché, trailed four Hungarian army T-34s over Margaret Bridge to Alexander Bródy Street at ten thirty p.m. and saw their commander climb out and announce to the crowd that his men would not fire on their fellow countrymen. At eleven Todd's assistant attaché

observed a convoy of Hungarian soldiers being blocked by two lorry-loads of unarmed demonstrators; by eleven thirty the rioters had taken over their weapons and trucks, the soldiers were explaining how to use the guns, and cases of small-arms ammunition were being broken open. Todd's British opposite number, Lieutenant-Colonel Noel Cowley, also arrived at Alexander Bródy Street to observe for Whitehall.

A typical molecule in this fluid mass of angry humans, a nineteen-year-old metal polisher from slumland, would describe to American psychiatrists in April 1957: "We went from the Stalin statue to the radio building . . . I got me a machine gun. I switched the gun to automatic fire. It was given to me by some soldiers, and they showed me how to use it. We were shooting and fighting in a street . . . My friend Kovács⁹ and I shot back and the man fell down. We were excited and terrified and nervous."¹⁰

As rumours spread of the killings in Alexander Bródy Street, there were angry scenes outside the New York Palace newspaper building.¹¹ Nicholas Vásárhelyi would later describe, "People became very upset and outraged, and demanded that we journalists should go and see it and write reports." He and Kende begged Losonczy to put pressure on the regime to halt the firing. "You've got authority with the Party," they pleaded. "Get Academy Street to act!"

Losonczy was not enthusiastic. Sooner or later the regime would start looking for scapegoats for all this. The Party might well hold the Imre Nagy group responsible. Thus began the atomisation of the Imre Nagy group.

"I'll go and phone the Old Man," Losonczy volunteered. But shortly he trailed back in, admitting: "I can't reach him."

They discussed the situation from every angle until about eleven p.m., then went home. As they stepped out of the building, people surged forward, clamouring to get in. Newspaper editor Ivan Boldizsár was mobbed. People shouted, "Write about it!" But Boldizsár was also at his wits' end. Vásárhelyi drove Losonczy home; the two men lived close to each other. Both went to bed.¹²

At eleven p.m. the machine tools in the Csepel factories began to whine to an unscheduled halt, and most of the night-shift workers marched off the job. Three lorries had come from the town centre with rebels calling for volunteers for the revolution.

There was something of a lull in the fighting around Alexander Bródy Street. When the Associated Press correspondent arrived, every window in the radio building seemed to have been smashed and men showed him bullets which they had picked up. A national flag had been hoisted from a balcony, and first-floor windows were crowded with rebels, while the floors directly above them were controlled by men in uniform. Some kind of official vehicle was burning opposite the building. Occasionally a machine gun rattled from somewhere. From doorways and side streets knots of people were shouting abuse at the ÁVH and cheering the regular soldiers.

The insurgents were using this lull to re-group. They begged, stole, plundered, and acquired guns and ammunition wherever they could. Hungary had become the Soviet Union's arsenal during the Korean War, and many factories had been converted to the manufacture of weapons. At about eleven thirty p.m. a senior civil servant in the appropriate ministry, summoned urgently from his home, began telephoning warnings to all the arms factories.

His first call was to the director of Lámpagyár, a former electric bulb factory. The director's voice was trembling.

"Can you talk?" the civil servant asked him.

"No," he whispered.

"Are they already carting things off?"

"Yes."

It was the same story at the Danubia factory: an armed rebel was holding a gun to the manager's back as he answered the phone. Lorries were being loaded with arms at many weapons factories that night. The Bányagyutacsgyár, the Pestvidéki engine factory, Gépgyár, the Gamma, the Déj, and the Csepel Téglygyár were all ransacked during the next few hours.

Outside the radio building the shout went up: "Are there any drivers here?" Zoltán Szabó hoped that nobody would notice his bus driver's uniform.¹³ Somebody did. "Here's a bus driver!" He was helped into a lorry and told to take it over to the Lámpagyár factory to pick up ammunition. Willing hands there stowed crates of ammunition aboard, and Szabó drove it to Calvin Square. The boxes vanished into the crowd, which was already porcupined with rifles slung over rebel shoulders. Then he made two runs out to the artillery barracks at Pestszentlőrinc to pick up shells; on the second approach he was sniped at – he

assumed by the ÁVH – and turned back empty rather than find out. He abandoned the lorry near his home.

A young architect later observed, “Some of the workers had small calibre sporting rifles which they had taken from the factory armories of MÖHOSz [the Hungarian Voluntary Defence Association], a military sports organisation sponsored by the Communist Party. Two lorry-loads of soldiers arrived from across the river. But neither officers nor soldiers fired on the people. No order was given and the soldiers remained in the trucks. They began slipping their guns over the side of the trucks into our outstretched hands. I took a machine gun and began firing it at the ÁVH in the radio building windows.”

A twenty-year-old storeman described how he reached the corner of Rákóczi Street and the Boulevard just as six lorry-loads of soldiers drove up, making for the radio.¹⁴ The crowd stopped the lorries, and began reasoning with the 120 soldiers on them. Somebody began singing the pre-Communist national anthem: the entire crowd joined in, while the soldiers stood to attention. After that the soldiers did not resist as the mob swarmed over the trucks and relieved them of their weapons.

“It felt good to have a loaded gun in one’s hands,” was how another man, a forty-three-year-old horticulturist, put it.¹⁵ And a twenty-four-year-old music student, busy hurling bricks at the radio building, found his finely-tapered fingers curling round the trigger of a rifle which the soldiers had given him. Even at music academy he had attended three hours of compulsory military training each week, so he knew how to handle guns. He toted that gun in Alexander Bródy Street until he suddenly realised that if his hands were ever harmed he would never become a concert pianist. He gave away the gun and slipped home to bed.¹⁶

Around eleven thirty p.m. the tank blocking the radio’s entrance tunnel suddenly pulled away, and the mob began to pour in. Army Major Ladislav Kovács and a dozen others stepped forward to stem the rush. Kovács was a beaky-nosed officer with receding hair and prominent ears; thirty-three years old, he had joined the secret Communist Party in 1943 as a mechanic at the Ganz wagon factory, he had volunteered for the army after Rákosi’s takeover in 1948 and he had trained officers at the Petőfi Military Academy. All his education did not help now, facing this mindless mob. Two men in front were carrying tommy

guns: one fired a short burst at the uniformed officers, and cut Kovács down on the flagstones of the courtyard.¹⁷

His death marked the beginning of the real carnage. Soon the building was under siege at point-blank range. A bus was seen arriving from Csepel and issuing guns and ammunition to the mob. People were sniping from concealed positions in several buildings opposite, aiming from darkened garrets and from behind chimneys at people in the radio building only thirty feet away. Muzzle flashes were also seen coming from the National Museum – the windows of its Archaeological Library looked right out over the radio building – and from buildings in Szentkirályi Street and Museum Street.

The telephone in Valeria Benke's bullet-shattered office never stopped ringing. With bullets flying, only two people dared go in to answer the telephone, a man called Joseph Vészics and Erdős – with the difference that Erdős crawled in on hands and knees while Vészics walked boldly in erect. There was no way of telling whether the calls were trivial or not. There was a call from Gerő himself, another caller announced that the rebels had captured Nicholas Gimes, George Fazekas telephoned from police headquarters to urge Erdős to join him there. Every call from the Party or government seemed to say the same: rescue parties were on their way. Peter Erdős conveyed these messages to Major Fehér, but no reinforcements came. Ödön Kisházi, the new secretary-general of the National Council of Trades Unions, also came through on the red K-line, self-importantly dictating an eight-page declaration he wanted immediately broadcast by the radio. Sometimes when Erdős reached the telephone and gave his name, the caller could only gasp, “Are you *the* Peter Erdős?” and hung up in perplexity.

By midnight the radio building was in danger of being overwhelmed. One last group escaped through the rear door. The remaining defenders could hear the thump of exploding hand grenades and even the rattle of heavy machine guns. Around twenty of their number had already been killed. Their commander, Joseph Fehér, again pleaded with his superiors for instructions, and at last he was given official permission to return the fire.¹⁸ Peter Erdős, still trapped like the rest of them inside this building, was not happy at the decision. With it he saw the last hope of a peaceful transition of power to Imre Nagy slipping away. Playing for time, he urged the plainclothes ÁVH officers to double-check that

the person who had issued the order actually had authority to do so: Major Fehér started frantically telephoning again. At twelve thirty-five A.M. Fehér announced: "I am going to issue the order to open fire," and left the room.

Many main streets in the city centre were by now under rebel control. On the corner of Stalin Road and Attila Joseph Street a big government car, a Zis, had been overturned as a roadblock and set on fire. The mob wondered who had once sat behind that limousine's charred curtains. Primitive barricades had been thrown up, and citizens had established roadblocks on Stalin Road. At one A.M. three lorry-loads of armed civilians, some even wearing grey steel helmets, stormed the telephone exchange building on the Joseph Boulevard.¹⁹

Hearing of the ÁVH casualties at the radio building, the city's ÁVH chief, Colonel Orbán, telephoned his lieutenant, Stephen Tompa, at Republic Square, to order the ÁVH men guarding the Party headquarters there to return fire if attacked.²⁰

Tompa issued live ammunition to his men. Neither he nor Lieutenant Várkonyi on the building's second floor slept that night. They circulated among their men, detailing fields of observation and fire and speaking soft words of encouragement to them. They saw no reason to doubt that the government would stamp out this insurrection; but as word came in of attacks on arsenals, factories, and barracks, there was some restlessness among the enlisted men. Most of them had been drafted in 1955 and assigned to the ÁVH. They had seen no action until now.

Their turn would come just one week later.

By this time Tom Rogers, the first secretary, had arrived back at the American legation with a flustered chargé, Spencer Barnes, who in his dinner jacket was as dapper as a fashion plate. At midnight he had sent off a 500-word cable to Washington. It mentioned rumours that Russian troops were on their way, but emphasised: "No Soviet forces yet seen"; twice it mentioned the icy reception accorded to Nagy on Parliament Square. The telegram warned: "Legation strongly urges media refrain from taking any kind of stand on Imre Nagy for [the] time being."

John MacCormac of the *New York Times* arrived in Alexander Bródy Street at midnight and learned that Hungarian tanks had arrived there shortly before

him. The lead tank displayed the national flag. Shouting, “The army is with us!” the crowd surged forward again to invest the building. This was a turning point of the uprising – the defection of the tank force to the insurgents. Corporal Paul Szatmári, a reporter on the newspaper of the Hungarian Armoured Division with headquarters at Esztergom, was among those in Alexander Bródy Street at the time.²¹ The division had been put on alert at nine p.m., shortly after the first firing broke out. Soon after midnight elements of the division’s Thirty-third Tank Regiment arrived from Pilicsaba. The motorised infantry were halted outside the Balassa hospital by sand-bag barricades thrown up by the ÁVH. Fourteen tanks arrived and a similar number of personnel carriers, while seven more tanks parked on the Boulevard, with seventeen lorry-loads of infantry and nine armoured personnel carriers. The situation seemed critical: the ÁVH were jumpy, had taken many casualties, and at any moment might open fire on the army.

Lieutenant-Colonel János Solymossi, the regiment’s towering, handsome commander, parked his tanks beneath some trees near the Museum building, and strode back to confer with his superior, Colonel János Mécséri, the Armoured Division’s commander. Meanwhile, his men furtively handed over fifty fuses the students needed to prime hand grenades they had purloined – “For the defence of the University,” one officer winked.

Corporal Szatmári next saw Colonel Solymossi steer his own tank into the mouth of Alexander Bródy Street, perhaps with the intention of relieving the ÁVH men trapped in the building. The colonel climbed out of his turret, grabbed a Hungarian flag and strode towards the building with his officers. They were met by sporadic fire from the building. One officer was killed, several were injured. From that moment, not a soldier moved a muscle to save the besieged ÁVH men.

In fact events were beginning that would end with Solymossi in prison and his commanding officer, Mécséri, on the gallows.

Shortly after, Major-General Ladislás Hegyi arrived on behalf of the defence minister, Lieutenant-General Stephen Bata, who was arguing at that moment behind closed doors in Academy Street for the army to be thrown in against the rioters.²² Hegyi recognised Lieutenant Decsi and waved him over.

“What’s the position now?” he asked.

Decsi began telling him, but Hegyi had his own views, and began mouthing remarks about counter-revolutionaries, and the “power of the proletariat”. The general had forgotten that he was within earshot of this very proletariat. They reminded him forcefully just who had put the epaulettes on his shoulders. The general purpled, and ordered the army to clear the street; the enlisted men made no move.

The defection by regular army units to the insurgents was a major embarrassment to the defence ministry,²³ who telephoned Colonel Kopácsi at police headquarters and asked what help his regular police could give; at the city’s Mosonyi Barracks Kopácsi had a squad of trained riot police armed with sub-machine guns and grenades; but the nervous ÁVH men at Alexander Bródy Street greeted these riot police too with deadly, mistrustful fire. The furious riot-police commander telephoned Kopácsi: “The crowd is mobbing my men and trying to get them to defect!” Kopácsi cut his losses: “Pull out! Get your men back to barracks immediately.”

There were several ugly incidents that night. Lorry-loads of airmen from a nearby airbase were ordered into the city. One was killed, allegedly by an ÁVH bullet. “A veteran sergeant known for his toughness astounded his men by picking up the corpse and shouting, with tears streaming down his face: ‘They shot him! They shot him!’”²⁴ Many airmen returned to barracks without weapons and ammunition after that – they had handed them to the rebels.

The commandant of the army’s radio intelligence centre near the ÁVH’s letter-censorship bureau in suburban Budakeszi also sent a lorry-load of soldiers to the town centre; an ÁVH patrol flagged it down at an intersection, then opened fire when it failed to stop. The officer was killed outright, and the truck overturned, killing several soldiers. The ÁVH men kicked the seven survivors, called them “fascist scum”²⁵ and hauled them off to barracks. “You’ll be as dead as your officer tomorrow morning,” an ÁVH lieutenant told them.²⁶ There is no doubt that feelings were running high that night.

The gunshot wound sustained by Professor Blücher’s girlfriend had by this time, one A.M., been operated on at Rókus hospital.²⁷ In Alexander Bródy Street he saw lorry-loads of already armed workers arriving from Csepel. He came across several men with tommy guns given to them by soldiers; other rebel

forces came from the Kossuth Officers' School, the Rákóczy Military Academy and the Bem Barracks.²⁸ It was startling that even the younger officers and cadets were joining the revolt, although they were from the workers' élite.

The street now had arms and ammunition in greater plenty than the radio building. The latter's defence was poorly organised: no attempt was made either to throw out a defence perimeter on to the surrounding rooftops or to secure all the entrances to the building. A battle plan had been drawn up by the defence ministry for every such important building – Peter Erdős saw the tattered document in Fehér's hands during the night – but by three A.M. the defenders would be in a grim plight, with forty men dead and their ammunition almost spent.

Late that night the defence minister, General Bata, sent the Petőfi Academy cadets to relieve the besieged building. They arrived carrying the national flag, and jumpy ÁVH men opened fire on them too.²⁹ The cadets who got into the building refused to fire on their fellow countrymen. As ammunition ran short, Erdős overheard them saying, "We're not going to give any ammunition to those ÁVH officers, or they'll claim later that their magazines are full and their guns haven't been fired!"

Outside the city, the Michael Táncsics Engineers' School had also been paraded to hear Gerő's broadcast. Then the soldiers were informed: "There is rioting in Budapest, people are attacking the people's power! We have been chosen to thwart these attempts." Each rifleman was later issued with 140 rounds of ammunition. While the commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Susa, took one class and a signals company in a lorry convoy to reinforce Academy Street, where the Party leaders were in session, Major Sziráky led the other convoy to defend the ministry of the interior building.³⁰

As their lorries passed the General Bem monument the soldiers saw mutilated flags and placards, but the actual wording was illegible in the dark. They noticed too that on public buildings the red stars had vanished. They did not know what to make of these strange omens – the weeks confined to barracks had sealed them off from these dramatic developments.

Deep, clammy despondency settled over the Writers' Union in Gorky Avenue as they awaited their delegation's return from Academy Street. Student leader Ladislás Márton was at the building with Tardos, Sarkadi, Ernest Urbán.

Later Déry, Jankovich and a few of the younger writers turned up.³¹ The delegation returned around midnight and reported Hegedüs's uncompromising words: "If the fighting does not stop by morning, I'll call in the Russians!"

But the fighting was showing no signs of stopping. There were increasingly ugly incidents, as the public tried to loot armories. At the Kossuth Officers' School on Üllői Road the commander, Colonel Kömüves, threw cordons around the building as a mob approached.³² He ordered his cadets to load rifles and warned the mob: "If you come any closer, we open fire!"

Two men stepped forward uninvited to parley with him; one was struck down by a pistol shot. The mob fled and the colonel ordered his men inside and the barrack doors locked. After that he sent out armed patrols to scour the People's Park opposite for any armed insurgents and to check the lorries driving down the Kőbánya Road for illicit arms and ammunition.

Béla Kurucz, a member of one such reluctant patrol, returned to the Kossuth School around four A.M. and found it in uproar: a lorry-load of insurgents hunting for arms and ammunition had rammed through the back entrance; the truck had hurtled only a few yards across the yard before it was stitched from end to end with machine-gun bullets fired by the sentries, killing most of the men aboard. The survivors were locked away in the barracks' gymnasium. The lorry would stand in the yard with its lifeless cargo until dawn.

26 Big Lie, Small Lie

SOMEWHERE BEYOND THE darkness of the suburbs, the Big Lie was crawling closer to the city. It was the Lie that called this regime “Hungarian”, the Lie that labelled it a people’s democracy, the Lie that told its hapless subjects that Marxism was giving them higher living standards than ever before. For a few brief hours, the Lie had been put to flight; but now it was being carried back into Budapest protected by armour plate and steel. The Lie was rattling and screeching and pawing the paving stones, it was waiting for the final order to go back in.

The Lie’s progenitors were on the defensive. The sappers of the Michael Táncsics School outside Budapest had been paraded after midnight and informed by their officers: “A Poznan-type riot has begun. Former Horthy officers are the ringleaders!” They had piled into trucks and driven along the Danube to Budapest.¹ On a bridge they were stopped by an angry crowd of workers who told them what was *really* going on.

At the ministry of the interior, deputy minister Fekete waited for them in his ÁVH colonel’s uniform. Ashen-faced ÁVH officers clustered round in their leather overcoats. The sappers were sent upstairs in groups of two or three to set up machine-gun positions in the windows.

The other group of sappers had been allocated to the defence of the besieged Central Committee headquarters at Academy Street. Typical of them was a tall twenty-six-year-old trainee signals officer whose hopes of a university career had been dashed by his father’s arrest in 1955 for spying; his father, an inter-

preter in the uranium mines, had been transmitting information to Radio Free Europe.

There is a scene in George Orwell's *Animal Farm* in which Boxer the Cart-horse is allowed into the farmhouse for a privileged audience with Napoleon the Pig. The old carthorse is too simple-minded to grasp that some are now substantially more equal than others. But letting these ordinary soldiers into Party headquarters was a mistake; few sons of peasants and workers had seen luxuries like these before. Some had, moreover, recognised friends in the crowds mobbing the building. Their officers tried to stop them from fraternising, but the damage was done. The soldiers returned to barracks. There they changed into plain clothes and elected a revolutionary council.

Over at the ministry the sappers had set up their positions. Around two A.M. two lorry-loads of soldiers halted barely thirty yards away from one position, a corner room with a balcony. The sappers could hear shouts of, "Whose side are you on?" "Yours!" "Death to the ÁVH!" "To the radio building!" and then the lorries drove off.

Some of the ÁVH officers could not control their chagrin: "We should have opened fire and wiped them out!"

Fekete shook his head. "You know what our orders are – not to get into a shoot-out. We've got to wait!"

By two A.M., when Endre Márton took a last stroll round, a leaflet was being doled out claiming that eight people, including an army major and an army captain, had been killed at Alexander Bródy Street. An hour and a half later, as Peter Kende and Ivan Boldizsár drove past the Octogon intersection they witnessed an unforgettable spectacle: a lorry was towing what had been Stalin's now decapitated statue along the Boulevard chased by a jeering mob. It was reminiscent of a picture in one of A. A. Milne's forbidden books – Christopher Robin dangling Winnie-the-Pooh along by one furry leg. The hollow bronze colossus was clanging horrendously as it bounced face down along the cobblestones and tramlines.²

Everywhere, clusters of people were tearing down the red stars mounted on public buildings. In Karl Marx Square organised groups of civilians were stopping cars and searching for ÁVH men. More writers had taken refuge inside Kopácsi's nearby police headquarters during the evening: he put an office at

their disposal.³ Some liaised with the Writers' Union and other focal points. Some compiled lists of names suitable for a new government. And some just agonised. Novelist Tibor Déry was stricken by the same guilt that had afflicted Otto Hahn, discoverer of atomic fission, on hearing of Hiroshima. "When the first rifle fired, my heart sank," wrote Déry a few days later. "I said to myself, 'You are equally responsible for all this, you made speeches and agitated, how will you account for this to the dead?' . . . I cannot accept so simply the fact that there is no revolution without bloodshed. As each bullet was fired, I kept having this irrational feeling that it was I who had pulled the trigger."⁴

What emotions were now firing the rebellion? An American psychologist would draw comparisons with prison riots, pointing out that these often occurred when prisoners' expectations had been cheated.⁵ It was true that the Marxists could have papered the Kremlin wall with the empty promises they had made to the proletariat. And now the workers suddenly found that they could take revenge.

At Csepel Island, the industrial mid-Danube slum in southern Budapest – the same "Red Csepel" which Rákosi and his henchmen had flaunted to visiting dignitaries as the heartland of his industrial revolution – the machine tools have slewed to a halt around eleven p.m. as rumour spreads about the drama unfolding in town. Lorries arrive from the city centre, and men jump out shouting: "A revolution has broken out in Pest! Where are the Hungarians among you! Come with us!" Revolution? What does a revolution look like? wonders one woman, a thirty-eight-year-old worker in a steel tube mill.⁶ She climbs aboard one of the lorries to find out.

Csepel has been her life. She was here in 1945 when the Russians stripped the tube mill of its machinery. They dismantled a brand new papermill, too, and packed it off to Russia; but the more patriotic local engineers deliberately omitted the blueprints, so the Russians were unable to reassemble it and five years later it came back to Rákosi as a "gift of the Soviet Union". She will say in 1956, "There was hardly a family which had not had at least one member dragged away by the Russians or by the ÁVO. The desire for revenge was burning, and just waiting for an opportunity."

This woman's schooling has been rudimentary, but she is bright and loquacious and is about to divorce her husband in favour of a man much younger than herself. She was one of some 35,000 Csepel workers who were working on war production until the 1953 "New Course" when Imre Nagy switched 25,000 of them to consumer goods' production – in her own case, to the manufacture of graceless tubular furniture that nobody would buy. That is her personal knowledge of Csepel and of the Marxist economic system.

By two A.M. the protracted, shapeless meetings in the now heavily defended Central Committee building on Academy Street have faded out, but little groups continue deliberations. Hegedüs himself has described: "I thought a political solution still possible . . . but once the demonstrators had begun attacking the red stars and the Soviet flags, it seemed clear to me beyond doubt that a counter-revolution had begun." Of the night's meetings, he relates: "The Party leadership became amorphous, as though paralysed by a stroke. Somebody proposed a measure, it was unanimously adopted, an hour later they would convene again and adopt a totally opposite measure." Now Imre Nagy, the new prime minister, stretches his portly frame on a sofa. Fateful decisions have already been taken in his name. In a room next door, Kádár, Gerő and Dobi bed down on the floor of Gerő's office. Only younger men like Hegedüs remain awake and active. It reminds those with long memories of happier times, the exciting post-war days when they slept rough in the big undamaged building on Republic Square which they had taken over as the city headquarters of the Communist Party.

At the American legation, the staff have also decided to snatch some sleep.⁷ It is three fifteen A.M. as Gáza Katona and assistant army attaché Major Tom Gleason drive back to the apartment building they share on City Park. Katona spins the wheel and detours briefly past the Soviet embassy on Gorky Avenue. The street is deserted – there is not even a policeman outside the embassy. A light fog is forming as Katona unlatches his front door at three thirty A.M. His family is asleep. Duty-conscious, he gropes around for his Ampex tape-recorder, settles it on the balcony outside his bedroom window and points the microphone towards the city centre to catch the rattle of gunfire sounding from Alexander Bródy Street. The tape records the distant wail of a railway engine.

And then it registers something else. A metallic, throaty rumble, something pawing at the cobblestones, something approaching from the outskirts of the city.

The American diplomat eyes the recording-level meter. The needle is swinging right off the scale. He tries to peer beyond the gas-lit hazy glare. The balcony begins to vibrate and the noise swells to a horrendous roar. He can see a huge shape waddling slowly past. A T-54 – no mistaking that squat, rounded outline or the thick gun barrel and the Soviet emblem smeared with the dust of a long road journey. There is another behind it and then more. On each T-54 Katona can dimly make out three or four helmeted, huddled shapes clutching rifles. The behemoths slither past close enough for him to spit on, but he doesn't. Instinct makes him reach for his camera, but better judgment prevails. This is no time for fooling around. This is war, these are the Russians, and a flash from his balcony may give quite the wrong impression. He glances at his watch and jots down the time in his shorthand diary: "4. 20 A.M.: Soviet troops have arrived."

At police headquarters, Deák Square, nobody knows that the Big Lie is nearly back.

The radio on the shelf behind Alexander Kopácsi comes alive.⁸ "Radio Kossuth, Budapest. Good morning, listeners. Our programme today begins with some light music."

There follows only silence. Kopácsi looks at his watch. It is four thirty.

The radio bleats again: "Here for our listeners is an announcement from the Cabinet: fascist reactionary elements have launched an armed assault on our public buildings and have attacked our armed forces. Until order is restored and further measures can be taken, all gatherings, meetings and demonstrations have been banned. The armed forces have received instructions to bring the full severity of the law to bear against those who break this order."

Kopácsi drums his leather riding boots on the polished floor. He knows that he has no orders. In fact he has begun to change his mind about this whole nasty business. His first step is to throw out of his headquarters the young rebels whom he has arrested and to tell them to go home. With a faint grin he stands at his window, watching them saunter across the square. Then he turns his back on the others and goes into his little bathroom to have a wash and shave.

Orders moving Soviet units closer to Budapest must have been issued hours, if not days, earlier. At one A.M. the ÁVH at Nyirbátor, on the Romanian border, reported to the defence ministry in Budapest that Soviet forces were rolling in across the frontier. But who took the decision actually to commit them to action in the city's streets? Subsequently nobody could agree. Kádár later blamed prime minister Hegedüs,⁹ while Hegedüs blamed Party leader Gerő.¹⁰ Gerő took care to pin the responsibility on Imre Nagy. After October 24th Nagy passed the buck straight back to Gerő and Hegedüs.

One thing is certain: nobody objected when the leadership actually met that night. According to Hegedüs, "Gerő's broadcast had exacerbated the tension. It was really after this that talk started about asking for Soviet help." Then Imre Nagy arrived, furious at having been booed on Parliament Square. The debate proper began at about eleven p.m.¹¹ It was dominated by the personalities of Gerő and Hegedüs, and by the news of the bloody gunfight breaking out in Alexander Bródy Street. That the mob had obtained guns was something they had not bargained for. Hegedüs was uncomfortable, but continued to turn down the pleas from the security police for permission to open fire.¹²

What tilted the balance was the news that Hungarian forces were proving disloyal to the regime, and were even defecting to the rebel side. Harrowing telephone calls arrived from Valeria Benke, and the ÁVH commander at the radio building pleaded for reinforcements. The forces that had been sent there were just not getting through. Several times Mrs. Benke called on the red K-line to announce that the mob had begun firing at the building; she supported the ÁVH plea for permission to return fire. Still Hegedüs and Gerő refused to give it, and as midnight approached the order had still not been given.

The élite members of the Politburo Secretariat agreed early on, according to Hegedüs, that the Soviet government should make available troops from its garrison to help restore order. George Marosán was particularly insistent that the Soviet troops should be called in, since the "people's forces" were in danger of being overwhelmed.¹³ Gerő also urged the purely military solution. "His point of view was simple," says Hegedüs. "Several hundred insurgents were controlling the city from strategic points . . . Soviet troops would mop them up without difficulty in a few hours."

Hegedüs now emphasises: “This does not mean that we expected the Soviet troops to intervene directly in suppressing the uprising. That this was not our intention is proven by the fact that during that same evening this same leadership were having terrible qualms about issuing orders to open fire.” Comparisons were drawn that night with the uprising in East Berlin three years before. There, the appearance of a few Soviet tanks had quelled the disturbances without a shot being fired.

“There was continuous debate, but nobody voiced real objections. We did not at that time realise the scale of the uprising. Imre Nagy had joined the debate at nine p.m., I think, and in his presence the position was adopted whereby the Soviet government should be approached for troops to re-establish order. I remember that before telephoning the Soviets . . . Gerő again asked everybody whether they were in agreement. We all agreed, including Imre Nagy. Gerő asked Imre Nagy in person: ‘Are you of the view that we must ask for help from Moscow?’ Nagy answered firmly, ‘Yes!’ But it has to be said that the situation was complex, and Imre Nagy was tired and edgy. It wasn’t a cool, considered decision.”

So Imre Nagy raised no objection. Why should he have? He was a Russian-speaking former Soviet citizen who had spent most of his adult life in Moscow and whose political muscle had always been provided by the Soviet army. It was his first elementary error. Afterwards, he bitterly rued it, and resorted to a small lie to conceal it. He encouraged a popular belief that he had had nothing to do either with the decision to throw in Soviet tanks or with the equally odious decision to proclaim martial law.¹⁴ On October 27th, as the shores of orthodox Communism seemed to be receding ever further from him, Nagy would repeat these denials to Szilágyi, Aczél, Gimes, Lőcsei, and half a dozen intellectuals.¹⁵ But no denials could conceal that in a radio broadcast he now welcomed, as prime minister, the Soviet intervention as “necessary for the re-establishment of peace and order”.

By October 30th Nagy knew that he had done his personal image great harm and his government formally proclaimed that both odious decisions were the handiwork of Gerő and Hegedüs (who had left the day before for Moscow). When an Austrian reporter asked him why the public *still* blamed him, he blustered, “At that time I was not a member of the leadership. It may have been this

way: at first it was said it was 'the government'. Then later on, after two or three days, *I* was the government. And the masses are unable to differentiate."¹⁶ Even making allowances for Nagy's unfamiliarity with German, his replies seem devious. When the Austrian pressed him: "Did you say it was 'necessary for the re-establishment of peace and order', or did you not?"

Thrice Nagy denied that too: "No, no, no."

He added, "I did not make any such statements and I must say that their appearance has caused much damage."

Next on the agenda that night, October 23rd, was the formal appointment of Imre Nagy to replace Hegedüs as prime minister; Hegedüs would remain as deputy premier, and Gerő would remain Party leader. As the estrangement between Nagy and Gerő was bitter and irreconcilable Kádár wisely argued for Gerő's immediate resignation.¹⁷ (Kádár had voted for Nagy's appointment. In May 1957, he would admit: "Despite his many faults I was convinced that he was an honest man supporting the working class."¹⁸)

Invited to accept the premiership, Imre Nagy's only stipulation was that he should be permitted to introduce major economic reforms.¹⁹ Of course Nagy's situation was delicate: he was still a nobody, without any Party position, and the gathering was overwhelmingly hostile: the Central Committee had changed little since denouncing him in April 1955.²⁰ The Stalinists such as Stephen Hidas and Ladislav Piros referred luridly to Nagy and his group as "accomplices of the fascists rampaging at this very moment through the capital". Nagy's appointment was unceremonial but legal, and its legality was confirmed by President Dobi long after it had become an embarrassment.²¹

At about four A.M. they learned that the radio building had fallen to the insurgents. Towards dawn, Hegedüs, Piros and the defence minister, Bata, decided to issue over the radio – by now operating from Lakihegy, outside the capital – a curfew forbidding people to go into the streets during the morning. It was broadcast at eight twenty A.M. One of Nagy's supporters at once wakened him and told him. Nagy angrily ordered the curfew rescinded. It was the first open conflict between the two diverging lines in the leadership, those who believed the riots could be quelled by force and those who believed in diplomacy.

As dawn greyed the skies, more and more Soviet troops arrived. They poured in from the south-west, through the hills of Buda and over Liberty Bridge and Margaret Bridge into the city. Some stayed on the bridges, others took up stations on the embankment road and around government buildings. Around six A.M. more tanks arrived from Cegléd, passing through the outskirts of Pestszenterzsébet and Soroksár. The Russian troops were trigger-happy, and sprayed streets and buildings with heavy machine-gun fire. Down Üllői Road at six A.M. rolled a long Soviet column: armoured personnel carriers with troops from Várpalota.²² They strafed the sandbagged machine-gun positions which Colonel Kömüves had installed on the Kossuth Barracks' roof; others opened fire near the slaughterhouse and Alexander Nagy Street.

But nothing could now save the radio building. The building opposite was occupied by the mob. Corpses littered the front offices, ammunition had run out. Mrs. Benke had bravely remained all night, but as the final minutes approached she began to feel that she should be at the Central Committee building. She asked Peter Erdős, "Do you think I should leave the radio building?" Around eight A.M. they managed to telephone Gerő. He sounded sleepy and irritable. They apologised but said that they would have to surrender in a few minutes. He promised reinforcements.

They had been waiting for those reinforcements all night, of course. The surviving defenders took refuge in dressing rooms to the rear. Among them were some members of the first street-deputation: they had stayed all night, and even joined in the defence of the building. Now several of them anxiously asked Erdős whether they might claim that they had been arrested and prevented from leaving the building.

It was every man for himself. Some nursery-school children had been trapped in the building and they added to the Berlin-bunker atmosphere. A young woman was crying quietly in a corner, there was a wounded ÁVH man on a sofa. The radio's Party secretary was shouting, "Get this man out into the corridor, they're going to kill us all because of him." Erdős drew his Walther automatic and said that the wounded soldier would stay where he was. As the ÁVH men waited grimly for the rebels to burst in, civilian overcoats were found for them; Erdős even gave the five ministry officials who also only had ÁVH identity cards his own personal documents – his radio pass, his ID card, his driving licence – to

give each of them a fair chance of escaping. Then he pushed the Walther down inside a chair.

A grim silence had settled over Alexander Bródy Street. The bodies of the dead were dragged out of the building and laid out in line in front of the main entrance.²³ About thirty of the surviving ÁVH and army officers retreated before the victorious rebels into a first-floor conference room. The rebels shouted, “Don’t shoot!” and their quarries also chorused: “Don’t shoot!” It was the end of the battle.

Moments later the door of the room where Peter Erdős and his group had taken refuge was thrown open and young men armed with tommy guns appeared. Erdős had the presence of mind to embrace the first of them, a paunchy thirty-year-old in a blue cap, with ammunition magazines and a hand-grenade dangling from his belt. Waving a Russian tommy gun in one hand and a revolver in the other, he introduced himself as the brother of a youth executed for placing a suitcase bomb outside Budapest Town Hall in 1947 (the bomb had not gone off). He was taking his own personal revenge for that. Erdős produced his own prison discharge documents. The rebels asked him about the others in the room. He identified the ÁVH men as journalists, and suggested that the rebels should get the others to produce their IDs – he knew they had genuine press cards. After that Erdős obtained a machine gun and, toting it at his erstwhile companions, he “escorted” them outside where he told them to run for their lives.

After Erdős had left the room, other armed men elbowed their way in and beckoned to the man in the blue cap, and they left together, taking the ÁVH casualty with them. A small man in a dark suit now stepped in, the squint-eyed deputy ringleader. “Gentlemen,” he called out, “I’m going to give you all a chance of saving your skins provided” – and at this point he paused to hand round a packet of badly-needed cigarettes – “provided,” he continued, “you join us and fight for our people’s freedom!”

The seconds slow-marched past. Yes, there were people who agreed their willingness. But one white-faced man stepped back and said firmly: “No. I will not fight!” Two more stepped back with him. The man with the squint turned away and said to the others: “Right. Pick a delegation. I want a delegation to come with me to Academy Street!”

The Petőfi Academy “political officers” found here in the radio building were separated from the ÁVH prisoners, and the rebels read out to them a letter of encouragement sent by their comrades to the student mass meeting the day before. The rebels urged the officers now to give them the leadership they needed against the Russians. The officers agreed, or seemed to agree – anything to get out of this charnel house – and quietly melted away into the streets.

Mrs. Benke and her colleagues escaped unscathed: the rebels did not recognise them and just escorted them out to the street and set them free. The forty-odd ÁVH prisoners were led down to the bowels of the building, into a coal-cellar, where their epaulettes and caps and coats were stripped off them. Here they mutely awaited a rude liquidation. But some hours later a student unlocked the door and simply called out to them: “Gentlemen, you are free.”

As live ammunition began whining and smashing around the pre-dawn streets, the police telephones on Colonel Kopácsi’s desk began to jangle.²⁴ He was dumbfounded at the news. That the Red Army had rampaged like this in 1945 was understandable to this Communist former partisan: but this was 1956! He sheltered, pale with anger, behind his windows, watching the T-54s rattle past. His two Soviet advisers appeared, with baggy trousers hastily thrown over their pyjamas. They stood next to him, nervously twisting their soft hats in their hands and peering into the grey dawn beyond Engels Square. Kopácsi saw them biting their nails as human shadows flitted across the alley opposite. Moments later a Russian tank halted to allow a crewman to adjust something outside, an alley window opened and the Russian soldier was felled by a single, well-aimed rifle shot. Petrol bottles splintered against the tank and it erupted in flames. Two of its five crewmen got out alive – one vanished into the darkness, the second ran across the square towards the police headquarters. After twenty yards he too was dead, a bullet in his back. Kopácsi briefly sighted the killer silhouetted in an upper window, with a tommy gun in his hands and a beret on his head. Behind him he heard somebody gasp in Russian, “*Grazhdanskaya voina*” – civil war.

27 New Guns Settling Old Scores

IT WAS SIX-THIRTY A.M. when the alarm clock rang in the apartment facing City Park.¹ American diplomat Gaza Katona switched on the radio. It was asking people to stay off the streets until nine A.M. while “plundering gangs of counter-revolutionaries” were mopped up. Gaza Katona dressed and went downstairs to wait for Major Gleason, the assistant military attaché. Bleary eyed from lack of sleep, they drove to the town centre through the lingering fog.

As the darkness lifted they could see the night’s damage. Rebel snipers had evidently been shooting at the Russians, whom Katona had seen arriving. Down by the river the fog was still thick, but they could pick out Soviet tanks parked around Parliament Square. As they drove around, they began listing the T-54 tanks, assault guns, armoured cars and 57-millimetre anti-tank guns brought up during the night; they counted thirty-six tanks, but they suspected far more – at least one regiment – had come. Most of central Budapest seemed to be in rebel hands. At the Octagon guns and ammunition were being doled out from a commandeered Zis; to judge from its number-plate it had been a minister’s car until last night. In Wesselényi Street, men, women and children were tearing up paving stones to build barricades.

But the regime had thrown a tight perimeter round its main power bases. Soviet tanks had replaced the Hungarian tanks that had earlier protected the defence ministry on Honvéd Street and the ÁVH headquarters on Jászai Mária Square. Three Stalin tanks were stationed at this end of Margaret Bridge. There was a burnt-out tram in front of the nearby Western Railway Station. Across the river, an armoured ring had been thrown round the wartime defence bunker

under Gellért Hill to which the radio studio had now been moved from the embattled Alexander Bródy Street. The radio was transmitting a wobbly tape of chamber music.

As the American diplomats reached their legation at eight thirty A.M. the phones were jangling. Katona lifted the first one, and a voice said: “The ÁVH are still fighting it out at the radio building, Soviet troops are trying to gain control, the streets are littered with corpses.”

“How many?”

“Can’t say, but there’s a pitched battle being fought against Soviet troops at Academy Street and round the defence ministry building.”

The radio announcements coming from the bunker shocked even the staunchest supporters of Imre Nagy of the night before. At eight thirteen A.M. the regime had announced the new Central Committee and Nagy’s appointment as prime minister. At eight forty-five A.M. the radio warned that Nagy had proclaimed countrywide martial law – he had signed a “shoot on sight” decree against any person caught with illegal arms or trying to overthrow the republic. At nine A.M. the radio officially announced what most Budapest citizens had seen with their own eyes – that Soviet troops had intervened. The radio reassured listeners that the foreign troops had come in “by invitation” and at nine twenty A.M. it announced a curfew until two p.m.

Handbills appear on the streets proclaiming Nagy’s appointment. But his name is already indelibly associated with the carnage that is beginning. Watching from a basement slit window, clerical worker Stephen Tollas sees a mass of demonstrators – to judge by their poor garb, mostly workers – confronting five Russian tanks vibrating and snorting in the middle of Calvin Square.² Even when the tanks begin firing over their heads until brick fragments and mortar rain down the walls above them, the workers do not disperse. But the next burst of gunfire scythes right across several ranks of them flattening them like corn beneath a combine harvester. Tollas covers his face with his hands, unable to bear the obscene and unexpected sight. He shoulders his stolen rifle and begins firing it in impotent fury at the tanks. The Russians lob shells into the building above him. “This happened between nine and ten A.M.,” Tollas said.

Stunned by the announcement of martial law several Communist writers – including Zelk and Benjámín – again scuttled off to Academy Street, wriggled between the Soviet tanks and tried to argue the Party out of this folly.³ This time they were really harshly thrown out. They returned licking their wounds and decided not to go back there again. Inside the Party building, Nagy showed not the slightest compunction about it. Later that morning he went over the details of martial law with his minister of justice and public prosecutor; he instructed the minister to prevent any abuse of martial law, but to apply it pitilessly if need be. “I signed the law towards midday,” Nagy testified at his trial.

Nagy’s first actions caused the Radio Free Europe policy directors in Munich equal anguish. The Hungarian exiles working for RFE had to be curbed in their natural impulse to heap contempt on this Marxist premier. Immediate guidance sheets went to RFE staff during the morning:

Actions of the new Communist leaders in Budapest and Warsaw are better not prejudged at this time. That Nagy called upon foreign troops to restore “order” is a fact he will have to live down. He can live it down only by keeping his promises and helping to establish the climate of freedom and material satisfaction for which the people yearn . . .

The rumours from Budapest rolled across the country that morning like a slow tidal wave. Near Cegléd, tractor driver Béla Harmatzy-Simon was ploughing long, steady furrows back and forth across the collective farm.⁴ After a while some peasants clustering round a cottage on one edge of the field began shouting to him: “Come and listen!”

He shook his head. Next time his tractor turned at the furrow’s end, they were shouting: “Imre Nagy is prime minister! Come and listen!” But Harmatzy-Simon shook his head, swung the wheel and started a new furrow.

When he did at last relent his only comment was: “That’s good. That means the end of collectives.”

The peasants were laughing; in their mind’s eye they were already carving up this collective between them. An official rejoiced: “Now I won’t have to be Party secretary any more.”

But at the end of the next furrow there was another news bulletin: it was Imre Nagy who had invited Soviet troops to intervene and restore order. This evoked angry shouts: “We want nothing to do with him.”

Budapest itself awoke to paralysed bus and tram lines and the rattle of sporadic gunfire. “The city was dead,” said one girl student. “Nobody went to work.”⁵ Film director Rodriguez sent his cameramen out on roving missions – there was no point in assigning locations to them.⁶ There were no newspapers. When Imre Nagy himself broadcast at midday, his words would ring out over deserted workbenches. At some of the biggest factories, like the Láng engineering works and the Klement Gottwald factory, only forty or fifty men had arrived even by midday.

At seven A.M. the first Soviet tanks rolled into Csepel Island’s cobbled streets. When the radio announced that “plundering gangs of counter-revolutionaries” were disturbing the peace, one young seventeen-year-old schoolboy saw red.⁷ He ran upstairs to fetch one of his home-made sawn-off shotguns from the attic, hid it under his coat and left the family’s slum flat. His father, a factory electrician, saw what he was doing and shouted after him: “Do what you think best! I’d do the same if I was your age!” His mother was crying, and tried to cling to him; he was her only son. He collected his two friends, the trainee priest and the mechanical engineer apprentice, and rushed with them to the centre of Csepel. A large crowd had gathered outside the local Party and DISz headquarters, and there was the crackle of gunfire being exchanged by the buildings’ defenders and the mob. Elsewhere a printing works was rushed by young men demanding to print the Fourteen Points. Police gunfire felled three of them. After that the mob began mercilessly picking off the police. The printing machines began to roll, and bundles of the leaflets thus sanctified in blood were passed out to the crowds.

At United Electrical in northern Budapest the day shift arrived at seven A.M. Many of them had already seen the big demonstrations after clocking off the afternoon before. As they waited to clock in a lorry-load of young armed workers arrived and began sniping at the red star mounted on the roof. Factory guards swung the main gates shut, but enough workers were already inside to break into the MÖHOSz (factory defence association) office and grab rifles. A woman

funky tried to stop them, but she was thrust aside.⁸ Thus armed this unattractive mob of workers and foremen sluiced through Budapest's endless northern slums towards the city centre, their ranks swelling with contingents from other factories. At the corner of Rákóczi Street a student organised these leaderless workers into smaller groups – it was an aspect of this uprising that the workers unquestioningly followed the young intellectuals – he told them the slogans to shout and pointed them in the general direction of the American legation.

During the night the plight of the Kilián Barracks had worsened as it was taken under fire by rebels from the houses opposite. Its armoury had been stormed by insurgents and ransacked. Colonel Maléter learned of this from the barracks commander, Captain Louis Csiba. What was more, some two hundred soldiers had joined the insurgents. Maléter sent his deputy, Lieutenant-Colonel Horváth, to the barracks, and appealed for a company from the Kossuth Military Academy a mile further up Üllői Road to come and eject the rebels still trespassing on the Kilián barrack premises.

The arms looted from factories, arsenals and armouries, or willingly released by disloyal Hungarian forces, were being freely issued at points all over the city. Bus driver Zoltán Szabó arrived back at his rented room near the Kilián Barracks, just off the Boulevard, at about nine A.M. and saw lorry-loads of arms arriving in the side streets. A sub-machine gun and two grenades were passed out to him. He recalled: "We were shooting in the direction of the Joseph Boulevard where Soviet tanks appeared from time to time. During the morning I fired at a Russian armoured car."⁹

Where people managed to get to work opinion was divided. One student architect of twenty-five found apprehensive faces at his architect's office. His older colleagues reproached him: "Is this what you wanted when you began your peaceful demonstration?"¹⁰ And a student journalist of twenty-one who visited the violated Stalin monument with János Gereben of the *Monday News* was frightened by the strangers he now saw hurrying past: these were not the young idealists who had paraded in yesterday's afternoon sunshine across Margaret Bridge – these were the working classes, men with leathery faces, muscles of steel, and malevolence in their eyes.¹¹ They were toting brand-new

guns still glistening with packing-oil, and they were out to settle old scores. “No good can come of this,” remarked Szabó to his friend.

That morning Francis Gaál, a twenty-seven-year-old army officer and Party member, drove his wife and child from Nyíregyháza to Budapest; from Debrecen onwards the road was choked with Russian convoys and tanks pouring in from the Soviet border.¹² At Pestszentlőrinc, an outer suburb of Budapest, the road was blocked by a hostile crowd. As he cranked down the car window he thought that he could hear gunfire coming from ahead. Young men hammered on his car and shouted, “Take that red star off your cap!”

Gaál complied, baffled. They thrust a leaflet at him. “Join us! Join the revolution!” Gaál read the fourteen demands. Why not? He sent his wife and child to shelter in a cottage and drove to the local anti-aircraft artillery barracks for help, which they refused, then he returned and helped the people throw up a barricade across the street beneath a railway bridge. Willing hands toppled railway trucks down the embankment on to the road. Other men drove off to get firearms. Then they concealed themselves and waited for the next Russian tanks to come into sight.

The radio had appealed for citizens to stay off the streets until nine A.M. and to prevent the armed rebels from getting into their blocks of flats. The curfew warnings were ignored. Chemical engineer János Ottó, twenty-six, went to the town centre curious to find out just why he should stay off the streets.¹³ In Moscow Square he ran into kids collecting empty bottles.

“What are the bottles for?” he asked.

They told him. They had all seen how to make bottle bombs in the Soviet partisan warfare films that were part of their general education.

He advised them, “Don’t just mess about with petrol – use nitroglycerine!”

They took this helpful stranger to their school lab, and he showed them how to set about synthesising nitro. He made enough to prime about a hundred bottles, and then went home.

A gang of secondary schoolboys hijacked an empty tram from the depot and careered it down the wrong tracks towards Saint Stephen’s hospital in the town centre. Every time they stopped more people clambered aboard, all heading for

the action. The mood was one of exhilaration. The youngsters felt they were rattling towards a great adventure. But soon the crowds were so dense that the tram could go no further. They abandoned it and ran on towards the Üllői Road intersection dominated by the Kilián Barracks. There was a powerful stench coming from a smouldering Russian army lorry.

There were sudden shouts: "Russians coming!"

The crowd melted as two tanks clattered round a corner into view. A silence descended, broken by a single shout: "Shoot the buggers!" And a rattle of small-arms fire began from every direction. The youngsters tried to get cover in the barracks, but the soldiers there threw them back out just as a violent explosion shook the building. A tank began burning fiercely: a teenager had scored a direct hit with a petrol bottle. A Russian soldier levered himself out of the turret, and was immediately peppered with bullets. He slumped slowly to the ground, where the crowd surged forward from their cover and kicked and spat on him.¹⁴

The rebels began to occupy the police stations and the district Party headquarters, looting the weapons and passing them out to the streets. There were the first reports of Soviet tanks firing into crowds: at nine A.M. two tanks rumbling towards Marx Square opened fire and killed two pedestrians. A local photographer called Hajdú took photographs of the demonstration marching down Stalin Street at ten thirty A.M., chanting slogans like "Russians go home", and "We are not fascists". Ten minutes later when they arrived at the Lenin Boulevard, Soviet tanks in front of the Western Railway Station several hundred yards away opened fire, killing a young soldier and gunning down a youngster who ran forward to try to help him.¹⁵

Right after Imre Nagy had left with Fazekas and Jánosi for Parliament Square, his daughter had moved next door to be with her mother.¹⁶ They put her two little children Frank and Katalin to bed and sat up late waiting for word from the city. None came. Finally they both went to bed worried sick by the lack of news from their husbands. In the morning Mrs. Nagy began telephoning around to find out what had happened. She phoned Vásárhelyi, she tried Julius Háty. "Do you know where Imre is? He didn't come home all night." She gathered that both men were still in the Central Committee headquarters, but the switchboard

there stolidly refused to put her through. Nagy's daughter tried then to get through to Francis Münnich, an old friend from their Moscow years together. Münnich was busy, probably with his mistress. Meanwhile, friends telephoned the Nagy household with the awful news of the fighting and George Heltai came round from next door to tell them that the radio had announced that Imre Nagy was prime minister again.

At Academy Street the old differences were coming out into the open. Gerő handed Nagy a radio speech and told him: "Go and read this into the tape recorder." Nagy read it and refused. As more alarming reports came in about the marching crowds, Gerő invited Nagy to make such changes to the text as he saw fit. The draft went back and forth several times until Nagy would yield no further, and Gerő agreed to allow the speech to be broadcast as it was.¹⁷

As the dynamos of this crumbling Party powerhouse faltered and the ideological lighthouse dimmed, the leaderless Communists fought with their consciences. Nicholas Molnár, Marxist writer of thirty-eight, at first saw all the typical signs of a "counter-revolution" most foul – until an old lady stopped him during this morning in the street and asked him simply: "How are our boys doing?"¹⁸

Molnár guiltily hurried round to Kopácsi's police headquarters and spent the rest of the day there, with a growing band of rebellious journalists. But by nine even this modern building on Deák Square was taking sniper fire from several buildings opposite. The front offices were unusable, their walls pockmarked with bullet holes, Whether the mob linked this building with the ÁVH or it was just a mindless assault on every vestige of authority, Kopácsi was in a spot. His ammunition was low and his ministry refused to help: "We're under attack ourselves," snapped an official when Kopácsi telephoned. "And as for sending tanks, don't daydream. Get lost, Kopácsi!" At the defence ministry, a fellow ex-partisan, Ladislav Földes, agreed to send round ammunition if he could find a way of fetching it. Kopácsi began sweating freely in his shirtsleeves despite the chill wind gusting through the shattered windows. He phoned a major-general he knew at the army's headquarters. The general said, "I'll try and send over a couple of tanks. Hold on!"

Kopácsi's minister demanded an explanation for his failure to throw the weight of the regular police force against the insurgents. "Your men are even

giving them back their weapons!” Piros protested. Kopácsi did not deny this: he later testified that he had been profoundly influenced by Nagy’s view – forcefully put to him by George Fazekas and the other writers – that this was a “pure and democratic revolution”. Twice he overheard Fazekas telephoning Nagy; and had not Aczél and the other writers originally arrived here direct from talks with the Old Man at Parliament?¹⁹ Kopácsi decided to disregard Piros’s protests.

The radio bulletins placed the members of the Imre Nagy group in something of a quandary. The Central Committee had ratified that Gerő was confirmed in his leadership of the Party, which was a direct rebuff to the public demands. Francis Donáth heard that he himself and János Kádár and Julius Kállai had been nominated as secretaries. Similarly, the radio announced the election to the Politburo of Kállai, Joseph Köböl, the Budapest branch’s first secretary, Nagy, Szántó, and Losonczy. Alexander Erdei telephoned Losonczy’s home and broke the news to him: “You are a member of the Central Committee!”²⁰ Donáth also telephoned Losonczy and then went round to see him. They jointly decided to refuse to accept the posts: they were furious about the use of firearms against the rebels; they thought Gerő must go, and they wanted the Russians to leave Hungary too. They wrote a two-page letter to the Central Committee.

Around noon Losonczy telephoned the Writers’ Union and asked their help in drawing up a new Central Committee and a new government. He told writer Stephen Márkus: “I’m thinking of a broad-based government of national unity under the leadership of Imre Nagy.”²¹

In the unhealthy isolation of Academy Street, Nagy was immured both from his friends’ criticism and the public resentment. While the broadly anti-Nagy Central Committee went into renewed session, it was impossible for him to think straight. A jealous fight was raging between the right and left wings, each anxious to lump Nagy’s brittle prestige behind its own policies. His friends Lócsei, Gimes and others pleaded with him to take a more independent stand; they wanted to lever him out of this bunker atmosphere.¹² But he would not move. This was his home.

Ten minutes after noon Imre Nagy made his broadcast. He sounded nervous. He repeated the call for the insurgents to lay down their arms by two p.m. He

promised them amnesty, appealed for calm and promised to revive his June 1953 New Course – as though that insipid manifesto was written in letters of flame on the insurgents’ banners! – “under the leadership of the Communists”. He blamed “hostile elements” for whipping up public feeling against the People’s Republic and the “power of the people”. He boomed, “Order, calm, discipline – these are now the slogans. They come before everything else.” That might be true inside the Party headquarters but outside, in the street, the slogans were very different: the people wanted the Russians out, they wanted free elections now.

Peter Kende telephoned Nicholas Vásárhelyi that morning to discuss Nagy’s proclamation of martial law. Vásárhelyi told him, “I’ve been trying to find the Old Man. No trace of him.” That afternoon Mrs. Nagy again telephoned Vásárhelyi. “Please go over to Academy Street,” she pleaded. “Poor Imre is all alone there, you should go and help him. Why did you leave the Old Man alone there?” Vásárhelyi soberly explained to her: “If Uncle Imre wants me and my friends to go there he can send a car or call for me. I can’t just turn up uninvited!”

The truth was that Nagy’s supporters were in disarray. They were distressed by his proclamation of martial law and by the Soviet intervention. The Old Man had sold out to the hard-liners. Vásárhelyi, one of the country’s most capable politicians, stayed in his flat all day while friends telephoned from across the river with stricken accounts of the street fighting.

From the radio bulletins it was obvious to anybody of intelligence that the rioting was, in fact, getting worse. The regime’s helplessness was evident from the curfews imposed, and from the sliding deadlines for amnesty: Nagy’s broadcasters promised at twelve ten p.m., at one twenty-three p.m. and at one fifty-four p.m. that anybody who laid down arms by two p.m. would not be punished despite martial law. At seven minutes past two p.m., however, the deadline was extended to six p.m. All the while, the radio provided unconvincing accounts of insurgent groups who had apparently complied with the surrender demands. Three hours later the process was repeated: at five forty-five Nagy’s broadcasters announced, “Only fifteen minutes remain for the avoidance of the death penalty.” Then, with no mention at all of their earlier efforts, they launched a new surrender appeal at twelve minutes past six. This undignified slither into

anarchy continued throughout the day. The rebels battled on, ignoring the curfews, the appeals, the T-54s, the police patrols, and the little lime-covered ragheaps that had once been their fellow citizens or enemies.

Above the growing din could be heard the plaintive voice of Nagy and his embattled broadcasters trying to curb the rebels. Every stooge was harnessed to this pathetic campaign. Proclamations were issued in the name of the Petőfi Circle, appeals were made to parents, and by “fellow sportsmen”. Long-forgotten names were wheeled out of the political junkroom to impress the older generations. Zoltán Tildy, the Smallholder politician who had been the country’s feckless president from 1946 to 1948; Árpád Szakasits, Tildy’s successor; Archbishop Joseph Grösz and Richard Horváth, president of the fellow-traveling Peace Council of Catholic Priests; the Party’s mass organisations like the trades union congress, the journalists’ association and the Patriotic People’s Front chorused lamentation at the uprising. Radio Kossuth broadcast sentimental appeals by popular figures like Julius Hágy who read out an injured reassurance that now that “our man” Imre Nagy was in power all further fight was senseless – “This is the message of your loving old friend Julius Hágy, the writer.” When “several listeners” questioned why the Soviet troops were in their city, the radio besought them: “Workers of Budapest! Welcome with affection our friends and allies.”

What were Nicholas Vásárhelyi’s feelings over all this? “I had two sensations,” Vásárhelyi reflected. “The first was of surprise. We never realised that within twenty-four hours such a mass movement would arise from the intellectual ferment we had provided. The second was of depression when I heard that Mr. Nagy had accepted the job of prime minister – I knew from that moment that everything was lost. We had accumulated over the years a measure of moral and political capital; but now Mr. Nagy had accepted the role of prime minister in a government which was otherwise precisely the same as two days earlier – the very government against which we had been fighting! He was the head of a regime which had proclaimed martial law, and its prime minister at the moment when the Soviet troops intervened. I had desperate discussions with Losonczy on this day, October 24th. We were in despair. We could not understand how the Old Man could have accepted this solution.”²³

28 Each Man has Two Reasons

NOW THE GRANDER names familiar from these chapters fade from view. The revolution is wrenched from the hands of the intellectuals and the street takes over. Nameless citizens, whom no Party newspaper – and that means no newspaper – has ever mentioned and never will by name, step on stage with guns, grenades, and other implements of insurrection, defying the professional military might of their imperialist oppressors. The Soviet tank crews face a barrage of furious gunfire.

Most of these street fighters remain nameless to the end. In Western interrogation files many are identified only as case numbers or by first names or soubriquets. But some men do become legends, not because a cynical editor has asked for personalities as circulation-heroes, but because they display the kind of instinctive leadership that is spoken of in awe; and these names will be passed from mouth to mouth, from street to street, and will eventually be engraved in the unofficial folklore of the nation long after the hangman has put a hateful end to the mortal frames that bear them.

There is Colonel Mecséri, the tank division commander, one of the few officers to order his men to fire on the Russians. There is Joseph Dudás, whose ragtag army occupies the Party's printing house and founds a newspaper called *Independence*. There is Captain Pálinkás, who frees the captive Cardinal Mindszenty and brings him to Budapest. There is "Captain Nemo", who commands a regular army unit which goes over to the rebels, and Alexander Angyal, a slightly-built young worker from Csepel with a roll-neck pullover, who sets up his headquarters in Tüzoltó Street next to the Kilián Barracks. Angyal's group

will fight on into mid-November. He will then be captured and executed. Most of these groups are in working-class areas of Budapest or around the Kilián Barracks, Museum Boulevard and Rákóczi Street. Over in Buda, four main groups emerge during the day: these centre on Óbuda, Rose Hill, Széna Square and Gellért Hill. A former army lieutenant, Emanuel Buttkovszky, assumes loose command of these Buda rebels.

Not all of these insurgent leaders will pay for their actions with their lives. There are the tall, smelt worker brothers Ödön and Ernest Pongrátz. Both are in their mid-twenties and will escape to the West. Ernest has mingled with the thousands on Parliament Square, and when he hears later that night from a motorcyclist that Soviet tanks are approaching down Fehérvári Road, he directs the construction of barricades to stop them. Yet another Pongrátz brother, Christopher, fills barrels from a petrol station and trundles them out into the middle of the road; the tarmac explodes in a pool of fire which halts the first tank while the thirteen tanks following close behind ram each other in the panic. As dawn breaks the brothers flag down a passing lorry and ride into town. At the intersection with Üllői Road they find a big crowd sheltering from flying bullets near the corner building – the Kilián Barracks.¹

Here the battle is still raging. The night's invaders have been thrown out, but the barracks is under withering fire from several nearby buildings. When the three young gun enthusiasts from Csepel Island arrive at the Kilián Barracks, to help in the fighting there, they are rudely rebuffed. "We are from Csepel, we've come to help," they megaphone down the glass-strewn street. But the only disbelieving answer is a hail of fire.² Somebody shouts: "Soviet tanks coming!" The tanks rattle past followed by three black limousines which open fire on the crowds. Another convoy of Soviet tanks and armoured vehicles approaches down the Boulevard. At the corner, a bullet slashes one front tyre of the last personnel carrier in the line; as it slews to a halt a young Russian soldier tries to man the rapid-fire machine gun but is shot dead. A youngster hurls a petrol bottle at it and an older man kindles it with a match. The exit hatch clangs open and steel-helmeted Russians throw themselves out. None of them gets far. The machine gun is torn out of the smouldering wreckage and set up nearby, in the school building in Práter Street.

Each little partisan victory redoubles their confidence. The Soviet troops are not invulnerable. Ödön Pongrátz notices a locked petrol station in the Corvine Passage; they smash the padlock, and get more petrol. Somebody tells him that house Number 4 is an empty workers' billet. The basements of these old buildings are linked by tunnels – a relic of the air-raids of 1944 – and so the Pongrátz brothers expand their fortress. From the Corvine Passage the gang snipes at passing Russian armour. The next tank jams one tank-track, and the beast pirouettes long enough for a petrol bottle to smother it in flames. Before the day is over these rebels will capture an anti-tank gun too; they spread its limber on the front steps of the Corvine cinema. Soon the two-hundred-yard stretch of boulevard running past the Kilián Barracks and the Corvine Passage is blocked with wrecked Russian military vehicles. The stench of burning flesh is overpowering. A placard is hung on the anti-tank gun's barrel: "Show prolonged by public demand."

The defenders of the Budapest Party headquarters on Republic Square have seen no action yet but they are badly rattled.³ Since dawn groups of rebels have drifted past, some of them quite openly armed. Three men approach the building, brazenly toting an airgun and a rifle and are arrested. Later this morning three Soviet tanks commanded by an army captain arrive. Together with an armoured car manned by Soviet soldiers and Hungarian officers and an interpreter, they take up station outside.

Tired and unshaven, Imre Mező returns from the nocturnal meetings at Academy Street. ÁVH lieutenant Várkonyi briefed him on the building's defences. Mező warns him about a passage leading from this Party building to the DISz headquarters next door; this will need guarding too. Mező persuades the defence ministry to send round fifty more rifles, three crates of ammunition and two crates of hand-grenades, and these are issued to Party officials who have taken refuge in the building. Throughout the day two NCOs drill them in handling these weapons. Mező also attempts to get arms issued to the Party branches throughout the city, but there appears to be a hold-up somewhere.

At Academy Street the Party is tackling the crisis in the only way it knows: it is appointing sub-committees, to which are co-opted worthy individuals like Zoltán Vas and Antony Apró, who are sent round to the ministry of defence. There is a military committee too; Imre Mező is made a member, and it meets

generals in the defence ministry to discuss the arming of the local branches throughout the city.⁴

This was becoming urgent. Attacks on local Party headquarters increased all that day, October 24th. Angry mobs successfully demanded the removal of signboards outside the XVIIIth and XIXth Districts. At the IInd District in Buda and on Csepel Island the Party headquarters were under siege. The K-line switchboard in the squat headquarters building on Republic Square was jammed with calls; the local funkies screamed for arms, troops and armoured cars to defend them from the angry workers. Mező's staff passed these frantic appeals on to Academy Street. The response was promises, but these promises rang increasingly hollow as the day wore on. Mező managed to obtain one consignment of army uniforms for the local district headquarters, but these were of no use without weapons. From Xth District came word that the prison there was under rebel assault. By afternoon, several branch headquarters had fallen to the insurgents. As darkness fell, Mező heard with grim foreboding that the arsenal in Timót Street and the Lámpagyár weapons factory had been stormed too. The balance of power was tilting ever further against the forces of the regime.⁵

Hungarian government forces had regained possession of the National Museum building, from which much of the gunfire had been poured into the radio building during the night. They found the floor between the exhibits littered with hundreds of cartridge cases, grenade fuses, hand-grenades, and bottles of petrol. Fires were smouldering, but fighting was still raging around the area, and the fire brigade could not get near it; by one thirty p.m. the building was in flames. The museum was gutted, its famous mineral and palaeontological collection, and its libraries consumed by the flames.

The universities and schools did not open, the shops and offices remained closed. Tens of thousands of young men and women poured into the streets, looking for weapons. Frantic fathers combed the streets looking for their offspring. In the block of flats where Imre Szabó Nyirádi, a forty-five-year-old former airforce captain, lived, all the youngsters had left to fight. He went out to join them. In Vármegyé Street near the Astoria Hotel a gang of twelve-year-olds asked to be shown how to operate the guns. Some older men were demonstrating the arming and throwing of grenades, and how to attack tanks. The airforce officer ran home and typed out several copies of instructions on small combat

tactics for them, never to attack twice from the same place, and so forth.⁶ As the days progressed, so the guerrilla tactics became more deadly. A rebel would stroll along the pavement with his hand tucked inside his greatcoat concealing a pistol: as he passed a Russian soldier he could push the muzzle out at left-shoulder height and shoot him down without revealing the weapon.⁷

A typical seventeen-year-old schoolboy living on the corner of Práter Street met some friends near the school, and decided to join the battle.⁸ They took over the school building. Three machine guns and ammunition materialised from nowhere, then other smaller weapons. The group grew to number over three hundred, including several young soldiers. One of this lad's best friends became its leader until he was killed a few days later. He sent out ten- and twelve-year-olds to report the "enemy" movements. After a while a regular police captain took command of the group. Not that the Corvine Passage gang were all saints: a one-legged man asked to join; opinion was divided, but he had brought two "cannons" and some ammunition with him so they let him in. He was probably János Méssz, known as Pegleg Jack, a criminal with sixteen offences for stealing and vagabondage; his own gang would eventually number eighty men or more, not a few of them fugitives from prison. And there was "Bijou", better known to the criminal police as Gábor Dilinkó on account of his seven theft convictions.⁹

The Hungarian defence ministry had distributed 6,700 troops and fifty tanks among thirty different locations, but they were virtually without orders.¹⁰ The main buildings were ringed by Soviet armoured vehicles. Around two p.m. a Soviet tank clattered past the armour lining one side of Academy Street and halted outside the Central Committee building; the hatch clanged open and two sombre-visaged Russians climbed stiffly out: Anastas I. Mikoyan and Michael A. Suslov. Mikoyan, deputy premier of the Soviet Union, was a short, moustached Armenian of whom his admiring staff said he needed no umbrella when it rained – he was clever enough to dodge each raindrop. His famous black hair was now peppered with grey. Suslov, fifty-three, son of a smallholder, was the Kremlin's expert on Central European affairs.

They had both been following the score in Hungary closely. At the time of the Rajk funeral they had conducted secret talks in the Kremlin with Hungarian

officials. The Russians were not impressed by the bickering they now witnessed between Gerő and Hegedüs on one side and Nagy and Kádár on the other. The mood was agitated. Nobody was sitting down, everybody was standing around. Zoltán Vas was in the middle of a big row with Gerő.

“Why did you have to go and make that broadcast?”

Gerő replied, “I did it for the Soviets’ sake!”

Vas snapped, “You’d have done better to put Hungary first and not the Soviets!”¹¹

Mikoyan excoriated Gerő and heaped recriminations on the local Soviet counter-intelligence official for having called in Soviet troops. In fact orders were issued this day to Soviet troops to open fire only if fired upon. But it was already too late.¹² Open battle had now been joined by the Hungarians against the Soviet forces and the ÁVH, the regime’s only reliable troops. The Hungarian armed forces stood idly by.

Probably most of the street fighters had only a hazy notion of how they had come to find themselves with guns in their hands. The Russians found themselves faced by hordes of death-defying youngsters: students, apprentices and even schoolchildren who did not care whether they lived or died. About eleven per cent of Hungary’s under-twenties would fight actively in the uprising, and nineteen per cent of those aged from twenty to thirty.¹³ But those aged over thirty were more circumspect. Only five per cent of those aged thirty to fifty fought actively, and one per cent of those older than that: they knew what war was, and many of them had fought Soviet tanks before with far better weapons than the youngsters could obtain now; they knew the odds against success.

The news from Warsaw had astonished Washington. In fact, these East European stirrings had caught the Americans flatfooted. President Eisenhower was in New York, being cheered by banner-waving girls with buttonhole badges reading: “I like Ike.” Ike was at a crucial stage of his re-election campaign, and his advisers were floundering. CIA director Allen Dulles telephoned his brother, the secretary of state, and muttered that he thought they ought to do something, but he did not quite know what. He called the Polish turnabout “one of the most dramatic things since Khrushchev’s speech”.¹⁴

Now the news from Hungary produced consternation. John Foster Dulles telephoned Ambassador Lodge at the United Nations at seven minutes past six in the evening on October 24th. “Apparently the fighting is developing in quite a big way and there is clear evidence of considerable Soviet military activity in the area to try to repress it. We are thinking of the possibility of bringing it to the Security Council.”

Dulles told Lodge what was worrying him. “People are going to accuse us that here is one of history’s great moments, with these Hungarian fellows ready to stand up and die, and we have been caught napping and done nothing.”

Lodge was hesitant. The secretary of state asked him to think what action should be taken at the United Nations and to ask the British and French perhaps to join in a motion for tomorrow.

“I’ll go to work on it,” said Lodge. “But I won’t do anything before I hear from you.”

The people in the big provincial cities like Debrecen, Szeged and Miskolc had not waited to take their cue from Budapest. Debrecen – with 140,000 inhabitants the second biggest provincial city – had seen University meetings several days before those in Budapest; on October 23rd the local Party newspaper *Néplap* published only a bowdlerised form of the resulting Twenty Points, and there were protest marches to the newspaper and to the Party headquarters. By afternoon the trams were at a standstill, and their red stars had vanished. One by one red stars were torn down from the main buildings too. A new edition of *Néplap* was forcibly printed in which the demands were correctly quoted. When crowds marched on the police headquarters, the police opened fire, killing an elderly shoemaker and one other man. After this a full-scale revolution broke out, and the county Party committee belatedly announced its support. With its approval a twenty-man Socialist Revolutionary Committee was formed from factory workers, scientists, students and agricultural labourers. Significantly, it was in Debrecen that the first workers’ councils were set up and began to take over the direction of the factories.¹⁵

There was unrest at Szeged, in Southern Hungary, too, and when word was received of events in Budapest during the night, the Party funkies barricaded themselves into the ÁVH barracks. Some fled in lorries towards Budapest or

made for the frontier with Romania and Yugoslavia. Students paraded through the darkened streets shouting slogans: "True Hungarians march with us! Freedom and Democracy! Russians go home!" The workers had obtained arms but there was no shooting. As the morning factory shifts arrived for work in Szeged from the surrounding villages, the radio was acting up. Radio Budapest was broadcasting no news or weather reports, just dance music. Sometimes a crackle like gunfire could be heard in the background. Sombre demonstrators paraded the national colours and a black flag side by side through Szeged. By noon all Szeged knew of the uprising, and as though to confirm the gravity of the crisis Russian tank personnel carriers coming from Transylvania rumbled down Kossuth Street, en route for Budapest. In Szeged too the crowd went on the rampage, tearing down Soviet emblems. One eighteen-year-old worker was killed, but there was no other shooting.¹⁶

Simultaneously unrest broke out at Miskolc, the big industrial city near the Czech frontier. The sensation of October 24th was an article in the city newspaper, *Észak Magyarország*, by the chief Party executive of Borsod County, Rudolf Földvári: he scathingly attacked Gerő's broadcast and declared that henceforth Borsod County supported neither the regime nor the Party. The pavements were crowded with people hurrying to work as usual, but many were carrying radios to keep up with the news. That evening Árpád Sultz, a twenty-eight-year-old Catholic theology student – a real *rara avis* in Communist Hungary – was sitting as usual with his pals in the Avas, the espresso bar near the Szinva Bridge.¹⁷ Everybody was talking about the newspaper article. Sultz had been arrested four times by the ÁVH, and interned in Tihany monastery, a barbed-wire prison camp for priests; the ÁVOs had broken four teeth, two ribs, and a finger and they had administered injections of sex hormones, a favourite ÁVH knavery against the celibate Catholics. In his cell, they had entertained him with sound recordings of what he would describe to the Americans as "hallucinations" and of other prisoners being tortured.

A commotion arose outside the coffee shop, and Sultz saw that a column of Russian troops had arrived, apparently coming from Czechoslovakia. They had stopped on the main street, casting around for the road leading south to Budapest. A hostile crowd had formed and swarmed on to the bridge so that the tanks could not cross. They first sat, then lay down on the bridge's cobbled surface.

The Russian commander drove up in a staff car, stepped out and began remonstrating with them. But Hungarians are hot-tempered people, and not easily intimidated. The mob surrounded his car, lifted it over the railings and toppled it into the river. The tyres of the lorries were slashed. Sultz arrived on the scene at the same time as his old acquaintances – ÁVH troops. Shots were fired into the air, and arrests were made.

At Cegléd about five thousand of the town's 45,000 inhabitants joined the rising this day, disarmed the police, wrecked the public prosecutor's office, and burned the files.¹⁸ It was announced that next day a public election would be held: a thousand people turned up for the meeting, including about four hundred industrial workers. There were hundreds of peasant folk too, and for the first time since the war they had wax-polished their leather boots. A tractor driver accidentally called the audience Comrades and was jeered off the platform. Judging by Cegléd the Party's days were numbered.

It was small wonder that in Moscow every alarm bell was clanging. By late on October 24th the ugliest rumours were flying round the Soviet capital. There was little in the Moscow newspapers, but from the reports being spread by Western diplomats it was clear that the emergency in Hungary was ten times worse than that in Poland. There was talk of armed clashes and of rioting. The uneasy Eastern bloc ambassadors got little help from the tight-lipped Soviet foreign ministry. Yugoslav ambassador Veljko Mićunović guessed that they might soon be witnessing the break-up of the Soviet empire – it had snapped at its weakest spot, Hungary. He heard some Russians saying that the West had evidently embarked on war in earnest against the “socialist camp”.¹⁹

There is no doubt that this belief conditioned Khrushchev's reactions. Late on October 24th, he sent for Mićunović. The Soviet leader made no attempt to conceal his worry. He raged that blood had been shed in Budapest, that the West was to blame, and that anti-Soviet elements had taken up arms against the socialist camp and the Soviet Union. “The West is seeking to revise the results of the Second World War,” Khrushchev bellowed. “They have started in Hungary, and they will go on to crush each socialist state in Europe one by one. But the West has miscalculated!”

His tone changed. He confided to the ambassador that in his view now was the time for Yugoslavia to render a real service to the cause of socialism in Hungary. He wanted the ambassador to carry a personal message to Tito, an uncompromising message that would stress that the Kremlin was ready to answer force with force.

“The Soviet leadership is completely unanimous on this,” insisted Khrushchev.

In large areas of Budapest the people were now in power. A major section of the city around the Kilián Barracks and the Corvine cinema had become a no-go area for the government forces. Woe betide those ÁVH men who fell into rebel hands here. There is one eloquent photograph of a man in a leather coat and snap brim hat being led away past the barracks by jubilant rebels for what the caption describes as “further questioning” while the local populace trails behind: the men gawping curiously, the women carrying shopping in string bags.

Who were these nameless faces in the photographs, clutching bottles, parcels, guns? Schooled by their own propaganda, the regime looked for stereotype ringleaders – for evidence of infiltration by the CIA, for agents of Adenauer’s Germany and for Horthyite exiles. They found none. Bewildered ÁVH men hacked their way into the dense jungle of tentacles hoping to find the rebel leader, a brain, a head, whose execution would cause the swift collapse of the uprising. But they encountered only fresh tentacles groping and slithering along every slum street and city square. This lack of leaders was both the uprising’s weakness and its strength. When one tentacle was hacked off more sprang up elsewhere.

In fact the uprising demolished some of Marxism’s most cherished beliefs. The fascists and reactionaries stayed out of it, the proletariat flocked to the anti-Soviet cause. Most of the combat damage would be done in Budapest’s working-class suburbs like Kőbánya and Csepel, and in industrial towns like Eger, Győr, Miskolc and Pécs.²⁰ Fellow sufferers from the Communist bloc joined in too. North Korean students would join the insurgents; a large Polish student delegation had arrived two weeks earlier; now they seized weapons and joined the fray.²¹ One of the ringleaders in the Corvine Passage was the former Greek partisan, George Nikos. “I fought British imperialism in Greece,” he was heard

saying. “Then I sought refuge here in Hungary, and that has cured me for all time of Communism!”²²

The insurgents’ motivations were deep-seated and often unsuspected. American psychiatrists will analyse many hundreds of these men only a few weeks later. Take the gangling, fair-haired biochemist of thirty-one, crouched behind the windows of the University building.²³ He has seen the first blood shed outside the radio building and has stayed in town with friends until the first Russian tanks rumbled by at four A.M.; then they hurried to the University dominating Üllői Road, and here the biochemist has found a gun pressed into his hands. On October 25th, with the formation of a revolutionary council of faculty members, he will be assigned responsibility for distributing supplies to other fighting groups around the University. He has become an armed rebel.

Five months later, this same man is in New Jersey, he can boast a fifteen-centimetre shrapnel scar on one thigh, and he is being subjected to intricate medical and anthropological scrutiny. Outside, the cars hum quietly across the Rutgers campus. The leaves are greening on the trees. It all seems very far from Hungary.

Precisely whom was he shooting at? The answer startles the experts as they probe deeper into the man’s childhood. He has a very high IQ, but is unmistakably servile: alone of the forty rebels whom Dr. George Devereux has interviewed, this man asks permission to sit down. His first memories are of the estate of Prince Eszterházy, where his father was a lowly gardener. It was a fairy-tale world of princes and princesses.

“What are your recurrent dreams?”

The man looks interested, and recalls: “We lived on a small hill and I dreamed that I fly away over the flat country; it was very pleasant. Sometimes I had nightmares, something unknown pursues me, but there is an obstacle, I must run, and I can’t.”

Psychiatrist Thomas J. O’Grady agrees that the man is unlike any other of the insurgents. “He is a very humble man, and this is contrary to the group as a whole,” he tells his colleagues at a conference on April 26th, 1957. “These people are conceited, self-seeking and completely ego-driven, as far as I can see.”

Dr. William N. Christensen nods and relates how this man got into the gun-play: “He said literally, ‘I don’t know why I did it, but I found myself shooting too!’” He volunteers his analysis to his colleagues: “The man’s great intelligence and levelheadedness are shown by the fact that he is able to tie together reality with fantasy. For example, in mentioning his recurrent childhood dream of flying out over the plains he started the dream by saying, ‘We lived on a small hill.’ In other words, the reality served as the jumping board for the fantasy. Another interesting thing is that he found in his puberty he had sexual fantasies about the princess, whom he described as a very sweet and agreeable person – and the prince is an insanely arrogant person. I checked on this fact with the niece of the prince,” adds Devereux, leafing through his file on Subject H50F, “and she said that the prince was so much the prince that there was nothing left over for the human being. As for the princess, she was extremely promiscuous and wore dresses with such deep décolleté that, as H50F put it, ‘It was only the Holy Ghost that kept it in place’.”

A colleague challenges him: how does all this add up to motivating the man to become a gunfighter. Devereux smiles. “As the great philosopher J. P. Morgan once said, ‘Everybody has two reasons for doing anything, a good reason and a real reason.’” The good reason would have been the biochemist’s feudal status as the son of a lowly serf on a princely estate. “First of all,” he explains, “he *had* to revolt, only – speaking now as though I were a Marxist! – he revolted against the wrong people. Instead of murdering the prince’s family he revolted against the *enemies* of the family!”

One of his colleagues prods Devereux. “I’m still not clear.” Devereux tries to put it another way. “He was shooting at the Communists with his gun, but psychologically he was shooting at the family of the prince.”

His colleague is still sceptical. “Why did he have to turn it upside down?” he asks.

Devereux sighs. “For the same reason that he couldn’t see that this sexual fantasy about the princess was actually produced by the princess’s deep décolleté and seductive manners,” he answers. “Because it was too closely tied up with his Oedipus attitude about his parents.”

“You’re saying then, that this man had built into him the seeds of a revolt, and also, because of his own personal character structure, it was not acceptable

to him to identify himself with the Communists? This would have brought more to the surface than he could have dealt with?” Devereux beams happily and nods: “It would have brought up both the prince-hatred and the parent-hatred.”

His colleague’s brow clears as he gets the point. “Therefore he ended up by revolting –” “– he shot at those who did his shooting for him!” Devereux completes the sentence for him.

In a University building on Üllői Road, a thousand miles east of Rutgers and half a year back in time, one angry biochemist steadies the rifle against his cheek as a Russian infantryman comes into view, and squeezes the trigger. There are two million different human beings in Budapest in October 1956: each of them has a different background, and most of them have their “two reasons” for turning against their oppressors.

29 Parliament Square

BUDAPEST, SIX A.M., OCTOBER 25th. A hazy early morning sun has begun filtering through the Danube mists. In Alexander Bródy Street Hungarian and Russian troops are preparing to clear out the rebels occupying the radio building at daybreak. The defence minister, General Stephen Bata, issues orders to his troops to “liquidate all counter-revolutionary elements still in the capital” by noon. A general strike is slowly spreading across capital and country; orders broadcast at six thirty A.M. for the resumption of public transport and the opening of shops and offices as usual are ignored. There are no trams running, and most offices and shops will remain closed even after the three-hour dawn curfew ends. From transmitters outside the city, a voice explains, “Dear village listeners, this morning you will not hear your regular programme, because events in Budapest have prevented our editors and colleagues from preparing their programme.”

At MTI, the government telegraph agency on Nap Hill, blankets mask the windows, bottles are wrapped in rags against splinter damage, and the editors shelter under their desks and argue about Imre Nagy’s action in calling in the Russians. From nineteen local MTI offices undiluted reports of revolution, turmoil and reprisals tickertape into this building. There are ugly reports of ÁVH actions in Miskolc, and nationalist sentiment is running high. The editors decide to suspend service to the radio: “It just keeps spreading lies.” Other MTI staffers try to get through to the prime minister but Nagy cannot be found. The agency tries János Kádár’s K-line extension, and a woman answers. When they

tell her of the reports from Miskolc the woman shouts: “Lies!” and slams the instrument down.¹

But turning their backs on the truth will not make it go away. Livid Party men soon read off the MTI tickertape that a revolutionary committee has taken power in Debrecen. Stephen Kossa, one of the remaining hardline Stalinists, telephones the agency and scolds it for undermining the official line that the uprising has fizzled out already.²

During the night there has been only intermittent firing, and American diplomats at first believe that the fighting has subsided. But early radio bulletins speak of renewed fighting near the Palace Hotel and at the radio building, and at six forty-five A.M. the newscaster reports that firefighters are still trying to douse the blaze at the Museum and that blocks of flats and shops are on fire; at eight twenty-three A.M. there are reports of rebel attempts to capture telephone exchanges. The American legation puts the Soviet strength that crashed into the city during the very first night of the uprising at “one mechanised infantry division”, and this is still doing most of the fighting; the Hungarian troops are being held in the background. Rebels are firing from positions on the roof of the American apartment house on Széchenyi Square, and Russian machine guns are spattering back, puncturing the masonry and smashing windows in the building.

As river mists still drift in past Parliament, an American legation car drives unobtrusively into the square. The square is an elongated paved space overshadowed by the riverbank neo-Gothic Parliament building on one side and a fifty-year-old building with street-level arcades, the ministry of agriculture, on the other. Beside Tom Gleason at the wheel of the legation car sits Gaza Katona, nursing a camera to photograph Soviet armoured vehicles parked around the square.³ The previous afternoon Associated Press stringer Endre Márton has counted more than fifty Soviet T-34s here. Their crews seem very young.

American attaché Brice C. Meeker also tours the city, exploring the strong perimeter thrown by the Soviets round Parliament, the defence ministry and ÁVH headquarters. Meeker finds the Russians digging in artillery on City Park. Tanks stand astride many of the main boulevard intersections. Six tanks now block every bridge, letting only pedestrians cross. One sharp-eyed legation wife

counts seventy-six Soviet troop lorries arriving in the city from the east with mobile field kitchens; the trucks' serial numbers begin with the letter "F" – which the agricultural attaché has "by chance" identified previously in Romania.⁴

Academy Street, with its Central Committee building, is plugged at both ends by Hungarian and Russian tanks. Radio journalist Peter Erdős has been inside the building since quite early; Valeria Benke has asked him to write an article for a Party newspaper. He sits down at a typewriter, but he has hardly started before Stephen Kovács, the powerful first secretary of the Budapest committee, walks in and whispers briefly to Mrs. Benke in a corner. The only word that Erdős catches is *megbízhatatlan* – "unreliable". Valeria Benke, who is of nervous disposition, bursts into tears. She comes over to Erdős and puts her arm round his shoulder: "Comrade Erdős, please leave the building. Go on, go away!"

He stands up, pulls the unfinished page out of the typewriter, and leaves the room. Mrs. Benke calls after him: "And one more thing – please try to persuade people not to go to Parliament Square!"

On reflection later this day, Erdős realises that Kovács must have asked Mrs. Benke to clear the building of unreliable elements. He guesses that some military decision must have been taken, some kind of action that will change the unhappy course that events were taking. As Erdős walks past the five-star Astoria Hotel he notices Russian tanks standing outside.⁵

Thomas Aczél, thirty-six, journalist, went home for a bath and a clean shirt.⁶ He had done this several times a day since the uprising, feeling that if a revolution was worth doing at all it was worth doing in style. Crowds were already flowing into Rákóczi Street, twenty blocks from Parliament Square. This morning there was to be another demonstration march to Parliament, where everybody assumed Imre Nagy to be. True, the ban on public gatherings had been repeated by the radio at seven thirty A.M., but nobody heeded it.

The regime's authority was disintegrating, and these crowds were the visible proof. Eight or nine hundred men and women had already formed up, blocking Rákóczi Street from pavement to pavement, and more people were falling in behind. The photographs show people holding aloft new national flags clean of the Communist emblem, and an immense red, white and green banner unfurled

like an apron across the entire front rank. In front of that would march two men carrying a black banner to mourn those already killed by the ÁVH. Like a long-distance locomotive gathering steam, the crowd began panting its first slogans: “The radio is lying!” “Gerő’s a rat!” and “Russians go home!”

Normally Rákóczi Street was one of the city’s busiest arteries, but its big hotels and office blocks had been devastated by the fighting. The tram cables were down; they were probably inert but nobody liked to touch them to find out. Where Rákóczi Street intersects the Boulevard, people hurrying past earlier, like Peter Erdős, had already noticed Russian tanks and troop carriers standing like motionless vigilantes near the Astoria Hotel. Foreign newspapermen billeted in the hotel had watched yesterday’s renewed fighting round the radio building, as tanks and infantry tried to winkle out the snipers in Alexander Bródy Street; now many shop windows were shattered and shellholes pockmarked the façades, and many fine cars with foreign number plates had their windshields starred by bullets.

At first they did not notice each other – the Russian tanks and the marching demonstrators. When they did, there was nothing either could do about it anyway. The tanks had their hatches shut, their guns were pointing away. The front ranks could not halt without being trampled underfoot. They just swarmed all over the steel monsters, led by a teenager who planted a flag in the muzzle of a gun on one of the tanks. Students banged on the closed hatches, and called on the Soviet tankers to show themselves. To gusts of laughter, the other motionless tanks were given the same treatment. Then a hatch opened, a Russian lieutenant poked his head out, there was a short exchange between him and the demonstrators, who had learnt Russian in school or captivity, and then all the Russian soldiers clambered out on top of their vehicles. There were remarkable scenes as the young men hugged and embraced each other, and even exchanged Soviet and Hungarian army caps. Of course, not everybody saw clearly what was happening. There were many different interpretations. One eye-witness relates, “At the corner of the Boulevard and Rákóczi Street I saw some Russian tanks behaving very peacefully, although the crowd was threatening . . . They put out a Hungarian flag.”⁷ A German who took two reels of film of the scene timed the photographs from nine-thirty to ten a.m.⁸ And an engineer described: “When the crowd reached the tanks they stopped and began to shout, since

many of them could speak Russian. They translated their slogans for the Russians, 'We are not fascists! We are the Hungarian workers.'⁹ The Russian soldiers displayed no hostility. They fraternised with the youngsters in the crowd and some of the kids climbed up on the tanks." One of the Russians must have issued an order, because the tank engines started, blasting clouds of mortar dust into the air from the ground with their deafening exhausts, and they lumbered slowly off down the Boulevard in the direction of the Western Railway Station.

As this was also the route to Parliament, the demonstrators in effect fell in behind the Russian tanks, an incongruous spectacle that led to further speculation and rumour.¹⁰ One of the tanks swivelled and vanished down a side street to the right. The other four rolled onward, still bedecked with Hungarian flags and passengers. As the marchers passed the American legation Endre Márton estimated their number at two thousand; some waved and shouted, "Why don't you help us?" Political attaché Gaza Katona took two snapshots of the Russian tanks as they rattled past the building.

Peter Hanák, a slightly-built, dark-haired professor with a beaky nose and nervous disposition, had spent all the previous day at home.¹¹ His nerves were taut, having marched with his colleagues and watched from afar as the multitudes massed on Parliament Square. When widespread street fighting broke out next day he stayed at home, pleading 'flu. But several friends had telephoned from the University, including Professor Zoltán I. Tóth, the popular dean of the philosophy faculty. Tóth was about ten years his senior, but they shared the same narrow field of interest as historians – East European nationality problems in the nineteenth century – and they had travelled abroad together. Tóth persuaded him to come over to the University building next morning for a meeting.

At the philosophy faculty in the city centre this morning, October 25th, the two professors were surrounded by clamorous students. The students handed them a scrap of squared paper on which they had jotted down four or five main demands, including an amnesty for arrested rebels and a new government, and pleaded with the professors to deliver the paper to the University or Party authorities. The professors walked over to the University's main administrative centre at the Law School, three or four hundred yards away in Kecskeméti Street, and asked to see the rector, Professor János Beér. They were told that he had just left with Professor George Székely, professor of medieval history, for the Party

headquarters at Academy Street. The University's party secretary, Csiky Szász, suggested that they go right over and join the rector's delegation.

Tóth, Hanák and a third academic, Stephen Kató, set off on foot, parallel to the streets along which the immense multitude of demonstrators was once again shambling towards Parliament.

By this time the Soviet emissaries, Suslov and Mikoyan, were holding another top-level meeting in Academy Street. According to one source, the two Russians scolded Gerő for having panicked Moscow into armed intervention in Budapest, by his "exaggerated and distorted" reports. Suslov advised him to resign, and when Gerő protested that Moscow needed him if the Party was to be held together, Mikoyan retorted: "Thanks to your incredible stupidity the Party has already gone up in smoke!"¹²

There was great confusion and panic in the Party building as demands to see Imre Nagy again reached them from the crowd. At one stage a burst of machine-gun fire crashed through the windows of the Politburo chamber – Hegedüs believed it had come from Buda – and stitched the wall only a couple of feet above their heads.¹³ The ÁVH gave assurances that it would defend the leaders and prepared a room in the basement to which the conference was shortly transferred.¹⁴ Nagy made no attempt to show himself to the multitudes this time.

Across the river, the telephone rang around ten A.M. in Nicholas Vásárhelyi's flat. It was a call from Julius Oszkó, a police colonel who had been imprisoned at the time of the Rajk trial. Oszkó had called – evidently on his own initiative – to suggest going down to see Imre Nagy at Academy Street; he in turn telephoned Losonczy, who agreed to go too. "Francis Donáth and I are just writing a petition to the Central Committee explaining our position. So it's a good thing, because we did not know how we were going to get into Academy Street!"¹⁵ About twenty minutes later Oszkó's Russian-built Pobieda automobile deposited them all at one end of Academy Street.

The street was in a state of siege. Vásárhelyi found Hungarian troops in the uniform of the *folyamörség*, the Danube flotilla marines, most probably ÁVH men in disguise. Tanks blocked both ends, and they had to show their IDs five times before reaching the Party headquarters' main door. Vásárhelyi, Losonczy

and Donáth sent a message up to Imre Nagy, but they were directed to wait in this draughty entrance hall as Nagy was still in conference with the Politburo.

When the prime minister came down to see them Losonczy did most of the talking; he was closer to Imre Nagy than either of the others. He began telling the new prime minister their opinion, that this was a great national uprising, and not a “counter-revolution” at all. “We don’t agree with the government’s present stance – the Russian intervention, martial law and so on.” Vásárhelyi and Donáth spoke too, but not for long: Nagy was very abrupt with all of them.

Perhaps it was fatigue. He had been here for two days now, and he was wearing the same crumpled suit. After only a few minutes he looked at his wrist-watch and said, “Well, comrades, I have no time right now: we’re in the middle of a very important meeting of the Politburo and the Soviet comrades are here. I must get back.”

The three men were wounded by their old friend’s aloofness. Nagy could have told them, “Comrades, I share your view but the majority view of the collective leadership in the Politburo is different and that is the one we have to announce.” He could have, but he did not. He had not even glanced at the document. The three left the building, and walked over to the Institute of Economic Sciences in Nádor Street where Donáth worked.

Six hours is the time difference between Budapest and Washington. It is still only just after midnight on October 25th when the teletype machine in the State Department building unexpectedly starts clattering. Since late afternoon on October 23rd, John Foster Dulles has received no direct word from the American legation in Budapest,¹⁶ and no cables will arrive until the afternoon of the twenty-ninth.

But now a dramatic teleprinter link is opened, direct from the American legation, and the operators in Budapest will succeed in holding it open throughout the daylight hours.¹⁷ American officials manhandle the heavy teletype machine down on to the floor so that it is out of the line of gunfire. Then the Budapest end transmit the first words: “*This is clear.*” And, “*Communications open temporarily.*”

For five hours nothing else arrives over this line at the Washington end. Then the machine coughs and whirs, and begins rattling out a message: “*Am*

typing on floor. A big battle . . . just took place in front of legation. Seems to have gone towards Parliament. Seems all Americans still OK and safe. Street fighting again flaring up with tanks fighting it out at present."

Another pause. The Washington operator taps out, "Stand by please, chief coming down in Telex room."

"Roger, will do."

"Here he is. Do you have any questions at present?"

In Budapest, the operator crouches on the floor, fingering the keys. "*Here some news: (at) 10:45 Parliament Square crowded with people . . .*"

As fresh contingents of marchers swirled along the otherwise deserted Boulevard towards Parliament Square, a tank waiting motionlessly at an intersection several hundred yards ahead suddenly loosed off a single shell.¹⁸ Perhaps it was firing at a sniper. The façade of a building on the opposite side of Bajcsy Zsilinski Street collapsed, covering the pavement and half the street with rubble. Francis Reményi and several others ducked into a shop for a few minutes, and as they emerged, another Russian tank fired two shells in rapid succession, each shock wave sucking hundreds of window panes like confetti into the street. Again there was no visible reason. The crowds again melted, but coalesced again a few minutes later. The march went doggedly on. The tanks shortly swivelled to the right and rattled off up Stalin Street towards City Park. Reményi decided it might be preferable to make his way independently to Parliament Square, through the side streets to the left. There were still ten blocks to go.

At the American legation the chargé, Spencer Barnes, had posted Gaza Katona at the door to field questions from Hungarians outside. A crowd was forming; some people were begging for canned milk for their babies, others wanted arms and ammunition. There was a mounting tumult from Parliament Square, two blocks away. Spencer Barnes, normally a quiet-spoken man, ran his fingers through his greying hair and sharply ordered the roller-blinds run down. Katona, frustrated, nipped up to the staff level on the second floor. Newspaperman John MacCormac's wife was already there, trying to peer through the slats.

Katona said, "I suggest we roll up just one blind, overlooking this square."

She beamed. "Bravo, I'm all for it!"

They opened the casement window inwards. As an afterthought Katona let a five-foot length of red, white and green ribbon flutter outside; he had bought it

in readiness for the last Independence Day celebration on March 15th. The crowds outside caught sight of it and an excited murmur went up. Katona could see several hands waving in response. By ten forty-five A.M. this square was empty, the crowds having debauched into the Louis Kossuth Square before Parliament.¹⁹

When American officials now visited Parliament Square, they estimated that twenty thousand people were already there. Hundreds had arrived by lorries, in “borrowed” armoured cars and riding on top of the Russian tanks. It was like two days before, when the uprising had begun, only this time it was broad daylight and Soviet armour was guarding the four corners of the square. Once again an immense crowd of unarmed people packed this square shouting slogans. “We want Imre Nagy!” and “Release the prisoners!”²⁰

There was the wildest speculation. A man shouted to John MacCormac, “The Russians are with us. They say they don’t want to shoot down Hungarian workers.” MacCormac would file a story later that day: “The Russian tank crews seemed to corroborate this statement when they smiled and waved.” AP correspondent Endre Márton noted two Soviet tanks and an armoured car driving up swarming with young Hungarians. The Russian soldiers were smiling uneasily. More people began clambering over these vehicles, willingly believing the rumours that these Russians had defected: the cocky Hungarians were sure that what they had started the great Russian people would follow.

Francis Reményi stepped into the arcades of the ministry of agriculture, a good vantage point from which to watch the Parliament. Meanwhile, a three-man delegation went into the building to look for Imre Nagy, unaware that all this time he was still in the Party headquarters in Academy Street.

Five thousand miles away, in Washington, the teletype machine clatters again. A small crowd gathers to peer at the metal fingers slamming into the paper.

“Heavy gunfire from Parliament area. Some legation reports . . . some Soviet tanks going over to the crowd flying Hungarian flags from tanks with crowds. Budapest radio broadcasts statement that isolated groups firing in town. Advised people stay off streets. Large crowd before Parliament now mainly dispersed by Soviet tanks firing over crowd’s heads. Some tanks in control of crowd withdraw from Parliament area. Heavy firing continues hearing-distance of legation, apparently tank guns.”

The Budapest operator pauses, the paper scrolls up, the keys rattle again: “*Any questions?*”

In Washington it is only five in the morning, and the kind of people who ask policy questions are still asleep.

It was a few minutes before eleven A.M. when Tóth, Hanák, and Kató, the three professors from the University, reached Academy Street. There was no sign of their Rector; he must have got through the security cordons to the Party building already. It took several minutes for their IDs to be checked by the Russian and ÁVH officers. At the Party building, the doormen asked them their business. Tóth said: “We’re part of the University delegation that has already gone in. I am Zoltán I. Tóth, the Dean.” The guards were unimpressed, and slammed the door on them.

The three academics were left on the pavement, pale and non-plussed. The tumult reaching Academy Street from Parliament Square was growing more menacing. At that moment a storm of gunfire sounded from Parliament Square. A few seconds later the guns of the tanks parked in this street opened fire as though on a single command. The cacophony was deafening as the tanks pelted shells down the street towards the square: they were aiming high, because Hanák could see the burst of brick dust and smoke on the buildings at the other end of the shell trajectories.

In the American legation Gáza Katona also heard the sudden crackle of gunfire echoing from the tall walls around the square. The square suddenly changed its aspect. The crowds panicked and scattered, tripping and stumbling. The Russian armoured vehicles lumbered off, shaking off the bewildered Hungarians who had boarded them.

It is not easy in an enclosed space to judge where the sudden staccato sounds of shooting come from. Most of the witnesses believed that the shooting originated from high up in the ministry of agriculture, and that the shooting was started by jumpy ÁVH outposts protecting the Parliament from what they took to be a mob about to storm it. They may be right: the Communist regime has always acted since then as though this shooting did not take place; it was mentioned neither in the Party’s newspapers nor in later official publications. But the chaos and carnage of Parliament Square at ten past eleven A.M. on October

25th, 1956, were real enough. Screaming people ran for shelter to the massive doors of Parliament, but the guards kept them closed. Bewildered Russian tank crews opened fire, perhaps even returning the unexpected fire from the rooftops. Endre Márton himself saw one tank firing wildly, then three armoured cars packed with Soviet soldiers drive up; but they, too, were aiming high. Reményi galloped down the arcades and escaped into the back streets, unscathed.

The panicking crowds fleeing across Liberty Square were photographed from the American legation by Gaza Katona; photographs oddly reminiscent of the scenes in Petrograd in 1917. He heard more bursts of firing overlaid with screams and yelling.

In Washington the State Department teleprinter is just clattering out the news. *“Mr. Barnes, Mr. Rogers, Mr. Katona, Mr. Clark, Mr. Meeker, Mr. Nyerges, etc., all in telex room huddling on floor to avoid gunfire.”*

“Do you people believe this fighting is going to spread?” asks Washington.

The oracle's reply gives little comfort. *“Have no way of knowing but seems very possible that it will spread.”*

But in Parliament Square the killing was only just beginning. An assistant professor at the Polytechnic and another witness, saw what appeared to be other Russian tanks opening fire on the first ones, and heavy machine-gun fire and shells thumping horizontally across the square at each other.²¹ When the panic and confusion subsided, the square was empty except for armoured vehicles and the dead and the injured: all victims of what was probably a hysterical misunderstanding. The photographs show people lying prone, broken into awkward angles: women in cheap autumn coats still clutching handbags, wax-faced factory workers, youngsters, students. Endre Márton saw one corpse in the arcades, and three more bodies on the tramlines. John MacCormac counted a dozen bodies from where he stood. A photograph shows thirteen bodies on a thirty-foot stretch of cobbled paving. Nobody had the curiosity to stay and count precisely.

On the pavement outside the Party building, the three stunned University professors exchanged frightened looks. The shelling had stopped, but even as they debated their next move an armoured troop carrier lurched out of the side

street to their right; they glimpsed about twenty Hungarian soldiers on it, manning a machine gun on a revolving mounting. The gun began spraying bullets at point-blank range into the Soviet troops clustered round their half a dozen tanks. Evidently these Hungarians had lost their temper and were carrying out a single-handed punitive expedition against the Russians for shelling the square.

Peter Hanák was petrified. He had never been a soldier: as a Jew, he had been spared combat duties and consigned to a concentration camp instead. But he did have enough presence of mind to dive face down into the gutter behind a tank. Bullets splattered the walls and smashed the windows, and grenade explosions rocked the street.

He screamed to Professor Tóth: “Zoltán, let’s get out of here! If those tanks don’t roll back over us the grenades or bullets are going to finish us off anyway!”

Stooping low they made a dash for the Party building. The guards on the door saw them coming – they saw three men in plain clothes doubling through the dust and gunsmoke towards them. They blasted away at them with sub-machine guns. Hanák’s right leg was burst open by a hand grenade. That cut him down just in time, but Tóth stopped eight bullets in his skull. They left his corpse lying face down in the doorway. Hanák was still alive, but he was badly shocked. Only now were they allowed to take refuge inside the building. Willing hands helped Hanák and Kató down to the basement. A first-aid station had been set up, but there were others with worse injuries and they got priority. A doctor gave Hanák a morphine jab then turned away to tend the others. Sounds of gunfire and banging still filtered down through the walls.

The total death toll was put at 170 by *New York Times* reporter MacCormac.²² A British legation official claimed to have seen twelve lorry-loads of corpses being carried away; Kopácsi saw at least one, trickling a trail of blood through the streets on its way to the cemetery. In the entire government district, the Vth, a total of 106 people were killed during the uprising according to exact statistics.²³

It was not the real number of casualties that mattered but the rumours – and the rumours spoke of hundreds. The mob blamed Gerő, and many cursed Imre Nagy too, whom they believed to be skulking inside the Parliament building:

that he could now have countenanced this massacre generated savage feeling against his name.

Alexander Kopácsi, the police chief, managed to get through by phone to Imre Nagy at last.

“The mob is howling for Gerő’s blood!” he told him.

Nagy sounded bad-tempered. “The comrades of the Soviet Politburo are just leaving,” he replied. “Gerő’s been sacked. Kádár’s replacing him as First Secretary.”

Kopácsi interrupted him: “Comrade Nagy, there are 300 dead in Parliament Square – your government is steeped in the blood of innocent people!”

At this, Nagy’s voice changed in tone.²⁴

Losonczy and Donáth finished amending their document, and walked back to Academy Street. They had to dodge from building to building to shelter from the ammunition still flying around the streets. Vásárhelyi went home. As he did so, a lorry piled with bodies rattled past.

At Academy Street, the mood was approaching panic. Bowing to Mikoyan’s advice, the leadership had already decided that Gerő must relinquish the Party leadership. Losonczy read out their document to the still overwhelmingly hostile Central Committee emphasising, “This process is not a counter-revolution but a revolution!” The letter stated that the events outside were a logical consequence of the Party’s policies. It was not a success. Except for *Free People* editor Martin Horváth everybody, including Nagy, Lukács, and Szántó, voted in favour of continuing the policy previously laid down. The events outside were a “counter-revolution”, and should be treated as such. Gerő excitably told them, “Do you want the mob out there to lynch me?”

Donáth handed the letter to Kádár as Gerő’s successor. In it, he and Losonczy formally resigned as secretaries of the Central Committee and as members of the Politburo. Kádár asked them not to make their resignations public yet.

When Professor Hanák regained his senses he was lying on the basement floor of the Party building, right next to a passage leading to a quieter, better-defended part of the street. High windows opened off this basement on to an inside corridor with potted palm trees. After a while, as he lay there half in the

clutches of sweet morphia, watching the widening pool of his own blood, he saw through his pain a strange cluster of people shuffling past: the Party leadership had decided it was time to get out before this building was stormed and they were all lynched.

Gerő led the way, shouting, "Let's go! Go! *Go!*"

The others were less frantic. Imre Mező, now appointed the city's Party secretary, had been in tighter spots than this in his lifetime: he was talking in low, well-modulated tones. In their midst Hanák could see Imre Nagy and Mikoyan, both surrounded by a halo of cigar smoke; and there were Losonczy, Piros, and Apró too. Hanák saw no indication that Nagy was under coercion, as his apologists would later suggest. On the contrary Nagy was obviously conscious that he was the man of the moment. Karl Kiss brought up the rear, brandishing a revolver in case the rebels should break in.

As Nagy strolled past, he raised his eyebrows at the bloodstained figure of Peter Hanák, whom he knew as a fellow academic. "Comrade Hanák! What has happened to you?"

Hanák answered painfully, "There has been shooting outside." Nagy evidently knew nothing of it.²⁵

By noon, Professor Hanák had been bandaged and he could join the University delegation, Beér, Székely and the deputy head of the University, Kardos. The radio was switched on, and at twelve thirty-three p.m. it announced that Gerő had been replaced as First Secretary by Mr. Kádár. Kádár himself then spoke. After that, Hanák was removed to hospital.

Outside the American legation a period of sullen shouting had followed the massacre. The heavy firing died away. The staff picked themselves up off the floor. The teletype machine was set back on its table and the operator keyed a new message to Washington: "*While we still have the circuit can inform you that large crowd still in front American legation shouting for help, etc.*"

The crowds thronged hard against the closed iron gate barring the main entrance door. Gaza Katona took up station just inside and consoled the crowds through the ironwork: "We saw it all, we saw the massacre, we've sent word to Washington."

But the crowd was swelling to unmanageable size and the clamour was growing. Spencer Barnes was pale. He drafted a brief announcement, stepped out on to the small balcony and read it out with Katona and US information officer Anton Nyerges shouting a translation sentence by sentence at the top of their voices:

“We understand the situation.”

“It has been reported to our government as fully as we are able.”

“You will understand that we ourselves can take no decisions.”

“This is a matter for our government and the United Nations.”

“We have been in Hungary for years and think we understand the situation.

After this most of the crowd dispersed, but not in good humour. There were cries of, “Give us the guns, we’ll do the fighting ourselves.” And: “Where is the United Nations – have them send troops!”

A middle-aged woman and her boy were hurrying across the short side street, Perczel Mór Street, by the legation, when a tan-coloured Pobieda saloon swerved round the corner near the little street market behind the legation, jolted across the pavement, sideswiped a tree and halted, almost pinning them against the wall. Two men jumped out and vanished into a courtyard. The American military attaché recognised it from its licence plate as an ÁVH car. A second car followed at speed into this street, evidently pursuing. More men jumped out and ran after the first two. After five minutes they emerged from the courtyard, washing imaginary blood off their hands to tell the gathering crowd that they had done the two fugitives to death. (Katona learned that they had caught each man by the arm and smashed his head like a battering ram against a brick wall. An ambulance removed the bodies.)

The mob had decided to take its revenge. Woe betide anybody caught wearing a leather coat, generally accepted as the trademark of the security police. Near the American legation, the mob was about to do a leather-coated man to death – he could produce no papers – when twenty-one-year-old bookkeeper Zsigmond Varga went to his assistance: the mob set about him, too, and only an armed passer-by who knew him by sight saved the two of them.²⁶ But the mob was not to be robbed of its sport so easily: newspaperman John MacCormac saw another leather-coated man pounced on nearby, declared to be ÁVH, hus-

bled into a courtyard and lynched. Not far away, Stephen Elias, forty-three, a horticulturist whose powerful physique betrayed something of his labour-camp partisan background, was grabbed by an armed lout and roughly denounced as an ÁVO.²⁷ “You blockhead,” shouted Elias as he tore himself free. “Does an ÁVO wear boots like these?” He pointed to the gumboots he had put on that morning at the State Farm at Soroksár.

“Roger. Hang on. Will keep this circuit open as long as possible. Hope you can hold circuit until officers arrive.”

In Washington the teleprinter operator is punching out a message to the legation in Budapest. It is already mid-afternoon in Budapest, but early morning in DC.

“*Hope so too,*” reply the metal fingers in the machine printing the message of the unseen operator in Budapest. He adds, “*Appears we have friends in Telegraph Office.*”

An anonymous hand somewhere along this dramatic five-thousand-mile teleprinter link interrupts: “*If you speaking of us – sure you have!*”

“Roger.”

Gold and red and rusty brown, the sugar-maple forests around the free world’s capital are marching triumphantly into autumn in a country where alien tanks have never prowled the streets lobbing 122-millimetre shells into apartment blocks, where fearful families have never crouched in basements, listening to the bark of the flak guns and the vibration and gasping thud of high-explosive bombs.

The State Department operator ventures: “Have man in back of me who was in Bogota in 1948. So we know what situation you are facing.”

His distant colleague’s suit is dusty from lying on the floor all morning. “*Oh well, that’s the life,*” he taps out. “*Am having bits to eat at my side and do not want to leave this machine while we still have contact.*”

The sixth-floor staff conference in the State Department goes on. The radio news from Budapest is that Gerő’s successor, János Kádár, is due to broadcast shortly.

McKisson in Washington asks Barnes in Budapest: “What is your estimate of Nagy’s position now?”

Barnes replies: *“This is a battle situation and we have no idea what is going to happen. Our impression yesterday was that in view of he being blamed for calling in Soviet troops he lost a great deal of popularity; where he stands today and how the people would view a further retreat from Kádár to Nagy, we do not know. We presume Nagy is to all intents and purposes Premier. Should the blame for calling the Soviet troops now be placed on Gerő and he made a scapegoat for all that is going on now, and if he made further concessions, he might have a chance. But we do not know enough to say anything very certainly.”*

30 Policeman on a Plywood Chair

OVERNIGHT A HAPPY, honest breed has appeared in revolutionary Hungary. An engineer of fifty-three dashing across the city on a motorbike, clenching a pipe in his teeth, is about to take his usual short-cut across the ravaged Calvin Square when he rebukes himself: “No! We must all be good now!” It is an odd feeling, he will later confess: a feeling he has not had since coming out of church all those years ago.¹

There is no looting. A reporter on the tabloid *Monday News* contemplates the showcases spattered with mud and blood, and writes:

Through the gaping holes shoes, clothing and silver trays appear in pale but proud countenance, as through a mirror. Further down the street are watches, their heartbeat as silent as that of the dead. Yet the coffee, sugar, and shoes, and the silver trays, lard and flour remain intact. And this is at a time when in many homes the last provisions were consumed yesterday.

In a pastry shop, two slices of cake are missing from a tray: a five-florin coin is in their place. Across the street a hurricane seems to have swept through one showcase; a machine-gun bullet lies among the débris – that and a note torn from an exercise book: “All goods left with the janitor. We don’t loot.”²

A Polytechnic instructor will describe, “Similar care was taken to suppress any manifestation of . . . latent anti-Semitism in Hungary.” He also stops late one afternoon at Zsigmond Móricz Square to look at the destruction. “We saw a suitcase full of money placed in the centre of one shop window . . . The square

was full of broken window glass, mortar and bricks. The sides of the square were plastered with revolutionary posters.”³

Cynics will say that this is no way to run a revolution, but the Hungarians are a childlike, simple people. Four days later the American legation will also confidentially refute the Kremlin's propaganda line that the insurgents are fascists and gangsters bent only on looting. Legation staff had personally observed smashed shop windows in which the contents were intact, and somebody had scrawled in lipstick on the remaining glass, “This is how we loot.”

There is an intangible change of mood in the air. Here is Bishop Péterfalvy, wearing his Greek Orthodox robes, dodging from group to group to ask whom they are sniping at, and then hurrying off with unconcealed curiosity towards the sounds of further shooting; over there are bread queues standing outside a bakery; and here is a lorry arriving with a placard on it, “Bread for the people of Budapest from the citizens of Körmend!” Other lorries will follow, bringing sacks of flour, beetroot, and turnips to the fighting capital. The workers of the state farm at Soroksár are typical, sending up to 800 litres of milk each dawn to rebel centres like the Writers' Union, Kopácsi's headquarters, the Corvin and Kilián Barracks, and Tüzoltó Street.⁴

This is the day that one official of the state hospital at Angel Fields goes to the Southern Railway Station to pick up some goods and mechanically addresses the railway employee as Comrade.⁵

“I'm not a comrade any longer,” sniffs the official. “That word has ceased to exist!”

George Kilián was a Hungarian who had left his life-blood somewhere in Spain's war-torn sierras. His name would have been forgotten if the Maria Teresa Barracks dominating a major traffic intersection on Üllői Road had not been renamed after him. Now, the name Kilián has also had to be chiselled off the building – too many recall the name now for the wrong reasons. Built in 1845 around three central courtyards, the building's four storeys of grey-painted stone are topped by a red tile roof. The main exit is a triple archway tunnelled thirty feet through the building from these courtyards to the bustling thoroughfare of Üllői Road. Doors of six-inch thick metal-studded oak can close off this entrance tunnel, and an orderly room flanks each side of the tunnel. Outside, the

street-level windows are protected by massive wrought-iron grilles. It is an ideal strong point, a small fortress in the heart of the city.

The barracks commander, Captain Louis Csiba, would recall: “We had been sealed off hermetically from the outside world and we did not know what was happening outside. At first the rebels had tried to force their way into the barracks to get weapons and because of this firing broke out between us and the rebels. On the morning of October 25th this shooting got worse and I therefore repeatedly telephoned the defence ministry.”⁶

At the ministry it was Colonel Paul Maléter who took Csiba’s call. Defence minister Stephen Bata ordered him to take five tanks over to combat the rebels around the Kilián Barracks.⁷

Lenin once said that if the Communists wanted to lead the masses, they must tower above them head and shoulders.⁸ Maléter was such a leader, a towering ostrich of an officer. He marched over to Mari Jászai Square where the Thirty-third Tank Regiment was protecting ÁVH headquarters and ordered their commander, Francis Pallós, to give him five tanks. Maléter climbed into Captain János Tari’s T-34 for the ride across town to the barracks.

It was about eleven A.M. when this task force arrived. On Parliament Square the massacre was just beginning. At the barracks Maléter ordered his driver to swivel the T-34 and reverse into the main gate. At first he sat tight while messengers came out of the entrance tunnel from time to time to receive his orders. Finally he sent for the barrack commander.

Captain Louis Csiba was a nervous forty-eight-year-old army officer with fleshy features and protruding eyes behind rimless spectacles. Everybody seemed to be shooting at everybody else. Maléter telephoned the ministry from the orderly room next to the gate, while Csiba stood next to him nervously licking his lips. According to statements in Maléter’s personnel file, he spoke at some length with Major Kindlovics, head of the operations branch, “He reported that he was restoring order and bringing the fighters under control.” An officer of the defence ministry later testified: “Maléter telephoned the defence ministry several times to announce that as he was engaged in combat with the insurgents it was not possible for him to report back in person.”⁹

Something of a change was already coming over the colonel. Perhaps he had been shocked at the spectacle of Hungarian fighting Hungarian; perhaps the

patriot in him surfaced, or the opportunist. But when Csiba mentioned that a dozen or more rebels had already been taken prisoner, Maléter's ears pricked up and he said: "I'd like to meet them."

The prisoners filed into the orderly room. Maléter singled out a fresh-faced youngster and fired questions at him about his motives for joining the uprising. Perhaps in the boy's frank, intelligent face Maléter saw something of himself twenty years before. The boy spoke fearlessly of the Fourteen Points, and then fished out his faded Party membership book, into which he had folded the leaflet. Maléter read it. It was the moment of tilt for him – the moment when the switchback car ends its skywards haul up the rack-and-pinion and topples into its free forward plunge. "When I arrived at the scene of the battle," he was to describe a week later, "I convinced myself that the freedom fighters were the loyal sons of the Hungarian people." He added: "I informed the minister that I had gone over." He now ordered the room cleared, and spoke alone on the telephone to somebody, no doubt at the ministry. According to Captain Csiba the defence ministry ordered: "Don't open fire except in self-defence; display the national flag on the barracks with the emblem cut out. Maléter is to act as he thinks best."

When the colonel returned, he spoke thus to the young prisoner: "I'm setting you all free. Go back to the insurgents and tell them I'm offering them a truce. We are all Hungarians."

The youngster's face brightened. Maléter repeated: "Nobody shoots! Neither you, nor us!"

He stuck out his hand to the young man. A little crowd applauded loudly as they saw this unexpected outcome. The rattle of heavy machine-gun fire died away. Tank commander János Tari described: "That afternoon we opened fire several times on the rebels in the Corvin Passage. Maléter . . . ordered a cease-fire. He forbade us to fire, and ordered us to get out of our tanks and turn our guns to the rear. At the same time he had the Hungarian flag raised over the barracks, after the republican emblem had been cut out of it. Hundreds of armed individuals invaded the barracks and surrounded us shouting different fascist slogans."¹⁰

In England there are pitched battles between teddy boys and GIs, there are strikes at the Austin Morris factory and Sydney Silverman's bill to end hanging is before Parliament; in France a young writer called Françoise Sagan is turning literary heads. In the United States, opera singer Maria Callas is opening at the Met and President Dwight D. Eisenhower is in the closing stages of his re-election contest against Adlai E. Stevenson. The election will be on November 6th – on this day, October 25th, he is in New York preparing to deliver a major campaign speech at the Madison Square Garden. Hungary has come at an awkward moment. Eisenhower has decided to play safe. He wants to avoid giving the Kremlin grounds to blame the United States for its satellite problems. Eisenhower wants time to think. He also wants to avoid looking insincere, yet that is precisely what the outcome will be.

Simultaneously the Anglo-French and Israeli build-up in the Mediterranean is approaching its climax. The Central Intelligence Agency reports to Eisenhower that the British and French airforces are massing on Cyprus and Malta and at Marseilles. Spy planes operating over Israel have detected squadrons of French Mystère aircraft based there. And since mid-October a studied silence has befallen official communications across the Atlantic, while the code-breakers of the National Security Agency have noted a significant increase in radio traffic between Paris and Israel. Throughout these weeks, Eisenhower has pressed his former allies to let time run against Colonel Gamal Nasser until he is isolated. "In all my correspondence with Mr. Eden," he will say in secret on November 9th, "I urged patience. But for a period of some ten days Mr. Eden would neither call nor write in response to my communications."¹¹

Eisenhower's friend and secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, is also in a dilemma. As he sits in his office in Washington's Virginia Avenue, Dulles itches to make political capital out of the uprisings in East Europe, but he, too, is anxious not to appear an accomplice in the bloodshed. Twice this morning Ike and Dulles confer by telephone; Dulles recommends United Nations action, but adds that they should wait first to see what develops in Hungary. His chief of protocol, Ambassador Wiley T. Buchanan, is angry: he has heard Dulles say many times, "If the Iron Curtain ever starts crumbling, it will go all the way and it will go quickly." Now it is happening, but Dulles is doing nothing about it.

There are clandestine actions which the Americans can – given the will – take immediately. “I don’t know whether you know it or not,” one of Eisenhower’s chief advisers will write confidentially to a friend at the State Department later, “but a good shipment of bazookas was found in a Western European country at the time of the Hungarian uprising, and could have been shipped to Budapest, but was stopped by us.”¹² The CIA and its mouthpiece, Radio Free Europe, still have their voice behind the megaphone, but Eisenhower and Dulles have their feet tangled on the brakes.

In Washington it is breakfast time as Dulles gets a telephone call from Chicago saying that vice-president Richard Nixon wants to know whether to say something on Hungary. Dulles agrees that it certainly is desirable – “The ruthless suppression will have a bad effect elsewhere,” he chuckles. But he adds a word of caution. “We don’t want to upset anything. He can refer to ‘love of country’ and ‘individual freedom surviving and bursting forth’ and ‘today the whole area of Soviet satellites is a seething mass’ and one can look forward hopefully to when national independence and liberties will be restored.”

Age and long years in power have bred cynicism in Washington’s statesmen. Moreover, the United Nations, being in New York, is well within Washington’s gravitational field. The large American delegation at the UN is lobbying against expressing sympathy with Nagy’s government: “They are Communists of a dangerous kind, with particularly bad records.”¹³ When at eleven A.M. the US ambassador to the UN, Henry Cabot Lodge Jr., telephones to recommend asking for action under the body’s charter, Dulles is apprehensive: “We don’t want to give the Soviets the opportunity to blame us for the uprisings.”

At twelve fifty-six Dulles does, however, call up the president in New York and urges him to make a statement about Hungary. The draft which Dulles proposes closely follows suggested arguments received that morning from Spencer Barnes in Budapest.¹⁴ Barnes had suggested a comparison with 1848, when Hungary also fought for liberty against Russian troops, and he proposes an American declaration that the insurgents’ demands are no more than the human rights to which every free nation is entitled. It all seems pretty innocuous. Barnes had also proposed that Ike might say, “The employment of Soviet troops to shoot down Hungarian people breaks every moral law and demonstrates that

Hungary is to Soviet Russia merely a colonial possession, the demand of whose people for democratic liberty warrants the use of naked force.”

Ike listens to Dulles and says, “I think it might be a good thing to add a final sentence about how the people of America feel about this situation.”

After discussion Dulles jots down the formula: “At this moment the heart of America goes out to the people of Hungary.” It is vintage Eisenhower eyewash, unlikely to chill the blood of any Soviet commander. But even these words alarm Dulles; he calls Jacob Beam, one of his experts on Eastern Europe, and reads the words over to him.¹⁵ “Could such a sentence be construed as involving us in complicity with the shooting?” Beam reassures him, “I don’t think so. The sentence is very good.”

Later that afternoon, Dulles finds a message asking him to call his brother, the CIA chief. Allen Dulles reports that the CIA-financed Hungarian National Committee in New York is brimming with ideas and he is afraid that they may jump the gun by going to the United Nations “via the Latinos”, as he puts it. Foster explains to Allen what his tactics are: to hold things up to see what develops. Half an hour later, the president calls him again. Ike, too, urges deliberate rather than hasty action. He adds, “I don’t think we should walk in this alone. It would look as if we were doing it for internal . . .” He leaves the sentence unfinished, but when he says he wants at least the major NATO countries to join any action, Dulles warns him, “They’ll be reluctant to come along with us, they’ll interpret it as being an election move.”

Ike insists, “I’d like to hear from our allies – even a grudging assent. I’ll be back in Washington first thing tomorrow morning, let’s talk then.” He ends by saying, “The worst thing would be to be thought of as guilty of spurious interest.” After this, Foster tells Ambassador Lodge that they are circulating a letter to the other signatories of the Hungarian Peace Treaty to get their reaction. “If they are against it, at least we will have a *reason* for not acting!”

By evening the State Department has produced a working paper recommending United Nations rather than unilateral United States action. Lodge’s approval signified in a telegram to Dulles at seven p.m. highlights the shallowness of United States’ foreign policy in 1956. “Even if final action blocked by Soviet veto, initiative would, in addition to increasing US prestige, add to prestige of UN in eyes of satellite peoples who now hold organisation in low esteem be-

cause of its past failure to note their plight.” In the telegram, Lodge elaborates the following scenario: the United States foster a relatively mild resolution which the Soviets will inevitably veto, after which the Americans can suggest despatching UN observers to Hungary. “This could be done with great show of reasonableness and sincerity,” Lodge remarks. He concludes, “We will get maximum support if we strike while iron is hot.”¹⁶

Khrushchev correctly gauged the hesitancy of the United States, and decided to bluff. As Yugoslav ambassador Veljko Mićunović prepared to fly with Khrushchev's urgent message to Tito, the Kremlin line was hardening. Soviet newspapers described the uprising in standard Marxist terminology: it was a “counter-revolution” inspired from abroad.¹⁷ And the astute United States ambassador Charles (“Chip”) Bohlen warned in a cable from Moscow on October 25th that Khrushchev faced a definite deadline: the Kremlin must find a final solution of the Hungarian crisis by November 6th at the latest, because on that date the regime's traditional ceremonies at the Bolshoi Theatre were due.¹⁸

In Munich guidelines are issued reminding Radio Free Europe's newscasters: “Who called out the Soviet troops is less important to the ends we seek than the question of whether Nagy can and will fulfil his promise to try to have all Soviet troops withdrawn for good.” In Budapest this day, October 25th, the radio transmitters are still firmly in the regime's hands. The radio makes no mention of the shooting on Parliament Square. There are oily appeals for calm and repeated announcements that Imre Nagy is shortly going to broadcast. At five past one p.m. the loudspeakers crackle again and inform a dubious population of their own delirious reception of Gerő's dismissal: “In Angel Fields the workers embraced and kissed each other. The people have hoisted national flags over their houses. There has been cheering everywhere. On the Great Boulevard, in Museum Square and elsewhere the national anthem and the *Marseillaise* are being played.”

The real situation was less appealing for the regime.

By three p.m. the local truce around the Kilián Barracks was in force. Colonel Maléter strutted out into Üllői Road and stood outside the main gate with his legs astride like an ostrich in army uniform, next to the T-34 that had brought him here. He gangled head and shoulders above the worshipping crowd. A young

man pushed through to him, carrying in his arms a Kossuth emblem he had made himself. Maléter gave him permission to put it on the building's façade in place of the Soviet star. Later that afternoon, a delegation of armed rebels visited the Kilián Barracks and asked Maléter to tell them what the soldiers there needed. "Bread," said Maléter, and soon a bus rolled into the yard loaded with freshly baked loaves.

Just across Üllői Road the rebel fighters consolidated their position in the Corvin Passage. Overlooked on all sides by seven-storey dwelling houses, they had made their headquarters in the pear-shaped Corvin cinema, built on an island in the middle of the half concealed courtyard that was Corvin Passage. Two or three hundred insurgents swarmed in and around the cinema building. Cards were issued to the rebels to establish their credentials – everybody wanted one. When bus driver Zoltán Szabó looked in, he found that the rebels had now got hold of two anti-tank guns, and he observed several soldiers among them.¹⁹ Somebody out on the Boulevard would give a hand signal as a Russian tank rumbled past, and an anti-tank gun was fired through the Passage at them. After a while the tanks hurtled past much faster, shelling the buildings on either side. The whole district was soon a shambles.

Two 155-millimetre self-propelled guns were disabled on the Üllői Road intersection – one with its track blown off, the other having rammed it from behind. A long mechanised Russian column of anti-tank guns, gun-tractors and troop carriers rolled into the city and was slaughtered right there. The burnt-out carcasses of the men and their equipment littered the street throughout the battle.²⁰ The rebels had learned how to fight like partisans in the Communist youth organisation. It was exhilarating, it was just as the Soviet author Fadeyev had set out in his book *The Young Guard*. Countless war films had illustrated every aspect of guerrilla warfare: heroic Russian partisans had clambered up on the back of Nazi tanks and smashed petrol bottles into their engine gratings, setting them on fire. Now the Hungarian youths knew how to do it. In a school laboratory a carboy of nitroglycerine was discovered and gingerly transported to the Corvin cinema, where student chemists filled bottles with the fragile, explosive liquid. Elsewhere the main roads were soaped and oiled, or strewn with cobblestones so that the tanks would skid like elephants on marbles. Russian tank

crews climbing out to manhandle their monsters clear were picked off by snipers.²¹

Italian newspaperman Bruno Tedeschi saw one lad of sixteen tackle a Soviet tank column as it rolled north towards them from Liberty Bridge. They could hear the crunch and squeal of tank tracks getting closer as the column climbed Béla Bartók Street. These streets were too wide to throw petrol bottles, and single grenades would not hurt T-34s, so the rebels had strung grenades together in clusters. The boy was wearing a tricolour armband – “My mother sewed it on,” he explained breathlessly. He fetched the six grenades tied together, said, “I’m going out alone,” and scampered after a tank. He managed to toss the cluster right on top, but they tumbled off. Tears of rage streaming down his cheeks, the boy picked them up and clung bodily to the tank turret as the seconds ran out. With a flash-boom the tank disintegrated, taking him into eternity with it.²²

No man was safe in the streets. A twenty-one-year-old office worker, who had spent the previous day wandering round the city and gawping at the corpses, heard the radio appeals and returned to work.²³ He heard the morning tumult coming from Parliament Square, a few hundred yards away from his office, and saw stray bullets chip fragments from the buildings opposite. Then a bullet bored a hole through a window and killed the office porter. The office shut, but a friend said: “Let’s take a look at the fighting!” They were standing outside the Corvin cinema when his friend was killed outright by a shell fragment. “I was angry and frightened,” the young man later told American questioners. He took a sub-machine gun from a dead Russian soldier and fought alongside the Corvin rebel group for the next five days.

After the Parliament Square incident, several thousands of the demonstrators scattered towards the British legation, and fifty managed to get inside. Leslie Fry, the urbane British minister, went down and listened to their breathless account. One man, more coherent than the others, protested at the regime’s claim that the Soviet troops were intervening under the terms of the Warsaw Pact – this provided for Soviet help only if Hungary was attacked from *outside*. They begged the British government to put this “aggression” before the United Nations. Fry assured them, “I am doing my utmost to keep my government informed of events.” (His legation had its own transmitter.)²⁴

The crowds then surged on to the American legation, and began shouting, “The workers are being murdered, we want help.” At the Austrian legation, the minister was assembling a convoy to leave for the frontier. The reporter of the Viennese *Neue Kurier* had gone to the police for an exit visa. He had emerged from the Astoria Hotel basement to find his car with its windscreen smashed and bodywork scarred by the fighting around the hotel. “You’re going to try and leave Budapest?” the policeman had asked. “I wouldn’t advise it. We’ve heard that parts of our army are making for Győr; they’re on the retreat.”

Near the Austrian legation, there were fresh sounds of machine-gun fire and the crowd was getting jumpy. A woman clutched at him. “Are you a German? An Austrian? You are? Are you married? I’ve got a beautiful daughter, take her, marry her, she’s got to get out of this!”²⁵

Imre Nagy has decided to appoint a new minister of the interior to replace Piros, who was compromised by his Stalinist past. The man who will now command the police and ÁVH is Dr. Francis Münnich, until two days ago ambassador in Belgrade. Münnich is one of the most intriguing figures of modern Hungary. Born of well-educated, bourgeois parents in Fejér County, he is sixty-five, a portly, hard-drinking, tough guy who has survived forty years of wars and revolutions. He likes to say, “I just have the good luck to be standing on the piece of soil that the bullets aren’t hitting.” He has personal charm, he is a ladies’ man and a speaker of many languages. As Béla Kun’s secretary he had to flee into exile after the collapse of the Hungarian Soviet Republic; he lived after 1920 in the Soviet Union, fought in Spain as “Otto Flatter”, and attained high Soviet military rank on the Stalingrad front. He enjoys Khrushchev’s personal confidence and probably has a high NKVD rank, too. Although it was Rajk who appointed him chief of Budapest police, Münnich survived the purges unscathed. He married a Russian woman but became disenchanted with her; Rákosi refused him permission to divorce. In 1947, Münnich fell in love with his secretary, Etelka, at a ball; she is thirty-five years his junior, but a vivacious, well-educated girl who hero-worships him and tints her auburn hair grey so as to look closer to his age. It is to her apartment that this revolutionary heavyweight hurries as soon as he gets back to Budapest on October 23rd, arriving from Belgrade

on the same train that brings Gerő and Hegedüs. She gets there a few minutes after he does and tells him of the uproar in the streets.

On the afternoon of October 25th Francis Münnich stubs out his cigar and hurries over to see Imre Nagy in Academy Street. The job of minister of the interior is very much after his heart. He co-operates closely with the ministry's new Soviet adviser, General Ivan Serov, and several times over the next days Münnich will step out of the building and vanish in a Soviet armoured car for an unknown destination, probably the Soviet embassy. It is sufficient to say that a street in modern Budapest has been named after him to pay tribute to the role that Dr. Münnich played when he took over the corner office in the ministry of the interior. It was a long time before Etelka saw him again.

The rumour of the Parliament Square massacre lost nothing in the telling. By three p.m. a vengeful crowd was prowling the streets. Where was the ÁVH headquarters? Few people knew for certain, so they made for the city's police headquarters, Colonel Kopácsi's white faced bullet-scarred building on Deák Square. Soon the square was filled with thousands of angry men, bent on tearing every occupant limb from limb. Some were armed, none was friendly.²⁶ Kopácsi could hear a murderous chanting begin: "Take down the star!"

The police chief was in mental anguish. The Soviet star on the roof was part of his life; it was symbolic of the great Communist brotherhood for which he had fought and conspired and killed and survived; half a dozen medal ribbons on his uniform displayed the same star of Moscow.

"Take down the star!" The few remaining windowpanes were rattling with the chant. Kopácsi pocketed his pride and gave orders for the star to come down. There were derisive cheers, but the crowd wanted more: "Release your prisoners!" "If you don't let us in we'll batter down the door."

Kopácsi's men glanced at the tear-gas grenades stacked near the windows. But the stocky colonel was thinking beyond them: a gun duel would follow between his men and the mob, and a mass lynching would probably follow that. He picked up a plywood chair and asked for two volunteers to go out with him to face the mob. Two policemen stepped forward: his driver and a scar-faced officer from the XIVth District. They took off their gunbelts and walked downstairs into the square.

At first the mob did not notice them as they shouldered their way through. The chanting was deafening. “Open up!” “Three minutes!”

At the centre of the square Kopácsi climbed on to his chair, called for silence and began to speak. A clammy silence descended on the thousands, spreading outwards from where he stood. He told them who he was, and asked them to delegate five men to go in and inspect his headquarters. “You can release any freedom fighters and political prisoners you find, but not the common criminals.”

Five men went inside piloted by Kopácsi’s two companions. He stayed in the square, balancing on his chair, until all the young rebel prisoners left the building. One voice shouted, “Kopácsi, give us at least your guns and ammunition!”

He smiled a taut smile: “The police of Budapest are here to preserve public order. How can we do that empty-handed?”

He picked up his chair and sauntered back inside.

Imre Nagy, Russian-speaking, Moscow-trained, a Soviet citizen since 1930, pulled back his sleeve and checked the chunky Schaffhausen gold watch on his left wrist: three twenty-five p.m. He cleared his throat and began to speak into the radio microphone. He sounded worried and his words were again disappointing. He equivocated between calling the disturbances a popular uprising and blaming them on “a small number of counter-revolutionaries and provocateurs”; worse, he said that he proposed to rely on the Russian troops to the very end. “The Soviet troops whose intervention in the fighting was necessitated by the vital interest of our socialist order will be recalled immediately after peace and order are restored.” His promises of reforms were the familiar jargon. Listeners pricked up their ears only when he announced what seemed to be a concession: he was starting talks with the Kremlin on a Soviet military withdrawal from Hungary on the basis of “proletarian internationalism” and “national independence”, whatever those catchphrases might mean.²⁷

The rebels had begun printing leaflets and posters, although their texts were uncoordinated and inchoate. One leaflet issued that afternoon called for a general strike but ended, “Long live the new government under the leadership of

Imre Nagy.” At the army’s Red Star works on Bajcsy Zsilinszky Street an army officer was seen tossing bundles of leaflets from a balcony, the manifesto of a “New Provisional Revolutionary Government and the National Defence Committee”. The leaflets demanded an end to martial law, an amnesty for prisoners, the disarming of the ÁVH, and Hungary’s withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact.²⁸

Russian casualties were mounting. A Joseph Stalin tank crunched to a halt outside the police headquarters and two corpses – crewmen picked off by snipers – were carried through to a growing heap of cadavers in the car park behind. The Russian tank commander, a major, who had, judging by his odour and growth of beard, been in the tank for two or three days, limped in to see Kopácsi’s two Soviet advisers: “It’s awful,” he sobbed. “I’ve lost most of my effectives since yesterday morning. We haven’t slept or eaten. What am I to say to those two boys’ parents?”

By mid-afternoon dusk was already closing round the American legation. Spencer Barnes released all his staff except duty officers. There were still two thousand people crushed against the entrance waving flags and softly singing anthems. Tom Rogers nervously read out Spencer Barnes’s improvised announcement to the crowds again. “16:31 local time,” tapped out the legation’s telex operator. Rogers dictated to the operator a message for Washington: “*If you have any suggestions as to what we can say in future, we would like to have it.*” But by five p.m. the State Department had still offered Budapest no suggestions, “Except you may wish to reiterate our sympathy . . .” This was to be the last official contact until late on October 29th.

Around eight p.m. Gáza Katona left the legation. As he arrived home, an open army lorry rattled past with soldiers and half a dozen civilians with bandaged heads or limbs. He ducked into his apartment, rolled down the wooden blinds and set up the Ampex to tape-record the distant chatter of heavy machine guns and the distinctive thump of the Soviet mortars and artillery that had now opened fire from City Park. After supper he switched on a radio and scanned the shortwave bands. Voice of America was already reporting the Parliament Square massacre, based on the despatch which the legation had unofficially allowed John MacCormac to telex to Washington.

Behind the American legation’s official residence a tank pulled up soon after dusk, and a masked middle-aged man scrambled over the fence and knocked at

the garden door. Speaking to one of the diplomats' wives first in French and then in German, he begged her to accept a letter and forward it to the United Nations. It was signed, "Hungarian Fighting Youth Organisation". He explained, "I am a leader of the Freedom Fighters. They kept me in jail for six years, I've come here because if I go to your legation they may be waiting for me. We've got about enough ammunition for two more days. We know we can't win, but we're going to keep fighting."

She telephoned the masked man's message through to the legation and a rough translation was sent off unofficially to Washington around dawn: "To UN – This is written in the name of Hungarian youth, which pleads with you while fighting unsuccessfully under this Red terror, and of their Hungarian fellow workers . . . We have seen that our government's policy is only to serve Moscow and is quite contrary to what the Hungarian nation wants." The message described the fighting for the radio and *Free People* buildings and continued, "We inform the UN that this is no longer a revolution but we are fighting against Soviet soldiers, types of human beings beyond imagination . . . We ask the UN to discuss this memo. We Hungarian youth want to stay Hungarian and if we die in our hopeless battle then our death shall be a memento for the regime. Please pray for us."

As he left he said, "Don't show it to any Hungarian. Forget you ever saw me. You must get the message out. I've been fighting for two days without sleep. The tank's waiting for me. We could do with some coffee – there's three more of my men out there."

She turned out the lights and gave him some beer bottles filled with coffee to carry out to the men. "Sorry about the fence," he said. The men waiting in the tank were as pleased to get the bottles as the coffee.²⁹

31 The Tide of Rebellion

YOU HAVE HEARD of the revolt,” said one toolmaker in a halting, nasal voice to American investigator Dr. George Devereux six months later. “And yet you know nothing about it really. I participated in it. I fired among the thunder of guns. I can’t tell you how this idea came to a nation, without leadership or plan. The people fought each other for guns. Men would shoulder each other aside, saying, ‘Give me the gun! I know how to use it!’”¹

His eyes gleam as he recalls the scene. Perspiration glistens on his elongated head with its small moustache. He radiates working-class hostility.

“Down Déli Street came a 75-ton tank with a 110-millimetre gun, and the twelve- and fourteen-year-old boys leapt out of doorways and climbed on to it, raised the lid and threw in the gasoline. A thirteen-year-old girl on the Boulevard saw a tank approach, raking the street with its guns. The girl ran up to the tank, hurled one bottle, and the Russians got scared and started shooting but she stood her ground and emptied two more bottles over it, and pretty soon the tank exploded. We had nothing but machine pistols, rifles, grenades and Molotov cocktails . . .”

The other big cities were also rumbling with revolt. One was Győr, two hours west of Budapest on the main road to Vienna, with 60,000 inhabitants and the big Wilhelm Pieck works making locomotives and railway carriages. Four Budapest students had been passing out their leaflets here on October 23rd when ÁVH agents pounced and arrested them. For one day the city smouldered uneasily. One police major confidently stated his view that Budapest would not be repeated here – workers and soldiers alike condemned the “fascist counter-revo-

lution” in the capital. An old guard Communist was less optimistic: “Believe me, it will only take one man appearing on the main street here with a red-white-and-green flag for the Party to collapse in ten minutes. And one hour later the present Party leaders would be over the border in Czechoslovakia.”²

The words were prophetic: that same noon a Communist agitator appeared on Baross Street at the head of about twenty men; he was carrying the flag. Over the next half hour the crowd behind him grew to thousands. On the city hall a national flag was raised, with the now-familiar hole where the Communist emblem had been ripped out. Then the agitator clambered on to the roof and dismantled the red star, and the crowds marched on the county Party headquarters. Among them were many Communists with bruised idealism – men such as Gábor Földes, a talented Jew whom the funkies had found reason to refuse to admit to University. Somehow he had risen to be director of the city’s theatre. Földes was a foolhardy but brave man – foolhardy enough to shout in the same breath irreconcilable slogans like, “We want freedom!” and “Long live the Party!” but so brave that he would go to the gallows later for his leadership during these days. The Party called in Hungarian and Russian tanks to defend its headquarters, but soon there were ten thousand people noisily confronting them.

Földes personally addressed the Party funkies on the steps of the building. He called on them to inform Budapest that the workers of Győr demanded that the rebels fighting in Budapest should not be termed fascists. “They are freedom fighters, and they are fighting for our freedom too!” After a few minutes the Hungarian tanks started their engines and rolled away, their crews raising their caps as a mark of respect. The mob cheered, “We are no longer slaves!” The Russian tanks remained with their tank-hatches closed. They had their orders: in Győr they did not open fire, either now or later, even when spat on by the mob.³

Industrial workers joined in. They tore the red stars off their factories and tasted blood when they rammed the prison gates to liberate the political prisoners held there.⁴ Then the ÁVH opened fire, killing a girl and two men before they were overwhelmed. Only four or five ÁVH men were caught here, their officers having escaped, many of them to Czechoslovakia. They had burned most of their files but the prison’s 1951 register was found; it listed 699 prisoners, and only one name had been endorsed as “released”. The prisoners’

occupations were listed as drivers, workers, waiters, mechanics – all little men, their lives permanently blighted by the ÁVH and the funkies.⁵

From Győr, the rebel tide rippled westwards to Magyaróvár, a township ten miles closer to the Austrian frontier.⁶ Word went round the factories that there was to be a short protest march to Magyaróvár that Friday, in solidarity with the workers of Budapest. “For the first time,” recalled a woman working at the local power plant, “everybody at the plant began talking politics.” Around ten A.M. most of the townsfolk met and marched to the local army barracks to remove the red star. The marchers were mainly agricultural students, or workers from the Kühne factory and the bauxite plant. They would have to pass an ÁVH barracks first, and they were singing as they approached it. But ÁVH troops lay in concealment with two machine-gun positions and about thirty well-armed defenders in trenches. As the crowd approached, the ÁVH commander stepped forward, calling out: “Ha-alt! What do you want?” The marchers pressed on. The officer drew his pistol and fired a warning shot. Then the machine guns opened fire and hand-grenades were thrown. The four hundred demonstrators scattered, leaving the road littered with dead and injured. Fifty-nine of the civilians died. After this the local police joined the uprising, and the ÁVH was disarmed.

The Magyaróvár incident, one of the worst single killings of the uprising, was all the more awful for being in a town through which every Western journalist would have to pass on the way to Budapest. When the young Italian newspaperman, Bruno Tedeschi, visited the chapel in the cemetery next day, he counted all the bodies laid out side by side. “Nearly all of them were very young as far as I could judge. The smell of blood, mingling with the scent of the flowers which the population had brought, pervaded the cemetery chapel.”⁷

Not since the Allied troops liberating Dachau in 1945 ceremonially liquidated every German soldier found near the site, had revenge followed so swiftly as at Magyaróvár. The citizens sent to Győr for reinforcements and it was the theatre director Gábor Földes who led the punitive expedition back to Magyaróvár that afternoon. They found the ÁVH barracks all but deserted.⁸ Three officers were still there; their commander had fled. Two of the three were beaten to death. Flora Pötz, a twenty-three-year-old factory girl who had always wanted

to be a doctor, was hanging around the hospital as the surviving ÁVH man was brought in. He had been beaten to a pulp. No one would touch him, so she herself knelt down and bandaged him. His skull was fractured, and he was badly concussed. He kept moaning, “Jesus, Jesus.”⁹

At Magyaróvár a revolutionary council was set up. It puzzled a lot of people that it was headed by Béla Nagy, a former Party secretary from the power plant, who had been “unfrocked” a year before. Several people noticed that former funkies now resurfaced in the rebel hierarchy and put on the rebel armband, including former ÁVH men and even a director of studies at the local agricultural academy who had been, until now, the most fanatical supporter of the regime.

A mass funeral was held for the victims on Sunday. Black flags draped the hospital and the town hall. Feelings ran high, and the mob descended on the hospital where the mutilated ÁVH man had been taken for surgery. They found him lying on a stretcher, chewing a cigar. The chief surgeon shrugged his shoulders and, ignoring Flora Pötz’s protests, allowed the mob to drag the heavily-bandaged officer outside. According to one factory worker, a Jew in the crowd bravely appealed to the others to leave the man alone: “What do you want with this wretch, he’s a sick man!” He was quickly silenced. “Do you want a fist in your face too?” The ÁVH man’s bloody corpse was left dangling by its feet from a plane tree on Lenin Street, the town’s main thoroughfare. “That was the end of the violence,” records the factory worker.¹⁰

Radio Free Europe decided that the time had come to spill the damage over into Moscow’s other captive nations. The line to propagate now was, “The events in Hungary should serve as a quick and urgent warning to leaders of all captive countries to move far and fast towards sovereignty and freedom. Otherwise they will surely be confronted by the same situation their colleagues in Hungary are now facing.”

An RFE policy summary was telexed to RFE headquarters in New York: “*Emphasising necessity immediate withdrawal Soviet troops if government is to save itself.*”

So far the voice of RFE was about the only central guidance for the rebels. It seemed clear to Spencer Barnes in Budapest that there were different groups, some of them calm and responsible, others desperate paranoids being gradually

winkled out by the ÁVH. The legation stated its impression that the Soviet command had attempted to keep actual bloodshed to a minimum. But this initial softness, coupled with the insurgents' new-found bravado, was protracting the struggle and giving them a chance to build up an organisation, "which clearly they did not have initially".¹¹

In the legation area there had been no incidents since the demonstration late that afternoon. But fighting broke out elsewhere after dark. At nine thirty p.m. an hour's battle began on the other side of the river near Moscow Square, and very heavy gunfire could be heard after midnight. Barnes suspected that insurgents were being hunted down when the streets were less crowded. But the sounds continued after daybreak on October 26th and built up again in intensity during the day. There was no evidence of Soviet infantry fighting on foot. But from seven A.M. Hungarian troops were encountered patrolling near the American legation and halting pedestrians. Barnes ordered the Americans billeted in the Széchenyi apartment to be evacuated to the legation building, as they were within the heavy Soviet concentrations ringing the ÁVH headquarters and defence ministry. They had spent the night in the basement.

Around twelve thirty there was a development that seemed significant to American eyes: a formal opposition seemed to be taking shape somewhere out there, in the country's shadows. A stranger slipped past the patrols and into the legation, and identified himself as leader of the group that had printed thousands of leaflets at the army printing press the day before. He talked of setting up a new government, and claimed to have visited Imre Nagy with a four-man delegation last night. "Nagy has agreed to all our demands," he said. "But he insists we back him, as head of the present legally constituted government."

He wrote down his name and telephone number. The legation was in a delicate situation, but agreed to listen without actually negotiating. The man returned at three p.m. and asked for advice on what the "new government" should do, and how an international forum could be brought into Hungary. "Nagy will do anything to keep the present government system in Hungary," he warned. "Nagy says, unless opposition ceases, horrible consequences will follow. The members of my 'new government' are becoming convinced Nagy means what he says. We've had reports about eight Russian tanks moving down Lenin Boulevard this morning, shooting up buildings on both sides of the street." He added,

“Neither I, nor anyone else among the insurgents, believes in Nagy’s pledge that Soviet troops will withdraw if arms are laid down.” The legation agreed to inform Washington as soon as communications made it possible.

Now, however, the MTI telegraph agency was refusing to forward the legation’s coded telegrams. Spencer Barnes sent off a telegram at seven p.m. about all this, but it would not reach Washington until fifty-six hours later. In another telegram he assessed:

Critical question at moment . . . is [the] extent of insurgent organisation. They have printing press. While a few Soviet tanks [have been] destroyed by fire [there is] no evidence of coordinated employment of Molotov cocktails . . . which we would think would be one of first signs central guidance of insurgents . . . This question of primary importance perhaps, because existence of insurgent movement, whatever its military strength, would mean different handling of case in UN. Legation will report urgently any information this area.

Throughout October 26th the secret eruptions within the Central Committee continued. That morning Andrew Hegedüs, the deputy prime minister, had managed to snatch his first few hours’ sleep since the uprising, slumped on a sofa in Gerő’s study. Suddenly Hegedüs was shaken by a young functionary, either Louis Acs or Béla Szalai. “It’s frightful, now they’re trying to disband the ÁVH! You’ve got to do something!” Dishevelled from his interrupted sleep, Hegedüs stumbled into the session chamber and spoke out against Nagy’s plan. “If we do what Comrade Nagy is demanding,” he said, “we shall be turning over the ÁVH men to mob violence.” The plan was dropped, but only temporarily.

Imre Nagy and his three henchmen – Donáth, Losonczy and Lukács – now launched a concerted attack on the old system. While there was still time they begged the Party to dissociate itself publicly from Moscow’s dangerous description of this popular uprising as a fascist putsch. (The Stalinist majority refused. Hegedüs now admits: “At this time I still thought it was a counter-revolution.”¹²) One person exclaimed angrily, “There is treason afoot. And the traitors are in our midst, here in the Party headquarters!”¹³ The wily old Communist Francis Donáth now recalls: “The whole Central Committee was present,

over one hundred people. Only we two expressed this point of view, and only one member of the Central Committee supported us, and that was the newspaper editor, Martin Horváth. Every other voice was against us: Hegedüs, Gerő, Marosán, the Budapest Party secretary Stephen Kovács and Jenő Hazai were particularly outspoken. Afterwards we told Kádár that we would not make public our dissent, but that we did not want any further part in the meetings of the Central Committee.”¹⁴

The street situation being as it was, Nagy's men cautiously demanded to be escorted home in an armoured car. That would not be possible until Saturday morning, October 27th. Meanwhile they too bedded down in one of the offices in the Academy Street building. When the armoured car did set out next morning to take them home across Margaret Bridge, it collided with a tank in Fő utca as a result of which Donáth suffered light concussion and had to remain at home for two or three days.

Like a tide spreading across a lake after an earth tremor, belated upheavals began in the more distant cities surrounding Budapest. For one or two days these townships had hesitated: perhaps it was inertia, perhaps it was the lack of communication, perhaps it was frank disbelief. There were minor, symbolic actions – the Soviet monument in Harkány was destroyed. There was industrial unrest, and the larger factories closed down except for a few big food processing and utility plants; the coal miners started a go-slow, producing enough coal to power the towns and cities but no more than that. As the incredible news spread that neither the Russians were immortal nor the ÁVH invincible, and that the very fabric of the Party was crumbling, numbed peasants reached for their pitchforks – and it was not to gather in the harvest. Here the funkies were often low-calibre officials banished to the provinces as the penalty for failure elsewhere, or dimwitted local opportunists. The army and the ÁVH were spread all too thinly across the countryside.

Sometimes the peasants remained passive but benevolent observers of the rising. They swarmed over the unloved co-operatives, greedy to be first in the great grab-back: farm implements, machinery and livestock were snatched from the state farms, the co-operatives and the tractor stations. Where farmers deliberately chose to work on, it was for one reason only: to feed the insurgent forces. Typical was the twenty-seven-year-old agronomist at a tractor station near Pécs,

who circularised all the local collectives in the name of the workers' council to which he had just been elected, and asked them to contribute two lorry-loads of food for Budapest. In fact he got twenty-four, and seventy men volunteered to drive the lorries to the capital.¹⁵

Deep in the country, even the revolution met stubborn attitudes. At Balassagyarmat, Ladislav Palkovics, a poor forty-seven-year-old carpenter, found enough to complain about: "If two strangers met, a nod of the head was enough for the other to understand what the other meant – we're having a bad time."¹⁶ Then a few students came from Budapest and organised a demonstration. Fifteen thousand people poured in to attend it: they marched, removed Communist signs, and sang the Hungarian anthem at the Russian memorial; but the monument itself was not demolished. Then a revolutionary council was formed, taking its orders from Radio Budapest, and this brought only headaches. The council called a general strike, but as Palkovics put it: "How could I tell folk that their carpentry work was not going to be finished before winter because there was a revolution going on in Budapest?" Life in the little town went on as usual, except that no trains ran through the railway station. The only decree Palkovics approved of was the dissolution of the co-operatives. "All of us wanted to become independent artisans again." After two days spent arguing and listening to much contrary Party jargon, Palkovics picked up his wood-plane and hammer and announced: "I'm taking my things home." The others grabbed their tools too and the co-operative dissolved of its own.

In the streets of the larger cities there were often little Budapests. By October 25th the tide of rebellion was engulfing Szeged, Győr, Pécs, Szolnok, Miskolc, Magyaróvár, Szombathely and Hatvan. Nineteen local MTI agencies forwarded accurate reports of the events to Budapest, where they were printed by the new rebel newspapers.¹⁷ Similar disturbances were reported from Nagykanizsa, Veszprém, Eger and Gyöngyös. Only once did Soviet troops intervene: in the mining town of Várpalota MTI reported several dead and wounded. Mobile student groups from Budapest raced round the countryside disseminating propaganda. The leadership of each group varied – there were intellectuals and students, former prisoners and deserters. The people took over local radio stations. Party headquarters were burned down, ÁVH units were scattered and

massacred, and the wretched informers identified from captured ÁVH files were remorselessly hunted down and liquidated.

Everybody wanted to know who the informers had been. At Sárvár, a town of about 10,000 inhabitants, the ÁVH headquarters was directly opposite the rectory. The police officials owed their lives to the local rector and Catholic priest Francis Mikes.¹⁸ They agreed to harbour the secret ÁVH files, so as to spare the lives of the local informers. The curious clerics did, however, dip into the files themselves, and found to their sorrow that three local priests had kept the ÁVH regularly supplied with gossip about their brothers of the cloth.

At Debrecen, a city of 140,000 near the Romanian border, disturbances had begun simultaneously with those in Budapest. Here, too, there had been student meetings and declarations. That evening, two thousand people demonstrated, annoyed by the watered-down version of their demands published by the Party newspaper, *Néplap*. The red stars had already vanished from the trams. While an excited crowd watched, three youths climbed to the roof of the Palace – converted to a railway office – and hacked down the red star there too. “I knew the revolution had begun,” said one woman.¹⁹ By nightfall all the red stars were gone except on the police headquarters where the police opened fire, killing an elderly shoemaker. A “Revolutionary Socialist Committee” took over the city government.

During that first night Budapest had evidently sent out instructions to provincial ÁVH forces to pull in potential troublemakers. At Pécs, a coal-mining region near the Yugoslav frontier and a traditional stronghold of nationalism, the ÁVH swooped next morning and jailed everybody of bad *kader*.²⁰ But the boot was already on the other foot. On October 25th, the city’s local radio announced that a revolutionary council had been formed covering all Baranya County. At two twenty A.M. on October 26th the city’s radio station broadcast an urgent proclamation from the local ÁVH commander, Colonel George Bradacs: “Attention! Attention! Curfew! Curfew! Until further notice I order a curfew in the area of the city of Pécs until five A.M.” He followed this with a denial that any municipal agencies had joined the revolutionary committee. “Wherever we get hold of them, we will hang them on the spot,” announced Bradacs.

This was less easily done than said. The miners went on strike at once, and after daybreak Bradacs decided to release the elements arrested two days earlier.

By eleven forty-five A.M. on October 26th the Pécs radio station had obviously changed hands: “Resistance groups Kinizsy and Zrinyi report in! Until further instructions the direction of attack remains unchanged.” A professor of military science at Pécs University, Professor Csikor, a former regular army officer, was appointed the city’s rebel commander. One of the freed prisoners, a thirty-five-year-old biochemist of Pécs University clinic, was appointed his chief of staff; his father had attained a high rank under Horthy, and he himself had seen war service as an army captain.²¹ On October 27th, the revolutionary council meeting at the city hall called for the arrest of Bradacs – some even demanded “quick popular justice” against the man. The situation could have been critical: he had 1,200 ÁVH troops still under arms. But the University’s youth brigade moved into his headquarters without a fight. Bradacs stayed long enough to swear allegiance to the revolution, and then vanished.

The revolution in Pécs appeared victorious, but the rebels had committed grave omissions already: the ÁVH commander, Colonel Bradacs, had slipped through their hands; they did not search the Party headquarters for arms; they had not disarmed the green ÁVH, believing these men loyal to the revolution; the main party funkies had escaped; and they had not realised that the Hungarian railway system had its own private telecommunications links.

Hundreds of Russian tanks had blundered through Kecskemét making for the capital. The crowds here had torn down several red stars and the police had surrendered about two hundred rifles to the mob. But as a Soviet division was occupying the area there was little firing. The city remained under Communist control at first but on October 28th news of the Budapest triumphs would turn the tables. The crowds went to city hall, threw out the Communists, and organised a revolutionary council.²²

In Western Hungary the transition of power was smooth and rapid after the bloody examples of Magyaróvár. Aided by workers from Győr and Magyaróvár, the population of Sopron disarmed the ÁVH units. After two uncertain days at Tatabánya, closer to Budapest, the population took over the county Party head-

quarters and the offices of the ministry of the interior on October 26th. A provisional revolutionary committee of workers and soldiers was formed. On the same day several thousand people staged an impressive, disciplined demonstration outside the county Party headquarters at Zalaegerszeg. Although there was some shooting at them from the building, the local police, army and ÁVH units did not intervene and the ÁVH units were disarmed next day; their buildings and weapons were handed over to the workers' council.

In Western Hungary, Győr became the focal point of the uprising. In the north-east it was the industrial city of Miskolc, capital of Borsod County near the Czech frontier, and ironically the birthplace of many of the country's leading Communists.

Here there had been revolutionary disturbances since October 24th, and a workers' council had been elected at the steelworks. Early on October 25th a friend telephoned one eye-witness, Árpád Sultz: "There's going to be a big demonstration organised by the workers' council." He took a taxi, and fell in with the marchers as they bore down on the city centre.²³ It was the familiar stirring pattern: the demonstrators, chanting slogans, tore down red stars and waved national flags.

At a mass meeting on Miskolc University campus a workers' and soldiers' council was formed, with seventy-two members. For five hours speech followed speech with a vast crowd acclaiming every demand. A list of twenty-one demands was drawn up: a Russian withdrawal, the dissolution of the ÁVH and the formation of a new government. When the local Party secretary tried to speak he was kicked off the platform. As the meeting went on, the army and police authorities reached an agreement with the new council. Shortly, a clandestine Radio Miskolc began transmitting these robust demands.

Next day, October 26th, crowds rioted in front of the Miskolc police headquarters and demanded the release of young men arrested in the earlier demonstrations. An ÁVH captain, Ladislav Csürke, waited in vain for orders, then lost patience. His men opened fire on the crowd, which melted away. But then it returned, with coal-miners from Szuhakálló armed with sticks of dynamite, and these men blasted open the building, killing several officers inside. In the ensuing act of vengeance the mob beat up Csürke and tried to lynch him and mutilated his best friend, Stephen Mohai. By dusk the workers' council had full

control. Next day, they broadcast a statement, “Stalinist provocateurs have felt the just punishment of the people.”²⁴ The local Soviet garrison lay low.

After October 26th, the whisper of rebel radios permeated the air waves. Radio Pécs and Radio Nyíregyháza fell into insurgent hands. Rebels also seized the more powerful Győr transmitter. It could be heard in Western Europe and its hotter items could be served straight back by RFE’s powerful voice. Later the Magyaróvár transmitter defected and by October 27th Radio Szombathely had also rebelled, enabling the voice of “Radio Free Győr” to be relayed over the whole of Western Hungary.

In Budapest the radio, broadcasting from well-guarded emergency studios, was still firmly in the hands of the funkies. A Polytechnic teacher summarised, “In the first few days of the revolution, all you could hear was the voice of Szepesi-Friedländer announcing that the police had captured such-and-such a ‘fascist counter-revolutionary’.”²⁵ The regime’s radio and newspapers had lost all their authority. Around five thirty A.M. on October 26th Radio Budapest had broadcast an emotional appeal to the public to stay off the streets all day unless working for essential services like gas, electricity and telephones. The appeal was ignored. By ten A.M. there was again heavy fighting, this time around Boráros Square. So the radio reversed its stand and allowed the people to go out after all – to buy food. When the Party organ *Free People* resumed publication that morning, its editorials besought an unimpressed public to take note that the Party’s three new secretaries, Kádár, Donáth and Julius Kállai, had all spent years in Rákosi’s prisons. The sense of *déjà vu* for the public was overwhelming.

The citizenry’s real voice was growing audible in clandestine revolutionary newspapers and leaflets. Handbills appeared everywhere demanding the resignation of Imre Nagy, the still invisible prime minister. Strange newspapers were also flourishing, openly offered for sale on the streets. On October 26th, Gaza Katona, the American diplomat, noticed one called *Soldier (Honvéd)* and another called *Revolutionary Youth (Forradalmi Ifjúság)*. There was still a left-of-centre consensus. Hundreds of journalists had been persecuted during the Rákosi era; now they could write and publish again. On October 26th, Géza Losonczy brought out his new *Hungarian Nation (Magyar Nemzet)* at the New York Palace.

A new tabloid newspaper printed in the same building caught the city's imagination: entitled *Truth (Igazság)* it was edited by Julius Obersovszky, and staffed by a dozen journalists like Ladislas von Zircz, who lives in Düsseldorf, and János Bárdi, now editor of a big newspaper in West Germany. Publishing a newspaper during an uprising was a dangerous delight: they had the presses and the newsprint but they had no accountants to warn about profitability. The editor kept in telephone contact with the workers' councils, an opinion was formed, and printed. "Everybody knew what they really wanted: the Russians must get out. Everything else was secondary," recalls Bárdi. *Truth* had a dangerous line in satire, printing mocking headlines over an article about Russian troops looting a jeweller's shop, "Counter-revolutionary looters in Budapest. Thefts by armed men . . ." Those were breathtaking days in Budapest. Once the deputy editor found a stranger sitting at his desk, cleaning a gun. "We have no room for collaborationist journalists," said the stranger and led the editor out at gunpoint. Evidently it was a case of mistaken identity.²⁶

The Social Democrats had also regained control of their old newspaper, *People's Voice (Népszava)*. On October 26th, this published a one-sheet edition with a banner headline demanding a new broad-based national government. It editorialised: "The government to be formed must immediately initiate talks with a view to the withdrawal of Soviet troops from our country." Significantly, the Writers' Union was only asking for their withdrawal "to their former positions", while the trades unions representatives demanded their "withdrawal . . . from the country", and a programme drawn up by the professors and students even included, "free passage out of the country for those Soviet soldiers who went over to the side of the Hungarian people".

This newspaper also revealed that a workers' delegation had come from Borsod County to put certain demands to the prime minister. This was true. It was the first of a series of belligerent delegations that were to plague and harass Imre Nagy from now on and make it impossible for him to formulate his own policies, because these delegations had industrial muscle, which they openly flexed by declaring general strikes in their own regions. While the Borsod workers' delegation led by Rudolf Földvári set out in person to Budapest, the newly-elected workers' council of Miskolc sent a telegram to Imre Nagy stating their twenty-one demands, which now included a Soviet withdrawal from Hun-

gary by January 1st at the latest; meanwhile, the rebel Miskolc radio station declared a disciplined general strike of all non-essential workers in Borsod County, “regardless of Nagy’s answer”.

From now on, Nagy always seemed to be conceding to the rebel demands, though always trotting one fateful pace behind. At one p.m. on October 26th Radio Budapest carried Imre Nagy’s reply. It promised: “Tonight or tomorrow morning a new government will be formed, a Patriotic People’s Front government.” Anxious to take the wind out of the rebel sails, Nagy even added a promise to adopt every one of the Miskolc demands. This promise was cut out of later news bulletins.²⁷ In fact at four forty-five p.m. the Central Committee broadcast a significantly narrower undertaking, that the new PPF government being formed by Imre Nagy would start talks with the Kremlin about a return of Soviet troops “to their bases” immediately after order was restored, but even this lame undertaking was removed when the statement was re-broadcast four hours later.²⁸

On October 26th, Red Csepel – the industrial island in southern Budapest – also fell to the rebels. The police building was stormed and its cells broken open to free those arrested during the days before. Then the mob sacked the Party headquarters. Here the daughter of the chairman of the town council, Joseph Kalamár, was seen firing on the mob, and ÁVH men opened fire from the windows before taking refuge in the basement. The mob flushed them out with firehoses; the roomy building would become the home for sixty-four grateful Csepel families.²⁹

Then gangs of armed and triumphant rebels scoured Csepel’s slum-land for the funkies who had made their lives a misery. First on their list was Kalamár himself. Sixty-one, and the son of a roadworker, he had been a shop steward in the Manfréd Weiss steelworks here at Csepel since 1918 and had a perennial record of agitation, fighting and striking until the factory owners blacklisted him as a troublemaker and he became unemployable. A gang of ten men ran him to ground hiding in a school at No. 170, Saint Stephen Boulevard in the city centre; they dragged him to a vacant lot at No. 153 and shot him; they trampled on his corpse and stuffed his mouth with sand. Rumours spread that when he was discovered he was radioing to the Russians.³⁰ That was the day when thirty-five-year-old lathe operator Andrew Bordás turned up at the now silent steelworks

to get his pay. Whether what followed was because he had been awarded the Kossuth prize as one of the hated Stakhanovite workers, or whether he was indeed an ÁVH official, the records do not relate; but there was a shout, "This is the ÁVO who shot a kid to death yesterday!" Accusation was tantamount to guilt: a pistol shot rang out, and Bordás, too, was dead.³¹

All over the city the ranks of the loyal Communists were thinning. In a flat in suburban Budakeszi the life of Alexander Sziklai, sixty-year-old director of the War History Museum, who had fought (as "Peter Ladi") in the Soviet cause on thirty years of battlefields from Central Asia to Spain, and had joined the Hungarian army after 1948, was terminated that day, the same day that Louis Kiss, president of the local Party branch, and his son-in-law were put to the rebel axe.³² The rebels swept off Sziklai's desk a photograph he had received from Francis Münnich when both were interned in France in 1940. On the back Münnich had written, "Concentration camp is just an enforced stop along our way but it does not mean that we are abandoning our determination to fight."

Power was slipping out of the hands of Münnich and his kind. Workers' councils were mushrooming throughout Hungary. Typically, at Óvár, a roughly-typed list of candidates was handed to workers assembled in their factory, and three or four names were voted for by secret ballot. From these factory councils, a workers' council was elected for the whole town.³³

It was the same in Budapest. On October 25th toolmaker Francis Töke arrived back at the telephone factory after spending two days fighting in the streets.³⁴ SZOT, the National Trade Union Council, had officially appealed for workers' councils to be elected in each factory. The workers conformed, but not at all as the Party had expected: eight hundred of the 3,000 workers assembled in their culture hall saw the same old funkies clustered on the platform in front of them – director, Party secretary, and works committee convenor – and howled down every name they suggested for the new workers' council. They then elected twenty-five honest men from their own number, including Töke, and these men promptly voted to go on strike until the regime accepted their demands: the first was the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the country.

Panicked by the political threat posed by these *ad hoc* bodies to the centralised Party leadership, Academy Street urged Party members as openly as it dared to infiltrate the new workers' councils, and it dropped a broad hint to the Party's

trades union apparatus that it should try to stage-manage the elections in the accustomed fashion.³⁵ Thus, Radio Budapest announced that the Central Committee had set this task to “every patriotic youth, every Communist: join the workers’ councils that have been formed. Lose no time in forming in every factory, every building, committees to maintain order.”³⁶

The most immediate threat to the regime’s prestige is posed by the rebel strongholds still holding out in Budapest itself. Reinforcements are pouring in for them from the countryside: on October 26th, 290 young men aged from about sixteen to twenty-one, mostly the sons of miners, arrive from Dorog.³⁷ The scenes in the capital are extraordinary: there are bread queues, and patient shoppers waiting to obtain food; there are insurgents hurrying past them, gripping rifles; there are crowds of curious onlookers, rushing from battle to battle. But it is the tanks that dominate the street scene, whether poised motionless at intersections like panthers listening for the rustle of their prey, or swivelling, or firing – or rattling past, crowded with fifteen or twenty insurgents brandishing flags and rifles and flanked by excited long-haired youths on bicycles.

A tank’s main gun coughs not far away. A split second later the air waves pluck at the eardrums, and a distant building’s façade crumples on to the pavement. People scatter, then re-form and continue their walking. Since the early morning of October 26th Russian tanks have bombarded the Kilián Barracks, now under Colonel Maléter’s command, and shelled the buildings opposite and along Üllői Road.³⁸ Façades collapse in showers of mortar dust with a rumble that mingles with the splintering crump of petrol bombs, the crackle of machine-gun fire and the screams of the injured.

Inside the barracks, Maléter, with a savage look on his face, is telephoning his minister. Lieutenant Peter Gosztonyi hears him shout: “Is this how the government intends to restore order in Budapest?” General Mata makes some reply, and Maléter’s face hardens. “In that case, sir, I shall open fire on the first Soviet tank that comes within range of the Kilián Barracks!” It is pure bravado. His young soldiers do not have much by way of weapons: rifles and tommy guns, but no heavy machine guns or grenades. He orders riflemen to snipe at the Soviet tank periscopes while those with tommy guns mop up any infantry accompanying the tanks; but the Soviet commanders have not dared to send

infantry into the streets. Word flashes across the whole city about the Kilián Barracks' bewildering stand. Unimpressed by the flying bullets, farm carts trundle into the courtyard laden with bread and meat and live chickens, the farmers asking nothing in return except to see this extraordinary man.

Maria Maléter, once his wife, is walking back home across the Chain Bridge when a neighbour from their old home town, Kassa, runs up to her: "Have you heard of the colonel at the Kilián Barracks? Nobody knows who he is, but they say every shell gets a Russian tank!" Next day the whole city knows his name: her telephone rings all day. This was the real Paul Maléter whom she had married. Young Paul, now ten, wants to go straight out and fight in the barracks too; Maria has to lock him into the flat. Even then he scrawls little leaflets and flutters them down on to passersby: "Chuck the Russians out!" "The Russians are horrible, don't trust them!"³⁹

From the eastern counties, however, alarming news filters into the capital. That evening, on October 26th, a US legation official notes in his diary that the military attaché has begun to receive calls indicating that fresh troops are arriving from the Soviet Union. What was the Kremlin up to now?

32 A Share of the Blame

I WENT TO SEE the commander of the Soviet forces that moved into Hungary, General Pavel Ivanovich Batov. He is over eighty, square shouldered and stocky. Like most Red Army generals, the stiffness of his epaulets makes it look as though a coat-hanger has been left in his uniform. Iron grey hair retreats up a broad, rectangular forehead, the eyes are of such watery faintness as to be virtually colourless, the muscular skin is tanned to a leathery toughness, and pockets below each cheekbone give him a gaunt, severe look. His voice is commanding and emphatic. He speaks in good order, mustering his wartime recollections around phrases and figures typed on to five well-worn sheets of paper on the table in front of him.

His Moscow office is austere furnished. There are windows with white lace curtains on two sides, and a fabric roll-up map of the German-Russian front in 1945, showing his sixty-fifth army marching from Stalingrad to Rostock. A conference table, a door upholstered with light blue leather padding, and a portrait of Leonid Brezhnev complete the room's equipment, apart from some showcases of medals, models of weapons and of the victory monuments in Berlin and Warsaw. Batov has done a lot of fighting: his collected medals weigh eight pounds, so he wears ribbons instead – twelve rows of them won in battles from Spain to Stalingrad. Among them I spy the red and blue Order of the October Revolution, which not even the defence minister now has.

General Batov has an air of practised authority. When the phone behind him suddenly jangles he does not even swivel his eyes away from his listener, as he knows that his secretary will jump to answer it. The conversation with him is at

first friendly and freewheeling. I let him do all the talking first, then gently prod the conversation into the post-war years when he was Marshal Grechko's chief of staff in the Warsaw Pact command, and then onward into the Hungarian uprising itself: in 1955 General Batov became commander of the Carpathian Military District with headquarters at Łvov; his District encompassed eleven sub-districts in the Ukraine with the Kiev Military District to the north and the Odessa District to the south.

In Łvov – until 1945 a Polish town – he felt at home. “It was safely in Soviet hands, he smiles, and I found many of my old friends in command of the armies in Bulgaria, in Czechoslovakia and in Hungary. They were officers I had first got to know in Spain, like Comrade Hoffmann, the defence minister in East Germany.”¹

I pick up the word Hungary. He stiffens and begins to stonewall; his voice takes on a forbidding edge. Several times he *almost* thumps the table, stopping his fist millimetres short of the surface as though somebody has placed some porcelain on it that he is afraid to shatter. “My duty,” he emphasises, “was to execute the orders of my superiors and that is all.” I ask him his first recollection of the uprising. He describes a dramatic telephone call made to him in the middle of one night by Soviet defence minister Marshal Zhukov: “It was October 23rd or 24th. Zhukov told me, ‘If you don’t get in there fast then you’re going to find yourself up against Americans there, so: get moving!’ Two hours later my troops began moving in.”

Batov crossed the frontier himself, going as far forward as Szolnok, a city in eastern Hungary. “I personally did not witness the fighting. I was at Szolnok when I got the order from the defence minister that I was to return to Lvov and that my troops would come under the command of Marshal Koniev.”

The River Tisza had swathed the airfield in fog, and Batov and his staff flew back at low altitude looking for landmarks. “But, orders were orders! . . . The army corps stationed in Hungary was commanded by General Larshenko. I have known him ever since he was a platoon commander in my regiment in the Proletarian division in Moscow in the Thirties. When the counter-revolution blazed up, Larshenko issued orders to his troops to keep well out of things. Even the troops that were sent into Hungary from my District and from the Odessa Mili-

tary District had express orders not to open fire. They were forbidden to open fire. For the first five days we did not even return the fire!”

It is an oversimplification, but basically true. I comment that I have gathered as much from several sources. “I remember clearly,” amplifies Batov, reddening, “there are two Soviet cities, Uzhgorod and Mukachevo – two Soviet cities in the Carpathians. And we set up something like eighteen field hospitals in them to treat the soldiers injured by the counter-revolutionaries. Only later did we return fire. And the moment that we did our casualty rate dropped significantly.”

I try to establish the chain of command, from Moscow to the Soviet tank commanders in Budapest. Batov explains that after Koniev’s interpolation, the Kremlin’s orders went direct to Koniev. In his mind’s eye he can still see one particular train-load of Russian tanks burnt out in the street fighting, arriving at the frontier station at Chop. “I must ask you when investigating this to realise that we only *returned* the fire. We waited a long time,” he says. His fist descends again, and this time he thumps the table so that the ashtrays rattle. “We were very patient.”

While in Moscow, I try to see Yuri V. Andropov, the Soviet ambassador to Budapest in 1956. I know that he has pronounced feelings about the way the Kremlin leadership handled the crisis. But he is a busy man.

Andropov was one of the most refined Soviet officials. A top-ranking NKVD officer as well as diplomat, he spoke many languages, including excellent Hungarian. As he had been a port official receiving wartime Allied convoys he also spoke good English, though choosing to restrict his topics to the arts; he preferred Oscar Wilde as a window on British class society. He had been at the Budapest embassy since 1953, was a close friend of prime minister Hegedüs, and by 1956 had the kind of position that gauleiters were assigned in occupied countries. But he was considered pro-Hungarian, and he took trouble to circulate among the workers and peasants to find out what they really thought. Andropov had little time for Imre Nagy, considering that the man lacked “discipline”. Like János Kádár, Andropov was an *apparatchik*, a funky to whom the power structure, rather than the Party’s ideology, was all-important.

In Moscow I did speak, however, with an official who recalled: "When I was still a very junior diplomat in the spring of 1957, attending my first term at diplomatic school, the former ambassador Andropov appeared and lectured us for an hour and a half on what had happened in Budapest and his own role there. Andropov had been recalled from Budapest shortly before. The twenty other people present were as dumbfounded as I. Talking very forcefully, Andropov spoke to this effect: 'When you're a diplomat you must be prepared for everything. Something like this may well happen to you gentlemen too, as future ambassadors!' He gave us to understand that he had made some mistakes, but in this small circle he wanted to speak frankly about them. 'To blame the Hungarians themselves, let alone the Western powers, for the uprising, is not right,' said Andropov. 'We Russians must bear a share of the blame.'"²

In Budapest, in October 1956, the young soldiers of General Batov and General Larshenko and Yuri Andropov were dying. Many of them did not know where they were or why they were there. Some believed themselves in Berlin, fighting Hitler's hordes again, or on the banks of the Suez Canal fighting the British. But they were dying all the same. A shaken journalist Ilario Fiore would slide a sheet of the Italian legation's notepaper into his Olivetti and type this into his diary for October 24th:

At 7:00 A.M. a hotel employee came and said that near Molotov Square, the square below the road crossing the Chain Bridge, there were dead soldiers who might be Russians. A British colleague and I decided to go have a look . . . The time was getting on but the fog had not completely dispersed, and you could not see more than ten yards. We got to the square in a few minutes. Near one corner were the corpses of four soldiers. I recognised them as Russian from their khaki uniform and the red star on their collar tabs and berets. They were lined up along the wall of the square, with their faces unmarked but their chests torn open by a tremendous explosion and their tunics clotted with congealed blood. The rebels had attacked an armoured car with hand grenades and machine guns emplaced on the far corner of the square. While we were there a Hungarian ambulance arrived, some civilians got out with a Russian official and they took the corpses

away. Nobody said a word, but the Soviet captain was perspiring and his face betrayed his feelings.

These were only the first Russian casualties that day.

We were just in front of the Danube Hotel when an armoured Russian patrol rolled past, making for Molotov Square where the four soldiers had been killed . . . The leading tank had to pause on the embankment a few yards from the square and the armoured car that was bringing up the rear halted twenty yards or so from where we had taken cover. The Soviet soldier in it was gripping a rifle and peering ahead; the mists were shifting because now a light wind was blowing across from Buda. He didn't notice, this Soviet soldier, the three or four rebels who slipped out of an alley to the right, expertly took cover and aimed at him. A moment later, a burst of gunfire hit him squarely in the chest while a second perforated the walls and tyres of the armoured car. The rebels didn't wait to see the T-34 turret swivel round on to them – they melted into the side streets. A squad of soldiers jumped out of the tanks and ran over to help their injured comrade. They lowered him and carried him over to where we had taken cover from the flying bullets. On the steps of the Danube Hotel, the three soldiers who were carrying their dying comrade waited while my British colleague and I tried to open the revolving door for them – they had signalled to us that they wanted to carry him inside. The soldier was groaning, his chest was torn open and he was losing blood from his neck too; but they couldn't get through the revolving door. What with the weapons he was carrying and his spreadeagled arms and legs, the gap was not wide enough, and they had to give up. The blood was still gushing all over the steps and as they carried the wretched man up and down bits of flesh were dropping off him. "It's his liver," said one of those watching. Never would I have thought so much blood could pour out of one human body. The dying man was laid on the ground and somebody went to call a doctor. The soldier kept murmuring the same word over and over again. I asked somebody I'd seen speaking Russian to an officer what the word was. "Mother," he said. "Mother."³

The fighting capital teemed with rumours. Some said that Russians were pouring into the country, others that they were pulling out. There were lurid

rumours that the SS “Hunyadi” division was poised to enter Hungary, other excited youths claimed to have learnt for certain that the West German army was already in Austria and about to march in. The Russian troops seemed no better informed: “Where do you come from?” a student asked one Red soldier.⁴ “From the Caucasus!” “Why are you fighting?” The soldier pointed across the river to the Soviet war memorial on top of Mount Gellért. “*Za mir!*” (“For peace!”)

There were persistent rumours that Russian troops had been seen changing sides, deserting en masse to the anti-Soviet cause. Interpreter George Lovas saw twelve Russian tanks and their accompanying lorries arrive at the Buda end of the Margaret Bridge.⁵ There they halted, unable to cross; the next time he saw the tanks, they were flying Hungarian colours.

Italian minister Fabrizio Franco wrote in his diary for October 25th: “The shelling and rifle fire in the streets reached a climax at 10:30 A.M., when it turned into a full-scale battle. We learned that at just that moment Soviet tanks began fraternising with the rebels and a battle broke out between Russians, on the Chain Bridge.” Franco’s source was evidently the journalist Fiore, who witnessed the scene himself.

Fiore’s own account, typed that day, reads:

I was going up to the residence of the Italian minister, Franco, near the top of Buda . . . when just after the tunnel which emerges on to the square before the bridge a column of unarmed demonstrators came to a halt. Between the Hungarians and the brand-new Russian tanks stationed on the bridge access were not more than fifty yards. The Soviet troops were manning the turrets of their T-34s and the guns were pointing straight ahead and I expected them to open fire any moment at point-blank range. At the bridge’s other end, in Pest, a furious battle was raging and a new critical moment seemed to have arrived, judging by the heavy Soviet machine-gun fire. It appeared that the Russian army, after twenty-four hours of procrastination, had finally decided to wipe out the rebels. The procession of Hungarians moved slowly towards the tanks, and then suddenly the “miracle” occurred: the Russians got down from their tanks and beckoned to the Hungarians, as though inviting them to come on without fear. They mingled, they talked,

and finally the civilians were seen to mount the tanks with the soldiers and these manoeuvred round until they were pointing directly at the other end of the bridge. An instant later, while I was still watching this historic scene, incredulously, the tanks' guns opened fire towards Pest, where other Soviet soldiers on the embankment were firing with tanks at rebel nests in that district. For ten minutes the city rocked to the duel between these two opposing factions of the Russian army, one of which had taken the extraordinary decision to help the Hungarian people to rid their country from oppression.

Many people believed they had witnessed such fraternisation, and several executions of Soviet officers – overheard by Hungarians imprisoned in the same buildings – would later lend support to their testimony. Besides, many people knew enough Russian to strike up conversations with the Soviet troops. Bishop Péterfalvy had learned the language in the Siberian labour camp: “I talked to a Russian soldier who went over to the Hungarians. He sold his truck for three bottles of rum.”

But often what seemed like fraternisation was just a ploy by tank commanders. There was a Hungarian saying: “You can fry a Russian in butter and breadcrumbs, but he still remains a Russian.”⁶ Many crews had been in their tanks for days on end. As pitched battles developed, the tanks stank of excrement; their supplies ran out, their morale was low, and they were at the mercy of petrol bombs. The only alternative to surrender was to pretend to fraternise. According to one source⁷ such were indeed the orders issued by their commanders: if you run out of fuel, food or ammunition, smile at the natives – and wait for fresh supplies to arrive.

There were a few genuine defections. At Cegléd the local Russian commander advised the rebels he would not interfere (he was one of those later executed).⁸ The Soviet barracks at Szombathely displayed placards reading: “We won't fire, don't fire on us.” But the legend far exceeded the fact as Western newspapers wallowed in wishful thinking. Russians at Győr were alleged to have provided the rebels with heavy arms. These legends were deflated by the CIA station chief in Vienna: as Colonel Peer de Silva stated, the refugees would have lynched any Soviet troops they found among them. “Headquarters was caught up in the

fever of the times, and became avid fans of this school of creative journalism,” he later reminisced. “They bombarded me for information. When I explained in tortured detail why there were *no* Soviet defectors I only received peevish replies that I was not being aggressive enough.”⁹

In Washington it was breakfast time, and a long, agonising silence had begun. No more authentic news had come from the Budapest legation, and it would be nearly eighty hours before that silence was broken.

In Budapest, it was October 26th, three p.m. Spencer Barnes could hear heavy fighting still going on in the town centre, but round the American legation itself it was still quiet. From his desk he was shouting into silence, and his telegrams were piling up unsent. He personally believed that it was time for Washington to take a giant risk: the legation had been contacted by a rebel leader, claiming to head a “provisional revolutionary government”. The longer Eisenhower prevaricated, the more certain it was that the rebels were facing extinction or amnesty, a choice which Barnes described as evil.¹⁰ By “complete inaction”, he pointed out, the United States would be condoning the Soviet suppression of the uprising. It had not escaped Barnes that it was France that had taken the matter before the United Nations. He wrote: “Legation strongly believes . . . that US government should lead the case in UN and use all its influence to mobilise world opinion.” The time had come to consider giving overt American material support to the rebels – “Some risk is warranted by emergence of this tremendous revulsion against Soviet domination.”¹¹

But how? Hungary’s only non-Communist neighbour was Austria. She was now a neutral and no power could convoy or even airlift armies and ammunition across her territory. It was the kind of question which only the National Security Council could consider. Its job was to advise on the integration of domestic, foreign and military policies. Normally it met on Thursdays, but Eisenhower was in mid-campaign, and it was this Friday morning, October 26th, before the NSC met in the Cabinet Room in the White House. The first item on the agenda was: “Significant World Developments affecting US Security.” It was dealt with by Allen Dulles as director of the CIA: he briefed the dozen grave men seated round the table on the latest intelligence from Poland, Hungary and the Middle East. (Later he would recall: “If the briefing was dramatic

at all, or presented a growing crisis in X country, somebody would say, ‘What should we do about it?’ And I would say, ‘Well, that’s none of my business, that’s the business of the secretary of state.’” The secretary was of course the other Dulles brother, and there would be a laugh around the table.) Eisenhower directed the NSC Planning Board to prepare a comprehensive analysis of the developments in Hungary and Poland and possible courses of action. Nobody in the NSC was anxious for action. Harold Stassen advised against doing anything that might cause the Russians to fear that the West was trying to get a foothold in Hungary.¹²

At about the same moment, thousands of miles away, Tom Rodgers set out from the American legation to drive a colleague over the river to Buda. There the rebels were building their barricades virtually unmolested by government forces; Anton Nyerges, the information officer, wanted to get home before dusk. They drove right across the Russian-held sector – past the tanks defending Parliament, the ministries of the interior and defence and holding bridgeheads on this side of the river. Their station wagon with its stars and stripes draped across the hood passed little other civilian traffic. On Margaret Bridge, their credentials were checked by Russian and Hungarian army patrols, then Rodgers eased the wagon between two tanks facing over the river and drove over to Buda.

At the Buda end of the bridge, the difference was noticeable. The bridge was unguarded. In Martyrs’ Street cheerful crowds were swirling round the squares as though it were a spring Sunday afternoon. They clapped and waved when they saw the American flag. In Széna Square, near the excavations for the new underground, a roadblock had been set up with paving stones and three overturned railway coaches pushed up during the night before on tramlines; the barricade was manned by *gyerekek* – grubby and taut faced youngsters fingering guns and grenades. They halted the station wagon, checked the Americans’ IDs and rummaged in their overnight bags for hidden weapons. They asked for news – news of the fighting in the town centre, and news from the outside world.

At the next square Rodgers noticed that the unpopular post-war name of Moscow Square had been freshly blanked out. Rodgers dropped off Nyerges on Castle Hill – his home was soon to be destroyed by Soviet shelling – and drove back down the steep winding street. The crowds, bolder now, shouted ques-

tions: "When is America going to help?" "What is happening in the United Nations?" "When is Hammarskjöld coming?"

Near his house Rodgers saw his children's nanny, Marika, and a crowd clustering round an ashen-faced young man. Marika had been taking coffee to the *gyerekek* of Széna Square, and bedsheets to tear up for bandages and they had begged her to get brandy for this man who had been shot by a passing Soviet tank; she had lifted some from the diplomat's drinks cabinet. Rodgers drove the casualty over to take refuge in a friend's home. He drove in silence. There was little that either of them could say – the wounded insurgent, the American diplomat.

At five fifty-one p.m. Eisenhower telephoned Foster Dulles. Ike said, "I've been turning over in my mind what Stassen said in the meeting this morning." He felt that the Hungarians might not have such a hard time if the Kremlin was told confidentially that it had no cause to fear that NATO was trying to incorporate the border states into her own system. Therefore Eisenhower saw it as vital to crush any such Kremlin fears on this score, quickly and completely. "My question is," he asked Dulles, "whether we should say we have no interest in those areas." He did not know how it could be done. Perhaps it could be put into the speech that Mr. Dulles himself was preparing for tomorrow night in Dallas: "It is not that the Western world has any idea of influencing them . . . but if they [the Hungarians] could enjoy the same freedom that is now Austria's . . ." ¹³

That evening at six thirty-one p.m. Foster Dulles telephoned Cabot Lodge in New York and suggested that they might talk informally in the Security Council with the Russians in this sense. (He mentioned, too, forebodings about what Britain, France and Israel were plotting. "It looks bad all along the line. We don't know what the British and French agreed to in their last talks, and I think they may be going in to fight.") As for Hungary, the French and the British were discussing with the United States how to bring it to the Security Council. Lodge pointed out: "We'll lose a good deal if we do nothing." Half an hour later Dulles telephoned Eisenhower: "I've been thinking over your own thought and wonder if you approve my saying something to the effect that all we want is their genuine independence and that if they once have that, that would alter the whole aspect of the European scene and the whole problem of European security would

be altered.” Eisenhower agreed. “From the evening paper it looks as if it is spreading.” Dulles reported that he was sending a cable to Selwyn Lloyd urging that Hungary should be placed before the Security Council in order to give the Americans a chance to talk privately with the Russians there. Eisenhower agreed: “Tell Lloyd that it is so terrible that we would be remiss if we didn’t do something!”

After three days, the character of the street fight in Budapest has changed. Of the 15,000 University students out on the streets on October 23rd, about two-thirds have withdrawn. The men now toting guns and Molotov cocktails are largely leather-jacketed toughs and hooligans from the industrial slums of Angel Fields and Ferencváros. One witness will state, “They were not driven by idealistic goals. The motivations of their heroic actions lay in their adventurous spirit and in the fact that they looked on the fight as a good sport.”¹⁴ Eighty to ninety per cent of the wounded insurgents treated by hospitals are young workers, less than five per cent are students.¹⁵ And a middle-aged gynaecologist will remark to his wife in an Austrian refugee camp, “This is a dreadful group here – what we used to call the *proli*, the scum proletariat.”¹⁶

Whose are the pale and apprehensive faces lingering behind half-drawn curtains or peering through the slats of Venetian blinds at a battle from which they are voluntarily abstaining? Here is one: a six-foot tall ex-Jew of twenty-three, a well-dressed research physicist whom American investigators will sum up as “an immature, emotionally sensitive individual, who also is hard-driving and much plagued by desire to achieve success”.¹⁷ He is aloof, easily tires or becomes depressed. Once at University he has tried suicide. His father was a self-made man with an electronics business, but perished with both grandparents and two uncles in a concentration camp, leaving his only son a frail and overprotected child. He has attempted to conform to the new regime and abide by the rules. He has avoided close personal relationships. The uprising has taken him by surprise: after drifting over to see the Stalin statue demolished, he has retreated to the protective confines of his mother’s home. Now he peers from behind her window clutching a camera in long, tapering fingers, fixing the fleeting images of slithering tanks and running men through the family curtains.

Cowering in his student digs is another abstainer, a twenty-two-year-old Jewish student leader.¹⁸ In the past he has written provocative articles and helped to organise the demonstration of October 23rd. Now he tells anybody who will listen: "I wanted no shooting, just a liberalisation!" He is bewildered and confused. In America he will explain his abstention thus: "As I edited a newspaper, I did not fight with weapons. Besides, it was safer to fight with manuscripts than weapons."

And another citizen who keeps his head down is a muscular urban lawyer of thirty-two.¹⁹ He has sidestepped marriage and made no close friends. He is a hedonist, and like ninety per cent of Hungary's lawyers a Jew: a "Yom Kippur" Jew, the American investigators will dub him, who has gone to synagogues only on feast days. He decided as a boy to make a fortune, and having heard his parents lament endlessly how his grandfather's estate had been dissipated in legal bickering between the seven children, and that "the lawyers got the lot", he quietly decided that being a lawyer was obviously the profession for him. For fifteen years after that he had a run of bad luck: matriculating in 1942 he was awarded only a C because of his race. His deeply Orthodox sister was obliged to have her dress shop registered in a Christian girl's name; he got his own back by laying her. Drafted in 1944 to labour service, he was deported to Mauthausen where his sisters and brother-in-law starved to death. He walked back to Budapest in August 1945 unshod because Russian soldiers had stolen even his boots – and arrived "emotionally numb", orientated simply towards survival and putting up that lawyer's signboard. He became a tax lawyer defending the kulak and wealthy bourgeois targets of penal Marxist taxation measures. For three years the money rolled in. He knew how and whom to bribe in the tax bureau – the civil servants had no love for the new regime. But since 1955 he has been forced to join a shared practice which has meant a big cut in pay; now he keeps to himself, and leads an insulated existence. October 23rd, 1956, has come and gone; he is to be seen at City Hall briefly trapped into posturing on the lawyers' revolutionary council before he flees in neurotic panic to his father's house at Óbuda, to play cards and study French until the thing blows over. His survival instinct is strong, and we can hardly blame him.

Among the non-combatants are those who have been physically prevented from fighting: there is an eighteen-year-old girl who has just started work in a

textile design shop.²⁰ She has been a truant and problem girl ever since adolescence, sexually promiscuous, wilful and disobedient; she runs home to show her parents the leaflet thrust through the shop door, and announces that she's going to join the rebels. Her father, a stern Catholic carpenter, restrains her. When she throws one of her usual temper tantrums, he takes away her clothes and locks her in the bathroom.

Although three days old, the revolt still lacked leaders at street level, though individual groups were beginning to coalesce. The Stalinists had liquidated the opposition long ago and most anti-Communists of calibre had long escaped abroad. The former political prisoners were the most numerous, but those who had stayed could not agree among themselves. Lorry driver Zoltán Benkő, a former Reck convict, wandered into a theatre where a meeting of former political prisoners had been called.²¹ "The scene on the stage was incredible," he later told interrogators. "People were milling about, jostling one another, yanking the microphone out of one another's hand . . . A friend grabbed the microphone and gave it to me and announced that I would have something to say." Benkő found himself elected chairman. His activities amounted to nothing.

The Reform Communist intellectuals – the writers and journalists – provided the least leadership of all; they were the nobodies of this uprising. They were the hacks who by their poems in praise of Joseph Stalin had helped to cast the chains around their not-so-learned compatriots; they were the editors who by their voluntary censorship had helped to seal every last vent of popular anger until an explosion of the whole Communist boiler was the only solution. For two days after the uprising began, the Communist writers and intellectuals feebly spluttered, their newly glowing candles of indignation outshone by the blazing torches of the unsung, the ordinary, the forgotten, who emerged from the shadows of obscurity, from the dark anonymity of the prisons to lead the revolt.

Such a man was Joseph Dudás.²² Nobody had heard of him before; few people in Hungary today know his name. On December 3rd, 1956, *Pravda* would identify him as the key figure in the "counter-revolutionary plot". The name still evokes hatred from the left. One source said, "He brought that grain of madness that germinates in every revolution."²³ Francis Ilosvay, the leftist *Monday News* journalist, claimed, "He was an adventurer, a totalitarian; he was

terrorising and looting. He had a room for executions in his headquarters.” (But Ilosvay would also tell his interrogators, with tears in his eyes, of how the Russian tanks killed his own wife and children and he had buried them with his own hands. He was not even married, let alone a father.²⁴) Thomas Aczél, the Jewish ex-Communist journalist, alleged that Dudás exploited anti-Semitism – but he overlooked the fact that Dudás conscripted several Jews on to his revolutionary newspaper.²⁵ “Dudás,” rasped Aczél to his interrogators, “was just a petty condottiere. At his headquarters he had a table heaped with money, revolvers, and sub-machine guns between two candles. He carried out the most terrible executions.”

The legends about Joseph Dudás were legion. But even the truth was unusual. He had the kind of burly frame that might be found as a mechanic on any garage forecourt, with the swarthy, hardened features of a football-coach. Born in Transylvania, he was a trained toolmaker. (The regime’s *White Book* would later hint, “He was allegedly an engineer – but where, when and how he acquired his diploma remain a mystery.”) He had spent ten of his forty-three years in political prisons. In 1936 the Romanians had jailed him for seven years as an illegal Communist; two of those years he spent in chains after an escape attempt.²⁶ After his release, he moved to Budapest and joined the anti-Nazi underground. A year later, in September 1944, the Horthy regime sent him through the lines to Moscow for secret armistice talks as a representative of the resistance.²⁷ After the war however, Dudás broke with the Communists and became a Smallholder member of Budapest city council in August 1945. A twenty-seven-year-old journalist who would join his revolutionary newspaper recalled, “He was one of the few figures untainted by Stalinism.”²⁸ A year later Dudás was back in political imprisonment, jailed on the same kind of trumped-up charges as his associate, Béla Kovács (“counter-revolutionary plot to overthrow the regime”). Ladislav Rajk did release his old resistance friend briefly, but in November 1948 he was again incarcerated, initially in solitary confinement at Budapest South internment camp and then in the penal quarries at Recsk; but there was something unusual about him, because Dudás was held there less than two years; one day he was suddenly called to the commandant’s office and he vanished from the camp.

Paul Jónás, a student leader imprisoned with him at Recsk, recalled: “Dudás turned to religion, influenced by the semi-mystic writings of the great British astronomers and mathematicians, Sir Arthur Eddington and Sir James Jeans. He was fascinated by the Second Law of thermodynamics, and lost faith in the determinism inherent in the world.” Released finally by Imre Nagy in 1954 Dudás had found work in a Budapest factory.²⁹ But for the uprising, he might have stayed at the workbench for the rest of his life: but he found a major focal point of the battle in the IInd District of the capital, near where he lived, and moved in to direct the fighting in the area around Széna Square.

Dudás had not made this uprising, nor would he eventually take a leading part in the street combats; but he had the personal magnetism and the political know-how to exploit the situation. In Széna Square he conducted the first interviews with his future lieutenants. He founded a National Revolutionary Committee, and leaving an even older rebel leader, known to the entire district as “Uncle Szabó”, in command of the battle group holding out in Széna Square and nearby Maros Street, he crossed the river, seized the *Free People* building with his ragtag army and masterminded the nationwide fight against the funkies and the Russians.

He recognised that by distributing food in the strife-torn city, his organisation could acquire immediate prestige: he recalled having met a Jew in jail at Szeged who had managed a factory restaurant and worked for the International Red Cross in 1944. Dudás sent him a message on about October 25th, to meet him at a certain café near his battle perimeter on Széna Square. The man, Dr. Paul Szappanos, found him there surrounded by friends.³⁰ “I need people I can trust, and lots of them,” commanded Dudás. “I’m putting you in charge of food shipments from abroad. You’ve had experience of dealing with the Red Cross.” Szappanos set out immediately for the frontier to organise the trucking of supplies to fighting Budapest.

In New York, the United Nations General Assembly was not scheduled to meet until November 12th.³¹ At one p.m. on October 27th, France, Britain and the United States formally submitted a request for the Security Council to consider the Hungarian question in view of the fact that Soviet forces were “violently repressing the rights of the Hungarian people”.

Denied a rock-hard picture of developments in Budapest, neither Eisenhower nor Dulles was eager to act. They had talked that morning before Dulles flew off to Texas to deliver a major policy speech in Dallas.³² In it Dulles would hint at American economic aid to tide the Soviet satellites over the economic crisis that would be caused if they now chose to abandon their Marxist policies, and he would, as planned, underline for the Kremlin's benefit that this offer came with no strings: "Let me make this clear, beyond a possibility of doubt," he would say. "The United States has no ulterior purpose in desiring the independence of the satellite countries. Our unadulterated wish is that these peoples, from whom so much of our own national life derives, should have sovereignty restored to them, and that they should have governments of their own free choosing. We do not look upon these nations as potential military allies."

Later that day, Dulles cabled instructions to Henry Cabot Lodge at the UN to seek the support of Cuba, Peru, Australia, Iran, China, and Belgium. The Security Council was summoned for next day – it would be its first emergency session on a Sunday since 1950. And shortly after seven p.m. the State Department sent to Lodge two telegrams, the first with the text of the proposed United States statement to be made at the meeting ("The hearts of free people everywhere go out to the people of Hungary . . . It is not the intention of my government to present a resolution for the Council's consideration at this time. We would first like to hear what the other members of the Council have to say. We urge that this item be inscribed on the Council's agenda without delay") and the second explaining the proposed *tactics*: the Sunday meeting should be limited to the inclusion of Hungary on the agenda, without engaging in substantive debate, since the Soviet reaction could be expected to be violent. "Department believes limiting first SC meeting [to] adoption [of] agenda will give us maximum flexibility [to] determine precise course SC should take subsequently and nature [of the] resolution to be submitted. Moreover, we [are] awaiting additional information from US legation which has been cut off from US government. Determination our course action SC will require consultation at highest level here . . ."

While Dulles was away, the State Department sent for Hungary's envoy; but Dr. Peter Kós – whose real identity was Leo Konductorov, a Soviet citizen – had to be in New York at the United Nations, so his first secretary, Tibor Zádor,

came instead. “The riot was terminated last night,” Zádor reassured Under-Secretary Robert Murphy. “A few scattered groups are holding out but mopping-up operations are now in progress.” He liked the word riot, and used it several times, adding that “fascist elements” had taken advantage of the students’ justified demands. The State Department noted, “Mr. Zádor could not be brought to acknowledge any personal feeling over the shooting down of Hungarian subjects by Soviet troops.”³³

Contacts had begun between the town centre rebel gangs and the police authorities. Several times Captain “Nemo”, commander of a regular army unit that had gone over to the rebels, telephoned police chief Kopácsi; and it was Nemo who established telephone contact between Kopácsi and the rebel leader Angyal. They told Kopácsi they were going to fight on until the Russians withdrew. The police colonel telephoned his friend Ladislas Földes at the defence ministry, and Földes urged him to meet the rebel chiefs like Angyal and the Pongrácz brothers. They all met at Kopácsi’s police headquarters, the rebels driving up to the building’s rear car park in a captured Russian half-track, while the police chief’s old friend, Major-General Stephen Kovács, and Major-General Julius Váradi arrived on foot to represent the armed forces.

Kovács had defected with several other generals to the Russians in 1944 – the others had died in captivity – and after attending staff college in Moscow he had been parachuted back into Hungary. Since a senior Party official had the same name, the general’s friends had cordially dubbed him “Fat-Arse Kovács” but he was universally regarded as an honourable man. The journalist George Fazekas, who was a spectator at these unusual talks in Kopácsi’s headquarters, had kneaded Kovács until this stout fighter for Communism turned into an equally staunch nationalist.³⁴

The talks began over coffee and sandwiches. At Kovács’s invitation the elder Pongrácz brother restated the rebel demands: the main one was that the Russian troops must quit the country. Kovács told them, “Two top Soviet Politburo members are in Budapest at this moment, Suslov and Mikoyan.” He asked more questions: what system of government did the rebels envisage? The answers were confused, but there was talk of free elections and a multi-party system.

After the meeting ended they rattled off in their half-track at sixty miles an hour.³⁵

Around six p.m. on October 27th, President Eisenhower telephoned Secretary Dulles in Texas.

Dulles enquired, "Mr. President, have you got the information about the build-up around Cyprus? – thirty to sixty-three in the last forty-eight hours."

Eisenhower said, "I just can't believe Britain will be dragged into this."

33 Crumbling

BY NOW THE world's newspapermen were cramming into the capital. Ilario Fiore, *Il Tempo's* thirty-four-year-old Vienna correspondent, was a bulky wine-loving man with froggy features; he talked with the weary nonchalance of a practised correspondent who had seen it all before and expected to see it all again. He had arrived by chance on the night of the uprising. He had been making for Warsaw. He typed in his diary:

A little after eleven p.m. I arrived at Budapest station with the last regular train from Vienna. The station plaza was deserted; there were no taxis. I found a motorist tinkering with his engine. I told him I had to go downtown to the Hotel Astoria, but he made it clear he wasn't going to take me: "There's a revolution in the city, I'm not going to risk losing my car!" I begged him, I offered him all the florins I had, but he just continued to shake his head. Finally, around midnight, after half an hour of pleading, the old man changed his mind: the gunfire was increasing . . .¹

Sydney Gruson of the *New York Times* had gone to Poland some days earlier to cover the Poznan trials. He had filed a story from there on October 17th hinting at big trouble in Poland. On October 22nd, its foreign editor Emanuel Freedman sensed that a big story was breaking. He cabled to Gruson in Warsaw: "Asking Bigart to join you as soon as he gets visa." Homer Bigart flew out from New York late on October 23rd just before the first real tremors from Hungary

– following John MacCormac's more general afternoon story from Budapest – registered on the newspaper's chattering teletypes at four a.m.²

"Goodnight" had been given on the news floor half an hour earlier, and the last edition was streaming off the rotaries. Joe Eisenberg hurried across from the wire room to Werner Wiskari, late man on the foreign desk. Wiskari called Lew Jordan, assistant news editor, at his home. Jordan said, "Shape up an Extra if there are still enough people around to get it out." A half column story was thrown together to top John MacCormac's lead, and Jordan dictated a three-column headline over the telephone. But then the editorial nightmare began: as the morning of October 24th dragged on in New York, there was silence from Budapest. Freedman sent a telegram to Drew Middleton in London: "Please try telephone MacCormac at Hotel Duna Budapest to learn if he has any additional copy. APEE Vienna says communications Budapest apparently offcut." All lines were out; New York tried through Warsaw and Moscow, but another two days passed before further copy came from MacCormac, courtesy of the legation's teleprinter.

MacCormac was a prematurely balding Irish-American with a quiet suit, polka-dot necktie, and narrow moustache; he had the confident grin of a journalist who had "just happened" to arrive with his wife a whole week before the uprising began. He had not been here since 1948, when he fled in the Austrian envoy's car after getting a tip-off that Rákosi's state prosecutor was looking for him. A *White Book* had referred to him as "Colonel John McCormick [*sic*] of the American CIC." One thing MacCormac does know: if he had realised that this was going to happen, he would not have brought his wife, he would have brought carrier pigeons. He had filed his first piece to Times Square around six p.m. on October 23rd, at the same time as Sefton Delmer, and then went to dine with his wife and a Hungarian agency man. When the shooting began he called Mrs. Pollak in Prague – like the London *Daily Express* – and dictated his copy to her. After that all lines went dead. MacCormac was actually on Parliament Square during the massacre but had no way of getting the story out of the country.

This was where the *Daily Mail's* Noel Barber had the edge on all of them. A tough, businesslike Yorkshireman, he had figured that what counted in Fleet Street was getting the story out. He had an Austrian rental car, and he had stockpiled enough petrol too: driving in from Austria he had recalled lunching on

fresh goose ten days previously at an inn at Hegyeshalom. He woke the innkeeper and arranged with him to cache some jerricans of petrol. It was a shrewd calculation, because now all the telegraph lines were dead, and the rivals' stories would sink without trace.

With dusk falling on October 26th Barber blarneyed, cajoled and bribed his way through the last checkpoint, slammed the Borgward into gear and hurtled straight through Buda and down the urban valley that would take him to the Chain Bridge; here he found himself in the thick of a battle as young rebels tried to force open the blocked passages across the river to Pest. In front of the Chain Bridge insurgents had manhandled wrecked trains and cars to form a barricade. Several of them wore stained bandages, one died in Barber's arms after a shell from one of the two Soviet tanks on the middle of the bridge sliced through their flimsy barricade. But Barber made one useful friend that night – Dénes Horváth, a twenty-year-old economist with thick-lensed glasses. Barber hired him as an interpreter: "I'll pay you twenty pounds a day to stay at my side until I leave."

Driving in this city was a nightmare. It was as though he was cruising round the El Alamein battlefield sightseeing while Rommel and Montgomery were still deciding the battle, with the added complication that the Russian and Hungarian tanks were of the same manufacture, and their troops had similar uniforms. Everybody was shooting at everybody else. The rebels, journalists and sightseers were in between.

That night Barber was back at the frontier, tired, unshaven and dishevelled. He was in the same blue city suit he had been wearing while shopping at Harrods. He flourished the telegram that Imre Nagy had sent him at the jittery ÁVH border guards and drove straight across into Nickelsdorf. There he met *Mail* man Jeffrey Blyth, shivering in a newly-purchased overcoat thrown over a tropical suit. Until two days earlier Blyth had been in Cairo, waiting for the balloon to go up over Suez; but seeing rivals suddenly pulling out for Austria he had cabled Fleet Street, and they had replied next morning: "Vienna-wards fastest!" Barber thrust seventeen pages of copy and several rolls of film into Blyth's hands. Blyth handed him more cartons of American cigarettes, then turned back to Vienna. At the first coffee house he put a call through to the *Daily Mail* in London. Relays of telephone typists took down his copy and rushed it page by page to the linotype room for setting. About halfway through his dictation, the

first operator came back and shouted into the telephone: "I've got the first editions, you're on the front page!" By getting out eye-witness coverage of the bloody insurrection, Noel Barber and the *Daily Mail* had scooped the world.³

He checked into Budapest's Danube Hotel in the early hours. The hotel was a dingy fleabag on the embankment with many of its windows already blasted out. He found his rival Sefton Delmer glowering at a white-clothed table in the restaurant and laboriously block-lettering endless despatches on to telegraph forms ("I don't believe in typing!") that he would never be able to send to Fleet Street. Delmer had had the nose or foresight – or the contacts in the CIA – to sense that a big story was breaking in Budapest, and he had slipped in on the morning before the uprising, after dining with the *Express's* stringer Laurence Davis at Sacher's in Vienna. But his editor's triumph at having a man on the spot withered rapidly, because Delmer had made no provision for a communications blockade.

"Ah, dear boy," shouted Delmer as Barber bustled past. "No need to get panicky! All communications have stopped."

Barber murmured, "Well, I'm awfully sorry, but I've got a *car* outside. Please don't spoil a beautiful friendship by asking me to take your copy out."

The rest of the world's newsmen were still being delayed on the frontier by obfuscating officials demanding proper visas. On October 27th, the dam burst. Sydney Smith of the *Daily Express* slammed his foot down on the accelerator as the frontier barrier lifted for somebody else and vanished down the road towards Budapest. Young Bruno Tedeschi of the *Giornale d'Italia* found the frontier virtually open, much to the surprise of Italian minister Fabrizio Franco, who decided there and then to send a courier back along the same route accompanied by Tedeschi and Fiore with their stories.⁴ The Associated Press rushed George Boulwood in from Bonn to join their resident man, the Hungarian-born Endre Márton, who had just emerged from political prison. For the rival United Press Anthony Cavendish flew in from Warsaw in a plane carrying Polish plasma. It landed thirty miles south of Budapest and he hitched a ride to the Danube Hotel. Seymour Freidin of the *New York Post* was already there, scaring them with a vivid description of how a trigger-happy Russian private had nearly terminated him with considerable prejudice.

Paris-Match sent in Jean-Pierre Pedrazzini and Paul Mathias to cover the insurrection. Pedrazzini was one of their finest photographers – just married, twenty-nine and a Greek god of golden haired manhood. Mathias had been born thirty-five years before in Hungary. He had fled Hungary in 1950. One of his best friends had just been arrested and the police had forced Mathias to sign a document against him; so he had decided to get out of the country for good. He was tall and elegant, with the lean features of a half-Jew and all the flamboyance of his native country, but he had already adopted many of the manners of the French. He had spent the night in Vienna pacing up and down their hotel room until Pedrazzini woke and remonstrated: “Stop it. You know perfectly well that you *are* going to go back in!” Back now in Budapest, he went straight round to see the French minister, Jean-Paul Boncour. The minister was not encouraging: “You’re mad. The Russians may return at any moment. I can’t do anything for you, even though you are now a French citizen.”

In Budapest, the fighting shows no signs of remitting. Diplomat Franco records in his legation diary:

A secretary of the Swiss legation advises us that the Hungarian Red Cross is requesting help from the International Red Cross because it lacks even the barest essentials. The Swiss legation has no means to transmit the request. In the legation we have now collected provisions (bread, pasta, cheese, milk, wine, canned food) that we hope will suffice for some days; today there are thirty of us living together.

Outside, the colours of this uprising are not those remembered from the paintings of the great revolutions of history. These are colours taken straight from Goya’s cruel palette: crusty browns that were once warm, bright reds; the dirty khaki of bloodstained uniforms; ochre-coloured mortar; brick-red scars defacing shattered masonry, and here and there a shrivelled burnt-sienna Something huddled in the tarmac, strewn with lime or salicylic acid, rotting in the slime under the eyes of unconcerned pedestrians. In Üllői Road the blackened hand of a cremated Soviet soldier clutches stiffly out of a half-open tank turret.

There is a grim humour in the air. One of the *Truth* journalists goes home to Rákóczi Street, braving exploding bullets and tank shells, and returns almost at

once to the newspaper: "I must have pressed the wrong elevator button. I pressed the one marked 4, and the fourth floor came down to me!" Most of this rebel newspaper's staff lunch in the Actors' Club. They hear the director of the National Theatre casually ask a latecomer: "What's new?" The man takes off his hat and coat, and says: "I just came past your theatre – you've only got half a house today!" Another *Truth* journalist writes in his column: "In the midst of all this horror a little way down Baross Street is a scarecrow made of a Soviet uniform with a *Free People* tucked into one pocket and a bag of salicylic acid in the other."⁵

The city's mood was one of sang-froid. Around this time Professor Dominic Kosáry, the historian, left his refuge in Buda and risked going down to a little shop on Zsigmond Móricz Square to buy provisions for his mother. There was quite a queue in the little shop that sold milk and chocolate. Suddenly two or three big Russian tanks rumbled past and the teenage girl serving behind the counter said quite casually "Would you pull down the blind, please, because if they see so many people standing here they'll probably shoot us!"⁶

In Budapest, life goes on side by side with the revolution. One photographer sees a truck with a woman clutching a bolt-action rifle on its running board. It has changed owners – a bullet has drilled a neat hole through the centre of the driver's windscreen. The truck is crowded with insurgents: workers, youths, some of them only children. On the pavements are food queues and girls with their hair carelessly snapped into pony tails, walking in twos and threes, lopsided under the weight of rifles or heavy pistols clamped to their belts. The children's faces are tired and dirty, but they display grim satisfaction. In George Orwell's *1984* the children make common cause with the totalitarian regime and denounce their parents. But here the children have grown up differently. They side with their parents. Now all are fighting against the Communists, a last desperate heave to throw out the imported creed.

In Budapest the strongholds of the Party's waning influence were the Central Committee in Academy Street and the city's Party headquarters on Republic Square. By now the headquarters was a fortress. Fifty armed ÁVH men guarded the windows, and fifty other Party faithfuls were drilling with rifles in the corridors. Loyal reinforcements were trickling in, like Colonel Joseph Papp from a

suburban police station. He had been beaten up by insurgents after the station was closed down by Kopácsi, but felt a duty to go and help out at Republic Square. He asked several of his comrades to go with him, but they thought he was stretching his sense of duty too far. Papp would not leave Republic Square alive: and a street and square in his native IVth District would be named after him.

On the morning of October 26th Imre Mező, the senior official at the headquarters, arrived back at Republic Square. He had sat in on the Central Committee meetings in Academy Street for two days. He told his staff about yesterday's "unsuccessful attack by counter-revolutionaries" but made no other mention of the killing on Parliament Square. For Mező at fifty it had been a long and unrewarding march from the battlefields of Spain to this nondescript oblong building. One of a peasant's ten children, he had eased his widowed mother's lot by leaving home to become a tailor's apprentice. Restless and ambitious, he had emigrated in 1927, joined the Belgian Party, been twice wounded in Spain and interned in France. He had read avidly, studied the economic history of Spain, served the French Party cells in Syria and the Lebanon, and then joined the French resistance, taking part in the dramatic week-long battle for Paris in August 1944. He did not return home until June 1945, almost twenty years after leaving.

Now Mező decided to show the capital that its Party headquarters was still alive and kicking. He ordered handbills posted around the city, and he assigned three journalists to help distribute *Free People* – armoured cars were now having to be used to distribute the Party newspaper. He called in Nicholas Szántó and told him to set up an editorial office right there in the building for the *Evening Budapest (Esti Budapest)*. Editor Frederic Vadász moved in next afternoon and the printing began on the 28th. As soon as the newspaper hit the streets the bundles were burnt by rebellious newsvendors. None the less Mező felt that it was important to prove that his committee was still functioning.⁷

By October 27th, Imre Nagy had arrived at far-reaching decisions, but as always he lagged a day behind the insurrection. Meanwhile at ten thirty A.M. the wives of two rebel leaders called secretly on the wife of an American legation official with a proposal: the legation should appeal to Imre Nagy for a twelve-

hour truce during which they would try to bring the rebel leaders together, first with American officials, and then with the regime, to arrange formal ceasefire terms. Spencer Barnes telephoned the deputy foreign minister but he contemptuously dismissed the idea, bragging: "The gangs are being wiped up."⁸

This was a premature boast. The Kilián Barracks were still in rebel hands. Maléter removed those of his soldiers who had no weapons or chose to stay out of the fighting to the back of the building. A heavy machine gun stripped from a blitzed Soviet tank was set up in a window on the main corner of the building, overlooking the Boulevard and Üllői Road. A large barricade was jammed into the tunnel inside the main gate so that the enemy could not penetrate to the inner courtyards. That day, an agricultural expert and old friend of Colonel Maléter, Gábor Magos, got through the Russian forces besieging the Kilián Barracks on the pretext of delivering milk. "An ÁVH officer has told me he knows where the regime keeps its secret files," Magos said. "Why don't we go and seize them?" Maléter was mistrustful. He suggested his friend should go and try somebody else. "I can't get away from here. We are surrounded by Russian troops."⁹

At noon, the Russians began a savage tank assault on the whole area. The gunners concealed in the Corvin Passage scored notable successes, and soon the whole Üllői Road frontage of the barracks as far as Liliom Street was a tank graveyard.¹⁰ The tanks opened fire on every window where they saw a gunman. Each cannonade sucked thousands of panes of glass out of the surrounding windows. There was not one intact window in the entire barracks façade. The corner of the barracks collapsed, as a tank lobbed a shell into the room with the heavy machine gun. Across the street, an entire building had given up and collapsed into the basement. But Maléter's gunners punished the Russians. Along the Boulevard a Soviet tank blew up; its turret landed on the intersection thirty feet away, near a mangled gun barrel and its mounting. A lorry was blazing fiercely, its tyres torn off. In the distance four more tanks stopped, and a Soviet armoured fighting vehicle halted with its left track blown off; after that it caught fire.

The shooting died down and the Russians withdrew. There were seven big shell craters in the walls of the barracks. A big crowd built up and was held back by a cordon of insurgents. By the time that Stephen Elias visited the Corvin Passage, bringing milk and food supplies from the state farm at Soroksár, the rebels were holding thirty ÁVH and Russian officers.¹¹ The rebels were being

interviewed by a Polish newspaperman from *Tribuna Ludu*. One of them was a young girl studying history: “Now I’m making history instead of studying it,” she said.

Late that evening, a Soviet officer telephoned Maléter and appealed to him to allow his troops to pick up the dead and injured lying in the street outside the barracks. Maléter retorted that his men were bringing in all the wounded, and they would get proper hospital treatment when the fighting stopped. “As for the dead, it is too difficult to recover the bodies from the wrecked tanks.”

Outside his window another horse-drawn cart had arrived, laden with still more food from the country. Word of the rebel stand at the barracks was evidently spreading.

By now, big news had broken on the radio. Imre Nagy had agreed to reshuffle his Cabinet. At eleven eighteen A.M. the radio announced that he had formed a national government based on his Patriotic People’s Front. It was a further reluctant concession to the street. Four of the twenty-seven men in the Cabinet were not even Communists. The street was unimpressed. Gordon Brook-Shephard of the *Daily Telegraph* commented, “The discredited Communist leadership in Budapest has fought to save its skin by roping itself to its former opponents.”¹² What difference did it make that the eminent Marxist philosopher Professor Georg Lukács had been wheeled in as Nagy’s minister of culture? The street had no time for any of them. Of the four new faces – Joseph Bognár, Zoltán Tildy, Nicholas Ribíánszky, and Béla Kovács – only Béla Kovács was not compromised in the eyes of the public. The old and hated funkies were still in office, men like the deputy premiers Antony Apró and Francis Erdei. Moreover the combined efforts of Imre Nagy and President Stephen Dobi had not sufficed to persuade the embittered Social Democratic leaders to join.

The insurgents could look hopefully only to Béla Kovács, the former general secretary of the Smallholders’ Party, for political leadership. But he was a human shadow, crippled by years of Soviet and ÁVH imprisonment (described coyly on the radio this day, October 27th, as “house arrest”). After his final release from prison by Rákosi, he had stepped out of Budapest’s Eastern Railway Station on April 8th or 9th with a telegram in his pocket inviting him to see President Stephen Dobi.¹³ In Parliament he had had a four-hour talk with Dobi

and Joseph Bognár, a fellow Smallholder who had wriggled into the Communists' good books and avoided Kovács's fate. But Kovács now laboured under a congenital heart condition aggravated by two brain haemorrhages; he had decided to return to Pécs because the air was healthier, whether politically or in fact. There he had kept his head down until now. He had, however, remained in secret contact with Nagy's group, and on October 26th, Nagy asked President Dobi to telephone him to say that the new premier urgently desired to include his illustrious name in the national government. Kovács agreed – all too eagerly, because next day he learned the names of his rascally bedfellows in the new Cabinet. He was so nauseous that he penned a letter of resignation; he was persuaded by friends not to send it.¹⁴

Nagy's changes were only cosmetic. Real power was still vested in the Stalinists. The ministry of the interior was firmly in the hands of Dr. Francis Münnich, and General Stephen Bata was replaced as defence minister by the no less Marxist Lieutenant-General Karl Janza. They applied themselves to the task of liquidating the resistance groups. Janza was not prepared to compromise with the rebels. Shortly after three p.m. he broadcast orders to his armed units to continue liquidating the rebel nests, and to stand by to "execute their battle tasks".

Münnich's first public announcement of his new appointment was less implacable but, seen in retrospect, it had sinister undertones. Broadcast an hour and a half later, it declared: "I expect each employee of the various organs of the ministry to do his work with the same exemplary devotion to duty as hitherto." Was this a signal to the scattered, demoralised ÁVOs that they could expect to be on top again soon? This language was immediately challenged by rebels broadcasting over Radio Free Győr, who demanded at six forty-seven p.m.: "The ÁVH must be disarmed and taken over by the Hungarian People's army."

Nagy had discussed with the Central Committee ways of winding up the security police, the ÁVH. Münnich sent for Alexander Kopácsi.¹⁵ The stocky police chief was not very trustful of Münnich and arrived with an armed escort. The ministry building was like a fortress: Soviet tanks stood guard in the side streets, their guns raking skywards, and there were guns and boxes of ammunition behind every window. Münnich sent for coffee and cognac, and asked

Kopácsi whether and how the ÁVH could be humanely disbanded. “Can we count on you to execute orders?” he asked.

Münnich’s deputy ministers, Bartos and Fekete, sidled up to Kopácsi as he left. Both were high-ranking ÁVH officers. Fekete pleaded, “Alex, some comrades from the Partisan Association want a word with you.” The partisans had been attracted by the power and high pay of the ÁVH in its heyday; but now they could see a pogrom coming, and wearing the khaki uniform of the ÁVH had lost its attractions. “All of us are trying to get out of this place,” stammered one of them. “Can you shelter us at your headquarters? From what we’ve heard you know how to speak with the mob.”

Nagy meanwhile coaxed conciliatory broadcasts out of the new Cabinet men, but in vain. Professor Lukács blathered: “What we want is a socialist culture worthy of the Hungarian people’s great and ancient achievements.” But no rebel hordes were inspired to run cheering to Academy Street, strewing beds of roses in his path; socialist culture was not what the street wanted at all.

Worse, Nagy’s reshuffled government did not impress the provinces either. Radio Free Miskolc rejected it outright: “We workers of Borsod County . . . will continue with our strike until our demands, above all those concerning the withdrawal of Soviet troops, are met.” Later that day, the same broadcasters emphasised: ““The Hungarian people have no confidence in some men in Imre Nagy’s government . . . No, no, a thousand times no, say Miskolc, Pécs, Győr and all Borsod County . . . Imre Nagy should have the courage to get rid of politicians who can only lean on weapons used to suppress people.”

Moscow was moving ponderously but deliberately along its own predetermined, mysterious paths. To obviate United Nations’ reproof, the legality of the intervention had to be established. It was on this day, October 27th, that Soviet ambassador Andropov contacted his friend, Nagy’s youthful deputy premier Dr. Hegedüs, and harked back to the all-too-informal telephone request made to the Kremlin from Academy Street four nights previously – the appeal for Soviet military help in crushing the disturbances. Now Moscow wanted it in black and white: Andropov handed to Hegedüs a typed copy and asked him to obtain Imre Nagy’s signature on it. It read, “On behalf of the Cabinet of the Hungarian People’s Republic, I request the Government of the Soviet Union to send Soviet

troops to Budapest to put down the disturbances that have taken place in Budapest, restore order quickly and create conditions favourable to peaceful and constructive work.”¹⁶

Hegedüs took the document to the prime minister. But Nagy was no fool: at the time that he had approved the request it had made sense; but not now. He refused to sign. Hegedüs was annoyed by what he considered Nagy’s dishonourable attitude. So he signed the document himself and returned it to the Soviet embassy. He now says: “My view was that only Imre Nagy could now save the situation. My own political career was at an end. In a sense I even welcomed it. I was thirty-four, I could go back to my real career, sociology.”¹⁷

Nagy’s satraps were getting more active. The group of Communist journalists sheltering at police headquarters swelled. Kopácsi put the office in his secretariat at their disposal and dropped in regularly to confer with them.¹⁸ The journalists Aczél and Fazekas were always there, and Gimes also looked in on Kopácsi this day, October 27th. More than a hundred ÁVH had also taken cover in this building; they would weather the storm playing cards or gossiping on the telephone. Journalists Tibor Méray, Paul Lócsei and Peter Erdős acted as liaisons between Kopácsi, Nagy, the Writers’ Union and the other focal points. And Kopácsi was often visited by his friend and neighbour, Joseph Szilágyi, whom Nagy had just appointed his personal assistant. A former police colonel and broad-shouldered peasant’s son, this fiery, black-haired lawyer had been everywhere since the uprising broke out – he had witnessed every gun battle, he had been besieged here at Kopácsi’s headquarters, and one photograph appeared to show him climbing the Stalin statue with a rope. Eyes gleaming, he told Kopácsi: “This is a real, marvellous revolution! From this bloodbath will emerge the world’s first and only truly democratic socialist state!”¹⁹

Together they drew up lists of names for Nagy’s new Cabinet. The writers and journalists assured Kopácsi that what was happening was a revolution, a democratic movement. Kopácsi was overawed by the presence of the writers but encouraged by their support too; he began issuing orders to the capital’s police precincts to avoid confrontations and negotiate where possible: he spoke with the XIth, XIIth, and XIIIth Precincts and told them to lay down their arms;

and police in the Vth, VIth and VIIth Precincts were ordered to return to his central police headquarters with their arms.

That day Aczél went over with Gimes and Lőcsei to tell Imre Nagy what was happening outside his fastness, the Party headquarters. They took a ten-man delegation, including a couple of young Angel Fields workers with them. The confrontation lasted three hours. Szilágyi asked Nagy outright: “Are you aware what’s happening in the town?” And he added, “Do you know that it was in your name that the Russians were called in?”

Nagy evasively replied, “It wasn’t I who called in the Russians, but they did try to get me to sign something subsequently.” He added, “And it wasn’t me who declared martial law either, they just put my signature on it.”

Everybody began talking at once, but Nagy silenced them: “My friends, be patient. Important decisions are being hammered out at this very moment – tomorrow an announcement is going to be published which will give you all complete satisfaction. In it, we confirm that the revolution was a democratic national revolution and not a ‘counter-revolution’, and we shall announce the withdrawal of Russian troops from Budapest and other important decisions.”

When Kopácsi fetched them in his official car to drive them back to his headquarters they were all well satisfied.

What was inducing this ponderous stampede in premier Imre Nagy now? Why had he belatedly begun to crumble before the rebel demands? The physical destruction and bloodshed in the capital were probably one factor; but another threat, potentially far more sinister, loomed over Party leader Kádár and himself. From Western Hungary, where they now commanded powerful radio transmitters, the rebels were openly threatening a march on Budapest, which might lead to civil war, unless Nagy toed their line.

From this day on, the split inside the Party widened. Gimes went over to help editor Martin Horváth at the *Free People* building to work up a leading article for next day’s edition. It would defiantly begin: “We do not agree with those who summarily dismiss the events of the past few days as a counter-revolutionary fascist putsch attempt.” And it would continue: “We must finally accept that a great national democratic movement has developed in our country . . .”

This was the very language of the Losonczy/Donáth memorandum that had been roundly rejected by the Central Committee. When it was published, the article evoked an explosion of fury that still echoed long after the end of the rising. Kádár, recanting his own error, would claim months later, "That famous editorial . . . one may say, morally almost completely disorganised the defence of the People's Republic. This article did not reflect the policy of the Central Committee."²⁰

The subversion of Nagy's new line began. Late on October 27th, the military sub-committee of the Central Committee met in the defence ministry and decided to launch simultaneous attacks on the rebel strongholds at five A.M. By daybreak, the gangs holding the Corvin Passage, Baross Square, Széna Square, and Móricz Zsigmond Square would be liquidated. Major-General Stephen Kovács, who had earlier visited both the Kilián Barracks and the Corvin Passage, was put in charge of planning the attack with the help of Colonel Nicholas Szücs, the fat ÁVH officer who had aided the murderous Gábor Péter and his Soviet boss Bielkin to prepare the Rajk trial seven years before. Around midnight, Imre Mező called a meeting of his Budapest Party committee and its department heads at Republic Square, and briefed them on this dramatic plan.

However, Imre Nagy killed the operation: the chief of general staff, Louis Tóth, would later testify, "He threatened to resign his office as prime minister if the plan was carried out." At four thirty A.M. on October 28th, Nagy telephoned the defence minister, Janza, with the same urgent message: "If you attack the Corvin Passage, I will resign. I am against all bloodshed!"²¹ Major-General Stephen Kovács wrote a handwritten memo: "Do not open fire on the apartment block. That would create a very difficult situation from a political viewpoint. Imre Nagy has asked us explicitly *not* to execute this operation."

Nagy knew that if the attack went ahead, the march on Budapest would probably follow.

34 Ceasefire

BY SUNDAY, OCTOBER 28th, 1956, the pressure on prime minister Imre Nagy had become acute. The view from his first-floor office in Academy Street, the Central Committee headquarters, was bleak. The rebels publicly identified him with the repressive measures of the last week: with the Soviet troops' use of tanks and self-propelled guns against the workers and young people fighting under Hungary's national flag, with the ÁVH machine gunning of the crowds on Parliament Square. Yesterday's Cabinet changes had not slaked the rebel thirst at all. None of the rebel strongholds had been liquidated, and each day new rebel transmitters were subverting the radio waves. The hope that the insurrection could be rapidly eradicated and forgotten had dimmed; the conviction grew that there would have to be a swift truce if there was not to be a pogrom in Budapest – indeed, civil war in Hungary.

Some of the strongest rebel positions were now in Buda, the western half of the city, where Joseph Dudás had assumed command. Near Széna Square, Denis Kovács had led a small gang that sprang an ambush on army lorries heading for Margaret Bridge on Wednesday, loaded with ammunition for the ÁVH troops fighting across the river in Pest. Thus armed, the rebels set up battle headquarters in a honeycomb of tunnels being built under Széna Square for an underground station, and next day they found a commander in János Szabó. Szabó, a moustachioed peasant of fifty-nine, radiated avuncular authority and became known henceforth until his execution as “Uncle Szabó”.¹ He had served a prison sentence for “espionage” and an illegal border crossing, so he had no cause to like the Reds. By October 28th Dudás had made him a “lieutenant-colonel” in

his private army, in charge of the whole area from Széna and Moscow Squares to Maros Street.

His group fought some notable actions. They obtained ammunition from the arsenals of the local Hűvösvölgy and Bem Barracks – the latter's commander, Colonel Kővágó, being given a ten-minute ultimatum on October 26th by Szabó's deputy, a thirty-four-year-old Armenian émigré, Kemal Ekren. The Széna Square battle group bristled with Czech revolvers, Russian sub-machine guns and radio equipment. They fought with ingenuity and courage – for example, luring Russian armour into ambushes by fake radio messages.² On October 27th, Nagy's government ordered an army major from the Bem Barracks to negotiate a truce. Ekren declared that he had instructions to carry on "from higher up", probably meaning from Dudás. (He added improbably, "By tomorrow reinforcements will have arrived from West Germany.") Ekren refused to recognise the authority of the Nagy government. "We don't need a single one of the government's ministers," he declared, "not even Béla Kovács, because we already have suitable men for all the portfolios!"³

So the battle here went on, but certain undertakings must have been given to the Széna and Moscow Square commanders because at seven twenty A.M. next day, October 28th, Radio Budapest announced that army negotiators had negotiated a ceasefire with the Moscow Square rebels after several preliminary conferences the night before.

A considerably more significant revolutionary nucleus had formed at Győr in Western Hungary. There were wild rumours that Austria had moved army units up to the frontier. The townsfolk were in high ferment, encouraged by the continuous passage of foreign cars with newspapermen and Red Cross supplies and by the voices of non-Communist radio stations from beyond the frontier. Every Western car was mobbed, and the journalists were hauled down to see the ÁVH dungeons, the tangled heaps of recording tapes of bugged phone conversations, the soundproof torture rooms, the bloodstains on the walls – and the broken twigs and splotches of blood on the pavement over at nearby Magyaróvár where the ÁVH man had been lynched.⁴ Here at Győr the ÁVH had disintegrated, the police chief had fled to Czechoslovakia, and the local army commander had thrown in his lot with the insurgents.

More importantly, the Soviet troops garrisoning Győr had stayed out; they had grown amiable and indolent, like Hitler's officers occupying France in 1944. The Soviet commander at Győr denied any intention to interfere with their internal affairs, saying: "I think that the rising . . . against the oppressive leaders is justified."⁵ When Győr's citizens asked him to be good enough to quit the city limits, he obligingly pulled his troops out to the next village, Győrszentiván, and pitched camp in woods nearby. The Hungarians were baffled but grateful and sent him food for his hungry soldiers and milk for the families. He issued a statement a few days later expressing his personal regret that his soldiers had been provoked: "They were stoned and spat on," he explained. The reporter for Győr's rebel radio said, "When we parted company, the Soviet military commander told me he was leaving with the best impressions."⁶

The opposition nucleus had begun to crystallise at Győr on October 27th. A workers' council had been set up under George Szabó, a metal worker who attended meetings in a shiny blue suit. A larger political body, a national council,⁷ was also being constituted: its very title betrayed larger than purely local ambitions. The power behind this council was a local politician, Attila Szigethy. In recent years he had been the number two Communist in this city. Before his conversion to Imre Nagy during the New Course, he had been a leading MP for the fellow-travelling National Peasant party. He was about thirty-five, a stocky, broad-shouldered, stooping man with a bulging briefcase that seemed as much a part of him as his red walrus moustache. Opinions differed about him. Some likened him to the vacillating Imre Nagy.⁸ The Yugoslav ex-diplomat Lazarus Brankov, banished to Győr after his release from prison, criticised him for his inability to delegate authority.⁹

Under the gaze of a Lenin portrait still on the walls, Szigethy had set up a model "soviet" consisting of the by now obligatory workers, students, and intellectuals, but also including four military representatives. The real motor behind him was the crowd outside. Hundreds of citizens milled permanently outside the baroque city hall, eager for revolutionary news and proclamations. They wanted action and innovation, not just words. The committee was in constant session upstairs. There was growing pressure for a motorised march on Budapest to enforce their revolutionary demands: and foremost of these was that the Soviets must pull right out of the country.

The pressure on Szigethy was unrelenting. He was surrounded by telephones, armed rebel guards, secretaries and army officers. The rooms echoed to the thump of rifle butts on bare wooden floors. Every action was monitored by a dozen or so Western reporters breathing down his neck. There was a coming and going, a whispering and a clapping of shoulders and a saluting, while outside there still seethed the partially armed and angry mob.

Sources describe a typical meeting of this national council in Győr. George Szabó, acting as Szigethy's deputy, was late arriving and showed up with a pistol held to his back by an unruly man called Louis Somogyvári – some said he was an emissary of Joseph Dudás – who took the floor and tried to harangue the body about Imre Nagy's treachery in Budapest. Then the man forced his way on to a balcony and incited the crowd outside; a near riot began in response to his emotive remarks. An ex-printer and Social Democrat threatened to punch him in the face if he did not quieten down.¹⁰ But Szigethy himself had not arrived yet, and the wild man merely pronounced the session open and a segment of the new council agreed with him. "At this point," recalled the printer later, "we had no choice but to call in the army and have Somogyvári taken into custody." Democracy was still a fragile flower in revolutionary Győr.¹¹

At eleven p.m. on October 27th, Szigethy gave a press conference. The crowd outside had now increased to about twelve hundred people. He agreed that he broadly supported Imre Nagy, but he added ominously: "There are some things which the Nagy government has not yet said." Later that evening, while the mob outside noisily chanted its disgust at Nagy's reshuffled Cabinet, Szigethy levered his tall, stooping frame into a chair behind his desk, telephoned Budapest and issued his first ultimatum to the government. Officials tried to quieten the mob from the balcony, but it was not easy. "We've had enough Communism," the people could be heard screaming. "We want a new government in Budapest."

His Stalin moustache twitching with annoyance, Szigethy clamped the telephone to one ear, held a hand over the other and demanded to speak to somebody in authority.

The pressure on Szigethy was growing. The first murmurs could be heard about his own fellow-travelling past. "We can't trust him one hundred per cent," the town clerk growled rebelliously to *New York Times* reporter Homer Bigart.

A suitable authority came on the line at the other end and Szigethy dictated the ultimatum: “The people and my national committee demand that you announce a date for free elections immediately, to be held within two or three months.” He added the other familiar demands: an immediate cease fire and Soviet withdrawal from Hungary. “We want a clear answer tonight,” he shouted down the line. And, “We have ten thousand men ready to march on Budapest.”

And a man in a soiled trenchcoat plucked at newspaperman Bigart’s sleeve and whispered: “The Russians are moving two or three hundred tanks into Hungary from the east. We just heard it on the railway telegraph. It’s official.”¹²

As the night skies lightened into dawn, *Daily Mail* reporter Noel Barber started up his Borgward and cruised around the Buda area. He observed that the Russians had now strengthened their bridge defences with field guns, as well as tanks and infantry. In the Moscow Square area there had been a twelve-hour running gun battle the day before, and it showed. When he tried to cross over to Pest he was turned back despite a white flag and union flag on his car – but not before he had glimpsed on the bridge a three-ton lorry surrounded by flour spilling from bags that had been bayoneted open, over the corpses of the driver and his mate. Barber was told that the Russians had found arms cached beneath the flour.

The capital’s radio started its day’s broadcasting. It was now Sunday, October 28th. The news bulletins stated that the city had been quiet during the night: “There were no armed clashes.” At six A.M. the news was that talks had taken place between the army and various rebel leaders.¹³ A truce had been reached with the rebels in Széna and Moscow Squares.

Colonel Maléter was still fighting at the Kilián Barracks. There had been heavy casualties on both sides. Captain Illes, father of four and a Party member since 1945, had been shot dead by a wounded Soviet tank officer: the Russian was captured, and said his unit had been sent into Budapest from Romania. Two Russian 122-millimetre self-propelled guns positioned near the Café Valeria in Üllői Road had begun systematically blasting the corner of the barracks. They were finished off by petrol bombs from the Corvin Passage fighters. Maléter later told reporter Sefton Delmer that a Hungarian officer arrived under a flag of

truce and left with him a copy of the *Free People* listing Imre Nagy's new Cabinet. "In their opinion," cajoled the official radio spokesman that morning, "the new Hungarian government . . . accords with the interests of the whole Hungarian people and will fulfil the most important demands that are contained in the Fourteen Points." But the rebel colonel repeated his basic demands to him: the Red Army must pull out of Budapest at once, and out of the whole of Hungary by mid-November; the rebels must take over policy decisions within the army – and perhaps the bitterest pill of all – Imre Nagy, too, must openly state his approval of the uprising.

Imre Nagy sighed when he got the news. He was an old man and no match for resistance of this kind. He would have to make further concessions. Bit by bit he was dragging himself like a mortally injured cowboy along the dusty track down which the rebel hordes had long galloped with their demands. He could never catch up.

During the morning he held a secret conference with the Kremlin's emissaries Mikoyan and Suslov. He demanded an unfettered hand to resolve the crisis. As a precondition he demanded that Hegedüs, Gerő and the other Stalinists should be evicted from Hungary without further ado. The two Soviet officials agreed. Hegedüs was brusquely told around eleven A.M., and given until the afternoon to pack his bags for the flight to Moscow.¹⁴ He was to take his entire family with him, although his wife was expecting their sixth child in five days' time.

The next ultimatum that Szigethy issued over Győr's rebel transmitter included a deadline for action. He called upon Nagy to issue instructions to stop the fighting and to request the Soviet commander-in-chief to cease fire. "We expect Imre Nagy's personal answer by eight o'clock at the latest."

Imre Nagy's office called Attila Szigethy but the rebel leader now stated even more exorbitant demands. Francis Erdei, who had been with him for years in the Peasant Party, handled the call at the Budapest end. At the Győr end, a reporter of the Vienna newspaper *Echo* witnessed Szigethy's actions. He wrote:

Our talk is interrupted: Budapest is on the line again. Szigethy listens intently, the conversation lasts ten minutes. Our interpreter translates snatches of the conversation. The Hungarian government has agreed to

withdraw the occupation forces. The government offers to negotiate with Szigethy. Szigethy's reaction is to reject the offer. "As long as our people are still being shot at in Budapest, I will not talk with Communists. The withdrawal of the occupation troops is only a placebo. What I demand is a government formed of patriots. It can be of a provisional character initially, but it must ultimately be chosen by secret elections. And all the parties must be represented in Parliament again – the Communists, too, for all I care!"¹⁵

At one twenty p.m. Imre Nagy caved in, and ordered the ceasefire. The official communiqué unexpectedly broadcast by Budapest radio was signed by Nagy himself:

The government of the Hungarian People's Republic orders an immediate ceasefire to stop further bloodshed and ensure peaceful development. It instructs the armed forces that they should fire only if attacked.

The corresponding order to the troops was signed by Janza and Münnich.

"What was the actual reason for the warfare of the past days in Budapest?" philosophised Budapest radio an hour later. "Delay. Temporising. Failure to grasp the real situation, and total disregard for the will of the people."

Nagy kowtowed to virtually all of Szigethy's and Maléter's separate demands. At five twenty-three p.m., he himself delivered a broadcast that was startling as much for its language as for its content. Gone was the address, "Comrades." Gone, too, was the Marxist-Leninist jargon, as dry as stale coffee grounds: in fact, it is difficult to accept that Nagy's own addled brain could have grappled with the task of formulating it. Other brains must have helped. In words that echoed the morning's *Free People* editorial, he declared that the uprising was not a "counter-revolution" as some people were claiming. "The government disapproves of views which contend that the present powerful stirring of the people is a counter-revolution . . . There can be no doubt whatever that this was a national democratic movement, which has inspired and united our whole nation . . . In the midst of the fighting was born a government of democratic national

unity, independence and socialism which has become the genuine means for expressing the people's will."

Right at the end, after all this meaningless hogwash, came the words that mattered: "The Hungarian government has come to an agreement with the Soviet government whereby Soviet troops shall immediately begin their withdrawal from Budapest," this to be "simultaneous with the establishment of the new security forces." And more than that: the broadcast revealed that talks had begun on "the question of the withdrawal of Soviet troops stationed in Hungary"; and to cap that the ÁVH, the despised security police force, would be abolished "after the restoration of order".

But again the rebels at Győr had galloped ahead of Nagy. At three thirty p.m. their transmitters had spoken again, and now they were demanding no less than the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. And two hours later still, the newscasters at Győr asked Nagy to begin face-to-face negotiations with delegations of the Budapest rebels on the formation of a joint government. To put muscle into these very specific demands the radio added that the thirty thousand coal miners of Balinka would stay on strike; as they put it, the miners would have no objections to the Communist Party campaigning against the other parties in free, cleanly-run elections: "The people will decide which party has its confidence." There was an ironic ring about these words.

At five thirty-five p.m. the radio announced that the Central Committee approved of Nagy's declaration. It was its dying act: it now abdicated Party leadership in favour of a six-man emergency committee, or presidium, evenly divided between Nagy's men (Kádár, Nagy and Szántó) and the old Stalinists (Apró, Kiss and Münnich). These names from the past showed that the Party was even further out of touch with the workers.

Many of the Central Committee's 120 members had slept in their headquarters at Academy Street throughout this nerve-racking week. Now late on October 28th their ordeal was over. Throughout this historic day the Committee had been in anguished session. Conscious that the victory of his ideals was near, Nagy had invited nine or ten of his closest followers to join him at the building. They were not allowed into the meeting, but clustered in a room outside. One of them, Nicholas Vásárhelyi recalls: "We were there from morning until evening,

waiting for the outcome . . . shut in a room. In the evening we were told the result.” The Committee had decided to change the Party line; the previous line had not been correct. The insurrection was given grudging blessing, and the rearguard of Rákosi’s rule would soon be en route to Moscow.

The response from the mutinous western provinces shocked the regime, and Nagy did not have to wait long for it. A delegation of four Sopron University students drove to Győr and broadcast from there to the whole of Western Hungary that it was not enough to spout that the ÁVH “would be” disbanded: the country would accept nothing less than that “the ÁVH *had been* disbanded”. And the eastern provinces followed with a loud and convincing raspberry of their own: at six forty p.m. the rebel Miskolc radio reported the Borsod workers’ council view that Nagy’s reshuffled Cabinet was needlessly top-heavy. “There is no need whatever,” they objected, “to have twenty-two ministers and three deputy prime ministers.” They recommended instead a temporary Cabinet in which Imre Nagy would govern with Béla Kovács as his only deputy premier, and a limited number of essential ministries like foreign affairs, defence, interior, finance, foreign trade, health, transport and communications. A Borsod workers’ council communiqué broadcast next day would add a pungent demand for the immediate retirement of Apró, Kiss, and Szántó, all of them Politburo members who had long ago forfeited the respect of the people.¹⁶

Late on October 28th, a government car collected the former deputy premier Dr. Hegedüs and his family and luggage from their little home on Liberty Hill and drove them to the Soviet military headquarters at Tököl, outside the city. At the steps of the Soviet military plane, he found Gerő, Piros and Bata waiting with their families. A few hours later they landed at Moscow, and were driven to a dacha compound built for the Soviet Central Committee. From now on Imre Nagy believed he had absolute power in Hungary.¹⁷

At four p.m. that afternoon, a dramatic debate started in the United Nations building, towering like a white, up-ended brick on New York’s East River. It was the first time since 1950 that the Security Council had been called to meet on a Sunday. The request had been made by France, Britain and the United States. Peter Kós, Hungary’s Russian-born ambassador to Washington, still seemed to be acting for his old clients, the Hungary of Rákosi and Gerő: before

the session began, he handed the secretary-general a note protesting at any debate on the Soviet intervention in his country. Almost immediately, the Soviet delegate Sobolev asked permission to speak and also protested at putting Hungary on the agenda. Nine of the Security Council's eleven members voted against Sobolev while Yugoslavia abstained. Sobolev had the gall to describe the debate as "an attempt to intervene in Hungary's domestic affairs". He pointed out that even Imre Nagy had not complained to the Security Council. "The Western powers are trying to give aid to the fascist and reactionary elements in Hungary."

Lodge telephoned Foster Dulles next morning and expressed satisfaction that the Yugoslavs had abstained. He now suggested a resolution calling for control of the Soviet forces, sponsored by nine powers – they should have the meeting on Thursday, November 1st, said Lodge, present the resolution "and leave it hanging".

"What about an observation commission?" asked Dulles.

Lodge said: "The British say they don't like that."

That morning there were secret discussions between Lodge, Dulles and Francis Wilcox, head of the United Nations desk at the State Department. At midday Lodge cabled Dulles from New York to confirm the plan of action. He would negotiate with the other Security Council members a draft resolution calling for withdrawal of all Soviet armed forces, political police, and paramilitary forces from Hungary and, as he put it, seek to "verify withdrawal by UN observation of 'neutral' and 'objective' kind". Their basic tactics would be, confirmed Lodge, to "*adjourn meeting without seeking vote*".

In later weeks it would puzzle people that no resolution on Hungary was actually put to the vote in the Security Council. True, the Russians would at once have vetoed it, but that would have cleared the way for a debate by the General Assembly where the international body's real power lay. With the matter "left hanging" on the Security Council agenda, the General Assembly now had its hands effectively tied.

The next days were to show the body at its most bumbling and inefficient, as urgent incoming telegrams were delayed, and then mislaid and then denied, and as it became ensnared in its own bureaucratic rules and procedures, and as the

United States' delegation – whether through high design or through plain inattentiveness – missed all the tricks until it was too late to make any difference.¹⁸

35 Lowering the Barriers

AMONG INFORMED HUNGARIANS there was dismay that the Security Council had adjourned without voting on any resolution, and depression at the continued failure of the United States to offer concrete help. John MacCormac reported to the *New York Times* that Hungarians “still have a touching reverence for everything American, but it seems doubtful that this will last much longer”.¹

To the American legation the situation early on October 28th seemed full of unanswered questions. The Austrian government tipped off the American and British ambassadors in Vienna on October 28th: “We have information that three Soviet armies, totalling twenty-seven divisions, are converging on Hungary from Romania, Czechoslovakia and the Ukraine.” In a telegram at two p.m., Spencer Barnes noted that the Soviet Union clearly seemed to be moving in fresh troops. “Thus [it is] likely they can by progressive use of force maintain control of Pest, get control of Buda and clear up provinces.” He mentioned, however, the possibility that the mounting pro-Hungarian feeling in the West might oblige the Russians to extricate themselves through an armistice followed by negotiations. The Russians already had three mechanised divisions in Budapest; they were holding key areas of the city and blocking the Danube bridges, and there were only a few rebel strongholds left fighting. Why had the Russians not resorted to all-out action against the rebels? That evening Spencer Barnes began a telegram to Washington with the words, “Current situation completely abnormal if factual situation correctly understood.”²

What was restraining the Soviets from using their familiar iron fist against the rebels now? Was there a high-level split in the Kremlin? Or were they wait-

ing cynically for some other world event to mask their own actions? Late on October 28th the Italian envoy entered in his diary:

At six p.m. . . . The rebel proposals for the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Budapest have been accepted, and they will shortly negotiate their withdrawal from the whole country . . . So says Nagy. But from Italian radio we learn that Soviet troops are pouring in from the Ukraine, Romania and Slovakia. Yet another version has it that Nagy is a prisoner of the Russians, and the announcement has only been made to trap the rebels.

In a telegram next day, Spencer Barnes would report that the insurgents urgently needed Western military aid and high-level moral support “to give them better bargaining strength and fighting potential if conflict to be kept alive”.³

In Hungary all the unpalatable auguries are ignored as the rebels savour the first intoxicating hours of triumph. They set about hunting down enemies and settling scores; they ransack the villas of the Communist élite. With such verve and vigour do they organise workers’ councils, revolutionary committees, private armies, newspapers and political parties that they do not perceive the distant rattle of tank tracks from the east. A babel of rebel transmitters saturates Hungary’s radio waves. Several cities – Miskolc, Pécs, Debrecen and Nyíregyháza – add their voices to Győr’s broadcast demands to Imre Nagy. They believe that their collective wisdom will frustrate the Communist knaveries in Budapest faster than Nagy and Kádár can devise them. Soon the international cable and telephone lines will be reopened.

In Lóránt Street in Buda’s wealthy XIIth District the barrier which until a few days earlier has kept the curious away from the ousted dictator Rákosi’s palatial villa has been lowered. Not long ago hidden sentry-boxes guarded the “beloved leader, our wise teacher and dear father, Stalin’s best Hungarian follower, comrade Matthias Rákosi”. In front of his twelve-roomed house is a terraced garden; beside it an outside garage; on the roof, two aerials – one for a television, the other for a shortwave transmitter.⁴ The interior is shrouded in a gloomy silence. Footfalls are swallowed by thick red carpet on the stairs. Shelves full of books line the drawing-room walls: they are all in Russian but appear unread. The pictures are reproductions of Russian paintings. Behind one is a

cinema screen; there are Russian titles on the reels, but Rákosi's television is from West Germany. On top of a stereo console are albums of photographs of himself in a variety of poses. Upstairs is an opulent American piano with his monogram on the side. Silver cigarette boxes and ashtrays are scattered around the room.

The last residents have obviously left in a hurry. Papers are strewn about the desk. The latest issue of *Pravda* has not even been opened. There is an envelope received by Rákosi from his secret police chief. It is empty, but bears the words, "Comrade Rákosi, I would like these two letters back with instructions by eight o'clock. Gábor Péter, July 31st, 1948." What wretched victim can those letters once have doomed? They also find Rákosi's Party book. Taken together with the wages slips found in the desk, it seems that the great dictator has been humbly paying only 160 florins a month membership dues out of his more than princely forty *thousand* florin salary. The rebels step into the gleaming blue bathroom with its scales and wall-bars, and with its wall cabinets stocked with every kind of vitamin. They marvel at the Hoenson cigars, the costly French and Spanish liqueurs, the wines and cognacs from all over the world. They have seen enough; as they leave, Stalin's oversize portrait seems to leer goodbye.

Imre Mező, of the city's Party headquarters, sensed trouble brewing. From his headquarters on the morning of October 28th he had appealed to the Central Committee's military council to send him reliable army officers to help organise a worker militia.⁵ The defence ministry ordered Colonel Louis Tóth over to Republic Square with ten staff officers at three p.m., and they set about the job. Tóth brought with him an experienced political officer, Colonel János Asztalos, with the job of conducting propaganda among the officers assigned to instruct the militia in each district. Mező placed at their disposal four first-floor rooms overlooking a side street. After a briefing by Colonel Tóth the army officers fanned out to call on Party headquarters in each of the city districts to start work.

That evening, Mező called a meeting of all the district secretaries and promised them weapons if they would raise the worker militias. Somebody asked, "Are we supposed to negotiate or shoot?" Mező spoke with the voice of years of

Party authority: “If you’ve got the force, then you use it! Shoot! This is a counter-revolution!”

But the old Party was collapsing. Force – that was on the rebel side now. Mező might have arms and uniforms, and four empty depots from which to distribute them to the worker militias – but the militias existed only in his mind. Besides, he had only one lorry to distribute these supplies and that soon fell into rebel hands. By the time he had obtained a replacement lorry, the workers were refusing to put on the army uniforms anyway.

An uncomfortable feeling of helplessness pervaded the oblong Party building on Republic Square. Eavesdropping on conversations on the regular police telephone network, Imre Mező’s lonely and apprehensive staff learned that although there were over 350 regular police standing by in their barracks in Mosonyi Street not two hundred yards away, police chief Kopácsi was refusing to order them to enforce either the curfew or martial law, let alone to help defend the Party workers here.

“Sabotage!” That was the word Mező’s faithful lieutenants used. He sent one of them round to see Kopácsi in person. The police chief just shrugged. He was under pressure now from many sides. One civil servant, Stephen Elias, badgered him to restore proper police patrols for the traffic if nothing else; Kopácsi, says Elias, did nothing, so fifteen-year-olds began acting as traffic policemen.⁶ Elias was also arguing for the immediate amalgamation of the civilian and military rebel units into a proper defence force for the revolution. Again Kopácsi just shrugged.

If Alexander Kopácsi was beginning to wish that he was somewhere else, then so were thousands of Hungary’s intellectuals, to whom bloodshed and combat were distasteful. A typical frightened egghead was one analysed by the Americans some months later, a chunky, balding, sloppily dressed Budapest economist of thirty-four.⁷ He had a superior IQ, around 136, but he had chosen to join the Party and teach Marxist economics, while privately exploiting his real-life financial wizardry to amass a personal fortune. His motives were complex and unexpected. “The prominent feature of his personality is the need for status, recognition and power,” said psychiatrist Dr. Maria E. Nagy after questioning him in March 1957. “Whatever he does, he does to prove that he was

more than his father expected him to be. Furthermore, this need for power and admiration stems from his castration anxiety – on the Rorschach that was especially prominent,” she added, referring to the picture-association tests.

Her colleague Dr. Sigmund Mezey suggested that this man had played both sides of the string. “We call it in German a *Mitläufer*,” he explained – a fellow traveller. Mezey suggested that this was why he had merely loaned his car to insurgents fighting on Castle Hill to transport ammunition and battle casualties: he had no option, and realised that lending the car might put him in good odour with the revolutionaries. A typical fence-sitter. A rat.

Psychiatrist George Devereux compared the case with a wartime disappointment when he had tried to recruit secret agents for the OSS. “A young anthropologist turned out to know some Siamese and I had him come in; but after hemming and hawing he told me that he thought he was more useful to the war effort sitting behind a desk in Washington . . .” He commented with bitterness, “I think that an intellectual who doesn’t take social responsibilities, but sends his car in his place, is a very objectionable person!” There paraded before his memory the brave men who had gone through parachute school with him – real intellectuals from Princeton and Michigan and Duke – and he burst out: “This is the kind of parasite to whom being an intellectual is a way of getting money, the same way he would be a grocer, a sausage manufacturer or a successful prostitute. I think this man is liable to be successful because he isn’t ever going to stop being a perfect stinker.” His superior frowned at Devereux. “We appreciate your feelings about this, but we must separate the anthropological from the Hungarian,” he lectured him. “I hope you feel better.”

Now that Nagy had declared a ceasefire, the shooting died down. Budapest breathed more freely. A Revolutionary Committee of Intellectuals came into being, drawn from the Petőfi Circle, the student association MEFESz, and from the writers’, journalists’, artists’ and musicians’ unions, all Communist organisations of course. The moving spirit was George Markos, a Western-orientated economics lecturer of fifty-four. Professor Thomas Nagy, a fellow economist, recalls: “Markos telephoned me and told me that this body was being set up; he told me that we Reform Communists would be calling the tune in it.” (The professor now adds: “That was my biggest disappointment: I really thought that

the Hungarian people would be delighted to side with us Reform Communists! The purest self-deception!”) The body met in the law faculty’s assembly hall of the University. Professor Nagy soon became disenchanted. “The committee did nothing at all – just talk, talk, talk.” Afterwards, the Intellectuals issued a ten-point declaration which included a demand for secret elections to be held, and for October 23rd, “the day when our national liberation fight began”, to be declared a public holiday. The signatories included the writers Alexander Erdei, Alexander Haraszti, Nicholas Vásárhelyi, Alexander Fekete, and academics like Professor Nagy, Professor Ivan Kádár, as well as Gábor Tánczos and Balász Nagy of the Petőfi Circle.⁸

More significantly, since Imre Nagy had emphasised the need to maintain law and order, the Intellectuals also decided to create a private army. The University’s rebel military instructor, Colonel Stephen Marián – who had played a notable part in organising the mass demonstrations of October 23rd – began to organise a militia from students with military experience: altogether three “battalions”, over 1,200 men, were raised. In addition to these, the final-year Polytechnic students who had been spending the summer at a military training camp now arrived back and brought their equipment with them: a dozen tanks, several anti-aircraft guns, and radio trucks. These unorthodox forces established their high command in Kopácsi’s crowded police station under the joint command of Colonel Marián and Kopácsi himself. Professor Joseph Blücher, who found himself on guard duty at this headquarters, said later that there was a constant flow of visitors, a *Who’s Who* of the insurrection, including the frail, white-haired Social Democratic leader, Anna Kéthly; meanwhile, down in the basement, the scores of ÁVH men to whom Kopácsi had given asylum sheltered from the fury of the mob.⁹

Among those seen at Kopácsi’s headquarters was a tall slim figure of undeniably military bearing, Lieutenant-General Béla Király. Although only forty-two he had an unusual army career behind him. He had been in hospital since October 10th. He had spent five years in Rákosi’s jails on trumped-up charges, and was still not fully recovered. But now that there was a change of regime, he had hopes of resuming high army office. After the ceremonial reburial of Rákosi’s victim, General Pálffy, shortly after the Rajk funeral, he had chatted briefly with Francis Jánosi, a former fellow officer and now Imre Nagy’s son-in-law,

and the portly Jánosi had agreed to take the matter further. But the insurrection had overtaken this.

In the hospital Király had heard Nagy's broadcast and seized a notepad that same day, October 28th, to write to Jánosi to remind him of their earlier discussion: "Dear Feri," he wrote, "this is the cause I'd like to devote all my strength to, my enthusiasm and my modest knowledge." He added, "My dear Feri, I beg you to reflect and ponder on these things: on my past, my hardworking nature, the five years I spent in prison . . . don't they make me an ideal choice to participate in this task?" Király asked unashamedly for a high post on the staff of the new defence ministry.

Only one day would pass before he got his answer.

Inside the battered *Free People* building the editors of the Party newspaper met that afternoon on the still largely intact third floor to work on what was to prove its last-ever edition. Outside the building Soviet tanks rattled past, the first stage of the withdrawal ordered by Imre Nagy. The newspaper's staff were torn by inner conflicts: some remained loyal to the Central Committee, whatever that body's new tint, others saw themselves as the mouthpiece of the vacillating prime minister Nagy. In a neighbouring room some of the legions of newspapermen sacked in by-gone years were planning a rival *Free People*. But after a parley they agreed to join forces for the current edition.¹⁰ Martin Horváth, the editor, took half a sheet of the newspaper's draft paper and began jotting down notes in his flowing handwriting.

"Harasz" – that was to remind him to get Haraszti, president of the journalists' union, to issue a formal declaration. Then "Revitalisation" and "Wages in the country", two items he wanted dealt with in the next day's issue. Below that he wrote, "Rebels don't loot." Clearly this was going to be a Party newspaper with a difference. After that, "Workers' councils in factories", and then he noted two possible authors for next day's lead article. Somebody said, "What about printing a report about outside Parliament!" That was to be an eye-witness account of the massacre. Horváth nodded, and wrote it down followed by an "Editorial report on the government's formation" and an "Open letter" to Nagy; a letter that lost its point when Imre Nagy a few hours later proclaimed the abolition of the ÁVH and a Soviet withdrawal. An article entitled, "The Soviet

army” was suggested. Horváth nodded approval and wrote the title down. Then he turned with distaste to the *Pravda* article entitled “Collapse of the anti-people adventure in Hungary”. He jotted down: “Reply to *Pravda*” and gave Nicholas Molnár the job of writing it.

Fresh news was breaking every hour. As the two-page newspaper went to the presses, it would lead off with the Soviet pullout instead: “It is the first step towards their return to their bases,” it exclaimed, “and then towards their evacuating our national territory altogether”, and a statement by Poland’s Party leader Gomulka that the hue and cry was all over. The edition would also contain telegrams from the provinces and the ten-point declaration issued by the Intellectuals. There was one curious omission, however: the article on the Parliament Square massacre had been duly written, typeset and proofed, but unknown hands lifted it from the final page make-up and inserted something else in its place. Around midnight the rotaries began to roll.

At around that time Kemal Ekren – commander of the Széna Square rebel group – emerged from his underground headquarters for fresh talks with the officers of the Bem Barracks. Fearing an ambush, Ekren told his men to open fire on the barracks if he was not back by eleven p.m. Ekren proposed to the army that they establish a joint peacekeeping force. The barracks commander proposed patrols of one policeman, one soldier and one insurgent each, but Ekren asked for an extra insurgent. Both sides compromised, and Ekren’s authority over a substantial part of Buda was recognised: the area extended from Margaret Bridge to the Chain Bridge and included much of Castle Hill as well. His force was not well disciplined; Uncle Szabó swaggered around with a machine gun slung round his neck all day, and, despite the ceasefire, was inclined to take potshots at suspicious motorcars and motorcyclists crossing Széna Square.

For a while intermittent firing carried on, as rebels continued to settle scores. That evening, Noel Barber took pity on the *Daily Express*’s Sefton Delmer and drove him round the city to check on the effects of the ceasefire. It was an uneasy truce and many people disbelieved that the Russians really were pulling out. In Alexander Bródy Street two Soviet tanks were guarding the shattered radio building. The defence ministry was also still surrounded by Soviet T-54s. It was around ten p.m. as Barber steered the car into Saint Stephen’s Boulevard.

Moments later a shadowy figure stepped into the street with a machine gun, shouted something, and sprayed the car with bullets. The windscreen starred into frosted glass, and Barber slumped in his seat with a savage wound in the head; he was blinded by the blood streaming down. Delmer jumped out of the back and screamed in German at the diminutive gunman, "We are journalists, don't shoot." He got behind the wheel of the bullet-riddled Borgward and bucketed it out of the line of fire on two flat tyres. Barber moaned, "For Christ's sake get me to the legation." The British legation gave Barber first aid and rushed him in a Land Rover to a hospital. When he came to, he could see Delmer's burly figure looming over him in a white smock. "Don't worry, old chap," boomed the *Express* man. "The worst will soon be over."

Of course Sefton Delmer scooped the story of Barber's shooting. But he was a gentleman: he dictated the story to Leslie Fry, the British minister, and asked him to see that it went only to the *Daily Mail*, his own rival.¹¹

Thus ended October 28th, 1956, the Sunday on which Imre Nagy capitulated to the most significant rebel demands: now Hungary had a reshuffled, partly non-Communist Cabinet and his promise that the ÁVH would be abolished and the Soviet troops withdrawn. The radio at seven A.M. next morning announced encouragingly: "An ever-increasing number of people are hurrying along the streets of Budapest to start work . . . They see calm and order everywhere." An attempt was made to get tram and bus workers to report back to work.

Across the Atlantic, in Washington, the mood was also one of relief. John Foster Dulles telephoned President Eisenhower at eight A.M. to congratulate him that in the Middle East the news was also good: Israel had still not moved against Egypt. Ike said, "At least things seem a little better on both fronts – Hungary and Israel – this morning than last night." Dulles agreed: "We have gained twenty-four hours."

He added, "I was thinking of advising Ambassador Bohlen to inform the Soviet government of the passage in my speech in Dallas that you and I both worked on – the one indicating that we did not look upon these satellite countries as potential military allies."

"Good idea," said Ike. "And while you are about it you might get in touch informally with Nehru. He may prove a useful informal channel to the Rus-

sians. We may kill two big birds with one stone: we stand to win over India from the Soviet sphere, and we can start dealing with the Soviet Union too while they are politically embarrassed. They may be more willing to talk sense now than at any time since Khrushchev has been in power.”

Dulles agreed, “They are up against a tough problem.” But he warned, “We have to be extremely careful not to do anything which might be interpreted in the satellite countries as us selling them out and dealing with their hated masters behind their backs.”¹²

36 Joseph Dudás

MONDAY, OCTOBER 29th, 1956. John MacCormac was reporting to the *New York Times*: “The seventh day of the Hungarian revolution has dawned with Soviet soldiers still patrolling Budapest streets despite a promise by Hungary’s new government that they would be withdrawn.”¹ And veteran Communist editor Ivan Boldizsár wrote a bold leading article in *Monday News* entitled “Blood on the Page.” “Clean sheet!” he began. “Thus we headed our first issue four weeks ago . . . Those four weeks have seen the Hungarian nation re-born in blood and self-sacrifice in indescribable heroism. Never in history has there been another revolution like this one: an entire city rose up without weapons in defence of truth and freedom. If the Soviet troops are to leave, then peace is necessary on the streets of Budapest.

“How much longer will it take?” asked Boldizsár. “Twenty-four hours? Forty-eight? The whole world is watching us. The fate of the country depends on us. Every revolution wins twice: once on the streets in blood and death; and then the real victory, in our souls, in work, in life itself. The first victory only has meaning if we win the second. And we will . . .”

What sentiments laid siege to Imre Nagy this morning? The movement to which he had dedicated thirty-five years was losing its biggest battle. There was a tumult in his soul between the Hungarian and the Communist.² However the Central Committee now accepted that this was not a counter-revolution so there was a new situation. He decided to take up his post as prime minister and to return to the office he had first occupied in 1953. Around nine A.M. he turned his back on Academy Street and set out for Parliament, constitutional seat of the

people's power. As writer Tibor Méray arrived with several colleagues at Academy Street they were astonished to be met by the prime minister walking down the steps, freshly shaved and smiling.³

“How are you, my children?” Nagy beamed. Passers-by crowded round. “What’s going to happen?” some shouted. “Are the Soviet troops going to go home?”

Nagy was grinning. “Everything’s being taken care of. You must go about your work, I am going to my work and everything will be all right.”

His first action was to transfer the radio station from Academy Street to makeshift studios in the Parliament building. His second was to construct a new government. At about nine A.M. he sent for Vásárhelyi, who had been his information chief in 1953, and offered him the same job now. Erdős accompanied the dissident journalist to Parliament. As they climbed the stairs to Nagy’s first-floor offices Vásárhelyi said, “You know, we are making the mistake of our lives. A clever politician doesn’t step right into that dirt. He waits until the muck is cleared by somebody else, and then he comes on.”⁴ Once in Nagy’s rooms, he politely made his excuses: “I am none too well,” he said, and went home to his first-floor flat in Hankóczy Road, on the other side of the river. (In fact Vásárhelyi was none too ill, but he estimated that the situation was deteriorating fast.)⁵

With the ceasefire there was a rush of “recruits” to the rebels in the Kilián Barracks and Corvin Passage. Colonel Maléter called his officers together and instructed them: “I shall need officers willing to stand on duty day and night. If any of you feel that family obligations must come first, or have other reasons not to join us, you will be given leave of absence.”

There were not enough weapons to go round, and his officers weeded out several hundred men until only those who knew how to handle guns were left. They were formed into three companies: one of these companies, 150 men who had come from Csepel, was issued with weapons, the other two were put to work clearing away rubble.⁶ Meanwhile journalists and cameramen besieged the tunnel entrance, while the crowd outside grew by the hour. A laurel wreath was draped round the gun of the T-34 tank outside. Carts and lorries arrived all day laden with meat, butter, poultry and even a live pig; and now there were Red Cross parcels from Austria too: sardines, cheese, chocolate, tobacco. The barracks kitchens were feeding both the soldiers and the rebels.

Now the journalists, Western and Hungarian alike, picked their way through the rubble, gawked at the shattered hulks of Soviet tanks and self-propelled guns, the collapsed façades, and the gaping craters . . . they filed through the narrow gap left in the sandbag wall blocking the tunnel entrance. The gap was so narrow that they had to sidle through crabwise. It was not easy to find the by now legendary Colonel Maléter. The building around the courtyards was large and rambling and every soldier asked pointed in a different direction from where they had last seen him. Finally they ran him to ground. Maléter parried every question with a taut smile. He told them, “We trust the provisional government, and we shall support it to the hilt because we are convinced that it is trying to restore peace and order to our country. We know both Zoltán Tildy and Imre Nagy. We know that they have fought for the people with all their might and we know that they represent the people. The freedom fighters, heroes of the armed struggle, will keep calm. I appeal to the people of Budapest to keep calm too, and not to permit anyone to ferment trouble.”⁷

Sefton Delmer jabbed at the Russian decorations on Maléter’s battledress.⁸ “Do you always wear that?” asked Delmer. “Of course,” was the proud reply. “And I am proud of it. Above all, do not think we are not socialists, because we are. This rising is not a rising by capitalists bent on restoring the old order of things. Its purpose is to liberate Hungary, and to restore to the Hungarian people their freedom.” Others who would visit Maléter included Colonel Cowley, the British military attaché, to congratulate him.

Hungary’s ancient political parties were re-forming like black slag on the still-glowing surface of a volcano. The Smallholder and Social Democrat Parties were re-born. Their leaders were dispirited by years of imprisonment, and their funds had been milked by the Communists during Rákosi’s years of salami tactics. The Social Democrat leader, Anna Kéthly, had been incarcerated in 1950 and released in 1954 broken in body and spirit. Many colleagues like Andrew Révész had been sentenced to death. Sentence was ultimately commuted and he was released in November 1955 with 150 other Social Democrats.⁹

He lived three blocks from the Kilián Barracks now – not a bad area to live, except that by October 29th every window in his flat had been smashed by days of tank battles outside. He was chopping wood down in the cellar, when his

daughter came and said: “There are some gentlemen with your father. They are asking if you will arrange a meeting with Anna Kéthly.” He wiped his hands, went upstairs and found Alexander Gáspár, the trades union leader, and Zoltán Horváth, the renegade editor of the *People’s Voice*, which the Communists had seized from his father.¹⁰ Révész was sorry then that he had wiped his hands. He had no time for these funkies. Gáspár whined, “We’ve come to ask you to save the unions. You Social Democrats are the unions’ last hope, now that the Communist Party is breaking up!” Révész undertook to speak with Anna Kéthly – in fact he took their car and told them to walk back to their headquarters.

The Social Democrat leadership was meeting as he arrived: with Anna Kéthly he found Joseph Fischer and the general secretary, Julius Kelemen. She flatly refused to see the delegation. Why should she? The Communists had forfeited the support of the country. She asked Révész to deal with them. He drove to the union headquarters and gave Gáspár two conditions before any talks could open: first, that Hungary must rupture her ties with the fellow-travelling International Confederation of Trades Unions. Gáspár acceded, and took the action two days later. The second condition was that representation in the new trades union body must be seventy per cent Social Democrat, and only thirty per cent Communist; again the Communists accepted. The party recovered the *People’s Voice* as well, and days of agitated meetings began in its editorial offices in Conti Street, a side street off Rákóczi Street: should they join the Nagy coalition or not? They lacked funds, but there was no shortage of recruits: hundreds of people blocked the street outside, according to Vilmos Zentai, who was charged with reorganising the party.¹¹ Anna Kéthly had still not decided whether to join the Nagy Cabinet when she left for Vienna, for a meeting of the Socialist International, with Andrew Révész.

On October 24th former members of the Smallholders’ Party had also met. The party was reactivated with Joseph Kóvágó, Alexander Kiss – chief of the Peasant Alliance – and Theodore Pártay among its leaders. Those opportunist members who had collaborated with the Communists – men like Dobi, Bognár, and Ortutay – were expelled. As the largest opposition party before Rákosi’s takeover, they had a lot of leverage and their general secretary, Béla Kovács, was able to dictate stiff terms to Imre Nagy. They recovered their old headquarters on Semmelweis Street and booted out the Russian-Hungarian Society.¹²

The National Peasants' Party was re-born as the Petőfi Party on October 25th, with headquarters in Dorottya Street. It, too, dissociated itself from collaborators like Francis Erdei, whom Nagy had appointed a deputy premier.¹³ Erdei was forty-six and universally despised, but he was one of the motors behind Nagy's government. He had Attila Szigethy – the rebel leader in Győr – eating out of his hand; Szigethy was constantly telephoning either Erdei or his wife, Joci, who was a fanatical Communist.¹⁴

The Soviet withdrawal from Budapest had begun late on October 28th. Next morning's *Free People* front-paged the pull-out, but the public had been conditioned not to believe anything that the Party organ printed. Besides, at first people saw few signs of any pull-out as they reopened their battered shops. There were the familiar after-the-blitz sounds of glass being swept into heaps and planks being hammered over gaping shell holes. Daybreak found Russian soldiers still patrolling some areas; the official excuse was that order had still not been completely restored. Professor Blücher¹⁵ spotted Russian staff cars touring the city with officers surveying the streets and checking their maps; it was difficult to understand why, if they were planning to withdraw.

The Russians knew how to window-dress and simulate a troop withdrawal, if pretence it was. On the road leading south a Soviet exodus had begun: that morning a United Press correspondent passed sixty tanks heading south, lumbering towards him like a line of circus elephants, trunk to trail, slithering sideways as one lorry skidded on an oil smear. Led by two armoured cars and ten T-54s, another column of tanks and armoured personnel carriers smeared with blood and oil crunched southwards through the chilly fog swathing the river, past the spitting, hate-filled peasants who stopped to stare at them. The Russian tank crews, looking tired and grim in their black leather helmets, were carrying their dead with them: trucks piled high with corpses like rotting rubbish; strapped on the back of one steel monster lay the corpse of one tanker, his vacant eyes fix-focused on the receding Budapest that had defeated him. Nowhere since 1945 had the Red Army had to retreat before, except where battlefield tactics required. Was this withdrawal just tactical too?

Soviet foreign minister Dmitri Shepilov officially announced that “no Soviet units have arrived in Hungary during the last twenty-four hours, in fact during the last sixty-four hours”. Spencer Barnes cabled to warn Washington

that this was a glaring lie: he and his military attaché had observed the arrival of a Soviet column at eleven A.M. on the previous day, with obvious signs of a long road trip behind them; moreover, the lorries had numbers prefixed with D4 and D6, never before logged in Hungary. And MacCormac of the *New York Times* told the envoy that he had now seen Mongol troops in the city who had obviously just arrived.¹⁶

Their beliefs were startling. When one elderly citizen asked a Russian officer, “Why are you shooting at unarmed people?” the Russian replied, “They told us this place is full of American troops.”

To the more pessimistic observers it did seem at times that the Soviet withdrawal was going unexpected ways: Soviet troops leaving Budapest were seen passing through Székesfehérvár, a city *west* of the capital; and food lorry drivers arriving in Budapest from Szolnok, to the east, reported having met no Soviet formations at all leaving to the east. A transmitter operating from Nyíregyháza, in the north-east, was heard warning that armour and truck columns of the Soviet Third Army had been entering Hungary since noon and were now pressing into the interior. Other new armoured forces were reported west of Debrecen: a tractor-station manager¹⁷ saw a four-mile column halted nose to tail on Route 4 between Szolnok and Cegléd.

The city was quiet that afternoon. Occasionally the bark of a tank gun or the snap of a rifle-shot could be heard. The Soviet troops were gradually melting away. The rising odour was indescribable: a smell of old buildings, mortar dust, decaying flesh, sewers and lingering gunpowder. Mopping-up was going on, there were improvised ambulances everywhere and doctors and people in white coats soiled with so much blood that they looked like slaughterhouse porters. A lorry rattled past with the words “dead bodies” scrawled on its sides.

Anxious to avoid a power vacuum, Imre Nagy telephoned police chief Kopácsi and ordered him to organise a national guard to maintain order, incorporating both police and rebel forces. Kopácsi was also to create a revolutionary committee for the forces of order. Its chief should be somebody with military experience. Representatives of the rebel groups met at police headquarters and decided to send for General Béla Király.¹⁸ Three rebels went to visit him in hospital. He got dressed and was driven to Kopácsi’s headquarters escorted by a car-load of armed youngsters. He and Kopácsi mapped out their immediate plans.

They agreed that they did not trust either the minister of the interior or the minister of defence; the new revolutionary committee would have to supervise both Münnich and Janza, while the new revolutionary national guard restored law and order.

Király did not expect much help from the ministry of defence. The journalist Thomas Aczél visited it, and returned to Kopácsi's headquarters calling it "that club of disturbed hens and generals": they were at their wits' end, and begged advice. "Grinding their teeth, they conceded that this was a revolution. They were frightened men." The new minister appointed by Nagy on October 27th, Lieutenant-General Karl Janza, was a balding, stocky officer with alert features; but he had risen during the Rákosi years. All the key officers were Moscow-trained and would hamstring any units that attempted to join the insurgents.¹⁹ Among them were generals like Béla Székely, a Communist agent and former deputy leader of the Peasant Party; Julius Uszta, an ex-partisan who now commanded an army; and Louis Gyurkó, a former Party official who commanded the corps at Kecskemét. Most insidious was General Stephen Szabó, the deputy defence minister and chief of army personnel; he was a Soviet-trained former Czech citizen who had emigrated to Moscow in 1938, became director of a munitions factory and denied all Hungarian ties when Horthy attacked the Soviet Union in 1941. "I am a citizen of Czechoslovakia and above all I am a Communist," he was quoted as saying at that time. Király suspected that however much these generals might remove their Communist insignia, they would still keep those emblems secretly within reach, and pin them on again as soon as they were able.

What puzzled Hungarian airforce officers was that the Soviets were tightening their grip on the airfields like Budapest's airport and those at Budaörs and Tököl. Similar reports came from Szentkirály-Czabadja – between Veszprém and Balaton – and from Kecskemét and Szolnok. The Hungarian airforce had four hundred planes on six military airfields (those at Pápa, Székesfehérvár, Kaposvár, Kiskunlacháza, Kalocsa, Kunmadaras) that were as yet uncontrolled by the Soviet forces. On the morning of October 29th the airforce command telephoned ex-Second World War veterans with combat experience and called them to a secret conference at its headquarters in Szent Imre Herceg Road. Among those telephoned was Imre Nyirádi.²⁰ A forty-five-year-old veteran, he had seen

service as an airforce major on the eastern front; until the previous day's cease-fire he had been giving tactical advice to the street fighters.

Like him, the commander-in-chief, Colonel Francis Nádor, and his deputy were also Second World War veterans. "We'd like to attack the Russian forces themselves," confirmed Colonel Nádor, "but we don't dare. However, we have discovered that the Russians are running out of fuel and that they don't have enough infantry here in Hungary. Suppose we immediately bomb the supply routes being used by the Russians?"

Nyirádi and his fellow veterans were uneasy, but for political reasons. If it relied heavily on former Horthy officers, the Nádor plan would surely be scorned by the regime as "fascist intervention". However, he began taking notes: Nádor explained that the bombing targets would be the frontier bridge at Záhony, the Soviet military airfield at Tököl and Szentkirály airport, and in addition the Russian supply routes across the Tisza. Hungarian parachute troops would also drop at Komárom to block the bridge from Czechoslovakia. After that the planes would fly combat missions against Russian forces gathering around the capital.

Such an attack would only make sense if the West joined in. At Budakeszi, just outside the capital, the army unit that monitored foreign military radio traffic had ascertained that the US airforce units in West Germany were on alert.²¹ The only sure way of finding out Western plans would be for Nádor to fly with General Király to Munich and if the NATO units would not guarantee armed support, to fly on to Spain and appeal to General Francisco Franco. ("We felt that Spain could do this because it was not involved in NATO," Nyirádi later recalled.) If Nádor was sent back empty-handed then the four hundred planes in Hungary should bomb as long as stocks lasted and then defect en masse to Munich. Shortly, a technical snag was found: most of the bombs were stored some miles from their fuses. Nádor went off none the less to the Parliament building to get permission for the plan and for the missions to Munich and Madrid. While Nádor was away the officers fixed on a date: the bombing of the Soviet supply routes should start in two days' time, and continue all day.

Under the mild-mannered economics professor Thomas Nagy, a delegation of Intellectuals went to see the prime minister now that he had moved over to Parliament. Soviet tanks with the familiar rounded turrets, big, squared-off num-

bers on their sides, and guns cocked skywards, still squatted around the building, motionless and bloated like cockroaches around a blackened apple core. The delegation went into the building and met deputy premier Francis Erdei. He said that *he* would be willing to help the delegation. None of them had any time for Erdei; they insisted on seeing the prime minister himself. Thomas Nagy recalls: "It was hard to get through to Imre Nagy in person because he was very busy. Several other delegations were standing around outside his rooms. Then he came out. He looked terribly tired. We were only able to speak for a few moments with him." The main recommendation that these Intellectuals put to Imre Nagy was that he should arm the workers. The premier's voice became bitter. "At present that is quite impossible," he said. "A lot of the workers are unreliable!"²²

The pressures on Imre Nagy were remorseless. Rumours flew. Spencer Barnes reported to Washington that there was growing dissatisfaction with him, and travellers brought word of strong feelings at Győr and a mood to march on Budapest and throw the Russians out themselves.²³ During the day, the Miskolc workers' council reported that Soviet troops were still flooding into Hungary, and demanded that the airforce should attack the main crossing point at Záhony. Imre Nagy did not react.²⁴

At around five thirty p.m. Colonel Nádor returned to airforce headquarters and announced, "General Király has asked us to hold our fire until he gives the go-ahead. So there is to be no bombing – that would only be regarded outside Hungary as a fascist provocation. We must look to the Soviet Union for our freedom, says Király, because we are nearer to them and not to the West." All the same, Nádor added: "Let's get ready to drop bombs anyway. I will give the orders if it proves necessary."

As Nádor was saying these words in Budapest, in Washington the puzzlement about Israel's war plans was mounting. At ten twenty-two A.M. John Foster Dulles was telephoning his brother, the CIA director, and saying: "There are a lot of pieces which fit into a pattern suggesting a high degree of co-operation between the French and the Israelis."

Allen Dulles agreed, and mentioned the build-up on Cyprus and the *Mystère* airplanes sighted in Israel. He reported that the American air attaché in Tel Aviv

had heard a rumour that there was a plan to force an Israeli ship through the Canal to provoke a fight. “I’ll come over at four o’clock,” said Allen Dulles. “What worries me is that a spark in the Middle East now could give the Soviets a shield to do things they can’t do now – like turn the clock back in Central Europe.”

In Moscow, Soviet policy was in disarray over Hungary. The recently exiled Hungarian leaders – Gerő, Hegedüs and Piros – were not consulted. From his clinic, ex-dictator Rákosi growled to the Hungarian ambassador: “No sooner am I gone than you lose control!” Neither Molotov nor Marshal Zhukov, the Soviet defence minister, would agree with any plan to neutralise Hungary. Zhukov demanded the smashing of the “capitalist and imperialist mutiny”, and those were the orders he had given to Batov and Koniev.

While Poland and Yugoslavia had on October 28th come out against the Soviet line that this was a counter-revolution, the rest of the Soviet bloc supported the Kremlin. Initially the Warsaw Communists drew powerful comparisons between Imre Nagy and their own Gomulka. There was powerful public sympathy in Poland for the Hungarian uprising. The public responded to appeals for help; Boy Scouts organised door-to-door collections of plasma, money and medicines, and official aircraft flew the supplies to Budapest. The Polish Central Committee sent a statement – signed by Gomulka and Cyrankiewicz – to Nagy and Kádár supporting their new programme, including the withdrawal of Soviet troops. Party newspapers published strong disapproval of those “brotherly” newspapermen who referred to the uprising – as did Louis Saillant in France – as a counter-revolutionary fascist putsch, or who even called the rebels former Hitler allies, as did *l’Humanité*.²⁵ It had the makings of a major split in the Soviet bloc.

On October 29th Peking backed Zhukov’s line: the “counter-revolution” must be smashed.²⁶ Now the official Soviet line began to clear. Russian citizens had not even been informed that the Red Army units were fighting in Budapest, let alone that Nagy had urged their withdrawal. The *Pravda* propaganda line was that imperialists were at the bottom of what it called – not an “uprising”, but first a “*myatyezh*” or mutiny, and then, more nostalgically – a putsch; the radio suppressed all mention of the official outcry in Budapest at this line.²⁷

That day the Soviet presidium met. Sir William Hayter, the British ambassador, saw the black Zis limousines crowding through the Kremlin gates. When the Soviet leaders – Khrushchev, Bulganin, Molotov and Shepilov – appeared at two diplomatic functions later that afternoon they were in noticeably better spirits than earlier.²⁸ Evidently a solution had been found. At receptions at both the Turkish and Afghanistan embassies Khrushchev and Bulganin went out of their way to be seen talking to Sir William Hayter and Charles Bohlen. But it was with defence minister Marshal Zhukov, who appeared at the Turkish reception, that Bohlen had the longest talk on Hungary.

Zhukov was a stocky man with a barrel chest and a good-humoured face out of which jutted a pugnacious lower jaw. His eyes were lighter now than when his troops had goose-stepped into defeated Nazi Berlin, and his hairline was receding; but his erect posture and the barrel chest beneath his stiff-collared uniform confirmed that he was nobody's sissy.

Bohlen tackled him about Imre Nagy's announcement of yesterday evening that Soviet troops would be leaving Budapest immediately, and that negotiations for a total withdrawal from Hungary would be undertaken. Zhukov answered evasively, "I cannot reply on behalf of the Soviet government to your question." (The tight-lipped foreign minister Shepilov, who otherwise said nothing at all, later snapped: "I have said all that I have to say about that.") Zhukov pointed out ominously that Nagy's broadcast had not referred to an "immediate" withdrawal from Budapest, and that Soviet troops would remain until Nagy requested their withdrawal or until "order had been restored". He then stated bluntly: "No Soviet troops have been sent to Hungary during the past twenty-four hours, nor during the last sixty-four hours either. The number of troops already there now is sufficient for the purpose." He further claimed that Soviet troops had only opened fire after their officers were killed by the rebels, and in the last forty-eight hours there had been no firing by Soviet troops at all. Bohlen raised his eyebrows in disbelief. Anyway, said Zhukov, the Soviet troops in Budapest came under the Hungarian defence minister, not under him. He added unconvincingly, "A government has been formed which enjoys our support and the support of the Hungarian people." He was also stung to remark that contrary to foreign news reports there had been no defections by Soviet soldiers to the rebels.

Any Soviet withdrawal from Hungary would be a question for consideration by all the members of the Warsaw Pact.²⁹ Bohlen tartly pointed out that NATO contained no provision for the intervention of foreign troops in members' internal matters. This drew a declaration from Zhukov that the Warsaw Pact was to protect the socialist camp from any threat, and that internal action was "envisaged" in the pact even if not spelt out. He cited Poland as an example of Soviet restraint, saying vehemently, "There was more than ample force in East Germany, White Russia and Poland itself – they could have crushed them like flies."

Bohlen concluded that, on the evidence of Zhukov's remarks, the Soviet Union had decided to break the resistance in the capital first, and leave the mopping up in the provinces until later. "In this light," the ambassador cabled Washington, "it would appear Nagy's statement on night of 28th regarding Soviet troop withdrawal from Budapest was nothing more than [a] trick, with Soviet connivance, to cause insurgents to cease fire."

Even before this diplomatic reception in Moscow ended, at four fifty-seven p.m. Budapest radio announced dramatic news: the ÁVH security police had been abolished. The minister of the interior, Münnich, withdrew with his staff into Parliament. A platoon of policemen and students took over the building on Attila Joseph Street. They found it full of weapons and ammunition and ÁVH uniforms that had been hastily exchanged for new police uniforms. Ever since October 21st – two days *before* the uprising – ÁVH men had been carrying armfuls of files down to the basement; thousands of routine files had been systematically destroyed. The document shredders on the upper floors had churned and gnashed, spewing out their fine paper straw until the wire baskets in front of each machine were overflowing on to the floor. The more secret files had been taken down to the boiler-room in coal trolleys for destruction. But there had been no time; today the entire force had suddenly been given thirty minutes to evacuate the building without a fight.³⁰ As Münnich and his evil cronies must have foreseen, in the country's present mood the result of the disbanding of the ÁVH was bound to be a pogrom.

The real criminals had long ago donned false uniforms and escaped, leaving the small-fry for the lynching parties; often blameless recruits who had had no part in the decade of spectacular crimes of their superiors. For these men a

nightmare now began. Scattered across the capital in new police uniforms, they were marked men; they were unable to return to their homes, unable to face a mob no longer afraid of them, unable to use their florins to purchase asylum, unable even to seek the help of the Soviet troops now pulling demonstratively out of Budapest. What did the long-suffering Hungarians know about high politics or strategy? One photograph shows patriots near the Kilián Barracks taking away a grim-faced man in a snap-brim trilby and long overcoat for “questioning”. There they are, bolt action rifles at the ready, prodding the unfortunate man along ahead of them, followed by a crowd in cloth caps or berets, wheeling bicycles, and the ubiquitous woman with a string shopping bag.³¹ The mob rage was primeval, primitive and brutal. It was the closest that the uprising came to an anti-Semitic pogrom, as the largely Jewish ÁVH officials were mercilessly winkled out of the boltholes where they had fled. To more than one official spectator occurred the idea that all this was somehow being stage-managed for the Kremlin’s long-term benefit: Spencer Barnes expressed concern lest Communist propaganda make capital out of the anti-Semitic aspects of the pogrom. He told Washington of an ÁVH major whose life was saved by four rebels who told the mob that his lynching might be used to blacken their cause; the mob stripped the major naked and turned him loose instead.³²

Elsewhere there was no mercy. ÁVH captain Francis Tóth, a tousle-haired father of two toddlers, was run to earth in his home near Lenin Boulevard by a national guard squad commanded by a bespectacled electrician, Tony Mayer; Mayer had volunteered for the Waffen SS in 1944. The mob converged on Tóth and left his lifeless remains hanging from a tree in the Boulevard.³³ Another ÁVH officer was lynched nearby in Aradi Road: the ten thousand florins of paper money they found in the lieutenant’s pockets was stuffed into his gaping mouth. The mob told newcomers that he had fled to his flat and shot his wife and children because they would not let him in. A journalist saw insurgents wreck yet another ÁVH officer’s flat in the building on Marx Square that bore the big neon Schmoll toothpaste sign; then the officer was dragged out and hanged from a tree on Lipót Boulevard. An ÁVH colonel was lynched on Kálmán Mikszáth Square, and the thirty thousand florins in banknotes found in his pockets were nailed to his chest.³⁴ Journalist Stephen Vajda saw a young man in the typical brown tracksuit of the ÁVH sports club running for his life on the Boul-

evard; they caught up with him at the Octogon, battered him unconscious and hanged him from a tree.³⁵

Yugoslav newspaperman Vlado Teslic saw Soviet tanks rattle past just as a lynching was taking place. The Russian tank commander stopped for a moment, not knowing quite why the people had gathered. The crowd thinned out, but the victim's relief was short-lived because when the Russian saw what was in progress he ordered his tanks to drive on again without interfering.³⁶

The outrages committed now by the insurgents shocked civilised world opinion; and hard-line Communist newspapers made much capital out of the reports and photographs that emerged from Hungary during these days.

That afternoon, Party branch secretary Imre Mező called a meeting at the Republic Square building. He believed that only one man could save the Party: its new general secretary, János Kádár. The meeting sent a telephone message to Kádár and he came over from Academy Street that evening. What he and Mező discussed in private we do not know, but Mező afterwards reported to his staff: "The Central Committee is paralysed. We know what we want, but we are alone." Kádár's only request of them was to make a careful record of every "counter-revolutionary" act and atrocity. Insulated from outside opinion, Mező's colleagues decided that fifteen of their number should go out to the main factories over the next two days and address workers' meetings. Mező himself was uneasy: something seemed to be brewing against Republic Square. Three times a light plane was spotted circling low overhead, evidently reconnoitring the area. But for whom, and why?

It was when an ÁVH lieutenant, Stephen Tompa, telephoned his superiors about the dwindling food stocks in the building that headquarters passed on to him the startling news that the ÁVH no longer exists – the Imre Nagy government has disbanded it. Morale in the building slumped. Tompa tried to reassure his men that this concerned only battlefield ÁVH units, and that of course there was greater need for security forces than ever before. But his deputy, Lieutenant Várkonyi, passed the word round his troops stationed inside the building: "The government is no longer behind you." And Imre Mező dolefully informed them: "There are no legal grounds for any of you to stay." Their predicament did not sink in – or perhaps it did, because none of the ÁVH men elected to leave the

building. An hour or two later, fifty artillery cadets drove up to help defend the Party building; but almost immediately they were ordered to leave. The three Soviet armoured cars guarding the building were also removed in line with Nagy's requirement that all Soviet troops should pull out of the city: Captain V. N. Kutikov, their commander, formally took leave of Mező around four p.m.; one armoured car made it safely back to its depot, the other two were ambushed in Rákóczi Street and Baross Square and their crews liquidated.

A sense of total isolation gripped Mező and his staff. The Party had lost its newspaper and radio monopoly: they could no longer dictate public opinion, and their private army was reduced to this handful of bewildered and hungry young men in ill-fitting new police uniforms. An appeal for help went to Ladislav Földes, chief of the partisan association; Földes promised to send round 120 former partisans that evening. Blankets were brought up from the air raid shelter and laid out on the floor of the small council chamber for them. The ÁVH lieutenants were still confident that they could defend the building, but the Party officials were less sure. Stephen Kertész, Imre Mező and Dezső Nemes showed Várkonyi over the whole building from its attic to its cellar, so that an escape route could be planned. Eventually they picked a route leading from the private cinema's fire-exit to the backyard of the apartment buildings fronting on to Rákóczi Street; a ladder was found and propped against the dividing wall.

Outside the American legation on Liberty Square that day, a crowd tackled the Soviet liberation monument. A fireman climbed a turn-table ladder and noosed a rope round the red star, and the fire engine winched down the obelisk; it fell with a satisfying crunch, while an American diplomat filmed the scene. The star was cut up with acetylene burners and some workers who had just driven lorry-loads of food to the capital from Szolnok came over and formally handed a chunk of the aluminium star to the American legation as a token of unity.

So far the American contribution to the insurrection had been minimal. Radio Free Europe had, however, become its unseen controlling voice. Every day the Munich headquarters discussed tactics by teleprinter with its masterminds in the skyscraper building at 2 Park Avenue in Manhattan. From Munich, RFE could re-transmit the weak messages picked up from the whispering rebel transmitters; more important, its experts could streamline rebel policy, after checking

back through 2 Park Avenue with the CIA for approval. On this date RFE directed its staff to publicise those rebel demands “with which RFE wholly identifies itself”: these included Soviet withdrawal from Hungary; dissolution of the ÁVH; guarantees that no freedom fighter would be harmed; “formation of a new temporary government whose majority is to be drawn from patriot groups and which does not include any *compromised* Communists”; and eventually free secret elections. These RFE guidelines were followed explicitly by the rebels in their demands. On October 29th, a telex went to Park Avenue: “[We] *continue utilise constantly rising demands of insurgent radios, correlate them, spread them to country at large.*”³⁷

The rebel demands were indeed “constantly rising”. Nagy’s cease fire no longer satisfied Radio Free Europe. As soon as the Nagy government proclaimed it, RFE urged the rebels to ignore it. Colonel Bell – cover name for a Hungarian émigré – broadcast this day to the rebels: “Imre Nagy and his associates wish to repeat the story of the Trojan horse in a tricky, modern form. The ceasefire is a Trojan horse needed by the Budapest regime to enable it to maintain power as long as possible.” And that same day RFE listeners could hear “Janus” addressing them in colloquial Hungarian, subtly reminding them that more than once in Europe’s history the victors had lost at the conference table what they had won on the battlefields: “Now is the time to concentrate every effort on ensuring that the victory in war continues as a victory in peace as well. The sacrifice of so many of our brave young men in rising against Soviet tyranny must not have been in vain. A political victory must follow an armed victory!”

As he was speaking, a figure from Hungary’s post-war past stepped out of an aeroplane at Vienna’s Schwechat airport. The exited prime minister Francis Nagy had returned from the United States, hoping to put out feelers to Smallholder colleagues in Budapest. Austrian officials, determined to keep neutral, put him on the next plane out of the country.³⁸

In Budapest, there was mob rule now that the ÁVH had disappeared. It was as though the last edition of *Free People* had never been printed: even though it now sported the old Kossuth shield – officially readopted as the national emblem – the public mistrusted it: it was still the organ of the Central Committee. A Soviet armoured car had to distribute it. The passersby pounced on the bun-

dles and tore them to shreds. "Don't read this garbage," yelled a young man. "Whatever the Communists print only serves the Russians!" "That's why their soldiers have to distribute it," chimed in another.³⁹

A handful of elderly veterans, trembling creatures in ÁVH boots and the green denims of the partisan association, arrived to defend the *Free People* building. When the remaining journalists advised them to leave, the ex-partisans pleaded: "The Party sent us here, we can't just leave!"

A lorry-load of machine guns materialised in nearby Louisa Blaha Square and an armed mob surged into the building. The partisans pulled off their boots and denims, tore up their partisan certificates and melted into the crowd swirling along the corridors. The remaining funkies made their excuses – "Comrades, we must telephone Party headquarters" – and disappeared. Two burly printworkers wielding spanners faced the mob.

Small arms fire crackled, but one of the *Free People* staff, a twenty-seven-year-old Jewish ex-factory worker,⁴⁰ stood on the stairs and shouted in a clear, steady voice: "We here are journalists who believe in different principles. We have been lying for ten years. I lied, my colleague here lied!" – he pointed a spanner at a less than grateful Mr. Szatmáry – "but we won't lie any more."

There were growls of, "Shoot them, we won't be fooled again." But others were yelling, "Write what the people want!"

There was a murmured debate, then the guns were lowered and the ring-leader – who may have been Dudás himself – stepped forward and emotionally kissed him on both cheeks. "All right," he beamed. "You prepare a newspaper. But it had better be good."

Joseph Dudás, the senior rebel commander in Buda, had taken over the building. He had announced the formation of his Hungarian national revolutionary committee, with himself as chairman, on the previous day. He had issued a twenty-five point challenge to the Nagy regime and announced that he and his men refused to recognise the regime. Among his demands was Hungary's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact.⁴¹ But Dudás realised that he would need a newspaper. So he had marched his ragtag army across the Danube and occupied the *Free People* building.⁴² With his wife as secretary, he began to produce his own newspaper, *Hungarian Independence (Magyar Függetlenség)*. Some of the

workless journalists he found in the building, like those of the Party's *Evening Budapest* – silenced by their own printworkers who had refused to publish Peter Kós's sanctimonious protests to the Security Council⁴³ – helped Dudás. The building's structure had suffered badly. The windows were smashed, the furniture and walls were cheeseholed with bullet marks. But the telephones worked, and so did the rotary presses. The Party itself might be on the point of collapse but it had one vital system that still worked: the *kisbúgó*, the secret telephone system. Dudás hooked into this red K-line system, listened to Party conversations, issued orders on it to his own distant outposts, and eavesdropped on the Party's intelligence reports from the frontiers about Soviet troop movements.⁴⁴

He installed himself on the first floor and brought his best lieutenants over from Széna Square. Here, behind a cordon of captured tanks, machine-gun outposts and rebel guards, this remarkable man drilled his recruits and began creating everything – his party, his army, his newspaper, his propaganda machine – in mid-revolution. Dr. Szappanos, engaged in running food supplies for him from the frontier, said: "I do not know exactly who were the people around him. I remember that George Egri was among them, as well as George Faludy . . . The chaos was too great to know who all the people were."

Names, rates of pay, finance – these details would take care of themselves until later. His followers were a heady mixture of students and tram conductors, of professors and prostitutes; they were constantly practising with firearms, so it was sometimes dangerous to step out into the corridors.⁴⁵ At the centre of this maelstrom, despising the jamboree of microphones and cameras around Colonel Maléter at the Kilián Barracks, sat the hard-working, shirtsleeved, haggard, frenetic rebel leader, Joseph Dudás, swigging ceaselessly from a bottle of lemon tea, reaching across the machine gun tossed on to his desk for the K-line telephone, and plotting his bloody revenge for Recsk.

One eye-witness, lorry driver Zoltán Benkó, related: "He was so extreme in his expectations and in his activities that he had to be accompanied by someone at all times to calm him down."⁴⁶ A Polish woman journalist described his group as decent, brave and sincere; several even showed her their Party cards. A journalist on the Polish *Nowa Kultura* agreed that Dudás was unhealthily ambitious but he had assured them: "We shall not tolerate right-wing groupings or fascists."⁴⁷ Of his national revolutionary committee, one man said: "It was a state

within a state, I saw it on my trips across the country. Wherever I went there was a committee affiliated to the Dudás revolutionary council.”⁴⁸

A typical Dudás follower is a burly athletics instructor of thirty-five, five foot five and muscle-bound.⁴⁹ His father is a master cabinetmaker; his elder brother is a former army officer forced to leave University when the Reds took over. This man has lived in this city for sixteen years of endless economic depression. A once-rich agricultural country has never stopped starving: in 1954, he recalls, you could not even buy meat. He will explain his feelings like this: “It felt like being shipwrecked on an island, and there was no way out.” Now the uprising has come to rescue him and ten million other shipwrecked souls. When he hears his students talking fervently about a man called Dudás he decides to join his organisation and becomes an executive on his newspaper. He works frantically, day and night, visiting, communicating, travelling across the city, writing, publishing and dodging the police. Only occasionally does he get home to see his young wife Elizabeth. His elder brother is also helping Dudás, managing *Independence*'s distribution all over the country. Many of the hundreds of Dudás's men in the newspaper building are either underworld figures or intellectuals. He will shrug muscular shoulders and say dismissively: “Everybody has a dark corner in his conscience.” In his own memory he can still see the squad of frantic Russian soldiers trying to surrender to him during the Second World War when he had orders to take no prisoners.

The first edition of his *Hungarian Independence* was prepared late on October 29th.⁵⁰ Its editor, a former Party journalist, had got the job from Dudás personally.⁵¹ He later explained: “I had met him in prison – he was very happy to find somebody he could entrust his newspaper to. But one of Dudás's faults was that he wanted to do everything himself. He wrote one article saying what the army should do, another on how Budapest should be sent food . . .” Dudás scarcely needed reporters; the news stories, short stories and articles flooded into the building. One woman brought pathetic love poems. A man came and said, “For twenty years I used to be a parliamentary reporter. Can you give me something to do?” The editor sent him to Parliament. “Bring back a story!” True, so long as other newspapers were being printed in the same building, Dudás sometimes filled gaps in his own pages by sending a man down the corridor with a tommy gun to force the rivals to write something for him. Dudás

was even rumoured to have robbed the national bank. If he had, then his journalists noticed none of this. He advanced only 500 florins to each of his staff, paid in used coinage evidently raised by the newspaper sales.⁵²

His interim objective was a sound one – to get all the revolutionary forces to present a united front to Imre Nagy. This project was taken very seriously by the Revolutionary Committee of Intellectuals, and they visited him on October 29th. They found him at his desk, with rings round sleepless eyes. His voice was hoarse from telephoning. Throughout the conference, compositors and journalists swept in and out, seeking directives for new pamphlets, and approval for the proofs of the first edition of *Independence*. Armed rebels also stomped in without ceremony, one reporting, “Just captured a tank. Where shall we use it?” To the Intellectuals, Dudás stoutly defended the robust line taken by his pamphlets: “You’ve got to listen to what the street is shouting for!” he said. “You’ve got to stay in touch with the masses. Lose that contact, and you’re lost! The moment that Nagy promises us what we’re asking, I’ll throw my entire authority behind him in restoring law and order.” The Intellectuals decided to arrange for Dudás to see Imre Nagy.⁵³

The more dogmatic Communist writers, like Gimes and Molnár, had declined to help Dudás. They went down the road to the New York Palace. But on the presses here Julius Obersovszky and the ailing playwright Joseph Gáli were preparing their openly non-Communist newspaper *Truth (Igazság)*; it would also appear next day. Gimes disliked its political attitude, and decided to found yet another new newspaper, *Hungarian Freedom (Magyar Szabadság)*, in the former *Free People* building.⁵⁴ About fifty journalists said they were willing to join. Dudás had taken over several floors but he was wise enough to allow the Communist journalists a corner in which to work, and they reached a gentleman’s agreement not to hurt each other.

The Nagy regime was dismayed at the sudden loss of its press monopoly. It reacted in the usual Communist way. That night Münnich ordered police chief Kopácsi to go to the building, arrest Gimes, and confiscate the newspaper. Kopácsi took twenty-five policemen, but Dudás had posted armed guards on the streets and they turned him back: “We don’t recognise Imre Nagy or his government,” said one. “We don’t want Communists in charge of our country, or our army, or our ministries. And we don’t want anybody of Imre Nagy’s

snooping round here by night either! Tell Nagy not to send any more patrols, but to negotiate with Dudás in person.”⁵⁵

Viewed from Washington, the Suez situation suddenly looked bad. At a quarter past five that evening, John Foster Dulles telephoned one of his press advisers and said, “It looks so bad that we may have to stop our aid to Israel.” Israel did not think the United States would dare to do that. An hour later President Eisenhower called a secret conference with the Dulles brothers.

In Budapest that night Jeffrey Blyth checked into the Danube Hotel and found a telegram from his newspaper, the *Daily Mail*, in London: “GPO now again accepting cables pro Hungary. Therefore hoping this may catch you. Thanks your valiant efforts. Good hunting and safe journeys.”

Noel Barber’s bullet-riddled Borgward was still outside the British legation. Blyth emptied its jerricans into his Ford Taunus. Then he teamed up with Peter Stephens of the *Daily Mirror* for a drive round the capital.

Many people stopped them and shouted: “When are the British going to come in?” But the British were about to become engaged elsewhere.

37 Colonel Kopácsi Shrugs Again

NOW SOVIET AND Hungarian interests began sharply to diverge. The Kremlin needed to destabilise the situation in Budapest, to prove that Imre Nagy could not keep control and to justify their return; but the insurgents needed to restore order to consolidate their position. Late on October 29th, General Béla Király and police chief Alexander Kopácsi worked on their plan for a committee to oversee the ministries of defence and the interior and set up what amounted to a revolutionary army, a national guard. Somebody telephoned Imre Nagy, and he agreed to see them. He would explain at his trial that Zoltán Tildy had recommended Király. “Tildy described him as an excellent organiser and said that it would be hard for us to find a more suitable man for the post at that time.”¹

In three trucks packed with armed men, Király rode off to Parliament to see Nagy with the draft document; he took with him two newspapermen, a young army officer, a worker and two students. He himself was wearing an old army greatcoat dyed dark blue. It was around midnight as they were shown in to a well-furnished room lined with rows of secretaries’ desks. Nagy admitted to Király: “I’m having trouble placing your name.”

Király was not flattered. He told Nagy just who he was, and showed him the written organisation plan. Nagy slumped into an armchair to read it while Tildy perched on an armrest. The premier altered a word here and there, then scrawled his signature next to Király’s.

When Király got back to police headquarters from Parliament, he found men waiting for him from the army’s revolutionary committee. “We are having a

meeting in the defence ministry,” they invited. Two car-loads of young sub-machine gunners escorted him right into the ministry’s main hall. Russian tanks ringed the defence ministry still, and the participants were frisked for arms before going in. The meeting had begun at two A.M. Lieutenant-General Julius Váradi, commander of the armoured troops, first outlined the ministry’s directives, and there was little in them that the visitors found to their liking. Then the rebel army officers set out their demands. As Király was brought in there were protests at the arrival of this “outlaw”. Lieutenant-General Váradi protested: “At his trial in 1951, Király confessed to being a conspirator and a saboteur. I was one of the judges who sentenced him!” A student brandished his gun and ended the uproar: “General Király, were you a spy or were you not?” Király emphatically denied it, and cheers resounded. The meeting confirmed him as their leader and commander of the Budapest forces.

While this meeting was going on between the representatives of soldiers’ councils and active rebel officers, upstairs in the same building other officers loyal to the Nagy regime had been busy electing a revolutionary military council. Those elected were largely the generals of the old, discredited system, who had failed to represent their country’s national interests before, and would shortly fail to do so again.

Budapest woke that morning, October 30th, 1956, to the sound of silence: no guns fired, no trams whirred, no factories stirred – a few cars flying the tricolour picked their way round the wreckage. Soviet armoured vehicles straggled past the dregs of the force which since dawn had been evacuating from the VIIIth District, where Hungarian units were due to replace them. In the turmoil of the street, people doffed their hats and stepped round a handcart on which a plain wooden coffin was being pushed by a weeping elderly couple, who had found the body of their only son who had died fighting in this district.

Unfamiliar newspapers were being snapped up at the news-stands. They were lively two- or four-page tabloids. Their articles were aggressive: they held a stick over the dull, vacillating and pompous Imre Nagy, and goaded him further and further to the right. Along the blitzed length of Rákóczi Street slogans had been smeared on walls and windows: “*Ruszkik haza*” – Russians go home.

The mistrust of Radio Budapest lingered on. Leaflets were being distributed, some typed, some scrawled in chalk or ink, some printed on fine-quality

ransacked paper. At the University headquarters of the revolutionary students and intellectuals, armed youngsters scurried about. The print room clattered with duplicators rolling off the latest challenge to the regime: “LET IMRE NAGY SAY WHO CALLED IN THE SOVIET TROOPS!”² A wallposter declaimed, “Hungarian patriots! The government has betrayed us again, because Soviet troops are withdrawing only from Budapest. We no longer trust the government of Imre Nagy.” There was a distinct tilt to the right in the graffiti: “Strike?” “No to Communism.” “Free Mindszenty!” “Free elections.” And, not inaccurately, “No to the workers’ councils – the Communists have their finger in the pie!”

At eight A.M. the fighting finally stopped at the Kilián Barracks too. John MacCormac drove over an hour later to see the battlefield. The wreckage was like nothing he had seen as a Second World War correspondent. A crowd of stubble-faced men and youngsters mobbed his car. They were grey-faced with fatigue. MacCormac asked them: “What time did you surrender?” One of them bridled in careful German: “We never surrendered. The Russians went away, and we came out.” Colonel Maléter was besieged, cheering crowds hoisted him on to their shoulders and begged him to go to Parliament and become defence minister. Maléter replied: “I am a soldier, not a politician.” Somebody shouted, “Then go to Parliament and say that we are not putting down our arms when they ask, because our demands have not been met!”

They were clutching tommy guns, pistols, grenades – a boy of ten was clinging on to a rifle taller than himself. In a side street MacCormac looked briefly into a surgical clinic that had received forty dead, five hundred injured and a hail of gunfire in its operating theatre during the unsuccessful Russian attempts to capture the barracks. The rebels had been supposed to lay down arms at nine A.M. But few had complied. In Szilárd Rökk Street over in the VIIIth District a crowd of teenagers stealthily surrounded a tank, gunned down the crew through the open turret and stole the slain driver’s machine gun.

Photographer John Sadovy had risen early this morning, October 30th, and moved into the VIIIth District just after the Russians pulled out. Along the Boulevard and at the Kilián Barracks cordons held back huge crowds gathering to see the burnt-out Russian armoured vehicles; they seemed amazed by their own triumph. Clean-up teams sprinkled lime over the corpses of the young Russian officers lying in the statuesque poses in which death had left them. Sadovy

snapped a small boy with a gun in front of his home; he saw a man going round painting fresh Kossuth emblems on captured equipment, and pedestrians peering under the coats covering dead Russians – partly hunting their own dead, partly out of a savage desire to see the slain enemy. He found one woman in a black jacket weeping near the body of her coalminer husband, and asked his name for the photo caption: Joseph Kiss. Then he strolled over to the Party's city headquarters, an ugly square building facing on to Republic Square. The plane trees were already littering their autumn foliage across the lawns. The people here trod carefully, because for several days lorries had been seen bringing men, police uniforms and automatic weapons to the building. There was a rumour that they had captured many armed rebels; certainly they had delivered others to the police station in Mosonyi Street without realising that it was in rebel hands.

Inside the building the leading Party official, now that the unpopular Stephen Kovács had been sacked, was Imre Mező. He was uneasy. Around nine A.M. he had noticed knots of armed people forming on the far side of the square. People came over asked the policeman on duty if ÁVOs were inside. Some bolder men forced their way in, tackled some ÁVH soldiers and demanded to see their identity cards. There was a skirmish, and their leader was detained and brought up to see him; Mező sent for the ÁVH commander.

The savage battle of Republic Square was about to begin. As Lieutenant Várkonyi stepped into Mező's office, gunfire ripped across the square. Glass flew; within minutes every window was smashed. The screaming womenfolk were sent down to the boiler house while the guards returned the fire. The army officers who had come to confer about raising a militia grabbed rifles and joined the defence; they had little choice. The gunmen were sniping upwards at the building from behind trees and from a depression in the middle of the gardens, so the bullets were embedding themselves in the ceilings. But soon the rebels had taken up positions in the apartment buildings round the square and on the rooftops, and bullets were hitting walls and splintering furniture.

Mező had been under fire before. He crawled from room to room, exhorting the riflemen not to let the rabble get near enough to storm the building. "It will

only last an hour or two,” he insisted. “The Central Committee will never tolerate such an attack!”

In this he was mistaken, however. Whether through some high and evil design – a deliberate plan to create martyrs for the greater good of the Communist cause – or whether through endemic Marxist inefficiency, callousness and bungling, no real help would come for Mező and his men.

Meanwhile General Király set about getting a revolutionary national guard into shape, as Nagy had commanded. Weapons would have to be distributed, and about 26,000 former rebels enrolled. He wanted his own general staff too. At about midday he visited the defence minister and demanded the reinstatement of forty of his pals who had been cashiered by Rákosi. General Janza agreed, and assigned to him one General Imre Kovács as chief of staff; Király did not know him personally but he seemed loyal enough to the revolution.³ The first of a stream of former officers called on him at police headquarters, many still wearing prison garb. Király issued them with police uniforms as make-do arms were handed out liberally. Kopácsi would later testify, “Somebody only had to come forward in the name of some rebel group to be issued with fifty guns.” He or Király countersigned for some fifteen to twenty thousand guns that were handed out over the next four days. Against Király’s signature the Timót Street depot alone handed out 2,206 rifles, three machine guns, two heavy machine guns, one hundred hand-grenades, and 1,339 automatic pistols.⁴

Even on this date, October 30th, Moscow was still grappling with the tactical problem of how to crush the uprising. In a speech to Budapest factory workers three years later, the Soviet leader Nikita S. Khrushchev would admit, “During those critical days for the Hungarian working class, we Soviet Communists debated how to help them . . . One or two of our comrades questioned whether our Hungarian comrades would take it in the right spirit if we hastened to their aid.”⁵

First the fighting had to be stopped. All else could follow. So the presidium sent Mikoyan and Suslov back to Budapest with an official Declaration on Relations between Socialist States, a document so revisionist in tone as to be inexplicable if not part of a cynical plan devised to dupe an escaping nation. Broadcast by Moscow radio, and printed in full by *Pravda* next day, it was a last

attempt to cool inflamed tempers, to win time before there was a general uprising. It declaimed the Kremlin's willingness to discuss with all the satellites the question of the Soviet troops stationed on their territory; it admitted "downright mistakes" in relations with them and "violations and mistakes which infringe the principles of equality between sovereign states". It reassured that the Kremlin was prepared to discuss with Hungary and the other Warsaw Pact signatories the presence of Soviet troops in Hungary and had meanwhile ordered these troops to withdraw from Budapest as soon as Nagy's government so desired. (Of course, Nagy *had* already made such a request. Sinisterly, the Soviet press made no mention of Nagy doing this.)

Almost simultaneously at a Kremlin reception that evening the American ambassador in Moscow, Charles Bohlen, tackled Marshal Zhukov about his assertion of the previous day that there had been no firing by Soviet troops in Budapest for the last forty-eight hours. "Every Western broadcast reports Soviet artillery is firing in the city." Zhukov denied it, but now stated flatly: "The order has already been given for Soviet forces to leave the city." This was a dramatic reversal of his statement the day before. He added a gesture of impatience, as if to say, "Let them deal with it themselves."

Bohlen wanted to ask him whether this meant that Budapest was sufficiently calm for Nagy to take over, or whether the Soviet forces were withdrawing on Nagy's request despite the situation there; but Molotov sidled over and started asking questions about the Middle East.⁶ On reflection, the ambassador gained the distinct impression from Zhukov that the Soviet military had been in favour of tough action in both Poland and Hungary. Zhukov had an air of "frustration". Bohlen reported to Washington at ten p.m.: "Soviet leaders including Khrushchev, Bulganin, Molotov, Kaganovich, were noticeably more glum than yesterday and it is possible Zhukov's statement represented an overnight shift in position based on some events in Hungary unknown to us here."

More than one observer familiar with Soviet methods could see that the Kremlin was giving Imre Nagy enough rope to hang himself. Marshal Tito sent a secret message begging him to drop his kid-glove tactics while there was still time and to act harshly against both the Stalinists *and* the mob on the street. He coupled this with a more conventional public appeal through diplomatic channels to the Hungarian Party to stop the bloodshed. The secret message was sent

verbally to Nagy through Géza Losonczy, who was invited to see the Yugoslav ambassador for the purpose.⁷ Charles Bohlen also warned Washington that events outside the Soviet borders were developing fast and that Soviet policy might yet shift despite the startling Kremlin Declaration. “For example if [the] Nagy government has completely lost control and what is termed in [the] Declaration ‘black reaction and counter-revolution’ has taken over, their position on troop withdrawal may well be reversed.”⁸

Reporting from Budapest that afternoon Spencer Barnes called the situation a “highly unstable stalemate which could well result in application [of] iron fist by Soviets”. The Russians were, he said, unlikely to accept free elections, but they might withdraw their troops if they could be satisfied that any new regime was not anti-Soviet. But who could be the regime’s leader? Imre Nagy’s prestige seemed to be diminishing daily. Barnes urged a decision to aid the rebels to begin a long-haul fight against the Russians.⁹

As bullets whipped across Republic Square at the Party headquarters, Imre Mező frantically telephoned for aid. In his glass-strewn, second-floor office there was little anybody could do but look into each other’s taut, white faces. Surely, to have remained in occupation of this building despite the public dissolution of the ÁVH and the growing menace from the street, made sense only if the regime was willing to commit massive forces for its defence? This was Mező’s only hope.

The city’s radio breathed no word of the vicious battle but news spread across the city, and reporters hurried over – and photographers too. Jean-Pierre Pedrazzini of *Paris-Match* was among the first to reach the square. The rattle of machine-gun fire did not alarm him; this was strictly a fight between Hungarians. He clamped a rifle-butt grip on to his telephoto camera, aimed it at armed rebels sheltering in a doorway, and told his colleague Paul Mathias, “You speak Hungarian, go over and ask that one why he’s fighting!” He pointed to a young man in a white scarf, next to a teenage girl. Mathias ducked across the street. The man lowered his rifle, and said: “Let me tell you something. I work in a truck factory. My father told me that this factory used to belong to a capitalist who pocketed all the profits. But at least the trucks stayed in Hungary! Now,” he continued, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, “I’ll tell you what

happens to them: we make them, we load them into railway wagons and off they go to Russia!”

A captured T-34 tank had arrived on the square, machine guns flailing wildly. As *Life* photographer John Sadovy triggered his camera, rebels ran to take cover behind it, and it lurched off towards the Party building. Bullets spattered it. One slashed Sadovy but he continued filming. As newsreel cameras pointed at them, armed men crouched and slotted bullets into machine-gun belts, while others dragged casualties out of the line of fire; a nurse ducked behind a tree for shelter. A vehicle was on fire on the far side. A lorry arrived with shells and these were handed up into the tank. A white-coated Red Cross man was hit; Sadovy pictured him as he writhed on the ground. People shouted to the Party building, “Don’t shoot, we’re going to send ambulance men!” But this was not a war in which international rules applied – this was a civil war, and more shots rang out. A running ambulance man in a white coat was blown over by a direct hit. Four people darted out carrying a stretcher to bring him in.

Smoke drifted across the square. Bullets were coming from every angle. *Life*’s correspondent Tim Foote was shot in the left hand. Young Pedrazzini stepped out into the road to get a better camera angle on the rebel tank when a burst of machine-gun fire from it ripped across his chest, mortally wounding him. He spun to the ground, amidst the splinters of a tree branch that had been hit as well. As he coiled in agony, he held out his camera to a colleague and coughed, “Here, take a picture for me.”¹⁰

Inside the building, a sense of isolation gripped the defenders. Towards eleven o’clock ÁVH Lieutenant Várkonyi telephoned the Szamuely ÁVH barracks for help. The duty officer there refused and there were angry words between them. Mező, Colonel Asztalos and Mrs. Joseph Csikesz, an official, frantically dialled every agency they knew for help. The firing from Kenyérmező Street was growing heavy. An expert sharpshooter dashed from room to room, trying to pick off the snipers, and several heaps huddled beneath the trees showed that the rebels out there were taking casualties too. But the firing was coming at the building from many angles and, through the dust and smoke in the front rooms, Mező could hear screaming and groans from the injured. They were carried down to the boiler room to have their wounds dressed.

Police chief Alexander Kopácsi, who owed his rank and position to the Party, did nothing to help his stricken comrades. He was on the rebel side now. Yugoslav newspaperman Vlado Teslic happened to be there just as the police chief's phone rang with the news of the rebel attack. Kopácsi made his by now familiar gesture of helplessness. "The colonel shrugged his shoulders with resignation," Teslic would cable to *Borba* in Belgrade.

When rumour of the battle reached rebel leader Joseph Dudás around eleven A.M. he was down in the linotype room, supervising the next edition of his newspaper. He put through a call to Nagy at Parliament, and snapped at the prime minister: "I have just been informed that innocent passersby are being sniped at from the Party building on Republic Square. So I have instructed freedom fighters to clear out this centre."¹¹ He sent about thirty armed men to the square, and "Uncle Szabó" sent a contingent from Széna Square.

Around noon Imre Mező heard the T-34's gun start firing. The building shook under each impact as the tank got the range. An interior wall collapsed and buried two soldiers alive. A Russian plane circled briefly overhead, then left – satisfied. An armed gang approached across the rooftops from Rákóczi Street. They were driven off after a fifteen-minute gun battle, but ammunition was running low and a woman Party official had to crawl around the corridors looking for unused bullets. Lieutenant Várkonyi tried to stir hopes of reinforcement, and spirits rose: but a telephone call to the defence ministry brought the laconic reply, "The plane can't see any mob in Republic Square. The attacking forces can't be big enough to warrant our assistance."

Elsewhere in Hungary it is the same. Untrammelled now by security police, the revolutionary hordes dominate the streets. The more fortunate funkies are merely ejected from office; but some are beaten, others are lynched, one is drowned like a medieval witch. On this day, October 30th, the Communist old-timer Zoltán Szántó will confess to a journalist in Parliament: "Believe me, we are no sadists. But we cannot manage to feel sorry for those Hungarians . . . Crimes have been committed against the people. The Communists have heaped guilt upon themselves. The people are right. We must finally go along with the people. It is already very late as far as the Party is concerned." What Szántó did

not realise was that this short-sighted and blood-thirsty revenge would help nobody in the long run but their powerful oppressors, the Soviet Union.

While his old friend Imre Mező is fighting for his life, prime minister Nagy is imperceptibly putting the Communist Party behind him. Looking out over Parliament Square, he tells a reporter, "I am a Communist, I always have been a Communist and I shall die a Communist. In these streets dies Communism, because it has become imperialism."¹² At Academy Street Nagy has left a party that exists only in name; its 800,000 members have deserted it. He has moved to the prime minister's suite in this grimy Parliament building and surrounded himself with tanks, troops and men whom he can trust. Journalist and ex-partisan George Fazekas, who has spent days at Kopácsi's headquarters and slept on a chair, is now appointed by Nagy to liaise with the police and the army. Kopácsi's neighbour, the former police colonel, Joseph Szilágyi, is installed with Otto Kölkes in the anteroom as private secretary. These three men will work in shifts.

The main entrance doors are locked, the hallways, burnished with purple and gold, are darkened, and the dimly-glowing chandeliers seem to cast more shadows than light. Members of the new government cluster inside the large smoke-filled chambers while journalists come and go. Workers' delegates clutch "demands" scribbled on notepads and soft-stubby students stand sheepishly around. Telephones ring and there are men with tired eyes in every cranny; there is an improvised air about it all. A Polish correspondent comes in. Géza Losonczy – newly promoted to minister of state – shows him round, apologising that he does not yet have an office or secretary. He talks about the difficulties Nagy is experiencing in broadening the government. "It is still going on," he says. "But the Social Democrats are proving obstinate. They prefer to wait and see."¹³

Mrs. Joseph Balogh, one of Imre Nagy's secretaries, answers the telephone and hurries in to the Cabinet meeting to tell him about Republic Square. Once before she has given him the Party's reports on rebel atrocities but he has tossed them aside: "They're exaggerating," he now says. She locks them away in her safe, but she is jumpy and afraid that the frenzied mob may march next on this building and lynch the lot of them; Nagy snaps: "Stop panicking!" He tries to telephone the defence ministry and the police, but for some reason he cannot get through.¹⁴

For the Party leaders trapped in the building on Republic Square, life was drawing to its close. The mob was now within throwing distance. Petrol bombs had set several rooms on fire; the filing section was a mass of flames. Attempts to douse the flames were thwarted by sniping coming from the Slovak students' hostel on the corner. Some of his staff suggested surrender, but Imre Mező shook his head. He telephoned prime minister Nagy in person. A voice said: "He is in a meeting."

The defence ministry had sent tanks to the square; the Thirty-third Tank Regiment commander, Colonel Ede Virágh, handpicked the crews and sketched the location of the building they were to relieve. But he chose not to accompany the little force in person. As they arrived the people in the square shouted to the tankers, "The ÁVH opened fire on our injured!" In one tank, the front gunner promptly emptied his machine gun at the Party building. This led to an angry argument inside the tank; his commander sensed that no good could come out of shooting up the Party headquarters. This tank broke away and was later seen lumbering like a rogue elephant up and down Rákóczi Street. The other three remained, and began systematically slamming shells into the already smoking Party building until a ragged hole yawned across its façade. Dezső Nemes and a handful of other funkies continued to return the fire, with wet cloths wrapped round their mouths against the fumes and flying dust.

The clock had moved on to one thirty. The soldiers in the room over the entrance were bearing the brunt of the shelling and were dead, deafened or badly injured. Great slabs of the building were crashing around Imre Mező's ears as he dialled the defence ministry yet again. He got the engaged signal. Mező turned to Colonel Asztalos and asked him to keep trying, while he himself tried to dial the prime minister. Imre Nagy was still at that meeting. When Mező asked Nagy's secretary at least to carry a message in to him, she replied: "I passed him a note about all this some while back and he railed at me for disturbing him with unfounded rumours." Mező slammed the phone down.

A smokescreen drifted across the square from blazing vehicles. Through it the gunfighters were dodging from tree to tree, scrambling closer and closer to the main entrance, clutching machine guns, rifles, bottles, antiquated hunting pieces. By two p.m. they had penetrated into the next-door DISz youth building.

ÁVH Lieutenant Tompa and his eight men held them at bay. It was now impossible to reach the basement as the staircase was exposed to gunfire. Fires were crackling in several rooms, flames were fingering through the building. Choking in the smoke, Mező telephoned the ministry once more. They replied coolly: "We can't help."

It was all up. The army and ÁVH officers and the Party officials gathered round. Mező suggested that they ask the rebels at least to allow the women and children out. Colonel Asztalos and Colonel Papp buttoned up their army uniforms and straightened up. János Asztalos was a dark-haired man with a high forehead and four children waiting for him at home; born thirty-eight years before to a cobbler in Slovakia, he had been active in the Party since his youth, and had joined the army in 1948, the year it turned Red. Colonel Joseph Papp was Budapest born and bred; pushing forty now but baby-faced, he had worked as a fitter's apprentice, and had joined the artillery in 1950. He too wondered if he would see his two boys again. Still, they urged Mező not to venture outside himself: "Your face is too well known."

Mező insisted, so the two colonels elected to go out with him. Asztalos was optimistic: "If they see an officer in uniform with you it is bound to impress them."

A white tablecloth was brought up from the canteen and knotted to a slat of wood. Asztalos ordered Várkonyi: "Shut the door the moment we are outside, and don't shoot if we come back with armed counter-revolutionaries."

Mező thrust the white flag through the door first, then stepped outside with the two army colonels. He could hear shouts: "Don't shoot. They're surrendering!"

Mező walked out on to the pavement and the other two formed up close behind him.

"Don't shoot," he shouted.

Czech-born photographer John Sadovy, covering the battle for *Life* magazine, had unslung his cameras and taken five pictures as the first rebel squads dashed to the main door, holding a national flag. The door opened, a white flag appeared, and Mező and his companions stepped out. Sadovy's sixth photograph showed Colonel Asztalos going down. "His death was the fastest I have

ever seen,” says Sadovy. “He came out grinning, and seconds later he went down. I would never have thought he had been shot. I thought he had tripped over.” Another shot rang out, and Mező pitched forward, mortally wounded.

The mob pushed and struggled, their screams drowning every other sound. Rebels surged through the doorway, and dragged out a good-looking officer, his face as white as chalk. He walked forward ten paces with his hands up, and recoiled as he saw his dead comrades. Those behind him prodded him forward. He tried to say something and suddenly dropped headlong, a bullet in his back.

Two more ÁVH men were dragged out. As the rifle butts swung down on one’s skull, and as the man vainly shielded his head, Sadovy’s shutter clicked and clicked again. A short burst of automatic fire – over. From inside the building came screams, curses, gunfire and the sound of breaking glass. Six young officers wearing dishevelled police uniforms but no insignia of rank were frog-marched out, taken round the corner and pushed roughly against a wall. Sadovy’s shutter clicked ten times as they were posted to their Maker. Two more, their hands instinctively folding in prayer, blurted, “We weren’t as bad as you think.” “Give us a chance to prove it!” No chance. Standing only feet away from them, Sadovy saw them scythed down at point-blank range. The frenzied gunmen juddered more pistol and machine-gun bullets into the seemingly lifeless bodies. Two more men were pushed against the building: Sadovy changed cameras, clicked his shutter as they tried to run away, again as they appealed to the watching crowd, and once more as they were killed. Then he could take no more. Tears were skidding down his cheeks. He had been in the war for three years, but he had never seen scenes like these.

Inside, the surviving ÁVH men with Lieutenant Várkonyi at their head made a fighting retreat down through the building towards the boiler room and air raid shelter. The first rebels to reach them were the contingents from Thököly Road and Baross Square: they burst in from the side street, while the Corvin Passage rebels, who had been shooting from the Erkel Theatre end, came through the main entrance. The mob stormed into the shattered building, smashing, beating, looting and wrecking. An elderly grey-haired man, who had come in with the mob, pleaded for no violence, but they were deaf to appeals. Paradoxically, as the building’s corridors teemed with rebels and rowdies, it became easier for

the Party officials to mingle with them and escape, provided they were not in uniform like the unfortunate ÁVH recruits.¹⁵

Young Agnes Kelemen, a pretty, round-faced typist who had moved into the building two days earlier to be with her brother, was badly manhandled. Perhaps she had been recognised; as a nineteen-year-old she had joined the *kader* section here in 1949, and had then become Imre Mező's secretary. She was sheltering with Eva Kállai in an upstairs room when the rebels burst in; Eva leapt out of a window to her death. As Agnes was taken out, a rebel leered at her: "I'll do away with this ÁVO whore."

Down in the street the rabble set about her, knocked her down, and tossed her the jacket of a policeman who no longer needed mortal comforts. When she refused to pick it up, a woman shrieked: "Tear off her clothes!" They stripped her from the waist down; her face bruised and split, she lost consciousness and survived. ÁVH Lieutenant Tompa was more fortunate. He put on plain clothes and slipped out unmolested, past the cars of the Western newspapermen, cars more luxurious than any he had seen here. The occupants were taking snapshots of the lynching of an army colonel.

Two journalists from the rebel newspaper *Truth* walked into the gloomy Parliament building to see Imre Nagy. Hungarian tanks now mounted guard outside, but Soviet troops still patrolled the main hall. "There was an oppressive smell of history in the air," one of the journalists would later say. "The Russian soldiers were big grey blots on the red carpet."¹⁶ At the press desk sat Mrs. Piroska Vigyázó who had formerly worked for *Free People*. She checked their credentials. As she did so she asked mechanically, "What's the news from outside?" Upstairs, the Cabinet was meeting, and ministers were milling around outside Nagy's office. The Cabinet was discussing even more sweeping concessions to the street. Gergely Szabó, minister of chemical industries, tackled the two journalists with the same question: "What's going on outside?"

Evidently they had heard about Republic Square. As Apró, Kiss and Tildy came out of the meeting, Kiss kept moaning, "We're all going to be lynched."

The man of the moment now was not so much Imre Nagy as Zoltán Tildy. He was moving to centre stage. He had been filmed emerging from the Kilián Barracks in his neat blue suit and loose-fitting overcoat. He stood less than

shoulder high to Colonel Maléter, who posed with him briefly for photographers, wearing a heavy revolver on his right hip, but both men were smiling. Tildy stayed day and night in his office in Parliament and mobilised the leaders of the non-Communist parties. He had assured Nagy that the creation of new parties would give the rebels other channels for their energies. Nagy instinctively fought tooth and claw against this democratisation: “That would mean giving up the dictatorship of the proletariat!” he objected, according to Nicholas Gimes. “I will never agree to that!”¹⁷ But now Tildy had persuaded him to change his mind: it seemed the only way to stave off a march on Budapest by Szigethy’s men from Győr; the decision for government by a multi-party coalition was ratified by his Cabinet.

Just before two thirty, everybody – ministers, staff, and waiting delegations – crowded into prime minister Nagy’s secretariat and listened on a radio as he went on the air with Tildy, Erdei and Kádár. He sounded tired; his speech was colourless. He announced a return to the coalition government of 1945, and the creation of an Inner Cabinet consisting of himself, Tildy, Béla Kovács, Erdei, Losonczy, Kádár, and Social Democrats “yet to be nominated”. He added, “The national government appeals to the headquarters of the Soviet command to begin the immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops from Budapest. At the same time we wish to inform the people of Hungary that we are going to begin negotiations without delay with the Soviet Union about the withdrawal of all Soviet troops from Hungary.”

But it was Zoltán Tildy’s long speech that sparkled. He was in his element. As Peter Kende would put it: “Tildy was electrified; it was as though he had suddenly become master of the situation.” In a voice that trembled slightly he declared that the rebels had surpassed even the martyrs of 1848, he promised that October 23rd would become a national holiday, and he promised: “The national government will bury the heroes of the revolution with military honours and it will take generous care of the wounded and the families of those heroes who fell in battle.”

Tildy was a new man: it was Tildy who now asked the University rebels to send delegates to see him (and “also prime minister Nagy”) here in Parliament, because they were to raise a militia. It was Tildy who announced that the treacherous Peter Kós had been recalled from the United Nations. It was Tildy who

promulgated that compulsory crop deliveries would stop immediately and who declared that this very radio station would become the nation's property. And he went further, he promised what even Imre Nagy could not bring himself to say: "*Free elections.*"

Of course, free elections are as compatible to Communism as the sign of the cross to a vampire; Tildy knew that they would seal the Party's fate in Hungary for a very long time indeed. Kádár knew so too, but he commented in a statesmanlike and chivalrous broadcast immediately afterwards, "I fully agree with what my acquaintances and friends Imre Nagy, Zoltán Tildy and Francis Erdei, my highly respected and honourable compatriots, have said before me."

As the speeches ended, the delegations were ushered into the prime minister's empty office. When Nagy came back from the studio everybody rose and applauded.¹⁸ He was flattered. "Did you hear my speech?" he asked, and continued without waiting for a reply: "Do you have any questions?"

A delegate from Sopron hoisted himself to his feet: "Comrade—" Tildy interrupted, "Please do not use 'comrade' but 'Mr. Prime Minister'."

"Mr. Prime Minister, there are rumours that it was you who called in the Russians!" Tildy answered for him. "Imre Nagy is an honourable man, a Hungarian patriot. It was not he who called in the Russians!" Nagy nodded: "It was Hegedüs who called them in."

A voice shouted, "Let's proclaim neutrality!" Nagy lifted a hand for silence: "I want it too," he explained. "But I don't know how to proclaim it legally."

There was a commotion and several Corvin Passage insurgents burst in. "The Russians are still shooting at us," they complained. Imre Nagy turned to János Kádár: "I instruct János Kádár, minister of state, to investigate that."

"Let's renounce the Warsaw Pact!" Nagy shook his head. "That won't be possible." He added smoothly that the approval of Parliament would be necessary. At these words the delegates grew restive. "There's been a *revolution!* We can do what we want!" Nagy was heard talking about the search for formulae, and about international law. The meeting grew quite heated. "This is anarchy," he said gruffly, and I cannot work in anarchy. I would prefer to resign first!"

A voice shouted in the hubbub, "That would be the best thing!" A hush fell and the speaker was hustled out. Nagy huffed: "We cannot just proclaim neutrality, however desirable it would be. There are procedures to be followed."

His sober language cooled tempers. A voice asked quietly, "Tell us when the Russians are going to start leaving Budapest." The prime minister answered, "They have already started leaving. There are no more Soviet tanks outside this building."

Over at Republic Square, Colonel Papp, mortally wounded, was propped up by the rebels, but he slumped to the ground, unable to stand; two men dragged him over to a tree by the Erkel Theatre's stage door, his feet were noosed in thick black cable, his face and upper torso were doused with petrol, then they hoisted him into the air by his feet and tossed a lighted match on to him. The other colonel, Asztalos, had died mercifully and fast. A voice shouted, "This one's a colonel!" The corpse was kicked and beaten, but did not twitch. The rabble screamed, "Cut out his heart." A nearby tough, Jankó Piroska, standing next to the corpse, took a foot-long knife and plunged it into Asztalos's chest several times. The blood spread over the officer's raincoat. Mező's mortally injured body was taken away by an ambulance bus to the Alexander Péterfy Street hospital.

John Sadovy stayed long enough to photograph the only woman captured alive in the Party building. The young girl's face was pale. In an instant, he noted, someone lashed out at her and then everybody joined in, kicking, pulling her hair and tearing at her clothes. He took five pictures of that, three more as she lay on the ground crying, a picture of the rebels deciding whether to kill her, a couple of pictures of her pleading and holding out a badge of some kind, and then a shot of her being driven away. For a while after that he stayed there filming rebels hurling guns, ammunition, books and documents out of the windows. There was a noisome smell of burning flesh carrying across the square and of burning paper from the building. People were rifling the corpses' pockets to prove that they were ÁVH men, and a young Red Cross nurse was unobtrusively tending those not mortally injured. There was a stir as a bareheaded young officer, not unlike Kirk Douglas, was pushed out of the front door; he seemed to be laughing defiantly as the crowd tore at his clothes. He too was shot. Sadovy expended three negatives on the body crumpling under the hail of bullets, being dragged across the street, heaped with Communist leaflets and books, and then set on fire. Then – the last picture on his roll – the four-year-old boy of the

building's charwoman was carried out on a gunman's shoulders. The mob screamed, "Save him, don't kill him!"

Whose were the contorted, frenzied faces in the crowd? Typical of them was a thirty-six-year-old toolmaker who had spent several days hunting down ÁVH men. "I was there when the ÁVOs were shot," he would boast in April 1957. "You know, the picture that appeared in the *Life* magazine supplement, page 34 . . . We did not plan to kill them. However, one man hit me and I hit him back and that was the end."¹⁹ Another face belonged to Husi, an eighteen-year-old Budapest callgirl; she was subsequently identified from John Sadovy's photographs by several of her clients and executed.²⁰

Altogether seventeen ÁVH men had been dragged out and liquidated. The crowd was baffled because they had been promised that a hundred were in the building. Somebody shouted, "There must be an underground exit!" Mass hysteria did the rest. People claimed to know for certain of a half-finished subway tunnel, and of underground cells and dungeons too. A mechanical excavator was sent for. The building's architect was fetched. The rebels were going to get to the bottom of this. Somehow, the massacre of Republic Square had to be justified.

Altogether fifty-one people from the building had been killed by the mob. ÁVH Lieutenant-Colonel Louis Szabó, who had spent a sad childhood in an orphanage in Slovakia, a late-developer who had educated himself and graduated from the Kossuth officer training school in 1947 – this aquiline officer of forty-two was strung up by his heels, orphaning his two little girls. Peter Lakatos, a teacher at the Party school, aged thirty-two, had worked as a farmhand until 1945, had then joined the Party and become something of an agricultural expert. He had been visiting the building this day. He was dragged out and shot in the guts; he died on the operating table. Ladislav Molnár was about to share his fate when the mob glimpsed the ex-partisan badge on his lapel – according to Kopácsi – and set him free, bruised but alive. Kopácsi called Joseph Szilágyi and arranged a job for him on Imre Nagy's secretariat. Mező, meanwhile, died after two days of agony; a grief-stricken János Kádár bade him farewell in the hospital, swearing revenge.

At Academy Street, Kádár – chairman of the six-man emergency committee mandated to run the disintegrating Hungarian Workers' Party by its abdicating Central Committee – contemplated the wreckage: the leadership was paralysed by savage arguments. The old bourgeois parties were re-emerging from the limbo into which Rákosi had cast them, including even the Social Democrats. In a secret speech eight months later, Kádár would not spare his language about them: "All the bourgeois parties organised between October 23rd and November 4th, including the counter-revolutionary parties, all of them together did not represent as great a danger to the dictatorship of the proletariat as the Social Democratic Party. For if one succeeds in splitting the working class then it means the end of the people's rule in Hungary."²¹

Kádár faced defeat on behalf of his Party bravely. Very well then, he said in effect, we shall continue – in opposition if need be; no doubt the weaker members will abandon us, but the pure, honest Communists will remain loyal to our ideals. "We shall fight, albeit it starting virtually from scratch, under more favourable and clearer conditions for the benefit of our ideas, our people, our compatriots and country," he said in a broadcast on October 30th, 1956.

38 Wool over their Eyes

PROBABLY THE SOVIET Union had counted on a diversion all along. Israel attacked Egypt; and acting in close collusion Britain and France used the aggression as a pretext to launch their own small war in the Middle East. By late October 29th, a film of ice had formed across Anglo-American relations. At the United Nations building, Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. talked with the normally agreeable British ambassador, Sir Pierson Dixon. Lodge telephoned Dulles: “It was as though a mask had fallen off, he was ugly and not smiling.” When Dulles visited the White House at ten A.M. on October 30th – around the time that the Party officials were being lynched in Budapest – there was little hard news and early newspapers even speculated that Israel’s attack might be just another “border incident”. But these two statesmen knew from their intelligence operations that it was only a matter of time before the British and French waded in.

At eleven thirty Dulles telephoned Ike: “Eden is on the air at this moment making a statement which presumably will announce their landings.”

“No, I did not know that,” said Ike.

“We’re trying to get it on the radio and pick it up,” said Dulles. “The focus will be shifting. The Israelis will be out and back in a few hours. *They* have accomplished their mission. And now the question is how to handle the British and French business there.”

Eisenhower advised, “Let them stew in their own juice for a while.”

In fact Anthony Eden and Guy Mollet first issued a twelve-hour ultimatum to Egypt and Israel to cease fighting. “It is about as crude and brutal as anything

I have ever seen,” Dulles told Ike. “I don’t think there’s much use waiting on that because by tomorrow they will be in.”

“Where will the Egyptians turn?” asked Ike.

“Probably to Russia,” said Dulles gloomily.

Later that afternoon, Ike called Dulles to read out a letter he had drafted to Eden. Dulles could only comment, “There is another thing, of course – the great tragedy is that just when the whole Soviet fabric is collapsing, the British and French are going to be doing just the same thing in the Arab world.”¹

Washington’s current objective in Hungary was to get the Russian troops to stop fighting and then to establish conditions for their withdrawal from Hungary. “With regard [to] Nagy regime and its pledge to rid country of Soviet troops,” Dulles had summarised in a circular to foreign missions on October 30th, “US is refraining at this point from adopting a stand on Nagy. Some evidence however regime attempting deception [in order to] break resistance. US will aim to hold it to promises . . .”

For the next four days, the world’s vigilance was relaxed from Hungary. After all, in Budapest the Russian troops did indeed seem to be pulling out. The hazard went, and so did a lot of the reporters. Emanuel Freedman, foreign news editor of the *New York Times*, sent a cable to Elie Abel, covering the story in Vienna: “Would like [Homer] Bigart go Israel soonest. Informed El Al flight 206 which left here today leaves Paris 1700 tomorrow arrives Israel around midnight Wednesday.”

As the Russians seemingly hauled out, a change came over the face of Budapest. The rebel tabloid, *Truth*, came on sale with the headline: TRAITOR PETER KÓS SACKED AS UN DELEGATE, and there were eye-witness stories from inside the Kilián Barracks. There was a sense of elation, and what one student termed “a great wave of honesty”.² He said: “The Writers’ Union put up a collection for relatives of those who had died in the uprising; nobody touched the money, although it was left unguarded in the street.” As the revolution finally swept the diehards out of Radio Budapest and it came on the air for the first time at eight thirty-five p.m. as Free Radio Kossuth, long forgotten, beloved voices were heard again on the microphone. The ringing of the noon bells was again broadcast.

The international telephone system reopened, but the Russians were monitoring all international calls, and there was a ringing echo on the line which frustrated dictation sometimes. The three sisters running the Danube Hotel switchboard clocked up private fortunes as they sold their lines to the highest bidders. Michel Gordey, Jewish reporter on *France-Soir*, got round that by arranging for his newspaper to telephone him every hour of the day.

Alberto Cavallari, reporting for *Corriere della Sera*, walked over to Republic Square that evening. The corpses of fifteen rebels had now been heaped with flowers. The citizens strolled around the lawns, flicking cigarette butts at the mutilated remains of the Party building's defenders. "A burly ÁVH colonel can be seen strung up, Mussolini-fashion, head down from a plane tree." There was a charred corpse beneath another tree; his upper clothes had been pulled up over his head. Round it stood a large crowd of working-class men, tieless and open necked, wearing railwaymen's caps, berets, and jerkins. Two were carrying guns; there was also a woman in a long spotted overcoat and slacks, carrying a cigarette and with an ancient rifle tucked under one arm. Several bodies appeared to have been trampled on. One corpse had its greatcoat pulled right up over its head. His boots had been stolen. Another corpse lay in the gutter surrounded by photographs of military parades in Red Square, Moscow, torn from an album. A work by Stalin was upended over the unseeing eyes of another funky, and portraits of Rákosi had been scattered over his chest. A four-foot high bonfire of literature and propaganda smouldered with a sodden, oily cloud of steam.³

Inside the blood-spattered walls of the building, people picked over the wreckage. Later that day armed men visited the *Daily Mail's* Jeffrey Blyth in the Danube Hotel and dumped a kitbag full of ÁVH files on to his bed: spy photographs and documents smothered with red seals. Some of the treasure ended up at the American legation. One man said, "Look, this was my *kader* file!" The haul included green flexidiscs on which the legation's telephone conversations had been recorded; Gáza Katona parcelled them off to the interested agencies in Washington.⁴

To his chief, Spencer Barnes, the whole situation was fantastic. In a cable to the State Department he speculated on why three Soviet mechanised divisions had been unable to pacify this city. The answer seemed to be that once a Soviet tank vanished round a corner, the mob took control of the street again. At four

p.m., just one block away from where an unmolested mob was treating the Soviet-Hungarian Friendship shop in a most unfriendly way, a young civilian shouldering a burp gun slung over his sweat shirt was openly strolling down a crowded street, and just three blocks further on Soviet tanks were still manning road intersections.⁵

By three thirty p.m. American diplomats on Liberty Square could see ÁVH troops move into the buildings opposite and soon afterwards several hundred people arrived in front of the closed gates. Spencer Barnes expected a firefright and ordered everybody back from the windows. The crowds were shouting Colonel Maléter's name and demanding the liberation of Cardinal Mindszenty, who was still being held by the ÁVH somewhere outside Budapest. Gaza Katona noted in his diary: "A young partisan-type leader appeared to be the main spokesman for the crowd." As the demonstrators shuffled off at four p.m. the legation sent a telegram to Washington:

Large crowds unarmed demonstrators at this moment moving on Parliament with following demands:

1. Mindszenty to be made Prime Minister;
2. Colonel P. Maléter, heading soldiers holed up in Üllői Street Barracks, to be minister of defence;
3. Withdrawal of Soviet troops from country by November 15;
4. If demands not met, are demanding Western intervention.

All day Budapest populace has been working itself up to stage of psychological frenzy.⁶

Radio Free Europe continued to broadcast guidelines to the rebel centres.⁷ On October 30th, Munich informed New York: "Line continues as before, keeping apace with insurgent demands, stressing importance workers' continuation General Strike until Soviet troops leave. Stress necessity unity insurgent forces." The Munich officials added later that day: "Line remains same: tactics being changed hourly to keep up with events. Stressing now genuine free elections, genuine reformation other parties under genuine leaders assuring evacuation Soviet troops and, above all, maintenance of power and authority of Revolutionary Councils and formation of new Police by and under them."

Thousands of radio sets were now openly tuned to Radio Free Europe. They quoted approvingly the rebel Miskolc demand for the strike against the Nagy regime to continue. "Dear listeners," cajoled the silky voice from Munich this day, "in these hours the striking Hungarian workers are the hope and pride of the entire country and – I am entitled to say this – of workers throughout the free world and of all freedom loving peoples . . . With their weapons the Hungarian people have already won one victory; now the political victory has to be won by the united, resolute, and heroic strike action of the workers."

The rebels in Eastern Hungary had their own concrete reasons for mistrusting Imre Nagy. At noon, Radio Miskolc reported that the village of Csaroda, just inside the Soviet frontier, had been witness to an influx of Soviet forces ever since the uprising. "Why are new Soviet troops necessary?" asked the rebel radio. "The government must tell the truth, it must keep its promise." Later that day Miskolc broadcast a fresh message: "At this moment it has just been announced from Kisvárda that thousands of tanks are pouring into the country. Motorised infantry is advancing towards Nyíregyháza. New Russian units! Marshal Zhukov, do you know of this?"⁸ The cry was taken up elsewhere. At Tatabánya the workers' council appealed to Nagy to protest to the United Nations if the Soviet troops would not respect the agreement on evacuation.⁹

That day Árpád Sultz was on the footplate of an empty freight train steaming towards the Soviet frontier. The Miskolc insurgents had sent him to find out the truth. The train driver was a Ukrainian, no friend of Moscow. He had lent Sultz a Soviet railway uniform, and Sultz was acting as his stoker. From the border crossing point at Záhony they passed east through Chop to Uzhgorod and Lvów in the Ukraine. Train-loads of Russian tanks and soldiers were passing them, heading for Hungary. Next day, the two men would return hauling a freight train loaded with military material.

The most serious threat to Nagy's authority was that still posed by Győr in Transdanubia or Western Hungary. A massive general strike had begun here – proof of rebel leader Attila Szigethy's muscle. He had now created a rival government, a "Transdanubian National Council".¹⁰ It held its first meeting on October 30th. Among the four hundred delegates who elbowed their way into Győr's impressive city hall were representatives from more distant counties like Borsod and Bács-Kiskun and from the central workers' council that had

been set up at Csepel. A delegation from Budapest Polytechnic proposed a petition to Nagy to declare Hungary's formal neutrality.¹¹ Szigethy himself had no programme. The chief engineer of the local railway wagon factory, Mr. Sebők, a friend of Szigethy, suggested that they simply convene in Budapest – every county should send ten upright men and Budapest perhaps seventy, and these men should simply take over the Parliament building and declare themselves Parliament; they could then demand the departure of Russian troops and call in the United Nations.

Szigethy was less adventurous.¹² The debate rolled and pitched across the smoke-filled chamber. The more romantic delegates urged him to appeal for help from the Western powers, and to launch a full-scale war against Nagy's forces until that help arrived. A Hungarian news agency despatch about this meeting said that Szigethy spoke from the chair against the idea of an *ellenkormány*, a "counter-government" to that in Budapest. Szigethy also warned against any action that might jeopardise the achievements of the uprising.

Just in time, news reached Győr of Nagy's latest concessions: his new Inner Cabinet, including three non-Communists, and the opening of negotiations on a Soviet withdrawal. The delegates decided finally to send Szigethy to Budapest to state in person to Imre Nagy their demands: in essence, the Győr rebels insisted on secret multi-party elections by January; the vetting of all military appointments above colonel by a reliable body; strong rebel representation in any interim government that was set up; and Hungary's neutrality. If Nagy would not accept, then they would open talks with the rebel leaders in Budapest to form a new government. They believed that they could even count on army support in Western Hungary.

The prospect of a counter-government backed by a patriotic army was quite a jolt for the people around Imre Nagy. That was how many of the bloodiest civil wars in history had started, most recently the war in Spain in which many of them had fought. János Kádár was not romanticising when he dwelt on it in later speeches; he painted in terrifying colours the danger that faced the country of becoming a new Korea, with Washington arming Western Hungary against a Soviet-backed east.¹³

It was now that Imre Nagy received Anastas Mikoyan and Michael Suslov with the text of the Declaration that was to be published in Moscow the next day.¹⁴ The presidium had devoted much care to its wording. It was clearly planned as a massive tranquillising dart to drug the monster of revolution rampaging in Central Europe. At face value it appeared to be an agreement by the Kremlin to allow the satellites to determine their own courses.

Almost certainly Mikoyan and Suslov made the Declaration conditional on Nagy somehow quelling the disturbances, in view of the failure of the Soviet forces. Mikoyan asked if he might meet the former leaders of the non-Communist coalition parties too. He telephoned Zoltán Tildy and asked: "Can I see you?" His fellow Smallholder Joseph Kővágó advised him, "Try and find out the official Soviet attitude to the multi-party system and withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact . . . Will they accept the decisions of our government?"¹⁵ Tildy talked for an hour with Mikoyan, and announced on his return: "He has accepted everything."

Or so it seemed.

Strangely enough, anonymous telephone callers to the rebel radio stations assured listeners that the Russians were withdrawing, and at about seven p.m. Radio Budapest assured its listeners: "Marshal Zhukov has given the order for withdrawal of Soviet troops . . . In Záhony the withdrawal of troops is being organised . . . We ask the public to maintain discipline and help facilitate the untroubled withdrawal of troops." Around seven p.m. Győr radio announced that the "postal inspector at Záhony" had telephoned: "The Soviet troop influx near Beregsurány has stopped. Enormous numbers of Soviet troops are leaving the country at Záhony." At seven forty p.m. Miskolc rebel radio broadcast without comment a similar report telephoned in anonymously from the rail-centre Nyíregyháza a few minutes earlier. And ten minutes later the news was: "Soviet tanks stopped in the central square and their crews asked for the road to Záhony."

Somebody was obviously pulling the wool over rebel eyes. Nicholas Fodor, speaking for the Borsod rebels, rejoiced on Miskolc radio: "This means that our glorious freedom fight is ended. The loss of Hungarian blood was not in vain."¹⁶

To keep his part of the bargain with the Russians, Imre Nagy would have to restore order first. This meant establishing relations with the revolutionary leaders like Colonel Maléter, the hero of the Kilián siege. Zoltán Vas, whom Nagy had

put in charge of Budapest's supplies during this crisis, knew Maléter personally; he had selected him from prisoners of war on the Russian front for partisan training. Vas broadcast a message to Maléter: he was to telephone a certain number. When Maléter did so, he was told a car was going to fetch him to Imre Nagy.¹⁷

Nagy also arranged to receive Joseph Dudás, Budapest's principal street leader. The meeting was set for five p.m.¹⁸ Dudás had been up all night, working on his newspaper, and his face showed the strain when the Intellectuals came to collect him at four. As they left, his wife gave him a bottle of weak lemon tea to swig. The Intellectuals asked him to go first to their headquarters at the University, and Dudás wearily agreed, motioning an armed escort to follow. At the University they found Géza Losonczy and Francis Donáth, who had, like him, spent years in political prison. Losonczy claimed that Nagy was going to make him minister of the interior: this would give him a chance to sweep the unsavoury elements out of the Party.

Dudás hardly listened. He had little taste for eggheads. Besides, he was so tired that he could barely string coherent phrases together. Finally he cut Losonczy short: "Let's get a move on. Let's go to Parliament."

Meanwhile Nagy's secretary Joseph Szilágyi had telephoned his friend Colonel Kopácsi and said that Nagy wanted to meet the police chief in person. "Hungary needs the forces of law and order which you have preserved," said Szilágyi. Kopácsi found General Király already at the Parliament building. After a while, Nagy emerged from the inner recesses conversing in Russian with Anastas Mikoyan. Mikoyan was evidently about to return to Moscow; he was carrying an elegant overcoat over one dark-blue suited arm. Nagy introduced Király and Kopácsi to him: "Meet the future commanders of the Hungarian armed forces."¹⁹

The Party leader János Kádár was with them. He turned to the police chief: "We are re-forming the Party, Comrade Kopácsi, as the Hungarian Workers' Party. We are just setting up a provisional Politburo, with Comrade Nagy, myself, Losonczy, Georg Lukács, Donáth and Szántó – all of us are people who suffered under Rákosi. We'd like to have you in it too, Kopácsi."

Kopácsi accepted proudly. It was a job after his own heart; perhaps he could save something of socialism after all. He later wrote, "We agreed with Imre

Nagy to raise two [National Guard] divisions totalling 26,000 men suitable for ridding Budapest in a few days of all the dubious elements, the *déclassés* and other power-hungry adventurers.”

More delegations crowded into the darkening Parliament building. Joseph Dudás and his escort found it virtually unguarded. One of them muttered: “Forty good men and we could smoke the government out of this place and take over!” Dudás enquired sharply if they all had handed in their guns as he had required. Two had not, and Dudás made them put the pistols in his wife’s handbag; he did not want any misunderstandings.

Nagy’s anteroom was crowded with journalists and officials of the *ancien régime* like Joseph Bognár, who had been one of Nagy’s three deputy premiers since October 27th; a former Smallholder leader, he had been in every Cabinet since 1946. The visitors were invited to be seated. Bognár asked ingratiatingly what he could do for them. Dudás snapped, “Right now you can fetch me a jug of water, and then you can leave us alone!”

While they waited for Nagy, Dudás outlined what he planned to demand: basically the country’s withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact and neutrality like Austria’s. Meanwhile he was planning to stage in two days’ time a massive rally in the capital’s sports stadium, with delegations from the whole country.

Imre Nagy entered, sat down between Dudás and his wife, and spoke to this effect: “The revolution is victorious, the one-party system has been abolished! My government will be based on the principle of democratic co-operation like the 1945 coalition government. It has been a pure and honest revolution, now it is up to you to safeguard its success permanently. Order must be restored, and that can best be done by those who have borne the brunt of the fighting.” There were still obstacles, Nagy added. He mentioned the headline in Dudás’s newspaper that morning: “We reject the present regime.” Given the delicate situation, he said, he would prefer Mr. Dudás to eschew such provocative language in future.

Dudás wearily drew one hand across his forehead. “Even in its latest shape,” he rejoined, “your reshuffled government is totally unacceptable to us. We will accept Communists who suffered prison under Rákosi like Losonczy and Kádár, but we will not accept the incorrigible hard-liners still infesting these corridors, the men like Joseph Bognár and Francis Erdei. We don’t want either of them.”

He continued, “We demand that you approach international bodies and get them to send an armistice commission to Hungary. There’s no time to be lost. It’s time for your government to take a *lead*. If you fulfil our demands, then you can count on me and my men.” Salt tears of emotion mingled with exhaustion skidded down his cheeks. His wife was weeping too. Perhaps she foresaw how it was all going to end.

A communiqué was agreed. The prime minister called in Mrs. Ferenc Molnár, one of his secretaries; Dudás dictated a suitable text, Nagy approved it and *Independence* published it next day.²⁰ It read:

At six p.m. on October 30th, contact was established between prime minister Imre Nagy and representatives of the armed revolutionary freedom fighters, the National Revolutionary Committee and the Revolutionary Intellectuals and the student body. Joseph Dudás was spokesman for the freedom fighters. The talks were conducted in a friendly atmosphere and it was decided that the premier would put the freedom fighters’ proposals to the government.²¹

Before he left the prime minister asked them to meet a fifteen-man delegation from the revolutionary council of the National Police, waiting in the next room. At its head were Colonel Julius Oszkó, the council’s chairman, and a major-general of the police, Ladislav Pocze. A note was drafted for *Hungarian Police (Magyar Rendőr)* to publish, instructing the police to co-operate with revolutionary authorities at a local level too. They conferred about linking forces, and about ways for the police to take over the thirty ÁVH men captured by Dudás. Oszkó’s council promised to unmask ÁVH men still masquerading in police uniforms, and to ensure due trial of the guilty.²²

Meanwhile Kádár and Münnich went to meet the other main rebels. Beginning at about seven thirty p.m. they negotiated with representatives of all the gangs ruling the streets in Budapest’s VIIIth and IXth Districts. (The rebel leaders here were stated to include “two officers, a few workers and students, a writer and a barber”.²³) Evidently the tactics adopted by these hardened Marxists, Kádár and Münnich, were: if you can’t beat them, join them; or failing that, ensure that a plethora of rival committees springs up. The outcome was the

formation of a Revolutionary Youth Committee bossing over the Kilián Barracks and the rebel groups in the Corvin Passage and Tüzoltó, Tompa and Berzenczey Streets, with an official peace-keeping role in conjunction with the Revolutionary Committee of the Army Command. They would also take over the guard on public buildings from the disbanding ÁVH units.

By now Colonel Paul Maléter had arrived at Parliament from the Kilián Barracks to see Imre Nagy. He was a towering figure – in crowds, he looked as though he was being carried on their shoulders – and not at all the mutinous colonel-type that Nagy had expected. He snapped to attention and saluted: “I will carry out whatever orders your government gives me.” The prime minister and Zoltán Tildy emphasised to him as they had emphasised to Király and Kopácsi the need to restore order in the streets. It was after midnight when Maléter returned to the Kilián Barracks.

That evening as the first Soviet military units evacuated Budapest and the protection of public buildings was turned over to the newly-formed national guard, yet another revolutionary council made its voice heard: several army officers had met that day and established in the defence ministry a Hungarian People's Army Revolutionary Council²⁴ (*Magyar Néphadsereg Forradalmi Tanácsa*). Its director was a Communist, Major-General Lörinc Kána, but that afternoon it struck the first blow at the Muscovites. Just before six p.m. the radio announced the dismissal by this body of Major-General Louis Tóth as first deputy defence minister and chief of the general staff, as well as of Generals Jenő Házi, Francis Hidvégi and Lieutenant-General Stephen Szabó. The fact that the real worm in the woodwork was the defence minister, General Janza, and that he was secretly in touch with Moscow even now, had not been recognised: he was believed by the revolutionaries to be loyal to Imre Nagy and to Hungary rather than to the Soviet Union.

The emergence of this revolutionary body in the regular army command complicated the structure, as perhaps it had been designed to; because a wholly different supervising body – to be set up by General Király – had already been “acknowledged and confirmed” at ten forty p.m. on October 30th by premier Imre Nagy, and charged by him with preparing a new army from the present army, police, revolutionaries, workers and youth brigades; the Király body would operate until the new government could be elected and take office. But now the

People's Army Revolutionary Council invited the police, national guard and other revolutionary bodies to attend a meeting at the defence ministry at two A.M.

Although it was midnight when Joseph Dudás got back to his newspaper building and rebel headquarters, and tired though he was, he sat down to pen a leading article. He was unsettled by a lot of what he had seen. He blistered:

The present so-called coalition is not representative of the people. Our hopes still rest on Imre Nagy, but we repeat: our demands must be met, and met at once . . . As for Francis Erdei and Joseph Bognár, we can only say: "Are you still not satisfied? The very velvet of the chairs you sit upon is red with your brothers' blood. We've got a job to do, so . . . just clear out of our way!"

Events were crowding in on Imre Nagy. Not only was Szigethy threatening to set up his rival government, but at about seven p.m. Budapest radio had broadcast an ultimatum by the airforce: if Soviet troops did not leave Budapest within twelve hours, the airforce would go into action. But that night Nagy went home for a change of clothes and to see his wife. Two lorry-loads of police escorted him in the presidential car. George Fazekas stood on the running board of one lorry with an elbow on top of the driver's cab and a machine gun in his hand. Nagy himself went in the presidential car.²⁵

To cap all his other misfortunes, on October 30th Cardinal Mindszenty was found and released. Rebel demands for the release and the complete rehabilitation of the persecuted religious leaders had grown throughout the day. But the last thing that Nagy wanted now was this fiery old religious leader back in Budapest: that would be taking liberalism too far. Only this afternoon Zoltán Tildy had told a workers' delegation that he thought that Mindszenty should return to his seat at Esztergom. But in Budapest, posters began appearing on the walls asking his whereabouts. The answers appeared, written in pencil on the posters themselves.²⁶ He was being held on an estate at Felsőpetény under house arrest by the ÁVH.

The cardinal's radio had been taken away from him at the beginning of the uprising, and the ÁVH had tried hard to persuade him to leave the area "for his own safety". The old man refused. Now an over-persuasive János Horváth, the head of the regime's Office of Church Affairs, arrived to make a final attempt to browbeat him into leaving. A crowd of villagers gathered, attracted by the armoured car. At five past ten p.m. army officers from Rétság drove up with two tanks. The ÁVH guard detail, queasy at the sight of peasants massing with hammers, scythes and sickles, willingly surrendered Mindszenty to General Gyula Váradi, commander of the tank corps. The tank school's deputy commander, Count Antony Pálincás, was assigned to the cardinal.²⁷ Major Pálincás introduced himself to the cardinal, automatically using his old aristocratic name, "Pallavicini!" Váradi went to Budapest but did not return; he was a member of the army's revolutionary council there. After a while, Major Pálincás telephoned the government that Mindszenty had just been liberated. The cardinal, said the major, wanted to drive on in triumphal procession to his palace on Castle Hill.

This was the last thing that Imre Nagy wanted: in the present frenzied mood that might result in the ugliest scenes of national rejoicing and pageantry. Zoltán Tildy ordered Major Pálincás to escort the cardinal to Budapest in person, the unobtrusive journey to be made in the hours before dawn and to install him in his palace. Lanky, balding, and losing his teeth, Pálincás had been a Panzer lieutenant at the end of the Second World War; he had surrendered to the Russians rather than fight, and had abandoned his aristocratic name to become simple Pálincás and – for a brief while – Király's adjutant in the Hungarian People's Army. By chance his in-laws lived in a suburb next door to the ÁVH chief hangman. So far he had had only a nodding acquaintance with his neighbour; later he would become his client, so to speak, as the penalty for having returned the cardinal to Budapest.²⁸

During the night, Moscow radio broadcast the text of the historic Declaration which Mikoyan and Suslov had already shown to Nagy.²⁹ At four thirty-seven A.M. it was read out over Hungarian radio. It seemed like total victory: David had defeated the Soviet Goliath in one straight week of rebellion. It appeared to proclaim the bankruptcy of all Soviet military strategy since 1944. Swiss journalist Roland Nitsche described the scene for his newspaper: "How can one

describe what happened in the minutes of this radio news in Hungary? Total strangers fell into each other's arms weeping with joy . . . Moscow had been beaten, beaten by a nation that had worn chains for ten long years and had torn them asunder in a matter of days."

In Munich, the Radio Free Europe émigrés went into a state of euphoria. Their policymakers urged them to adopt another man's ringing words of 1940: "This is Hungary's finest hour. Never have so many owed so much to so few."

39 Khrushchev Changes his Mind

TWO HOURS AFTER midnight on October 31st, 1956, over two hundred rebel army officers met in the defence ministry building, still ringed by Soviet tanks. That was one odd feature of this revolt. But there was another: the incoherent and melodramatic ultimatum broadcast at the same time by the airforce command, calling on the Soviet ambassador, Yuri V. Andropov, to pledge an immediate withdrawal of Soviet forces: “Failing this,” the ultimatum threatened, “the airforce . . . will take action in support of this demand of all Hungarian workers.”

A greater provocation of the Kremlin could scarcely be imagined. Yet only days later Soviet generals would help the “rebel” airforce commander, Colonel Francis Nádor, to escape from his place of refuge and even in later years nothing would happen to him; in fact he was destined for high office in the national airlines, a fate that contrasted sharply with less fortunate, and perhaps more genuine, rebel colleagues.

As the last dramatic words of the ultimatum were going out over Radio Budapest – “With the people, through fire and water!” – cars were pulling up at the Markó Street entrance of the defence ministry and rebel officers hurried in. Invitations for the meeting had gone out over the name of the newborn “Hungarian People’s Army Revolutionary Council.”¹ Some 250 men were present, representing this host body, as well as the National Police Command Revolutionary Council, and the Frontier Guards’ Revolutionary Committee.² These officers elected a Revolutionary National Defence Committee³ consisting of twenty officers including Maléter, Váradi – the tank corps commander involved

in the liberation of Cardinal Mindszenty a few hours earlier – the said Colonel Nádor, Colonel Andrew Márton of the Zrinyi academy, and Lieutenant-Colonel Marián, the military science instructor at the Polytechnic who was raising battalions of student troops.⁴ General Béla Király was elected chairman. Some of their decisions were harmless: at eight A.M. it would be announced that under pressure from this revolutionary council the defence minister General Janza had ordered changes in the army uniform; from now on soldiers would wear the traditional Kossuth emblem on their hats. Some of the decisions were more far-reaching: Király, Maléter and Nádor decided that the army would have to be reorganised to eliminate the traitors infiltrated into its fabric by Moscow since 1948. But some of the decisions seemed to be inviting trouble. These rebel officers now demanded no less than their country's repudiation of the Warsaw Pact. This was the kind of military threat that would force her Warsaw Pact partners to take the Hungarian rebellion seriously.

By now Cardinal Mindszenty, his eyes stark with fanaticism, was setting out for the capital. Eight years had passed since his arrest and trial. As he emerged from the army barracks at Rétság at six A.M. on this morning the reactionary cleric promised the waiting villagers: "My sons, I shall carry on where I left off eight years ago."⁵

Major Pallavicini drove him to Budapest in an armoured car escorted by four tanks. It was an ungodly hour for such a journey; the regime's radio camouflaged the real reason for the early hour thus: "Because the road seemed unsafe, the primate was brought to Budapest in the morning, between six and six-fifteen." The real reason was that Imre Nagy wanted no awkward demonstrations in favour of His Eminence. As the tidings spread ahead a huge, devout crowd built up outside his residence in the narrow, cobbled Uri Street, anxious to kneel again before him and to strew roses in his path. As he arrived the radio was broadcasting Nagy's decree rehabilitating him, a decree as unorthodox, illegal and autocratic as the original proceedings in 1948.

That night something of the prevailing euphoria at Miskolc had evaporated. The Soviet forces which had made such a spectacle of their withdrawal now seemed to be re-entering Hungary through Záhony and Nyíregyháza. Worried

Miskolc rebels telephoned Zoltán Tildy in Budapest about this. Imre Nagy was wakened. He agreed to call a Cabinet later in the day to discuss this new aspect.

In Budapest itself there were still a few Soviet troops to be seen at daybreak; they clung like a clammy mist around buildings, obstinately defying the morning sun to drive them away. Of course, on Stalin Square the old dictator's boots defied every attempt to wrench them from their pedestal. Cameramen filmed rebel lorries rattling past, crowded with men waving flags or guns, and armoured vehicles decked out with the new Kossuth emblem. The streets were still strewn with debris; tram coaches sprawled across the roads in tangles of their own overhead cables; somebody had scrawled across the wreck of a tank: "Soviet culture." A different hand had scrawled in red pencil on posters everywhere: "*Nem kell kommunizmus!*" An old gentleman in a worn coat and faded hat translated for a Polish journalist: "We don't want Communism." In a voice tinged with hatred and satisfaction, the man added his own comment: "Nobody in this country wants Communism. From the smallest child to the oldest man, no one wants Communism. We have had enough of it. For ever!"⁶

During the morning the Soviet tanks withdrew from outside the Parliament and certain other public buildings. At eight A.M. the radio announced over-confidently that all Soviet forces had left Budapest. Almost immediately posters began appearing: "Radio Kossuth is lying!" An hour later the radio apologised: "A number of listeners have also objected . . . There are still Soviet tanks stationed in front of the defence ministry, the ministry of the interior and the Soviet embassy." But the defence ministry promised that the last Soviet tanks would quit during the morning. At nine A.M. photographer Hajdú stood on the street corner of Martyrs' Street in Buda and photographed the Russian tanks pulling out. A pencil acknowledgment appeared on the wallposters: "Radio Kossuth has stopped lying." The whole episode gave the impression that Nagy's government was drawing its information primarily from the rebel wallposters.⁷

Even the American legation's scepticism about Moscow's real intent dissolved during the morning. Spencer Barnes's scouts toured the city centre and confirmed that the Soviet withdrawal was a fact. There were fewer Russian tanks, two bridges had been cleared, and gun positions were empty. A few Soviet troops were still guarding street intersections but there were Hungarians escorting them until they withdrew. By eleven A.M. armed rebels were openly

keeping order in the areas they had fought for. Legation officers told Spencer Barnes that although there was one unconfirmed sighting of Soviet soldiers in Hungarian uniforms a general Soviet exodus had started during the night. Russian diplomats and army officers lined up along the embankment to embark on the Danube river boat. The populace lined the railings in overcoats, felt hats, berets, and raincoats – mostly men, their faces quiet and composed; only the autumn sun was smiling.⁸ More and more bewildered Russians arrived in open lorries, carrying all manner of suitcases and brown paper parcels. Paul Mathias of *Paris-Match* saw a telephone switchboard unloaded from one lorry. The womenfolk were well manicured and wearing fur coats and head-scarves. The Russian children were smartly dressed and clutching dolls.

Spencer Barnes began a priority telegram to Washington at one o'clock with the grudging admission: "In dramatic overnight change, it became virtually certain in Budapest this morning that this Hungarian revolution is now fact of history." But he was puzzled, and he admitted it: "I myself would never have believed the Hungarians could have achieved this withdrawal without the strongest Western support."

The high Soviet emissaries in Budapest told everybody who would listen that Moscow was pulling out its troops. According to Maléter, Soviet minister Anastas Mikoyan said as much this day to minister of state Karl Kiss.⁹ Mikoyan certainly told Tildy, too, that in so far as the troops were in Hungary under the Warsaw Pact they would withdraw. A large national flag had already been hoisted on the Parliament building. As Tildy ushered Mikoyan out Anna Kéthly hurried in; the Social Democrats had just picked their new leadership and they had come to negotiate with the government. She found Andrew Révész, the Party's new deputy first secretary, waiting; he began telling her about the editorial that he was writing for the first issue of their newspaper, *People's Voice* (*Népszava*), but Anna Kéthly exclaimed, "Don't you realise what's happened! It is extraordinary! The Russian troops are leaving Hungary." Tildy rejoined them and confirmed that, yes, the Russians really were leaving.¹⁰

At eleven A.M. the fire department arrived and began labouring to remove the one-ton red star mounted three hundred feet up on the Parliament building.

Spencer Barnes's aide Gaza Katona drove round the city. He recorded in his diary, "When people saw the small American flag and the red-white-and-green streamer on my car they waved freely and shouted whatever greetings they knew in the English language, such as: 'Hello,' or 'Good morning, mister!' or 'Hello to President Eisenhower!'"¹¹ The legation cabled Washington and advised an early statement – perhaps a promise of economic aid and political discussions. While Eisenhower duly spoke in a report to the nation about "economic aid" for Poland and Hungary, he emphasised, however, that the United States was not "looking for new allies in East Europe". On November 1st RFE parroted that this declaration was "a potentially decisive American contribution to the fight for freedom . . . clearly designed to remove Soviet hesitations in withdrawing their armies of occupation".

Khrushchev saw it differently. His plot was working: at last those Hungarians really were laying down their arms. President Eisenhower's renewed disclaimer of any strategic interest in the satellite nations barely drew an appreciative belch from him, now he knew that he could risk everything to recover Hungary without in effect risking anything.

"It is a war of nerves," said one official at the riverside headquarters of Radio Free Europe in Munich. "It calls for a steadying, strengthening approach." Accordingly, newscasters were asked to inspire the rebels to fight on by giving them a survey of what they had already won.¹² Radio Free Europe informed its controllers in New York: "[We] continue serving as spokesmen and communication centre for revolutionaries' desires and plans; able to do it better than before because much more information available re situation in country from our own and other sources."

A typical RFE propaganda broadcast this day demanded: "The portfolios of Interior and Defence are still in their hands. Don't let that be, freedom fighters! Don't hang your rifles on the wall! Don't yield a lump of coal, nor a drop of oil to the Budapest government, until you have taken charge of the country's internal affairs and of its defence!" And "Colonel Bell" coached his listeners: "The Communist leaders, who never had any business to be there, must give up their posts in the army! Fellow freedom fighters! Demand the posts of minister of defence, of commander-in-chief and of chief of staff for yourselves!"

Revolutions in Communist countries spawn committees. It is the way they have been taught. At eleven A.M. a mass meeting at the Kilián Barracks spawned yet another revolutionary committee, this time, one to channel the revolutionary ardour of the armed insurgents.¹³ About one hundred men assembled in the hall including Király, Colonels Maléter, Kopácsi and Marián, and the Corvin Passage chief, Gregory Pongrácz. The new committee, the Revolutionary Committee of Security Forces,¹⁴ would attempt to merge the regular police, factory guards, and armed rebel forces into Király's National Guard or *Nemzetőrség* with the job of restoring order.¹⁵

The rebel officers and insurgents arrived in half tracks, escorted by their own bodyguards. They drove past burnt-out lorries, blitzed tanks, rough graves and the wreckage of big Russian field guns, one bearing the scrawled slogan, "Scrap Metals Ensure peace!" Maléter's T-34 was still wedged backwards into the barracks gate. His office had been converted into a council chamber. It was packed with rebels in all manner of garb, from the neat sailors' uniforms of the Danube flotilla to pistolero'd bandits. Other delegates came: from the Ganz shipyards, the rubber works, the Western Railway Station, the Széna Square gang, and those of Tompa Street and the Corvin Passage; the Writers' Union was also represented. An armed soldier and an armed rebel presented arms at the entrance.

Paul Maléter took the chair, his uniform jacket clinking with medals, including the partisan medal and a high Soviet order awarded him by Marshal Malinovsky. He brusquely opened the discussion by putting forward his candidates for office: the suave Király as commander of the National Guard and the more proletarian police chief Kopácsi as his deputy. Several voices objected: both men were Communists, and the rebels had taken casualties in the fighting around both Kopácsi's headquarters and the Kilián Barracks during the first two days. In fact Pongrácz accused Maléter of being a murderer; he had killed many of his fellow rebels in the Corvin Passage. A fair-haired young man with an intelligent face objected that there was nobody present to represent the Dudás group, which was by now the best-organised of the rebel armies. Dudás had only himself to blame for staying away, retorted Maléter – he had been invited. After that a hirsute man in a leather jacket shouted angrily at Maléter for having beaten up one of the Corvin Passage insurgents and taken away his tommy gun,

or “his guitar” as he put it. Maléter retorted that he had found some bracelets in the man’s pockets and he could count himself lucky to get off so lightly. They shook hands after that.¹⁶

The meeting generated more jealousies than it healed. General Király decided that he did not like this jumped-up Panzer colonel. Colonel Maléter himself would testify: “From the very first moment I was against using insurgents to raise units of the public force.” But the meeting adopted Király’s proposal: as from next day, a properly constituted National Guard would come into being comprised of army and rebel forces.

Almost at once Maléter was called away to the telephone. When he returned he wound up the meeting, explaining: “The prime minister’s secretariat has informed me that a mob of several hundred people has overrun the ministry of the interior and the Institute of the Labour Movement and has started to carry off their papers.¹⁷ Colonel Kopácsi! See that the ministry is cleared, so that a National Guard unit can take over its security. I will take a platoon round to the institute myself. Every such outrage just plays straight into the Soviets’ hands.”

At noon the last Soviet tanks surrounding the defence ministry withdrew. Thirteen minutes later the radio announced the fact. Half an hour later still, Spencer Barnes reported to Washington, “Partisan ferreting out of ÁVH units . . . will probably go on for some time. Virtually no looting has occurred . . . nor has any evidence of anti-Semitic outbursts become known to legation.”

Some sectors of the city were under the control of Dudás, and not of Király’s new National Guard: squads of well-armed men attacked Party headquarters, accosted suspects, arrested ÁVH men. Yugoslav journalist Vlado Teslic was struck by a hoarse amplified voice: “We won’t lay down arms. We shall not be subdued by the government. We are the authority, until Soviet troops withdraw from the whole of Hungary, until all treaties hitherto concluded have been annulled and until new elections take place.” Soon afterwards, Teslic learned the rebel leader’s demands: while he would admit to the provisional government Nagy and even Kádár and of course Béla Kovács for the Smallholders, Dudás considered Zoltán Tildy too tainted by his past. Old resentments against Tildy died hard.

At twenty past twelve the last Soviet armour – the tanks that had been guarding the ÁVH buildings – started engines and clattered off out of sight.

Inside the Parliament building, Nagy's new Cabinet met. Smallholder leader Béla Kovács was still too ill to attend. Social Democrat leader Anna Kéthly was already on her way with Révész to Vienna, invited to attend a meeting of the Socialist International. High on the agenda was the morning's unofficial report that Soviet troops were still coming in across the north-east frontier.

But then the *Pravda* text of the Kremlin declaration was brought in. It seemed even more satisfactory than the draft brought by Mikoyan the day before from Moscow. There was a sigh of relief round Nagy's Cabinet table. (Fortunately they did not know that the very next edition of *Pravda* would again denounce the rebels as hirelings of imperialists.) To Nagy it seemed that the main thing now was to get those negotiations with the Russians started. Nothing must put the Kremlin nose out of joint now. On no account could Nagy permit any public doubt to be cast on the Soviet good faith.

"Nagy and his group decided to keep the morning report secret," the Communist deputy foreign minister George Heltai would recall. "Everyone at the meeting agreed that it was imperative to obtain Soviet guarantees that infiltration of troops would not continue."¹⁸

Accordingly, by way of answering the suspicions voiced by the rebels during the night, Nagy sent down to the radio studio a reply of Delphic evasiveness. It was broadcast at one seventeen p.m.: "I can reassure you of the creation of an independent, free and democratic Hungary."¹⁹

According to Heltai, a telegram interrupted them. Nagy read it, then said: "The British and French airforces are bombing Egypt."

Losonczy exclaimed, "Goddam them!"

Nagy looked at his big Schaffhausen watch, and pulled a wry grin: "Mikoyan's expecting us," he said. "Let's go."

In Washington, Foster Dulles reached for the telephone and called Eisenhower about the chilling news from the Middle East: the British and French airforces had launched air attacks on Egypt – though not on Israel – to enforce their ultimatum. To Dulles, the president sounded grim. An eye-witness saw a

frantic John Foster Dulles stalking up and down his State Department office in Washington, moaning: "Think of it! In this day and age, people doing this!"²⁰

The world was lining up impressively behind America in condemnation of the British and French action. In the UN building, everybody down to the busboys and lift operators showered congratulations on ambassador Cabot Lodge. Lodge telephoned Ike to cheer him up: "The secretary-general Hammarskjöld handed me a note, 'This is one of the darkest days in post-war times. Thank God you have played the way you have. This will win you many friends.'"

The papers of John Foster Dulles give witness to the fury of his fellow politicians. Vice-president Richard Nixon telephoned from Detroit at eight thirty A.M. pleading for action against the British and French. Dulles confided to him his belief that Israel had been "used". But he added, "We will probably suspend our major economic aid plans to Israel." Nixon warned, "You'll lose Jewish votes." Dulles explained to Nixon: "Only two things are important from the standpoint of history: this is the beginning of the collapse of the Soviet empire. And, the idea is out that we can be dragged along at the heels of Britain and France in policies that are obsolete. This is a Declaration of Independence – that they can't count on us to engage in policies of this sort."

In face of the news from Suez, policies towards Hungary went into cold storage. Anyway, no real action could be taken until the next meeting of the NSC (the National Security Council) on November 1st. For nine years this had been the senior decision-making body: its meetings were attended by Eisenhower, Nixon, the secretaries of state and defence and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the JCS. Its files bulged with policy directives designed to meet every contingency. Eastern Europe had until recently been governed by the highly secret directive NSC 5608.²¹ But in the light of Poland and Hungary this had been redrafted by the NSC planning board and the new directive, NSC 5616, was up for consideration at the November 1st meeting. It was circulated first to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for comment; they in turn asked their Joint Strategic Survey Committee to assess it from a military point of view.²² The directive has not been wholly declassified but the JCS remarks forwarded to the secretary of defence after their own meeting on October 31st indicate that it referred to a controversial "disarmament proposal" and to certain "assurances" (evidently exceeding even those given to Marshal Zhukov on Eisenhower's authority de-

nying any US interest in the satellite countries as potential allies); anyway, the “assurances” were objected to as they “would tend to undermine such influence as the United States may have on the government which is established in Hungary, and [they] could in the future operate to our military disadvantage”.

The NSC draft directive also contained proposals for US troop reductions, evidently as a further attempt at allaying Soviet suspicions; but the joint chiefs pointed out that the Kremlin had long tried to seduce the United States into withdrawing completely from Europe, while making specious promises of Soviet troop reductions in return. “Such action would be detrimental to the best interests of the United States and its European allies,” the joint chiefs advised the secretary of defence on October 31st. “Furthermore, in view of the uncertainty of developments now taking shape in Hungary, it may be that local actions will result in the withdrawal of Soviet military forces from that country without involvement of the United States.” This was secretary Dulles’s hope too – that over there in Budapest, premier Imre Nagy would persuade the Soviet troops to pull out.

Uppermost in American minds now was the Suez crisis. At four p.m. on October 31st, Bill Jackson of the CIA telephoned Dulles: “I’m considering the NSC agenda for tomorrow – there’ll be the Intelligence report and the paper on the [Soviet] satellites. Do you want to give a report on Suez?” Dulles said simply, “Yes.” At eight thirty A.M. next morning, Dulles telephoned Eisenhower about the NSC meeting and reminded him, “The major part of the discussion is to be on the satellite states.” Eisenhower demurred. Ann Whitman, his secretary, monitored their conversation in her office and noted: “It was decided, so far as I could gather, that the satellite discussion would be brief, and concentration would be on Egypt vs. Israel, France and Britain.” Brief was the word: true, the director of the CIA did report at the NSC meeting on Hungary and Poland, but only Suez was actually discussed, while action on NSC 5616 – policy on Hungary – was deferred “until a subsequent meeting”.²³ Hungary would not reappear on the agenda until November 15th.²⁴

In a private talk with Foster Dulles afterwards, Eisenhower reminded him that he had said last evening that he intended to put an early end to the Suez war.²⁵ That meant calling for UN action against the British and French. An emergency session of the General Assembly was called for five p.m. that evening.

Eisenhower urged Dulles to go in person to New York, to present the resolution calling for a ceasefire. Allen Dulles would later recall: "I think one of the toughest decisions my brother had – and I know the one that really tore him to pieces – was when he had to go into the United Nations and practically demand that the British and French withdraw."²⁶

In Moscow the order of priorities is reversed. Hungary is very much on the agenda of the Soviet presidium as it meets. Barely has Moscow radio broadcast late on October 30th the Kremlin declaration of policy towards the satellite nations, when the news arrives of the British and French ultimatum to Egypt. The news ripples round the presidium. Three days later Nikita S. Khrushchev will tell a diplomat – who notes it in his diary²⁷ – that this has created what he calls a "favourable moment" for the Soviet intervention in Hungary.

A historic decision confronts Khrushchev. He cannot risk a NATO presence in Hungary, and nor can he delay his action too long: at any moment a final pogrom may liquidate the country's remaining funkies. At any moment he can move his troops back into the Hungarian capital and brutally stamp out the uprising, particularly if Nagy's own forces have first emasculated and disarmed the rebel fighting groups. But the Chinese argue against going back in. Mao Tse-tung has sent a delegation to discuss the problem with their Russian counterparts: it is headed by Liu Shao-chi, a man of authority and wisdom. Khrushchev confers with the Chinese party at Lipky, in what was once a dacha of Stalin's. They talk all night, with the Chinese arguing: "You should get out of Hungary and let the working class build itself up and deal with the counter-revolution on its own."

At first Khrushchev agrees, but somebody objects that the workers may find that they like the new Hungary, particularly the susceptible young Hungarians. Several times they change their minds, and Liu hurries off each time to a telephone to consult with Mao, waving aside reminders that it is already far into the night. "Mao is like an owl, he works all night," says Liu Shao-chi. It is nearly morning when this conclave ends, and the decision has gone against the use of force.

Later that day the presidium meets and Khrushchev reports to them on the conclave. But he adds that he has slept on the decision and found it unsafe. He

paints his colleagues a bleak picture of “what may happen if we don’t lend a helping hand to the Hungarian working class” – meaning the Party – “before the counter-revolutionary elements close ranks”.

The debate lasts for hours. News comes of the British and French attack on Egypt. Finally the presidium agrees with Khrushchev that they cannot refuse to assist their Hungarian comrades. They ask Marshal Koniev, commander of the Warsaw Pact troops, “How long will it take to restore order in Hungary and crush the counter-revolutionary forces?”

Koniev thinks it over and says, “Three days, no longer.”

By this time Liu has already gone to Moscow airport with his delegation. The entire Soviet presidium – ten of the biggest names in the Soviet Union – drive there in a motorcade to tell them the new decision. Liu remarks merely, “I think Comrade Mao will support this decision.”

Oblivious of what the immediate future held for them, the Hungarians were marching resolutely into the past. Crowds still jammed the Castle Hill area, hoping for a glimpse of their liberated prince and primate, Cardinal Mindszenty. Not since gliderborne SS troops spirited Benito Mussolini out of his mountain prison in 1943 had one man’s rescue thrown news editors into such a frenzy. At one p.m. the *Daily Mail* cabled its man in Budapest, Jeffrey Blyth, “You doing fine and still getting top show despite other events. Mindszenty’s return now major angle and know you’ll press hardest for talks. ’Tis even suggested agencywise he might be asked participate government.”

Italian newspapermen had got to the cardinal already. Alberto Cavallari, who went with the Italian envoy at noon to pay his respects, found the residence smothered with flowers and guarded by two Hungarian tanks. The primate’s blue and white flag fluttered from the balcony. They crossed a courtyard of the bomb-damaged palace and climbed a gloomy staircase to a little apartment with a tank officer nursing a tommy gun in the corner. The cardinal was in a little low-ceilinged room filled with priests and furnished only with a clock that had stopped at eight forty on December 26th, the day of his arrest eight years before. The Italian envoy, Fabrizio Franco, remarked: “Your Excellency must be very tired.” Mindszenty gestured with one hand. “No, I have been resting for eight years.” He took Cavallari’s hand affectionately; the journalist could feel it trem-

bling with emotion. "We can talk again on Friday, after I've had time to find out what the world has been doing while I have been away."

As the Italians crossed the Chain Bridge back to the town centre it was one p.m. There was the occasional crack of rifle fire; crowds milled round the ministry of the interior, sacking the building, having seen the last Russian tanks withdraw. The Italians' car fell in behind a lorry-load of insurgents bringing up the rear of one Russian tank column and kept with them as far as Heroes' Square. Whole families were lining the streets, eager to catch last glimpses of these unwelcome visitors whom their country had endured for twelve years.

Not all the citizens were pleased to see them go. A sense of panic enveloped Imre Nagy's staff in Parliament: fear of the mob. Several times this day he had to call his frightened, exhausted secretary, Mrs. Balogh, to order.

She sobbed, "But I've seen uniformed men who've been lynched!"

Imre Nagy stolidly replied, "Don't panic, woman!"²⁸

At five p.m. the radio announced that the Cabinet had appointed Király military commandant of Budapest, and that General Louis Tóth, one of the army's most senior officers, had been sacked. Colonel Maléter would be promoted forthwith and occupy Tóth's office as first deputy minister of defence and the porky major-general, Stephen Kovács, would take over Tóth's other office as chief of the general staff. The radio added: "To prevent any misunderstanding, we announce that this is not the same Stephen Kovács . . . as the notorious former first secretary of the Budapest Party Committee."

In the *Free People* building, the next issue of Joseph Dudás's *Independence* was nearly ready to roll off the presses. It would contain a lurid, untruthful and bloodthirsty version of yesterday's battle of Republic Square.²⁹ ("An ÁVH general ran out holding a fair-haired four-year-old in front of him like a shield, to save his own miserable skin. But he could not save his life. The people wrought their judgment on him, his bloated corpse was strung up by its feet from a tree and hung there, smeared with blood, as a warning and as a screaming proof of guilt.")

The mobs began systematically demolishing Soviet monuments, including the immense victory memorial on Gellért Hill. Irregular fusillades continued all day as rebel posses ran their victims to earth.³⁰ An orgy of assassination and

destruction was beginning. At three p.m. Spencer Barnes suggested to Washington that the Western press would do well to “omit atrocity stories” of any kind. He had an inkling, evidently, that a deeper strategy lay behind these ugly scenes.

Party leader János Kádár could see the Nagy regime slithering to the right. A few weeks later he commented, “By his impotence and passivity under the onslaught of the counter-revolution, he actually camouflaged and protected the murderous counter-revolutionary White Terror . . . If he was powerless, he should have resigned and told the country and the world that counter-revolutionaries were massacring the Communists and other progressive patriots, workers and members of the intelligentsia in the streets of Budapest.”³¹

After talks in Academy Street with Mikoyan and Georg Lukács, the respected Party philosopher, about resuscitating the Communist Party under yet another name, he began canvassing for support. That evening Lukács telephoned playwright Julius Háý: “Regards from Kádár,” he said. “He’s inviting you, Tibor Déry and me and one or two other writers to join a preparatory committee for the new Party.” Háý brooded about it, then turned him down. None of the writers who were invited joined, which was as well, because of the seven-man preparatory committee announced by Kádár next day only he survived unscathed. One was hanged, one was killed in jail, the other four were imprisoned by Kádár’s judges.

What happened to change his mind? It can only have been a tip-off about the change in the Kremlin’s mood.

That day the Yugoslav ambassador Dalibor Soldatić called on Nagy for half an hour. They spoke German with each other. Soldatić was a typical Dalmatian, pleasant, handsome and over-dressed, with a handkerchief in his top pocket. It is likely that he again urged Nagy to make a tougher stand against both the Russians and the insurgents. After he left, Imre Nagy went with Kádár for a final conference with Mikoyan and Suslov at Academy Street before they returned to Moscow.

The Central Committee building was already under National Guard control. In the lobby, a number of expressionless men in sombre topcoats and Russian caps waited beneath the tall marble pillars for Mikoyan and Suslov to reappear. Nagy tackled them about the controversial troop movements; afterwards he re-

assured his Cabinet that the Russians described them as routine and confirmed their readiness to begin talks on the revision of the Warsaw Pact. Nagy invited them to nominate representatives and to fix a time and place for talks to begin on the Soviet withdrawal.

After a while Nagy came out of Kádár's room; Münnich, the sinister minister of the interior, was with them, beaming a fat smile. Suslov emerged with Mikoyan shortly after; both men were wearing dark blue topcoats. There was a broad smile on Suslov's face too.

A journalist from Julius Obersovszky's rebel newspaper *Truth* had gatecrashed the building and stationed himself near the door. The Kremlin men shook hands with him, too, as they hurried out to their waiting armoured vehicle. ("We were equal partners" – the reporter would triumph in his report – "the Hungarian press and representatives of the Soviet government.")³²

The tank convoy moved off and conveyed the Russians to the airfield, taking the same route that Rákosi had taken in July, and Gerő, Hegedüs and Piros only three days before.

As Nagy returned to his suite of offices in Parliament, crowds were building up there again. They were still unfriendly, their faces showing blatant mistrust. Jeffrey Blyth reported in the *Daily Mail* that some were chanting "Out with the government of murderers!" Nagy realised that it was a blunder not to have persuaded the public that he was blameless over the intervention of Russian tanks. He had begun dropping broad hints that he had been framed: on October 29th he had blamed Gerő and Hegedüs and described how they had just tried to get him to sign a paper accepting the blame.³³ By October 31st a lurid version was circulating in a leaflet of the Revolutionary University Student Committee: "It has been evident that Imre Nagy was a prisoner of the ÁVH for two days and that he made his first radio announcement with a machine gun at his back." Small wonder that Nagy's radio broadcast these welcome, but wholly inaccurate statements.³⁴ In a newspaper interview, Colonel Kopácsi repeated that Nagy had been a prisoner of the ÁVH at the time of the decision to call in the Russians.³⁵

Shortly afterwards, Imre Nagy again spoke to the people; this time he did so from the street's own level. And this time he had a sensational new Cabinet decision to impart. He walked down into Parliament Square, mounted the steps

of the pink granite memorial to Louis Kossuth, shuffled his notes, struck a pose, choked back the word “Comrades” that sprang so naturally to his lips, and began: “Hungarian brethren!”

He continued, “I speak to you again with warm and affectionate greetings!” He described the dramatic week’s events, he talked of the country’s new sovereignty and independence, and of how they had expelled the Rákosi/Gerő gang. Then he complained, “They tried to smear me too, they spread the lie that I called in the Soviet troops . . . Imre Nagy, the champion of Hungarian sovereignty, Hungarian freedom and Hungarian independence, did not call in those troops. On the contrary, it was he who fought for their withdrawal.”

Then he delivered the sensational news to his audience. “This day,” he announced, “we have started negotiations for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from our country and for the abrogation of the obligations imposed on us by the Warsaw Pact.”

Be patient! Have confidence in Imre Nagy! Negotiations have started! This was his message as he stepped down and vanished back inside the Parliament building, leaving the crowd – in one radio reporter’s hearing – vocal in its criticism of Münnich as minister of the interior.³⁶

The radio bulletins created, perhaps deliberately, the impression that Nagy had actually declared that Hungary would leave the Warsaw Pact. His actual language was significantly vaguer. Interviewed in German for Austrian radio, he was asked: “What about the Warsaw Pact now – are you in it or not?” Nagy correctly answered: “At present we are in it.” When his interviewer pressed him, “Do you wish to leave the Warsaw Pact if the Hungarian people desire this?” he would only answer, “Today we have begun negotiations on this matter.”

Nagy was no more specific when challenged by four journalists – British, Italian, Dutch and American³⁷ – that afternoon. Nagy replied, “Leaving the Warsaw Pact does not just depend on us; we have to negotiate with the other members. We have started talks and hope for a satisfactory outcome.”

“Are the Russians quitting Hungary?”

“Talks have already begun. At present the troops leaving Budapest are returning to their bases in Hungary and those arriving from Romania are returning there.”

“Does your government have provisional character?”

“The present government is definitely not provisional. It will do all it can to create a true democracy and is preparing free secret elections. It is not necessary for a Western type democracy to exist. It is probable that here in Hungary we shall be able to form a government that has no need of an opposition (i.e. a general coalition of all parties) . . . what we want is a Hungarian democracy.”

“Will the Communist criminals be punished?”

“The guilt of the ÁVH is a collective guilt. We have no intention of not punishing the criminals. All ranks who belonged to the ÁVH are criminals just by virtue of having belonged to it . . .”

“Who asked for the intervention of Russian troops?”

“The Hungarian people does not know and so they tried to cast the suspicion on me. But it was not me. I was not in the government at the time the invitation was issued to the Russians to intervene.”

“Was it Gerő?”

“I don't know.”

Khrushchev has changed his mind. The change can be followed from the echoes it provokes. In Poland, there is a change in Gomulka's posture. Only two days earlier he has supported the rebel demand for Soviet withdrawal from Hungary, but by October 31st he has come to his senses: suppose ordinary Poles choose to emulate their Hungarian neighbours? A few days later he will explain to 2,000 party activists: “One cannot doubt that restoration of the capitalist system in Hungary would have greatly weakened the socialist camp. Nobody wants such a weakening . . . Each and every one of us must be a political realist.”³⁸

So, he sends deputy defence minister Marian Naszkowski and Central Committee member Artur Starewic secretly to Budapest to confer with the Soviet minister, Mikoyan.³⁹ Hearing of this visit, the American ambassador in Warsaw will later conjecture: “It is conceivable that at this meeting, which may have also been attended by representatives of Communist parties of other countries, a recommendation was made or decisions were taken which ultimately resulted in the bringing of Soviet or satellite armed forces into Hungary.” On October 31st the Polish newspapers begin blasting the “counter-revolutionary forces” in Budapest.

That evening, *Pravda* presses roll off the last indulgent account of events in Budapest. By late evening, Mikoyan and Suslov are back in Moscow, reporting on the ugly trends: the new parties springing up in Hungary, the danger of free elections, the collapse of the Communist apparatus, the pogrom of Republic Square.

Khrushchev sets out on a whistlestop tour of satellite capitals. No need to visit East Berlin; Walter Ulbricht is the most Stalinist of his viceroys. First he flies to Poland and then to Romania. The Bulgarian and Czechoslovakian leaders have sent their representatives to Bucharest. A rescue operation is beginning.

40 Declaration of Independence

IT SEEMED AT first like victory. On this first day of November 1956, a Thursday, the sun shone over the city's domes and spires, as people began clearing away rubble. Budapest, once royal residence and jealous sister of Vienna, was now a smoke-blackened pile of apartment blocks and shattered shopfronts. Civilians wearing coloured armbands and the new National Guardsmen were controlling traffic; the longest bus route – Route 1 – was running again, and as from today passengers had to buy tickets again. But there was an uneasy undertow. The radio was warning people to boil milk. Rumours multiplied like the rats that scurried around the piles of uncollected rubbish. Queues formed outside post offices as people tried to withdraw their savings. On some buildings people had scrawled signs: “We don't trust Imre Nagy!” “Russians go home!” and “General strike until the Russians quit Hungary!”

Newspaper reporters checked at random roads leading into the capital and saw six lorries carrying flour and potatoes from Kaposvár, twenty-seven bringing meat, live poultry, and potatoes from Győr. One driver said he had been shuttling between Győr and Budapest like this for six days. For the first time, there was a unity of purpose between the industrial workers, the country peasants and the white collar classes – so said a miller escorting lorries of flour from Csongrád. János Nagy, driver from Hatvan, said that he was working twenty hours a day bringing vegetables. A reporter on a rebel newspaper saw a long convoy of trucks advancing along the battle-ruined Üllői Road. Tricolours fluttered from their bonnets and inscriptions were emblazoned on their sides: Food for Budapest from the people of Szolnok.¹

At eight A.M. Géza Losonczy, Nagy's devoted minister of state for propaganda, called round in his car to pick up Nicholas Vásárhelyi. Vásárhelyi had stayed at home all week. Last evening, Losonczy had called him and said simply: "The situation's changing. I want you as my press chief. It is your duty to help me!" Vásárhelyi could not well refuse; they had been friends ever since their student days at Debrecen. They drove over the river together to the Parliament building. Vásárhelyi knew that a tragedy was inevitable, but he could not find it in him to say, "I won't help you."

There were fewer armed insurgents about, but enough to cause concern. Len Waernberg, photographer for the Swedish picture magazine *Vecko Journalen*, arrived with a car-load of rebels from Sopron this day, and wrote in his diary:

We went for a stroll through Pest – they with their guns and I with my cameras. We were just returning over the bridge to Margaret Island when we heard the tramp of boots on the quay beneath us, just like the Nazis in the movies. We leant over the railings and caught sight of two bare-headed men between six soldiers with machine guns . . . The two men were stood against a wall – a single volley and the hated ÁVH men dropped.²

More and more prisoners were packed into the old *Free People* newspaper building, where Dudás had put two former army lieutenants, Andrew Kovács and Frank Pálházi, in command; about two hundred of his own men clustered into the building too. A woman employee of the next-door Corvin department store fell foul of them – her deposition does not explain how – and she was hauled inside for interrogation:

It was conducted by Andrew Kovács . . . There were twelve of us towards evening, three of them women including myself. As far as I could judge the people brought in were ÁVH officials as well as members of the army and police. There were guards in the room armed with machine guns and hand grenades. Several times during the interrogation, the gang's "lieutenants" dropped in and asked questions. Among them was an "Uncle Feri" [Pálházi] and a young man with sandy hair who wore glasses. At about nine p.m. there was a commotion and everybody was obviously nervous, ex-

pecting their commander Joseph Dudás to come in. Dudás wore black riding breeches, laced top boots and a civilian jacket. He behaved as one obviously in command, giving instructions to the others.³

A tractor station manager who called in on November 1st to visit an old school friend assisting Dudás, glanced at the secret maps in the *Free People* building and saw at once that the Russians appeared to be regrouping around Budapest. While he waited, he saw ÁVH men being brought in for questioning; they were given the same food as the Dudás troops.

Dudás ducked in briefly to answer the telephone, and barked into it: "I haven't time to talk politics now." It was a caller touting for some new party. "No, not while the fight is still on." "No, this is not the time!" "I'm not going to talk about political parties either!" His voice cracked. "That is not what I'm fighting for! The fight is still going on." He slammed the instrument down.

As he drove back out of Budapest, the tractor station manager noticed that the city airport at Ferihegy was now ringed by Soviet troops, and there seemed to be a lot of Soviet vehicles clogging the road to Cegléd.⁴

John MacCormac reported in the *New York Times*: "Now that the Russians have left Budapest no one seems to know who rules Hungary . . . The Communist Party itself appears to be in a state of terror." The radio broadcast pathetic attempts by the Communists to still the pogrom. The Writers' Union appealed to listeners to guard the "purity of the revolution", and not to "pass judgment in the streets". The guilty, they suggested, should be handed over to the National Guard or to army patrols. "Personal revenge is an act unworthy of us. The whole world is watching."

Nor did the renegade politicians relish the reckonings to come. George Marosán, who had sold out his Social Democrats to Rákosi in 1948, lay low until November 1st: he happened to be out when "Uncle Szabó's" gang came that day to get him. As he returned the two doormen on his building shouted, "Run for it!" and he escaped to Academy Street.

"If the Horthy regime did not manage to crush me," he told Kádár there, "and I wasn't hanged by the Germans, or by Rákosi, why should I die just now? Just tell me if there is anything I can do."

Kádár said mysteriously, “We do need you, badly. Go to Parliament and I’ll send you word.”

The most powerful fears of pogroms surged in the breasts of the funkies around Nagy. All of them had heard of the lynchings. John MacCormac met two prominent Communists in Parliament. They did not try to conceal their fear for the future. The two said that the entire government feared that another anti-Communist terror like that in 1919 was about to begin.

It was no coincidence that top funkies now put out feelers to the Yugoslav legation to ask if they could hide there if need be. Zoltán Szántó, who had one of the longest records in the Party, and an even longer memory, would admit that he was the first to do so: on November 1st he took aside Yugoslav diplomat Soldatić in Nagy’s office and discussed with him the desirability of moving their women-folk and children to safety in the legation. As an official Belgrade source would put it: “It was not a matter of the Nagy group as such, but of members of the government and other personalities.”⁵

The voice of the rebel government in Győr was getting louder. Its rebel radio station “Radio Petőfi” operated with 2,000 watts of power, reaching Budapest easily and frequently contradicting the official “Free Radio Kossuth”. “We do not recognise this government,” proclaimed the Győr radio. “We demand a provisional rebel government until elections are held.” On October 31st, Attila Szigethy set up his own Parliament at Győr, a Transdanubian national council, with delegates from all over Western Hungary.

Nagy could hardly cold-shoulder the moustachioed Szigethy when his delegation marched up the steps into his secretariat at five p.m. on October 31st.⁶ A delegation from Cegléd was obliged to wait outside, while he listened to the Győr demands – demands including a Soviet withdrawal; secret multi-party elections by January; the vetting of all military appointments above colonel by a reliable body; the inclusion of rebels in the interim government; and a neutrality declaration to the United Nations.

Nagy tried hard. He repeated his apologia that it was Hegedüs who had called the Soviet troops into Budapest. He mentioned that he had promised the miners of Dorog a wage revision. But one of Szigethy’s delegates told Nagy bluntly that people had no confidence in him and felt that he should resign in favour of

Béla Kovács. Nagy disagreed. He begged them to call off their general strike, while hastening to assure them of his support of workers' right to strike in principle. "I would consider a strike legitimate if your demands are not met," he told Szigethy. Szigethy's "Parliament" agreed: it voted to continue the strike.

The bullying of Imre Nagy by the right continued as well. Later that day, October 31st, the students' rebel committee coolly began a new ultimatum with the words: "We regard the present political leadership as purely temporary." They demanded the dismissal of a number of unacceptable funkies from the government, and insisted that Nagy take aboard even more non-Communists, including Anna Kéthly and representatives of youth. "We support Imre Nagy but only so far as he meets our demands," they continued. "We'll use any means to purge the Stalinist influences around him."

In Munich, the Radio Free Europe executives realised that a delicate stage had been reached. In a telex to New York on November 1st they explained policy: "Directly and indirectly advising population to avoid violence in connection with departure of Soviet troops and excesses in hunt for ÁVH and Communists." A further internal directive ordered the hot-headed Munich émigrés: "Avoid to the utmost any explicit or implicit stand for or against individual personalities in a temporary government." If RFE appeared to sponsor any one politician, it could be the kiss of Judas for him. The people of Hungary were on their own now.

That morning, November 1st, Dudás sent his newspaper *Independence* out on to the streets with the headline: SOVIET UNITS DIGGING IN ON OUTSKIRTS OF BUDAPEST. It front-paged an eye-witness report of a trip made at three p.m. the day before by Lieutenant Louis Fekete. "Our anti-aircraft and field artillery stationed at Rákospalota for the defence of Budapest have been forced to stand idle until now. Five hundred yards outside Rákospalota, on the outskirts of Budapest and in full view, a Soviet tank regiment and a field artillery division have dug in. Several more Soviet units have halted during the afternoon around Csomor." Rákospalota was in the XIIIth District, in East Budapest. Dudás asked: "Is the government aware that Soviet forces are facing our anti-aircraft artillery past the time limit set for withdrawal?"

Even as this edition went on sale, Dudás learned from his sources that more Soviet armoured troops were leaguered along the main road coming from Chop, on the Ukraine frontier, to Budapest through Szolnok, Debrecen, and Nyíregyháza, and that Russian anti-aircraft units were guarding the bridges over the Tisza at Szolok and the Danube at Dunaföldvár.⁷

Something of a picture was emerging. Rebel leaders had built a radio monitoring station at the Polytechnic, and the Russian-directed MÁV (Hungarian railways) radio-telephone network was monitored. On October 31st it had been heard reporting from Záhony that Soviet troops were pouring back in: the officials cited the precise numbers.⁸ Through the K-line telephone network at the Smallholder Party's headquarters – they had thrown the Hungarian-Soviet Friendship Society out of their old headquarters in Semmelweis Street – economist Zoltán Száray knew that the Russians had occupied Nyíregyháza and had reached Debrecen. He had minute by minute information on their approach, yet he felt driven to continue working on rebuilding the Smallholders' Party. Friends pleaded: "Go home – you're out of your mind!" Others warned him, "The Russians are already at Szolnok." But he worked on, hoping that the auguries were wrong, although by then he knew that the Russians were already west of Cegléd.

By October 31st there was a Soviet stranglehold on Szolnok, a city near the frontier. The rebels there were still out on strike and talked with Imre Nagy and Kádár. Nagy begged them to go back to work. They replied: "Only if Soviet troops leave the Szolnok neighbourhood."⁹ But something was going wrong with the revolution there. Miskolc rebel radio warned that the Szolnok revolutionary council had collapsed and that the local broadcast relay station was back in what it called ÁVH hands; moreover Soviet troops had disarmed the Hungarian artillery units in the town.¹⁰

Was this just because Szolnok housed the Soviet High Command, or was there a clue to this in János Kádár's sudden interest in the delegation which had visited him from Szolnok on October 30th, begging for guidance in the midst of the turmoil? Kádár had sent them back with a handwritten letter couched in veiled language that seemed to urge the loyal Party men at Szolnok to stand by for action:

My dear working brothers! Having met the delegate of Szolnok, Comrade Francis Bujáki, in the last days of a difficult epoch and the first days of a new era of development, we send you our greetings. Join forces with all sincere and well-intentioned Hungarian patriots to restore order and resume the work that constitutes the basis of life. Rid of the dross of the past, let those who believe in the Communist ideal trust in the future. We will serve the true ideal with pure means and socialist Hungary will triumph. János Kádár.¹¹

The American legation saw little reason to trust in the future. The military attaché knew that Soviet troops were pouring in through Chop, the major crossing point from the Soviet Union. The baffling feature was that official radio newscasts still reported their withdrawal.¹² By early on November 1st Spencer Barnes's staff had located three Soviet bivouac areas along Highways 3 and 4, on the eastern edge of the capital. He cabled Washington that it was still too early to assess whether this was just a service stop for tanks and troops or if the Russians "plan to remain concentrated within easy striking distance of City".¹³ In a second telegram he pointed out that the continuing anarchy and tilt to the right could hardly please the Soviets. He warned explicitly of a second Soviet intervention, and pressed for "further US statements soonest"; these should urge speedy restoration of law and order, and offer early economic discussions with the "provisional government of Hungary".

Italian newspaperman Egisto Corradi drove out of the city towards Lake Balaton during the morning and witnessed a Russian airlift already in action, and tanks that had obviously just arrived across the frontier.¹⁴

By this time Joseph Dudás, with his superior contacts, knew that the rebels were losing the battle. On October 30th, his newspaper had announced a congress of all the revolutionary forces on November 1st at the Budapest covered sports stadium, to organise the Hungarian National Revolutionary Committee as a united, countrywide rebel force for confrontation with the Nagy regime. The Russians, by encircling Budapest, had vitiated this project. Only if he had had enough aeroplanes could he have brought the rebels in from all over the country – and now the Russians were occupying Budapest airport too. In this day's edition of *Independence* Dudás therefore had to postpone the mass meet-

ing indefinitely: “We appeal to the revolutionary bodies not to send their appointed delegates; we wish to avoid possible unnecessary bloodshed. The new date of the congress will be announced in *Independence* in good time.” On November 1st, Dudás sent an envoy to Győr to advise Szigethy’s Transdanubian National Council that he himself, as chairman of the National Revolutionary Council, was willing to recognise them as a rival government.¹⁵

That morning Imre Nagy could not ignore the reports. More Soviet tanks had crossed the border and were rolling along the main roads through Debrecen and Szolnok towards the centre of the country. Ministers rushed into Nagy’s office, unkempt and in rumpled clothes. “How is this possible now that we are getting things under control?” an astonished member of the Revolutionary Military Committee asked. The Inner Cabinet went into session. Certain crucial steps would now have to be taken. Nagy’s face was set in the well-known look of stolid unflappability. “We must avoid panic,” he boomed. He would have to take over as foreign minister as well. Until now, he had relied on George Heltai as a foreign policy adviser.

His first step was not a bold one. He sent a cable off to Marshal Voroshilov, the Soviet head of state:

With reference to the latest Declaration of the government of the Soviet Union, to the effect that it is ready to negotiate with the Hungarian government and other member states of the Warsaw Pact on the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary, the Hungarian government invites the Soviet government to designate a delegation so that talks can begin as soon as possible. It requests the Soviet government to designate the time and place . . .

But he also sent for the Soviet ambassador. Andropov arrived suave and unruffled. Nagy told him about the new Soviet troops pouring in. He snapped, “This entry is a violation of the Warsaw Treaty, and my government will denounce the Treaty if these reinforcements are not withdrawn.” The Russian pleaded ignorance but said he would contact Moscow. “I’ll inform you as soon as I receive an answer,” he promised.

No sooner had Nagy announced the abolition of the one-party system on October 30th than all the other parties stalked back out into the open. That same day the Smallholders, who had won 246 of the 409 parliamentary seats in 1945, and the Social Democrats, who had won seventy, were reconstituted. The National Peasant Party, which had won twenty-three seats, was reborn next day as the Petőfi Party, led by Francis Farkas, the lawyer Stephen Bibó, and the leading Győr rebel Szigethy. Farkas called for the replacement of Nagy's discredited government by a supreme national council headed by Zoltán Kodály – an elderly composer who had contracted an even more outlandish marriage than Münnich. Over the next few days a rash of fringe parties broke out, including a Democratic People's Party, a Catholic People's Party and some forty other groups.

On November 1st the Smallholders began publishing a daily, endearingly titled *Small News* (*Kis Újság*); its leading article demanded that the fellow travellers should be kicked out of the party: that meant Erdei and perhaps even Tildy himself. At the same time the *People's Voice* (*Népszava*) and *Free Speech* (*Szabad Szó*), organs of the Social Democrats and National Peasant Party, made their first appearance.

What mattered was that Nagy's coalition government consisted of four parties which had between them polled 4,632,972 of the 4,717,256 votes cast in 1945, and had won 407 of the 409 parliamentary seats. Not since Hitler's pre-war plebiscites could a national leader boast of such a backing. Speaking to an Italian journalist¹⁶ on November 1st, Zoltán Tildy explained: "The government's main aim is to prepare for free elections in January 1957. They will be secret (we shall invite the Western press to attend) and with multiple lists of candidates of the Communist, Social Democrat, Christian, Smallholder and Peasant Parties."

Among the gaunt, hate-filled faces appearing on the streets this day were thousands of former convicts. A revolutionary committee had been set up in the public prosecutor's office under a young attorney, Ladislav Kovács. It had sacked George Nón as attorney general and started talks with the ministry of justice for the release of political prisoners. Commissions began touring the forced labour camps around Dunapentele, like Pálhalma and Bernátkút, examining their files.

They ordered the immediate release of thousands of convicts, for instance of 585 sentenced to forced labour in the coal mines at Dorog.¹⁷

A vociferous campaign began in Ivan Boldizsár's *Monday News* for the release of the young rebel fighters from the ÁVH prisons in Gyorskocsi Street, Matthew Zalka Barracks and Hűvösvölgy.¹⁸ Inside the central jail (Gyűjtőfogház) in Kőbánya the prisoners had heard shooting and explosions, but their guards spoke only of military exercises; then the Communist emblems on uniforms vanished. Late on October 31st the rebel attorney Kovács arrived in an Ikarus bus with release documents.¹⁹ Pale, starving men peered through the cell windows; some had been in prison since 1944 or 1945. With Lieutenant-Colonel Bakondi, the new commandant, Kovács walked from cell to cell and handed out the documents. Bakondi asked them to stay for one last night as his "guests" until clothes had been sorted out. The 800 prisoners elected corridor commanders and waited patiently until morning, when they were released ten at a time. Long before daylight women and children began gathering outside the gates. Some prisoners were met by nobody; they just shook hands with each other in silence and melted into the streets. Some looked for guns. The more prudent headed straight for the Western frontier.

By November 1st, the rebels had released 812 political prisoners from this central jail. Another 113 classed as "common criminals" would be freed on November 2nd and 3rd. A common criminal might be a builder accused of stealing his own materials to prevent its nationalisation, so his release commanded less astonishment than the fact that there were 812 political prisoners here alone. Altogether 17,000 political prisoners, "common criminals" or other victims of socialist legality were freed during these days.

The public did not know yet of the drama unfolding inside Parliament on this November 1st as Imre Nagy waited for Moscow's reply to his protest. The square was empty except for women in black crossing themselves before candles lit beneath the building's towering walls. As Zürich *Tagesanzeiger* reporter Roland Nitsche checked into the Danube Hotel, the foyer was darkened, and a candle guttered on a flag-decked table in memory of a waiter killed in the street fighting.

He drove round to the famous Corvin Passage. The cinema – the rebel headquarters – was burnt out, but the gun still stood in front. A cinema placard had been hung on the barrel: “Performance extended by popular demand.” Several urchins were standing guard outside, nursing machine guns and hand grenades. Some wore Russian kapok jackets. Nitsche ribbed one, “You don’t even know how to shoot!” Somebody shouted something and the armed dwarfs dragged him over to a fire-gutted building, screeching like parrots. Somebody interpreted for him, “They’re showing you where thirty of them held out for three days against the ÁVOs.” They had smeared streets with soap to delay the Russian armoured vehicles.

Nitsche returned to the Danube Hotel and wrote: “It’s incredible that these ragged urchins were dying on the barricades for Europe, while Europe’s diplomats conferred in their frock-coats about Notes and procedural problems. If ever the time comes to commemorate the heroes in Hungary, they mustn’t forget to raise a monument to the Unknown Hungarian Child.”

In the hotel restaurant the exhausted British newspapermen Paul Sargent and Jeffrey Blyth were working on their stories. A tousled Blyth crumpled the tablecloth hammering at an Olivetti. A telegram had just reached him from the *Sunday Dispatch*: “Urgent . . . Anxious secure best possible interview soonest with Cardinal Mindszenty which could be big seller Irish editions . . . confident you will help if possible.”

On Castle Hill, Cardinal Mindszenty was giving audiences. Zoltán Tildy called with Béla Kovács and General Maléter to ask him to come out in Nagy’s support. But Mindszenty was putting a price on that – he wanted to lead a Christian Democrat party. Spencer Barnes assessed the chances of such a party as high, but he felt that the stubborn old cardinal was damaging his country’s interests by stating such a price just now.²⁰

In black overcoat, her face showing the strain of years in prison, the white-haired Social Democrat leader Anna Kéthly left that morning for an extraordinary meeting of the Socialist International in Vienna. In this morning’s *People’s Voice*, she had warned against a “counter-revolutionary victory”. Before she left, Herbert Wehner telephoned in despair: “What is Nagy up to?”

“He’s going to quit the Warsaw Pact!”

“Can’t you even count up to two! Do you want Mindszenty and a fascist putsch in Hungary?”

She found Budapest airport occupied by Soviet troops, so a *Manchester Guardian* reporter gave her a lift to Vienna. With her Marxist ideals, she stood well to the Left of many socialists that she now met in Vienna, and she shared many of the Communists’ “White Terror” traumas. Wehner, president of the West German party, would long recall her description of how hatred of the ÁVH had degenerated into a pogrom. Three weeks later he would quote her as saying: “There has been something like an orgy against everybody alleged to have been members or functionaries of the Party. Not just they, but their wives and children were hunted down and killed. And not just killed, but slaughtered in a way that beggars description.” She had even blamed Cardinal Mindszenty for being the standard bearer of these “White elements”.²¹

Before Anna Kéthly’s deputy, Andrew Révész, left Vienna, Otto Probst, the Austrian Social Democrat leader, handed him a small fortune to fund the struggling new party in Budapest: currency notes totalling \$20,000 and £500. The suitcase of his Italian colleague Matteo Matteotti was also bulging as he left for Budapest (he showed the cash it contained to an Italian journalist on his arrival).

Anna Kéthly urged the foreign socialists not to go to Hungary; it was too dangerous. However, Révész and Matteotti had no difficulty in getting back in via Sopron.²² She herself never returned to Hungary. She was apparently prevented by Russian troops at the frontier.

It was approaching noon, November 1st, in Budapest. Transmitters based in Slovakia were now jamming Győr’s radio station. Workers crowded into Nagy’s offices clamouring that Soviet soldiers were digging in around their housing estates in the suburbs. Tildy or Losonczy received them. A student delegation returned to Győr and reported that they had passed motionless columns of Soviet tanks. A deputation of Smallholder and Peasant Alliance officials led by Dr. Alexander Kiss demanded that the Soviet ambassador be asked to explain the troop movements.²³ A reconnaissance plane sent to check the reports had been shot down over Debrecen by Russian flak. These were acts of war.

Soon after, Maléter arrived wearing his new general's insignia and confirmed that hundreds of Soviet tanks were still streaming across the eastern frontier; this armour was coalescing with the tanks withdrawn from Budapest along a wide crescent. Other tank forces were massing west of the city. "A pincer movement!" somebody cut in. They decided to keep all this to themselves: it was tough enough persuading people to keep calm as it was. Maléter himself went and told a press conference at the Kilián Barracks: "The people of Hungary are mature enough not immediately to regard as a provocation any tardiness in connection with promises made by foreign leaders."

At noon a telephone was handed to Imre Nagy. He found Ambassador Andropov on the line, suave and amiable as ever. He read out a cable which he had just received from Moscow. Nagy translated it into Hungarian for his colleagues. The Kremlin, it said, stood by its Declaration of October 30th and the promise to negotiate a withdrawal of Soviet troops; the telegram suggested the appointment of two mixed commissions to discuss the relevant political and technical questions.

Nagy was unconvinced. "But what about our complaint? Can you promise that troop movements will halt immediately?"

Andropov purred, "The troops have crossed the border only to relieve troops who have been fighting and to protect the Russian civilian population –"

"I am not interested in excuses," Nagy interrupted. "I demand that the Soviet government reply to these complaints within an hour. I shall appeal to the United Nations if the influx is not halted." Andropov gave his word that no more troops would come.

Moscow was obviously playing for time. All eyes turned to Nagy. He was pale but composed. George Heltai now recalls, "We came to the opinion that either the Russians wanted to provoke the Hungarian people to attack, and would then liquidate the revolution, or they wanted to occupy all Hungary without a fight. There was only one way to save the country: to walk out of the Warsaw Pact and to declare Hungary neutral."²⁴ Imre Nagy commanded him to draw up the two documents. In later testimony Nagy would claim that it was Tildy and not he who took the lead in these decisions. But these matters were in everybody's mind. Nagy, of course, had been inclining towards neutrality even in his 1955 secret writings. In the present crisis, it seemed the only way of fulfilling

his people's aspirations while at the same time guaranteeing to the Soviet Union that the country would not enter a hostile alliance. It was a desperate gambit all the same.

A hurried search began for the actual text of the 1955 Warsaw Pact and its secret annex. Probably Nagy wanted to use the annex as a pretext for withdrawing, as it had not been approved by Parliament. Neither Nagy's secretariat nor the foreign ministry had a copy. Maléter discovered that a friend had taken it home and put it in his larder, of all places. He telephoned the man, and said: "Tibor, I order you to bring it to this office in one hour."²⁵

Meanwhile it was two p.m. Nagy had reassembled his Inner Cabinet and the party leaders for what was to prove a historic session. Tildy noticed that somebody had pinned up a poster emblazoned with a sash in the national colours and the new Kossuth emblem – and the inscription: "Long Live Hungary, Independent and Neutral!"²⁶

Nagy told them that Andropov's time was up. The Cabinet decided that Nagy should now become foreign minister as well. A communiqué was drafted: "This change is necessary to enforce the new, independent political policy of the Hungarian people's government. The chief task . . . is immediate talks in connection with the Warsaw Pact and the withdrawal of Soviet troops."

Then he telephoned the Soviet ambassador in rising indignation: "My military experts have determined as a fact that within the last three hours even more Soviet troops have crossed the frontier. Your government is trying to reoccupy Hungary, despite your own Declaration. For this reason Hungary is withdrawing from the Warsaw Pact with immediate effect."

Nagy then presented to the Cabinet Heltai's draft declaration of neutrality. It would be addressed to the secretary-general of the United Nations.

Reliable reports have reached the Government of the Hungarian People's Republic that further Soviet units are entering into Hungary. The prime minister in his capacity of foreign minister summoned Mr. Andropov, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Soviet Union to Hungary, about this and expressed his strongest protest against the entry of further Soviet troops in Hungary. He demanded the instant and immediate withdrawal of these Soviet forces. He declared to the Soviet Ambassador that

the Hungarian Government immediately repudiates the Warsaw Pact and at the same time proclaims Hungary's neutrality, turns to the United Nations, and requests the help of the four great powers in defending the country's neutrality.

The Government of the Hungarian People's Republic made the Declaration of Neutrality on November 1st, 1956; therefore I request Your Excellency promptly to put on the agenda of the forthcoming General Assembly of the United Nations the question of Hungary's neutrality and the defence of this neutrality by the four great powers.

At about four p.m. the Cabinet approved this action. (Kádár, as Party leader, voiced no disagreement.²⁷) In the Party leadership only the old Muscovites, Zoltán Szántó and Georg Lukács, spoke out against quitting the Warsaw Pact.²⁸ The Cabinet decided to summon the Soviet ambassador to hear their decision. Through the windows they could hear church bells ringing in memory of the dead.

As these momentous decisions are being secretly adopted in Budapest, it is morning in New York City. On the twentieth floor of the United Nations building, it is ten twenty-six A.M. when teleprinter MNY 0544 suddenly starts clacking:²⁹

"United Nations New York . . . Are you there?"

Affirmative.

The transmitting station identifies itself: *"Diplomag Budapest calling."*

A codebook is consulted: that is the Hungarian foreign ministry. There is a flurry of excitement: Nagy's government has patched a direct circuit through from Budapest – station BP 679 – to Vienna and onward by radio to this skyscraper in Manhattan. Nine times BP 679 requests the United Nations receiver to identify itself, then it asks New York to stand by. At ten forty-two A.M. the clattering fingers slam into the paper roll again: *"For Secretariat UN: If you are busy I call a few minutes later. Our message will be ready. Okay? Please answer."*

The UN replies: *"We are not busy."*

They are words that will have a prophetic quality. At eleven fourteen A.M. the circuit goes dead. For an hour there will be only silence. It seems that Budapest has ordered a special circuit to be tested: but for what?

By now Italian journalist Alberto Cavallari had arrived at Parliament with Bruce Renton of the *New Statesman* in London. The newspapermen were led up interminable flights of stairs by two dirty, grinning soldiers carrying tommy guns, and conducted along corridors decorated with Byzantine quantities of marble and gold. On every landing stood a machine gun. The Russian-uniformed soldiers slouching along these golden passages smacked of revolutionary Russia and of 1917. The Cabinet was in session, the journalists were told, as they were motioned to an antechamber. Once the door opened and they glimpsed Kádár and the back of Nagy's head. They recognised Zoltán Tildy with his silvery hair and elegant blue suit. He seemed upset, and he was raising his voice.³⁰ They could not see the Smallholder leader Béla Kovács – they were told he was ill.

After a quarter of an hour Ivan Boldizsár, the veteran editor, appeared: "We're swinging too far to the right," he murmured. "Russia will never allow this."

At five p.m. a Zis automobile glided to a halt at the steps of the Hungarian Parliament, and Andropov was ushered in. In the presence of his Cabinet, Nagy solemnly read out the Declaration of Neutrality. Andropov remained impassive. He asked only whether the Hungarians would withdraw their proposed appeal to the United Nations if the Soviet Union pulled its troops out of Hungary.

After a while Boldizsár stumbled out again, grasped Cavallari's arm and muttered: "Have you a car? Then use it to escape! Don't waste time waiting for a scoop. Because by the time you've got one you won't be able to get it out!" He spoke in English, in a fast, low voice. To Bruce Renton he disclosed that in half an hour's time the prime minister intended to proclaim Hungary neutral and to ask the United Nations for protection. "Russian troops are digging in around Budapest. I am very pessimistic. I hope I am safe in telling you this. But you could not communicate it anyway."

Boldizsár gave Renton some messages for relatives in the West, shook his hand, and advised him, too, to leave at once. He explained: "The Soviet ambassador is trying to talk Nagy out of it. If he doesn't succeed, he says their troops

will march on Budapest and will occupy it again. For goodness' sake, escape!" he said. "I have just sent my wife to Paris." His wife was French.

Five minutes later Andropov hurried out past them. Cavallari heard somebody say, "The anti-Communist forces in the Nagy government have got the upper hand. I'm not stopping here tonight!" Losonczy followed on Andropov's heels, and announced formally to the newspapermen that Hungary was repudiating the Warsaw Pact and appealing to the United Nations. A phone call went to the foreign ministry. It was five thirty. The teletype operator switched on the circuit that had been opened earlier, and keyed a new message to the United Nations building.

"Budapest calling. Are you ready please?"

In New York it is twelve thirty, noon. Officials crowd round the machine, watching open-mouthed as Nagy's historic declaration rattles briskly through. Six minutes pass, then New York acknowledges receipt. By twelve twenty-seven p.m. Nagy's all-or-nothing appeal has come legally into the hands of the United Nations, into whose care he thus commends his people's destiny.

41 Has Anybody Seen Kádár?

BY DUSK ON November 1st, the sombre news about the continuing Soviet invasion had still not been officially divulged. Budapest's mood was artificially gay. The people thought they had won; they thought they were free for ever, and now they were promenading around as though it was a Sunday. Never brightly lit even in peacetime, the town centre was now in almost total darkness except for myriads of candles flickering in the windows: it was All Souls' Eve. The American families who had taken shelter in the legation overlooking Liberty Square were allowed home. Gábor Katona rummaged around and found a candle to light in a third-floor window.

From distant Radio Moscow, speaking on the propaganda service for which Imre Nagy and Matthias Rákosi had worked during the war, a Hungarian voice squeaked indignation: "How many dirty charges have not been levelled against the Soviet Union in connection with events in Hungary! The Soviet government has faithfully followed Lenin's principle of respect for other nations' sovereignty and it is not even thinking of imposing its will on Hungary by force, or of interfering in her national affairs."

All the same, copies of Nagy's protest to the Soviet ambassador were handed to the ambassadors and other envoys at the Hungarian foreign ministry later that evening together with the text of the Declaration of Neutrality, and Nagy's request to the United Nations for aid from the four great powers. "The Soviet ambassador has taken note of the communication and of the protest by the prime minister and foreign minister and has promised to ask his government for an

immediate reply.”¹ At six thirteen p.m. the document was also broadcast to the Hungarian people.

Nagy walked to the broadcasting studio in the Parliament building, the programme was interrupted, the national anthem was played, and just before eight p.m. he read out the Declaration of Neutrality. It was emotional and laden with histrionics; it was drafted in anything but treaty-making language.² What kind of “neutrality”? Perpetual, like Austria’s? Absolute? Armed? Nagy’s declaration used no adjective. Clearly, it was more than just a declaration of neutrality. It was a declaration of independence, a unilateral denunciation of the Warsaw Pact – which however it had not even mentioned.³ Then the regular programme resumed, a broadcast of Mozart’s Requiem.

At the United Nations building in New York it was early afternoon. Only five days earlier, Peter Kós had bitterly opposed any UN interference in Hungary’s domestic affairs. Now Imre Nagy was pleading for it by notes handed to every legation in diplomatic French, by radio, and through the teletype circuit to a machine installed on the twentieth floor of the United Nations. A special messenger had taken it to the secretary-general’s office. There its time of arrival had been stamped on it: twelve thirty-five p.m. But it was lunchtime in Dag Hammarsköld’s office. The teletype message was snowed over by other papers, and it was two p.m. before his frantic press chief – harried by news agencies for confirmation of Nagy’s broadcast – disinterred it.

It could not have come at a less opportune time. The General Assembly was to meet at five p.m., but about the Suez crisis, not Hungary. Eisenhower and Dulles had decided to teach the British and French a lesson, and there was no room in their crowded minds for anything else. Cabot Lodge had his instructions. The Third World War seemed a possibility, and a taut foreboding strained nerves in the building’s secretariats. All the earlier, slender news from Budapest had indicated that the crisis there was over, and nobody was in a hurry to dig up a new one. Nagy’s appeal was distributed to all UN delegates – with no priority markings. Most of them ignored it. How did Washington itself react? At five past two p.m. a summary of Nagy’s note reached the State Department.⁴ They replied to Spencer Barnes at two forty: “Inform Foreign Office . . . matter being brought most urgent attention highest officials US Government.” But Dulles

was in mid-air now, on his way to New York, with his scathing condemnation of Britain in his attaché case.

In the towering shoebox building at the end of Forty-second Street, the afternoon was drawing on. An informal group of Catholic delegates led by Dr. Emilio Nuñez-Portuondo of Cuba – a tireless opponent of Soviet colonialism – began privately canvassing support for Nagy's appeal. But many delegates protested that the session had not been called on Hungary; besides, Hungary was still before the Security Council, and that prohibited the General Assembly from discussing it. Still others pointed out that Imre Nagy had appealed to the "forthcoming assembly", which could be taken to mean November 12th. This argument could have been resolved by reference to a second teletype from Nagy received in Hammarskjöld's secretariat just eighteen minutes after the first: "*I have the honour to inform you that Mr. János Szabó, First Secretary of the Permanent Mission, will represent the Hungarian People's Republic at the special session of the General Assembly of the United Nations to be convened on November 1st, 1956, at New York.*" In visible embarrassment, Hammarskjöld's office later denied this telegram's existence (and was duly corrected).

Thus misunderstanding was heaped on indecision, and procrastination on delay. At five p.m. the General Assembly met, but only to debate Suez. Hungary was mentioned only once, when Britain's Sir Pierson Dixon contrasted the United Kingdom's actions at Suez with those of the Soviet Union, "aimed at perpetuating its domination of Hungary". Foster Dulles spoke but did not mention Hungary at all. When the Suez vote was taken at three thirty A.M. the US resolution against Britain, France and Israel was overwhelmingly acclaimed.

Only now was Hungary mentioned. Vitetti of Italy rose and stated on a point of order: "I hope that the United Nations – and if necessary this special emergency session – will take immediately whatever action is possible with regard to the request of the Hungarian people." He sat down, but no resolution followed, just more indignant speeches about Suez. At four A.M. Dulles again spoke on Suez, and in closing the debate he did mention Hungary, and endorsed Vitetti's intervention.⁵ Dulles said: "I hope that this matter, which is on the agenda of the Security Council, will be kept urgently before it . . ." It was a speech just for the headlines: in reality, it was only guaranteeing more delay. The real power was

vested in the General Assembly. The whole futile debate was transmitted to Hungary by the Voice of America and by Radio Free Europe.

As Dulles flew back to Washington, the *New York Times* headline read: "SOVIET TANKS AGAIN RING BUDAPEST: NAGY, DEFIANT, APPEALS TO UN."

In Budapest more than one man was not pleased at Nagy's defiance. There was Dr. Francis Münnich: for a week now he and his beautiful mistress Etelka had not met. They were in touch by telephone, but both were afraid for each other. Now he rendezvoused with her briefly, though not at her home, and while he did not say much he said farewell to her in a way which suggested that he might not see her again.⁶ Armed gangs were still out settling scores with the old-guard Communists, and there were few whose activist history stretched back as far as his. Münnich had been progressively humiliated by Imre Nagy, in his eagerness to placate the street: along with other Rákosi intimates like foreign minister Imre Horváth, Anthony Apró and Stephen Kossa he had been omitted from the new Inner Cabinet of October 30th. A few days earlier, Münnich had said: "The only thing that remains to be done is to die honourably."⁷ But now he had spoken with the Russians, and he had apparently decided to put opportunity before honour.

Etelka knew that the Russians had begun negotiating with individual Communists, with a view to replacing Imre Nagy, and she gathered that they had offered him the premiership. But now he went underground, seldom daring to set foot outside the Parliament. It was in his office here on the afternoon of November 1st that Colonel Julius Oszkó, leader of the Revolutionary Committee of Police, chanced to be standing next to Münnich when a telephone call came. He heard Münnich answer in Russian. Oszkó knew enough of the language to understand that somebody at the other end was enquiring if some kind of deal was still going ahead, and was asking about times, dates and names. Münnich mentioned Kádár's name: "Okay, we'll be there," he confirmed. And, "Yes. Later on this evening!"⁸

Moody and disconsolate, Kádár was irritated and alarmed at Nagy's endless preoccupation with Cabinet changes: "The government," he would remark a few weeks later, "was unable to deal with the problems of the moment. The counter-revolution was gaining hand over fist, and in consequence of the con-

tinuing daily changes the government finally looked so different that its own mother would not have recognised it!”⁹

Kádár and his Party were at a crossroads. Acting probably on advice from Mikoyan and Suslov, he had begun to organise a new Communist Party. The curious thing was that he refrained from actually dissolving the old one. He and his cronies had come under great pressure to make this logical decision. “Comrade Georg Lukács, for example, pestered us every five minutes with word that at some institute or other people were already meeting and were just waiting for a telephone call from us, and that if we didn’t reach a decision to organise a new Party they would go ahead without us! One and a half days the argument raged before we finally bowed to this decision.”¹⁰

On November 1st, Kádár proclaimed the new Hungarian Workers’ Socialist Party. Thus two special Party skeletons sailed side by side: the old one, apparently doomed, waterlogged with Stalinism and disintegrating, and Kádár’s new party, ostensibly pro-Nagy but being propelled by the “counter-revolution” towards an ever more uncertain future. Crewman János Kádár had one leg in each boat, as they drifted apart. It was time for a rapid reappraisal.

Bruno Tedeschi, handsome young Italian journalist, strolled into Parliament, and obtained an impromptu interview with Kádár.¹¹ He was already image-building for the new party and for its new line of “Hungarian National Communism”. “As you know,” he told Tedeschi, speaking slowly and almost in an undertone, “numerous Communists fought side by side with students, workers and the people.”

Tedeschi enquired who then had called in the Russian troops. Kádár gave the standard answer: “Gerő probably knew of it and gave his blessing, but it was Andrew Hegedüs who called them in.”

After this he became downright evasive. Tedeschi unwittingly hit a sore point: yesterday’s secret talks with the men from the Kremlin. With whom did Mikoyan and Suslov talk? Kádár, who had spoken with them himself, lied: “I don’t know.”

When Tedeschi enquired, “What will become of those Communists who were prominent during Rákosi’s time and fought on the side of the Soviet troops and ÁVH?” Kádár’s answer revealed that he was burning absolutely no bridges. “Our government will take no action against them.”

More significant was what Kádár did *not* say in his public utterances now. Not once did he voice support for Nagy's concessions to the street: a multi-party system, free elections, neutrality, and ditching the Warsaw Pact.

Before his eyes was the dying image of his best friend, Imre Mező, gunned down as he surrendered on Republic Square. Who next? His private emotions would be laid bare in a speech eight months later to his new Party's congress.¹² They were the emotions of a dedicated Communist angry at the humiliation of the Party, furious at the popular concessions wrung from the prime minister, and determined to restore the dictatorship of the proletariat. Preying on his mind was the most recent ominous rebel declaration: "We regard the present political leadership as temporary. We shall employ every means to get rid of Stalinist influence." Clearly, Communists might soon become extinct animals in Hungary.

Around nine p.m. Münnich took his hat and said: "We're off to dinner." He strolled out of the Parliament taking Kádár with him. He ordered a car up from the pool and drove off with him into the darkness.

The position of the rebels – the real leaders like Dudás and Szigethy – was in fact weaker now than before. None of them had been invited in from the street to join the government. The old bourgeois parties, who had failed Hungary before, were being reorganised, and they were landing the plushier Cabinet positions. Deputy premier Tildy invited several Smallholder politicians round to Parliament during the day and informed them that Nagy was redrafting his government on coalition lines, with Smallholder, Peasant, Social Democrat and Communist participation; Nagy had now agreed that yet another of their number, Stephen B. Szabó, should join Tildy himself and Béla Kovács in the government.

As so often in his career, Tildy was once again making common cause with the Communists, this time in trying to stamp out the insurrection: he had after all secured his own party's objectives. That afternoon three young rebels, probably from the Dudás group, arrived at Parliament and tackled him and the Communist old-timer Zoltán Vas about the need to unite all the revolutionary factions now and build them into every ministry. Tildy and Vas stalled them, saying that it would take twenty-four hours to assemble all the rebel factions. At

eight p.m. the rebels came back and this time Vas tried to kidnap them. ÁVH men, they found, had tampered with their car. They escaped on foot. “Youths got weapons,” reported the American legation who heard them out soon after, “[and] went to central post office from where they sent initial request to legation over telex, and then came to legation with Hungarian army escort.”

The legation was almost deserted. Around midnight political attaché Gáza Katona heard the doorbell, and the marine guard called him down to see the three-man delegation. The Hungarian army truck was parked a few yards away with a small detachment of soldiers in it. They said, “We’ve been sent by the revolutionary council from the Corvin Passage group.” They begged for a car to drive to Győr where they could print leaflets to scatter over Budapest. They asked too what help was on its way from the United States. “We need all kinds of weapons, particularly bazookas, and food.”

After a hurried discussion with air attaché Colonel Welwyn Dallam they were given first-aid materials and tinned food. The automatic weapons slung over the rebels’ shoulders tangled with their burdens and tins clattered to the pavement as they ran back to the army truck. Katona saw them dart about the pavement in the shadows, scooping up tins and dumping them into the truck before driving off without headlights into the darkness.

They probably moved on to the Italian legation. It recorded in its diary: “Towards eleven thirty p.m. delegates of the district revolutionary council come to confer with the minister and tell him of their concern at the deterioration of the situation; they request him to take steps to obtain material aid, above all in the shape of weapons.”

The University revolutionary council chaired by Stephen Pozsár, a rather long-winded Communist student leader, was also disenchanted. It re-examined and then approved the idea first mooted at Győr by engineer Zsebök for a rival Parliament to convene in Budapest, and simply take over the building. Student delegates hurried to Győr in a government car to make the necessary preparations. Győr city hall would be in uproar when they arrived next day. Zsebök was frantically trying to get things moving, but it seemed unlikely that the new Parliament would be able to assemble in Budapest on the planned date, Sunday, November 4th, as Soviet forces were methodically sealing off all routes to Budapest now.

That day Cardinal Mindszenty was also restoring his position. One man kept waiting for a promised audience with His Eminence had the rare chance to study him as he posed for photographers: stubborn, narrow-minded, senile. He was surrounded by opportunists and officials of a newly-formed Catholic party, the Revolutionary Party of Youth; the officials seemed neither young nor very revolutionary.¹³ The cardinal telephoned Washington and San Francisco, he held a press conference at which he refused to answer whether he was interested in becoming prime minister himself (“I am the Primate,” he snapped in German at the reporter), he sent off a personal message to Eisenhower, he received delegates of the Swiss and West German Red Cross authorities – including Adenauer’s intimate Hubertus zu Löwenstein, who chatted about the possible need to risk a war to reunify the two Germanys – and he received the Vatican’s special emissary, Monsignor Rodhain, who brought with him substantial funds from Rome for Hungary’s Catholics.

Mindszenty is no fool; before the emissary leaves, the cardinal entrusts to him his papers for the Vatican archives. There is a smell of burning coming from somewhere. Italian envoy Fabrizio Franco writes in his diary:

Towards evening alarming rumours spread about Soviet contingents returning to the capital, and of the arrival of Soviet reinforcements over the eastern frontier. Hungarian radio meanwhile (at ten twenty p.m.) calls on all soldiers not in the National Guard to report back to their units within twenty-four hours and – late in the evening – the rumour is confirmed that Ferihegy airport has been occupied by the Russians and that Russian and Hungarian formations are in direct confrontation, arms at the ready, because as yet the Hungarians have received orders from their government not to open fire.

It is true. Soviet tanks withdrawing from the city have occupied all its airports. Late that evening the Soviet embassy’s smooth explanation is issued: Russian civilians and wounded are being evacuated. At eleven thirty p.m. the radio announces this, and adds: “The Hungarian airforce, in full complement, is

ready to defend itself against overwhelming odds. However, the government, in full realisation of its responsibilities, has prohibited shooting. Therefore the Hungarian airforce has maintained discipline and is . . . waiting for the departure of Soviet troops.” But word spreads in the capital that the Soviet armoured cars occupying Ferihegy airport have brought all civil air traffic to a halt. Only Czech, Polish, and Romanian planes are still landing there.¹⁴

The rebels have freed hundreds more prisoners from provincial jails during the day. There is a mass meeting of former political prisoners during the evening in Budapest’s Uránia cinema, and a revolutionary committee is organised. These men are as mad as hell. Most of them flock into Joseph Dudás’s organisation, and swarm through his headquarters, the former *Free People* building. After November 1st no outsiders are allowed to stay in his building overnight, not even the printers. Among the inmates released from the city’s prisons is eighteen-year-old Dezső Varga, awaiting trial for embezzlement: “On hearing that rebel headquarters were at the *Free People* building I reported there,” he will testify. The commander, Andrew Kovács, gave him a gun and ammunition. That night these elements of the revolutionary *demi-monde* bring in a lawyer, Stephen Sarkadi, thirty-four, and an ÁVH lieutenant, Paul Fodor, thirty-one. Varga finds himself assigned to the guard detail. The prisoner Sarkadi worked as a cook before the war, and deserted to the Russians in 1944; recently he has qualified to work at the public prosecutor’s office, on the way to which Dudás’s men intercepted him on November 1st. The ÁVH lieutenant, Fodor, had been run to ground in a friend’s flat and hauled into this building for interrogation. They do not have many days to live.

Dudás’s newspaper *Independence* goes to press this night with the claim that “victory” is theirs; the last of the twenty-five demands which he posted on October 28th has now been implemented by the regime. Some of his lieutenants arrange to move three tons of copper from Csepel to the Mint to start casting freedom medals. But there is one blemish: Dudás himself is still on the outside; his own ambitions have not been satisfied.

This is the day when the first edition of *People’s Freedom (Népszabadság)* appears. It is the turgid successor to the defunct party organ *Free People*. It is probably also the day when a Moscow correspondent puts a call through to Peter Rényi, chief of the editor’s secretariat; before he can take the call in the

second-floor machine room Dudás plucks the telephone from his hand, and says: “This is the chief of the national revolutionary committee. I want you to go and find Mr. Molotov and give him my regards. Say it’s me, Joseph Dudás.” Rényi is astonished at his impertinence, then it dawns on him that the two must have met in 1944 when Dudás was sent to Moscow to negotiate an armistice.¹⁵ It is characteristic of Dudás’s tactical cunning that he graciously allows the Party to print its newspaper in “his” building, after his own newspaper has first rolled off the presses. He probably recognises that for the time being the country still needs Kádár and Nagy.

Dudás makes a strange “fascist”. He tells a reporter of the Italian *Epoca*: “The Communists will also be admitted to the elections. We are people with our feet on the ground. We know that Russia is the world’s second power and that their country of 200 millions borders on our country of nine millions . . . We want no Danubian Korea. The leaders of the revolutionary forces must have faith in Nagy even if the people have lost it. This for the good of the country.”

In a hundred thousand homes Radio Free Kossuth broadcast Kádár’s proclamation inaugurating his new Party. “Those who prepared this uprising were recruited from our ranks,” he insisted. He continued: “Communist writers, journalists, University students, the youth of the Petőfi Circle, and thousands and thousands of workers and peasants and veteran fighters who were imprisoned on false charges, fought in the front line against Rákosi’s despotism and political hooliganism.” But he also uttered warnings: “A grave and alarming danger exists that foreign armed intervention may allot to our country the tragic fate of Korea . . . We must eliminate the nests of counter-revolution and reaction.”

The new Party would be set up by a preparatory committee whom the public could trust: Donáth, Kádár, Kopácsi, Losonczy, Lukács, Nagy himself and Zoltán Szántó. This list was the purest window dressing: Donáth now says: “I never even met Kopácsi.”

This broadcast was only one of a series of appeals engineered by Imre Nagy that night, designed to restore calm at all costs before the Russians could use disorder as a pretext to return. The Smallholder leader, Béla Kovács, was brought from his sick-bed in Pécs late on November 1st, and the radio announced that he had now arrived in Budapest and joined Nagy’s government. Nagy persuaded

him to issue a statement for immediate broadcast expressing fulsome support for the national government: “We must be on guard against the peril of restoration and reaction. The political struggle must therefore concentrate on the need to defend the agrarian, industrial and school reforms, if we are to prevent the large landowners and the big capitalists regaining the upper hand.”

General Maléter was also roped into this campaign. He proclaimed, “The most important thing is to safeguard order and discipline . . . As from November 1st the freedom fighters will be regrouped as the National Guards. They will remain armed so long as Soviet troops remain in Hungary.” And he issued an appeal to the workers to end their strike: “My compatriots! In the course of the armed revolutionary struggle every fighter has been proud of the fact that our workers supported them by going on strike. But after every battle an era of peaceful reconstruction must follow so as to safeguard the fruits of revolution. The aim of striking is to weaken the enemy. The present strike of the workers, however, does not weaken the enemy – it weakens ourselves. We must ensure milk for our children, coal for our factories and regular transport for our workers who long to be with their families; otherwise we lose what our revolutionary fighters have gained at the price of great blood-sacrifices. Hungarian workers! Strengthen our free, independent, and neutral Hungary, our beloved fatherland! Go back to work!” The Hungarian language that Maléter used was unnaturally pompous.¹⁶

In her flat across the river in Buda, his first wife Maria had gone out, but their three children heard the radio. Ten-year-old Paul threw himself at her when she came home: “Papa just spoke on the radio!” He grabbed a sheet of paper. “Dear Papa,” he wrote:

We’re all so proud of you because you’re a big hero and fighting on our side. We still love you. But we often used to cry because you didn’t come and see us. Where were you when Mummy was ill and we had to be all alone at home? Where were you when little Judy was in hospital and wanted so much to see you? Why didn’t you come? Anyway, now you have spoken to us on the radio, and when you said we all had to start work again so that the children would get more bread and milk, we knew you were speaking to

us. So I'm writing to tell you that we love you and want you to come and see us soon. Lots of kisses from your little son, Paulie.

Few Hungarians wanted to believe that the Russians would snatch this victory from them by renewed violence; admittedly there were brief news items on Suez, but the view was that the internal crisis in the Soviet Union caused by the XXth Congress would prevent Khrushchev from doing a "Suez" here. Alberto Cavallari disagreed. He drove that same evening to Vienna, to phone Milan to expect the crushing of the uprising within a few hours. Then he drove back to Hungary to witness its certain "September 8th".

42 Fraternal Kisses

THIRTY FEET FROM the plane tree on Republic Square where Colonel Papp was strung up by his heels, two shallow trenches have been scooped out beneath the cobblestones not far from the capital's shattered Party headquarters. People have claimed that they can hear knocking from underground. Bare hands are not strong enough, so mechanical excavators are fetched. Newspapermen eagerly stand by watching the frantic search for dungeons where ÁVH prisoners are still rumoured. The architect is brought in, blueprints are studied, and on November 2nd the former janitor is fetched. Voices are heard to mutter, "This affair is having repercussions beyond the country's borders." It has become a matter of urgency, almost of state, for something – anything – to be found. The entire Moscow-aligned press has begun to capitalise on the pogrom; so now it has to be justified. A drilling rig is set up, but it just hits more clay. A voice commands, "Move the rig five yards and drill again!" Bore-holes are sunk across the gardens, near the ventilation grilles of the Erkel Theatre, along Rákóczi Street and in Baross Square. The rebels are victims of their own hysteria, but the digging goes on.¹

An entirely spurious news item is fabricated and inserted in the *Small News*:

A labyrinth of corridors has been found about fifty feet down branching out in every direction over an incredibly large area. Muffled yells for help can be heard from under the corridors. When these sounds are amplified, it becomes clear that there are about 156 people down there – all the indications are that they are the captives of the ÁVH gangsters.²

November 2nd, a Friday, had started with the kind of cold rain that would turn into intermittent sleet. Around ten A.M. Nagy decided to discuss with János Kádár the programme which the Party leader had shown him the day before.

Kádár could not be found.

An hour later Maléter received a dozen Western journalists in his drab, pock-marked rebel barracks.³ They picked their way past his now famous T-34 blocking the entrance, and waited in a guardroom until he could see them. Then they were invited up to the second floor. His office looked like a drug store, so many tons of goods had Austria sent. Twenty folding chairs were brought in, then Maléter arrived: he was still lean and wiry, but his intelligent eyes looked tired and his face was unshaven. He offered to answer their questions.

“What will you do if the Russians open hostilities against the Hungarian army despite their pledge to withdraw?”

Maléter adhered stolidly to the regime's line: “Neither Imre Nagy's government nor I have any reason to doubt the word of vice-premier Mikoyan. We have ordered the Hungarian army and people not to take any steps against Soviet troops stationed in this country. But if the Hungarian army is attacked it will defend itself.”

Somebody asked how on earth mere children managed to knock out tanks. Maléter showed them a two-litre bottle of Harmatvíz mineral water, and explained how it could be loaded with petrol and an improvised wick.

The restaurants and coffee bars were cautiously reopening, the newsvendors were shouting a score of newspaper names. Today's newspapers carried an appeal by the revolutionary committee of Csepel for an end to the general strike. Other workers' councils were also trying to get it stopped, saying that the regime had fulfilled the rebel demands. The Láng machine factory was reopening; over a thousand men showed up at the Ganz locomotive works and were put on to maintenance work, like repairing the damage done by machine-gun fire in the Hungária workshop. But Budapest's transport workers were still out and this would keep most factories closed.

At key street corners the Writers' Union had placed unguarded empty ammunition boxes inviting alms for the families of the fallen, with a sign to which

a thousand-florin note had been stuck: “The purity of our revolution permits us to use this method of collection . . .”

Later this day Nagy’s personal assistant, Joe Szilágyi, began a desultory investigation of the disappearance of Kádár and Münnich. Nagy told somebody to telephone Münnich’s flat. Nobody answered. The chauffeur admitted having driven both men to the Soviet embassy, where they had switched cars and been driven off. Eventually, Szilágyi dictated a file minute concluding: “It is to be supposed that János Kádár and Francis Münnich have deserted to the Soviets.” Nagy was told of this conclusion in the presence of Losonczy, Donáth and others.⁴

On Alberto Cavallari’s return from Vienna he phoned round the Western legations. From them he learned that the Russians had advised the Eastern bloc embassies to evacuate women and children. The smell of burning seemed stronger now. Cavallari telephoned to ask the Soviet ambassador about the situation over the next hours. Yuri Andropov replied, courteously, as Cavallari wrote in his notebook: “I hope everything goes well, but I can’t guarantee what the military will do.”

That morning Nagy telephoned his new National Guard commander, General Béla Király, on their special line and Nagy said: “Andropov is protesting that Hungarian terrorists are rampaging around inside the Soviet embassy, and that if the Hungarian government is not capable of restoring order he will have to ask the Soviet Army for help.”⁵ Király ordered a dozen tanks, a hundred infantry men and a hundred National Guard men to rush over to Heroes’ Square near the embassy; then he drove over himself. He found Gorky Avenue virtually deserted. After a ten-minute wait Andropov received him. Andropov apologised softly, “Nagy must have got hold of the wrong end of the stick.” There had been warnings of trouble, but it had not materialised.

“Believe me, general,” added Andropov, “the Soviet people are Hungary’s best friends. Incidentally did you know that we have offered negotiations on the immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops? We would like to meet to discuss the details. Would you be so good as to telephone Mr. Nagy and see if he has received our proposal?” He gestured to the red telephone on his desk: Andropov was hooked into the top-secret K-line telephone network.

Nagy confirmed to him that he had received the note. "I agree with the proposed meeting," said the prime minister. "You will be in our delegation."

Andropov went over to Parliament and gave the prime minister Moscow's reply. He said that his government had taken note of the declaration on the Warsaw Pact, and asked Nagy to draw up a list of members of the two commissions, and to state where he wanted the political talks to take place; the Soviets wanted the military talks to be held in Budapest.

Király also went to Parliament. Here the prime minister broke it to him that he had decided to entrust General Maléter with the negotiations. Király was piqued, because a lot of prestige would be associated with the talks. Nagy comforted him: "I shall want you at my disposal all the time that Maléter is away." Király envied Maléter his fame. He found him increasingly tedious to work with, suddenly remote and inaccessible. For his part, Király was busy enrolling National Guard commanders at Kopácsi's police headquarters on Deák Square. He slept on a frame bed, sometimes during the day, too. Down in the police cells, he had locked up several of his opponents like General Julius Uszta, a partisan who had fought on the Soviet side during the war. A journalist who interviewed him found him spending much of his waking time trying to establish what was going on.⁶

Király spent hours bickering over lines of demarcation. He blamed every shortcoming on the treachery of Muscovites. Moscow had sent to Budapest several Hungarian officers with details of a "special Soviet military plan". The Muscovites divided the capital into two zones, an inner one under Király and an outer one under Colonel Márton. Király expected to hold off a Russian attack for a couple of days. He had prepared the defence of Budaörs airfield by ordering infantry, artillery and flak batteries there; this would at least allow Nagy's government to flee into exile. But this was not the kind of programme for which young men would be willing to die on the barricades. Moreover, Király's officers had been firmly and efficiently calling in the guns, ammunition and equipment captured by the insurgents in their week-long battles with the Russians. Only if order was maintained could the Russians be kept out, he, Maléter and Nagy naïvely believed. He told John MacCormac that this job was not made any easier by Radio Free Europe or the Voice of America: "They have been inciting

Hungarians to further rebellion and strikes. But what the revolution needs now is the workers back at their jobs.”

The truth this morning was that Radio Free Europe was also urging the rebels to calm down. Over its antennae urgent warnings went out calling for “disciplined self-restraint”. As they read the news reports of the Soviet movements, a sense of helplessness overcame the analysts in Munich. An internal guidance lamented that it was impossible to assess the significance of these reports: “Our listeners must try to answer these and similar questions for themselves,” it said.

All Andropov’s blandishments could not conceal the truth that day. During the morning two Soviet armoured trains had crashed the frontier and entered Záhony, where they occupied the railway station after stiff resistance by the railway men; they then seized the line onward to Nyíregyháza. Telephone communications with Nyíregyháza railway station were cut, and the safety installations were taken over by Soviet railwaymen. Twenty lorry-loads of Soviet infantry arrived at Nyíregyháza. The Miskolc University radio station monitored Soviet armour arriving in the village of Kisvárda during the night. Reports spoke of an uninterrupted flow of Soviet tank and machine-gun units heading westwards through Debrecen to Szolnok. About two hundred tanks that had been dug in between Szolnok and Abony had now left, heading further west. Soviet troops surrounded airfields at Taszar, Pécs, Szolnok and Kaposvár. In the evening six further armoured trains entered Záhony. Similar reports had been received from the north and west. Soviet tank battalions arrived at Gyöngyös on November 1st and 2nd and appeared as far west as Szombathely.⁷

Maléter now moved out of the Kilián Barracks, put on his major-general’s insignia and moved over to Parliament, where he nailed his flag back to the Communist mast. Hungarian tanks were manoeuvring around the building. No office was available so deputy foreign minister George Heltai cleared a desk for him in his office. Maléter returned to the Kilián Barracks only to eat and sleep. A change was coming over him, now that he was Nagy’s deputy minister. His sympathy with the rebellion had been short-lived.

During the morning the Cabinet met.⁸ It now included the Smallholder minister Stephen B. Szabó; Francis Farkas was present for the first time for the

Peasant Party. Francis Erdei and Julius Kelemen turned up later. Nagy drafted two more notes to the Russians. The first protested at the continuing Soviet influx but welcomed the planned joint talks. The political commission would be headed by his devoted colleague, Géza Losonczy, with Joseph Kővágó representing the Smallholders, Colonel Márton the army, Farkas the Peasant Party and tiny cigar-smoking Vilmos Zentai, the Social Democrats. This commission would go to Warsaw to negotiate the termination of the Pact.⁹ The second note proposed that the joint military commission on the withdrawal of Soviet troops meet here in Parliament. The names finally agreed on made strange bedfellows: beside the porky, curly-haired army chief of staff, General Stephen Kovács, and General Maléter, they included both Francis Erdei and the no less obnoxious former ÁVH colonel, Nicholas Szücs, who had played such an evil part in the softening-up interrogations before the 1949 Rajk trial.

At four thirty p.m. Tildy received a number of journalists. His blue suit was still immaculate; he was tranquil and correct. Two men armed with machine guns stood guard in the room and his wife carried a rifle under one arm.¹⁰ The last time that Sefton Delmer had seen Tildy was eight years earlier: then he had found him weak and unsure of himself, waffling vague and evasive answers. Now he was firm and decided: years of Communist imprisonment had done that to him.

“How many tanks entered Hungary from the Ukraine on Wednesday night?” enquired Alberto Cavallari.

“Several hundred,” answered Tildy.

“And where are they now?”

“Over 200 kilometres inside our frontier.”

“What policies will a free Hungarian government pursue?”

“A just social policy. We shall not throw away our post-1945 achievements like the agrarian reform.”

“And what is the state of the Communist Party?”

Tildy replied contemptuously, “A state of collapse!”

Delmer asked him about the impending joint talks with the Russians. The Smallholder politician smoothed back his silver hair with a sad gesture. “These talks will only have a real chance of success if the Soviet troop movements that are pouring in fresh armour stop – at least until the talks begin. The sad, sad

news is that according to our incontrovertible information, the movements are still going on.”

As the journalists left, Nagy appeared at the door of his room and called in General Maléter. The prime minister looked worried. He asked the general their chances if they offered resistance. Maléter replied: “It all depends on the officers.”

At that afternoon’s Cabinet, Nagy debated the need to fill the remaining ministerial posts.

Having regard to the increasing urgency of the question of reshuffling the government the Cabinet decided not to proceed with the nomination of new ministers but to make up the Cabinet on the one hand with new forces – and first and foremost with the participation of the insurgents – and on the other hand not to appoint ministers to head the ministries for the time being, but to entrust the running of the ministries to a number of competent secretaries of state with ministerial mandates.¹¹

Lynchings were continuing. The government urged all ÁVH men still at large to report in their own interest to No. 25 Márkó Street. *People’s Voice (Népszava)* reported a meeting of the Social Democrat leadership on November 1st which discussed “regrettable reports of ‘popular justice’ still being practised in several areas”. The revolutionary council of the attorney general’s office and other rebel bodies appealed to the public to leave punishment of crimes to the organs of law. For a start, the media announced during the day that Julius Alapi, the odious public prosecutor in countless trials, including that of Mindszenty, had been arrested.

More and more frightened funkies had gathered within the safe walls of Parliament. They slept and lived there, day and night. Armed rebels had showed up at their apartments but they had stayed away and thus escaped assassination; now they were muttering and plotting for revenge.¹² This morning Alexander Nógrádi had come to see George Marosán here and confided to him that Münnich and Kádár had vanished. Marosán suspected at first that rebels might have kidnapped them, just as Uncle Szabó’s gang had tried to get him the day before.

Among the others skulking here were Mrs. Joseph Nagy, minister of light industry, Alexander Czottner, minister of mines and energy, and János Csergő, minister of metallurgy and the machine industry. For several days they had been secretly meeting in the room of Alexander Rónai, a leading Social Democrat renegade who had sold out to the Communists and been well rewarded with ministerial positions and a seat in the Politburo. Here they set up their headquarters. President Stephen Dobi, the country's head of state, furtively joined them. His peasant cunning had not abandoned him; through an alcoholic haze he had grasped that Nagy was doomed.

Just as reports flooded into Nagy's office of the Soviet movements, so this group listened with horror to each fresh outrage committed by Nagy's Cabinet. Now that he had repudiated the Warsaw Pact and declared the country's neutrality, what would Nagy announce next as "resolutions of the Cabinet", as though the entire body had taken part and not just his select Inner Cabinet? That afternoon, November 2nd, this cabal boiled over with indignation. At five past four p.m. the radio news had announced, "Changes will be made in the composition of the national government very shortly, possibly during the course of the day. Ministers who have lost the confidence of the population will be removed." What kind of language was that? Dobi slurred agreement. Barely an hour later the radio broadcast a fresh directive: "All history books used at present in general and secondary schools are to be withdrawn; Soviet literature is no longer to be taught; the compulsory teaching of the Russian language is to cease; the Russo-Hungarian 'Maxim Gorky' school is to close . . ."

The three ministers marched to Imre Nagy's secretariat and demanded to see him. His usually timorous secretary Mrs. Balogh barred their way: "The prime minister has given instructions to let nobody in; he is carrying on important discussions," she said. That put their noses even more out of joint. Mrs. Nagy took the lead and marched into the prime minister's office, brushing the secretary aside. She found Tildy inside with General Kovács and an army officer; Tildy shook hands with her, Imre Nagy pointedly did not. She spluttered, "We disapprove of these resolutions being passed . . . and we are not willing to take responsibility for them! Take note: you're not going to dismiss us. We quit!"

Nagy wordlessly turned away from them to the two officers with whom he had been studying maps. Tildy was more diplomatic, and commented: "Hear

that, Imre? That wretched radio has made a mess of things again.” The offended minister did not like the tone of that either. Tildy soothed her in unctuous tones: “What can I do, my daughter? They want to relieve even me of my post! They have lost confidence in me! Things are happening here that are practically unbearable. It is a job sometimes to keep sane and I wonder if I shouldn’t walk straight out of this lunatic asylum.”

The day had brought relief for the American chargé d’affaires, Spencer Barnes: Tom Wailes, his new minister, had arrived; and he had brought a radio operator, Travers Hanna, and a portable radio transmitter. Born in Brooklyn, Wailes was fifty-three and a former American ambassador to South Africa. He had been kicking his heels, pottering around in his Washington rose garden since August; this idleness was not important, because Dulles nonchalantly admitted that he had not wanted much to do with either the Hegedüs or the Imre Nagy government. On October 31st, however, Dulles had urgently briefed Wailes to get into Budapest within forty-eight hours.¹³

Wailes sent his first report to Washington at ten p.m.: “Situation predominantly quiet during day, except for short bits of intermittent firing heard just after dark. Numerous reports, *not* fully confirmed, that additional Soviet motorised units moving towards Budapest, city largely ringed by Soviets. No significant news re Hungarian internal situation from official sources, except item to effect [that] formation [of a] new Hungarian government to be announced soon.”

Meanwhile in Parliament, George Marosán, having deduced that Münnich and Kádár had probably fled to Moscow, had begun to reflect on which way he ought to flee himself – West, or East – when Nógrádi slipped into his room and announced that “they” wanted four more people. By “they” Marosán guessed the Russians were meant. The four men specified were Marosán, Dobi, Antal Apró, and Stephan Kossa, a small-time Stalinist from the Rákosi era. Marosán was relieved that the decision had been made for him. By car, he was taken to the Soviet headquarters at Tököl airfield. Here he was told that he had been appointed a member of a government being set up *against* Imre Nagy.¹⁴

Unhappy Imre Nagy! This day he spoke with Louis Lederer, a reporter on the *Observer* who had just published an important interview with Tito. Perhaps he imagined that Lederer had some special line to the Yugoslav president. Lederer later wrote: “He was a man of moderation and good will thrown into an extreme

situation which engulfed him. His valuable qualities – the shrewdness of the professional politician, the homely dignity of the Hungarian peasant farmer – were of no avail at this stark, dire moment.” But in this interview he tried to clear his personal reputation: he had become obsessed with the night of October 23rd. He swore to Lederer as to so many other journalists that he had never, never, appealed for Russian armed aid against the insurgents.¹⁵

That afternoon he conferred with his Inner Cabinet. The six men huddled together in the corner of his study. Kádár was still missing, and there was no word from New York of Hungary having been placed on the United Nations agenda yet. A third note was drafted to the Soviet ambassador, protesting that there had been further movements of Soviet troops into the country this day, occupying railway lines and steamrolling through Western Hungary to the Austrian frontier. Copies of the note were sent round to foreign legations and a further message was sent off to the United Nations. However, it would not reach most delegates until much later that evening. It described the situation and the Soviet reply to their requests. Nagy described to UN secretary-general Hammarskjöld the proposals which he had made for talks, and concluded, “I request Your Excellency to call upon the Great Powers to recognise the neutrality of Hungary and ask the Security Council to instruct the Soviet and Hungarian governments to start the negotiations immediately.”

For Imre Nagy, a long wait began.

Almost simultaneously in New York, at one p.m., a French-British-American letter had in fact been delivered to the President of the Security Council. In two sentences it called for a special session immediately on Hungary. The Council's eleven delegates were summoned to attend at five p.m.

As political power in Budapest shifted slowly to the bourgeois parties, there was growing discord among the rebel armies. In the Corvin Passage group, which now numbered about 1,500 “troops”, one commander after another had been relieved, discipline was haywire, apathy was spreading. Most of the original members had been replaced by ex-convicts who increasingly took control.¹⁶ It disturbed the insurgents – particularly the former army officers – that Király's National Guard was systematically calling in all guns and ammunition, and denuding the city of the means of defence: what if the Russians did return?

Around six p.m. Joseph Dudás sent a force (under a man he had promoted to “Lieutenant-colonel”) to search and hold the foreign ministry building on the Danube embankment. In Parliament, the telephone rang on the desk of George Heltai, deputy foreign minister.¹⁷ Peter Mód, a senior ministry official who now chaired the ministry’s revolutionary committee, was at the other end, and Heltai could hear shots in the background. Mód said, “I’m speaking from underneath my desk. Dudás’s men are occupying the building. They say they’re searching for ÁVOs.”

Heltai handed the telephone to General Maléter. He spoke with the insurgent leader, Tibor Szeifert, a thirty-six-year-old statistician.¹⁸ The man addressed Maléter in old-fashioned language, calling him: “Sir!” Maléter rasped at him, “There are no Sirs now, only comrades!”

He sent National Guard men round to throw the Dudás men out of the ministry. For a few hours Király even had Dudás held under arrest, but the rebel leader’s personal secretary, a muscular, stocky athlete, threatened he would raise hell in *Independence* – with 200,000 copies – and Dudás was set free. This did not please Maléter at all, who ordered Dudás’s rearrest. When Király refused, Maléter threatened to arrest him for disobedience. Király said simply: “I think you are mad,” and put the phone down.¹⁹

The regime had appointed military advisers to the radio. Maléter dictated instructions to them: “The revolution must be prevented from veering to the right . . . There exist certain phenomena which indicate that the revolution itself is in danger. You may be sure that the Russians are watching like hawks for any opportunity to intervene.”²⁰

Later he telephoned the Kilián Barracks. “I’m bringing some guests this evening,” he announced. The guests were Kovács and Szücs. They talked of the morrow’s military talks, and of the future of Hungary. Maléter said: “We’re not going to return any land or factories or banks to their former owners . . . Our first task is to restore order. That is the only way we can exert any influence on the Russians.” When Captain Louis Csiba, the barracks commandant, gloomily mentioned the latest air reconnaissance reports from Mátyásföld airfield, Maléter was unimpressed. “The Soviet Union already has in Hungary military forces far in excess of any they might need for an action against us.” He shook his head knowingly: “No. In my view, the Soviet divisions are concentrating against the

West. It's their reaction to Suez. Sabre-rattling! What matters now is that we must not violate the ceasefire. Not one shot! It could have incalculable consequences."

For whatever reason, most Western journalists decided to get out of Budapest. True, dinner in the old-fashioned hotel dining room over-looking the Danube was not what it was; the waiters tried to keep things going but the tablecloths were stained, there was no heating and the main dish was rice and beans. At the hotel reception desk, Paul Mathias caught sight of Sefton Delmer. The *Daily Express* correspondent explained to his colleague from *Paris-Match*, "I'm checking out." Mathias, Hungarian born, caught his arm. "Where are you going?" Delmer shrugged: "You know what's happening in Suez. This isn't front-page news any more!"

In the foyer, Swiss radio reporter François Bondy detected panic and depression in the air.²¹ As he headed west in his big Buick across Margaret Bridge, the sky was lowering, and wet snowflakes sloshed against the windscreen. Crows blackened the bare branches of the trees, and stared at the long truck laden with ammunition. Just before Magyaróvár – the last town before the frontier – he ran into fifteen Soviet tanks. A Russian soldier ripped the door of the Buick open and snatched his camera. A peasant whispered to him, "Don't argue, just drive on and tell the world what you've seen here." Bondy's Buick was one of the last to slip out. A short while later a convoy of diplomats' families and journalists was blocked by twenty-four tanks and forced back to Budapest. As yet the Russians were keeping a low profile. Julius Nagy, a student emissary, merely showed them his orders issued by the revolutionary council to get cocoa at the border at Hegyeshalom, and they made no attempt to interfere.

Audible echoes were now sounding from Khrushchev's whistlestop tour of his satellite capitals. At the Kremlin luncheon for the visiting Syrian president on November 1st, Khrushchev had been noticeably absent; and now something seemed to be happening in Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Romania. In Belgrade an Italian journalist talked with the Russian embassy; a Soviet official bragged: "Soviet Russia cannot just stand by and watch passively while fascist forces get the upper hand in Hungary." He added, "The denunciation of the

Warsaw Pact by Nagy is illegal. There is no proof that Nagy represents the will of the people.” The Italian legation in Prague reported that *Rude Pravo*, the Party organ, had branded the repudiation of the Warsaw Pact as “unheard of”. Minister Fabrizio Franco learned from his colleague in Bucharest that since yesterday the Romanian press, too, had started a campaign against the Nagy regime.²²

In Moscow, by the evening of November 2nd the Soviet press had not even reported that Nagy had declared neutrality and repudiated the Warsaw Pact, let alone that he was accusing the Soviet Union of throwing in more troops.²³ Now tomorrow’s newspapers were going to the presses, and they made no mention of any Soviet-Hungarian negotiating commission. American ambassador “Chip” Bohlen predicted in a telegram to Washington that this mixed commission was “little more than a device to gain time for preparations [of] armed action in Hungary”.²⁴ He also foresaw that the Soviets would use this device in the United Nations to forestall Security Council action and to confuse the issue.

At a reception thrown by the Syrians this evening in Moscow, Bohlen noticed that Khrushchev was still absent, and that Marshal Zhukov and others left early wearing an “air of satisfaction and even triumph”. Bohlen was curious and asked Voroshilov and Mikoyan if Khrushchev was ill. “No, he’s at home,” lied one. And: “It is impossible for us all to attend every reception,” said the other.

Marshal Bulganin mentioned the “mixed commission” and Bohlen asked him: “What about Nagy’s allegations that Soviet troops in Hungary are being reinforced?” Bulganin denied it; but it did not escape the shrewd American that in doing so he mechanically used the classic Soviet cover-up phrase: “The reports of reinforcements,” Bulganin said, “do not correspond to reality.”

That worried Bohlen. By midnight he had noticed, too, a clumsy shift in the Soviet media treatment of the crisis. Now Nagy’s government was lumped together with the rebels as “counter-revolutionary”.²⁵

Italian newspaperman Alberto Cavallari also checked out of Budapest that evening. It was around six p.m. when he left, his car wheels spinning wildly on the wet snow. On the main road he saw young men bristling with machine guns rebuilding the long barricades which had been all but removed four days earlier. After Győr a Soviet tank straddled the road, but it let him pass – too politely,

because by the time he reached Magyaróvár it was plain that this had become a cul-de-sac: the town was surrounded by heavy Soviet tanks, and nothing would persuade the Russians to let him through.

The snowstorm was worsening. The *Daily Mail* and *Mirror* men, Blyth and Stephens, had slung their bags into the Taunus, driven off, and arrived in the same rebel-held oasis. So did Paul Sargent. A score of journalists were given refuge in a building that was all red plush and gilt, rumoured to be the local bordello. Blyth thrust his story into the hands of a young armed insurgent on a bicycle and asked him to find a way through to the frontier where Anthony Cave Brown, the newspaper's young reporter, would be waiting for it. Unfortunately, Brown was not there. So the mud-stained young rebel handed it to a local journalist, Ernest Schott, who telephoned it to Vienna. From there Laurence Davis telephoned it on to Fleet Street, and Blyth's dramatic story made the last edition of the *Daily Mail*.

The Iron Curtain has fallen again on Hungary's frontier with the West. Nobody's being allowed out, nobody's being allowed in. The Curtain is formed of Russian troops, Russian tanks, Russian guns. They swept in from the north and south tonight in a snowstorm, they blocked all the roads to and from Austria along which the West had been sending supplies to Hungary.²⁶

The giant Soviet pincer arms had clanged shut around Budapest at about seven p.m., simultaneously sealing the Western frontier. At eleven thirty p.m. the Italian ambassador in Vienna telephoned Fabrizio Franco in Budapest that even the diplomatic convoy had been stopped about ten miles from the frontier at Hegyeshalom. Franco angrily contacted the Soviet embassy. The Russians repeated what Andropov had told him that morning: "We give you a categorical assurance that Soviet troops are not controlling the highway."

At this moment, 300 miles south-east of Budapest, a knot of men waits in the gathering darkness on the deserted quay of Brioni, Tito's island in the Adriatic sea. A storm is blowing up, its fists pounding high waves across the meek waters between here and the Yugoslav mainland. A motor launch heaves into sight and makes fast to a ladder. The men who climb shakily out include some of the

most powerful men on earth: Nikita S. Khrushchev, green as a sicked-up pea after the rough sea crossing, and Georgi M. Malenkov, another uncomfortably pale landlubber.

They slobber fraternal kisses on to the cheeks of the Yugoslav welcoming party – Marshal Tito, vice-president Edvard Kardelj and Aleksandar Ranković – then ventilate stomach felt reproaches about their flight in an inconspicuous little Ilyushin-14 to Pula airfield earlier that afternoon. Malenkov has had to lie on the floor of the plane for most of the flight. The Kremlin leaders reproach Tito that his security officers have “conspired” to bring them from Pula to this island along a much longer, nastier, and duskier route than was necessary.²⁷

Feelings are running high, but Khrushchev controls his, as he desires to hitch Tito as an accomplice to his next act: the re-invasion of Hungary. From seven p.m. until five A.M. the talks last. No record is made. Those who jot cue-notes on to scraps of paper tear them up and drop them into an ashtray afterwards, like mobsters planning a heist. Khrushchev reveals to Tito that he is going to crush the counter-revolution in Hungary. He has consulted all the other Warsaw Pact leaders and the Chinese, and all have agreed. Military preparations will take two more days. Marshal Zhukov has put General Michael S. Malinin in charge. “What else can we do? If we let things take their course the West will say we’re either stupid or soft . . . We would have capitalists on the frontiers of the Soviet Union.”

He adds that he has just telephoned Marshal Bulganin in Moscow, and Bulganin has given him the triumphant news that they have succeeded in extricating Münnich and Kádár from Budapest and that they are at this moment flying to Moscow. Now they have to get Apró out too. “We’re doing what we can about this,” says Khrushchev, “but so far we don’t know what has happened to him.” Khrushchev also said, “Rákosi telephoned Moscow offering to go and help in Budapest. I told him that if he went down there the people would hang him on the spot.”

The name of Imre Nagy finds little favour. Several times both Khrushchev and Tito mention the news photographs of Communists being lynched by the mob, and Khrushchev blubbers: “They are slaughtering Communists in Hungary!” He adds: “Twice already the Hungarians have fought alongside the West against us, and now they want to join forces with the West against the Russians

again.” Fortunately Suez has provided a fine opportunity for the Soviets to smash the uprising. “They are bogged down there,” he smirks, “and we are stuck in Hungary.”

Then he asks Marshal Tito whom he would prefer as prime minister in Hungary – Münnich or Kádár. He himself clearly prefers Münnich; he is a high-ranking Soviet agent, and they shared the same tent on manoeuvres in the Thirties. In fact it becomes clear that the Russians have already chosen Münnich as prime minister. They also intend to send General Bata back as defence minister but Tito talks them out of it: Bata served Rákosi in the same capacity. The Yugoslavs are unanimous that János Kádár, having languished for years in Rákosi's prisons while Münnich was luxuriating as ambassador to Moscow, will attract a bigger following in Hungary.

Interestingly, the Yugoslavs also praise two of Nagy's leading henchmen: Géza Losonczy, who has five times in the last week secretly met with ambassador Soldatić and his counsellor Osman Dikić in Budapest; and Zoltán Szántó, who has even asked for asylum in the Yugoslav embassy because of the danger of a pogrom. The Russians show no enthusiasm for either. When Tito hints that the Soviet Union should first try assisting Imre Nagy towards a peaceful solution, Khrushchev palpitates with controlled anger: “Nagy's directives are to blame for the slaughter of the Communists!” he snaps.

In Washington it is four p.m. President Eisenhower has just announced a gift of \$20 million of surplus foodstuffs and medical supplies to Hungary. That is the total outcome of one week of expert analysis of the laws and acts governing aid to foreign nations; and even this mite will never reach Hungary.

At the United Nations, the men who make the decisions are deciding to drag their feet over Hungary. The reasons are obscure. At four ten p.m. Foster Dulles telephones his ambassador there, Henry Cabot Lodge. Lodge tells him obliquely that his British and French colleagues are in a very emotional state over the American indictment of their Egypt campaign: “They say there will be a bad impression at home if we are in a hurry to put *them* in the dock, and yet drag on Russia.”

The secretary of state is cynical: “They want the limelight off them! . . . I think it's a mockery for them to come in, with bombs falling over Egypt, and

denounce the Soviet Union for perhaps doing something that is not quite as bad.” Lodge utters sounds of agreement. Dulles repeats: “I want no part of it.”

“I’m glad to hear that, Mr. Secretary,” says Lodge.

So Dulles instructs him to table no resolution when the Security Council meets this evening; he is just to suggest getting a representative of the new Hungarian government as quickly as possible. Dulles adds by way of justification: “We don’t have any hard information as to what’s going on in Hungary. But about *Egypt* there is no doubt!”²⁸

Later the CIA director telephones his brother. They congratulate each other on the wonderful United Nations result last night, when sixty-two nations sided with the United States. Foster Dulles is still chuckling at the British and French discomfiture: “They are angry, because they want to put in a ringing denunciation of the Soviet Union over Hungary, and we refused to be in on it! I think it would be a mockery.”

Allen Dulles pauses. He does not share his brother’s obscure high principles. “Foster, I’m worried about Hungary,” he admits. “The news is pretty bad. They’ve cut off the Austrian frontier, though they haven’t moved into Budapest. Are they going to say, we’ll get out of Hungary if you get out of Egypt?”

The secretary replies: “I don’t believe so. Maybe Germany.”

At six p.m. Allen Dulles telephones his brother again: “I’ve had a message from Cairo about the seriousness of the situation.” “I have it too,” says Foster. “And I have a message picked up from a Moscow broadcast about Hungary, backing their build-up. It says that the counter-revolutionary bands are spreading terror in the country.”

Meanwhile the Security Council has met in New York but has begun with an hour’s wrangling over the right of János Szabó to attend; finally somebody whispers into the under-secretary general’s ear that a cable has in fact been received thirty hours earlier, formally appointing Szabó.

Mr. Arkady A. Sobolev, speaking for the Soviet Union, calls reports of Soviet tanks and troops flooding back into Hungary “utterly unfounded”, and points out: “There is a report today which is being distributed by press agencies which says, ‘Early today a government spokesman said that no new Soviet troops crossed the Russian-Hungarian frontier during the night.’”

Dulles has meanwhile spelt out the delaying tactics to be used, in a telegram to Cabot Lodge shortly before seven p.m.:

Confirming Secretary/Lodge conversation re procedure to be followed at tonight's SC meeting on Hungary, US should state Council now lacks complete and current information as to developing Hungarian situation. In these circumstances US believes SYG [Secretary-General] should communicate urgently with Hungarian government for purpose of getting Hungarian representative to New York at earliest possible moment so that SC will have more information before acting upon any substantive resolution . . .

Meantime you should make every possible effort dissuade French from proceeding with tabling substantive resolution at tonight's meetings. Even if French resolution submitted, US should make every effort ensure deferral of vote on above grounds.²⁹

After hours of procedural hairsplitting, Lodge begins his long and apparently spirited speech. But as the speech grinds eloquently on, puzzlement among newspapermen and delegates increases: what is needed is a resolution, to get this matter out of the Security Council and into the powerful arena of the General Assembly. But Lodge's only proposal is that Nagy should get a representative from Budapest to tell the UN exactly what the situation is. At this moment, when all roads westward from Budapest and all Hungarian airfields are in the vice-grip of Russian tanks, the proposal has an unrealistic quality.

The council president, Entezam, moves to adjourn over the weekend until Monday, November 5th. But Cuba's Nuñez-Portuondo objects and with a sigh Entezam agrees to resume at three p.m. tomorrow, November 3rd.

Next morning, we have the clue to the strange behaviour of John Foster Dulles. He awakes in Washington with cruel abdominal pains: they are the first pangs of the cancer that will kill him. He is taken to Walter Reed Hospital for an immediate operation. It is a further fist-blow to the hopes of Hungary. The State Department now comes under the control of his under-secretary, Herbert Hoover Jr., a former oil engineer, with Robert Murphy acting as his deputy.

Eisenhower now assumes direct control of his great nation's foreign affairs. He assigns his first priority to peace in the Middle East; he refuses to have any truck with Anthony Eden, whose deceits he will never forgive. In fact for the rest of Eden's premiership Anglo-American affairs will largely be conducted through Eisenhower's ambassador in London, Winthrop W. Aldrich, and Winston S. Churchill, the ailing former premier. Henceforth Aldrich sees Winston every Wednesday morning as he breakfasts in bed. Not for the first time, the West is in disarray at a time when unity and resolution are needed against the East.³⁰

43 We'll Meet Again

THUS THE NAGY regime's will to resist had been sapped. The Russians had done the seemingly impossible: they had halted a nationwide insurrection of ten million enraged people in full charge, merely by withdrawing over the horizon, while their former satraps and the bourgeois politicians were lulled and gulled into believing that revolutions had become easier with each century. While the furious streetfighters fumed, the regime's own hirelings now called in all their guns and ammunition, the radio equipment and the artillery that they had wrested at high price from their tormentors. The dazed remnants of the ÁVH were re-assembled behind closed doors, under the guise of being called into protective custody for their own good. Now the last act had to be written by the Kremlin: the revolutionary leadership had to be neutralised, while the outside world was bluffed into inactivity.

By November 3rd, several thousand Russian tanks had rolled into Hungary, yet the people believed that they had won. An entire army of mechanised infantry and artillery had melted into the countryside, yet the street was celebrating victory. Only the rebel newspapers, as usual, were printing the truth. At eight A.M. airforce Colonel Zsolt, Colonel Nádor's deputy, telephoned a warning to the former Second World War officers who had attended the conference at headquarters five days earlier: "The Russians have surrounded all the airfields. Everybody who was at that meeting had better escape while he can!"¹ Two hours later the radio broadcast a wholly spurious report that a sixteen-man team of United Nations observers had landed at Ferihegy airport and was on its way into the city.²

During the night the Russians had returned to Győr. They met with no resistance, because such were Attila Szigethy's orders.³ The city was crammed with Western journalists and diplomats' families trying to get out; there were women and children, a Swedish Red Cross column, and journalists like Antony Terry of the *Sunday Times*. At midday sixty Russian tanks rumbled through. Alberto Cavallari began noting down their white painted numbers – 802, 803, 808 – then gave up.

When he and his driver set out towards Vienna again around five p.m., the highway was clear. The tanks of the previous night had lumbered off across the snow-covered plain. The *Daily Mail*'s Noel Barber passed through, swaddled in blankets and bloodstained bandages. Sefton Delmer was driving the Borgward, and there was a Hungarian girl with them. The car's windscreen was gone. They told Jeffrey Blyth that they were going to make a dash for the frontier. Noel Barber found the way across the frontier by bribing a peasant with the Samsonite suitcase full of baby clothes he had bought at Harrods on the day that his paper had sent him into Hungary. Barber did not return, so Blyth also drove off, but yesterday's snow had mushed the farmtracks, and several Hungarian soldiers wearing rebel colours had to help free the Ford Taunus. Barbed wire and a ploughed strip marked the frontier. Safely beyond them, the Hungarian girl knelt and kissed the soil of Austria, then turned and kissed the mud-stained, ice-stiffened British flag on the Taunus as well.

Two hours later, an exhausted Jeffrey Blyth drove into Vienna. As he waited at traffic lights, his foot slipped off the clutch and the car lurched forward. A tram sliced across the front and carried away his lights, front bumper, and grille. Blyth had to claim he had been sideswiped by a Soviet T-54; he could hardly admit to having tangled with a Vienna tram, after all that he had been through.

Moscow citizens were now reading lurid accounts of the tumults and lynch law prevailing in Budapest, and of arms being airlifted from the West.⁴ A *Pravda* headline screamed: "BLOCK THE PATH OF REACTION IN HUNGARY!" *Izvestia* adopted the same tone. To "Chip" Bohlen, the Kremlin seemed to be about to describe Nagy's government as "counter-revolutionary".⁵ Every indication was that Khrushchev had decided to use force if need be. Bohlen asked the State Department to consider a direct approach in Moscow, which might have some

value even now. But Foster Dulles was in hospital; the telegram was shown to President Eisenhower and no answer was forthcoming.

It struck Bohlen that the newspapers contained no reference to any “mixed commission”. This confirmed his impression that it was just a trick. He cabled a warning to Washington: “It is also possible that commission gambit will be used by Soviets in Security Council debate, in hopes [of] forestalling SC action and to confuse issue.”⁶

As though to taunt Budapest, this Saturday morning is bright and wintry. The mood is brilliant: on Monday, everybody is going back to work. A reporter takes the tram down to Csepel Island and walks into its famous steelworks: the old name, Rákosi works, can still be made out faintly on the gates but the placards and Lenin pictures are being swept into a heap by maintenance engineers preparing for the Monday shift. A workers’ council has taken control, with an ex-Communist engineer as chairman. Up on Zsigmond Móricz Square the barricades are being dismantled. The combat debris of empty ammunition cartons and cartridge casings is being swept into heaps, and workers are repairing the tram cables.

The wags are out in force. In a shop window three dummies have been labelled Geró, Rákosi and Apró. Stalin Square has been renamed Jackboot Square. And one popular joke mimics: “Proletarians of the World Unite: but not in groups of three or more.” Lecturer Joseph Bálint and his University colleagues are still chuckling as they begin preparing for the Monday; announcements and timetables are posted, classrooms are cleaned.⁷ The University’s militia – several thousand rebel students, now officially licensed to carry arms – have been sent home on leave this very day. For that matter, most of the army officers assigned to the student battalions have also disappeared on this day.⁸

The capital city has become a troop-free oasis in a country that has over the last week slowly become one of the most troop-saturated territories in the world. Joseph Bálint barely looks up as some students and staff come in. Somebody remarks that Kispest, a distant suburb, is still crawling with Russian tanks. But the optimists find explanations for everything.

Less easily beguiled were the morning’s revolutionary newspapers: *Hungarian Youth* headlined: “WE PROTEST THE INFLUX OF NEW SOVIET TROOPS

INTO THE COUNTRY.” Julius Obersovszky’s *Truth* laconically asked the revolutionary committee at the foreign ministry if it was true that their country’s unloved representative at the United Nations, Peter Kós, was none other than the oil engineer Leo Konduktorov, a Soviet citizen; the committee admitted that the foreign ministry had granted him the phoney identity.

The new Party newspaper *People’s Freedom* (*Népszabadság*) also appeared, edited by Alexander Haraszi. He had written a realistic assessment of the Party’s prospects and expressed approval of Nagy’s demand for neutrality and the withdrawal of Soviet troops. Haraszi also argued in the newspaper that Kádár’s new Party must be built “from below in the factories, villages, offices and universities, rather than from above as was done under the old system”. Peter Kende⁹ and Nicholas Gimes did not like the new newspaper. They went to Nagy’s office and sought permission to publish an independent Leftist weekly. In Parliament they heard somebody say that Kádár had disappeared. Kende wondered if he had been assassinated – not impossible, as he was another relic of the Rákosi era.

The view from the American legation this forenoon in Budapest was sombre. By midday Tom Wailes had on his desk estimates of fifteen mechanised and four infantry divisions. He scratched his head, picked up a pencil and legal pad, and drafted a shrewd report to the State Department:

Soviet intentions unclear as to the ultimate use of these overwhelming forces but my current guess is that after making dispositions they will issue an ultimatum to the Hungarian government, possibly in the veiled form of ‘negotiations’ about Hungarian participation in the Warsaw Pact and the form of government. The major problem for the Hungarian government in yielding in face of hopeless odds is that the aroused populace may not follow [and he underlined the word *not*]. This could lead to slaughter.¹⁰

These telegrams attracted scepticism in Washington. The State Department asked him what basis he had for his estimates.¹¹ “Do reports emanate from official Hungarian sources or elsewhere? Has there been identification of any units and do reports indicate complete units, or merely elements thereof?” They added that at today’s Security Council meeting a resolution would be tabled calling for

a Soviet withdrawal. However, they also forewarned Wailes: “No vote expected today.” (He was not informed that this was in fact American policy.)

Imre Nagy's new Cabinet had met early, including the new Smallholder, Social Democrat and Peasant Party members. Nagy put the final touches to a remarkable new government. This one, the third in five days, would be “a government of national unity”. Losonczy and Maléter would be the only other Communists in the Cabinet. With the exception of foreign affairs and defence there would be no ministers at all. Nagy appointed several new ministers of state including three Social Democrats: Kéthly, Kelemen, and Joseph Fischer; under pressure from the Petőfi (formerly Peasant) Party Nagy had allocated to them one more ministerial position – it went to lawyer Stephen Bibó – in addition to that of the party's leader, Francis Farkas.

János Kádár also figured on the list. Evidently Nagy discounted the malicious rumours that he had defected. Of Münnich, who had also vanished, he obviously considered anything possible; Nagy sacked him as minister of the interior along with Imre Horváth, General Janza, Lukács and Kossa and numerous other ministers. In this bloodless purge, Nagy also dismissed the three querulous ministers who had marched into his office the afternoon before and announced that they were quitting: Mrs. Nagy, Czottnér, and Csörgő.¹²

Franz Philipp, forty-one-year-old Austrian Communist, sent this new list to his employers, the East German news agency ADN. When they published it a few hours later, they had crossed off one name: that of János Kádár. Evidently East Berlin knew something that Budapest did not.

During the morning Soviet ambassador Andropov visited Nagy. Nagy asked for further information about the Soviet troop movements. Andropov replied that his government had now accepted the proposals for the joint negotiations: military talks could start right away.

At about ten A.M. the Soviet delegation marched in, headed by General Malinin, a stocky Russian with heavy features and thin lips beneath a pug nose. He was accompanied by Lieutenant-General Stepanov and Major-General Shcherbanin. The atmosphere was friendly.¹³ Nagy introduced them to Maléter, Francis Erdei and the chief of general staff, General Kovács. From Nagy's office, the whole group walked through the anteroom into Erdei's room, where

the conference was to take place. Erdei asked apologetically in the anteroom if anybody knew Russian well enough to act as interpreter; General Kovács, the chief of the general staff, knew more Russian than he did, but not enough. The wife of journalist Nicholas Molnár, who worked for Heltai, stepped forward; she had lived for twenty years in the Soviet Union and was the daughter of a well-known Muscovite.

The Russians handed over a document about ten pages long, listing the conditions under which Soviet troops would withdraw. Aided by Mrs. Molnár, General Kovács went to work on a typewriter and hammered out a rough translation. Nicholas Molnár, who was waiting for his wife in the anteroom, says: "I concluded that the Russians were at that time sincere in their intention of withdrawing."

Later Maléter walked into Heltai's office. He was jaunty. He described the minor differences with the Russians as only paltry. They wanted a ceremonial farewell parade, and the restoration of Soviet monuments wrecked by the rebels. "I suppose that Moscow is behind these demands," Maléter speculated. "Let's hope their generals here can talk them out of pressing them."¹⁴

Elsewhere in the Parliament building, there was a curious little scene. Two airforce officers came to see Losonczy. Journalist Peter Erdős's wife, Erzsi, who was acting as Losonczy's secretary, escorted them in to see him. After a while they emerged, and stayed briefly in her office, where they engaged in conversation with Erdős. They had had the mission of persuading Losonczy to go to Szolnok – a city some distance away – for some reason which they would not disclose. Rather than return empty handed, they dropped hints that perhaps Erdős would like to go there instead – they did not explain why. "You won't be in Szolnok more than a couple of hours and then you can be back in Budapest!"

Erdős asked them, "Are you going to provide me with transport back?"

They would only say, mysteriously, "Just take it from us: you would be back tomorrow."

But his wife had gone in meanwhile to see Losonczy and when she came out she signalled unmistakably to him: *don't talk to them any more.*¹⁵

At one thirty p.m. Budapest radio announced the new national government. Stephen Bibó was at a conference at the academy of sciences when somebody came in and whispered to him: "You've been made a minister of state!" If Bibó expected a government limousine to come and rush him to the next Cabinet meeting, he was disappointed. He went home across the Danube, and waited. Nobody even phoned him. The truth was that Imre Nagy and his cronies were ruling on, and making no attempt to consult the men whose names they had put into their "shop window".

Bibó was forty-five. A tall, gangling intellectual who spoke English, French and German, Bibó had the beaky nose and prominent forehead of an academic. He had a wry sense of humour, and he would need it. Minister of state for less than a day, he would be imprisoned for five years as an accomplice of Imre Nagy, a man whom he would never have the fortune to meet.

The first session of the military talks ended at about two p.m. General Malinin cordially invited the Hungarian officers to be his guests that evening. "We'll meet again at Tököl," he said.

The National Guard's commander, General Király, buttonholed Maléter as he left the conference room.

"How are things going?"

"In fine order," said Maléter, noncommittally.

Later Király asked General Kovács the same question. The chief of staff was optimistic: "It's all sewn up. But to avoid disrupting transportation, they'll leave in stages; meanwhile our garrisons are to cease denying the Russians food and fuel. And, because they aren't prepared for a winter movement, we must be patient. Their troops won't be able to leave until January 15th. We're holding out for a December departure date."¹⁶

An official communiqué was issued to the evening newspapers: "A joint committee of the Hungarian and Soviet army commands has met and both parties have defined their position on the technical aspects of a Soviet troop withdrawal. The joint committee has agreed that they will study the documents and will meet again at ten p.m. Until then the Soviet delegation has promised that no more troop carrier trains will reach the Hungarian border."¹⁷ A communiqué was also broadcast on the radio at about three fifteen p.m.

A reliable source informed the American legation shortly before five p.m. that General Kovács had revealed that the Soviet delegates had agreed to a complete withdrawal from Hungary. The source had double-checked with a junior officer who was also at the meeting, and added that at the coming meeting at Tököl timing and other details would be discussed.¹⁸ That was not all that Tom Wailes learned, however. He sent a telegram to Washington that afternoon, “Top ranking reliable military officer has just informed us that there is now one army and two corps (about 4,500 tanks) here and more coming.”¹⁹

The invaders had little knowledge of where they were, or why. At Győr they told Hungarians who could speak the language that they had come four hundred miles. Others explained that they had come to defend Hungary against the Americans. Others still, that they were coming to fight the fascists. The official radio was now broadcasting scattered items about Soviet troops closing up to the cities: armour and mechanised infantry was seen crossing the frontier near Beregsurány during the forenoon. One mechanised unit was approaching Békéscsaba from the south-west and another Szarvas from the south. The railway station at Debrecen had been seized. At one twenty-five p.m. the rebel radio at Miskolc warned: “Soviet forces here are marching towards Debrecen from Vásárosnamény”; that was near the Soviet border. Later Miskolc radio broadcast a running commentary: “Tanks are approaching . . . No one is in the streets except Soviet troops on patrol. Nyíregyháza has been surrounded.”

All this was difficult to reconcile with a “Soviet withdrawal”. That afternoon the Austrian newspaper publisher, Fritz Molden, arrived at Parliament accompanied by newspaperman Géza Pogány.²⁰ They had driven through Győr in their Simca bringing gammaglobulin vaccine needed to fight a polio outbreak in Miskolc. They stowed the vaccine in the Danube Hotel fridge and hurried round to tell Imre Nagy of the tank build-up they had witnessed between Sopron and Győr in the west. Molden told the prime minister, “I’m no soldier, but we counted sixty tanks and there must have been many more. One lot was rolling towards the frontier, and the other towards Budapest. At Komárom we saw masses of Soviet troops pouring over the bridge from Czechoslovakia.”

Telephone calls were now pouring in. Working in Nagy’s secretariat, Peter Erdős guessed that there was going to be a show-down. Newspaper editor Ivan Boldizsár passed him in a corridor, clutched his arm and joked: “I am consider-

ing opening a Gallup Poll institute. How would you like to become its first director!”

Erdős brushed Boldizsár's arm aside. “We'll talk about that later – in prison.”²¹

Imre Nagy had directed Vásárhelyi to call a press conference to announce the success of the talks. Now he wished that he hadn't. Worse was to come. A telephone call from MTI alerted him to a report from Peking: the Chinese Party newspaper *Jen Min Jih Pao* had just printed a leading article, “Long Live Great Unity of Socialist Countries”, which echoed Moscow's line, emphasised the need for the Warsaw Pact, and called on every socialist country to prevent “reactionary” attempts to drive a wedge between the Soviet Union and other socialist countries.

Nagy felt ill. Every journalist still in Budapest was already arriving for the press conference. He asked Tildy and Losonczy to stand in for him. In a telegram at six p.m. to Washington, Tom Wailes summarised, “Tildy showed adroitness in dodging questions and being indefinite.” He would not state how many Soviet troops were now in the country. “Our chief of staff has the precise figures,” he said. “But I do not want to make them public.”

The reporter of the Dutch radio asked straight away, “Is the Hungarian-Austrian border open?” Tildy admitted, “We do not at present know the precise situation along the entire Austrian-Hungarian border.” The BBC's reporter asked how the talks with the Russians were going. Tildy became evasive: “The negotiations have only started today and will continue this evening. Hence we cannot yet report the results.” Géza Losonczy added more optimistically, “We trust that further results will be reached in the evening. There has been a thaw in the situation.” Tildy chimed in, “I have this very minute received a report that the Soviet military delegation has promised that further Soviet troop carrier trains will not cross the Hungarian border.”

For twenty minutes Tildy vanished and Losonczy took over. On Tildy's return he was noticeably more blunt. A newspaperman asked, “What was the Soviet answer to Mr. Nagy's demands on Thursday for the withdrawal of the newly-arrived Soviet troops?” Tildy answered: “The answers to our protests against the influx of Soviet reinforcements have been unsatisfactory. This government has demanded from its first days the withdrawal of Soviet troops. With this, any

legal or political basis for their presence disappeared. We have demanded their withdrawal in innumerable notes. We have never received a satisfactory reply.”

John MacCormac commented to the *New York Times*, “His replies strengthened a belief widely entertained here that the Russians, in their customary fashion, were dragging out the negotiations for the withdrawal of their troops to gain time to widen their occupation.”²²

A journalist asked, “Has the United Nations delegation arrived in Budapest?” Losonczy replied, “To the best of my knowledge a United Nations delegation has arrived from Prague this morning.” Asked whether there was any possibility of combat between the Soviet troops and the Hungarian population or armed forces Tildy made a curiously worded reply: “Our troops have been ordered to refrain from any kind of animosity.” The *Observer*’s Lajos Lederer pressed him, “Did the Soviet government inform the Hungarian government prior to the troop movements into Hungary and have they given information about the purpose of these reinforcements?” Tildy ducked that one: “Good question!” Amidst sympathetic chuckles he concluded, “In the name of the entire government I declare that in spite of everything that has happened we are striving to achieve true friendship with the Soviet Union, but basic to this is recognition of Hungary’s independence.”

Afterwards Géza Losonczy – one of the last Communists in Nagy’s Cabinet – spoke a few words about the problems of halting the insurrection now it had triumphed. “In our opinion counter-revolutionary forces are quite active at present in the country. The government declares in absolute unanimity that we shall not give up one, single achievement of the past twelve years, such as land reform, the nationalisation of the factories and workshops, and other socialist achievements . . . The government unanimously affirms that under no circumstances whatever will it tolerate the restoration of capitalism in Hungary.”

In his office at Parliament, General Kovács had a visitor – Group Captain Dennis David, the British air attaché. Kovács looked grave. He said that he hoped the legation was telling the truth to the West. When David replied that the legation had its own radio link with London the general asked him to pass on a heartfelt plea to the exiled members of Horthy’s government. It was, “Keep out of Hungary.” Kovács was anxious that Russian radio reports that these men had

caused the uprising should be disproved. "No one thing caused the uprising," he said. "It just evolved, and I was caught up in the events, like so many others."

Kovács began taking notes as Group Captain David confidentially told him of the Russian forces he had seen pouring in. He had seen Ferihegy airport crammed with tanks, guns, trucks and personnel carriers. He had made a surreptitious drive down to Tököl, the Soviet jet bomber airfield on Csepel Island, and witnessed an airlift of one hundred transports a day unloading troops. Kovács confirmed, "Our intelligence is that there are already eight and possibly nine Soviet armoured divisions in Hungary. And further infantry is coming in all the time from the Ukraine and our neighbouring countries. It looks bad." He continued, "There are optimists in our government who think that all this is just designed to put muscle into their talks with us this evening. I have my doubts, but Mr. Nagy trusts the Russians. He thinks they are sincere."

The group captain warned, "The Russians are smarting from their defeat. The fact that the insurgents include men and women from all walks of life can only make the situation more delicate."

As Kovács showed him out he murmured, "Things may go well tonight. If they do, we shall want the co-operation of the West." Then he lowered his eyes and concluded with dignity: "But if they don't, then please see that the West sends us bandages."

There was no doubt at all that by taking the Kremlin's promises at face value, Nagy and his National Guard commanders were taking a risk: but it was too late to turn back. On this Saturday, General Király issued an order for all Hungarian tanks to be returned to barracks and disassembled for the winter.²³ He and Kopácsi jointly signed an appeal that was duly broadcast for arms and ammunition to be turned in. Joe Szilágyi, head of Nagy's secretariat, broadcast an appeal to mothers not to allow their children to continue to carry arms. "Order must be maintained," he pleaded.

Some of the messages left an odd aftertaste, as though they were not quite genuine: a workers' revolutionary council at Szolnok appealed to the local inhabitants to stop hounding ÁVH men, as "all ÁVH agents of the region have been arrested". In Budapest the radio announced, "Members of the state security police are reporting to the prosecutor's office en masse, asking to be arrested.

In the XIIIth and Angel Fields Districts early this morning thirty ÁVH men reported.”

In the provinces, the guns of unreliable army units appeared to have been sabotaged. Aides sent by Dudás to different cities to contact student committees discovered this. One journalist sent by Dudás to Sopron learned from the local soldiers that their guns had been mysteriously disabled during the day.²⁴

There were odd occurrences at other cities, like Pécs. At about seven p.m. an accountant at the local railway station came and tipped off the biochemist who was chief of staff of the city's rebel leader, Professor Csikor: “There is a radio system linking the railway centres. And Chop has just informed us that Russians are pouring into Hungary by rail. They've counted fourteen trainloads of tanks.”²⁵ The rebel force then swooped on MÁV railway's so-called “revolutionary council”. The faces looked familiar. The manager claimed that he had no fresh news. The biochemist accused him, “But you have a two-way radio!” The manager stammered that it was only a very small set. The rebels pushed past him. The set filled one wall with two operators and it was buzzing with news now of trainloads of Soviet reinforcements rumbling in from Romania.

At about the same time there is a state reception at the Kremlin in Moscow, for the Syrian president. At first the Soviet leaders keep to themselves. In fact Khrushchev has been missing for some days, and Moscow is alive with rumour. But there is a commotion and Khrushchev appears with Malenkov. Immediately they are surrounded by the other presidium members present. “Chip” Bohlen is all ears, but continues making small talk with the Norwegian ambassador. Khrushchev stomps over and bursts out in Russian, “I want to talk to you about Israel.”²⁶

Bohlen replies evenly: “I want to talk to you about Hungary, but you got in first so you go ahead.”

The Soviet leader snarls: “I don't see how you can tell me that your government is in favour of Israel's actions.”

Bohlen suavely rejoins that the Kremlin is going to have to get itself new agents, if that is what he has been told about the United States' attitude. He continues: “Now Hungary! Last evening Bulganin told me that you were going

to negotiate with Hungary; and yet we keep hearing reports of powerful Soviet reinforcements pouring in. How do you reconcile these two things?"

Khrushchev refuses to be drawn. "I assume that NATO is rather pleased at the possibility of some 'dislocation' in the Warsaw Pact," he counters.

Bohlen puts to him one question he had not had time to ask Bulganin the evening before. "What are Soviet intentions with regard to Premier Nagy's request for the withdrawal of Soviet forces and getting out of the Warsaw Pact?" At first Khrushchev gives a standard reply: negotiations are proceeding with the Hungarian government. "Things will soon be straightened out."

Chip Bohlen does not miss the undertone. Again he prompts Khrushchev that troops are apparently still being rammed into Hungary. The real Khrushchev is suddenly there, slicing the air with his pudgy fist. "We have enough troops there. If not, we will add more and more if necessary." He snaps: "*This is no joke!*"

By eight p.m. Bohlen, still bruised by the Russian leader's language, is back in his embassy, reporting to Washington. "The only discernible virtue in Khrushchev that I can see is his brutal frankness."²⁷

Five thousand miles away, in New York, the clock advances to three p.m. The Security Council meets and Henry Cabot Lodge introduces his resolution "deploring the use of Soviet military forces to suppress the efforts of the Hungarian people to reassert their rights", and proposes that the member nations send relief to Hungary. The resolution makes no reference either to Imre Nagy's appeals to the UN, or to Hungary's formal declaration of neutrality.

At once there is a heated debate. The Yugoslav delegate argues that since Hungary and Russia are at that moment negotiating, the Council should adjourn until things worked out. Disbelieving Western delegates hear Lodge support this argument; they do not share his complacency. Australia's Walker makes the tart comment: "Unfortunately, the world has had some experience of the course that 'negotiations' sometimes take in a country where the Soviet Union has been able to establish military supremacy." Britain's Sir Pierson Dixon calls for an immediate vote.

Several delegates turn to the Hungarian delegate. János Szabó confirms: "I should like to inform the Council with satisfaction about the following promis-

ing information received from Hungary today: the leaders of the Hungarian and Soviet armies met at noon today and both parties expressed their view on the technical questions of withdrawing the Soviet troops. They agreed that they would study the proposals of each and they would meet again at ten o'clock tonight, Budapest time."

Darkness now mantled Budapest. In that darkness, a conflicting babble of voices spoke to the bewildered people. At nine nineteen p.m. Francis Farkas broadcast, appealing for an end to "party strife and bickering"; he addressed to Red China, Yugoslavia and Poland a plea for support, a plea now overtaken by events in those countries. President Zapotocky made an impassioned speech on Czech radio about the counter-revolution which had unleashed "fascist white terror against the workers" in neighbouring Hungary. "Now returning to Hungary," he screamed, "are reactionary elements, war criminals, aristocrats, fascists and other émigrés from the West who in 1945 ran before the advancing Soviet army or later fled from the people's anger . . ." Unhappy Czechoslovakia's turn was still to come.

Quietly waiting at home, Farkas's fellow-Peasant, Stephan Bibó, meditated on his country's future. He would later say, "I had at this time the impression that in Moscow they were still wavering, and that by a firm diplomatic step Eisenhower might still achieve something."²⁸ He sat down at his typewriter, drafted a form of appeal to the American president, and put it in his pocket.

Once that evening Francis Donáth wanted to speak with Imre Nagy. He found Nagy involved with visitors from the Romanian embassy. Donáth waited around for a while, then gave up. Later he guessed that this delegation had only come to tie up the prime minister's time, and prevent him attending to other affairs of state.²⁹ The rest of the building looked like an overbooked hotel; unshaven funkies were sprawled everywhere, at desks, or on sofas and chairs pulled together like make-shift beds. He saw Kádár's wife there and the Party's former youth leader, Ervin Hollós, too – everybody who had reason to fear slept in Parliament that night. Vásárhelyi had a clean conscience, and went home.

There were still a couple of hours before the Tököl conference. General Maléter drove back to the Kilián Barracks for dinner with invited commanders

of Király's National Guard. Here he proudly showed around the protocol that had been initialled by the Soviet generals in Parliament: the barracks commandant, Captain Csiba, saw in it that the Soviet Union expressed willingness to complete the withdrawal by January 15th.³⁰ Maléter was clearly pleased to be at the centre of these historic talks. When the writer Julius Háry telephoned him, Maléter sounded cheerful and said that the talks were going well. He asked Háry to use his Writers' Union's influence to stop the lynchings.³¹ When somebody ventured to suggest to Maléter that the Russians might be preparing a trap, he brushed the warning aside: "Who knows? It wouldn't be the first time in history. Certainly not the first time in Russian history."

Captain Csiba asked Maléter: "Suppose they arrest you there – what then?"

Maléter answered: "I don't expect this of the Soviet officers, because so far they have conducted the conferences honourably and with understanding. But if the unthinkable should happen, then be on guard!"

Then his Pobieda car left the barracks.

At Parliament, he joined Erdei, Kovács and Szücs and set out for Tököl, with a number of junior staff officers. Imre Nagy told them, "I want a report every half hour." Then he turned to his staff and asked if there was any reply yet to his cables to the United Nations. There was none.

Late on November 3rd, Dr. Ludwig Gogolak, forty-seven, historian, heard shouts coming from the Corvin Passage opposite. "The Russians are coming!" He ran out of his shell-blasted flat. Somebody shouted to him, "They've telephoned us here. The Russians have attacked the city!" But it was a false alarm.³²

For a few hours now, people could take stock. The uprising had apparently triumphed, but the victors were not those who had begun it eleven days before, the students and intellectuals; nor even the workers, who had taken the baton firmly in their hands next day. The victors appeared to be the right wing, fast consolidating around the figure of Joseph, Cardinal Mindszenty: that evening he telephoned his former aide, Joseph Jaszovsky, in San Francisco and said, "Life in this city and elsewhere in Hungary has come to a complete standstill. We need help immediately. We need help, freedom and food." Then Mindszenty broadcast to the entire nation. He spoke of Hungary's thousand years of history and said, "I am, and will remain, independent of any party, and because of my office, above it. I take advantage of my authority to warn every Hungarian not

to give way to party strife and disagreement after these days of beautiful unity. Our country needs many things, but it does not need many parties and party leaders.”

To the Jewish writers and Communists like Julius Háý who had started the ferment with their open malcontent in October, the Party was everything. They were horrified at what was now crawling up out of the bloody swamp of revolution: it horrified Thomas Aczél, Stalin prize-winning author, that Cardinal Mindszenty was using their squabble for his own purpose. He would describe the broadcast as reactionary, and the cardinal himself as a stupid, medieval and shady character: “That murderous rascal and idiot Rákosi made a martyr of him.” Tibor Méray described him as “a feudal, limited, stupid homosexual” and saw a danger that his influence would push the workers to the extreme right.³³

Around ten p.m. General Király called round at the defence ministry. He learned of the new Soviet troop movements, took a map with him and visited Kopácsi at police headquarters. There he unrolled the invasion map on Kopácsi’s desk.³⁴ From here he telephoned Joe Szilágyi on the K-line. “Does the Old Man have the invasion map?”

“Yes. He still believes in miracles. Keeps saying, ‘The talks, the talks!’”

“What about Maléter?”

“He’s arrived at Tököl and reported in twice to us already.”

“Perhaps the Old Man’s going to get his miracle.”

The red K-line telephone never stopped ringing. Kopácsi adjusted the coloured arrows on the map. They were closing around the capital.

About eleven p.m. a patrol of students of the National Guard stopped a Soviet jeep carrying a commander of the Soviet armoured troops ringing the capital.³⁵ He was taken to Kopácsi’s former police headquarters on Deák Square, now the National Guard headquarters. The Soviet officer kept his nerve. “We are only taking up positions around Budapest so as to ensure that the employees of Soviet firms here are peacefully evacuated.” His friendly, relaxed manner reassured the students. He drank a toast with them: “To the future of Hungary!”

All the same, Colonel Kopácsi telephoned a warning through to Imre Nagy. Nagy was annoyed: “You will deliver the Soviet officer to the Soviet embassy immediately. Colonel Maléter is at the Russian High Command at Tököl at this

moment and the negotiations are running well. In fact the only things that matter have been agreed already.”

Midnight in Budapest; in New York it was still six p.m. The Security Council session was dragging on. The delegates were staring inquisitively at the Soviet delegate. Sir Pierson Dixon drawled, “I think we really must hear him.” The Russian briefly confirmed that negotiations were in progress. Acting on Foster Dulles’s instructions, Cabot Lodge had still not put the Hungary resolution to a vote when the council president ruled that they would have to wind up this session soon as the General Assembly was scheduled to meet on other matters at eight p.m.³⁶ The proposal evoked a storm of protest from other delegates, including Australia, France and Britain. Cabot Lodge, however, voted that they should indeed adjourn for two days, until Monday morning.

The Security Council broke up at six fifty-five p.m. Lodge’s action has evoked controversy ever since. When *Life* magazine attacked him in an editorial, he explained confidentially that Washington did not know what the situation in Hungary was, and in any case he was operating under direct instructions from Dulles.³⁷

Inside the American legation in Budapest, Colonel Dallam, the air attaché, invited Gaza Katona up to his second-floor office: “I may need interpreting assistance. I’m just going to telephone the defence ministry.”

Dallam had a good contact, an airforce colonel. The colonel replied that Soviet troop movements had been spotted to the south-east but otherwise things seemed quiet. As he put the phone down, something struck both Americans: the velvet silence that hung over the whole city for the first time in days. It sounded almost eerie.

Everything had gone *too* silent, for Imre Nagy’s liking. An hour had passed since General Maléter’s last telephone call from Tököl. The base telephone exchange seemed to have closed down. Nagy was uneasy, and asked his chief assistant, Joe Szilágyi, to telephone the National Guard to re-establish contact with Tököl. At the same time, Király and Kopácsi sent an armoured car haring down the road, with orders to use a little-known ferry, and not the Csepel Island bridge.

“I’m on the ferry,” came a radio call. Then: “I’m on the island. I can see the lights of Tököl.”

“Now I’m driving up to their headquarters.”

After that there was again silence. Király telephoned Imre Nagy. The prime minister asked Király and Kopácsi to assume the functions of Maléter and Kovács until their return from Tököl. Király bedded down in an armchair; Kopácsi sat at his desk and tucked his head on to his arms, but he could not sleep.

Meanwhile pangs of conscience had seized Tito. His ambassador telephoned Nagy’s secretariat: “It is Belgrade’s desire that Mr. Nagy and his friends should make immediate use of their right of asylum in our embassy.”³⁸

An hour or more passed. In Conti Street the Social Democrat *People’s Voice* was just going to press. The typesetters were blocking in a banner headline: “SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING ADJOURNED TO MONDAY BECAUSE OF HUNGARIAN/SOVIET TALKS.” The edition would never go on sale. Over in the American legation, Katona stretched out on bedding on the floor, meaning to monitor short-wave radio broadcasts on his portable Philips radio. But he fell asleep. Once he dreamed that he heard the distant rumble of thunder. Then he woke and glanced at his watch. It would soon be five thirty. He spun the radio dial to the Radio Kossuth wavelength. He could hear Nagy’s voice: “This is prime minister Imre Nagy speaking. In the early hours of this morning . . .”

The drive from Parliament, where he had picked up the rest of his delegation, to Tököl air base, fifteen miles south of the capital, had taken General Maléter an hour. As his *Pobieda* pulled up outside the Soviet headquarters, a company of Red Army soldiers presented arms. One of his accompanying officers, Lieutenant Zsigmond Szabó, stated that the talks resumed at about nine forty-five p.m.: the Soviet negotiators from the morning were already there. Malinin was still cordial and understanding. Maléter and his colleagues – Erdei, General Kovács and Colonel Szücs – left their personal aides outside in the anteroom.³⁹

The army private who had chauffeured Maléter was still downing the glasses of beer and vodka that their hosts had given him, when a squad of uniformed Russians burst in past him. At their head was General Ivan Serov, chief of the Soviet security police, wearing no insignia of rank. A command was barked in

Russian, the door into the conference room was kicked open, and guns were trained on the Hungarian delegation. "Gentlemen, you are the prisoners of the Soviet army," announced Serov.

The blood drained from Maléter's face. His features frozen, he rose slowly to his feet, and said in Russian: "So. This is how we stand!"

General Malinin, heading the Soviet delegation, acted as shocked as Maléter. Serov took him aside and murmured into his ear. Malinin shrugged, and took his own delegation outside. The Hungarians were marched into another room, held under armed guard for some time, then led out into a brightly-lit courtyard one at a time.

Maléter heard short, sharp bursts of machine-gun fire, punctuated by the banging of the door. He stiffened, waiting for the door to open once more, when it would be his turn.

44 Second Coming

UNDERSTANDABLY, NO STREETS in modern Hungary will be named after the one minister who acts courageously on November 4th, the day that the callous, bloody Soviet attack begins. Understandably – because he is not a Communist of any shade. Years of power have corrupted their earlier idealism, and when the bell begins to toll for them, when the tank guns start to bark, the national Communists will announce: “The government is at its post,” and flee, taking their parcels with them, in the mocking words of their no more honourable fellow, János Kádár. They will seek asylum in one foreign legation, while the country’s religious leader flees to another.

This morning there is only one intellectual with the same kind of courage as the worker who marched up Alexander Bródy Street to the ÁVH colonel eleven days before, bared his chest and dared him to shoot him. This is Stephen Bibó, professor of law, a lanky dark-haired figure of nonchalance. Before dawn on November 4th a small army car brings him to Parliament. Bibó’s hour of private glory is coming.

Prime minister Imre Nagy was assembling as much of his Cabinet as he could. Telephone calls had begun intruding from distant revolutionary councils reporting Soviet forces advancing in battle formation. Two thousand tanks were on the move. Among the Communist old-timers sleeping in Parliament was Francis Donáth.¹ He was wakened and told to summon the “executive committee”. As he began phoning, Tildy walked in with his wife in her nightgown.

Belgrade had now sent an urgent cable to its embassy in Budapest. Ambassador Soldatić failed to raise Géza Losonczy, and sent for Zoltán Szántó at one

A.M. "We forwarded your enquiry about asylum to Belgrade," Soldatić said. "This is their reply: The situation is grave, there may be a fresh attack by Soviet troops at any moment, so my government has decided to extend asylum to Imre Nagy, to the members of his executive and anybody the executive considers worthy of it."²

By three A.M. tanks were following the river from the south, debauching along Soroksári Road into Boráros Square and cutting off Csepel Island. A second armoured pincer was slicing down the Danube from the north, along Váci Road. A sentry at Kopácsi's police headquarters woke company commander Joseph Blücher. "There are two Russian tanks prowling around the square," he said. Elsewhere in the building, telephones were jangling. Callers announced that tanks had shelled army barracks at Kiskunhalas, ninety miles away. General Király looked at his watch: it was nearly four A.M. He telephoned Parliament, but Nagy just spluttered: "The Russian ambassador is here in my office. He is calling Moscow now. There is some misunderstanding. Don't open fire!" Király could see that Nagy was determined never to give such an order. At four A.M. ex-minister Lieutenant-General Janza informed Nagy of the "Soviet entry into Budapest".³

Soon afterwards, three tanks clattered past the headquarters, heading evidently for the ministry of the interior. For a moment the screeching made speech impossible. Király telephoned the prime minister again. Nagy said, "I won't be needing any further reports from you."⁴ Over in Buda, Kopácsi's daughter Judy was staying with the Szilágyi family; she was awakened by tanks thundering past their home. Joe Szilágyi – Nagy's chief secretary – came in, shouting, "Get packed, we're leaving." They drove over the Danube to Parliament together.⁵

At four twenty-five A.M. the tanks opened fire. First target was the Budaörsi Road Barracks, in suburban Buda. In a seedy hotel in the town centre British student Mike Korda, who had brought a Volkswagen load of medical supplies from Cambridge, heard muffled thunder. He got out of bed and pulled back the heavy curtains. Across the horizon he could see lightning, but from service in the British army he knew that it was not. He woke his colleagues: "That's artillery!" In his rather superior hotel, Indro Montanelli, reporting for *Corriere della Sera*, could hear a mournful rumbling like a distant avalanche. The cannonade reawakened Professor Blücher at the National Guard headquarters too. Calls to

the defence ministry now elicited that General Maléter's delegation had not returned from Tököl. Over the Polytechnic a glare lit up the sky; Colonel Marián rattled off with a lorry-load of men to investigate.

It was the telephone in the corner of Nicholas Vásárhelyi's living room in Buda that tore his sleep apart.⁶ It was Francis Donáth calling: "Russian tanks and ÁVH troops are entering Budapest." Vásárhelyi threw on some clothes and began running down to the Danube. It would take him an hour to get to Parliament on foot.

The stone walls of Parliament induced a sense of calm in the prime minister's offices, despite the ringing telephones. Nagy was fully dressed and sombre. Tildy said to him, "The government must make a declaration. It may be our last chance to get it broadcast." Nagy agreed. He and Tildy dictated a brief script while Donáth pencilled it down. Nagy displayed a brief burst of temper; he snapped, "I can't read that!" Donáth took the scrap of paper away to type. Tildy took one copy to transmit to the United Nations while Nagy hurried to the studio.

Two girls were in the studio, playing discs of Hungarian national music. At five nineteen A.M. the music was interrupted: "Attention! Attention! Premier Imre Nagy will address the Hungarian people!" His voice was trembling with genuine emotion: "This is Imre Nagy speaking, the prime minister of the Hungarian People's Republic. Today at daybreak Soviet troops attacked our capital with the obvious intention of overthrowing the legal Hungarian democratic government. Our troops are in combat. The government is at its post. I notify the people of our country and the entire world of this fact."

When a Stalin tank's high velocity gun goes off it is an ear-opener. Officer-cadet Béla Kurucz is in bed with his girlfriend Rosie when the bang awakens him.⁷ More follow. He throws on a uniform, kisses her goodbye and gallops down Üllői Road to the Kossuth Barracks three miles away. Tanks are advancing, lobbing shells into buildings on either side. The barracks seem deserted. Somebody tells him, "Colonel Kömüves has rounded everybody up and locked them into the basement." Through a window Kurucz sees the colonel talking with some Russians. He snatches a gun and runs out grabbing another cadet,

Alex Nagy, on the way. Soon there are three of them, all armed with tommy guns and grenades. Üllői Road is jammed with slow-moving Russian troops and armour, evidently unable to get past the intersection dominated by the Kilián Barracks.

Here the sudden flash-boom of a shell has shaken the building. Somebody switches on a radio. A voice is coming through the grille

“Our army is engaged in fighting. The government is at its post . . .” Through the window, Lieutenant Peter Gosztony can see tanks already drawn up across the street. Inside the entrance tunnel lie the half-clothed corpses of sentries. Russians must already be inside the building. Captain Csiba, the barracks commandant, phones the defence ministry. A voice explains, “The Russians are already here too.” Major-General Horváth comes on the phone and drily advises: “You’d better try negotiating with the Russians.”

Bullets start whining through the windows. A young rebel standing next to Gosztony clutches his throat, and slides to the ground while red blood spurts through his fingers. Csiba scouts around and returns. “There’s nobody alive downstairs,” he whispers hoarsely. Major Ficzkó counter-attacks to seal off the main gate. Then a hail of mortar bombs blasts the courtyard. The major drops, drags himself painfully towards cover. A nurse runs out, a machine gun rattles, and both she and he are dead.⁸

Nearby, Kurucz and his cadet comrades have at first dodged into the side streets, but the Russians are loosing off streams of gunfire to keep people indoors. From a top floor in Üllői Road they can look right down into the slow-moving armoured personnel carriers; infantrymen are crouching in them, rifles at the ready. Kurucz laces three grenades on to one handle, and lobs this deadly bundle into one of the carriers. The explosion sucks the glass from hundreds of windows. Bullets scream and splatter against the walls; Kurucz does not make the mistake of looking out but shifts immediately to another building.

General Király’s National Guard has been caught flatfooted. One company commander will speak of treachery by regular army officers.⁹ Why did the commander of the Petőfi Barracks in Budaörsi Road order the hundred tanks to be sardined into one parade ground with only one narrow exit? The troops have no hope of disentangling them when the Russians storm in. Why did the defence ministry order flak units near Nagykovácsi to disarm their guns that evening?

Why has no officer revealed to the insurgents that thousands of bazookas are stored in an ammunition dump at Budakeszi? The generals who have turned the most benevolent face on the uprising will now outbid each other with pro-Soviet feelings, and they will claw like wolves to get the best new posts.¹⁰

In Nagy's offices, while Tildy is still out, Zoltán Szántó arrives, brandishing the Yugoslav telegram; he translates it to Nagy and Donáth. Perhaps it is just coincidence that only Communists thus hear this offer of asylum. Donáth has spent many years in political prisons and needs no second bidding. Joe Szilágyi also knows that Nagy's men can expect short shrift from the Russians: he drives Donáth home to pick up his wife and two children. As yet the Danube bridges are still open.¹¹

Two blocks away on Liberty Square, American legation staff have heard the bombardment begin. They push filing cabinets against the windows of the telex room in case of flying bullets. A radio is switched on: "This is Imre Nagy speaking, the prime minister of the Hungarian People's Republic. Today at daybreak —" Tom Wailes reports to Washington at five twenty-five A.M., "*Guns are heavy calibre and to date firing appears to be going out from city rather than in. Garbled local broadcasts are reporting it. Either Nagy or Tildy has advised people to take to cellars as the city is being occupied . . .*"

For ten minutes the operators make small talk. Then a telephone call comes from Tildy's office: "The Russians are attacking all over Hungary." They formally ask for American aid. Wailes informs Washington immediately and adds: "*Broadcast at five forty-five A.M., reputedly Nagy, stated Russians advancing on city and presently engaged with Hungarian army.*" He orders his staff to start the destruction of codebooks and secret files. At six A.M. a different message briefly interrupts Nagy's declaration which is being repeated in Hungarian, French, German and Russian. It is an appeal for the missing delegation to report back: "Imre Nagy, prime minister of the national government, calls on defence minister Paul Maléter and the chief of the general staff Stephan Kovács and other members of the military mission who went to Soviet army headquarters at ten p.m. and have not yet returned, to do so immediately and take charge of their respective offices." The wording is odd: does Nagy want to avoid offending

Soviet susceptibilities by imputing, perhaps wrongly, that they have kidnapped the entire delegation?

No such inhibitions prevail at the Hungarian news agency (MTI) headquarters on Fény Road. A telex operator transmits a running commentary to Associated Press in Vienna.¹² “Russian gangsters have betrayed us. The Russian troops suddenly attacked Budapest and the whole country. They opened fire on everybody in Hungary. It is a general attack . . . I speak in the name of Imre Nagy. He asks for help . . . Nagy and the government and the whole people ask help.”

Over the next hour MTI transmits harrowing appeals for information. “If you have anything from the Austrian government, tell me. Urgent, urgent, urgent . . . Any news about help? Quickly, quickly, quickly! . . . Please tell Europe . . . The Soviet tanks came from Western Hungary, through Vecsés and Rákoscaba. Now they are in Rákóczi Street and Alkotás Street . . . We too are under heavy machine-gun fire.”

The picture from provincial MTI agencies is the same. “Russian MiG fighters are over Budapest. Győr is completely surrounded. Székesfehérvár does not answer. Associated Press, Vienna, if you have something, please pass it on to me. The government waits for your answer!” After a while MTI continues: “It’s five forty-five and the Russians have stopped shooting for a minute. The street lamps are on and the town shows a peaceful sight, but everywhere Russian tanks are in the street. A Russian infantry division is heading for Parliament. Pécs was attacked by the Russians at two A.M. They tried to seize the uranium mines and airfields but the Hungarians stopped them . . . If you have any answer, pass it on . . . Imre Nagy personally asks help . . . And diplomatic steps, diplomatic steps . . .”

With the final message, “Long live Hungary and Europe. We are going to die for Hungary and Europe,” the line is interrupted by an operator using the former *Free People* teleprinter: “Since early this morning Russian troops have attacked Budapest and our people. Please tell the whole world of this treacherous attack on our freedom struggle. Our troops are in combat. The Petőfi transmitter is still in our hands.” This telegram ended, “Help, help, help. SOS, SOS, SOS!”

Local time in New York was eleven forty-nine p.m., as the Reuters tickertape broke the news coming through Vienna. The United Nations general assembly was in session, but about Suez. Forty minutes later exiled Hungarians – includ-

ing the CIA-financed group led by Béla Varga – broke into the building and demanded to see Cabot Lodge: a fist fight started, and security guards hustled them out. The Australian delegate, Walker, did get to see Lodge but the American coolly suggested that the Security Council might meet next afternoon.

Walker would not accept that. At one A.M. he interrupted the debate and read out the Reuters bulletin. “In view of this news,” he declaimed, “I am now asking the President of the Security Council to invite the members of the Council to meet with him within half an hour . . .”

Twenty minutes passed before Lodge echoed Walker’s words. Lodge said, white-faced with indignation, “And I sat here and heard the representative of the Soviet Union talking about stopping bloodshed in Egypt!” At three A.M. the Security Council convened. Now at last Lodge pushed through the resolution. By five thirty the matter had been voted over to the General Assembly which was due to meet that same afternoon.

When Tildy returns from sending Nagy’s message to New York he finds the prime minister and four of his more intimate friends already in their hats and coats, carrying white towels in their hands. “Where are you off to?” he asks.

“We’re all going down to the shelters,” lies Nagy, “to avoid flying bullets.” Tildy hurries off to fetch his coat. Meanwhile he has sent a car for his fellow Smallholder, Stephen B. Szabó, too. Szabó arrives just as Nagy’s party is leaving. “Everybody has to go immediately to the shelters,” instructs Nagy. Cardinal Mindszenty and Béla Kovács have also been summoned to Parliament. The cardinal flows in, wearing his magnificent robes; when Tildy gets back Nagy has vanished. The rest wend their way down to the shelters, but even now Nagy does not join them. After a while, Tildy goes up and asks a guard on the entrance. The officer says that Nagy has gone to the Soviet embassy.¹³

When writer Julius Háý arrives at the entrance nearest to Kossuth Bridge, he gets the same answer.¹⁴ The officer of the parliamentary guard says emptily, “They’re all away at some foreign embassy or other.” Inside, a guard thrusts boxes of chocolates at Háý: “Here, take these; don’t let’s leave anything for *them!*” Háý can hear Nagy’s voice coming from a radio loudspeaker, disembodied and sonorous: “. . . overthrowing the legal Hungarian government. Our troops

are in combat . . ." Through the walls he hears a scraping of steel on cobblestones as hundreds of tanks paw their way into the city centre.

It is around five forty-five A.M. when Professor Bibó gangles in, looking bewildered by it all. He has been telephoned at his flat in Buda by Jolán Majlát, the wife of Francis Erdei, one of those who has not returned from Tököl; she tells him that Mr. Nagy has sent a car for him. That car never arrives, but meanwhile Tildy's secretariat has sent a small army car over the Danube, and this has brought Bibó and one of Tildy's own military staff to the building.

Bibó finds the Tildys sitting with Szabó and Mindszenty. Tildy says, "Nagy must have been detained at the Soviet embassy. So it's up to us to do something!" Meanwhile Joe Szilágyi had sent a message to Kopácsi confirming that the Russians are attacking. He is to come to Parliament, and bring as many police as possible.¹⁵ Kopácsi telephones the news to George Fazekas, his wife's cousin. Fazekas hurries back to the police headquarters. He and Kopácsi run to Parliament; outside, they find the presidential Zim with its engine running – it is operating a shuttle service to the Yugoslav embassy. Szilágyi runs down the steps, shouting to Fazekas, "Quick, you're on the list, get in! We're taking you to the embassy." With the Presidential pennant fluttering, they drive past the Hungarian T-34s drawn up round the square.¹⁶

By the time Kopácsi reaches the prime minister's offices most people have gone. He finds Tildy talking with a lieutenant-colonel of the parliamentary guard. Kopácsi tells him that Soviet T-54s are approaching and columns of tanks are crossing Margaret Bridge and occupying the boulevards. He enquires, "Where is Nagy?" Tildy does not know.

Nobody wants to take the first step, or any step for that matter. Professor Bibó exclaims, "Shouldn't we call a Cabinet meeting, or something? After all, we *are* the Cabinet!" Tildy runs his hands nervously through his silver hair and changes the subject. So Bibó pulls out his draft letter to Eisenhower and reads it out. It is pretty red meat to the elderly gentlemen present – Tildy, Szabó, and Alexander Rónai. Bibó decides to act. At six thirty he steps out of the building, shivering in the pre-dawn mist and walks briskly past the armoured cars, tanks and self-propelled guns lining the approaches to Parliament.

It is difficult to discern each unit's loyalties. A dozen T-34s of the Thirty-third Tank Regiment have been deployed between the defence ministry and Parliament, but their superior officers are Moscow trained and have one common attitude: "Better a live slave than a dead hero." So the crews of these T-34s are summoned to the ministry and will be hanging around for two hours, and when they return they will find that grinning Russians have taken over their parked tanks.¹⁷ Some army units have resisted. Before going with Maléter to Tököl, Colonel Mécseri has ordered his tanks to resist all attacks, and many Russians and ÁVH troops have died in the resulting battle at Soroksár.

Lajos Lederer, the *Observer* reporter, crosses the Danube just before a tank unit blocks the bridges at the Pest end. In Pest he sees Soviet T-54s rolling towards Parliament with their hatches battened down and guns firing wildly. Near the Astoria Hotel people are levering up paving stones to rebuild the dismantled barricades. There seem to be a lot of Hungarian troops in the streets. At six forty A.M., belated instructions are telexed to Wailes from Washington: "Suggest you present your credentials." Minister Wailes does not relish the idea of braving the war machines now separating the legation from Parliament. "*Doubt at the moment if could find the gentleman on whom I should call even if I could navigate streets,*" he replies nervously.

At that moment the doorbell rings: it is somebody who has made the journey safely in the opposite direction. Wailes telexes Washington: "*Have examined credentials [of] State Minister and find he is one of the ones appointed yesterday. Will give you his name in few minutes.*" It is Professor Bibó, no less. The legation lets him in and accepts the document. "*He tells me Nagy has gone to Soviet embassy and has not returned. The Minister downstairs says he is therefore one of the two Cabinet ministers now acting. [Tildy is the other.] He has a message which he wishes transmitted to President . . . He says it is most urgent.*"

While jet aircraft began low, tile-rattling passes over the city, Wailes's staff translates Bibó's letter: an elegant, reasoned appeal to Eisenhower to threaten a Third World War while he still has the chance, and thereby call Khrushchev's bluff. "In this moment the kind of help most urgently needed is political, not military," Bibó stipulates at one point. He argues against letting the Soviets subjugate Hungary once again: "It would bankrupt the liberation policy which

America has pursued for ten years with such firmness and wisdom . . . This is the historical moment to which both President Eisenhower and secretary of state Dulles have referred in speeches in which they said that only by *risking* a world war can a sure way be found to avert the outbreak of a new world war.”¹⁸

In the pause while more is translated, Washington notifies Wailes that Lodge will shortly be addressing the General Assembly. Wailes replies, “*Soviet embassy says they do not know what is going on here in town.*” Then he tells Washington briskly: “*Rest of message from Cabinet minister states in brief: ‘Fate of world depends on President.’*”

A cup of coffee is pushed onto the table next to the telex: “*Sure is good*”, types Wailes.

Aiming at a swift victory, the Russians have hoped to seize all tactical keypoints first, before detailed defensive battles can begin. They put tanks on all the intersections. Professor Blücher takes an eight-man patrol out but he finds tanks and armoured cars swarming along both embankments; when he returns, he cannot even get back to Deák Square. It is the beginning of the end of the National Guard. From his headquarters here General Király telephones the defence ministry. On to the line comes General Janza, whom Nagy has sacked the day before! “What are you doing there?” exclaims Király. “You’re nobody!” But Janza is playing a different game, and to a different set of rules. He snaps: “I order you to come to this headquarters and issue orders to the army units to attack the fascist groups and cease resistance against our friends the Russians.” Király decides it is time to get out.

Going on past experience Cardinal Mindszenty has come broadly to the same conclusion. As he steps out of Parliament, he glances up and sees a white sheet fluttering from its windows. He picks up his robes and hurries off down a street leading diagonally off Parliament Square.

Back inside Parliament, Professor Bibó retires to an office and drafts a message for the Hungarian people. It ends with these words:

Now it is the turn of the world powers. It is my conviction that in this historic moment when the liberation of the Eastern European nations is on the verge of fulfilment, the only way to secure world peace is to accept the

risk of war. To postpone this decision now is to endanger the entire free world. God save Hungary! Stephen Bibó, November 4th, 1956.¹⁹

Julius Hágy is also writing – a proclamation on behalf of the Writers’ Union. He shows it to Tildy. The deputy premier’s voice floats after him: “I want you to know that we’re not going to offer any resistance.” His lacklustre words mingle with Nagy’s disembodied voice – “The government is at its post” – Hágy traces the cables snaking along the corridors to the studio. A clatter outside on Kossuth Square announces that the first Soviet tanks are now arriving.

He records his statement in all the languages he knows. Shortly before eight A.M., the radio begins to broadcast it:

This is the Hungarian Writers’ Union. We appeal for help to writers, scholars, writers’ associations, academics, scientific organisations and the leaders of intellectual life all over the world. Our time is limited! You all know the facts, there is no need to explain them. Help Hungary! Help the Hungarian people! Help the Hungarian writers, scholars, workers, peasants and intellectuals! Help! Help! Help!

Zoltán Tildy’s son comes in with officers who tell him that the troops outside want permission to open fire on the Russians. Tildy wearily refuses: “Only the defence ministry can give such an order. If you want my advice, then have a senior officer go with two juniors and an interpreter under a white flag to the Russian commander and tell him that if his troops don’t fire on Parliament the Hungarians won’t open fire on them.” Then the radio broadcasts a no less pathetic message: “Attention! . . . The Hungarian government requests officers and soldiers of the Soviet army not to shoot. Avoid bloodshed! The Russians are our friends and will remain our friends in the future!”

The Soviet officers who march into Tildy’s room are polite but firm. They ask, “Where is Imre Nagy?” Nobody knows. A colonel sends for President Dobi and demands that he sign a document surrendering the armed forces. Dobi murmurs alcoholically, “If the Soviet representative desires to speak with me, I shall be available in my office,” and teeters out of the door. The Soviet officers then utter a formal ultimatum: if the government does not capitulate by noon

Budapest will be bombed. The British military attaché, Colonel Noel Cowley, is officially informed of this ultimatum, and reports it to the American legation. Wailes telexes Washington, "He was told that the government would technically capitulate under those terms but that the insurgents would not."

In the US legation nobody takes breakfast: at any moment "undisciplined" Soviet troops may storm in. As jet planes thunder overhead, marine guards strip to the waist in the furnace room and bundle secret documents into the flames. The list of recent insurgent visitors is hidden behind bricks in a storage room. Officials memorise safe combinations and the record is destroyed.

The legation is about to receive its most auspicious guest. Around seven thirty A.M., as Gaza Katona is frantically stuffing documents into the code room's incinerator, code clerk Gordon Bruegi excitedly flourishes a crisp two-line telegram from Washington. It advised that CAS – "Controlled American Source", indicating the CIA – has approved granting asylum to Cardinal Mindszenty. Seldom can a cable have arrived at a more fortuitous moment. At seven fifty-eight A.M. the doorbell rings, marine guard Jerry Bolick opens up, and in stalks the cardinal himself, with his secretary Monsignor Egon Turcsányi. Wailes nonchalantly interrupts a routine report on Soviet tank markings: "*The Cardinal is now at the door and we are now taking him in.*" A women employee recognises His Eminence and drops to her knees. The cardinal is about to begin an "exile" that will last for fifteen years.²⁰

At seven minutes past eight Radio Budapest fell silent: the Russian troops had penetrated the studio in Parliament. One last telex line still ran from Tildy's office to the United Press agency in Vienna. At eight twenty-four A.M. this line was also cut. "Goodbye, friends; goodbye, friends," the Budapest operator said. "Save our souls. The Russians are too near."²¹

The Soviet takeover of Parliament was very civilised. There was no violence. Politicians and funkies wandered in, having dossed down elsewhere in the building. The Russians ordered the troops and police to lay down their arms, and the civilians to go home. Tildy went round saying goodbye. To nobody in particular, he announced: "I'm going to my death!" As the group made their separate ways towards the exit portal, the clanking of tanks squeaking into parking

positions could be heard. Alexander Rónai blurted out, “Well, this is where I leave you all.”²² Julius Háý wondered what business the old Stalinist Rónai could possibly have to attend to.

While they sidled past the expressionless Russian troops one man remained behind, determined that “the government” should stay at its post, whatever Tildy decreed: it was Professor Bibó, minister of state. Outside, Béla Kovács had only just arrived. Tildy told him: “I have negotiated a surrender with the Russians. But minister of state Bibó is refusing to leave. He’s up there – go and telephone him and order him to leave.”

Professor Bibó was not taking orders from anybody. His blood was up. He was quite alone in Tildy’s secretariat, a luxurious three-roomed apartment. He wanted to make his own personal demonstration. Never lacking in romantic imagination, he had already envisaged his likely fate: “I shall be sitting in this large armchair when the Russians come. They will drag me out, but I will not go quietly. There will probably be an affray and then I will be evicted.” His private telephone rang – it was Béla Kovács. But nothing would persuade him to leave. Bibó said: “If the Russians move against me, it will demonstrate to the entire world that force has been employed to crush our independent government.”

He was not left alone for long. A young red-faced man strolled in, a journalist in Tildy’s press office. Bibó asked, “Why haven’t you gone home like the others?” “I’m staying here,” answered the young man. “Just the man I need,” said Bibó, half seriously. “Consider yourself my press chief.” Shortly, he heard him on the telephone next door: “This is Minister Bibó’s press chief speaking. He is holding a press conference in Parliament and all foreign press representatives are invited to attend!”

Bibó’s heart missed a beat. He had never held a press conference in his life. He rapidly drafted a text for the conference. Meanwhile around nine A.M. he telephoned the American legation and dictated a statement: “Premier Imre Nagy went to the Soviet embassy when the Russians started their attack at dawn today and was unable to return. Only Ministers of State Tildy, Szabó and Bibó were able to attend an extraordinary meeting of the Cabinet called to consider the new situation. When the Russians ringed the Parliament, Tildy, to avoid further bloodshed, agreed with them that Soviet troops should occupy it on the condi-

tion that civilians be allowed to leave freely. In accordance with this statement Tildy left, convinced, however, that he was going to his death.”

Now only he, Bibó, remained. “I reject the slander that fascist anti-Jewish actions have stained the glorious Hungarian revolution. The entire Hungarian nation participated in it, without class or religious discrimination . . . My orders to the Hungarian nation are not to recognise the occupying army or the puppet government it sets up as legal authorities, and to use all weapons of passive resistance against them.”

After that Professor Bibó drew up another statement. “Now it is for the world powers to demonstrate the force of the principles laid down in the United Nations charter and the strength of the freedom-loving peoples of the world. On behalf of my subjugated nation I ask for a wise and bold decision by the great powers and United Nations. At the same time I declare that Hungary’s sole legal representative abroad is minister of state Anna Kéthly. God save Hungary. Stephen Bibó, November 4th, 1956.”²³

Nagy’s press chief Nicholas Vásárhelyi had not reached Parliament. When he reached the river he found the bridges blocked by tanks. He telephoned home. The housemaid answered: “Madame has gone with the children! A big car came to take them.” Then he called Peter Erdős, and he drove round to his hiding place and told him that a Yugoslav had toured Buda with a diplomatic car ferrying the endangered members of the Nagy group like Mrs. Rajk to his embassy in Pest. Unable to cross the river, Vásárhelyi and Erdős sought asylum in the home of the assistant military attaché, Voukmirović.²⁴ Here they were surprised to find the airforce colonel, Nádor, with his wife and daughter.²⁵ Evidently there had been some Yugoslav connection with Nádor without their knowledge. But Nádor’s Soviet connections were even more surprising. He was called to the telephone by some Soviet general, and eventually he just walked out and disappeared. Nothing ever happened to him.

The Nagy group at the Yugoslav legation swelled to forty-two. For three weeks they would be cramped into three rooms here while Soviet troops cordoned off the building: Imre Nagy himself, Losonczy, Szántó, Donáth, Jánosi, Fazekas, Szilágyi, Lukács, Tánczos, Haraszti, Zoltán Vas, Mrs. Rajk, Újhelyi, together with fifteen women and seventeen children.

By ten thirty most of the press corps knew about Bibó's press conference. His incorrect behaviour caused the Russians a headache. Soviet ambassador Andropov stiffly advised the press not to attend. John MacCormac, the *New York Times*' stalwart reporter, tried to go, but the Russians refused to let him through. Most of his colleagues suddenly remembered pressing business elsewhere. DPA correspondent Géza von Pogány wrote in his diary, "Around eight A.M. most of the journalists decide to quit the Danube Hotel and take refuge in their legations." As Roland Nitsche of the Swiss *Tages-Anzeiger* packed rucksack and typewriter into his car a dozen men and women clamoured round him and an old man said in broken German, "Tell everything you have seen here. Help us, please!" Nitsche was ashamed that he could not look them in the eyes.

Joseph Dudás's newspaper had stopped appearing. In the newspaper building his lieutenants cleared the decks for battle. There were still over two hundred people in the newspaper building, many of them women. The Corvin department store was raided to provide suits for the three hundred former political prisoners.²⁶ Two captives were taken behind the store and liquidated. Guns were cleaned, petrol bottles filled. People outside the building had capsized a tram as a barricade. Dudás himself was not there; he had gone out fighting before dawn. The Intellectuals would find him sleeping in a room at the University later that day, with blood oozing from a chest wound.²⁷

It looked like a fine morning. The sun was rising, but looked lilac-hued through the cloud of dust churned up by tanks advancing through rubble streets. Here, too, the telex was still working and an operator began tapping out a dramatic commentary to Vienna. "We are quiet, not afraid. Send the news to the public and the world and say it should condemn the aggressors. The fighting is very close now and we haven't enough tommy guns in the building. I don't know how long we can resist. We are fixing the grenades now. Heavy shells are exploding nearby. Jet planes are roaring overhead, but it doesn't matter . . ."

At eight thirty A.M. the commentary continued: "People are jumping up at the tanks, throwing hand-grenades inside and then slamming the drivers' windows. Hungarians are not afraid of death. Trouble is that we can't hold on for long. A man just came in from the street. He said we should not think that be-

cause the street is empty people have taken shelter. They are standing in doorways, waiting for the right moment . . .” Emotionally the telex operator continued: “It can’t be allowed that people attack tanks with their bare hands! What is the United Nations doing?” Towards nine A.M. the anonymous operator tapped out: “The tanks are coming nearer . . . We will hold out to our last drop of blood.”

The Russian troops now appearing in the streets had hungry faces, and the slant eyes and Mongol cheekbones of troops from Soviet Asia. These young men in dark grey coats were killers and sadists, not like the Russians from the Carpatho-Ukraine whom years of occupation in Hungary had rendered indolent. These newcomers were ambivalent about Europe, they spoke little Russian and they were ignorant of politics and geography. Others believed the Danube must be the Suez Canal. All had been told they were defending Hungary from fascists.²⁸

As the last insurgent strongholds crumbled, two things became clear: the invaders enjoyed no support from Hungarian forces; and they had set up a complaisant new “government”, albeit one that did not yet dare show itself inside Hungary. At its head was János Kádár, with Münnich as his deputy premier and minister of the armed forces and public security; Marosán, Horváth, Kossa, Apró, Dögei and Rónai completed this willing tool of Soviet foreign policy.

Nagy probably heard of this only in the Yugoslav embassy. It was a cruel blow. Thus the disappearance of Münnich and Kádár on November 1st was explained: according to Kádár’s chauffeur it was Münnich who had talked him into meeting the Russians. They made the car halt in Gorky Avenue outside the Soviet embassy, and here they alighted and talked for some time before transferring to an embassy car parked nearby.²⁹ From Tököl air base they were flown to Uzhgorod, in the Carpatho-Ukraine. That night they flew on to Moscow, and Bulganin could telephone the triumphant news to Khrushchev in Yugoslavia.³⁰ In June 1957 Kádár would admit that they had begun talks on November 2nd “with the Soviet comrades” and with other Soviet bloc leaders about the need to smash the uprising and, as he put it, about “the assistance which would be granted to the Hungarian People’s Republic to that end”. “Those negotiations,” said Kádár, “began on November 2nd; by November 3rd we were all set, and on November 4th the offensive began.”³¹

Was this Kádár's valiant attempt to salvage at least some of the doomed uprising's achievements, regardless of the odium? One thing was plain to him: he had embarked on a course that would brand him for all time as the Judas Iscariot of his nation. He would say a few weeks later to applauding trades unionists, "When we considered the formation of this government on November 3rd we knew full well that we would not be received with garlands of flowers. But I was convinced that we were right and that the people would understand our deeds and that they would approve of and respect the fact that we opposed the counter-revolutionary torrent and saved the Hungarian proletarian dictatorship."³²

This morning, November 4th, as the Soviet hordes they have invoked are killing Hungarians and pulverising Budapest, Kádár and Münnich are still on Russian soil. But both have recorded speeches and these are broadcast from the radio transmitter at Szolnok, a large Soviet garrison town sixty-five miles south-east of Budapest. The first goes out at five past five A.M. It is Münnich's broadcast of an open letter dated "Budapest, November 4th". This declared that he and his colleagues broke with Nagy on November 1st and have set up a Revolutionary Worker-Peasant government because "respected sons of the working class have been exterminated" – Münnich mentions his own friend Sziklai, as well as Mező and Kalamár, the Party boss in Csepel. It is this "government" that has asked for Soviet help against "fascism and reaction and its murderous bands". An hour later Kádár's voice is heard broadcasting a verbose statement that begins: "The Hungarian Revolutionary Worker-Peasant Government has been formed . . ."³³

The insurgents show no sign of surrender. The old battle centres have been reopened, like ancient wounds needing extra surgery, and desperate gun battles rage around the main railway stations, the Astoria Hotel, along Üllői Road and in Marx Square, while the fighting in Buda spills over Gellért Hill, Széna and Moscow Squares, and Zsigmond Móricz Square. In central Pest the telex operator steals a look out of the newspaper building's shattered windows, and reports: "Tanks are coming in long lines . . . The roar of the tanks is so loud that we can't hear each other's voices . . . They just brought us a rumour that the American troops will be here within one or two hours."

Hungarians are dying again at the Kilián Barracks; at ten forty-five A.M. the newspaper building reports that a fierce battle is raging. "There is heavy artillery fire." Russian assault teams have penetrated to its upper floors and the building is ablaze from mortar fire. Man-sized unexploded mortar bombs strew Üllői Road. Finally, the men are ordered to escape and join rebels in the Ferencváros suburb. Fifty shin down knotted sheets into Tüzoltó Street at the rear.³⁴ At two fifty p.m. despite a tank, mortar, and infantry assault that has now lasted thirteen hours people are still holding out in the barracks. The American legation gets a telephoned running commentary: "Here they come! Down the street . . . We're going to let them have it!" A legation official can hear the gun firing, followed seconds later by the soundwaves of the same shellbursts trembling through the autumn Budapest air.

Across Üllői Road the cornered rebels fight on against hopeless odds. Tanks are slamming shells into the Corvin block. Here, too, the telephone still works. A journalist calls through and the block's commander answers, "We've got 200 dead and injured in the cellars but we're going to fight to the last man. We have no choice. Tell Nagy that we didn't start the firing!" A young Catholic toolmaker will later explain that they are holding out until the Western powers come to save Hungary: "I was in the cinema there. It was awful. There was a man with only one leg fighting like a hero – he was killed. We were in the cellar. We put mines out across the street tied to a rope and then pulled them in front of the tanks . . . Towards the end there was no food and we were out of ammunition, we had to give up." He has a wife at home but she wants him to fight on. "She loved me, but she knew that it was for Hungary."³⁵

In two hours the noon ultimatum would expire. Fresh embarrassments crowded in on the American legation, even as a telex brought news of the futile Security Council meeting. Towards ten A.M. Tom Wailes telexed Washington: "*Béla Kovács, Smallholder leader, with two lieutenants now at front door seeking asylum. I will have to turn them away unless you instruct contrary.*" Kovács, a hunched figure with a thin moustache and half-closed eyes, was a minister of state like Bibó; he had spent eight years as a prisoner of the Soviets and ÁVH. To an America where millions of Catholic voters were about to vote for a president, Mindszenty was an important symbol, but not these men. Robert Murphy gave a half-reply. "You are authorised to grant shelter tentatively to Kovács and

his lieutenants.” Shelter, of course, was not asylum. Kovács was told to leave by dawn on November 5th.

Wailes reported, “*Just had a good flight of jets overhead.*” A few minutes later he added, “*We plan to send staff to basement just before twelve and if it gets really hot we will all go there for few minutes but will tell you beforehand in case you can keep machine running.*” The machine replied at a tangent: “Australia said the two Hungarian delegates who went to negotiate with Soviets for withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary have not returned and have apparently been taken prisoner . . .” In a way, this telex exchange symbolised the time lag between harsh reality in Budapest and the distant echo from the other side of the planet. Wailes was typing: “*Some sort of press conference has been called at Parliament and we will let you know results when available, we do not know who called conference.*”

An Italian legation official noted, “MiG planes are overhead and Radio Moscow announces that the ‘counter-revolution’ has been smashed. We hear ultimata issued to the rebels, none of which has the desired effect so far as we can see . . . During the afternoon, the shelling increases, so the minister orders strips gummed on to window panes and an emergency exit prepared.” As mid-day approached, Wailes ordered everybody down below. The basement was like a medieval dungeon. Mindszenty, Kovács and the Mártons had seen cells like these before; they sat mutely along the wall benches or talked quietly in Hungarian. After a while the roar of aircraft diminished, and they filtered back upstairs. The noon deadline passed. The radio was carrying the news about the Security Council and about Kádár.

The uprising was far from crushed. Isolated pockets fought on. The rebels had experience now, and confidence. They knew the blind spots of the tank crews. When rebels near the Southern Railway Station ran out of ammunition and petrol bottles, they planted rebel flags on the Soviet tanks and watched them shoot each other to pieces.

By two p.m. the Russians had captured Baross Square and the Eastern station. Heavy fighting still blocked Széna Square. The Russians were converging on Gellért Hill and shelling Csepel Island, while the big Divat Csarnok department store across the river was ablaze. At three p.m. the Soviet-controlled Szolnok radio broadcast a fresh ultimatum to Hungarian army troops to surrender or

“face extermination”. Shortly afterwards, the Soviet commander-in-chief ordered a nationwide curfew and a complete blackout in all cities – threatening that the airforce would open fire on any points of light. At five forty-five p.m., the Hungarians still controlled the Városliget park (City Park) in Pest, but the Russians had control of Andrásy Street, leading to the park, and containing the Soviet embassy. At seven forty-five the American legation telephoned the Kilián Barracks but there was no answer.

Quietly seated in his chair in Parliament, Professor Bibó, Hungary's legal government, got a call from Leslie Bain, an American reporter. After a while, there were sounds of life again, apart from the scratching of Stephen Bibó's pen. Former funkies of the Rákosi regime drifted back in: long-discredited funkies like Dobi and Bognár and Rónai. Francis Erdei's wife, Jolán Majlát, reappeared. A Soviet general jerked a thumb towards Bibó's office, and asked who he was. She told him he was a minister.

“Is he a Communist?”

“No.”

“So he's some kind of fascist then?”

“No.”

The Russian grappled with this baffling concept, gave up, and went away. A sentry was posted on Bibó's room. He worked on, undisturbed, on his solution to the Hungarian problem; occasionally he telephoned his friends. At night he slept there. On November 6th a lawyer acquaintance came in, now working for Kádár, and advised him that it was pointless to remain. The lawyer amiably piloted Bibó out past the guards and he went home. Undeterred, Bibó later handed his compromise solution to the British, French and Indian envoys. In May 1957 he was arrested, interrogated for fifteen months and sentenced to life imprisonment for his participation in Nagy's “counter-revolution”. He would serve six years and emerge spiritually broken. They did not like men of his calibre in Hungary.

45 Tricked, Kidnapped, Deported, Hanged

A PROCLAMATION WENT up on walls all over Budapest:

Take care! Ten million counter-revolutionaries are roaming the country. Hundreds of thousands of landowners, capitalists, generals and bishops are at large, from the aristocratic quarters to the factory areas of Csepel and Kíspeszt. Because of this gang's murderous activities only six workers are left in the entire country. These latter have set up a government in Szolnok.

At first these men did not show their faces inside Hungary. When Kádár arrived in Szolnok he found the arch-Stalinists, Elizabeth Andics and Andrew Berei, plotting their own Rákosi-type counter-government. Braying rebels had taken them to police headquarters on November 2nd; since they squawked: "We are Soviet citizens!" Kopácsi had turned them over to their embassy.¹ Until November 8th, Szolnok radio camouflaged itself as "Radio Budapest". Budapest's real transmitters had been silenced by Soviet troops.

When this Szolnok government slunk into embattled Budapest a few days later, escorted by Soviet troops, a new scurrilous "police notice" had been placarded round the city: "LOST: the confidence of the people. Honest finder is asked to return it to János Kádár, prime minister of Hungary, address: 10,000 Soviet Tanks Street."

It was, as Münnich bragged, the first Hungarian government with no Jews. But the problem of restoring confidence was no joke: 900,000 Party members and the 35,000 strong ÁVH had melted away; and the army was unreliable.² Nagy's government was dismissed by the presidential council on November

12th and Kádár's formally installed.³ Kádár's first step was to ask Münnich to piece together a new secret police force.

Budapest itself is at a standstill – one vast pedestrian zone, with people picking their way past heaps of rubble and shattered façades. Sullen queues wind round the state stores. Occasionally guns crackle, because some strongholds are still holding out: over in Buda, in the Kilián Barracks, recaptured by rebels, and in the Corvin Passage they are still killing and dying for a Hungary which the Western world has already sacrificed. Soviet troops distribute leaflets about the “liberation” down the quieter streets, and they comb “liberated” areas for gunmen. A young girl is executed in a courtyard for throwing a petrol bomb. The fight goes on, but the methods are changing to guerrilla warfare and the general strike. Workers' councils have sprung up on the Yugoslav model and they find that they wield real muscle. In the event they are to be defeated and dismantled only by trickery and arrest, the historic weapons of Communism.⁴

The night has passed with little firing. But as November 5th breaks, dreary with rain, the shooting is increasing and jets show overhead. The legation wakes to find that the hunted Smallholder leader, Béla Kovács, has slipped out through a side door while it was still dark.⁵ Cardinal Mindszenty has settled temporarily in the minister's office: it has a small drawing room and a shower. Using Wailes's desk as a makeshift altar, Mindszenty says his first Mass. By noon the air is trembling as Russian artillery opens up from City Park right across the Danube.

The foreign legations suffer deliberate violations. Seven tanks shoot up Harmincad Street, bringing plaster showering down from the British legation. The French and Yugoslavs lose every window in a hail of small arms fire, the Egyptians are bombed and ransacked, while the Italians will record on November 6th: “At noon-thirty a Soviet tank lets fly with a cannonade that shatters most of our windows facing on to Voroshilov Street.” A Soviet tank lolls in front of the Yugoslav embassy, where Nagy's group are sheltering, and leisurely guns it, killing a senior diplomat at his desk. The same insult is inflicted on the Polish embassy. It is as though Marshal Zhukov wants to prove how brutal he can be. Joseph Angyal, rebel commander of the XIth District, wearing his arm in a sling, finds out that Soviet infantry are planning an attack on the Kilián Barracks through a clinic containing 150 children. He signs a leaflet charging the Russians with

killing civilians queuing for bread, and he accuses Kádár and Zhukov of destroying Budapest. The time will come when Kádár will accuse him, and hang him too. Meanwhile police chief Kopácsi has been arrested and taken to Sashalom in a Soviet armoured car. “János Kádár would like to talk with *Tovarish* Kopácsi!” There is no sign of Kádár, of course, just General Serov pointing his pistol at him. Outside, Kopácsi can hear the sudden rattle of sub-machine guns – an execution. Russian officers who have failed in their duty are being spared the journey home.

Washington was in a panic, induced by a public warning from the Kremlin about the Suez conflict: “If this war is not stopped it contains the danger of turning into a Third World War,” Bulganin had remonstrated, adding: “I expect a positive reply from you.” The reply mentioned Eisenhower’s “inexpressible shock” at the Russian invasion but was deliberately mild by comparison.⁶

Radio Free Europe was holding its tongue too. In Budapest there was anger at the part it had played.⁷ Frantic defenders holding out in Dunapentele appealed to Munich and RFE direct for parachute drops. One student heard RFE announce on November 5th, “Hold out for three more days.”⁸ But the RFE officials were muted by anguish and chagrin, as they recalled their recent triumphant commentaries. A telex went to New York: “We [are] concentrating on news, with little commentary treatment. Latter covers Soviet intervention, attacks Kádár government. No commentary position taken re desirability [or] possibility of resistance by Hungarian revolutionaries.” While the victims of Soviet imperialism lay unburied in the streets, its audiences would not be receptive to propaganda language, said one officer. The internal guidance on November 5th would state: “If ever there was a time to broadcast humbly, this is it.”

American domestic coverage was now virtually non-existent. MacCormac and the other newspapermen were baffled – their despatches were going out over the legation circuit. Wailes angrily complained to Washington about the periodic official statements that the situation was not clear: “Situation in Budapest at least is entirely clear. Soviets have been systematically cleaning up city; slaughter has been continuous over last three days of men, women and children, with hospitals and clinics included among targets, despite which resistance evidently *not* yet entirely broken. Estimate heaviest shelling came few hours after

Radio Moscow broadcasting all resistance liquidated. These facts, *not rumors*.”⁹ On the UP wire service, of ninety-two despatches sampled on November 6th only eight concerned Hungary (the rest reported Suez and Eisenhower’s approaching landslide victory). The bare-fisted uprising of ten million against 200,000,000 had already lost its box-office appeal.

The insurgents themselves could not know this. Theirs was the worm’s eye view. There was officer-cadet Béla Kurucz, clutching a sub-machine gun, in an abandoned apartment house at Number 18, Ferenc Boulevard. The tenants were down in the basements – how they felt, the fighters did not know or care. Blanketed corpses in the street marked the trail of the battle. The night was cold, but others had given him heavy black breeches and an overcoat to replace his army uniform.¹⁰ The smell was of cordite, flying mortar and burning houses. The outside parapet was gone; firing through the hole which had been the window, he was alone except for a telephone lying in a tangled heap on the floor. He dialled a number and found that it worked. The voice begged him: “Quit now, we’ll hide you!” He did not leave, but sniped circumspectly all night at passing troop carriers. Next morning, November 6th, his friends were as amazed as he was to find him alive. As he came downstairs he did not know if it was his legs or the staircase trembling.

On the far corner of Bakáts Square a tank was firing at something. He sheltered behind a street corner, joined by a Red Cross nurse waiting to get to her hospital on the other side. For a while the tank’s guns flickered aimlessly as though to show that the dragon was still alive. The nurse decided to risk dashing across. Kurucz advised her not to, but she just smiled: “Watch!” She started to wave and stepped out across the square. “You see!” she triumphed. A stream of tracer bullets ripped across the square, chest-high. The impact lifted her off her feet, and she tumbled into the road. Kurucz screamed, “Did you get shot?” – he felt stupid, but it was all he could find to say. She wanted to speak, but her eyes went funny.

The morning was sunny but the winds were brisk. All day Russian tanks laid siege to the Castle Hill. By five p.m. newspapermen had seen the heaviest continuous shelling of the rebel strongholds yet.¹¹ From near the Chain Bridge, tanks were firing across the river into the Royal Palace, never repaired after the wartime bombings. Perhaps the Russians believed that Cardinal Mindszenty

had returned to his residence. When the shelling stopped, the rattle of small arms could be heard. That evening, the power failed in the American legation. From its upper windows the staff could see flames consuming the cathedral-like National Archives building on the hill. By the light of candles they listened to the political testament which the Cardinal had composed. Tom Wailes signed as a witness; the Cardinal impressed his ring in a wax blob at the bottom, and the document was pouched to Washington.

Leading the fight on Castle Hill was Father Basil Végvári, a young Franciscan monk. Two weeks ago he was supervising boys at a school at Esztergom.¹² But here in Budapest nobody seemed to need him. Maléter had spurned him as chaplain at the Kilián Barracks. So now he stood up here on the battlements, with a tommy gun slung round his neck, a grenade in one hand and a petrol bottle in the other, watching the tanks inching up the inclines. The Castle commandant had vanished, and the monk had stepped into his shoes; he had had some military experience before taking holy orders. His aim was to hold out until UN troops arrived. He had good men but they could not stand the continuous mortar fire, aircraft strafing and shelling much longer. They rejected one telephoned ultimatum to surrender, but then Zoltán Czérna, his second in command, was killed by a shell near the Vienna Gate; next day, November 7th, Father Végvári ordered the defence abandoned. Nobody was going to help Hungary. His deputy, Gábor Folly, was caught and later hanged.

On November 7th, President Dobi swore in the Kádár government. But Kádár ruled in name only: master now in Budapest was the Red Army. The commandant was a Russian, Brigadier-General K. S. Grebennyik. He placarded the walls with orders for the surrender of all weapons. The placards explained: "At the request of the Hungarian Revolutionary Government of Workers and Peasants the Soviet army has temporarily moved into Budapest in order to extend fraternal help in defending the socialist achievements of the Hungarian people, in overcoming the counter-revolution and in warding off the danger of fascism."

Journalists and diplomats who tried to leave the country without a signed "Propusk" from the Soviet army were batted back and forth down the highway. Even passes signed by Münnich were slapped back by leering Red Army officials. Soviet ambassador Andropov replied to Wailes's protests about the children's clinic incident that he was powerless; for once he was probably speak-

ing the truth. Meanwhile the fact that Russian troops were operating in Hungary was kept from the population of the Soviet Union – and for that matter from the troops themselves as well. “From two separate sources,” the Italian legation noted on November 8th, “it is learned that Soviet troops have been told by their commandant that they are suppressing a Nazi movement in Germany.”

The Moscow newspapers reported, allegedly from Budapest, that Kádár was meeting “wide support” and that factories and public transport had resumed work.¹³ They published atrocity photographs pirated from the *Daily Express* and claimed that “counter-revolutionaries machine gunned crowds on Rákóczi Street and murdered Red Cross personnel”. From East Berlin to Peking, Party newspapers sanctioned the Soviet invasion; Prague expressed “warm sympathy”; the Communists from Paris to Bucharest cooed their approval. But there were violent demonstrations in Paris outside the Communist headquarters and *l'Humanité*, and in other Western capitals. In Rome fistfights started in the Chamber when Communists refused to stand in tribute to the insurgents; the Communists rose afterwards and cheered the Soviet Union instead. In New York the protests were more staged than genuine: when the Russians sent out invitations for a lavish reception on November 7th, Dr. Béla Fabian, the leading Jewish émigré, appealed to his CIA financiers for six thousand dollars to stage a protest rally (including \$1,000 for taxis and personal expenses).¹⁴

The news in the American legation was of the re-election of President Eisenhower. By way of congratulations, ten Stalin tanks trampled into Liberty Square and rotated their turrets until their guns pointed straight into its windows. Then the tanks swivelled and blundered off northwards out of the square. It seemed that the Russians know only one tongue: brutal force and aggression.

Of course, the Russians denied that it *was* aggression.

But both Soviet interventions were clearly illegal acts. Even the Warsaw Pact bound its signatories to follow “the principles of mutual respect for their independence and sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs”.¹⁵ The interventions were wars waged against Hungary, no less; in 1953 the Soviets had defined “aggression” in such a way that it included both interventions.¹⁶ Kádár’s request was of course invalid because it was made before his government even enacted a law legalising its own existence. Moreover, the Geneva Conventions of 1949 applied to all combatants; in fact the right of civilians to

take up arms against an invader had been canvassed at Geneva by the Soviet Union itself with the Nazi invasion of Denmark uppermost in its mind, since the Danish army had not opposed it. The Geneva Conventions stipulated that occupied peoples could not be deported, executed without trial, or tortured: nor could criminal laws be retrospectively enacted. All these provisions would be broken by Kádár and the Soviet commanders. “Know where we went wrong in October?” Kádár’s subjects later mimicked. “We interfered in our own affairs!”

By November 8th the insurgents began to feel more sorrow for the residents; people started to say: “Please don’t fire from this house!”¹⁷ So the rebels moved into Communist buildings, like the Party headquarters of the IXth District, instead. There were other signs that morale was cracking. When Matteotti went to the Soviet command early on November 9th for a pass, he noticed a constant stream of Hungarians coming in to identify the focal points of resistance to the Russians.¹⁸ The intellectual revolt collapsed. The students’ revolutionary council was wound up by Stephen Pozsár. Even the Writers’ Union was in disarray. A meeting was called in Julius Hágy’s flat on the 12th but he got cold feet, so they met at the Union building instead; a noisy, packed meeting that wrangled for hours over the advice to give the workers. “There was complete impotence and helplessness – it was maddening,” described one of the *Truth* staff later.¹⁹

It was around Julius Obersovszky’s *Truth* that the last fires of intellectual revolt flickered. While unsuspecting tanks cruised the streets outside the New York Palace, it was published for one last time, front-paging a poem by young Joseph Gáli, who had spent his infant years in Auschwitz. Most of his friends had already fled abroad, arguing urgently, “We can do more for Hungary abroad.” But Gáli had rebuked them: “They can’t drive us out of our own country.” Now, however, it was time for tough decisions in the *Truth* office: tired insurgents with bloodshot eyes wanted to fight to the death, and it was Gáli who urged that they go underground and rise up again when opportunity next presented itself. So on November 7th, for one last time, the journalists sneaked in through the stockroom, printed 15,000 copies of a final edition and spirited them out on to ambulances for distribution round the fighting capital.

The final headline read, “THE WHOLE NATION RISES! THE COUNTRY IN DANGER!” Obersovszky’s lead story apologised that because of “the difficult situation” the newspaper had not been proof-read. “We have defended our

editorial office and printing works until today. From tomorrow we fight for *Truth* from elsewhere.” His editorial heaped scorn on Kádár:

Our selfless liberators have given us a prime minister who is above party. Be not amazed, Dear Reader, I am indeed talking about János Kádár! He has personally abolished the HWP . . . and established a whiter than white Communist party. Mind you, this has run into trouble too, since it turns out that some of its leaders like Géza Losonczy and Imre Nagy are precisely the same “depraved fascists” as the rest of us Hungarians . . . If János Kádár ever collects any followers he should inscribe HMP on his banner – “Hazaárulók Magyarországi Pártja” [Traitors’ Party of Hungary]. Then everyone will know . . .

After that Obersovszky called a final editorial meeting in the Nest, the Artists’ Club, a rich villa on the Boulevard, and announced: “As from today we go underground.” There were apprehensive murmurs. He continued, “Those of you who want to join me can telephone today or tomorrow. After that I vanish.”²⁰

All across the country – at Pécs, Komló, Székesfehérvár, Veszprém, Miskolc – the Soviet commanders issued ultimata; but in many places they encountered workers determined to fight on until the West intervened. For a week the workers defended the steelworks city of Dunapentele, Rákosi’s former pride and joy, “Sztálinváros”. For two days the Russians skirted round it, then issued a new ultimatum: “All officers and soldiers who surrender will preserve their lives . . . If the garrison does not lay down its arms the Soviet command will take the city by force.” To this the proud city replied: “Dunapentele is the foremost socialist town in Hungary. Its residents are workers, and power is in their hands . . . The houses have all been built by the workers themselves . . . The workers will defend the town from ‘fascist excesses’ but also from Soviet troops!” The Russians attacked with tanks and planes. Joined by three hundred men, mightily armed with the steelworks’ own flak the workers fought off three attacks. Casualties were heavy: in one group of thirty-five workers, four were killed including their leader, a reserve lieutenant, hit by a Russian bazooka.²¹ Five hundred Greek exile workers went over to the Russians as did the garrison commander, Captain

Nagyéri.²² He thus survived, while the flak commander, who had inspired the workers to this defence, was hanged after Dunapentele fell on November 11th.

Even more determined was the resistance in Rákosi's old constituency, "Red" Csepel. For ten days the fight raged around it. Meanwhile the factories were idle, and placards mocked: "The forty thousand aristocrats and fascists of Csepel are on strike!"²³ Here too soldiers had turned over flak guns and ammunition to the workers. Battle groups were organised. Motorcycles were taken off production lines for despatch riders. On the night of November 6th we find a typical young steelworker in a patrol armed with machine guns attacking a mortar unit in a field. Asked routinely on April 22nd, 1957, for his worst ever deed, this unlikely guerrilla would reply: "I shot four Russian soldiers in a cowardly, underhand manner." He had gunned them twice from behind, firing from the hip; the ejecting shellcases had burned his face, but he saw the enemy drop, and two crawl away. "*They* taught me to fight like a partisan," he said in justification, but he wondered whether his boyhood hero, Horatio Nelson, would have acted in this way.²⁴

Around Dombóvár and Pécs, Hungarian artillery fought Soviet tanks attacking from the north, but on November 6th, Soviet soldiers swarmed into Pécs; accompanying them was Colonel Bradacs, the expelled ÁVH commander. The rebel soldiers, coalminers, and workers' militia took to the mountains, blasting roads behind them: the Mecsek mountains bordering the city with their trees, caves and quarries were ideal for partisan warfare. An uneasy truce began between the remaining townsfolk and the Russians.

Back in Budapest the American legation staff heard intermittent firing during November 8th as the house-by-house search continued.²⁵ More Hungarians asked for asylum, a hopeless quest. Tildy's assistant came on his behalf, but Wailes refused this plea like all the rest, consoling himself: "Tildy's . . . chances of survival would probably be better elsewhere."

The legation "family" had swollen to sixty. Early that day attaché Katona noticed that Mindszenty's secretary, Monsignor Turcsányi, had abandoned clerical garb for civilian clothes and a black beret. Evidently he was planning to make a run for the frontier. "You look like an Irishman going out on the town," he told him bluntly. From a window Mindszenty and Katona watched the

monsignor climb into another reporter's automobile in the little convoy. Turcsányi did not get further than Győr before being caught and hauled out by Kádár's secret police.²⁶ (On January 17th, 1958, the People's Court would sentence him to life imprisonment for "crimes against the Hungarian People".²⁷) Mindszenty was already becoming an embarrassment. With considerable poetic licence he was working on a dramatic appeal to the UN.²⁸ ("Wallowing in the blood of murdered members of their families, 10,000 women are being molested.") Eventually the State Department would hint to the legation that while verbal demands for his surrender should be refused, no attempt should be made to protect him from the government or any mob if that put American lives at risk.²⁹ Eisenhower no longer needed the Catholic vote, of course.

American prestige in Budapest had hit rock bottom anyway. On November 8th a US airforce doctor arrived from the Paris embassy to assess the casualties. Katona showed him round. At a nearby intersection three Soviet armoured cars and several trucks had been ambushed and incinerated down to their wheel rims. There were charred corpses still in the wreckage. A middle-aged Hungarian wearing a tricolour armband was directing traffic. He spotted the two Americans and tore into them unashamedly. Pointing at the airforce officer's camera he screamed: "Go ahead! Take all the pictures you want, send them to the Voice of America! Let them see how we are willingly sacrificing our lives while the free world stands idly by!"

Trundling through the city elsewhere was an anonymous convoy, an open armoured troop carrier conveying the Kopácsis to Gorky Avenue. United with them were the ceasefire delegation tricked and kidnapped at Tököl: Maléter, Kovács, Erdei and Szücs. Forbidden to talk, they sang a soldier's ballad instead: "*Kerepesi cemetery, the first grave is a private's . . .*" In the Soviet embassy compound they were led down to the prison cells with which, no doubt, each well-appointed embassy in foreign capitals is furnished; the wooden slatted beds were sheeted with linen of the Hungarian Wagons-Lits company.

By November 11th, the Soviet troops had inflicted damage "far greater than that caused by the Second World War", according to Wailes.³⁰ The fighting in the town centre had finished. It was a sombre Sunday: colleagues from the French and Italian legations crowded in as Mindszenty said Mass. Later he gave to the

people who had helped him ten sacred pictures which he had authenticated as touched by the tears of a saint.

In Moscow the propagandists were shrieking that all this had been instigated from outside Hungary, by émigrés in Hungarian uniform armed with American and West German weapons, and effectively led by bishops, fascists, landowners, and Admiral Horthy's former generals, relatives and ministers, not to mention Otto von Hapsburg.³¹ Kádár was more subtle in his approach, offering inducements and blandishments. Broadcasting this Sunday he traced the origins of the rising to legitimate indignation at Rákosi, and he ascribed honest intentions to the insurgents. While *Pravda* still branded Nagy an "accomplice", Kádár was more indulgent, indicting him of helplessness before the right wing, but acquitting him of any conscious intent to aid the uprising.

Where was Imre Nagy? Some rumoured that he was dead, others that he was already flying to New York.³² In fact Nagy and his group were still in the Yugoslav embassy, and they were not comfortable. They behaved as if they were still the legal government – as indeed they were.³³ There were endless discussions about organising a new movement. Nagy wavered. Donáth wanted to consult outside opinion first. A short questionnaire was sent out by an embassy official to Balász Nagy, of the Petőfi Circle. The replies claimed overwhelmingly that Kádár's new Party had no prestige.

Nagy's most active supporter, Nicholas Gimes, was still at large. He had a strong sense of security and told even his mistress very little in order not to compromise her. But he reassured her that not even Kádár would use the rope now, not in the twentieth century right in the heart of Europe.³⁴ He discussed Nagy's questionnaire at a furtive meeting on November 13th in Professor Robert Bohó's flat: all agreed that there was a need for a movement that would fight on in the spirit of October 23rd. They named it the Democratic Hungarian Independence Movement, and Gimes founded its secret newspaper, *October Twenty-third*. In it, he called for a national workers' council to give leadership to the whole working class.³⁵

Nagy's presence in the Yugoslav embassy was most unwelcome to Kádár. He wanted Nagy well out of the way, somewhere where his name could no longer exert its disruptive magnetic pull through the embassy walls. But if Nagy

had flirted with the idea of extending his asylum in Yugoslavia itself, this idea was rudely dispelled by Tito in a speech on November 11th.³⁶ Speaking at Rula on the Dalmatian coast, Tito poured vitriol on the uprising and justified the Soviet intervention. "I can assure you, comrades, I know the men who have formed this new government. And in my view they incorporate all that is honourable in Hungary."

Kádár was gaining time while he recreated his police arm, a successor to the ÁVH called the "*karhatalmi század*". By November 10th, the first regiment of this militia had been recruited, "primarily from former ÁVH men and other officials of the ministry of the interior", as an official publication admitted some weeks later.³⁷ By the week after that two more regiments had been raised and uniformed in the kapok jackets that were to become their trademark. Several hundred army officers were given the choice of resigning their commissions or joining this militia, in which case they had to sign a declaration approving the "help" that the Soviet army was rendering.

Their duties were less than heroic. A wave of arrests began, despite Kádár's promise published on November 14th that nobody would come to harm because of his participation in the "great popular movement of the past few week".³⁸ *Truth* poet Joseph Gáli and 180 other rebels were hiding in the air-raid shelter of the Péterfy Street hospital when the militia raided it three days later. The militia found radio equipment tuned to the West, duplicating equipment and typewriters including one with Russian characters. The flight of refugees to Austria and Yugoslavia now became a flood. An aide urged the injured Joseph Dudás to flee the country. Dudás refused: lesser men might flee, not he. "The revolution will prevail in the end! Let's hope the West intervenes," he said.³⁹ For some days the workers concealed him in a factory in Kőbánya. Then a miners' delegation visited Kádár and urged him to negotiate with him. Kádár agreed. Dudás strode proudly into Parliament, and met the familiar Communist reception: tricked, kidnapped, hanged.

Kádár still scarcely ventured out of Parliament. The power was in the street, and the street had stated its terms: Soviet troops must leave Hungary before the general strike would end. Workers' councils existed in many of Budapest's districts; each consisted of delegates elected by mass meetings. The councils cared for the homeless, paid the wages, and organised food and social assistance. On

November 13th the council in Újpest set up a powerful new council for the whole capital. The Central Workers' Council of Greater Budapest⁴⁰ was the first step towards a genuine workers' authority to confront the regime. It settled in the transport union building in Akácfa Street. Its president was a twenty-three-year-old toolmaker, Alexander Rácz, of outstanding leadership ability.

Dramatic meetings began with the government, meetings unique in the history of Communism. On November 14th delegates from Beloianis, the former Siemens factory, and from factories in Csepel restated their demands, high up on which was a return to government by Imre Nagy. Kádár smoothly replied: "I would gladly bring him back into the government . . . Let Nagy come to this Parliament building, then we can talk to him." Later that day the Central Workers' Council sent a nineteen-man delegation to argue with Kádár.⁴¹ He explained frankly that the workers' other demand for free elections and a multi-party system was no easy matter: "The workers' power can be killed not only by bullets but also by the ballot." On Nagy, he gave the same sly answer that he had given to Alexander Báli, Rácz's fellow leader, that morning, adding: "How do you expect me to talk with Imre Nagy while he is in the embassy of a foreign power?"

First the CWC should call off the strike, Kádár insisted: *then* he would talk terms. The CWC mistrustfully ordered work to resume on Monday, November 19th.

By this time the Russians were using their cruellest form of blackmail. Tanks would suddenly appear at both ends of a street, or outside a school, and hundreds of young Hungarians would be kidnapped at random and deported to the Soviet Union as hostages. Italian and American diplomats noted the horrifying details in their diaries. A student who escaped from Russia told the Americans of how he had been transported to Csap, where the largely Hungarian population had aided his escape. He had seen a Russian lieutenant executed at Vecsés, near Budapest, for refusing to load such a prison train. The Debrecen *Diary* (*Napló*) referred to public agitation about sealed freightcars of people being shipped through the city to the Soviet frontier. Insurgents attacked some trains to liberate the deportees, and they wrecked the rail track outside Záhony. On November 14th the CWC protested to Kádár, and he declared that "agreement had been reached with the competent Soviet authorities that no one would be

taken out of the country". On November 18th his government actually denied the deportations. These denials just fed the panic and two days later the Writers' Union protested to the Soviet commander, General Grebennyik, who hinted that if the strikes stopped the deported men would be returned.

Work resumed on Monday, November 19th, as the CWC had promised. It was galling for Kádár to see the way the workers were solidly behind the council. That day the CWC workers again came to see him. They had been at their workplaces all day and at CWC headquarters all evening; but now they had to wait until after midnight before Kádár would see them. Meanwhile anonymous funkies started questioning them. When Kádár and his cronies came, the funkies briefed them; they interrupted and insulted the workers, and tried to demoralise them, scoffing that the engineers were not "real" workers, and that the workers lacked the education to serve on such a council. "They were all rested and well-dressed," recalled one delegate, Francis Töke later. "It was easy for them to browbeat tired, unshaven, badly-dressed men."

The CWC told Kádár – and they told the Soviet commander Grebennyik next day too – that they were convening a meeting in the stadium on the 21st to set up a nationwide workers' council. Kádár and Grebennyik were separately invited to attend. Kádár's henchman Apró was indignant: "Do you want a counter-government?"⁴² Grebennyik diplomatically advised them that the government would have to send him such an invitation. He sent his "representatives" all the same: a force of tanks that cordoned off the stadium. The workers' delegates pouring into Budapest had to be redirected to the CWC headquarters. That building was blocked by cadets of the Zrinyi military academy armed with machine guns, a sign that Kádár was re-establishing the government's own forces. Thus the attempt to form a national workers' council failed. Workers at the bus garage opposite the stadium spread rumours that the entire CWC had been arrested and proclaimed a one-day stoppage. The factories joined them. Kádár was furious: "You only just resumed work, and now you're striking again already!" The CWC blamed him for sending in the tanks. He retorted, "I am prime minister, I will show you that the Communists are masters here, not you."

He was as good as his word. He staged a further outrage. Imre Nagy's group had refused to accept the latest hint, that they should voluntarily leave for Romania.⁴³ Hungary and Romania were not the best of neighbours. So an

under-secretary in the foreign ministry had come from Belgrade to discuss the Nagy dilemma with Kádár.⁴⁴ Kádár reiterated to him that the Nagy group had nothing to fear by leaving the embassy. On November 16th he broadcast reassuringly, “We have promised not to institute any court action against Imre Nagy or his friends on account of the crimes they committed . . . We shall keep this promise.” (Two days later three of the Nagy group left the embassy: Vas, Lukács, and Szántó.) The Yugoslavs asked Kádár to repeat his promise in writing; on November 21st Kádár’s government obliged. Ambassador Soldatić later wrote, “I had the impression that Kádár was acting sincerely.”

But he was not. The first news that something had gone wrong on November 22nd, the appointed day, appeared in *People’s Will* next day. After the group left the embassy, the newspaper began systematically telephoning their homes: Losonczy, the Jánosis, the Nagys, Mrs. Rajk – but none had arrived. At Kádár’s secretariat the night duty officer said that the Cabinet was in session. Evidently something of unusual importance had occurred.

It was indeed unusual. It seemed that Kádár’s government had violated the very first international agreement that it had signed. Münnich had sent a bus to the embassy at six thirty p.m., “to take the group to their homes”, and Vásárhelyi had been brought over from the attaché’s house in Buda to join it – in itself odd, as he *lived* in Buda. Nagy found Soviet secret policemen in the bus, and the driver whispered: “Watch your step, Comrade Nagy! You’re not going home!” The ambassador murmured to Nagy in German, “Come back, don’t go!” Nagy backed down the steps and insisted that the Russians get off. Soldatić then detailed two of his staff to board the bus.⁴⁵ As it drove off, armoured cars moved into its path. A Soviet colonel boarded it and ordered the two Yugoslavs off. The bus then drove Nagy’s group, not to their homes but to the Soviet kommandatura in Gorky Avenue. Tricked, kidnapped, deported . . .

At the kommandatura they met Lukács, Szántó and Vas. These gullible Communists had been pulled in too, soon after they left the embassy on November 18th. Both Kádár and the Yugoslavs had known all along that these three had been kidnapped. Yet Soldatić had blandly assured the others, “They got home safely.” Vásárhelyi was bitter, and suspected that some kind of Yugoslav deal with Moscow was involved.⁴⁶ Next evening Kádár’s government broadcast this lie: “Imre Nagy and his associates asked the Hungarian government for permis-

sion to . . . transfer to another socialist country. After the government of the Romanian People's Republic gave its consent, Imre Nagy and his associates went there on November 23rd." Tito protested. Kádár replied on December 1st, reaffirming that he "did not intend to apply any punishments for their past activities".⁴⁷

The Soviet kidnapping of the Nagy group caused uproar. The workers called for an hour's silence at two p.m. next day. The entire population complied. Now Kádár changed tack. He told a workers' delegation of his concern for Nagy's well-being: "In the interests of their own safety the occupants of the minibus in question were not taken to their homes. The government had good cause to believe that counter-revolutionary elements still lying low in the country would undertake a provocation and might kill Imre Nagy or one of his colleagues, and then pin the blame on the Hungarian government for these murders. We did not want to run this risk."

He announced that they had already left Hungary, but at that time Nagy and friends were still on a Soviet airfield near Budapest. Münnich came several times to ask Nagy to think it over – to concede that he was not prime minister any more, to exercise self-criticism and to damn the uprising. Nagy refused. On November 27th, as the group was finally exported in three military planes to Romania, Kádár's tone became shrill and condemnatory: "By his incompetence and inaction Imre Nagy first camouflaged the white terror of the bloodthirsty counter-revolution, and then supported it . . . If he was so incompetent, he should have abdicated." The exiles were driven to Snago, an idyllic lake district near Bucharest. Here top Romanian Communists also tried to talk Nagy round. They failed as Münnich had. After a while, Nagy and his companions became prisoners of the Romanian security service.

Béla Kovács was still on the run. American attaché Gaza Katona had offered him sanctuary, and when Katona got home on November 29th his cook Elizabeth told him that Kovács had telephoned – she believed from the Italian legation further down the street – and asked when he would return. She had said she did not know. "I'll have to seek refuge elsewhere, then," Kovács had concluded, "because it's getting dark already."⁴⁸

His election campaign behind him, Eisenhower applied his mind at last to Central Europe. He decided that if the Kremlin resorted again to force to reimpose Soviet rule in Poland, then immediate United Nations military action should follow. On November 23rd, the Joint Chiefs of Staff was asked to investigate the feasibility of such action and the risk of a general war. After analysis of the combined strength of Polish, NATO and United Nations forces they concluded that, provided the American forces were not “restricted to limited objectives and actions”, the Soviets could be defeated. Accordingly, the JCS recommended that the United States should participate – mainly by using its Strategic Air Command bomber force – to attack Soviet lines of communication and the sources of Soviet air power. But the JCS warned the government on December 3rd, “There is a risk of general war if the United States adopts this course of action.”⁴⁹ None of this was of any use to Hungary now.

Kádár would not even let the United Nations send in observers. The Indian prime minister, Pandit Nehru, gave his special ambassador, Krishna Menon, the job of changing Kádár’s mind. He flew to Moscow, then on to Budapest, arriving there on December 1st.⁵⁰ Not until December 5th could he see the prime minister in Parliament. “Kádár,” he related later to another ambassador in Moscow, “is virtually a prisoner, surrounded by Soviet tanks and with Soviet sentries inside the building.” For Menon the interview was most depressing. Kádár had no authority whatsoever and was afraid to leave the building. He was implacably against any UN visit. “It is quite impossible at the present time,” he kept repeating.

The Central Workers’ Council impressed Menon by their moderation, but they were without exception pro-Nagy. Afterwards he advised the Soviet foreign minister in Moscow to encourage a *political* settlement – the workers, students and intellectuals represented a constructive force and would provide stability.⁵¹ Shepilov rejected this outright and particularly opposed any idea of bringing Nagy back to the political scene; Nagy had, after all, condoned the White Terror. “Besides,” he said, “our government has information that Nagy at one time considered joining NATO.”

One moving event that Menon witnessed was the silent “March of Mothers” called for eleven A.M. on December 4th, one month after the Soviet invasion. When Gáza Katona drove across the city on his way to Vienna early that day he

saw Soviet soldiers flitting about the dim streets distributing handbills urging women to boycott this “provocation”. The Soviet appeal was ignored by thirty thousand women. They were of every age, mostly poorly dressed, and shuffled silently to Heroes’ Square carrying black and national flags to pay homage to the dead of the uprising.⁵² The wives of several high funkies were among them: newspapermen identified the wife of Kádár’s foreign minister, Horváth, and even Mrs. Marosán.

In these and other small ways a frightened public could show its mood. Passengers on the No. 19 bus prompted the conductor that it was Elizabeth, not Engels Square.⁵³ Wise conductors abstained from announcing Moscow and Voroshilov Squares, or Tolbukhin Boulevard – they reverted to the pre-war names. On December 5th, Russian tanks charged fleeing demonstrators over the pavements outside the American legation. But bit by bit Kádár was getting the upper hand, and he could move against his opponents. Gimes continued to move a bit too openly about Budapest. He was invited to see Krishna Menon, at the Margaret Island Hotel, and must have been shadowed because he was picked up shortly after in the shadow of the ministry of the interior. Afterwards, his brother-in-law, Gábor Magos, continued to negotiate with the Indians.⁵⁴

After the silent march, even more young people were kidnapped and loaded on to freight cars heading east.⁵⁵ A steelworker saw three lorry-loads rattle past, and heard muffled shouts of, “Help us!” and “They’re taking us to Russia!” But then rebel gunmen materialised from nowhere, shot out the tyres of the last lorry, killed its Russian crew before they could react and liberated the young men.⁵⁶ On December 16th it was this steelworker’s own turn. Russian soldiers suddenly appeared, and shouted: “Hey, Magyar!” He was grabbed by rough arms and tossed into a lorry with thirty others. They joined fifteen hundred men being processed in a camp at Komárom for deportation to Russia; his wife and little boy would never know what had happened to him. He had spent nine years there already, and understood the language. A few nights later he overheard a conversation: the move was about to begin. He crawled towards a trench latrine where the foul smell kept even the Russians at a distance. The trench ran under the barbed wire. One by one he and fifty others dropped into it and began their escape. He had a clasp knife in his pocket. He was ready to kill. Anything was better than a return to Russia,

Kádár's government was growing police muscle all the time. On December 5th he dissolved the revolutionary committees and arrested two hundred members of workers' councils; many were deported. Next day the leaders of the workers' councils in the Ganz and MÁVAG factories were arrested. The Central Workers' Council could see that the showdown was coming. Early on the 8th it invited delegates to come to a routine evening meeting: on arrival they were told that they would spend the night there and reconvene as a *National Workers' Council* next day. The mood was already ugly, but even as they were ponderously debating whether to call a one- or two-day general strike, a call came for the delegate from Salgótarján, a grimy industrial city in Northern Hungary: he learned that ten thousand coalminers there had demonstrated against the arrest of their workers' council leaders; Kádár's forces had opened fire and eighty people had been killed.⁵⁷ That did it. "Strike until the spring, or until hell freezes over!" shouted one delegate. "Let the lights go out! Let there be no gas, let there be no nothing!" exclaimed another. The CWC decided to call an immediate general strike for two days.

Kádár responded by dissolving the CWC. His new police raided the building before dawn and arrested leading members. The two CWC leaders, Rácz and Báli, were given asylum at the Beloiannis works and the workers refused to let Soviet tanks get at them. The strike that began now was of a solidarity never equalled before or since. The government tried to dupe the workers that the CWC decision had been invalidated, but the country at large ignored them. One bus tried to run, ran, but not for long. Its conductress told a radio reporter, "At Matthew Zalka Square the people attacked us . . . On our entire journey through the town we were cursed and spat at and finally hounded back to the depot."⁵⁸ On Széna Square a grenade halted another bus. Gunfire halted a No. 75 trolleybus near the Ganz factory. In all Hungary no wheel moved, no furnace was tapped, for two days. The government newspaper gasped: "The workers' movement has never seen such a strike!"⁵⁹

On December 11th János Kádár appeared to concede defeat. He sent word to the Beloiannis works that he would confer with the two CWC leaders in Parliament, as equals, man to man. Inside Parliament, he exchanged a few words with them, then stood aside while they were arrested and dragged away. Tricked,

kidnapped, arrested . . . A few days later journalists on the Communist organ, *People's Freedom*, puzzled: "It is painful but true that the majority of people do not believe our promises."

Dudás, Báli, Rácz, and the betrayed members of Maléter's delegation and Nagy's group could have told them why.

Epilogue: Back from the Dead

POLICE SERGEANT HAJDÚ arrived back in Budapest one January day in 1957 and showed the American legation his neck. He had been taken by the Russians to Záhony, on the frontier, and hanged from a tree with two comrades. (They had found him wearing a uniform without insignia.) Local peasants cut him down, still alive; he lives now in Texas, his neck permanently scarred.

In a sense the Communist Party also came back from the dead in those weeks in Hungary – lynched but with life in it yet. His power consolidated, his kapok-suited militia now patrolling in force, János Kádár backtracked on the easy reassurances he had given the people earlier. On December 13th, 1956, his government reintroduced internment by Decree 31. On January 15th, 1957, a new law provided the death penalty for strikers – described as “those who deliberately disturb the functioning of public utility services, water, gas, electricity or obstruct the activities of organisations declared essential for the public by the government” – as well as for people inciting others to break this law. On March 19th, 1957, the punishment of internal exile was restored by Decree 8130.

People’s Courts were set up. Their sentences were usually death, and usually executed only a few hours later. On June 15th, 1957, his government reimposed the restrictions on lawyers whom defendants could select: “If a defence counsel is needed, he may be appointed only from among those listed by the minister of justice for this purpose.” The pension rights of dead insurgents or those subsequently executed were forfeited, a hardship which neither Hitler nor Rákosi had visited on their enemies. The short-lived freedom of the press came to an end. While, admittedly, compulsory crop deliveries were replaced by voluntary of-

ferings, it was simultaneously made impossible for farmers to sell their surplus products to anybody but the state, and that at ruinous official prices. On July 21st, 1957, work norms were re-established.¹

In part, these measures were inevitable if Communism was to have any future in the country. The uprising and subsequent general strike had bankrupted the economy. Six hundred shops and twenty thousand homes had been damaged in Budapest alone and 2,217 homes destroyed. "Just think," Hungarians wanly joked. "The Russians came as friends. What would they have done if they came as enemies!" Injury to the capital's public buildings and museums was severe. Twenty-seven hospitals and seventy-three schools were seriously damaged. The big department stores had been wrecked: the famous Divatcsarnok was gutted by fire, and the Parisian Arcade was badly damaged.

By November production of coal, petroleum, bauxite, chemicals, rubber and pharmaceutical goods had slumped; only food production recovered fast, perhaps because the peasants had blissfully dissolved over half the 3,900 agricultural collectives the moment that the uprising began. At the drop of a hat, the peasants were ready to do it all again: one year later, a dramatised play was broadcast about the uprising, incorporating actual recordings of the news bulletins of October 1956. In the village of Ete, a ramshackle collection of roofs and barns tucked between fields and trees in Komárom County, the villagers heard with excitement and anticipation that counter-revolutionaries and fascist bandits were storming the radio building in Budapest, and said to each other: "Here we go again!" and had dissolved the co-operative, dismissed the local Party secretary, and elected a new village leadership before their tragic error was discovered.

The little country's cruellest loss was of people – the brave and educated men and women who sensed that there was no future for them here and vanished through the still-leaking Western frontier. "It became particularly conspicuous around Christmas time," said one man, "when I tried to ring up or visit three of my friends and all three had disappeared."²

They were welcomed more or less fervently by the Western nations, anxious to salve their consciences for not having acted in other ways. The refugee figure had risen by December 11th to 126,000, and a week later Radio Free Europe was heard urging Hungarians to stay put, as the exodus was "straining facilities" in the West. Among them was Nagy's National Guard commander, General

Király, who had scurried westwards with his troops on November 4th; apart from one skirmish a few days later, they did nothing in Hungary's defence, effectively escorting and exporting themselves to Austria on November 18th.³ General Maléter's first wife Maria crossed into Austria with her children three nights later, hiding under a tarpaulin on a fruit lorry; she had had to leave behind one daughter ill with influenza. Some children arrived at the frontier alone, with labels round their necks: "Take good care of me, my daddy has gone back to fight for Hungary." Before 1956 was over, 200,000 Hungarians would have fled.

Hungary's bloody losses were greatly exaggerated at the time. On December 14th in New Delhi, Pandit Nehru quoted evidence gathered by his diplomats in Hungary that 25,000 Hungarians and 7,000 Russians had been "killed in Budapest". But in January 1957 the Central Statistical Office issued an interim estimate of the casualties which listed 2,500 to 3,000 killed (including 1,800 to 2,000 in Budapest itself) not including Soviet troops.⁴ These figures agree closely with the agency's subsequent confidential report, which listed 16,700 injured in Budapest and 2,526 injured elsewhere by the end of 1956, while 1,945 had been killed in Budapest and 557 elsewhere; the heaviest casualties in Budapest were taken by the VIIIth District, with its Corvin Passage and Republic Square (435 dead) and the IXth, with the Kilián Barracks and the rebel area commanded by Stephen Angyal (234). Specific provincial statistics included fifty dead in Magyaróvár, forty-six in Salgótarján, twenty-five in Miskolc, and twenty-four in Dunapentele.⁵ There is no reason to doubt these figures.

János Kádár himself survived to become Hungary's grand old man, winning over many of his most dedicated enemies despite his subservience to Moscow. He lived to bury most of his opponents. Rákosi died in the Soviet Union in 1971; his ashes lie in a third-class Budapest cemetery. Farkas and his vicious ÁVH colonel son were jailed in 1957 but amnestied three years later; the general worked until his death in 1965 as a publisher's reader, his son is now an engineer. Gerő died in 1980, and was accorded only a five-line obituary. Hegedüs returned to academic life, and teaches sociology in Budapest. Piros is manager of a salami factory in Szeged. Cardinal Mindszenty lived on in the American legation, behind a third-floor door with a combination lock. He read papers, smoked a cigar, and listened to the Vatican's Latin broadcasts which were not

jammed. The attendance at his Mass fell off and by mid-December 1956 only half a dozen faithfuls attended. He left the building fifteen years later, emigrated, and died in May 1975.

The hangman claimed most of those rebel leaders who had nearly triumphed in the uprising. Thousands were incarcerated, like Major-General Váradi, jailed for ten years because of his soldiers' mass defections. Colonel Mécseri, commander of the armoured division, arrested with Maléter at Tököl, was hanged for having ordered his troops to open fire on the invader. Dudás was charged with armed rebellion against "the lawful government", and hanged in January 1957 with "Uncle Szabó" – an unusual admission that Nagy's government was still considered to have been "lawful". The Győr revolutionary leader, Attila Szigethi, committed suicide in prison. He had first searched for a priest by tapping messages on the heating pipes and the priest is said to have administered confession in the same way.⁶

For two years the arrests and trials went on. On December 28th, 1956, the Writers' Union had met and overwhelmingly (by 250 votes to eight) identified itself with the uprising and its aims. The government dissolved it and arrested Julius Háý and fourteen other leading writers in January 1957. Obersovszky and Gáli, who had published first *Truth* and then the underground newspaper *We Live (Élünk)* under the guns of the Russian tanks, were sentenced to long prison terms; but the prosecution appealed and on June 20th, 1957, both were re-sentenced to death for "conspiracy, murder, continued incitement, violation of personal liberty and hiding arms". There was an outcry and both sentences were commuted.⁷ Four of their youthful colleagues were sentenced to death and immediately hanged.⁸ On November 13th, Déry was sentenced to nine years, Háý to six, and Zelk to three. Captain Pálinkás, the tank officer who had rescued Mindszenty and conveyed him to his palace on the express orders of the legal Nagy government, was hanged in December 1957 for "organising a military counter-revolutionary battalion, arresting members of the ÁVH and editing a pamphlet".⁹

Peter Erdős went underground with the help of one of the five young ÁVH officials whose life he had saved after the harrowing radio building siege. When Erdős was arrested on March 8th, 1957, the official resigned from the new security forces in protest. Erdős received a jail sentence, his third term as a political

prisoner. He now manages the country's gramophone record company and lives with his sixth young wife in a quiet Budapest side street. Most of the important survivors live on the same hill in Buda, only a few hundred yards from each other. They have not dared to meet since their release from prison, let alone to reminisce about those times. George Fazekas, sentenced to ten years, was released in 1961. He shared a cell with Rudolf Földvári, who directed the Miskolc uprising.¹⁰ Colonel Marián, who organised the student demonstrations and militia, was also broken by years in prison, and now lives in one rented room in Budapest. General Stephen Kovács, the former waiter who became Nagy's chief of general staff, was given six years; he would willingly talk about how he and the others were tricked and kidnapped at Tököl, but his government still refuses permission. The other Stephen Kovács, the former Party secretary of Budapest, refuses to talk: perhaps one day he will release the letter that he wrote to Khrushchev in January 1957.

Kádár had thrice denied any intention of prosecuting Nagy.¹¹ But the decision was not his: Nagy's fate was sliced by the unholy triangle Moscow-Belgrade-Budapest. In April 1957, Moscow's relations with Tito nose-dived, and the campaign started against Nagy. Münnich wrote in *Izvestia* that Nagy had ordered the army to shoot at the Soviet troops. The day came when the former prime minister was shipped back from Romania to Hungary and held in the notorious Fő utca prison in Buda. Gimes was already there. When his friend Alice Halda visited him he had lost fifty pounds from his frame.

Under maximum secrecy the trial of Imre Nagy and his "accomplices" opened on January 28th, 1958, with Dr. Géza Szénási as prosecutor. But after only a few days Khrushchev decided to woo Tito again, and the trial was shelved. Asked in March about Nagy, Kádár wisecracked: "At the time when a Nagy trial would have made some sense, we weren't strong enough. And now that we're strong enough, it doesn't make sense!"

It was some time after mid-May 1958 – because on May 15th Kádár was still assuring the visiting Polish leader, Gomulka, that the Nagy affair would be "settled bloodlessly" – Moscow's order went out to Budapest: the man was to be tried and hanged.

The second trial took place from June 9th to 15th, 1959, in the military courtroom at Fő utca prison. Former ÁVH officers, rewarded thus for their role during

the uprising, sat as guards during the trial. The witness box was bathed in spotlights, and witnesses could not see into the gloomy courtroom. The defendants – Nagy, Tildy, Kopácsi, Gimes, Vásárhelyi and the others – sat in semi-darkness. The judge was Francis Vida; one of his lay assessors was the widow of Mező, martyred on Republic Square. Losonczy was already dead, evidently killed in an attempt to force feed him. Nagy noticed that the chief of his secretariat, Joe Szilágyi, was missing too. Szilágyi had proved uncooperative in the extreme and had been accorded a trial all of his own late in April; he had been dead six weeks when Nagy's trial resumed.

Once Kopácsi managed to ask Maléter what sentence he expected. Maléter drew a hand across his neck. He added, "Alex, you'll probably survive. Don't forget: Tököl, Sashalom, Gorky Avenue, Fő utca prison!" On June 14th, 1958, he, Nagy, and Gimes were sentenced to death, and hanged next day. Kopácsi was jailed for life, Donáth for twelve years, Tildy for six, Jánosi for eight and Vásárhelyi for five.

Afterwards rumours circulated that Imre Nagy had been seen in the Crimea – that his old comrade Kádár had not hanged him at all, but had spared his life in the way he was rumoured to have promised a new life to Rajk in 1949 if only he would confess his crimes; the death sentence would just be for the sake of appearances.

Nagy had refused to toe that line. He had not confessed, and that was his most unpardonable sin. It was August 1958 before his wife and daughter, still imprisoned in Romania, learned that he had been put on trial and sentenced to death. When they returned from Romania in December 1958 Mrs. Nagy found she had been dispossessed of everything: that was part of the People's Court sentence on her husband.

A few weeks later a funky sent by the ministry of the interior appeared at their door and handed them a brown parcel containing Imre Nagy's personal effects. There were his suit, his smoking jacket, his boots – he was very fond of wearing boots – his gold Schaffhausen watch and a wedding ring. It was not his wedding ring, Mrs. Nagy noticed; and her husband's pince-nez spectacles were missing.

Sources

Chapter 1: The Engine Room

1. Columbia University Oral History Project interview (CUOHP) 526, Ladislav (László) Szolnoki, twenty-eight-year-old unmarried historian, “a highly intelligent man”.
2. Interview of Paul Mathias, Paris, June 1978.

Chapter 2: Liberation

1. Imre Nagy, Speech at Commemoration Session of Parliament held at Debrecen, December 21st, 1954; broadcast by Budapest home service, December 21st, 1954, at five fifty p.m.
2. Matthias Annabring: *Der Freiheitskampf in Ungarn* (Stuttgart, Aalen, 1957), pages 19ff.
3. H54M, one of a series of Hungarians subjected to expert interview at Cornell University; the reports are in the files of Dr. Richard M. Stephenson at Rutgers University, Department of Sociology.
4. H35M, a fifty-three-year-old motor engineer with a Ph.D. in political science.
5. H75M, a journalist on the Party newspaper *Free People* (*Szabad Nép*).
6. H41F, Mrs. Bondor, aged thirty-seven, questioned on March 28th, 1957; her husband H36M was also a source.

Chapter 3: Rákosi

1. In the John Foster Dulles papers at Princeton University is a paper entitled, “What the United States might lose if the Yalta, Potsdam and other Agreements were denounced”.
2. Julius (Gyula) Hágy was interviewed at Ascona, Switzerland, in August 1974; and see his memoirs, *Geboren 1900* (Hamburg, 1971), page 297.
3. H75M.

Chapter 4: Salami Tactics

1. On February 29th, 1952, Matthias (Mátyás) Rákosi delivered a famous lecture to an Indoctrination Course of the Hungarian Workers' Party called "The Road of our People's Democracy". It was published in *Social Review (Társadalmi Szemle)*, Budapest, February-March 1952, pages 114-150. An English translation will be found in the records of Charles Bohlen, 1942-1952, Box 7, National Archives and Records Service (NARS), Washington, Record Group (RG) 59. A summary is in State Department intelligence report 5882.

2. Ibid.

3. Joseph (József) Révai, article in *Társadalmi Szemle*, Budapest, March-April 1949.

4. CUOHP, 227, Bishop János Ödön Péterfalvy, forty-five-year-old Greek Orthodox bishop.

5. See Note 1.

6. Magyar Közösség, an underground organisation.

7. CUOHP, 602, a fifty-eight-year-old Smallholder member of Parliament, 1945-1946.

8. Author's interviews of Béla Szász, a fellow student of Rajk, London, August 1974 and March 1978; and of Mrs. Julia Rajk, Budapest, May 1980.

9. CUOHP, 515, Ernest (Ernő) Farnadi, who was district police chief of Győr under the Social Democrats, November 1945 to November 1947.

10. MDP, Magyar Dolgozók Pártja (Hungarian Workers' Party).

Chapter 5: The High Profile

1. H74M.

2. H71M, editor of *Revolutionary Youth (Forralmi Ifjúság)* newspaper during the uprising.

3. Jay Schulman, sociologist, speaking at a seminar on April 12th, 1957.

4. CUOHP, 242, Joseph (József) Fazekas, forty-three-year-old engineer.

5. H13M, and CUOHP, 213, twenty-two-year-old student.

6. In Hungarian, *jó megértők*.

7. H38M, a paper-cutter of thirty-four. His view was supported by H34M, a thirty-three-year-old Jewish lawyer interviewed in March 1957.

8. H43M.
9. H24M.

Chapter 6: Takeover

1. General Béla Király, “Hungary’s Army under the Soviets”, in *East Europe*, 3/1958, pages 3-14.
2. Speech, February 29th, 1952.
3. H74M.
4. Speech, February 29th, 1952.
5. Háý, *Geboren 1900*, page 133.
6. Interview of Frigyes Rubin, June 1978; and of Msgr. Béla Ispánky, January 1975, who encountered Gábor Péter in prison.
7. Decree 4353, published in the *Hungarian Gazette (Magyar Közlöny)*.
8. H64M, a sixteen-year-old schoolboy, Louis (Lajos) Hévézi.
9. H44M, George (György) Bastomov, bus driver.
10. Frederick T. Merrill, Special Assistant, US legation in Budapest, confidential biographical data, November 22nd, 1945: “Mindszenty, József” (National Archives, Washington (NARS), Record Group 59, Box 28: Records of the Personal Representative to Pope Pius XII).
11. That they were forged was revealed later by the ÁVO’s master counterfeiter, Ladislav (László) Sulner, who fled to the West.
12. Hoover (acting secretary) to Wailes, tel. 241, November 16th, 1956; and cf. *World Telegram and Sun*, New York, September 26th, 1955.

Chapter 7: The Tortured Silence

1. Speech, February 29th, 1952.
2. Imre Nagy’s memoirs were first published on March 15th, 1957, in England by Ladislav (László) Kardos, who described himself as their rescuer. Nagy had begun writing in the summer of 1955, had completed the 115,000 words in the summer of 1956 and had given the document to Kardos for his opinion before submitting it to the Central Committee. The uprising intervened, however. According to testimony given on June 11th, 1957, at the trial of Imre Nagy, by a former driver at the legation and no doubt an ÁVH officer, Kardos hoped to transmit the “subversive” writings to the

West; Kardos had prevailed upon one Árpád Göncz to suggest to his friend the chauffeur that a deal be struck with Mr. Cope of the British legation, whereby Kardos would be spirited out of the country in return for the documents. Göncz told the chauffeur in May 1957 that Kardos had been arrested. The manuscript was published in four languages (see Bibliography for details). It was accepted as authentic by the Hungarian journal *Társadalmi Szemle*, December 11th, 1957, and extracts were published in the West by émigré newspapers like *Nemzetör*, in Munich, and by *Irodalmi Újság* in London.

3. CUOHP, 483, Joseph (József) Parlagi, a Jewish insurance expert; and 458, Dr. George (György) Károlyi, thirty-seven-year-old chief accountant. The statistics were cited by Edmund O. Stillman, Chief of Special Publications department of the Free Europe Committee Inc., in the Second Seminar, June 6th, 1958, pages 54ff.

4. H54M.

5. CUOHP, 608, a forty-one-year-old professor of law at Budapest University, later (1951) reduced to the status of reader; and 625, Louis (Lajos) Barát, twenty-eight-year-old assistant to professor of civic law at Budapest University.

6. In Moscow the author met a man who had once bumped into Kádár standing humbly in a queue in a restaurant. These biographical details are from *Népszabadság*, March 3rd, 1957; *Current Biography*, 1957, pages 287ff.; *New York Times*, October 26th, 1956; *Time*, January 14th, 1957; *Der Spiegel* No. 34 of 1955 reported him as “hanged” – a premature judgment.

7. János Kádár, speech at Salgótarján, February 5th, 1957 (CIA file).

8. On this clipping in the CIA file on Kádár, an analyst has pencilled the unappreciative comment: “Yum! yum!”

9. Peter Kereszturi, in Baudy, *Jeunesse d'Octobre* (Paris, 1957), page 53.

10. H45M.

11. George (György) Pálóczi-Horváth, article in *Daily Herald*, London, December 11th, 1956.

12. H8M, a twenty-eight-year-old coal miner and former political prisoner until 1955, calling himself János Szabó.

13. H75M.

Chapter 8: Trial and Error

1. *Szabad Nép*, June 19th, 1949; and CUOHP, 451, Béla Szász.

2. CUOHP, 566, Lazarus Brankov, forty-four-year-old Serbian, a lieutenant-colonel in Yugoslav army until 1947.

3. Why did Rajk “confess”? Modern legend says that it was Kádár who persuaded him to do so. At the time, William (Vilmos) Olti himself, a leading judge, told Louis (Lajos) Barát, an assistant professor of civil law at Budapest University (CUOHP, 625) that Michael (Mihály) Farkas persuaded Rajk to admit his guilt, as a service to Communism. Rajk believed it was only a mock trial, and yelled, “They tricked me!” when he learned differently. (“Whereupon,” added Barát, “Kádár fainted.”)

Chapter 9: Into the Darkness

1. Interview of George (György) Marosán, October 1978.

2. Háy, *Geboren 1900*, page 276.

3. The author obtained the CIA file on Paul (Pál) Maléter, and interviewed Zoltán Vas in September 1979. In general on Maléter: see Gosztony’s articles in *The Review*, Brussels, 1957, pages 8ff., and in *Problems of Communism*, March/April 1966, pages 54ff.; extracts from Maléter’s personnel file were published by the Communists in *Free Soil (Szabad Föld)* on March 3rd, 1957.

4. H74M.

5. CIA file. The Hungarian Partisan Comrades’ Association was the *Magyar Partizánok Batjársi Szövetsége*.

6. Maria Maléter, “Ungarns stolzer Rebell”, in *Das Beste aus Reader’s Digest*, 1959.

7. H75M.

8. CUOHP, 615, Stephen (István) Elias, forty-three-year-old manager of the state farm at Soroksár; and interviews of Andrew (András) Révész and William (Vilmos) Zentai, Budapest, April 1980.

9. See Note 1.
10. Háy, op. cit., page 366.
11. CUOHP, 602, a former Smallholder member of Parliament.
12. Interview of General Louis (Lajos) Dálnoki-Veress, London, December 1974.

Chapter 10: The Stone Quarry

1. CUOHP, 201, Imre Erős; and interviews of Béla Szász, London, August 1974, and General Louis (Lajos) Dálnoki-Veress, December 1974.
2. CUOHP, 551, Zoltán Száray, thirty-nine-year-old economist; and 208, Gábor Szarka, former army officer of thirty-nine.
3. H61M, Dr. Paul (Pál) Jónás, student leader.
4. Ibid.
5. Interview of Paul Gorka, London, December 1974 and August 1978.
6. Alexander (Sándor) Kopácsi, *Au nom de la classe ouvrière* (Paris, 1978); and interviews of Kopácsi in Toronto, February 1979 and of George (György) Fazekas in Budapest, April 1980.
7. Back in Budapest the young police captain Kopácsi called for the dossiers on 150 men, appealing against their continued internment and, so he claims, released ninety-five next day by a simple stroke of the pen.
8. CUOHP, 406, a twenty-seven-year-old agronomist near Pécs. The kulak, in Communist jargon, was the rich farmer, one owning more than 35.5 acres of land or with a “cadastral” income of 350 gold crowns or who had paid agricultural development levies in 1949 or employing outside labour – *Szabad Nép*, July 1952.
9. CUOHP, 506.
10. CUOHP, 237, Maria Novák, singer.
11. H35M, automotive engineer.
12. Testimony of Margaret (Margit) Zsengellér, in Baudy, *Jeunesse d'Octobre*, pages 83ff.
13. Háy, *Geboren 1900*, page 312.
14. H50F, daughter of Countess Serényi.

Chapter 11: All Things Bright and Soviet

1. H25F, a medical student.
2. Dr. Richard M. Stephenson: “The Role of Interpersonal Relationships in Revolt against Totalitarian Power”, manuscript, August 1958.
3. George Káldi, “Fünf lange Jahre nach kurzer Freiheit”, in *Stimmen der Zeit*, vol. 169, page 134.
4. CUOHP, 427, Paul (Pál) Hoványi, fifty-one-year-old civil servant.
5. H75M, a leading Party journalist on *Szabad Nép*, born in 1919; he subsequently worked on Dudás’s rebel newspaper *Függetlenség*.
6. Dr. Paul Kecskeméti, speaking at Second Seminar, June 2nd, 1958, page 16.
7. CUOHP, 439, Ödön Vajda, state hospital purchasing agent.
8. H73M.
9. *Szabad Nép*, March 18th, April 27th, July 1st, and October 29th, 1952.
10. US State Department, intelligence report, February 1st, 1955.
11. H44M, George Bastomov; and CUOHP, 551, Zoltán Száray.
12. CUOHP, 564, anonymous Jewish factory worker.
13. CUOHP, 567, Tibor Méray, journalist.
14. CUOHP, 563, Peter Kende, Jewish journalist.
15. Letter from János Bardi to the author, November 1978.
16. CUOHP, 152, Alexander (Sándor) Kiss, Smallholder leader.
17. CUOHP, 505, Communist student.
18. CUOHP, 455, fifty-year-old worker.
19. CUOHP, 155, Csepel worker.
20. H54M, Csepel worker.
21. H74M, Budapest engineer.
22. H53M, seventeen-year-old Csepel youth.

Chapter 12: The Treadmill

1. Mrs. Alice Dinnermann, deputy director of International Research Associates (New York) at first Ecology Seminar, April 12th, 1957, pages 36ff.
2. H75M.
3. H30F.

4. H42M, toolmaker.
5. H29M, assistant professor of surgery.
6. H44M.
7. H42M.
8. *Hungarian Nation (Magyar Nemzet)*, September 30th, 1956.
9. Imre Nagy, memoirs.
10. H43M, factory workers.
11. CUOHP, 242, Joseph (József) Fazekas, forty-three, tool designer.
12. CUOHP, 204.
13. CUOHP, 243; and 508, András (Andrew) Sándor, twenty-four, journalist and former DISz official.
14. CUOHP, 439, Ödön Vajda.
15. *Szabad Nép*, July 29th and September 6th, 1952.
16. CUOHP, 619/II, George (György) Pauly-Pálos, twenty-three, geology student; and 201 and 203.
17. CUOHP, 615.
18. CUOHP, 405, eighteen-year-old student from rural area, Kiskun; and 616, Nicholas (Miklós) Molnár, editor of *Literary Gazette (Irodalmi Újság)*.
19. CUOHP, 243, Dipl.-Ing. Francis (Ferenc) Reményi, thirty-seven.
20. CUOHP, 204, anonymous worker, Óvár; and 406, anonymous twenty-seven-year-old manager of tractor station at Baranya.
21. CUOHP, 243.
22. CUOHP, 606, Dr. Dénes Horváth.
23. *Szabad Nép*, July 6th, 1952.
24. CUOHP, 208, Gábor Szarka, forty, hotel manager.
25. CUOHP, 403, Dezső Kiss, locksmith.
26. CUOHP, 564.
27. Budapest *Evening News (Esti Hírlap)* March 18th, 1958; Káldi in *Stimmen der Zeit*, page 134.
28. CUOHP, 209, Flora Pötz, factory worker.
29. CUOHP, 204, car worker.
30. Radio Budapest, January 25th, 1958; CUOHP, 203, 223, 615, 625.
31. *Lánynak szülni dicsőség, asszonynak kötelesség.*

32. CUOHP, 439, hospital official.
33. CUOHP, 227, Bishop Péterfalvy.
34. CUOHP, 203.
35. CUOHP, 427, Paul (Pál) Hoványi.
36. CUOHP, 208.
37. CUOHP, 439.
38. CUOHP, 506.
39. CUOHP, 204.
40. CUOHP, 227.

Chapter 13: Uncle Imre

1. CUOHP, 567, Tibor Méray.
2. Bill Lomax, unpublished manuscript; BBC Monitoring report, Summary of World Broadcasts, June 29th, 1953.
3. Imre Nagy, memoirs.
4. CUOHP, 500, Thomas (Tamás) Aczél, thirty-six, writer; cf. Tibor Méray, *Thirteen Days That Shook the Kremlin* (London, 1957), pages 3-9.
5. Imre Nagy, memoirs.
6. Report of the Central Committee submitted by János Kádár, printed in *People's Freedom (Népszabadság)*, June 28th, 1957.
7. *Szabad Nép*, December 22nd, 1954.
8. The Third Party Congress of the Hungarian Workers' Party lasted from May 24th to May 30th, 1954.
9. Imre Nagy, speech to HWP congress, May 30th, 1954 (CIA file, Imre Nagy).
10. Ibid.
11. The author has drawn extensively from the thick CIA biographical dossier on Imre Nagy, containing, for example, his speeches; also, *The Times*, October 25th, 1956; and Imre Patkó's article, "Az MKP Lista Vezetoi: Nagy Imre", in *Szabad Nép*, August 27th, 1947.
12. François Fejtő, *Monat*, November 1957.
13. Julius (Gyula) Háty, on WDR television programme, June 17th, 1968; and interview, Ascona, August 1974.
14. *Magyar Közlöny*, January 4th, 1945.

15. Interview of Imre Nagy's daughter, Mrs. Francis (Ferenc) Jánosi, Budapest, September 4th, 1979.

16. Imre Nagy, speech, March 29th, 1945: in *One Decade: The Selected Speeches and Writings of Comrade Imre Nagy* (Budapest, 1954); cf. *Szabad Nép*, October 6th, 1954.

17. *Szabad Nép*, August 27th, 1947.

18. Imre Nagy, article, "The Key Question of our Villages Policy: the Alliance with the Medium Peasant", in *One Decade* (see Note 16).

19. Quoted in Hajdú newspaper *Bihari Journal* (*Bihari Napló*), April 7th, 1957, and in *Népszabadság*, May 9th, 1957.

20. Stephen (István) Dobi would later recall in a public speech how Nagy had mercilessly cleared out every last ounce of grain from the attics of the peasants: "At the meetings of the Council of Ministers he spoke about these actions with a nonchalance that made one clench one's fists in anger." However, Vászárhelyi says it is unfair to quote a drunkard's views on Nagy.

21. Margaret (Margit) Zsengellér, quoted in Baudy, pages 116ff.

22. On March 31st, 1953, most arable land was still in private hands (60.8 per cent). The rest was in the socialist sector: 26 per cent in producers' co-operatives and 13.2 per cent in state farms.

23. A decree of August 8th, 1953 ostensibly restored private enterprise. The strict licence requirements for sixty-four categories of artisans were liberalised. But this liberalisation was very narrow: the licences were issued only when, in the judgment of the (wholly Communist) local councils, the state and co-operative organisations could not adequately meet the requirements. Nothing more was ever heard of Nagy's promise to extend free enterprise to the retail trade as well.

24. CUOHP, 500, Thomas (Tamás) Aczél.

25. Quoted in *Cultured Nation* (*Művelt Nép*).

26. Stephen (István) Márkus, in *Star* (*Csillag*), September 1956.

27. Hungarian Home Service broadcast, January 23rd, 1954, seven p.m. – a twenty-eight page speech.

28. And see Imre Nagy's speech at MÁVAG, in *Szabad Nép*, November 14th, 1954.

29. *Szabad Nép*, July 19th, 1953.

30. US State Department intelligence report, September 1st, 1953.

31. The office of attorney-general was already provided for under the constitution, but it had been vacant for six years. Nagy had suggested in his speech that the office was new: his government “will establish an office of Chief Prosecutor as one of the main constitutional guarantees of legality and constitutional rights”. The decree specifying his duties was evidently published as part of Law 13 in *Magyar Közlöny* on July 30th, 1953, the official gazette to which Western diplomats had been denied access since January 1st. The Law’s Article 13, §1, is known to have stated: “In cases involving espionage and other especially dangerous anti-state criminal activities, investigations will be carried out by the State Defence Authority [ÁVH] of the ministry of the interior”, which was the first indication that the ÁVH now came under that ministry. In *Szabad Nép* on August 2nd, 1953, his far-reaching powers to uphold the law were described, acting as a kind of ombudsman to protect the rights of citizens against the executive; he himself would participate in Presidential Cabinet and Cabinet meetings, while his corps of local prosecutors would participate in local council meetings with sweeping powers to examine police records.

32. Broadcast, January 23rd, 1954 (see Note 27).

33. Alexander (Sándor) Kopácsi, *Au nom de la classe ouvrière*, page 97.

34. Interview of Stephen (István) Bibó, Budapest, October 1978.

35. Quoted in US State Department intelligence report.

Chapter 14: Mightier than the Sword

1. CUOHP, 222, a seventeen-year-old secondary schoolboy Horváth (“it took the ÁVH to halt further demonstrations”); and author’s interview, Béla Kurucz, London, April 1978.

2. Hinkle, speaking at Ecology Seminar, April 12th, 1957.

3. Lawrence (Lörinc) Vicinzei.

4. H73M, Szeged graduate.

5. CUOHP, 231, Béla Harmatzy-Simon.

6. H39F, Jewish schoolgirl.

7. CUOHP, 616, Nicholas (Miklós) Molnár.

8. CUOHP, 567, Tibor Méray.
9. CUOHP, 506, George (György) Faludy.
10. CUOHP, 500, Thomas (Tamás) Aczél; Kuczka's poem "Nyírségi Napló" can be read in English in William Juhász (ed.), *Hungarian Social Science Reader 1945-1963* (New York, 1965), pages 170ff.
11. CUOHP, 565, forty-two-year-old peasant.
12. CUOHP, 427, of Dr. Paul (Pál) Hoványi, fifty-year-old civil servant.
13. H3M, anonymous student.
14. The author interviewed Dr. Nicholas (Miklós) Vásárhelyi in Budapest on several occasions from 1977 to 1980, and was impressed by his open and fearless answers.
15. Interview of Nagy's daughter, Mrs. Francis (Ferenc) Jánosi, Budapest, September 1979.

Chapter 15: Fan Language

1. Imre Nagy, memoirs.
2. Interview of Professor Nicholas (Miklós) Molnár, Geneva, April 1979.
3. Published as facsimile in Béla Szász's book, *Volunteers for the Gallows* (London, 1971).
4. Interview of Mrs. Jánosi, Budapest, September 4th, 1979 ("My father told me that") and Vásárhelyi, April 1980. Vásárhelyi was Nagy's press chief in Parliament and had this from Nagy direct.
5. US State Department intelligence report, February 1st, 1955.
6. *Szabad Nép*, June 15th, 1954.
7. *Szabad Nép*, October 20th; *Free Youth (Szabad Ifjúság)*, and *Magyar Nemzet*, and Budapest Home Service, October 21st, 1954, eleven A.M.
8. *Szabad Nép*, November 14th, 1954.
9. *New York Times*, March 10th and April 27th, 1957.
10. H74M.
11. CUOHP, 616, Nicholas (Miklós) Molnár.
12. CUOHP, 500, Thomas (Tamás) Aczél, and 506, George (György) Faludy.
13. Kopácsi, memoirs.

14. *New York Times*, February 9th, and *Washington Post*, March 10th, 1955.

15. The Central Committee resolution was published in *Szabad Nép* as early as March 9th, 1955.

16. Alexander (Sándor) Kopácsi, article, “Maléter Pál végnapjai” (Paul Maléter’s Last Days) in *Irodalmi Újság*, London, May/June 1978., pages 3-4.

17. *New York Times*, April 19th and 24th, 1955; and *Népszabadság*, May 17th, 1957.

Chapter 16: Man in a Porkpie Hat

1. Interview of Mrs. Francis (Ferenc) Jánosi, Budapest, September 4th, 1979.

2. CUOHP, 231, Béla Harmatzy-Simon.

3. CUOHP, 507, economics student.

4. CUOHP, 500.

5. Interviews of Professor Molnár; Dr. Peter Rényi (editor of *Népszabadság*), cousin and close boyhood friend of Gimes, Budapest, September 1979 and Alice Halda, April 1980.

6. János Mészáros, “The Kádár Regime charges Yugoslavia with ‘conspiracy’ . . .”; and testimony of Vásárhelyi, Haraszti, Kopácsi, Balázs Nagy, Gimes and Jánosi in *Le Complot Contre-Révolutionnaire de Imre Nagy et de ses Complices* (Budapest, 1958) cited henceforth as *Procès*, pages 22ff. and 152ff., and interview of Vásárhelyi, October 1978.

7. Interviews of Vásárhelyi, and his testimony in *Procès*.

8. Imre Nagy, memoirs; quoted in extract in *New York Times*, September 11th, 1957.

Chapter 17: Run Rabbit Run

1. Some of these photographs, culled from ransacked ÁVH files, were shown to the author by Jeffrey Blyth, the former *Daily Mail* correspondent.

2. CUOHP, 483, Joseph (József) Parlagi, fifty-five-year-old Jewish insurance expert, was in the audience but escaped.

3. *Szabad Nép*, February 12th, April 13th, June 25th, July 10th, 1955.

4. US Senate, *Final Report of the Select Committee to Study Government Operations with respect to Intelligence Activities* (Report 94-755), April 23rd, 1976.

5. Austrian Institute for Market and Opinion Research, monthly, "Querschnitt der öffentlichen Meinung", November 27th, 1956. And RFE Policy Handbook, Section 4, page 2, quoted in an analysis, "Radio Free Europe and the Hungarian Uprising", in Box 44 of the C. D. Jackson papers, Eisenhower Library.

6. H60F, Countess Anna Nádasdy.

7. H76F.

8. Imre Nagy, speech to MÁVAG workers, in *Szabad Nép*, November 14th, 1954.

9. Senate report (Note 4); interviews with Frank Wisner's widow, Mrs. Polly Clayton Fritchey, October 28th, 1979, and Dr. Frank Wilcox, Washington, May 10th, 1978.

10. Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski, "US Policy in East Central Europe – a Study in Contradiction", pages 60ff.; and article by C. L. Sulzberger, *New York Times*, May 16th, 1952.

11. Oral interview of W. A. Harriman, July 1966; and of E. L. Freers, May 1966, both in the Dulles papers at Princeton University. Freers, director of the Office of Eastern European Affairs, said that Dulles "was fully convinced that the idea of encouraging the Communist regimes of East Europe to loosen their ties with the Soviet Union, rather than fostering movements which might tend to overthrow these regimes, was the proper course for the United States". Herman Phleger put it the same way: John Foster Dulles's policy was to do nothing contributing to permanent satellite status of East European countries; but also nothing that would openly *encourage* revolutions (Letter, March 18th, 1966).

12. Stillman was speaking at a seminar on June 6th, 1958. The Free Europe Committee operated from West 57th Street in New York, with General Crittenberger as its president and Joseph C. Grew as chairman. For the files of the Study Commission on International Radio Broadcasting, appointed by President Richard Nixon on August 9th, 1972, to study RFE and other agencies, see NARS, RG 220.

13. Senate report, pages 52-53.
14. Krishna Menon, *The Flying Troika*, pages 58-59.
15. H. F. York, "The Debate over the Hydrogen Bomb", in *Scientific American*, October 1975, pages 111ff.; and R. H. Baker, "Understanding Soviet Foreign Policy", Royal United Services Institution *Journal*, March 1978, pages 46ff. The exaggerated American fears at the time of the Hungarian tragedy were expressed by Eisenhower to the secret Bipartisan Legislative Meeting in the White House on November 9th, 1956: "It is necessary to remember that this is the age of the atom and that the world has to find a solution – either we achieve peace or we face extinction" (Eisenhower Library).
16. Theodore Streibert, director of the US Information Agency, Oral History interview November 5th, 1964 (Dulles papers).
17. Manuscript in Dr. Peter Gosztony's archives, Berne.
18. CUOHP, 202, Julius (Gyula) Nagy; and cf. Nos. 201, Imre Erős, and 203.
19. Mrs. Alice Dinnerman, of International Research Associates (Ecology Seminar, April 12th, 1957, pages 36ff.).
20. News Conference with J. F. Dulles, Augusta, Georgia, December 2nd, 1956, two-thirty p.m. (Dulles papers).
21. H60F.
22. CUOHP, 526, Ladislav (László) Szolnoki, historian.
23. Ibid.
24. CUOHP, 202, Julius (Gyula) Nagy, economist. Further information: author's interview, Mr. Frigyes Rubin – a Jewish "class-alien" who came into unwanted contact with the ÁVH – in London, January 14th, 1978.
25. Alexander (Sándor) Nógrádi, *Történelmi lecke*, Budapest, 1970, page 441; Peter Gosztony, *Aufstände unter dem Roten Stern*, Bonn, 1979, page 117.
26. Nagy, memoirs.
27. Interview of Professor Molnár, April 1979.
28. CUOHP, 500, Thomas (Tamás) Aczél; and 567, Tibor Méray and interview of George (György) Fazekas, Budapest, April 1980.
29. *Nagy sikoltás az éjszakában*.

30. *Hogy zür legyen.*
31. *Procès*, pages 25ff.
32. Vasas Székház.
33. Háý, *Geboren 1900*, pages 318ff.; interview of Vásárhelyi, September 1979.

Chapter 18: Vicious Circle

1. CUOHP, 559, Francis (Ferenc) Gaál, political officer in Hungarian army.
2. Peer de Silva: *Sub Rosa – The CIA and the Uses of Intelligence* (New York, 1979).
3. CUOHP, 226, veterinary student.
4. Kopácsi, memoirs, pages 106ff.
5. Interview of George (György) Marosán; and CUOHP, 249, Stephen (István) Szabó, veteran journalist and correspondent of *Népszava*.
6. Soldatić, interviewed in *Vjesnik*, Zagreb, November 28th, 1977.
7. CIA file, Imre Nagy, citing source B.375.
8. Interviews of Vásárhelyi, July 1978, and Mrs. Jánosi, September 1979; and testimonies of Francis (Ferenc) Jánosi and Francis (Ferenc) Donáth, in *Procès*, pages 34ff., and statement of Thomas (Tamás) Aczél, WDR television, June 17th, 1968.
9. Julius (Gyula) Háý, WDR (Note 8).
10. *Hol szorit a cipő?* CUOHP, 210, music student.
11. Interview of Peter Erdős, Budapest, April 1980.
12. Testimonies of Nagy, Haraszti, Jánosi and Donáth, in *Procès*, pages 22-23 and 32.
13. CUOHP, 507, anonymous twenty-four-year-old, active in foundation of the Petőfi Circle; and testimonies of Tánczos, Márkus, Haraszti and Donáth, *Procès*, pages 27-28.
14. CUOHP, 428, Imre Szabó Nyirádi, former airforce officer.
15. CUOHP, 506.
16. CUOHP, 615.
17. Kopácsi, memoirs, page 74.
18. CUOHP, 226, Budapest veterinary student.

19. CUOHP, 500, Aczél; interview of George (György) Fazekas, Budapest, April 1980. François Bondy, “Ungarns Augenblick der Freiheit”, *Monat*, December 1956.

20. Déry, quoted in *Procès*, page 29.

21. Bourgin’s letter is printed in Lasky, *The Hungarian Revolution*, page 32.

22. The Central Committee meeting of July 17th, 1956, was described to the author by Zoltán Vas, who indicates that he was the only one to advise Mikoyan against appointing Gerő: “I went to see Mikoyan after the session, in Rákosi’s first-floor office, because we felt that somebody ought to keep near the hot line telephone.”

23. CUOHP, 567, Méray.

24. *Szabad Nép*, July 18th, 19th, and 23rd, 1956.

Chapter 19: In Which Voices are Raised

1. Thus Balász Nagy, a secretary of the Petőfi Circle, writing to *The Review*, Brussels.

2. Uranium of good commercial quality had been discovered near Pécs: on the basis of ore samples supplied by a Sopron University student the US Atomic Energy Commission found them to contain 0.78 to three per cent uranium. Since the spring the Russians had extracted about 65 tons; but a big expansion was planned: barracks were being built for 25,000 workers and refineries too (*New York Times*, January 28th, 1957).

3. CUOHP, 606, an agricultural marketing executive.

4. Lukács had fathered Jánossy’s two sons as a favour to his close but very sick friend.

5. H75M, journalist.

6. CUOHP, 606.

7. H62M, Dr. Alexander (Sándor) Kiss.

8. Béla Király, article in *East Europe*, vol. 6, 1958, page 7. Gömbös was prime minister 1932-1936.

9. Interview of Marosán.

10. CIA file on János Kádár.

11. Ibid. The source reports are listed as CS 91000, April 20th; CS 94685, June 6th; TDCS 101817, August 23rd, 1956.

12. H36M, Captain Bondor.

13. H31F, Mrs. Bondor.

14. Interview of Stephen Koczak, Washington, March 26th, 1978. Only one year earlier, on February 1st, 1955, the US State Department had concluded in an intelligence report that the ÁVH appeared adequate to prevent the development of any organised resistance: "No such movement has materialised in the wake of sporadic relaxations of police controls." Sporadic resistance would probably increase by mid-1956, "but even then it will in no sense be able to jeopardise the stability of the regime".

15. Bipartisan Legislative Meeting in the White House, November 9th, 1956 (Eisenhower Library).

16. CUOHP, 201, student; cf. 202 and 212. On February 1st, 1955, a US State Department intelligence report summarised that there was no popular opposition in Hungary to West German rearmament; the two countries had a common Western heritage, and Germany appeared to the Hungarians the lesser of two ancient evils. "There is little reason to suppose that any non-Communist segment of the Hungarian people would seriously object to seeing Germans give their blood for Hungarian freedom and thereby reverse the trend of past history. The main concern is that of liberation, and not that of security against a recrudescence of German aggression in the foreseeable future. The principal means whereby liberation is expected to materialise is a Western coalition, and the great majority of Hungarians appear to have acquiesced some time ago in the idea of the inevitable inclusion of Germans in that coalition."

17. CUOHP, 558.

18. CUOHP, 243, Francis (Ferenc) Reményi, engineer.

19. CUOHP, 209, Flora Pötz.

20. Ivan Boldizsár interviewed by William (Vilmos) Faragó on Hungarian television, November 20th, 1977 (published in *Valóság*, 78/4, and *New Hungarian Quarterly*, vol. XX, 75, pages 120-133).

21. Interview of Stephen (István) Vajda, Vienna, October 1978.

22. Interview of Matthias (Mátyás) Sárközi, London, August 1974.

23. CUOHP, 227.
24. *Szabad Ifjúság*, the DISz organ *Free Youth*, September 25th, 1956.
25. *Irodalmi Újság*, September 22nd, 1956; cf. *Népszabadság*, May 17th, 1957.
26. *Procès*, page 37.

Chapter 20: Humble Pie

1. Interviews of Lawrence Davis, Vienna, Jeffrey Blyth, New York, and Noel Barber, London, 1978.
2. Interview of Vásárhelyi.
3. Lasky, *The Hungarian Revolution*, pages 34ff.
4. Mićunović, diary, September 1956; and Tito, in *Borba*, Belgrade, November 16th, 1956.
5. *Szabad Nép*, October 14th, 1956.
6. Julius (Gyula) Háý, “Miért nem szeretem Kucsera elvtársat?” in *Irodalmi Újság*, Budapest, October 6th, 1956; and *Geboren 1900*, pages 320ff.
7. Interview of Dr. Peter Rényi, Budapest, September 1979; he is now chief editor of the party organ, *Népszabadság*.
8. H61M, Dr. Paul (Pál) Jónás; and CUOHP, 511, interview of Mrs. Julia Rajk, Budapest, April 1980.
9. *Elmegyünk megnézni hogy nevette ki magát a rendszer*.
10. H71M, student leader, interviewed at Oxford.
11. CUOHP, 446, army officer; and interview of Béla Kurucz, army officer cadet.
12. CUOHP, 204, 205, and 551.
13. *Szabad Nép*, October 6th, 1956.
14. CUOHP, 458.
15. Interview of Gaza Katona (political attaché in US legation), Virginia, May 1978.
16. Cf. also Mićunović diary, September 7th, 1956.
17. Spencer Barnes to State Department, tel. 107, September 21st, 1956 (US State Department archives).

18. Tibor Dénes, director of the Kaposvár theatre, reported this in *Irodalmi Újság*.

19. János Berecz, *Ellenforradalom tollal és fegyverrel: 1956* (Counter-Revolution with the Pen and the Sword: 1956), Budapest, 1969; and CUOHP, 203.

20. Lasky, op. cit., page 39.

21. CUOHP, 563, Peter Kende.

22. Interview of Béla Király, January 1974.

23. *Győr Sopronmegyei Hírlap*, October 19th, 1956; cited in Barnes to State, tel. 151, October 23rd, 1956, two p.m. In his memoirs Háý wrote that he first realised on this evening that a storm was brewing.

24. CUOHP, 566, Lazarus Brankov.

25. H17M, third-year medical student at Szegeed University; cf. CUOHP, 210.

26. *Procès*, pages 37ff.

27. CUOHP, 442, Francis (Ferenc) Ilosvay; the alerting of the ÁVH units on October 18th was mentioned by an army doctor to the doctor father-in-law of Peter Kereszturi, cited in Baudy, *Jeunesse d'Octobre*, page 67.

28. Interview of Kurucz, London, April 1978.

29. The official was Imre Szelepcsényi.

30. In an interview on about October 24th about the Soviet movements inside Poland, Gomulka stated: "Certain units were called out with our agreement to protect changes made. At the same time, there were movements of armed forces about which we knew nothing. A Party/Government commission has been set up to investigate and to punish the guilty. Khrushchev has assured us that Soviet forces will return to their Warsaw Pact bases" (*Kurier Szczecinski*, October 30th, 1956).

31. US embassy, Warsaw, to State, tel. 592, November 2nd, 1956; and C. D. Jackson papers (Eisenhower Library).

32. CUOHP, 425, Andrew (Endre) Rodriguez.

33. Peter Kereszturi, cited in Baudy, page 67.

34. CUOHP, 205, bookkeeper.

35. CUOHP, 244, Szabolcs Pethes, storekeeper; cf. CUOHP, 213.

36. US State Department intelligence report 7545.

37. Interview of General Reinhard Gehlen, Bavaria.
38. Interview of Dr. Andrew (András) Hegedüs, Budapest, April 1980.

Chapter 21: The Big Pageant

1. CUOHP, 561, Joseph (József) Blücher, twenty-seven-year-old assistant professor at the Polytechnic.
2. H13M, a thirty-two-year-old assistant professor at the Polytechnic, showed American interrogators a mimeographed list of twenty-five points drawn up by the students before the meeting; the Fourteen Points were distilled from these, aided by writer Peter Kuczka.
3. MEFESz: Magyar Egyetemisták és Főiskolások Szövetsége, Association of Hungarian University and College (*Főiskola*) Youth.
4. CUOHP, 205 and others; *Szabad Ifjúság*, October 23rd; and Barnes to State, telegram sent two p.m., October 23rd.
5. Testimony of Professor Paul (Pál) Szerbin, *Procès*, page 45.
6. Information from Erika Thibault, Grenoble.
7. H1M, twenty-two-year-old medical student; and interview of George (György) Gömöri, Cambridge, May 1980.
8. H105M, engineering student Louis (Lajos) Zaka.
9. H71M, twenty-two-year-old Jewish student.
10. Deposition of Losonczy, published as facsimile in *Procès*; and testimony of Gimes, Donáth, Losonczy, pages 41ff.
11. Testimony of Stephen (István) Márkus, *Procès*, pages 40ff.
12. H105M.
13. Testimony of Mrs. Peter Józsa of the Petőfi Circle, *Procès*, page 45.
14. CUOHP, 561, and H13M.
15. *Szabad Nép*, October 23rd, 1956: editorial, “*Új tavaszi seregszemle*” (“New spring troop-review”).
16. “Radio Free Europe and the Hungarian Uprising”, report in Box 44, C. D. Jackson papers, Eisenhower Library.
17. *A párt a mi eszünk, irányítónk és fegyverünk*.
18. CUOHP, 501, student architect.
19. About ten days earlier *Művelt Nép* had published the first photograph of Nagy since his dismissal, with Julia Rajk at the funeral.

20. Testimonies of Újhelyi, Áron Tóbiás, Mrs. Peter Józsa, in *Procès*, pages 45ff. As H71M commented, “The Petőfi Circle joined us very hastily, they were afraid that they would lose the confidence of youth.”

21. János Gura in *Magyar Híradó*, Vienna, October 1st, 1979.

22. Kopácsi, memoirs, page 118. Vásárhelyi states that Fekete was a Party apparatchik, who was transferred to the ÁVH in 1953 to restore the Party's influence over the security police; he was not a career ÁVH officer like Gábor Péter.

23. George (György) Marosán boasted in a later speech of having given this advice (*New York Times*, July 31st, 1957); and he confirmed to this author: “I opened the discussion on this item. I said that all demonstrations should be *banned* and that the order should be issued to the police to open fire.” (Interview in October 1978.)

24. CUOHP, 561.

25. CUOHP, 563, Peter Kende.

26. Interview of Mrs. Jánosi, Budapest, September 1979.

27. Testimonies of Nagy, Vásárhelyi and Jánosi, in *Procès*, page 43.

28. Vásárhelyi, July 1978.

29. A delegation also arrived from the Writers' Union building. Nicholas Molnár (CUOHP, 616) saw them return still shaken by Révai's uncompromising words: “If there's the slightest trouble, we're going to open fire,” Révai had said. According to Molnár, Kádár was present and had taken an equally aggressive line.

30. CUOHP, 505.

31. Interview of Rényi, September 1979.

32. Kopácsi, memoirs.

Chapter 22: Critical Mass

1. Háý, *Geboren 1900*, pages 324ff.

2. Kopácsi, memoirs.

3. CUOHP, 408.

4. Barnes to State, telegram, October 23rd, two p.m.

5. Report of ÁVH Colonel Nicholas (Miklós) Orbán, in: Súlyom and Zele: *Harcban az ellenforradalommal* (Budapest, 1957), pages 19ff.

6. CUOHP, 505.
7. Interview of Professor Dominic (Domokos) Kosáry, Budapest, April 1980.
8. CUOHP, 454, Tibor Molnár, actor.
9. The author was able to view the newsreels in the collection of Munich film producer, Dr. Stephen (István) Erdélyi.
10. H71M, student.
11. Slogans quoted by CUOHP, 413, Julius (Gyula) Józsa, student at the Lenin Institute of Budapest University.
12. CUOHP, 243, Reményi.
13. CUOHP, 413.
14. CUOHP, 430, Joseph Bálint, thirty-three-year-old technical assistant at the Polytechnic.
15. *Daily Express*, London, October 24th, 1956; and interview of James Nicoll, London, November 1978.
16. Interview of Mrs. Jánosi, Budapest, September 1979.
17. CUOHP, 430.
18. H61M, Dr. Jónás.
19. CUOHP, 412, Professor Stephen (István) Szabados.
20. CUOHP, 561, Joseph (József) Blücher.
21. CUOHP, 425, Andrew (Endre) Rodriguez, film director.
22. Barnes to State, telegram, October 23rd, 1956, six p.m.: "Crowd listened to Veres with only minimal politeness."
23. CUOHP, 413, Julius (Gyula) Józsa, and 551, Zoltán Száray, economist, thirty-nine; also 458 and 505; and Sir Leslie Fry, *As Luck would Have It* (London, 1978).
24. Interview of Dr. Hegedüs, Budapest, April 1980; and Claude Furet's interview of him in *Quotidien de Paris*, October 28th, 1976.
25. Ervin Hollós and Vera Lajtai, *Köztársaság tér, 1956* (Budapest, 1974); and report by Stephen (István) Tompa, in *White Book*, vol. 11, pages 79ff. Hollós, a ranking ÁVH officer, was a former senior DISz official (and figures in Rákosi's telephone notebook!); after the uprising he became chief interrogating officer of Fő utca (High Street) military prison. He now teaches

at Budapest Polytechnic. However, there is no reason to doubt his study's accuracy.

26. CUOHP, 210, pianist Julius (Gyula) Kupp.

27. Maria Maléter, memoirs.

28. Dr. L. E. Hinkle also makes this point at the Ecology Seminar, April 12th, 1957.

29. Told to Dr. Andor Klay, State Department, at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey; cited in Second Ecology Seminar, June 6th, 1958.

Chapter 23: Nagy Smells a Rat

1. Interview of Fabrizio Franco, Verona, July 1978.

2. Interview of Vásárhelyi, September 1979.

3. Kopácsi, memoirs, pages 123ff.

4. CUOHP, 211, Zoltán Szabó, bus driver.

5. CUOHP, 501, student architect, twenty-five.

6. CUOHP, 561.

7. H1M, student; and interview of Professor Kosáry, Budapest, April 1980.

8. CUOHP, 442, Ilosvay, journalist.

9. *White Book*, vol. II, page 14, quoting "M.L." In general, on the radio building battle, the author has used this official publication with appropriate caution. Also "A Rádió Ostroma", a series of articles in *Népszabadság*, January 22nd-26th, 1957, and interviews with Vásárhelyi, September 1979, and Peter Erdős, April 1980. See also Note 23.

10. On the Kilián Barracks the author relies on his interview with Dr. Peter Gosztony, in Berne, June 29th, 1978, and his "Diary, The Kilián Barracks during the Revolution", in *The Review*, Brussels, vol. 3, 1961, pages 65ff.; for a Communist version see *Szabad Föld*, March 3rd, 1957: "The Legend about Maléter has Collapsed"; and *Procès*, pages 71ff.

11. H11F, student, interrogated February 7th, 1957.

12. CUOHP, 210, Julius (Gyula) Kupp, music student.

13. CUOHP, 413, Julius (Gyula) Józsa, student, twenty-one; and 501. The slogans were: "*Le a vörös csillaggal!*" "*Mondjon le a kormány!*" "*Halljuk Nagy Imrét!*"

14. Ernest (Ernő) Pongrátz, interviewed in *Hungarian Torchlight*, New York, October 23rd, 1964; cf. Gosztony, *Aufstand*, pages 141ff.

15. CUOHP, 244, student.

16. Interview of Giza Katona, Virginia, May 1978; and Katona diary.

17. CUOHP, 430.

18. CUOHP, 243, Francis (Ferenc) Reményi; and 244, Szabolcs Pethes.

19. Interview of Mrs. Francis (Ferenc) Jánosi, Budapest, September 1979.

20. Interview of George (György) Fazekas, Budapest, April 1980.

21. Thomas (Tamás) Aczél, in *Life*, February 18th, 1957; and in Westdeutscher Rundfunk television film “Die Toten kehren wieder”, June 17th, 1968; and interview of Vásárhelyi, October 1978.

22. Bözske Nagy (Mrs. Jánosi) describes her father’s spirits on being dragooned into going down to address the crowds: “We did not anticipate he would be away long. He had been reluctant the first time that he was asked to go down, and he continued this reluctance, though it began to fade. He was still apprehensive as he left. The people who came said that there was a huge crowd down in the square and they were demanding his presence.”

23. See Note 9; John MacCormac’s despatch in *New York Times*, October 24th; and Barnes to State, tel. 161, October 26th, 1956, seven A.M.

24. See especially the *Népszabadság* series, “A Rádió Ostroma”, published in January 1957; and interview, Peter Erdős, Budapest, April 1980.

25. H24M, gynaecologist and obstetrician.

26. CUOHP, 408, Ildikó Lányi, schoolgirl, eighteen; 526, Ladislav (László) Szolnoki; and 413, Julius (Gyula) Józsa.

27. In Hungarian: “*Őlik az egyetemistákat!*” The official *White Book* publishes one testimony: “We learned subsequently that the demonstrators before the building had been augmented by a huge crowd brought to the radio through the false rumour that ‘the students were being shot there’. In various places of the capital – as eye-witnesses later related – certain individuals kept showing live rounds and saying, ‘The ÁVO-murderers are shooting with these!’ And the bullets in their hands served as ‘evidence’.” This author came to the same conclusion before reading this testimony. The question is, however, *who* was the provocateur?

28. CUOHP, 408, Lányi: she *then* went to radio, and witnessed the shooting *begin*, at eight thirty p.m.

29. CUOHP, 526.

30. Nagy's speech was described to the author by Vásárhelyi, Budapest, July and October 1978; by Stephen (István) Vajda in Vienna, October 1978; and in very many interrogation reports, e.g.: H11F, student; CUOHP, 243, Reményi; 413, Józsa; 408, Lányi; an authentic text of Nagy's words was published in *Élet és Irodalom*, May 10th, 1957.

31. CUOHP, 229, University student, twenty.

32. *White Book*, vol. II, pages 16ff., quoting "M.I.", and pages 24ff., quoting "N.N."

Chapter 24: Violence in a Narrow Street

1. Interview of James Nicoll, London, November 1978.

2. CUOHP, 561, Professor Ladislav (László) Blücher.

3. Interview of Matthias (Mátyás) Sárközi, August 1974.

4. Interview of Stephen (István) Vajda, Vienna.

5. Dr. Paul Kecskeméti, speaking at Second Seminar, June 6th, 1958, page 17.

6. CUOHP, 430, Bálint; and Barnes to State, tel. 161, October 26th.

7. CUOHP, 551.

8. Interview of Peter Erdős, Budapest, April 4th, 1980.

9. CUOHP, 442, Francis (Ferenc) Ilosvay, journalist.

10. "N.N." testified: "All this takes place without either direct firing or warning shots . . ." (*White Book*, page 25). So evidently indirect firing had begun, over the heads of the crowd.

11. CUOHP, 229.

12. CUOHP, 563, Peter Kende, journalist.

13. CUOHP, 500, Thomas (Tamás) Aczél.

14. *New York Times* suggests there were eight lorries; the US legation's telegram speaks of "four to five" lorries.

15. Peter Kereszturi, cited in Baudy, *Jeunesse d'Octobre*, page 74. His wife was at the debate.

16. Information to the author from Erika Thibault.

17. Thibault, and CUOHP, 561.

18. In Hungarian: “*Ruszkik hogyha szaladtok, engem itt ne hagyjatok!*”

19. CUOHP, 446, army radio officer, twenty-eight.

20. CUOHP, 501, architect.

21. The siege proper began sometime after midnight according to the radio officials (Lasky, page 141). A former airforce major (CUOHP, 428, aged forty-five) who had been watching from a distance with his two children, describes: “First they [the ÁVH] fired warning shots over the crowd but the crowd did not disperse. Then shots were fired *into* the crowd . . . The crowd were infuriated by this and took arms from the ÁVH and soldiers standing around, and began to say: ‘Let’s use them against these killers.’”

22. Interview of Kurucz, London, April 1978.

23. CUOHP, 619/II, George (György) Pauly-Pálos, geology student, twenty-three.

24. CUOHP, 446. He glanced at his watch and noticed that it was nine thirty-seven p.m. when the Stalin statue toppled.

25. H42M, toolmaker.

26. *White Book*, vol. II, pages 12 and 22, testimonies of “K.I.” and “N.I.”

27. *Ibid.*, page 13.

28. CUOHP, 501.

29. *White Book*, vol. II, page 46, testimony of Captain “V.”

30. CUOHP, 430.

31. H49M, metal polisher, eighteen.

32. CUOHP, 441, journalist on staff of *Free Culture* (*Szabad Művészet*).

33. H49M. He obtained a sub-machine gun from the Kilián armoury.

34. In CUOHP, 501, a young student architect states that the army defended the crowd from the ÁVH by placing its armoured cars between them.

35. Around this time the political officer of the Second ÁVH Guard Battalion, Major Ladislás Mátya, arrived and went to the entrance gate to listen to the crowd’s demands; he decided that another small delegation should be let in. There are different versions as to how he was killed. One eye-witness account by János Gura in *Magyar Híradó*, Vienna, October 1st, 1979, says that Mátya pushed Fehér aside after a disagreement, so Fehér shot him in

the stomach. The official *White Book* certainly makes more of Kovács's death an hour later. The *White Book*, vol. II, page 25, says only, "Major Magyar [*sic*] of the ÁVH was the first to be killed . . . Someone in the crowd shot him." The memorial tablet lists no Magyar, but one Lieutenant-Colonel Ladislav (László) Mátya. Around this time Peter Erdős saw one other incident which may have a bearing on this: a man was being carried roughly away from the tunnel, covered with blood. Major Fehér told him, absolutely furious, that this ÁVH officer had been standing talking to people when he had been shot from the crowd by someone.

36. CUOHP, 508.

37. Radio Kossuth, October 31st, 1956. According to Zelk (interviewed in Budapest, April 1980) the delegation also included the thirty-one-year-old graphic artist Kálmán Csohány (a former miner and railway worker) and Louis (Lajos) Kónya.

38. This timing does not fully support the item published in *University Youth (Egyetemi Ifjúság)* on October 29th, 1956: "The Soviet troops were called in by Andrew (András) Hegedüs on Tuesday night. He said so himself to the writers' delegation of which Ladislav (László) Benjámín was a member. Imre Nagy was fooled and outwitted."

39. H72M, student leader.

40. CUOHP, 505. The little group included himself as the twenty-three-year-old Jewish secretary of MEFESz, Ormay, Devecsery and the actor Imre Sinkovits. Aczél may have been there and a few DISz officials.

41. Interviews of Vásárhelyi, July 1978, and Fazekas, April 1980. Bözske Nagy tells this author that her husband, Jánosi, was not allowed into the Central Committee meetings, and over subsequent days he was separated from Imre Nagy. "Jánosi tried to make contact with the outside world, for example telephoning Déry and Háry and talking to deputations of the insurgents . . . Losonczy and Donáth were the only people who were in touch with Imre Nagy at Academy Street."

Chapter 25: Who are You?

1. CUOHP, 563, Kende; and interview of Professor Kosáry, Budapest, April 1980.

2. Radio Budapest, October 25th, eight thirty-eight A.M.; *White Book*, page 13; J. MacCormac, *New York Times*, October 27th, 1956.

3. CUOHP, Nos. 505, Ladislás (László) Márton, and 616, Nicholas (Miklós) Molnár.

4. Radio Budapest, October 25th.

5. Interview of Rényi, Budapest, September 1979.

6. CUOHP, 500, Aczél; Kopácsi, memoirs, pages 141ff.; and interview of Fazekas, Budapest, April 1980.

7. Kopácsi. "That night," Aczél told his interlocutors some weeks later, "we had a tremendous argument with Kopácsi. He said this was a counter-revolution. As dawn approached he had taken all the necessary steps to defend the regime against it. We writers fought back. 'Whom are you going to open fire on – the workers of Csepel?'"

8. Interviews of Dr. Zoltán Vas, September 1979, and Hegedüs, Budapest, April 1990.

9. H49M, aged eighteen.

10. H51M, metal polisher, nineteen.

11. CUOHP, 563, and interview of Vásárhelyi.

12. Kende in CUOHP, 563, gives a different version: Kende felt that their duty as journalists was clear. He stood up: "Come on, let's go!" But Vásárhelyi looked at his neat suit and grimaced: it was no battledress. Kende pleaded: "The most they can do is to shoot us!" Vásárhelyi, however, has told this author that both he and Losonczy went home at eleven p.m. and stayed there until next midday.

13. CUOHP, 211, Zoltán Szabó, bus driver.

14. CUOHP, 244, Szabolcs Pethes, storeman.

15. CUOHP, 615, Stephen (István) Elias, horticulturist.

16. CUOHP, 210, Julius (Gyula) Kupp.

17. *White Book*, pages 23 and 29.

18. One army colonel, Francis (Ferenc) Konok, was against opening fire. He told Mrs. Benke he had just spoken with some of the people at the main gate, and all they wanted was their demands broadcast over the radio. But Mrs. Benke had been hearing that tune for many hours and had wearied of it; however, the colonel persuaded her, and three more men were found

to take to the mob her promise to broadcast the full text, despite her objections to it. A witness says, "I remember their pale and frightened faces. They explained that they could not prevent the attackers from firing, they could not influence them" (*White Book*, page 27). This last attempt failed: the men shouted themselves hoarse, but few people wanted to leave then.

19. The rebels lost the Joseph (József) Telephone Exchange to an ÁVH counter-attack four or five hours later.

20. Ervin Hollós, *Közársaság tér, 1956* (Budapest, 1974).

21. CUOHP, 247, Corporal Paul (Pál) Szatmári, twenty-four.

22. He was voted down, says Francis (Ferenc) Gaál, twenty-seven, political instructor in the army.

23. Probably army discontent over plans to axe 15,000 men from the officer corps contributed, according to CUOHP, 559.

24. Interview of Stephen (István) Gaál, airman, September 1974.

25. *Piszkos csirkefogó fasiszták*.

26. CUOHP, 446, army signals expert, twenty-eight.

27. CUOHP, 561, Professor Ladislav (László) Blücher.

28. CUOHP, 559, Francis (Ferenc) Gaál.

29. John MacCormac, in *New York Times*, October 31st, 1956. Not surprisingly the Petőfi cadets were among the first to set up a soldiers' council against the regime.

30. Gosztony, *Aufstand*; and H26M, soldier, twenty, interviewed March 5th, 1957.

31. CUOHP, 505, Ladislav (László) Márton, journalist.

32. Interview of Kurucz, April 1978.

Chapter 26: Big Lie, Small Lie

1. H26M.

2. CUOHP, 563.

3. Testimony of Joseph (József) Balogh and Alexander (Sándor) Kopácsi in *Procès*.

4. *Irodalmi Újság*, November 2nd, 1956.

5. Dr. Nadany, of the US Information Agency.

6. CUOHP, 560, woman steel mill worker.

7. Katona diary.
8. Kopácsi, memoirs.
9. When interviewed by an Italian journalist, Dr. Bruno Tedeschi, on November 1st, 1956.
10. Dr. Peter Gosztony's information to the author, February 1979; and author's interview of Hegedüs.
11. Interview of George (György) Marosán, October 1978.
12. Hegedüs, in *Quotidien de Paris*, October 28th, 1976.
13. Interview of Hegedüs, April 1980. In a speech in July 1957, Marosán would brag: "I was the one who on the night of October 23rd-24th demanded that Soviet troops should be thrown in" (*New York Times*, July 31st, 1957); repeated in author's interview.
14. *Truth (Igázság)*, October 31st, 1956.
15. Testimony of Szilágyi, *Procès*, page 87.
16. Austrian radio interview, October 31st; Lasky, *The Hungarian Uprising*, pages 155ff.
17. Thomas Schreiber in *Le Monde*, Paris, December 4th, 1956.
18. Kádár, speech to Parliament, May 11th, 1957.
19. *Népszabadság*, May 17th, 1957.
20. "The strange thing is," reflected Peter Kende afterwards, "that Imre Nagy broke almost completely with his friends during those days" (CUOHP, 563).
21. "The Presidium . . . elected Nagy prime minister in full compliance with the provisions of the Constitution" (*Népszabadaság*, May 10th, 1957).
22. Interview of Kurucz.
23. CUOHP, 561, Professor Blücher. Major Fehér was killed by the rebels, there are conflicting versions as to how. János Gura in *Magyar Híradó*, Vienna, October 1st, 1979, luridly claimed that when his men wanted to capitulate, Fehér threatened to court martial them. As he stepped into Valeria Benke's office a battle-fatigued ÁVH private fired a machine-gun burst through the door into his back. However, Peter Erdős has told the author that he saw that office door later and it was open and intact. Through a window overlooking the courtyard he saw a figure which looked very much like Major Fehér being led away in the direction of the garage.

24. Kopácsi, memoirs, pages 146ff.; and CUOHP, 500.

Chapter 27: New Guns Settling Old Scores

1. Katona diary, October 22nd, 1956; and interview of May 1978. Barnes to State, tel. 156, one p.m., October 24th, 1956.

2. István Tollas, *Wir kämpften für unsere Freiheit* (Liestal, 1957).

3. CUOHP, 508.

4. CUOHP, 231, Béla Harmatzy-Simon.

5. H11F.

6. CUOHP, 425, Andrew (Endre) Rodriguez.

7. H53M.

8. George Sherman, in the *Observer*, London, November 11th, 1956.

9. CUOHP, 211, Zoltán Szabó, bus driver.

10. CUOHP, 501, student architect.

11. CUOHP, 509, Andrew (Endre) Szabó.

12. CUOHP, 559, Francis (Ferenc) Gaál.

13. CUOHP, 241, János Ottó, chemical engineer.

14. Interview of L.F., Nottinghamshire, September 1974.

15. Hajdú's photographs with his handwritten captions are in this author's possession; they were turned over to a US legation official; other versions of this shooting are in *UN Report*, §480, and CUOHP, 247, Corporal Pál Szatmári.

16. Interview of Mrs. Jánosi, Budapest, September 1979.

17. *UN Report*, §251.

18. CUOHP, 616, Molnár.

19. Kopácsi, testimony in *Procès*, page 56, and memoirs.

20. CUOHP, 508; also 563, Kende, and interview of Donáth, Budapest, May 1980.

21. Testimony of Stephen (István) Márkus, *Procès*, page 49.

22. CUOHP, 563.

23. Interview of Vásárhelyi, October 1978.

Chapter 28: Each Man has Two Reasons

1. Gosztony, *Aufstand*, pages 193ff.

2. H53M.
3. Ervin Hollós, *Köztársaság tér, 1956*, pages 38ff.
4. Interview of Vas, September 1979.
5. Hollós, op. cit.
6. CUOHP, 428, Imre Szabó Nyirádi, former airforce officer.
7. Nikos said this to historian Dr. Louis (Lajos) Gogolay, who lived opposite the Corvin Passage (CUOHP, 441).
8. CUOHP, 222, schoolboy, seventeen.
9. *Procès*, page 70.
10. Berecz, *Ellenforradalom tollal és fegyverrel: 1956*, page 99.
11. Interview of Vas.
12. George Mikes, *The Hungarian Revolution* (London, 1957), page 91. And interview of Hegedüs, Budapest, April 1980.
13. The statistics are from a survey conducted by the RFE audience analysis section in Munich; fourteen per cent of the active fighters were from “professional social categories”, only two per cent were white-collar (office) workers, thirteen per cent industrial workers, six per cent agricultural workers, and twenty per cent others including students. Of the white-collar group, eighty-two per cent were “inactive” – did not participate even in non-combat roles; evidently the office workers remained demoralised throughout. By contrast, only six per cent of the intelligentsia remained “inactive” in this sense: they began feverishly constructing new political parties, founding newspapers and otherwise dissipating their energies in non-urgent non-combat tasks.
14. Telephone calls, in John Foster Dulles papers, October 23rd-24th, 1956.
15. *Monday News (Hétfői Hírlap)*, October 29th, 1956; and Gosztony, *Aufstand*, page 211.
16. CUOHP, 403, Dezső Kiss, apprentice locksmith; and Gosztony, *Aufstand*, page 217.
17. CUOHP, 206, Árpád Sultz.
18. CUOHP, 231.
19. Mićunović diary, October 15th, 23rd-25th, 1956.
20. H36M, former soldier, forty-one.

21. One Pole was killed and several wounded according to their interpreter George (György) Lovas (CUOHP, 207).
22. CUOHP, 441.
23. H32M.

Chapter 29: Parliament Square

1. Dezső Kosak in *Franc Tireur*, Paris, December 18th, 1956.
2. Ibid.
3. Interview of Gáza Katona, Virginia, March 25th, 1979; he provided the photographs to this author.
4. On October 25th, the US legation was able to transmit a lengthy teletype to Washington giving a running commentary on events.
5. Interviews of Erdős, Budapest, April 1980.
6. CUOHP, 500, Aczél.
7. CUOHP, 229.
8. Photographer Hajdú's snapshot in author's possession records, "Eleven A.M., defected Russian tanks heading for Parliament in Bajcsy Zsilinsky Street." The time was somewhat earlier according to the legation's telex report: "At ten thirty large crowd marched north past legation, proceeded further towards Parliament."
9. Francis (Ferenc) Reményi, thirty-seven (CUOHP, 243). The slogan was: "*Nem vagyunk mi fasiszták – munkások vagyunk!*"
10. An assistant professor at the Polytechnic (CUOHP, 561) later described: "At the National Museum eight Russian tanks changed to the rebel side; three or four . . . accompanied the marchers as they poured into the square."
11. Interview of Dr. Peter Hanák, Budapest, September 1979.
12. Leslie Bain, in *Washington Evening Star*, October 31st, 1956.
13. Interview of Hegedüs, April 1980.
14. UN *Report*, §254.
15. Interview of Vásárhelyi, October 1978.
16. *New York Times*, October 24th, 1956.
17. On the morning of October 25th, the Budapest legation succeeded in patching through a direct link to the State Department, and from six

thirty A.M. until three minutes past five p.m. Budapest time a dramatic teletype “conversation” kept the line open. A copy was rushed to President Eisenhower, and it is in his files; another copy is in State Department records.

18. CUOHP, 243.

19. Katona diary, October 25th, 1956; and interview, May 1979.

20. CUOHP, 413, Julius (Gyula) Józsa, student; and Endre Márton.

21. CUOHP, 561, assistant professor at Polytechnic; and 205.

22. Endre Márton’s AP dispatches of October 25th and 26th; *New York Times*, October 27th, 1956.

23. The British official’s statement is mentioned in the UN *Report*, §482, which itself estimated the number killed as “from 300 to 800”. However the Hungarian Central Statistical Office’s confidential report lists only 106 (identified) dead in the Vth District, which includes Parliament Square, during the uprising, so this figure must be regarded as the upper limit for this incident.

24. Kopácsi. Kopácsi describes receiving a call from a woman police lieutenant with an office near Parliament Square: an ÁVH lieutenant commanding machine-gun positions on the rooftops had just run upstairs shouting that he was not going to let the mob get away with this; three minutes later she phoned again to report the shooting. Kopácsi is the only source for this direct evidence of ÁVH responsibility.

25. Hanák told the author the whole episode in Budapest in September 1979. In 1956 historian Ladislav (László) Szolnoki (CUOHP, 526) quoted Hanák as having told the group: “The only solution for this crisis is to disband the ÁVH, stop the machine-gunning and hold free elections.” There were muttered objections: “How absurd!” And when Hanák talked of free elections there were scandalised shouts: “This is pure counter-revolution – what else!” Nagy squared up to the others and announced, “Comrades, it is far from being as simple as all that.” Tóth’s accidental shooting by the Party HQ’s guards was later blamed on the rebels, and he became something of a martyr in Communist Hungary. His scatter-brained colleagues of the philosophy faculty stripped the body of all his valuables to return to the widow, with the result that the body became unidentifiable and she and Hanák had

to sift through hundreds of victims at a cemetery to retrieve it for proper burial.

26. CUOHP, 205, Zsigmond Varga, bookkeeper.

27. CUOHP, 615.

Chapter 30: Policeman on a Plywood Chair

1. H35M, engineer.

2. Imre F. Joos, in *Hétfői Hírlap*, October 29th.

3. CUOHP, 430.

4. CUOHP, 227, Bishop János Ödön Péterfalvy; and 615, Elias, horticulturist.

5. CUOHP, 439, Ödön Vajda, purchasing agent.

6. Louis (Lajos) Csiba, interviewed in Westdeutscher Rundfunk TV programme, "Die Toten kehren wieder", June 17th, 1968; and interview of Peter Gosztony on the same programme.

7. Maléter statement, November 2nd, 1956; and testimony of János Mecséri, Vladimir Madarász and János Tari, *Procès*, pages 72-73.

8. Imre Nagy quoted Lenin's saying in a June 1954 speech.

9. *Szabad Föld*, March 3rd, 1957. This is supported by Captain Madarász's testimony.

10. Testimony of Tari, *Procès*, page 73.

11. Herman Phleger, Oral Interview, July 21st, 1964 (Princeton University), and letter to James McCargar, March 18th, 1966; and Eisenhower's remarks at Bipartisan Legislative Meeting, November 9th, 1956 (Eisenhower Library).

12. C. D. Jackson to Hon. Walt W. Rostow, September 28th, 1962 (Eisenhower Library, Jackson papers, Box 57).

13. Conor Cruise O'Brien, book review, "Discreet Biography of a Smiling Public Man", in *Washington Post*, February 4th, 1973.

14. Barnes to State, tel. 157, October 24th, three p.m., received in Washington next morning; *New York Times*, October 26th.

15. Telephone notes in John Foster Dulles Papers, Eisenhower Library; and Eisenhower diaries, Box 18, October 1956 phone calls.

16. Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., to State, tel. 403, seven p.m., October 25th; and letter to C. D. Jackson, March 4th, 1957 (Eisenhower Library). Dulles to embassies in London, etc., and to Lodge, seven thirty p.m., October 25th, 1956; and Oral Interview of Wiley T. Buchanan, Jr., chief of protocol at the State Department, June 15th, 1966 (Princeton University): he disagreed with Dulles's policy of not going in to help the Hungarians. "I didn't believe then, and certainly was more sure than ever after I'd travelled two weeks with Khrushchev, that they ever would have bombed . . . You know the danger of a bomb being dropped was foremost in everybody's mind."

17. TASS report Budapest, October 24th; and David J. Dallin, *Sowjetische Außenpolitik nach Stalins Tod*, Köln, 1962.

18. Charles Bohlen to State, tel. 439, Moscow, October 25th.

19. CUOHP, 211.

20. Interview of Kurucz, London, April 1978.

21. Ernst Halperin.

22. Bruno Tedeschi in *Il Giornale d'Italia*, November 18th, 1956.

23. H70M.

24. *Manchester Guardian*, October 27th, 1956.

25. *Neue Kurier Wien*, October 26th, 1956.

26. The author's account of the siege of Kopácsi's headquarters is based on interviews with Fazekas in Budapest, May 1980, and with Kopácsi in Toronto in March 1979; on his memoirs, and on the testimony of Vilmos Oláh, *Procès*, page 54.

27. BBC Monitoring report. Lasky in *The Hungarian Revolution* gives the correct text with all the dreadful Marxist jargon that the RFE anthology of these broadcasts tactfully omits! Later George Mikes in *The Hungarian Revolution* (London, 1957) claimed inside information that Nagy was refused permission by Suslov and Mikoyan to blame Gerő in this speech for calling in the Soviet troops; Mikes suggests that two Russian officers, "their hands deep in their pockets", stood menacingly behind Nagy as he made his broadcast. This image is difficult to reconcile with the word-picture rendered by Hanák, of Nagy as master of his situation at noon this day.

28. John MacCormac, *New York Times*, October 27th; Gordon Shepard, *Daily Telegraph*, October 27th; text of leaflet in Barnes to State, tel. 161, October 26th, seven A.M., and *The Times*, October 27th.

29. Barnes to State, tel. 161, October 26th, seven A.M., and H60F, Countess Anne Nádasdy.

Chapter 31: The Tide of Rebellion

1. Dr. George Devereux, interview of H42M, on April 4th, 1957 (at Rutgers).

2. Gosztony, *Aufstand*, pages 213ff.

3. Ernest (Ernő) Farnadi (CUOHP, 515).

4. CUOHP, 221, student from Győr, twenty-one.

5. Adolph Rastén, in *Politiken*, Copenhagen, October 29th, 1956.

6. UN *Report*, page 85; *The Times*, October 29th, 1956.

7. Tedeschi, in *Il Giornale d'Italia*, Rome, October 30th, put the figure at eighty-two. Dominique Auclères in *Le Figaro*, October 29th, 1956, wrote of fifty local corpses seen in coffins, and twenty-seven belonging to the next village. The UN *Report* says (§497) that 101 were killed. The *Times* correspondent counted eleven corpses at the mortuary, and twenty elsewhere, but accepted that “some eighty” were killed. Noel Barber, in the *Daily Mail*, October 23rd, 1957, says that he and his assistant Dénes Horváth counted eighty-two. The number killed during the uprising at Magyaróvár totalled fifty, according to the report of the Central Statistical Office, and this agrees with the estimate given by Flora Pötz of forty, killed and about 150 injured.

8. According to Ernest (Ernő) Farnadi (CUOHP, 515), Földes was beaten up by the ÁVH and then nearly lynched by the mob for trying to protect the ÁVH: “He came back to Győr with a black eye, but confident that he had done his duty.” The *New York Times* reported on May 26th, 1957, that Földes had been hanged for leading the attack on the ÁVH headquarters at Győr.

9. CUOHP, 209, Flora Pötz, electro-technician at a local factory.

10. CUOHP, 204, factory worker.

11. Barnes to State, tels. 162, 165 and 167, October 26th, 1956.

12. Kádár referred to the row some months later: “At the meeting of the Central Committee on October 26th the followers of Imre Nagy demanded that all these acts be recognised as a national-democratic movement. The Central Committee rejected the demand” (Speech, June 1957, in *Vsevegerskaya konferentsia . . . etc.*).

13. *Népszabadság*, May 17th, 1957.

14. Interview of Donát, Budapest, May 1980.

15. CUOHP, 406.

16. CUOHP, 525, Ladislav (László) Palkovics, carpenter.

17. *Hétféli Hírlap*, October 29th, 1956, article, “Revolutionary Country – from Tuesday evening to Friday evening”.

18. CUOHP, 301, Francis (Ferenc) Mikes, priest.

19. Quoted in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, January 29th, 1957; the UN *Report* says that two people were killed in the Debrecen shooting.

20. One of them was “Dr. Hardy”, a thirty-five-year-old biochemist of Pécs University Clinic (CUOHP, 517).

21. CUOHP, 517.

22. H56M, a member of the Kecskemét revolutionary council.

23. Árpád Sultz, a Catholic theology student of twenty-eight, interrogated in June 1957 at Feldafing (CUOHP, 206); interviewers were worried about more fantastic elements of history but where they could check it against their files it proved reliable. For a more fanciful account of the Miskolc fighting, see *New Hungary (Új Hungária)*, December 14th, 1956.

24. *Népszabadság*, April 14th, 1957, which carried an article about the sufferings of ÁVH officers. And UN *Report*, §497.

25. CUOHP, 430, Bálint.

26. CUOHP, 505, Ladislav (László) Márton, journalist; and 508, and interview of János Bárdi, Wetzlar, July 3rd, 1978.

27. Radio Free Miskolc, broadcasts, October 26th, one ten A.M.; and Radio Budapest, one p.m. (cf. Lasky, *The Hungarian Revolution*, pages 90ff.).

28. Radio Budapest, October 26th, four forty-five p.m. and nine p.m.; cf. Victor Zorza, *Manchester Guardian*, October 26th.

29. CUOHP, 560, female Csepel factory worker; and *Hungarian Youth (Magyar Ifjúság)*, Budapest, September 7th, 1957.
30. CUOHP, 560.
31. *White Book*, vol. II, pages 153-154; and CUOHP, 560.
32. *White Book*, vol. II, pages 159-162; the photograph is on Münnich's desk now.
33. CUOHP, 204.
34. Francis (Ferenc) Töke, "Experiences with Workers' Councils during the Hungarian Revolution", in *The Review*, pages 74-88; and *Népszava*, London, October 1st, 1961.
35. Radio Budapest, October 26th, four forty-five p.m.
36. Radio Budapest, October 26th, eight forty-five p.m.
37. CUOHP, 231.
38. Gosztony diary.
39. Maria Maléter, "Ungarns stolzer Rebell", in *Das Beste aus Reader's Digest*, February 1959.

Chapter 32: A Share of the Blame

1. Batov was interviewed by the author in Moscow, April 1978.
2. Interview of Vassily R. Sitnikov, Moscow, April 1978.
3. Ilario Fiore, diary on notepaper of Legazione d'Italia, Budapest, October 25th-26th, 1956.
4. CUOHP, 213, student.
5. CUOHP, 207, interpreter George (György) Lovas.
6. *Az orosz vajban és prézliben sütve is orosz marad!*
7. An interpreter assigned to Soviet forces, Mr. Szegedi, told journalist Stephen (István) Vajda of this in 1957: interview, Vienna, October 25th, 1978.
8. CUOHP, 231.
9. Peer de Silva, *Sub Rosa*, pages 128-129; for typical newspaper exaggerations see *Expressen*, Stockholm, November 4th, 1956.
10. Barnes to State, tel. 168, October 27th, eleven A.M.
11. *Ibid.*

12. Record of Actions by the NSC at its 301st meeting on October 26th, 1956 (Eisenhower Library); and Allen W. Dulles, Oral History, June 3rd, 1965 (Princeton University).

13. Records of the Eisenhower and Dulles telephone conversations are in the Eisenhower diary, and in the Dulles and Dulles-Herter papers in the Eisenhower Library.

14. CUOHP, 407.

15. Bill Lomax, manuscript; he cites Berecz, *Ellenforradalom tollal és fegyverrel*, pages 86-90.

16. H24M.

17. H47M, interviewed by Dr. William N. Christensen.

18. H71M.

19. H24M.

20. H55F.

21. CUOHP, 212.

22. Sentence of death was passed on Dudás and Szabó on January 15th, 1957 (*New York Times*, January 20th, 1957); on Dudás, see also the edition of December 31st, 1956; and R. Bányás, "Dudás fejjavadásainak nyomában" ("Dudás's Activity during the Revolution") in *People's Will (Népakarat)*, Budapest, Nos. 76, 81 and 83, 1957.

23. Baudy, *Jeunesse d'Octobre*, page 383.

24. CUOHP, 442, Ilosvay. He now lives in Vienna as Franz Ilosvay.

25. CUOHP, 500, Aczél.

26. The *White Book* published after Dudás's execution stated that after the war the Romanians had imprisoned Dudás for his pre-war activities as an informer for the Romanian secret police, the Siguranta. This was quite untrue.

27. The government's 1957 *White Book* skated round Dudás's wartime role in Moscow. It is confirmed by Paul (Pál) Jónás, in his article "Porträt eines Revolutionärs" in the journal *Hinter dem Eisernen Vorhang*, 10, 1957, and by Alexander (Sándor) Kiss (H62M) and by Dr. Peter Rényi in an interview in September 1979.

28. Interview of J.T., January 17th, 1974.

29. *White Book*, vol. II, pages 105ff.; Hollós, *Köztársaság tér, 1956*, pages 120ff. Interview of Robert Gáti, Leicester, August 25th, 1980.
30. CUOHP, 429, a Jew, Dr. Paul (Pál) Szappanos (Ráday).
31. Summary of UN Action in the Situation in Hungary from October 28th to December 31st, 1956.
32. Dulles, speech in Dallas, Texas: appendix to NSC 5616/2.
33. Memo on conversation re Situation in Hungary, October 27th, 1956, noon; in State Department files.
34. Rényi, interview, July 1978; CUOHP, 500, Aczél.
35. Kopácsi testimony, *Procès*, page 57; and memoirs, pages 159-161.

Chapter 33: Crumbling

1. Ilario Fiore diary; and interview in Madrid, May 1979.
2. *Times Talk* (*New York Times* house journal), November 1956, February 1957.
3. Interviews of Jeffrey Blyth, New York, May 1978; Noel Barber, London, June 1978; and Lawrence Davis, Vienna, July 1978. Barber's report is in the *Daily Mail*, October 27th, 1956: "Tonight Budapest is a city of mourning. Black flags hang from every window . . ."
4. Fabrizio Franco diary, October 27th.
5. *Truth (Igazság)*, October 30th, 1956.
6. Interview of Professor Kosáry, Budapest, April 1980.
7. Hollós; interview of Vásárhelyi in Budapest, September 1979.
8. Barnes to State, tels. 169, October 27th, four p.m., and 171, October 28th, two p.m.
9. Free Europe Press division, background hand-out on Maléter, December 13th, 1957.
10. Gosztony diary, October 27th.
11. CUOHP, 615.
12. *Daily Telegraph*, October 29th.
13. Ladislav (László) Kocsis, "The last days of Béla Kovács" in *New Hungary*, Budapest, August 1959.

14. Béla Kovács, speech of October 31st, in *Small News (Kis Újság)*, November 1st; broadcast from Budapest in French, seven minutes past five p.m., October 31st; MTI despatch October 31st, 1956.

15. Kopácsi, memoirs, page 175, says that this was late on October 25th. While Münnich's appointment was not announced until early on October 27th and the dissolution of the ÁVH was announced late next day, it is believed that he was in fact appointed minister of the interior on October 25th.

16. Such was the text which Dimitri T. Shepilov, Soviet foreign minister, read out in the United Nations General Assembly on November 19th, described as "the telegram received by the Council of Ministers of the USSR from the Prime Ministers of the Hungarian People's Republic on October 24th".

17. Interview of Hegedüs, Budapest, April 1980.

18. Testimony of Joseph (József) Balogh, Miklós (Nicholas) Gimes, and Joseph (József) Szilágyi, *Procès*, pages 87ff.

19. Kopácsi, memoirs, pages 172-173.

20. Kádár speech in *Vsevenskaya konferentsia . . . etc.*

21. The note is printed as a facsimile in *Procès*; testimony of Janza and Tóth, in *Procès*, page 93; and Hollós, op. cit.

Chapter 34: Ceasefire

1. *Szabó bácsi*.

2. Sources on the Széna Square group include Géza Bánkuti (CUOHP, 448), a motorcycle racer, considered possibly unreliable; Szabolcs Pethes, a twenty-year-old (CUOHP, 244); and Y139F, an eighteen-year-old Jewish jeweller's daughter who tended the wounded and helped smuggle guns and grenades beneath her overcoat to the rebels holed up in the tunnels; see also Gordon Shepard in the *Daily Telegraph*, October 29th, 1956.

3. *White Book*, vol. II, pages 35-37.

4. Dr. Roland Nitsche, article in *Bild-Telegraf*, Vienna, October 29th, 1956; he was in Győr on October 27th.

5. Radio Free Győr, eight thirteen A.M., October 28th.

6. *Ibid.*; and CUOHP, 221 and 515.

7. *Győri nemzeti bizottság*.

8. Dr. Roland Nitsche; CUOHP, 501; CUOHP, 507, a twenty-four-year-old former DISz official; and CUOHP, 566, Lazarus Brankov.

9. CUOHP, 566.

10. CUOHP, 515, Ernest (Ernő) Farnadi, Social Democrat in Győr.

11. CUOHP, 515. And 507, a twenty-year-old Budapest University student.

12. Homer Bigart in *New York Times*, October 30th. According to Giorgio Bontempi, in *Il Paese*, Rome, October 29th, 1956, the ultimatum (of which he had learned before leaving Győr at ten fifty A.M. on the 28th) was: "If Nagy does not offer the most substantial guarantee before eight p.m. the revolutionaries of Győr will march on the capital."

13. Radio Budapest, October 28th, four, six, and seven twenty A.M.

14. Interview of Hegedüs, Budapest, April 1990. He heard about the conference afterwards. "It has always been a mystery to me what precisely happened at this conference."

15. Peter Eder, in *Echo*, Vienna, November 4th, 1956.

16. Radio Free Győr, October 29th; and Radio Free Miskolc, October 28th, six forty p.m., and 29th, two fifteen p.m.

17. Interview of Hegedüs.

18. For Sir Anthony Eden's criticism of the United States' handling of the Hungarian case in the United Nations, see his *Full Circle*, page 609.

Chapter 35: Lowering the Barriers

1. *New York Times*, October 30th, 1956.

2. Thompson to State, tel. 918, Vienna, October 28th, three p.m.; Barnes to State, tels. 171, Budapest, two p.m., and 177, eight p.m.

3. Barnes to State, tel. 180, October 29th, nine p.m.

4. George (György) Baranyai and Gábor Nógrádi: "Secrets of Rákosi villa", in *Népakarat*, November 2nd, 1956.

5. Ervin Hollós, *Köztársaság tér, 1956* (Budapest, 1974).

6. CUOHP, 615.

7. H13M.

8. UN *Report*, §523; and interview of Professor Thomas (Tamás) Nagy, Budapest, April 1980.

9. CUOHP, 561.

10. Nicolas Baudy, *Jeunesse d'Octobre*, pages 382ff. He had chanced upon the draft in Horváth's handwriting late on October 30th in the *Szabad Nép* offices, after arriving there with the copy for the latest *University Youth (Egyetemi Ifjúság)*; and interview of Professor Molnár, Geneva, April 1979.

11. Noel Barber, interview, London, June 1978.

12. Semi-verbatim texts of these conversations with the President; in the Eisenhower diary; and in the Dulles-Herter papers (Eisenhower Library).

Chapter 36: Joseph Dudás

1. *New York Times*, October 30th, 1956.

2. CUOHP, 616, Molnár: “*Nem akarta meglovagolni ezt a forradalmat.*” (Nagy did not want to take advantage of this revolution.)

3. Méray, in Westdeutscher Rundfunk TV programme, “Die Toten kehren wieder”, June 17th, 1968.

4. Interview of Erdős, April 1980.

5. Interview of Vásárhelyi, October 1980.

6. Gosztony, in “The General of the Revolution”, *Allgemeine Schweizer Militärzeitschrift*, 10, 1964, pages 668-674.

7. Radio Budapest, November 1st.

8. *Daily Express*, October 31st; *Igazság*, November 1st, 1956; and *Nemzetör*, Munich, November 1st, 1962.

9. Interview of Dr. Andrew (András) Révész, April 1980.

10. Ibid.

11. Interview of Vilmos Zentai, Budapest, April 1980.

12. Tildy, *Procès*, page 105.

13. Free Radio Kossuth, October 30th; and see H45M.

14. CUOHP, 606, Dr. Dénes Horváth, a classmate of the Erdei brothers.

15. CUOHP, 561, Professor Blücher.

16. Barnes to State, tels. 182, of October 28th, ten p.m., and 186, October 30th, one A.M.

17. CUOHP, 231, tractor station manager.

18. Interview of Király, New York, January 1974. On February 18th, 1957, Király published a dramatic version of events in *Life*; its dating is cavalier in parts. His letter to Jánosi is in facsimile in *Procès*, and see pages 58ff.

19. Király, in *East Europe*, vol. 6, 1958.

20. CUOHP, 428, Imre Szabó Nyirádi.

21. CUOHP, 446, army signals expert. His unit also knew about the Russian units coming in, but nobody knew where to send this information; their own defence ministry was not asking for it.

22. H61M, Paul (Pál) Jónás; and his article, "My Generation", in *East Europe*, vol. 6, Number 7; he was thirty-five and a former inmate of the Recsk camp. UN *Report*, §523. And interview of Professor Nagy, Budapest, April 1980.

23. Barnes to State, tel. 180, October 29th, nine p.m.; Katona diary.

24. CUOHP, 206, Árpád Sultz, who had been appointed the Miskolc council's propaganda chief.

25. US embassy Warsaw to State, tel. 592, November 2nd, 1956; there was a furious attack on Saillant in the Polish union organ, *Glose Pracy*, October 30th.

26. János Radványi, *Hungary and the Superpowers* (Stanford, California, 1972).

27. BBC Monitoring report, Summary, November 2nd, 1956.

28. Bohlen to State, tel. 992, Moscow, October 30th, one p.m. The reception was also reported by T. Popovski in *Borba*, Belgrade, October 30th.

29. Dulles tel. to Bucharest, Budapest, Vienna, and Belgrade, October 30th.

30. CUOHP, 526, Ladislav (László) Szolnoki, historian.

31. Radio Times Hulton picture M 70975.

32. Barnes to State, tel. 187, October 30th, one A.M.

33. Testimony of Anthony (Antal) Mayer and Ladislav (László) Szolnoki, historian.

34. CUOHP, 407, Anthony (Antal) Braunecker, a twenty-nine-year-old economics student, witnessed this. So did 220, Gábor Kóbor, student, twenty-one.

35. Interview of Stephen (István) Vajda, Vienna, October 1978.
36. Vlado Teslic, *Borba*, November 1st, 1956.
37. Transcript of policy messages to Free Europe Committee, New York, from RFE, Munich (C. D. Jackson papers, Box 44, Eisenhower Library). On October 29th, a message went from RFE: “[We are] using material from Radios Győr, Miskolc, Pécs-military in so far as it reflects genuine demands of revolutionaries, emphasising withdrawal of Soviet troops immediately and disarming and disbandment of ÁVH.”
38. *Weltpresse*, Vienna, October 30th, and *Neues Österreich*, October 31st, 1956.
39. Marian Bielicki, in *Po Prostu*, December 9th, 1956.
40. CUOHP, 564, journalist.
41. *Magyar Függetlenség*, October 30th, 1956.
42. Hanka Adamiecka, quoted by Wiktor Woroszyński in *Nowa Kultura*, Warsaw, December 2nd, 1956.
43. CUOHP, 564.
44. Interview of János Bardi, Wetzlar, June 1978.
45. CUOHP, 564.
46. Zoltán Benkó and H75M.
47. Marian Bielicki, in *Po Prostu*, November 25th, December 2nd and 9th; Hanka Adamiecka, in *Sztandar Młodych*, November 27th; and Wiktor Woroszyński diary, published in *Nowa Kultura* and *France Observateur*, January 3rd, 1957.
48. CUOHP, 429, Dr. Paul (Pál) Szappanos.
49. H31M.
50. The first issue of *Magyar Függetlenség* was dated October 30th; the last, November 3rd, 1956.
51. This was H75M.
52. CUOHP, 564.
53. Paul (Pál) Jónás, op. cit.
54. CUOHP, 563, Kende.
55. Ibid. Kopácsi times this episode late on October 30th, however.

Chapter 37: Colonel Kopácsi Shrugs Again

1. Letter from Joseph Kővágó to the author, April 1978; and CUOHP, 615, Elias.
2. *Borba*, Belgrade, October 31st, 1956.
3. Király, *Life*, February 1957.
4. Testimony of Király's secretary, Mrs. Ladislav (László) Balla, of Joseph (József) Balogh, and of Kopácsi, *Procès*, pages 68-70.
5. *Népszabadság*, December 3rd, 1959.
6. Bohlen to State, tel. 1006, Moscow, October 31st.
7. Tito's message of October 29th is printed in *Free Youth (Szabad Ifjúság)*, October 30th. From *Neues Österreich*, October 30th, 1956. And interview of Erdős, Budapest, April 1980.
8. Bohlen to State, tel., Moscow, October 31st, one p.m.
9. Barnes to State, tel. 191, October 30th, four p.m.
10. *Time*, November 12th, 1956; interviews of Blyth, New York, in May, and Matthias, Paris, in June 1978, and of Katona, Virginia, in March, and Tedeschi, Rome, in May 1979.
11. Hollós, *Köztársaság tér, 1956*, page 120.
12. Interview of Mathias.
13. Wiktor Woroszyński, *Nowa Kultura*, November 25th, 1956.
14. Interview of Vásárhelyi, Budapest, April 1980. This emerged during the trial confrontation of Mrs. Balogh with Imre Nagy, which he witnessed; her testimony on June 13th, 1958, is in *Procès*, page 98.
15. Hollós, op. cit., page 151.
16. CUOHP, 508.
17. CUOHP, 563, Kende, quoting Gimes.
18. CUOHP, 508.
19. H24M.
20. Julius Háry, *Geboren 1900*, page 365; and H61M Paul (Pál) Jónás.
21. Kádár's speech on June 27th, 1957, printed in *Vsevenskaya konferentsia . . . etc.*

Chapter 38: Wool over their Eyes

1. These telephone conversations are reported in the Dulles and Dulles-Herter Papers, and Eisenhower Diaries, Box 18.

2. CUOHP, 213, student.
3. Radio Times Hulton pictures M 68955, 68960, 71140 and 80285; report by Alberto Cavallari in *Corriere della Sera*.
4. Katona diary.
5. Barnes to State, tel. 197, October 30th, eleven p.m.
6. Barnes to State, tel. 191, October 30th, four p.m.
7. An RFE summary states that this principle of broadcasting back the rebel demands “had already been laid down in an exchange of messages between New York and Munich offices. RFE was to help unify the thinking of the many scattered patriot groups by playing back their own programmes and desires – not by launching a programme of its own.”
8. Radio Miskolc, October 30th, six thirty p.m.
9. BBC Monitoring report, Summary, October 30th; Budapest radio in French, October 30th-31st, midnight.
10. *Dunántúli nemzeti tanács*.
11. CUOHP, 501.
12. CUOHP, 213, student, twenty-two.
13. Kádár said on May 11th, 1957: “Never in the course of history has there been a purely local war in the heart of Europe. Local wars have always developed into world wars.”
14. George (György) Heltai in Westdeutscher Rundfunk TV programme, “Die Toten kehren wieder”, June 17th, 1968.
15. Joseph (József) Kővágó, speech, January 29th, 1957; Heltai (see Note 14).
16. Radio Budapest, October 30th, seven p.m.; Radio Miskolc, five past ten p.m.
17. *Procès*, page 73; interview of Vás, September 1979; and of Gosztony, Berne, June 1978.
18. Testimony of Mrs. Joseph (József) Balogh, *Procès*, page 101.
19. Kopácsi, memoirs, pages 179-181; his dating appears vulnerable. The new Politburo as described by Kádár was finally announced on November 1st at ten p.m.
20. Testimony of Mrs. Francis (Ferenc) Molnár, *Procès*, page 103.
21. *Magyar Függetlenség*, October 31st.

22. Radio Budapest, October 30th-31st, midnight.
23. Radio Kossuth, October 30th, ten forty p.m.; and Woroszylski, *Nowa Kultura*, Warsaw, November 25th, 1956.
24. UN *Report*, §509; Radio Budapest, five fifteen p.m., October 31st.
25. Just before Fazekas met the author in Budapest, in April 1980, he ran into the wine waiter of the Hungária restaurant who reminded him of that scene: the man had been one of the policemen in the truck. Bözske Jánosi confirms that her father (Imre Nagy) returned home on the day that Mindszenty was released.
26. Witnessed by George (György) Pauly-Pálos, geology student (CUOHP, 619/II).
27. Radio Budapest in French, October 30th-31st, midnight.
28. Julius Háý met him in prison – *Geboren 1900*, pages 360ff.; and see the testimony of Mindszenty's secretary, Msgr. Egon Turcsányi, *Procès*, pages 107-110.
29. "Declaration of the Government of the USSR on the Principles of the Development and Further Consolidation of the Friendship and Co-operation between the Soviet Union and the other Socialist States", in *Pravda*, Moscow, October 31st, 1956; translation in *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, November 14th, 1956, pages 10-11.

Chapter 39: Khrushchev Changes his Mind

1. Magyar Néphadsereg Forradalmi Tanácsa.
2. Országos Rendőrkapitányság Forradalmi Tanácsa, and Határőrségi Forradalmi Bizottmány, respectively. UN *Report*, §§193, 518-521.
3. Forradalmi Honvédelmi Bizottmány.
4. Radio Budapest, October 31st.
5. MTI report.
6. Wiktor Woroszylski, *Nowa Kultura*, December 2nd.
7. CUOHP, 619/II.
8. Radio Times Hulton picture M 75107.
9. Free Radio Kossuth, November 3rd, 1956.
10. Interview of Révész, April 1980.
11. Katona diary, October 31st.

12. RFE internal guidance directive, October 30th.
13. CUOHP, 599.
14. Forradalmi Karhatalmi Bizottság.
15. Djuka Julius in *Politika*, Belgrade, November 1st, 1956.
16. Vlado Teslic, in *Borba*.
17. Kopácsi, in *Irodalmi Újság*.
18. Heltai in Westdeutscher Rundfunk TV programme, “Die Toten kehren wieder”, June 17th, 1968, and article, “November 1956: The End in Budapest”, in *East Europe*, pages 10ff.
19. Radio Miskolc, October 31st, one seventeen p.m.
20. David W. Wainhouse, Oral History Interview, November 20th, 1972 (Eisenhower Library).
21. JCS 2066/14, July 10th, 1956, NARS. The enclosure NSC 5608/1, dated July 18th, 1956, was partially declassified at the author’s request.
22. JCS 2066/17: Report by the Joint Strategic Survey Committee on US Policy Toward Developments in Poland and Hungary (NSC 5616), with annex, Memorandum to Secretary of Defense, October 31st, 1956; in NARS, Record Group 218. This document was released to the author in May 1979, but its important appendix NSC 5616 was only partially released in 1980. From a later paper, JCS 2066/19, submitted to the NSC meeting on November 15th, a further paragraph of NSC meeting 5616 is known: “If the USSR uses military force to repress the Gomulka regime or to reverse a further trend toward national independence, and if the Polish regime resists and makes a timely request to the UN, the US should initiate and be prepared to support *any* appropriate UN action *including the use of force*, necessary to prevent the USSR from successfully reimposing its control by force.” The words italicised were deleted by the JCS as “unduly restrictive” and likely to commit the US to courses of action detrimental to its best interests.
23. Hungary was “removed from the NSC agenda as a result of higher priority problems in the Middle East”. NSC actions 1626-1628, Record of Actions by the NSC at its 302nd Meeting, held on November 1st, 1956 (NLE 78-2, 2, in Eisenhower Library).

24. JCS 2066/19: Report by the JSSC to the JCS on "Interim US Policy on Developments in Poland and Hungary" (NSC 5616/1), November 14th, 1956.

25. Departure Statement of the Hon. John Foster Dulles, Secretary of State, for the General Assembly in New York (Dulles papers).

26. Allen W. Dulles, Oral History Interview, June 3rd, 1965 (Princeton University).

27. Mićunović diary, November 2nd-3rd.

28. Testimony of Mrs. Joseph (József) Balogh, June 13th, 1958, one day before Nagy's death sentence (*Procès*, page 98).

29. "Public Justice on Republic Square", in *Magyar Függetlenség*, November 1st, 1956.

30. Barnes to State, tel. 200, October 31st, one p.m.; cf. *Wiener Presse*, November 1st: "As the Russian troops pulled out of the town centre at twelve twenty-five p.m., where they had guarded the ministries of defence and the interior, the Day of Long Knives began. Everywhere hidden ÁVH men were being hunted down."

31. Kádár, broadcast on November 26th, 1956 (CIA file).

32. "Eye to Eye with Mikoyan and Suslov", in *Igazság*, November 1st, 1956.

33. *Igazság*, October 31st; cf. Radio Budapest, October 31st; in a conversation with the Intellectuals Szilágyi, Aczél, Gimes, Lőcsei on October 27th he had said the same thing: *Procès*, pages 87ff.

34. The leaflet was quoted in full over Budapest radio at ten p.m. on October 31st.

35. Kopácsi was interviewed by *Hungarian World (Magyar Világ)*, November 2nd.

36. Nagy's speech was broadcast by Radio Budapest, October 31st, five twenty p.m.

37. Italian transcript in papers of Ambassador Fabrizio Franco.

38. *Trybuna Ludu*, Warsaw, November 5th; neither the Polish press nor radio of November 4th and 5th mentioned the second Soviet invasion of Hungary, which further underlines Gomulka's complicity. His conversion was complete by December, when he told 3,000 activists in Warsaw that

“the use of Soviet troops had been thought necessary”. Shortly after the execution of Imre Nagy and his collaborators Gomulka expressed approval even of that, in a speech at Gdansk.

39. This was reported on November 1st (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*); and see US embassy to State, tels. 596 and 600, Warsaw, November 2nd: the French embassy learned of the visit by Polish leaders to Mikoyan to coordinate Soviet-Polish policy in Hungary; and tel. 171, Warsaw, November 5th, 1956.

Chapter 40: Declaration of Independence

1. *New Hungary (Új Magyarország)*, November 2nd.

2. Len Waernberg diary, supplied to the author; and *Vecko Journalen*, Stockholm, vol. 46, 1956.

3. *White Book*, vol. II.

4. CUOHP, 231.

5. “When they arrived in the legation at dawn on November 4th (by now under quite different circumstances) they were taken in.” Vljajko Begović in *Borba*, April 5th, 1957. The digest in *Internationale Politik*, Belgrade, April 16th, 1957, gives the date of the feelers as November 1st; a Yugoslav foreign ministry announcement earlier dated them on November 2nd (published in *Népakarat* 10, November 24th, 1956). For Szántó’s testimony see *Procès*, pages 154ff.; Vásárhelyi recalls that Szántó told Nagy, Losonczy and Donáth of his part in this during the weeks in the legation.

6. Radio Budapest, November 1st.

7. *Magyar Függetlenség*, November 2nd, 1956.

8. CUOHP, 508, twenty-three-year-old journalist on *Igazság*.

9. Radio Budapest, October 31st, ten forty-five A.M.

10. Radio Free Miskolc, October 31st.

11. *Népszabadság*, November 2nd, 1969.

12. Katona diary, November 1st.

13. Barnes to State, tel. 204, November 1st, eleven A.M.

14. Alberto Cavallari, article in *Corriere della Sera*, November 5th; Bruce Renton in *New Statesman*, November 10th, 1956; and Adolph Rasten, *Politiken*, Copenhagen, November 2nd, 1956.

15. Hollós, *Köztársaság tér, 1956*, pages 120ff.; *Magyar Függetlenség*, November 1st, 1956.
16. Filippo Raffaelli of *Il Corriere Lombardo*: his interview notes are in Fabrizio Franco's papers.
17. *Új Magyarország*, November 2nd, 1956.
18. "Open up the cells", in *Hétfői Hírlap*, October 29th, 1956.
19. Oszkár Zsadányi, "On-the-spot report from the Central Jail: 800 political prisoners freed", in *Igazság*, November 3rd, 1956; *Procès*, pages 63ff.; interview of Paul Gorka, London; and H23M, Polytechnic student.
20. Barnes to State, tel. 212, November 1st, midnight; *Kis Újság*, November 2nd.
21. ADN Information (East Berlin), November 24th, 1956: quoting Herbert Wehner speaking to SPD functionaries in Hamburg; Günter Leuschner, "Zu den Vorgängen in Ungarn", in *Deutsche Außenpolitik* (East Berlin), vol. 2, 1957, pages 41-55; *Volksstimme*, November 27th; and letter of Wehner to the author, January 1979.
22. Thompson to State, tel. 993, Vienna, October 30th. Interview of Révész, Budapest, April 1980. Subsequently the Communists attempted to plant misleading stories about Kéthly's statements about the new White Terror in Budapest: letter from Bjarne Braatoy, secretary of the Socialist International, to Morgan Phillips, November 27th, 1956.
23. Interview of Kiss, Washington, January 1974.
24. *Procès*, page 140; and Westdeutscher Rundfunk TV programme, "Die Toten kehren wieder", June 17th, 1968.
25. Interviews of Heltai, January 1974; and of Erdős, April 1980.
26. *Procès*, page 140ff.
27. UN Report, §§74, 336-340. Kádár is said on this occasion to have emphasised to Andropov that all Hungarians were in full agreement: "The Soviet press calls this a Hungarian counter-revolution. You know very well that this is not so, though it might become one – and if it does, it will be the fault of the Soviet tanks." As a Hungarian Communist he would have no choice but to join the workers in the streets. This romantic version is unlikely, in view of Kádár's later actions.

28. Interview of Vásárhelyi, April 1980: “Donáth and Haraszi told me that Szántó and Lukács were against it.”

29. Gordon Gaskill, “Timetable of a Failure”, reprinted from 1958 *Virginia Quarterly Review*, in *Best Articles and Stories 1958*, December.

30. In an article dated November 5th, Cavallari described how Kádár *urlava* (was shouting) but in the original story in *Corriere della Sera*, datelined “Budapest and Vienna, November 2nd”, it was Tildy *gridare*, shouting.

Chapter 41: Has Anybody seen Kádár?

1. Barnes to State, tel. 213, November 2nd, ten A.M.; and French text in Italian files.

2. The text of Nagy’s declaration was:

“People of Hungary! The Hungarian National Government, imbued with profound responsibility towards the Hungarian people and its history, and giving expression to the undivided will of the Hungarian millions, declares the neutrality of the Hungarian People’s Republic.

“The Hungarian people, on the basis of independence and equality and in accordance with the spirit of the United Nations Charter, wish to live in true friendship with their neighbours, the Soviet Union and all the peoples of the world. The Hungarian people desire the consolidation and further development of the achievements of its national revolution without joining any power blocs. The century-old dream of the Hungarian people is thus fulfilled. The revolutionary struggle fought by the Hungarian heroes of the past and present has at last carried the cause of freedom and independence to victory. The heroic struggle has made it possible to implement, in our people’s international relations, its fundamental national interest: neutrality.

“We appeal to our neighbours, countries near and far, to respect the unalterable decision of our people. It is true indeed that today our people are as united in this decision as perhaps never before in their history. Working millions of Hungary! With revolutionary determination, sacrificial work and the consolidation of order, protect and strengthen our country: free, independent, democratic, and neutral Hungary.”

3. Michael S. Samsonow, "Diplomacy of Force" (Redwood City, California, 1960), and, "A Case Study, Hungary's Declaration of Neutrality" (Hoover Library).

4. Barnes to State, tel. 208, November 1st, 1956, eight p.m., received Washington, five past two p.m. (The translation of its full text, tel. 213, timed ten A.M., November 2nd, arrived in Washington at three minutes past five A.M.)

5. See Press Release of US Delegation to the first emergency special session for the General Assembly of the UN, November 2nd, 1956 (Dulles papers).

6. Interview of Mrs. Francis (Ferenc) Münnich, Budapest, May 1980.

7. Wiktor Woroszyński, *Nowa Kultura*, December 9th, 1956.

8. Interview of Vásárhelyi, May 1980. Oszkó refused to be interviewed.

9. Kádár, broadcasting on November 26th, 1956.

10. János Kádár, *Vsevenskaya . . .* op. cit.

11. Bruno Tedeschi, in *Il Giornale d'Italia*, November 2nd, 1956; and author's interview, Rome, May 1979.

12. János Kádár, speech at national conference of the HWSP from June 27th to 29th, 1957, published in *Vsevenskaya konferentsiya Vengerskoi Sotsialisticheskoi Rabochei Partii* (Moscow, 1958); on many occasions he stated that he "ruptured relations" with Nagy's regime on November 1st, e.g. in *Népszabadság*, five days later; Münnich said the same on November 4th, on Radio Szombathely. Broadcasting on November 26th Kádár amplified, "I broke off relations with him on November 2nd [*sic*] when I saw that the counter-revolution was gaining more from Imre Nagy's revolution than the Hungarian People's Republic."

13. CUOHP, 615, Elias.

14. *Új Magyarország*, November 3rd, 1956.

15. Interview of Rényi, Budapest, September 1979.

16. *Hungarian Soldier (Magyar Honvéd)*, November 2nd, and *People's Word (Népszava)*, November 2nd, 1956.

Chapter 42: Fraternal Kisses

1. Testimony of caretaker Stephen (István) Kertész, Budapest, December 15th, 1956 (*White Book*, vol. II, pages 84-88).
2. *Kis Újság*, November 3rd, 1956.
3. Swiss journalist J. F. Bálvány, quoted in Gosztony, pages 326ff.
4. Testimony of Nagy's secretary, Mrs. Balogh, *Procès*, page 52.
5. Király, *Life*, February 1957; and in WDR TV programme "Die Toten kehren wieder", June 17th, 1969.
6. Interview of Sárközi, August 1974.
7. *Igazság*, November 3rd, 1956.
8. Testimony of Stephen (István) B. Szabó, *Procès*, pages 50ff.
9. *Procès*, page 145.
10. Cavallari, in *Corriere della Sera*, November 5th, 1956.
11. Cabinet minutes, in *Procès*, page 51.
12. *Népakarat*, July 5th-6th, 1957.
13. Interview of Katona, May 1978.
14. Interview of Marosán, October 1978.
15. Lajos Lederer, "The Men of Budapest", in the *Observer*, London, June 1958; and interview June 1979.
16. Testimony of George (György) Kerekes, *Procès*, pages 70ff.
17. Interviews of George (György) Heltai, Charleston, South Carolina, January 7th, and of Király, January 22nd, 1974.
18. Hollós, *Köztársaság tér, 1956*, pages 120ff.
19. H31M.
20. Quoted by Hungarian military author Miklós Zalka, in *Minefield*, vol. II, Budapest 1962, pages 227ff.
21. François Bondy, "Ungarns Augenblick der Freiheit", in *Monat*, vol. 9, 1956/57.
22. Italian legation, "Determinant Factors of the Situation before the Revolution", and "Chronicle of Events", November 2nd, 1956.
23. Bohlen to State, tel. 1041, Moscow, November 2nd, nine p.m.
24. Bohlen to State, tel. 1044, Moscow, November 2nd, ten p.m.
25. Bohlen to State, tel. 1044, Moscow, November 2nd, ten p.m., received Washington four forty-four p.m.; and tel. 1048, November 3rd, noon.
26. *Daily Mail*, November 3rd, 1956.

27. Mićunović diary, November 2nd, 1956.
28. Eisenhower Library, Dulles papers.
29. Telegram signed Dulles drafted by C.M.P(hillips) to Lodge, Washington, November 2nd, six fifty-three p.m.
30. Interview of Frank Wilcox, Washington, May 1978, and Winthrop Aldrich, Oral History, October 16th, 1972 (Eisenhower Library).

Chapter 43: We'll Meet Again

1. CUOHP, 428, Imre Szabó Nyirádi, former airforce captain.
2. Wailes to State, tel. 220, November 3rd, one p.m., received six minutes past two p.m., Washington time.
3. CUOHP, 501.
4. Bohlen to State, tel. 1057, Moscow, November 3rd, eight p.m., received four forty-three p.m.
5. Bohlen to State, tel. 1048, Moscow, noon, November 3rd.
6. Ibid.; it reached Washington at three A.M. on November 4th!
7. CUOHP, 430.
8. CUOHP, 561, Professor Blücher.
9. CUOHP, 563, Kende.
10. Wailes to State, tel. 219, November 3rd, one p.m., received five past ten A.M.
11. State to Wailes, tel., November 3rd, four thirty p.m.
12. The other ministers sacked included Erik Molnár (justice), János Csergő (metallurgy and mechanical industries), Mrs. Joseph (József) Nagy (light industry), Francis (Ferenc) Nezvál (urban and communal economy), Nicholas (Miklós) Ribiánszky (state exploitation of agriculture), Joseph (József) Bognár (foreign commerce), János Tausz (internal commerce), Rezso Nyers (food), Antal Gyenes (agricultural product collection), Antal Apró (constructions), and Antal Babics (health).
13. CUOHP, 616, Molnár; and interview, April 1979; and statement by János Szabó at Security Council, evening of November 3rd.
14. Letter of Heltai to Gosztony.
15. Interview of Erdős, April 1980.
16. Király, in *Life*.

17. *Népszava*, November 4th.
18. Ibid., and statement by Szabó at Security Council that evening.
19. Wailes to State, tel. 224, November 3rd, five p.m., received Washington seven minutes past two p.m.
20. Interview of Fritz Molden, Vienna, May 1980; and article in *Die Presse*, Vienna, November 13th, 1956.
21. Interview of Erdős, April 1980.
22. Vásárhelyi, interviews, October 1978 and September 1979; and Wailes to State, tel. 226, ten p.m., received Washington, one minute past six p.m. The MTI record of the press conference was printed in *Népszava*, November 4th.
23. CUOHP, 428.
24. Interview of J.T., journalist.
25. CUOHP, 517, “Dr. Hardy”, biochemist, Pécs.
26. Charles Bohlen, Oral History, December 17th, 1970 (Eisenhower Library).
27. Bohlen to State, tel. 1057, Moscow, November 3rd, eight p.m.; received four forty-three p.m.
28. Interview of Professor Stephen (István) Bibó, Budapest, October 1978.
29. Interview of Donáth, May 1980.
30. Gosztony and Louis (Lajos) Csiba, in WDR TV programme, “Die Toten kehren wieder”, June 17th, 1968.
31. Háý, *Geboren 1900*, page 342.
32. CUOHP, 441, Ludwig Gogolak, historian.
33. CUOHP, 500, Aczél, and CUOHP, 567, Méray.
34. Kopácsi, memoirs, pages 212-215.
35. CUOHP, 561, Blücher, who now commanded a National Guard company.
36. State to Wailes, November 3rd, four thirty p.m.
37. Memo, Larry Laybourne to Serrell Hillman, March 1st, 1957 (Eisenhower Library: C. D. Jackson papers, Box 56, Henry Cabot Lodge file). In the January 1961 issue of *Hungarian Quarterly*, Senator Dodd of Con-

necticut voiced vigorous criticism, but in the next issue Lodge again replied that he had been motivated by “instructions from Washington”.

38. Hungarian note to Yugoslavia, July 23rd, 1958.

39. The scene was described by Maléter to Kopácsi; by the private to Peter Gosztony; and by Lieutenant Zs. Szabó to an army officer (CUOHP, 559). The official Hungarian version later (e.g., *Procès*, page 71) was that the Hungarian delegation arrived uninvited, that the Soviet commander at Tököl had no intention of lowering himself to talks with Maléter, and that Maléter was arrested on the orders of the Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government (that is, Kádár's new government) for violation of oath, treason, and attacking the order of the democratic popular state.

Chapter 44: Second Coming

1. Tildy and Donáth, testimony, *Procès*, and interview of Donáth.

2. Szántó testimony, *Procès*, pages 154ff.; and Yugoslav foreign ministry announcement of November 23rd, 1956, in *Népakarat*, November 10th, 1956.

3. CUOHP, 561, Blücher; and Imre Szenes, *Az utolsó napjuk* (Budapest, 1957), page 139.

4. Interview of Király, January 1974.

5. Interview of Gelberger, Toronto, March 1979.

6. Interview of Vásárhelyi.

7. Interview of Kurucz, April 1978.

8. Gosztony.

9. CUOHP, 561.

10. CUOHP, 559, Francis (Ferenc) Gaál; and Gosztony, *Der ungarische Volksaufstand*, pages 410ff.; in *Aufstände unter dem roten Stern* Gosztony also quotes an order issued to army garrisons by officers who had seized the defence ministry's operations section and communications centre during the night: “Obey the order of the Soviet commander. No shots are to be fired. Lay down your arms and allow the Soviets to enter the barracks.” Miklós Zalka, *Aknamező* (Budapest 1962), vol. ii, page 308.

11. Interview of Donáth.

12. MIT despatch to AP bureau, Vienna, printed in *Neue Kurier*, November 4th, 1956, special edition; and in part in Lasky, pages 230ff.

13. Szabó testimony, *Procès*. Tildy later testified that when he learned the truth – that Nagy had fled with his friends to the Yugoslav embassy – it was “one of the greatest shocks of my life”.

14. Háý, *Geboren 1900*, page 339.

15. Kopácsi, memoirs, pages 217ff.

16. Interview of Fazekas, Budapest, April 1980.

17. CUOHP, 247, Corporal Szatmári.

18. Bibó’s message is buried in the transcript of the telex conversation between Budapest and Washington; a copy is also in the Dulles-Herter files, Box 6, Eisenhower Library; it was actually shown to Eisenhower. Until the author showed it to Bibó he was unaware that a copy had survived.

19. György István Révész, *A béke volt veszélyben* (Budapest, 1957), page 53.

20. Both James McCargar and the attaché Katona (diary, November 4th) record that permission to grant Mindszenty asylum arrived *before* he showed up at the door. Mysteriously, there is no trace of this in the telegrams so far opened.

21. United Press telexes, November 4th (in Theodore Kyriak collection, Hoover Institution).

22. Háý, op. cit., page 346.

23. Interview of Stephen (István) Bibó, Budapest, October 23rd, 1978.

24. Vásárhelyi, testimony in *Procès*, page 155; and interview, October 1978.

25. Interview of Erdős, April 1980.

26. Depositions of employees of the printing works and Corvin department store and of the defendant Rezső Varga, quoted in *White Book*, vol. II, pages 110-114.

27. Paul (Pál) Jónás, article, “Porträt . . .”. CUOHP, 564, a Jewish journalist on his staff aged twenty-seven would say: “Dudás was a popular tribune manqué. He carried on a great fight against the Russians and was wounded in this fight. He was personally courageous.”

28. CUOHP, 408.

29. Interview of Szász, August 1974; and George Pálóczi-Horváth, in *Der Monat*, Berlin, March 1957. Kádár's movements after November 1st are still shrouded in official secrecy. As Donáth now says (interview, May 1980): “*Das hatten wir Kommunisten gelernt! Wer illegaler Kommunist war . . . wir wissen nicht viel, aber das können wir!*”

30. UN *Report*, §78; Mićunović diary, November 3rd; Kádár, in speech of December 7th, in *Népszabadság*, December 8th, 1959.

31. János Kádár, *Vsevenserskaya* . . . op. cit.

32. Kádár, to National Trades Union Congress, in *Népszabadság*, January 29th, 1957. In May 1972 he reminisced to funkies at his sixtieth birthday: “. . . There are situations where a man has to do something that only a very few people understand. But it still has to be done in the hope that the reasons will be understood later . . .” (*Társadalmi Szemle*, No. 6, 1972).

33. BBC Monitoring report, 1956, No. 5, 193, pages 1 and 2.

34. Gosztony.

35. H42M.

Chapter 45: Tricked, Kidnapped, Deported, Hanged

1. Tamás Sárkány, in Baudy, *Jeunesse d'Octobre*, page 48; Kopácsi memoirs, pages 192ff. Zoltán Vas told the author: “In Szolnok two governments had been set up, one of them by Rákosi followers like Andics, and Berei. If I had known that it would be Kádár and not Rákosi who would take power I would never have fled into the Yugoslav legation. I personally was fleeing from Rákosi . . . !” CUOHP, 508, also mentions this rival Szolnok government.

2. *Honvéd Újság*, Budapest, April 25th, 1957.

3. *Magyar Közlöny*, No. 93, November 12th, 1956.

4. Peter Gosztony, “Zur Geschichte des ungarischen Nationalen Widerstandes in der Anfangsperiode des Kádár-Regimes”, in *Osteuropa*, Nr. 10/11, 1968, pages 805-824.

5. Wailes to State, tel. 232, November 5th, nine A.M.

6. Memo of conference with the President, November 4th, one thirty p.m. (Eisenhower Library). Letter, Eisenhower to Bulganin, November 4th (NARS, 764. 00/11-456).

7. Wailes to State, November 5th, 1956.

8. CUOHP, 226, veterinary student, 24. Adolph A. Berle Jr. investigated the allegations against RFE and found that inflammatory appeals had been broadcast by an East German transmitter using RFE call signs as an agent provocateur, as well as by Hapsburg monarchists given air time on Radio Madrid and a radio station elsewhere operated by Hungarian exiles. "It is claimed that our mutual friends in Washington" – the CIA – "had nothing to do with the last two, but I am not dead sure" (Diary, December 5th, 1956; Roosevelt Library).

9. Tel. 239, November 5th, nine p.m., received six thirty-five p.m.

10. Interview of Kurucz, London, April 1979.

11. Wailes to State, tel. 244, November 6th, five p.m., received seven forty-eight p.m.

12. CUOHP, 478, Father Vazul Végvári, twenty-eight; supported in part by H31M's testimony.

13. Bohlen to State, Moscow, tel. 1098, November 6th, eleven p.m.

14. Letter from Dr. Béla Fabian to Cloyce K. Huston, of Free Europe Committee, November 6th, 1956 (C. D. Jackson Papers). "I wish to observe that these estimates are modest as compared to the costs of a March 15th or August 20th celebration, that usually amounts to \$5,000."

15. Permission to station Soviet troops in the satellites is given by them under the Warsaw Pact of May 14th, 1955, only if it is in accordance with the requirements of those satellites' "mutual defence" against armed attack by another state. The Soviet definition of "aggression" was set out to the United Nations in 1953 (see UN document A/2638): the aggressor was the one who sent forces into another state without the permission of its government. *Actes de la conférence diplomatique de Genève de 1949* (Berne, 1949); and *Final Record of the Diplomatic Conference of Geneva of 1949* (Berne, 1949). The Soviet delegate declared on May 16th, 1949: "Civilians who took up arms in defence of the liberty of their country should be entitled to the same protection as members of the armed forces" (*ibid.*, vol. iiA, page 426).

16. International Commission of Jurists, *Hungary and the Soviet Definition of Aggression*, The Hague, November 16th, 1956; and *The Hungarian Situation in the Light of the Geneva Convention*, December 7th, 1956.

17. Kurucz; and CUOHP, 247, Szatmári, who stated that in this way massive tank retaliation proved effective against the rebels.

18. Bohlen to State, tels. 1170, 1184, 1185, 1188 and 1213, Moscow, November 12th-15th, 1956.

19. CUOHP, 508.

20. Interview of Vásárhelyi, April 1980.

21. Katona diary.

22. CUOHP, 558, chief of shipping division, Danubian Iron Works, Dunapentele, aged twenty-nine.

23. *Daily Herald*, December 12th.

24. H53M.

25. Wailes to State, tel. 252, November 8th, five p.m.

26. Tel. 253, five p.m.; and Wailes, tel. 322, November 19th, six p.m. On December 2nd a technical security team from Washington found that the secret police had lowered a microphone into the chimney of Mindszenty's office.

27. *Népszabadság*, January 18th, 1958.

28. Hoover to Wailes, tel. 278, November 11th.

29. Eisenhower diary, November 12th; Hoover to Wailes, tel. 241, November 16th, 1956.

30. Wailes to State, tel., Budapest, November 11th.

31. Bohlen to State, tel., Moscow, November 11th.

32. Yugoslav foreign ministry announcement of November 23rd, 1956, in *Népakarat*, 10, November 1956.

33. Vásárhelyi, interview, Budapest, October 21st, 1978.

34. Interview of Alice Halda, Budapest, April 1980; and Professor Molnár, Geneva, April 1979; and CUOHP, 563, Kende.

35. Testimony of Stephen (István) Pozsár, George (György) Ádám, Róbert Bohó, in *Procès*, page 160.

36. For Tito's Pula speech, see *New York Times*, November 16th, 1956; and *Népszabadság*, November 25th, 1956, which pointed to the inconsis-

ency of Tito describing the Soviet intervention as inevitable, while describing the assistance granted by Soviet troops to the Hungarian regime as an “error”.

37. RFE monitoring service, November 11th, 1956.

38. *A proletárhatalom megszilárdításáért* (Fortifying Proletarian Power), Budapest, 1957, cit. P. Gosztony; *Népszabadság*, November 14th-15th, 1956.

39. CUOHP, 429.

40. *Nagybudapesti Központi Munkástanács*. CUOHP, 439, Ödön Vajda, fifty-four; and Töke.

41. *Népszabadság*, November 15th, has a report on the meeting.

42. Töke; and Reuters report in Lasky, page 264.

43. The Yugoslav delegate, Dr. Mladen Ivekovic, made this clear at the UN General Assembly: see *New York Times*, December 5th, 1956.

44. Dalibor Soldatić, interviewed in *Vjesnik*, Zagreb, November 28th, 1977.

45. Milan Georgiević related this to Nicholas (Miklós) Molnár a few moments later in the canteen of the Journalists’ Union.

46. Interview of Vásárhelyi, April 1980.

47. These exchanges were referred to in the Yugoslav note of June 24th, 1958, protesting at Nagy’s execution: see its text in *East Europe*, August 1958, pages 55ff.; and János Mészáros, “The Kádár Regime charges Yugoslavia with ‘Conspiracy’ and ‘Interference’ in Hungary’s domestic Affairs”, in *Journal of Central European Affairs*, vol. 18, 1958/1959, pages 318-323.

48. In the circumstances the version authorised by the regime after his death appears unlikely. According to this, on about November 8th he telephoned his friend Ladislav (László) Kocsis from the apartment of former minister Joseph Antal, rejoicing : “It happened just as it should have. I think that János Kádár . . . acted as an honest Hungarian Communist should have.” Kovács returned to Pécs and resigned as leader of the Smallholders’ Party. In 1958 he became an MP for the new PPF – he was photographed talking with Dobi and Kádár during a recess. But in 1959 his condition worsened. Forty-three foreign newspapermen asked the foreign ministry for permission to see him. It was denied; some newsmen did visit the clinic

at Pécs, but there Professor János Angyal (“at the request of the patient”) refused them access. The Party newspaper published on June 14th, 1959, a statement said to have been dictated to his daughter Piroska, denying false rumours about his health; he died a week later, “closing a life replete with struggle and difficulty, but also abundant with joy” (Ladislas [László] Kocsis, in *New Hungary*, Budapest, August 1959).

49. Arthur Radford to Secretary of Defense, December 3rd, 1956 (JCS 2066/23); NARS Record Group 218, file CCS 092; and memo by Chief of Staff, USAF, for the JCS, November 30th, 1956.

50. Bohlen to State, tel. 1426, Moscow, December 11th, 1956.

51. Bohlen to State, tels. 1446 and 1462, Moscow, December 13th and 15th.

52. Wailes to State, tel. 255, November 9th, three twenty p.m., and tel. 294, November 15th, 1956.

53. *Népakarat*, December 16th.

54. Interviews of Alice Halda, Budapest, April 1980, and Professor Molnár, Geneva, April 1979; and CUOHP, 563, Kende.

55. *New York Times*, December 4th and 8th, 1956, January 6th, 1957; *Borba*, Belgrade, December 6th; and *UN Report*, §§713ff. On January 5th, 1957, reports in Vienna said that about 15,000 Hungarians were being interned in camps at Uzhgorod.

56. H43M, Mr. Gál, steelworker, forty-three.

57. *New York Times*, December 4th, 16th, 17th, and January 8th.

58. Radio Budapest, December 12th, 1956; CUOHP, 439, Vajda.

59. *Népszabadság*, December 12th.

Epilogue: Back from the Dead

1. *Magyar Közlöny*, December 13th, 1956, and January 8th, March 19th and June 15th, 1957; *Népszabadság*, July 21st, 1957. Dr. László Varga, manuscript, “Main Measures of the Kádár Regime in Violating Human Rights since November 4, 1956” (Hoover Library).

2. CUOHP, 430, Bálint.

3. Király, in *Life*; Kopácsi, memoirs, page 215.

4. Of the dead, eighty-four per cent were men; and twenty per cent younger than twenty. Központi Statisztikai Hivatal: “Fontosabb adatok as 1956 Október novemberi időszakról”, Budapest, January 15th, 1957; Budapest radio; *Esti Hírlap*, December 28th, 1956, and *Népszabadság*, December 30th, 1956. The latter’s editor recalls having calculated the typographical feasibility of printing a list of all the (“3,000”) dead on two pages.

5. The figures are from a confidential document furnished by an official historian in Budapest to the author. Monthly figures for rebel deaths in Budapest were: October, 757; November, 926; December, 36; January, 6; not classified, 220. The document’s December 31st figure for the wounded tallies well with the government’s statement that up to December 1st, the Budapest hospitals had registered 12,961 injured; but such figures are a poor guide, as rebel casualties sometimes preferred to get injuries tended privately. Of the injured, one-quarter were under eighteen, and three-quarters under thirty.

6. Interview of Vásárhelyi, April 1980; and *New York Times*, May 26th, June 3rd, 1957; Julius Háý, *Geboren 1900*, page 367.

7. *Népszabadság*, July 5th, 1957.

8. Julius Háý, op. cit., pages 364ff.; *White Book*, vol. II, page 44; and *New York Times* despatches.

9. *Népszabadság* and MTI announcement, December 11th and 12th, 1957.

10. Interview of Fazekas, Budapest, April 1980.

11. Kádár repeated the denials, through a foreign ministry spokesman, on February 27th, and again in person to foreign press men in April 1957.

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