The First Domino
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CHAPTER 1

Roots of the Uprising

Spring 1953 to Summer 1956

More than four decades ago, the first major anti-Soviet uprising in Eastern Europe—the 1956 revolution in Hungary—took place. It is not surprising that Hungary, given its history and culture, was the first "satellite" to challenge Soviet hegemony directly by declaring its withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact. Many scholars writing about this key turning point in the Cold War have operated on the implicit assumption that the Soviet leaders were the key aggressors and all the Eastern European leaders the reluctant and passive allies.[1] However, while Stalin's successors did play a strong role in internal Hungarian politics, they certainly were neither omnipotent nor omniscient.[2] They misperceived the Hungarian leaders (Imre Nagy, Mátyás Rákosi, and Ernő Gerő). Because the Kremlin leaders thought the problem of Hungarian unrest lay at the top, they believed they needed an "iron hand" like Rákosi's to maintain discipline; no one else could take his place. Thus the Kremlin leaders' misdiagnosis of the problem further exacerbated it, as they mistook the disease for the cure. The Soviet perceptions of Nagy, Rákosi, and Gerő are worth examining since, arguably, had Rákosi been replaced earlier than mid-July, 1956, by a non-Stalinist leader like János Kádár or Imre Nagy, the Hungarian revolution might never have taken place.

To some extent, as well, the Hungarian leaders subtly manipulated Moscow. They exhibited what psychologists would term "passive aggressive" behavior. The Rajk question, "Farkas Affair," return of Kádár to the Politburo, Jewish question, use of the Yugoslav press and diplomatic corps, and eventual dismissal of Mátyás Rákosi illustrate this behavior.

Factors in Hungary's Anti-Soviet Nature

Hungary's distinctly anti-Soviet past helps to explain why Hungary became one of the first dominoes to wobble and why the Kremlin leaders decided to intervene militarily. One can account for Hungarian antipathy toward the USSR in several possible ways.

Unlike Poland, of which a large area had been a Russian province, no part

of Hungary had ever been under direct Soviet rule. Thus, in some respects, Hungarian citizens were less cowed and Russophobic than Polish citizens, who had experienced Soviet military domination firsthand. This might explain in part the Russians' underestimation of the spontaneous nature of the uprising, and the Hungarian peoples' determination to repulse the Soviet intruders. Historically, the Hungarians have been especially sensitive about territory and the right of self-government, jealously guarding their power when they had it. The outbreak of World War I stemmed from the anger one Bosnian student (Gavril Princip) felt toward the Hungarian politicians for ignoring the right to self-government.[3] Some Hungarian workers took a brief interest in communism in 1919, but mainly because they hoped the Russians would help them defend their country against the territorial claims of Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia.[4] Later, Adolf Hitler coaxed Hungary to fight on the Axis side by promising the return of territory Hungary lost in the 1920 Treaty of Trianon.[5]

The Hungarians remembered having fought Russians earlier, in 1849, after their Austrian oppressors called on Moscow for aid. Led by Lajos Kossuth, Hungarian forces fought for liberation from Austria, with which Hungary was then still bound. Kossuth's forces had managed to recapture Buda and Pest from Emperor Franz Josef's Austrian army and issue a declaration of independence from the House of Habsburg. However, Franz Josef then asked Tsar Nicholas I to send in troops to crush the uprising. Outnumbered, Kossuth's forces were compelled to surrender on August 13, 1849.

In 1956 Hungarian "freedom fighters" hailed Imre Nagy as their new Kossuth, a fact duly noted by the KGB head Ivan Serov three months before the Hungarian revolt. He wrote, "The young people in the Petőfi Circle *[Petőfi Kör]* say that the Petofisty are also communists, but they don't want to copy Russian methods. . . . If we Petofists are 'Martovtsists' [March people, of the 1848 revolution], then Imre Nagy is our new Lajos Kossuth."[6] The Petőfi Circle was an intellectual organization originally established in 1954 by members of the Hungarian National Museum and led by István Lakatos, a nonparty member and poet. In March, 1956, after the Twentieth CPSU Congress, a new secretariat was formed, consisting of the ebullient Gábor Tánczos (Nagy supporter), András B. Hegedűs (an economist), Balázs Nagy (a historian), and Kálmán Pécsi (an economist).[7]

Curiously, Soviet First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev perceived a "historical debt" to the workers of Hungary, which enabled him to rationalize the later invasion on November 4, 1956, and deny the fact that it constituted a repetition of the 1848 experience. In his memoirs Khrushchev wrote: "In 1848 there

was a successful revolution in Budapest, but Nicholas I threw in his legions, crushed the revolution, and helped restore the rule of the Austrian monarchy in Hungary. That was a disgrace. Of course that black deed was committed by Nicholas I and those around him; the disgrace did not rub off onto the working class and peasantry of the former Russian Empire. But our country still owed a historical debt to the people of Hungary."[8] Later, on his visit to Hungary in April, 1958, Khrushchev said, "Since the tsar did not quibble about intervening, how could the Soviet Union have withheld such help in 1956?"[9]

Moreover, the Austro-Hungarian Empire had traditionally competed with the Russian Empire for control of the Balkans, especially in the 1870s. Both empires contained Slavic peoples, including (in the Austro-Hungarian Empire) Croats, Slovaks, and Serbs. The Soviet Union acquired territory such as the Carpatho-Ukraine, which had belonged to Hungary before World War I and again between 1939 and 1944. István Bethlen (Hungarian prime minister from 1921 to 1931) wrote in 1935, "I observe with great anxiety the growing political domination of Russia not only in the northern part of our continent, but also in the Danube basin and in the Balkans."[10]

Given Hungary's monarchical past, an inherent antipathy existed toward communism, with its professed aim of establishing a stateless society and abolishing private property. Although Hungary had a constitutional government to manage domestic affairs, it had formed a dual monarchy with Austria in 1867. The same monarch conducted the foreign and military affairs of the two powers. Béla Kun's communist regime lasted only four months in 1919 (March–July), due in part to the Hungarians' resistance to the seizure of their farms and factories, as well as to the pressure of Admiral Horthy's anti-communist armed forces, and the advance of Romanian troops. (A beautiful church—Regnum Marianum—was built in Budapest in 1921 to celebrate the Hungarian victory over the "red hordes"; the communists demolished it in the 1950s.)[11] Ironically, Béla Kun's failure may have proved useful for the postinvasion Kádár regime in explaining to the Hungarian people why the government called in Soviet troops on October 23. In a meeting on December 2, 1956, György Marosán said, "We can refer to the example of 1919 when the young Red Army of the Soviet Union could not give help and therefore the proletarian dictatorship failed in the face of foreign armed intervention and internal counter-revolution."[12]

The regime that Admiral Horthy established as regent in 1919 was also a monarchy, or at least in name. Lasting twenty-five years, it was actually a very nationalistic regime more similar to Salazar's Portugal or Piłsudski's Poland than to other Eastern European regimes. Horthy gained popular support by

associating the Trianon treaty and the consequent loss of Hungarian territory with the democratic revolution of 1918 and Béla Kun's Soviet Republic of 1919; leftist parties in Hungary served as his scapegoats.

The Hungarians' antipathy toward communism is also illustrated by the fact that the Communist Party never did win a popular election, but gained control primarily because of the presence of Soviet troops and their gradual hold over key government posts. In the free elections of November 4, 1945, in Hungary, the Communist Party received only 17 percent of the total votes, while the Smallholders Party received 57 percent, the Social Democratic Party 17 percent, and the National Peasant Party 5 percent.[13]

Another element of Hungary's particularly anti-Soviet history is the belated influence of communism in the interwar period. In contrast to other satellites, Hungary remained fiercely nationalistic, obsessed both by the desire to recover lost territories and the fear of communism. With its multiparty system, Hungary remained relatively liberal until 1944.[14] Even then, while the Hungarian provisional government of December, 1944, was under heavy communist influence, the majority of its members—including Prime Minister General Béla Miklós of Dálnok—were not communists and were ready to establish democracy in Hungary. Thus, to establish his communist regime, Mátyás Rákosi needed to practice slow, careful "salami tactics" to disarm the noncommunist parties.

Moreover, in both world wars, Hungary had fought "in coalition with the West against Russia," as Khrushchev pointed out often, according to Yugoslav diplomat Mićunović.[15] He stressed the animosity existing in the Soviet Army against Hungary, which wanted again to join the West against the Russians.[16] Khrushchev again mentioned this fact explicitly, when in retirement he compared the 1956 intervention to the 1968 intervention in Czechoslovakia.[17]

As a result of having fought with the Germans, the Hungarians had perhaps less fear of German "militarism" than did Poland and Czechoslovakia. Hungarians generally have feared Russian—more than German—expansionism, and hence have been more willing to fight the USSR. Even before World War II, the circle of Hungarian policymakers and intellectuals during the 1930s who feared German encroachment and territorial proximity to the Third Reich after the *Anschluss* with Austria in 1938 nevertheless considered German expansionism to be a lesser evil than Russian expansionism.[18] By contrast, the Czechs, Slovaks, and some Poles have tended to look to the Soviet Union for protection from Germany.[19]

Austrian influence on Hungary reappeared in 1955 when the Austrian State Treaty granting neutrality was signed. In early 1956 Imre Nagy was writing the

third chapter of his book, *In Defense of the New Course,* which is devoted to the "Five Principles" *(Pancha Shila)* propounded at the 1955 Bandung Conference.[20] Nagy advocated the same neutrality for Hungary.[21] One should note as a caveat that because Nagy was primarily an agrarian theorist, his ideas on foreign policy were not fully developed, despite having spent twenty-five years in political positions. As a member of the first generation of Hungarian communist leaders, moreover, Nagy's views on foreign policy were heavily influenced by the USSR's imperial traditions and the international communist movement.[22] Nevertheless, from the Russians' viewpoint, given the "two camp" or "zero-sum" mentality prevalent at the height of the Cold War, any discussion of neutrality was tantamount to betrayal.

Another factor contributing to Hungarian aversion to Russian dominance concerns Stalinism. Stalinist repression had in many ways been harsher in Hungary in the 1940s and 1950s than in the other satellite countries, due to the more vehement resistance of the Hungarians. During Stalin's rule, Mátyás Rákosi was one of the harshest dictators in Eastern Europe, and Hungary was the model satrap. Imprisoned for sixteen years under Admiral Horthy, Rákosi owed his release to Stalin.[23] As if to show gratitude, Rákosi (Stalin's "best disciple," also dubbed the "bald murderer") imitated Stalinist political and economic programs.[24] He conducted the 1948–49 anti-Titoist campaign more zealously than party leaders in the other "peoples' democracies."[25] Hundreds of Hungarian communist officials and intellectuals were sentenced to death or life imprisonment after 1949, when Foreign Minister László Rajk and other prominent figures were tried and executed.[26] Approximately 350,000 officials and intellectuals were purged from 1948 to 1956. It should be noted that "purging" did not necessarily mean the same thing as it did in the Soviet Union. In some cases, it meant losing one's job or being demoted; other times it meant being deported or resettled. Some "purged" people could even keep their jobs if they were not high up in the party hierarchy. Most of these people were accused of being agents for Tito, the Yugoslav leader, who was called the "chained dog of Western imperialists."[27]

In mimicking the Stalinist model, Rákosi's economic plans contradicted Hungary's genuine interests, and required the use of obsolete Soviet machinery and old-fashioned methods. Unrealizable targets were repeatedly set that resulted in a flagrant waste of resources and the demoralization of workers. The situation reached crisis proportions by the summer of 1952 due to an abysmal harvest and inflated production targets. Resistance flared in the countryside. As deputy prime minister, Nagy proposed free-market grain trading, which helped to calm the peasants, but the economic situation remained

dismal.[28] According to the minutes of the June 25, 1953, session of the MDP political committee (roughly a week after Rákosi was forced to cede the prime ministership to Nagy), coal production increased from 11.5 million tons in 1949 to 27.5 million tons in 1954. Iron production increased from 398,000 tons in 1949 to 1,280,000 tons in 1954; likewise, steel production in the same period increased from 860,000 tons to 2,200,000 tons. The MDP officials acknowledged that "this was too fast because the country has hardly any iron ore" to begin with.[29]

The Hungarian leaders had additional grievances against the Kremlin. The Soviet leaders told them which military supplies to buy from other socialist countries—whether or not the Hungarians wanted them, needed them, or could afford them. For example, on February 9, 1955, in Moscow the Soviet Union, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia signed an agreement whereby Hungary would purchase from Czechoslovakia, at a cost of approximately 98,100,000 rubles in the period from 1955 to 1957, tanks, airplanes, motors, and spare parts for the tanks and airplanes of Soviet manufacture. The USSR pledged to provide credit to Hungary for a ten-year period to cover two-thirds of the cost of this military equipment.[30] As part of the long-term contract, the Hungarians agreed to purchase four hundred T-34 tanks from Czechoslovakia. Hungary bought one hundred of them, but refused to buy the other three hundred, pleading lack of funds and claiming the tanks were outdated. On February 27, 1956, Soviet Presidium members Anastas Mikoyan and General Kliment Voroshilov had a talk with Mátyás Rákosi (then the first secretary of the MDP), complaining that Hungary had "violated its end of the three-country deal" and "placed the Czechoslovak comrades in a difficult spot" because "they already began to carry out the order for production." Besides, Voroshilov protested, these T-34 tanks are indeed modern, "even more modern than the type of tanks that the Americans and English have in their armies at the present moment." Rákosi backed down. Curiously, no Czechoslovak representatives attended these "negotiations."[31]

Hungarian journalists objected to the presence of Soviet troops on Hungarian soil, which reminded them constantly of Hungary's inferior status. Hungarian troops were not stationed in the USSR, so why should Soviet troops be stationed in Hungary? Journalists were preoccupied with the "problem of relations between the USSR and other countries" in the summer preceding the revolution. Two in particular, Lorant (reporter for the newspaper *Népszava*) and Király (editor of the journal *Csillag*) spoke on June 17, 1956, with V. N. Kelin (attaché of the Soviet embassy in Hungary). According to Kelin, they told him, "People think that if one proceeds from the

principle of full equality of nations and sovereignty of states, then there should not be such a situation whereby the USSR is the leading [country] in the socialist camp and all the others are supporting countries. In posing this question they cite the sayings of Marx, Engels, and Lenin. This problem troubles the Hungarians a lot more than Hungarian-Yugoslav economic relations."[32]

The general populace had specific grievances against Soviet troops as well. In one case, on December 21, 1955, in the city of Sarbogard, József Res was fatally wounded during shooting practice by Soviet military units. Res, a Hungarian, was with other workers, building a wall in the vicinity. Soviet headquarters immediately helped the family by paying six thousand forints for the funeral. But when Res's widow, who had two children, asked for a pension to compensate for the loss of her husband's income, she was told that "the Soviet legal system does not provide for the granting of a Soviet pension to a Hungarian citizen," although the military authorities agreed that it was their fault that safety measures were not taken.[33]

In the winter of 1955, some Hungarian citizens began to express more directly their dislike of the Soviet Special Corps, which was stationed at various points in Hungary. As General-Lieutenant Lashchenko informed Ambassador Andropov (who forwarded the message to V. V. Kuznetsov, the deputy minister of foreign affairs of the USSR), "Lately, a series of attacks and beatings have been inflicted on completely innocent soldiers of the Soviet army by Hungarian citizens." He went on to describe how six Soviet soldiers on three different occasions were beaten with knives and rocks on their way home in the evening. In each case, Hungarian legal authorities did not hold the perpetrators ("hooligans") accountable. He then told the story of the Soviet military official, Major A. N. Pliukhin, who was run over by a Hungarian truck driver.[34]

Andropov suggested to Kuznetsov that "the Hungarian comrades" be informed about the facts in Lashchenko's note and reminded of "the necessity of conducting political-educational work among the population [to explain] the presence of Soviet military units in Hungary." He also suggested that the unit develop ties with the local Hungarian population by setting up concerts, movies, and collective meetings with the local inhabitants," inviting them to sporting events, and periodically offering help to the local cooperatives and state collective farms during the hay cutting *(senokos),* the grain harvest, the repair of agricultural machines, and so on.

Hungarian citizens also resented the Soviet advisors who enjoyed privileges they could only dream about. As a model satrap, Hungary's institutions were

riddled with them. By the end of November, 1952, in the Hungarian Internal Ministry, for example, thirty-three Soviet advisors were employed there; counting their families, there were forty-six Russians in the advisory group affiliated with this ministry. The advisors each received between 2,550 and 9,750 Hungarian forints in November, 1952, or a total of 217,790 forints. In addition to salary, each Soviet advisor received gratis a furnished flat, a maid, phone service, cleaning supplies, and internal and external repairs and maintenance. By comparison, 11 percent of the Hungarian population earned fewer than five hundred forints in November, 1952; 10 percent earned between five and six hundred forints per month; 26.6 percent earned between 601 and eight hundred forints; 21.2 percent earned between 801 and one thousand forints; 12.8 percent earned between 1,001 and 1,200 forints; 10.2 percent between 1,201 and 1,500 forints; 5.6 percent between 1,501 and two thousand; and 2.6 percent earned more than 2,001 forints.[35]

In addition to geographical, historical, political, economic, and military factors, the Hungarians' language and culture of course differ greatly from that of the Russians. The Hungarian language, Magyar, is not a Slavic language, but a Finno-Ugric tongue, somewhat related to Finnish. Very few Russians speak Magyar, and those soldiers who did in 1956 (officers on leave and reserve officers in neighboring areas of Romania) were recalled on October 21 and 22.[36] Perhaps because of the distinctive language, the Hungarians' culture was particularly homogenous (not torn—as that of Czechoslovakia, for example—by the customs of many nationalities).

In short, Hungary has had a distinctly anti-Soviet past, due to such aspects as the 1848 Russian invasion, its historical rivalry with the Russians over the Balkans, its former alliance with Nazi Germany, its monarchical past, the belated influence of communism in the interwar period, and its vastly different language and culture. To be sure, some other satellites—Romania, for example—shared some of these characteristics. Like Hungary, Romania also fought on the Axis side, has a non-Slavic language and culture, and was ruled by monarchs and crushed by the 1849 Tsarist invasion. Indeed, the communists in Romania did not strike against their fellow travelers until late 1947, ousting the opportunistic members of the main opposition parties who had cooperated in the Communists' takeover. The Romanian Stalinist leader Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, however, managed to keep the population under control, despite some unrest among students and workers in 1956. As we shall see, the Soviet leadership's awareness of Hungary's historic hostility influenced its decision to apply force in response to the 1956 revolution.

Background (June 1953–July 1956)

A brief overview of events between June, 1953, and July, 1956, illustrates the fluctuating degrees of control the CPSU leaders had over domestic Hungarian politics. Just before the outbreak of the June 17 riots in East Berlin, Khrushchev and his colleagues invited a delegation of Hungarian leaders (including Rákosi and Nagy) to Moscow to stay from June 13 to 16. They sharply criticized Rákosi for his bossiness, his "adventuristic economic planning," the huge size of the army, and the excessive persecution. Georgi Malenkov (prime minister and unofficial head of the "collective leadership" until his demotion in February, 1955) asked: "Why should you have an army so large that it bankrupts the state?" Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov pointed out that, "In three and a half years, Comrade Rákosi persecuted 1,500,000 people in a population of only 4.5 million adults. He should not decide alone who should be arrested."[37] Grossly violating Hungarian sovereignty, the Soviet leaders curtailed Rákosi's monopoly of power by forcing him to relinquish one of his posts, the prime ministership, and to share power with the new prime minister, Imre Nagy. As someone who stood outside of Rákosi's inner circle and who was not Jewish, Nagy—the Soviet leaders thought—could perhaps remedy some of the mistakes of the overzealous Stalinists by advocating New Course policies (e.g., increased production of consumer goods, relaxation of terror, and concessions to the peasantry).[38]

Upon its return to Budapest the delegation delivered a self-critical report on the Moscow meeting, first on June 20, before the MDP Central Leadership, and later at the plenum on June 27–28, although the resolution of the Central Leadership was not published.[39] The general population first heard about the new political course from Imre Nagy's parliamentary speech on July 4, 1953. Advocating greater production of consumer goods, a slower pace of collectivization, and other agrarian reforms, Nagy was in effect Khrushchev's political kinsman before the latter ousted Malenkov in 1955. From June, 1953, until the spring of 1954, Nagy sought to increase the authority of the Council of Ministers to solve the most urgent problems. After the June, 1953, uprising in the GDR, it became clear that raising living standards by lowering prices was imperative. Nagy also resolved to restore "socialist legality," which entailed rehabilitating political prisoners.[40]

On July 24, the Hungarian Council of Ministers passed a resolution granting amnesty, which was confirmed by the Presidium (Politburo) the following day and published in the newspapers on July 26. A total of 39,547 individuals

were sentenced for serious offenses such as murder, rape, military crimes, illegal border crossings, and "anti-democratic plots." Of these, 24,935 were amnestied in 1953–54 soon after Nagy became prime minister.[41] By November 1953 the Hungarian Ministry of Internal Affairs and public prosecutor's office together composed a definitive list of individuals to be amnestied consisting of 748,000 people. This figure consisted not only of those sentenced for various lengths of time, but also those under investigation, fined, deported, or punished for violations.

These were positive steps. However, as long as Rákosi remained first secretary, the New Course was doomed to fail; Rákosi sabotaged Nagy's efforts from behind the scenes right from the beginning of Nagy's assumption of the prime ministership in June, 1953. As early as July 25, 1953, for instance, Evgenii Kiselev (the Soviet ambassador to Hungary) reported to Moscow about his conversation with Nagy. In Kiselev's words, Nagy confided that, "It is hard for the old man [referring to Rákosi] to change his attitude *[perestroit'sya]*. He has up to now forgotten that he is not prime minister, and often gives state and administrative orders to the ministries as he did in the past. Only when he, Nagy, reminds him in a friendly manner that he can entrust this matter calmly to the Council of Ministers, does Rákosi realize, sometimes with surprise, that what he is instructing the ministry has already been decided by the Council of Ministers. . . . Our task, Nagy said, is to help Rákosi change his attitude, and without our help, he won't be able to do it."[42]

Later, in October and November of 1954, for example, Rákosi took a two-month vacation in Moscow, where he tried to turn the Soviet leaders against Nagy, accusing the latter of having gone to extremes. This dual leadership caused extreme tension among political elites and the general population, a condition that was less prevalent in other satellite countries. Rákosi's knavery thus exemplifies the Kremlin's lack of complete control over Hungarian politics. The Soviet leaders could not force Rákosi and other Hungarian Stalinists to remedy past mistakes via New Course policies. It was unrealistic for a relic of the Stalinist era [Rákosi] to rule Hungary now under the New Course. As the Hungarian villagers quipped at the time, "You don't let the goat watch over the cabbage."[43]

Rákosi's schemes were not the only factor hindering Imre Nagy's New Course. Radio Free Europe and the Free Europe Press, funded by the CIA, launched "Operation Focus" between 1953 and 1955, which encouraged the Hungarian population to oppose Imre Nagy's government. This propaganda campaign will be discussed in further detail in chapter 6.

Together with Mátyás Rákosi, Mihály Farkas, Lajos Ács, and Béla Szalai,

Nagy was again invited to Moscow on January 8, 1955, this time to be branded a "right-wing deviationist" during a four-hour session. At the same time, a power struggle was taking place in the Kremlin—Winston Churchill called it a "fight between bulldogs under the carpet"—that resulted in Malenkov's denunciation at the January, 1955 Plenum and dismissal in February, 1955, as chairman of the Soviet Council of Ministers. According to the newly declassified transcript of the CPSU Central Committee Plenum (January, 1955), Molotov accused Malenkov for the latter's "absence of principles in policymaking" and his "carelessness in the realm of theory." Specifically, Malenkov was accused of siding with the "scoundrel" Lavrentii Beria in the 1953 debate on the future of Soviet policy in Germany.[44]

Rákosi took advantage of Khrushchev's denunciation of Malenkov's "rightist deviation" in the February 3, 1955, issue of *Pravda* and the latter's subsequent dismissal, which occurred during Nagy's absence due to illness.[45] He convened the Hungarian Central Leadership in March to censure Nagy's "right-wing deviation." Rákosi thus succeeded in creating a scenario parallel to the one in Moscow within one month. Unlike Malenkov, who dutifully performed self-criticism *(samokritika),* Nagy was ousted as prime minister on April 18, 1955, because he refused to recant. He was thus expelled from the party altogether in November, 1955. Sovietologists such as Zbigniew Brzezinski have long believed that Moscow endorsed Nagy's expulsion from the party.[46] We now know that it is not the case. During his speech at the July 13, 1956 Plenum in Budapest, Soviet Presidium member Anastas Mikoyan told Hungarian communist officials that it had been a "mistake" to expel Nagy from the party, because it would have been easier to control him as a party member. "The Hungarian comrades made their work harder on themselves," he said.[47] According to the Malin transcripts of the November 3 emergency Presidium session, Khrushchev said angrily, "The exclusion of Nagy from the party was an error reflecting Rákosi's foolishness." At this same meeting, Kádár told the CPSU Presidium members that the MDP officials endorsed Rákosi's expulsion of Nagy because they thought the CPSU leaders supported the move.[48]

In fact, even Rákosi and his supporters had apparently neither wanted to expel Nagy from the party, nor to dismiss him as prime minister. At the first Politburo session on January 13, 1955, following the Moscow meeting, they simply insisted that Nagy confess to such mistakes as his resistance to land reform and his encouragement of farmers to leave the collectives. They wanted him to admit that "the party's politics were 'essentially' correct prior to June 1953." Nagy refused. When he offered to resign, Rákosi protested that Nagy's departure would mean that there were "two political centers within the Party:

the sulking opposition and the official line." Furthermore, if Nagy left his post, all the "enemies of the people's democracy would line up behind him." When Nagy failed to deliver an address at the February 2 session of the Political Committee *(Politikai Bizottság)* due to a mild heart attack the previous morning, Rákosi exploited the situation by persuading Dr. István Rusznyák, president of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (*Magyar Tudományos Akadémia*, or MTA) to diagnose the heart attack as infarct (blockage of the arteries), and by preventing Nagy from consulting his own physician, Dr. Imre Hajnal. Thus Rákosi succeeded in "quarantining" Nagy: forcing him to take six weeks off on sick leave, which was required by law after a case of infarct, rather than two weeks off as required after a heart attack. On February 15, Nagy was excused from all his duties as prime minister, ostensibly so he could prepare a formal statement of self-criticism. Although he was officially still the prime minister, he could no longer lead Cabinet meetings.[49]

In any case, after April, 1955, Moscow once again relied on Rákosi to control state affairs in Hungary. Rákosi quickly reversed Nagy's policies: tightening censureship, cracking down on writers, curtailing public discussion of economic and political problems, and halting the rehabilitation of political prisoners. However, the next policy volte-face occasioned by Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" in February, 1956, had limited influence on Rákosi initially. Archival documents suggest in any case that Khrushchev's motives for delivering the speech had more to do with self-preservation than with the securement of justice for the Eastern European satellites.

Motives behind the "Secret Speech" at the Twentieth CPSU Congress

During his lifetime, Stalin focused always on his chief opponent, be it Trotsky, Hitler, Roosevelt, or Truman. He regarded Hungary as a mere pawn on his chessboard. Rather than visit Hungary himself, he usually sent Voroshilov or the two "Hungarian experts" Mikoyan and Mikhail Suslov. The latter two Presidium members visited Hungary every year, from 1948 to 1951.[50]

In contrast, Khrushchev seemed genuinely concerned about the situation in Hungary and the other satellites. His name has gone down in history as more or less synonymous with the catchwords "Destalinization," "peaceful coexistence," and "many roads to socialism." However, documents (some still classified) indicate that, in fact, Khrushchev shared Stalin's thirst for power and saw liberalization of the Eastern European satellites as primarily a method by which to enhance his personal power. As he wrote in his memoirs, Khrushchev

admired the Georgian dictator, despite his faults: "I still mourned Stalin as an extraordinarily powerful leader. I knew that his power had been exerted arbitrarily and not always in the proper direction, but in the main Stalin's strength, I believed, had still been applied to the reinforcement of Socialism and to the consolidation of the gains of the October Revolution. Stalin may have used methods which were, from my standpoint, improper or even barbaric, but I haven't yet begun to challenge the very basis of Stalin's claim to a place of special honor in history. Even in death he commanded almost unassailable authority, and it still hadn't occurred to me that he had been capable of abusing his power."[51]

Khrushchev had not been squeamish about following Stalin's orders. After his appointment in December, 1937, as general secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party Central Committee, Khrushchev carried out an extensive purge there. His predecessor, Stanislas Kosior, had been transferred to Moscow. In close cooperation with the henchmen of Nikolai Yezhov (chief of security police, the NKVD, from 1936 to 1938), Khrushchev purged almost all top party and government officials in the Ukrainian provinces.

After Stalin's death on March 5, 1953, the most powerful Soviet leader was Lavrentii Beria—the secret police chief who possessed revealing dossiers on all his Kremlin colleagues. Soon after the June, 1953, East German uprising, Khrushchev and others plotted Beria's arrest. In the course of investigating the "Beria affair," they discovered a vast quantity of detailed material about the illegally repressed people, falsified legal cases, and use of torture against the political prisoners. Although the trial against Beria was closed to the public, a forty-eight-page brochure was sent to all the local party organizations. In the fall of 1955 the security organs began to reexamine the cases of party members convicted between 1937 and 1939. As new documents reveal, Mikoyan and Khrushchev became increasingly anxious. Mikoyan recalled, "After Stalin's death I received requests from families of political prisoners to reexamine their cases. I sent these requests to Rudenko [General Procurator of the USSR]. The prisoners were completely rehabilitated after the reexamination. It surprised me that not once did I send a file that did not result in a full rehabilitation."[52]

Mikoyan approached Khrushchev, saying: the first congress since Stalin's death is coming up. We need to report the truth about the scale of repressions, because if we don't, someone else will. Then everyone will hold us fully responsible for Stalin's past crimes. Of course, we *are* responsible in part. But we can explain the atmosphere in which we had to work. If we do this on our own initiative, tell the delegates at the congress the whole truth, then they will forgive us. If we don't do this, we will be disgraced *(obescheshcheny).*[53]

Mikoyan continued in his memoirs: "N. S. [Nikita Sergeevich] listened attentively. I suggested that we propose to the Presidium that an authoritative commission be created that would investigate all the documents of the Ministry of Internal Affairs [*Ministerstvo Vnutrennykh Del,* or MVD], KGB, and others. It would conscientiously analyze all the cases of repression and prepare a report for the congress. N. S. agreed with this."[54]

Khrushchev gave a different version: "I cannot now remember Mikoyan's position exactly. It seems to me that Mikoyan did not play an active role *[ne vyel aktivnoi linii],* but also did not curb the process of exposing the injustices."[55]

It is now known that Khrushchev enthusiastically endorsed such an exposure of Stalin's nefarious deeds only after he had eliminated all evidence of his own complicity in them. In 1955 he ordered all of Beria's papers, as well as documents about Stalin and other party leaders (filling eleven paper bags), to be destroyed.[56] With peace of mind, Khrushchev could then deliver the emotional "Secret Speech" on February 25, 1956, promoting himself as the number one decision maker in the Kremlin. By initiating this exposition of Stalin's crimes, albeit indirectly incriminating himself, Khrushchev made his own sins seem more forgivable, and those of Mikoyan, Malenkov, Molotov, Lazar Kaganovich, and others less so. Ironically, the Secret Speech, as part of the general Destalinization campaign, contributed indirectly to more uprisings throughout Eastern Europe than Khrushchev had ever intended. In addition to earlier revolts in East Berlin and Plzeň, Czechoslovakia (1953), uprisings occurred after Khrushchev's courageous demarche in Poznań (June, 1956), Warsaw and other Polish cities (October and November, 1956), and finally Budapest (October, 1956). As we shall see, the post-Stalin succession struggle was not really solved until June, 1957, when Khrushchev defeated the "Anti-Party Group."

Meanwhile in Hungary, the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU complicated everything for Rákosi. Emboldened by Khrushchev's anti-Stalinist diatribe, members of the Hungarian opposition once again criticized the party dogmatists. Especially critical were writers, including Tibor Déry, Gyula Háy, Zoltán Zelk, and Tamás Aczél. They demanded that Rákosi fully rehabilitate all the unjustly accused, especially Rajk. They openly raised the question of Rákosi's dismissal. As in Poland, the rift deepened in Hungary between the Stalinist "Muscovites" and the "home communists," with the latter group gaining popularity.[57] As their criticism grew more radical, their audiences rapidly multiplied, especially at debates held in the Petőfi Circle. Given the historical factors outlined earlier, Khrushchev's Secret Speech perhaps had its sharpest

impact in Hungary. No matter how hard Rákosi tried to convince party members at the March Plenum that his own policies coincided with the ideas of the CPSU Twentieth Party Congress, a series of speakers at the plenum criticized him personally with unusual incisiveness. On June 26, Voroshilov reported to Moscow: "I had the impression that Rákosi is very anxious about the upcoming [July] MDP plenum . . . and fears publicity about a number of facts as yet unknown to the party. He spoke a lot about the conversations connecting his name with the 'cult of personality.'"[58] Rákosi himself told Voroshilov that "Members of the party and intelligentsia say that Rákosi is not capable of implementing the decisions of the Twentieth Party Congress."[59] He made small concessions in the spring and summer of 1956, but when Polish workers rioted in Poznań in June, 1956, he seized on the opportunity to initiate a new crackdown, which will be examined in the next chapter.

Soviet Leaders' Flawed Image of Hungary

As long as they harbored a distorted image of Hungary, Soviet leaders could not completely control the tempo of political changes in Hungary sparked by Stalin's death and Khrushchev's denunciation of the Georgian tyrant. An image can be defined as "a mental conception held in common by members of a group and symbolic of a basic orientation."[60] Such a mental conception results from the selective perception of stimuli. According to Jervis, perception "involves conceptualization and learning which both render the world intelligible by making us sensitive to common configurations of stimuli and lead us to misperceive these stimuli when they are linked to unexpected phenomena."[61] In this section we will examine the Soviet image of Hungary, an integral part of which was perceptions of Nagy and Rákosi. This image was flawed in the sense that Soviet leaders failed to grasp the pressure cooker–like state of the Hungarian situation, the complexity of Nagy, and the depth of popular hatred of Rákosi.[62] Signs of insubordination in a "fraternal country" (which were more or less common stimuli, given the upheavals in the 1953–56 period in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Poland) led Presidium members to misperceive the unexpected phenomenon of a spontaneous revolution at the grass roots in Hungary. This faulty image of Hungary led the Soviet leaders to "misdiagnose" the situation and thus recommend the wrong antidote.

In the opinion of János Kádár, the Soviet leaders were out of touch with Hungarian reality. (After leaving prison, Kádár became party secretary in Budapest's thirteenth district and then, in 1955, became party secretary in Pest County.) Referring to the Soviet telegram that was published in the Hungarian

newspaper *Szábad Nep* on April 6, 1956, praising Rákosi, János Kádár told Anastas Mikoyan, "If the comrades in Moscow knew the situation in Hungary, they would not have sent such a telegram."[63] Later in the Presidium meeting of November 3, Kádár said the telegram "caused confusion" *(vnesla sumyatitsu).* The telegram had ostensibly commemorated the eleventh anniversary of Hungary's "liberation" by the Soviet Armed Forces, but was really intended to bolster Rákosi's position in the party leadership.[64] On October 14, Hungarian deputy minister of foreign trade, Zoltán Vas, visited the Soviet embassy on his own initiative and told Soviet Ambassador Yuri Andropov that the "Soviet comrades incorrectly assess the situation in Hungary" and "do not see the approaching national catastrophe *[nadvigayushe'sya natsional'nyi katastrof].*"[65]

Soviet officials seemed to think the problem lay at the top, in the highest party circles, not at the bottom. Presidium member Mikhail Suslov was more or less regarded as the key Soviet official supervising Hungarian affairs for several years. When he visited Budapest (June 7–15, 1956), he concluded on the day of his arrival that "the mood of the workers and peasants is healthy. . . . [A]mong them, as well as in the lower industrial party organizations, there are no conversations about a 'crisis' in the party leadership or about distrust toward the leaders."[66] Suslov stressed that the removal of Rákosi would only please the class enemy, which was very active. As proof of this activity, Suslov cited the recent visit to Vienna of former Hungarian prime minister Ferenc Nagy, who had emigrated in 1947 and participated actively in the New York–based Hungarian National Council, a quasi-exile anticommunist Hungarian government. Suslov admonished the Hungarian party officials: do not let the "enemy cause a gap between the party leaders and activists."[67] Andropov seemed to think the situation could be cleared up if only the Hungarian leaders would follow Suslov's advice to "increase party unity."[68] Likewise, Mikoyan implied that the problem lay at the top when he reported to Moscow on July 14 that the Hungarian "comrades" had not taken "any action against the hostile elements and did not even have a plan in this regard." They can only discuss separate issues because they lack "an organized platform and system of views" *(sistemy vzglyadov).*[69] Given the erroneous Soviet opinion that the problems stemmed from indecisiveness at the top and from just a few hostile elements, Soviet envoys such as Mikoyan gave the wrong advice. The latter advocated that Ernő Gerő, who had just replaced Rákosi on July 18, "Exclude all ideological concessions and conciliation with hostile viewpoints *[primirenchestvo k vrazhdebnym vzglyadam].*" Despite *détente* and peaceful coexistence, Mikoyan continued, the party spirit *(partiinost')* must not be allowed to disintegrate; discipline must be restored among Central Leadership members and the party rank and file.[70]

After a chat the following month with András Hegedüs (Hungarian prime minister until October 23), Andropov reported to Moscow that, "Hostile elements are spreading rumors that after Rákosi leaves, cooperative farms will be disbanded and agricultural collectivization will stop. The peasants, because of these rumors, have been requesting permission to leave the cooperative farms." Andropov apparently did not consider the possibility that the peasants might genuinely be dissatisfied and leave the cooperatives of their own volition, without the impetus of rumors spread by "hostile elements."[71] Later, on October 12, Andropov tersely informed the Kremlin that the Hungarian Workers' Party had acted indecisively, making a series of "unprincipled concessions without any kind of political advantage," and this "strongly crippled the position of the Hungarian leadership."[72]

Even on October 24, the day of the first Soviet intervention, Mikoyan and Suslov sent a telegram to Moscow reporting in a Pollyannaish manner that, while some of the workers, especially young ones, did take part in the riots, "The majority of the workers did not participate, and it is even said that the workers in Csepel, who had no weapons, drove off the provocateurs, who wanted to incite them to riot."[73]

Both KGB Chief Ivan Serov and Andropov regarded members of the intelligentsia to be the "hostile elements." After the July Plenum—according to Serov—the rightist and oppositionist elements continued their antiparty activities. "These people are mainly from the writers' and journalists' circles," he stated.[74] On October 12, Andropov reported: "The agitation of the reactionary segments of the intelligentsia fundamentally disorients the workers and arouses in them a passivity toward political life."[75]

Had Soviet officials realized that the malaise extended to the grass roots they might have recommended a more moderate approach to win over various segments of the population.

Soviet Perceptions of Imre Nagy

The Soviet image of Hungary also included views of Imre Nagy. Since the later events of October and November resulted in part from Soviet perceptions of Nagy, these perceptions are worth examining closely. The Kremlin officials and envoys viewed Nagy ambiguously: alternatively as hostile and opportunistic, average and nonthreatening, idealistic and stubborn, or loyal and malleable. This ambiguity was a factor in the "zigzagging" decision making process during the height of the crisis, as will be examined in chapter 3.

Soviet views of Nagy as hostile and opportunistic were abetted by Gerő,

Rákosi, Serov, and Soviet diplomats in Budapest. In August, 1956, for example, Gerő complained to Andropov: "Nagy is telling everyone that Mikoyan and other MDP Central Leadership members had private talks with him. He is trying to portray these discussions as our confessions that he was right all along."[76] Noting Nagy's opportunism, V. N. Kelin, attaché of the Soviet embassy in Budapest, reported that Nagy tried to attract attention while attending a concert by the American violinist Yehudi Menuhin on June 14: "He sat with his wife in the fifth row, parterre. He stood up several times, looked around at the audience, and bought programs. During the intermission, he stood by the entrance so that everyone would see him."[77] From Moscow Rákosi continued to sabotage Nagy in numerous letters to the CC CPSU, claiming that, "Nagy is undoubtedly the most popular [person] in Hungary at present. The entire imperialist camp and Yugoslavia . . . all anti-Soviet forces . . . support him."[78] Frequent references to Nagy as "the new Lajos Kossuth" reinforced Soviet suspicions. In his writings Nagy cited as worthwhile Kossuth's plan for a Danubian confederation.[79]

According to a postinvasion reference report *(spravka)* on Nagy in preparation for his upcoming trial, Nagy left Hungary in late 1929 for the USSR to attend the Second Congress of the Hungarian Communist Party as a delegate, bringing with him an assistant named Nikolai Tirier, later identified as an *agent-provocateur*. Nagy allegedly introduced Tirier to his Russian colleagues as "a most trustworthy party man" *(parttiets)*. Upon his return to Hungary, however, Tirier betrayed to the Hungarian police all the Hungarian delegates who had attended that Congress (except for Nagy, who—luckily in this case—ended up staying in Moscow for fourteen years). When Tirier was caught, Nagy tried to defend him, taking his side against the other Hungarian communists.[80]

As stated in the reference report, Nagy twice appealed to the Hungarian Central Committee in 1949, criticizing the party's position on the "peasant question" and advocating the delay *(zatiagivanie)* of collectivization. For this Nagy was expelled from the Politburo temporarily, until early 1951.[81] The Soviet leaders may also have recalled some of Nagy's dubious actions as prime minister in the 1953–55 period, for example, his attempt to get credits from the West in response to shortages.[82] At times, Soviet perceptions of Nagy were even stronger. On the eve of the second intervention, November 3, Khrushchev told fellow Presidium members at the emergency session, "They criticized Nagy and regarded him as an opportunist, but he is also a traitor."[83]

However, at other times, perhaps due to Nagy's long tenure in the USSR,

Soviet and Hungarian party officials and party members saw him not as particularly "anti-Soviet," but as a rather lackluster politician, certainly not as threatening as those "home communists" like Polish leader Władysław Gomułka, who had suffered in Stalinist prisons in their native countries.

Having spent fourteen years in Moscow, from 1930 to 1944, Nagy was considered one of the "Muscovite" communists, although a minor one. This heritage may have weakened his ability to appeal to nationality later, although most Hungarian peasants remembered Nagy primarily as the Minister of Agriculture who gave them land in 1945. His avuncular style later in 1953–54 reinforced their favorable image of him. While serving on the eastern front in World War I, Nagy was wounded and then taken prisoner by the Russian Imperial Army. He was languishing in a Siberian POW camp when the Russian Revolution brought the communists to power in October, 1917. The following year Nagy joined the Bolshevik Party and the Red Guard. In the spring of 1921 Nagy was sent to Moscow and from there he returned to Hungary to help organize the clandestine Communist Party.[84] Nagy was arrested a second time in February, 1927, but was released quickly for lack of evidence. He immigrated to Vienna. As mentioned above, Nagy participated in 1929–30 as a delegate to the Hungarian Communist Party's Second Congress in Moscow. He decided to stay in the USSR. For at least six years Nagy conducted research at the International Agricultural Institute *(Mezhdunarodnyi Agrarnyi Institut)* in Moscow. When one of his Russian colleagues, Vladimir Mikhailovich Turok, heard later that Nagy had become prime minister of Hungary, he was surprised. He recalled: "I remember a person named Imre Nagy from the Agricultural Institute. We shared the same office . . . facing each other. My first impression of him was of his heavily built body, his engaging face, his cheerful disposition, and his fondness for women, just like any other Hungarian man. He spoke fairly good Russian. . . . When, several years later, I learned that he had become prime minister of the Hungarian Republic, my overriding reaction was surprise. (Everyone shared this reaction, which makes me think it was objective.) Nagy was an average politician with a good knowledge of, and rapport with, the peasantry, but nothing beyond that."[85] Another contemporary who apparently knew Nagy from his work in Moscow was Ferenc Rákos, director of the Hungarian publishing house Új Magyar. According to the tendentious reference report, Rákos described Nagy as a "weak-willed person" *(bezvol'nyi chelovek)*.[86] Only in 1944 did Nagy return to Hungary with the Soviet army. He served as minister of agriculture in the first Hungarian government that was under heavy communist influence, beginning in December, 1944.

While not "anti-Soviet," Nagy was viewed as an idealist harboring "dangerous ideas." Zoltán Vas stated that "Nagy is not anti-Soviet, but he wants to build socialism the Hungarian way, not the Soviet way."[87] Gerő told Andropov, on October 12, that "the forces which seek to tear Hungary away from the USSR and the entire socialist camp are using Nagy, who is not an enemy himself, but who has very dangerous ideas."[88] One dangerous idea, as mentioned earlier, was neutrality.

As a professor of agricultural economy and long-time member of the Hungarian Academy of Science, Nagy was something of a "bookworm"—obviously no match for ruthless politicians of Mátyás Rákosi's ilk. He was briefly appointed Minister of the Interior after the first free elections of 1945 but he resigned from this position after six months, since it required a pitiless personality so antithetical to his own.[89] Yet his idealistic convictions often rendered him stubborn, and this threatened Soviet and Hungarian communist officials. He refused to recant in 1955, compelling the Rákosi leadership to expel him completely from the party. This in turn prevented the party from controlling him. Again, in early October, 1956, during discussions with Gerő and others about his readmittance to the MDP, Nagy refused to mention in his letter that he would distance himself from the opposition.[90] As we shall see, Nagy probably would have been able to serve as deputy prime minister in the postinvasion government had he not stubbornly refused to sign a declaration endorsing the Kádár regime and had he agreed to keep Soviet troops in Hungary.[91]

As long as this idealism remained linked to his communist faith and duty to the party, Nagy was extremely loyal to the MDP and Moscow. In Khrushchev's memoirs, the Soviet leader indicated almost a fondness for individuals like Hungarian leader Ferenc Münnich, to whom he referred as a "battered old wolf,"[92] over individuals like Polish leader Bołesław Bierut, whom he thought was too gullible.[93]

Nagy's idealism can be noted in his 1955 dissertation in which he completely overlooked the bloody methods of the Soviet communists. He yearned to rejoin the MDP and wrote many letters to the Central Leadership in the summer and early fall of 1956. Apparently he expressed his fears to Mikoyan and Suslov on October 26 that "the Americans would intervene" if he and his colleagues relied only on Soviet tanks and "isolated themselves from the nationalist movement."[94] Mikoyan and Suslov even had the impression on that day (October 26) that Nagy would not oppose a second Soviet military intervention.[95]

Moreover, archival findings suggest that Nagy's loyalty to the Soviet Union often outweighed his idealist tendencies. He agreed to oversee crop collection briefly, thus acquiescing to the exact policies to which he objected.[96] He did

not hesitate to perform *samokritika* in order to be readmitted to the Politburo in 1951. Also in 1951, Nagy—along with other Politburo members—signed the note proposing János Kádár's arrest, thus authorizing extremely brutal beatings.[97] Furthermore, as we now know, Nagy ("Agent Volodya") served as an NKVD (precursor of the KGB) informer in Stalinist Russia in the 1930s. This NKVD connection may explain why, despite Rákosi's hatred of Nagy, it was László Rajk—not Nagy—who was chosen to be the first victim in the anti-Tito campaign. It may also explain why Imre Nagy, whom Rákosi called a milquetoast *(miagkotelyi),* was even offered such plum jobs as Minister of the Interior or Minister of Administrative Organs.

Having immigrated to Moscow in 1930, Nagy had established contacts among the Hungarian émigré community, encouraging them to speak candidly with him. Documents located in the Soviet communist party archives state that in 1939, while Nagy was living in the USSR in exile, he provided the names of thirty-eight Hungarian political émigrés for recruitment *(razrabotka),* and in another document, he listed 150 names—not just of Hungarians, but also Austrians, Germans, Poles, Bulgarians, and Russians. Of the total number of people upon whom Nagy is reported to have informed, fifteen were "liquidated" (shot) or died in prison, according to KGB archivists' calculations. "Volodya," his NKVD superiors wrote, is a "qualified agent" who shows great "initiative" and "an ability to approach people."[98]

Many caveats are in order here. First, given the *kto kogo?* (who to whom?) atmosphere of the 1930s in the Soviet bloc, with arrests and executions occurring in concentric circles, one was almost compelled to inform on others for survival, although even that didn't guarantee one's safety. Foreigners were especially vulnerable, because they were, as Russians say, "not ours" *(ne nashi).* Thus, for a foreign Comintern member, to be an NKVD agent was a mark of prestige and trustworthiness. One's loyalty to communism was measured by the number of people one either recruited *(zaverboval)* or informed upon *(donosil).* Many Comintern members had close ties with the NKVD or the GRU (*Glavnoe Razvedyvatel'noe Upravlenie*, or Main Intelligence Administration). At the time, there was nothing unusual in this; it was almost a given.

Second, these documents came to light in 1989, just when the Soviet hardliners, especially KGB chief Vladimir Kryuchkov, were trying to discredit the liberal reformers in Hungary. Indeed, Kryuchkov sent Gorbachev the incriminating dossier on Nagy on June 16, 1989—the day of Nagy's ceremonial reburial, which several hundred thousand Hungarian citizens attended in Heroes' Square *(Hősök Tere)* in downtown Budapest. The daylong ceremony came to symbolize Hungary's rush away from communist rule. The hardline

Kryuchkov, who was later one of the shrewder (and soberer) of the coup plotters of August, 1991, correctly perceived the developments in Hungary as a threat to communist rule and to Hungary's status as a Warsaw Pact ally. (There is another, more personal twist: Kryuchkov had himself served as Third Secretary in the Soviet embassy in Budapest in October–November, 1956, and had personally witnessed what he undoubtedly considered Nagy's treachery to the Soviet and communist cause. Perhaps he still carried a grudge, or at least grasped Nagy's importance as a historical symbol.) Third, since these archival documents, albeit authentic, were selected specifically to discredit Nagy and undermine political trends in Hungary in 1989, scholars should certainly be cautious in evaluating them, and it is possible that with fuller access to the archives scholars—not archivists or bureaucrats—may reach a more balanced assessment of Nagy's NKVD activities.

Ironically, the initial search for Soviet archival materials on Nagy may have been triggered by a 1988 inquiry from Hungarian reformist political figures, who had requested that all documents pertaining to Nagy's sentence and his activities while in the Soviet Union be declassified. Evidently Gorbachev opted not to disclose the Nagy file unilaterally, and just as Kryuchkov and other Soviet hardliners expected, the Hungarian leaders were loath to disclose the explosive information. When the documents were unveiled during an interparty consultation in the summer of 1989, and the topic of Nagy's NKVD connections was raised, Rezső Nyers, then the chairman of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (*Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt,* or MSZMP), demanded that the issue be dropped.[99] Meanwhile, Károly Grósz, the MSZMP General Secretary, broke the news to a plenum of the MSZMP Central Committee, which endorsed Grósz's proposal that the facts not be published. Only in February, 1993, when Kryuchkov's secret 1989 letter to Gorbachev was published in the Italian paper *La Stampa,* did Grósz agree to give an interview to the Hungarian newspaper *Népszabadság* the following month, confirming the authenticity of the documents, that Nagy did indeed inform on his comrades in the 1930s and early 1940s.[100]

In any case, twenty years after the Stalinist purges, Eastern European leaders were still vulnerable even in their home countries, especially as the Destalinization process came to an end. When he did shift his loyalties and struggled on the same side as the Hungarian insurgents in October–November, 1956, Imre Nagy took a heroic step indeed. In the end, in June, 1958, Nagy did not compromise. He died for his belief. As two of his countrymen, Miklós Molnár and László Nagy, put it: "If his life was a question mark, his death was the answer."[101]

Soviet Perceptions of Mátyás Rákosi

Another vital component of the Soviet image of Hungary was, of course, the Kremlin's opinion of Rákosi. If Nagy's life was a question mark and his death the answer, then Rákosi's life was an exclamation mark and his death a question mark. Never brought to trial for his humanitarian crimes, Rákosi was deported to the Soviet Union for life, dwelling first in Moscow (at the Barvikha sanatorium), then Krasnodar, Tokmak (Kirghizia), Arzamas, and finally in Gorky, where he died of natural causes on February 5, 1971.

Because the Kremlin leaders thought the problem was at the top, they thought they needed an "iron hand" like Rákosi's to maintain discipline, and there was no one else they could trust to take his place. Khrushchev is reported to have told Tito, "I have to keep Rákosi . . . because in Hungary the whole structure will collapse if he goes."[102] Soviet perceptions of Rákosi are worth examining, for, had Rákosi been removed earlier than mid-July, the Hungarian revolution arguably might never have taken place.

Mátyás Rákosi, called "the Last Mohican of the Stalinist Era," had clung to power long after the deaths or dismissals of the other Stalinist leaders in the Eastern European countries (with the exception of GDR and Romanian leaders Walter Ulbricht and Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej respectively).[103] Until eventually forced to, the Moscow leaders were too afraid to install Kádár or one of the other former political prisoners, assuming that these individuals would bear too heavy a personal grudge against Moscow, prompting them to do something unpredictable. It was hard enough for them to accept Gomułka as the new head of the Polish United Workers' Party, and had the Hungarian crisis not been so acute, they might not have allowed Gomułka to come to power.

This is not to say that the Kremlin did not have doubts about Rákosi. Perhaps because Hungary was the satellite that had most obediently imitated the Soviet dictator, it was most stubbornly resisting post-Stalin reforms.[104] The release of political prisoners was a vital component of Khrushchev's program of Destalinization. By the summer of 1956, Rákosi had still not freed about 150,000 Hungarian political prisoners, while in the other communist satellites the prisoners were freed more quickly from 1953 to the spring of 1956 (after Khrushchev exposed Stalin's crimes at the Twentieth Party Congress).[105] At one time Khrushchev complained about this, saying: "The detainees are being released slowly. This is Rákosi's fault, because he hasn't taken the matter in hand. Rákosi alludes to the fact that his nerves are bad. Nerves don't count."[106]

Nevertheless, to many of the Presidium members (viz. Mikhail Suslov,

Vyacheslav Molotov, and Marshal Zhukov), Mátyás Rákosi—despite his ruthlessness and hesitation to follow the New Course—had more leadership qualities than the alternative candidates: Gerő, Kádár, and József Révai. (Imre Nagy was not readmitted into the party until October 13, 1956—just one week before the student demonstrations—and thus was not eligible for the leadership posts.) On June 7, Suslov went to Budapest. Alarmed by Andropov's reports that the anti-Rákosi opposition was growing more vocal, the CPSU Presidium had decided a month earlier to send him there, but the trip was delayed.[107] Suslov concluded that Rákosi should not be removed, because "everything Rákosi has done was on the instructions of Stalin." He added, "Rákosi is no more to blame than we are in Moscow." He advised his Kremlin colleagues to keep Rákosi even though he "makes mistakes."[108]

Moreover, Suslov warned, getting rid of Rákosi would be a "gift to the Americans."[109] According to the notes kept by Vladimir Malin of the Soviet Presidium session on July 12, other officials agreed that, in light of the "subversive activities of the imperialists," Rákosi should be retained.[110] This suggests that the Soviet leaders' misperception of the Hungarian situation resulted directly or indirectly from U.S. and Western intelligence activities in East Central Europe. In any case, the Malin Notes of the Presidium sessions reveal that as late as July 12, 1956, the Soviet leaders had still not realized that Rákosi should be dismissed. Earlier on July 9, Andropov sent a cable to Moscow warning that Gábor Péter had written a letter to István Kovács (head of the commission investigating the so-called Farkas Affair described below), accusing Rákosi of direct involvement in the Rajk execution.[111] Gábor Péter was the former ÁVH chief.[112] In the letter, Péter claimed that when the interrogation about his involvement in the Rajk Affair began on April 16, 1956, the Procurator Pál Bakos interrupted Péter every time the latter mentioned the name Rákosi, with the words, "Don't talk about the old man!" Thus, Péter explains, the testimony he gave on May 4 was very limited: "I cannot answer these questions without talking about Mátyás Rákosi. Why? Because Belkin received direction on the Rajk case from Rákosi. [Belkin told me] 'He [Rákosi] always wants more and more.' 'Nothing is enough for him. Now we have to make it as though Rajk wanted to kill Rákosi.'"[113]

Clearly, the letter could further damage Rákosi's reputation. If Hungarian officials read the letter aloud at the July Plenum, as they plan to, Andropov wrote, Rákosi will be discredited.[114] Kremlin officials discussed Andropov's telegram at the July 12 Presidium session. They decided to publish an article to "rebuff the enemy."[115] Presidium members Pospelov, Shepilov, and Ponomarev were told to prepare an article about "international solidarity of

the toiling peoples' democracies and the intrigues of the imperialists, conducting their subversive work to weaken ties between the countries in the socialist camp."[116] An editorial was published in *Pravda* to this effect.[117]

This is not to say they were not receiving complaints about Rákosi, but until mid-July, 1956, the Moscow leaders seemed to practice what political psychologist Irving Janis termed "selective attention," that is, the choice of incoming data to fit preconceived views and the filtering out of all other data as irrelevant.[118] Like Khrushchev, Hungarian officials such as János Kádár were upset that Rákosi had not freed political prisoners faster. "We're afraid that in the changed situation comrade Rákosi will again return to his old arbitrary ways and throw us all in jail for being honest and devoted people," Kádár told Mikoyan on July 14.[119] The main complaint about Rákosi was that he was not sincerely taking responsibility for mistakes committed before 1953. As Kádár explained: There are three categories of people unhappy with Rákosi. The first [consists of] honest, dedicated communists who distrust Rákosi, doubting his ability to change his methods of leadership. The second category consists of people who oppose Rákosi because they are just confused, and the third group of people was comprised of obviously hostile elements.[120]

On the other hand, András Hegedüs, chairman of the Council of Ministers, thought the main problem was that Rákosi was too far removed from the people and even other Politburo members. The people closest to him were "Muscovites"—Hungarians who had lived abroad in the Soviet Union for too long. Hegedüs noted that at the latest Politburo session, Rákosi only criticized the Yugoslavs, omitting the positive steps the latter had taken, especially toward improving Soviet-Yugoslav relations. "The Politburo members clearly disagreed with Rákosi," he said. "But Rákosi states his opinions on issues without considering the possibility that his views are not shared by other Politburo members."[121] Other MDP officials were irritated by what they called Rákosi's "repeated zigzags in the political line in recent years."[122]

It should be noted that many Hungarian officials complaining about Rákosi were motivated simply by the instinct of self-protection. Politburo and Central Leadership member Béla Szalai confided to Mikoyan on July 13 that these people (including himself) had been promoted by Rákosi and worked closely with him during the Stalinist period and now feared that all of them together, the whole "kit and caboodle" *(vsiu garnituru),* would be sacked just for being associated with him. Hence the need to distance themselves. These officials approached the matter gingerly; they could not state forthrightly that Rákosi should be dismissed because they knew that Khrushchev was in favor

of keeping Rákosi. Szalai was referring to people such as Minister of Defense István Bata, Central Leadership members Béla Vég and Gyula Egri, and deputy chairmen of the Council of Ministers István Hidas and József Mekis.[123]

Hungarian Party Officials: Passive Aggressive?

From reports by Suslov and Andropov one grasps the degree to which the Soviet Presidium members who visited Hungary in the summer of 1956 directly influenced that country's decision making. This kind of interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign communist party did not give rise to any overt protests at the highest levels of the Hungarian Workers' Party (*Magyar Dolgozók Pártja,* or MDP). However, it did make Hungarian party officials search for other, more subtle means by which to influence Moscow's thinking. Archival documents reveal that the MDP officials behaved—to borrow another psychological term—in a "passive aggressive" manner. Traits of passive aggressive behavior include procrastination and avoidance of responsibility in most of one's interpersonal relations, often accompanied by silent anger toward authority figures.[124] This behavior is exemplified by the Rajk question, Farkas Affair, return of Kádár to the Politburo, Jewish question, use of the Yugoslav press and diplomatic corps, and eventual dismissal of Mátyás Rákosi.

A key mistake of Rákosi's was to murder so dedicated a communist as László Rajk, who was innocent, at least of the "crimes" for which he was executed in 1949. László Rajk served as Rákosi's Hungarian Minister of the Interior from 1946 to 1948 and then Foreign Minister. His show trial in September and October, 1949, marked the beginning of Stalin's sanguinary anti-Titoist witch-hunt that swept Eastern Europe from 1949 to 1952, and cost the lives of Traicho Kostov (Bulgarian CC member), Rudolf Slánský and Vladimir Clementis (both high-level members of the Czech Communist Party Central Committee), and the freedom of Władysław Gomułka (former general secretary of the Polish Communist Party).[125] For Rákosi the 1948 conflict between Stalin and Tito served as a convenient pretext to eliminate a dangerous rival. Rákosi accused Rajk of having plotted the murder of Stalin (and himself) as a tool of Tito.[126] Because Rajk had fought in the Spanish Civil War and was interned in France afterwards, he had been exposed to the West and was therefore suspect. Unlike Rákosi, who was one of the inner group of Moscow-trained Hungarian communists, László Rajk was a "red, white, and green" (Hungary-trained) communist. Rákosi coaxed János Kádár, Rajk's best friend, to persuade the former foreign minister to confess to crimes implicating Tito. Kádár told Mikoyan on July 14 that he first began to doubt the cor-

rectness of Rákosi's (and his own) actions, when he watched Rajk—minutes before dying—shout, "Long live the party, Stalin, and Rákosi!"[127]

Pressures mounted after the Twentieth Party Congress for Rákosi to elucidate the Rajk affair. On March 29, 1956, Rákosi reluctantly admitted in a speech in Eger that Rajk had been an innocent victim of "provocation." The police had "misled" the government, Rákosi claimed. He said nothing about his own role in Rajk's execution. He blamed everyone, including Lavrentii Beria, Victor Abakumov,[128] Mihály Farkas,[129] and Gábor Péter.[130] On May 18 Rákosi admitted a degree of responsibility for the mass repression in the 1949–1952 period, although not for the Rajk case.

It is clear that the MDP members had wanted to remove Rákosi long before Moscow did. In the spring and early summer months, these officials began, at first very subtly, and then more boldly, to set the Soviet diplomats against Rákosi. For example, András Hegedüs, the chairman of the Hungarian Council of Ministers, told Andropov on May 4 that, "Lately Rákosi has been working sporadically, neglecting to study the big political and economic issues. Sometimes he does not show the necessary interest in urgent, important matters."[131] On June 5, Kovács told Andropov more decisively that Rákosi constantly violated collegiality in the Politburo's work, and that "many good measures for improving the leadership go to waste due to Rákosi's conservatism." Kovács added that "it is necessary to work stubbornly on Rákosi to get him to change his methods of leading the Politburo, so that they conform more closely to the decisions of the 20th Party Congress of the CPSU."[132] One can see in these words an obvious attempt to induce Moscow to exert some influence on Rákosi.

Rákosi evaded Moscow's influence by scapegoating a subordinate, Mihály Farkas, who served as Minister of Defense from 1948 to 1953, and who had indeed been actively involved in the repression of that period. Rákosi may have chosen Farkas because the latter had also been denounced by the Kremlin at the June 13, 1953 meeting in Moscow as being "bossy." Bulganin had said: "Farkas likes glamour too much and passes himself off as a great commander." In Rákosi's newly declassified memoirs, he claims that Farkas had his troops march to a tune with the words, "I am a soldier of Mihály Farkas!"[133] Rákosi was referring to the Áron Gábor March of 1849, which Farkas amended to his own taste.

After the June Plenum in 1953, Farkas briefly had moved closer to the reformist wing of the Hungarian Workers' Party headed by Nagy. Earlier, in January, 1953, he was arrested along with other ÁVH officers, because Rákosi had heard that his boss Péter had complained about Rákosi to Beria. And even

though Farkas again distanced himself from the reformers, Rákosi could not forgive him for his "betrayal."[134] In the spring of 1956, he decided to sacrifice Farkas in order to save himself, the main person responsible for the repressions. (Three years earlier, he had sacrificed Gábor Péter, mentioned earlier, who as the head of the Hungarian state security organization, was also heavily implicated.)

In March 1956, István Kovács, the leader of the Budapest party organization, was appointed, as mentioned above, to head a special party commission to investigate the Farkas Affair, namely Farkas's role in the execution of László Rajk. Earlier, during their chat, both Rákosi and Andropov agreed that "the very discussion of the Farkas affair at the [upcoming] Central Leadership plenum will aggravate the situation in the party, since the rightist and hostile elements will probably redirect attention from Farkas onto him [Rákosi], which will lead to Rákosi's dismissal or at least compromise him." But Kovács assured Andropov that the commission would try not to implicate Rákosi. However, on May 7 Kovács told Andropov that, unfortunately, the commission had found material proving that Farkas was a "bloody murderer" *(krovavyi ubitsa)* and that Rákosi was also involved. "We will have to gloss over *[smazat']* this evidence," Kovács continued, so that Rákosi's authority will not be tarnished at the forthcoming Plenum.[135] On June 4, Politburo member Ernő Gerő told Andropov that it "would not be so easy to reach a 'calm' decision now about Farkas." Kovács made a point of asking for Andropov's advice about whether to bring Farkas to trial. As Andropov wrote to Moscow, "I refrained from replying, saying only that I thought the Farkas affair should be investigated in a way to strengthen the party's authority."[136]

One has to wonder, though, about how sincere Kovács, Gerő, and other Hungarian party leaders really were about their stated intention to "gloss over" Rákosi's role in the Rajk execution. They were still going ahead with the muckraking operation and planning to publicize their findings. In a sense, they were playing a double game. On the one hand, they communicated to Moscow their concern that the committee investigating the Farkas Affair had gone too far in its exposure, but on the other hand, they did not try to interfere at all with the committee's work, thus giving themselves the opportunity to use the material against Rákosi at some later time. Their instinct of self-preservation proved to be stronger than their personal devotion to Rákosi.

Kovács went even further. During these conversations with Andropov in early June the Hungarians were expecting Suslov's visit. Knowing this, Kovács tried to test the waters beforehand. How would Moscow react, he asked, if it turned out that the Hungarian Politburo had already been thinking about

getting rid of Rákosi? How should we Hungarians behave if the advice from the CPSU Central Leadership does not fit the point of view of the Hungarian Politburo, and Central Leadership at the upcoming plenum? In this way Kovács probed for a solution that would lead to Rákosi's dismissal without angering the Kremlin.[137]

When Suslov arrived in Budapest on June 7 to study the situation firsthand, he became more concerned about the Farkas Affair than about Kádár's possible promotion (discussed below). He convinced the Hungarian communists to discard their original idea of holding a special forum devoted solely to the Farkas Affair, and instead to discuss the new five year plan first, thus deemphasizing the former.[138]

Generally, in comparison to the reports from the Soviet diplomats, Suslov's report to Moscow was much calmer in its appraisal of the "rightist" opposition. He merely acknowledged that legal violations had occurred from 1949 to 1952, and that the party leaders should have corrected these mistakes more quickly. While the strategy that many Hungarian hardliners used as a way to induce Moscow to act firmly was to paint all dissatisfied persons as "hostile elements," Suslov, on the contrary, thought some unhappy people were still honest communists.[139]

Promoting Kádár was yet another way for the Hungarian reform communists subtly to thwart Rákosi, who they knew was adamantly opposed to readmitting Kádár. He had been arrested in 1951 and released in 1954 while Nagy was prime minister. In the fall of 1955 Kádár became party secretary in Pest County, as mentioned above. On April 18, Rákosi complained to Andropov, "Kádár has become a hero; all the oppositional elements have made his name their banner in the struggle against the party leadership."[140] Gerő and Hegedüs both assured Andropov in separate meetings that pressure would steadily mount for Kádár to reenter the leadership anyway, and that he would be more dangerous to the Politburo outside it than within it.[141] Judging from the diplomatic reports, the Soviet embassy had been watching warily as a number of prominent communists and former Social Democrats who had been imprisoned in the forties and early fifties reentered the political arena. Released from 1954 to 1956, these people (including Kádár, György Marosán, and others) were reputed to be secret opponents of Rákosi. Many of them had the support of reformists in the party apparatus and party organizations in Budapest factories. Suslov thought that bringing Kádár into the Politburo would mollify the disgruntled party members and would morally bind Kádár himself. Kádár was thus readmitted to the Politburo in July, 1956.

Magnifying the Jewish issue could also be seen as the Hungarian party

members' subtle attempt to unseat Rákosi and to promote Kádár, and later Nagy. Beginning in 1953, but increasingly since Khrushchev's Secret Speech, some Hungarian communists claimed that the mood in Hungary was increasingly anti-Semitic, and that it was necessary for a non-Jew (or as they put it delicately someone of "Hungarian nationality") to replace Rákosi (and later Gerő). Much hatred among the Hungarian population was directed against the "big four" Hungarian communist leaders who dominated Hungary in the postwar period, who all happened to be Jewish: Mátyás Rákosi (Róth), Mihály Farkas (Wolf), József Révai (Lederer), and Ernő Gerő (Singer).[142] During the June 1953 meeting in Moscow, Beria had derisively alluded to Rákosi as a "Jewish king." According to a telegram written during his visit to Budapest in June, Suslov also considered the number of Jews in the top leadership to be a real problem.[143] Kryuchkov, too, reported the issue as a problem during his conversation with István Király, editor of the journal *Csillag*.[144] Kádár told Andropov that only during Rákosi's arbitrary rule did Jewishness become associated with the regime, implying that once Rákosi was dismissed, anti-Semitism would dissipate.[145]

Exerting influence on Yugoslav diplomats and journalists was another passive-aggressive tactic Hungarian party officials used to communicate ideas they could not express directly. By exploiting the Yugoslavs' grudge against Rákosi for his role in the anti-Titoist Rajk Affair and playing on the idea that the elimination of Rákosi would expedite Soviet-Yugoslav rapprochement, the Hungarians found a ready ear for their complaints about Rákosi. The Yugoslav journalists—unlike Hungarians—were then able to publish articles with minimal censorship. This angle will be explored in more depth in the next chapter.

Mikoyan's Visit and Rákosi's Dismissal

Rákosi, of course, was eventually removed at the Plenum beginning on July 17. Soviet leaders had decided at the CPSU Presidium session of July 12 to send Mikoyan to Budapest.[146] In order to alleviate Rákosi's situation, they also decided to appeal to the Italian communist leader Palmiro Togliatti to help strengthen Rákosi's authority, perhaps by giving an interview to *Szabad Nép* journalists a plan that was quickly overcome by events.[147] The next day, July 13, CPSU Presidium member Anastas Mikoyan flew to Budapest and immediately met with the Hungarian Politburo members Rákosi, Gerő, Hegedüs, and Béla Vég. Judging from the documents, the CPSU Presidium was unclear how closely the "Hungarian comrades had followed Suslov's advice in June about strengthening the unity of the party." The Presidium had thus not made

a final decision about Rákosi's fate and had given Mikoyan the authority to decide on the spot.[148]

Mikoyan assessed the situation more critically than Suslov had the previous month. Soon after his arrival, he realized that "day after day more power is falling out of the hands of the comrades," and that "the press and radio have fallen out of the control of the CC."[149] Even Rákosi at one point admitted on that day that stepping up arrests would not help: "If we arrest some, others will make trouble; if we arrest them, still others will revolt, and there will be no end to it."[150]

Mikoyan apparently informed the Kremlin leaders on July 13, either by telephone or just before his departure, of his opinion that Rákosi should resign. On the same day the CPSU Central Committee sent a telegram to Togliatti: "The situation in Hungary has changed, since the party leaders have said that it will probably be impossible to keep Rákosi as the Central Leadership General Secretary. Comrade Mikoyan, now in Budapest, thinks there is probably no other alternative. . . . Thus if *Szabad Nép* asks for an interview . . . it is desirable to strengthen the position of the Hungarian people's republic. Direct support of Rákosi, given the changed conditions, would be ill-timed."[151]

The Kremlin leaders apparently approved of Rákosi even as they dismissed him; reconciliation with Tito may have motivated them the most in firing him. "He conducted himself correctly," Mikoyan wrote.[152] Rákosi told his party colleagues that he had been planning on retiring but thought he should try to correct his mistakes himself. Despite his distrust and disliking of Kádár, he recommended him as a replacement. We now know that Rákosi's conciliation stemmed from a belief that he would remain in Budapest, in the party, and could rule behind the scenes. In fact, as mentioned earlier, Rákosi was exiled to the Soviet Union for life, where he died on February 5, 1971. Even before the October uprising, Gerő and Hegedüs in Budapest requested that Rákosi be retained in the USSR since he would only complicate matters if he returned to Hungary. Rákosi continually tried to establish contact with Hungarians. He called at least three people: Gerő while the latter was in the Crimea; his younger brother Zoltán Bíró (director of the Party Academy, *pártfőiskolát*); and János Boldoczki (the Hungarian Ambassador to the USSR). Rákosi was never brought to trial and publicly condemned for the mass repression of the 1949–53 period and for his other political mistakes. As late as May, 1957, Rákosi still thought that he could return to Hungary, and claimed that the revolution had occurred because of his absence from the country since July, 1956![153]

The selection of the unpopular Ernő Gerő (also Jewish) to replace Rákosi further illustrates the Hungarian officials' timidity and Soviet leaders' misperceptions of the Hungarian situation. Gerő told Andropov on August 2 that he had the impression, after talking with officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the State Planning Office (*Állami Tervhivatal,* or the Hungarian equivalent of "Gosplan") that the party members welcomed the decisions of the July Plenum (namely, his election as First Secretary) and would uphold them.[154] In reality, the majority of speakers at the July Plenum described Gerő as "coarse *[zhiostkii],*" "impatient," and "very austere in his relations with people." They said: "He . . . does not tolerate criticism, does not follow the advice of comrades, . . . [and] does not love the people."[155] This is the kind of individual whom Mikoyan—pouring gasoline on fire—advised to avoid all concessions and restore discipline!

Only a week after Gerő's election, Kremlin leaders received ample warnings from strategically placed secret agents that the election was not a solution. Serov conveyed to them snatches of conversation overheard among writers, journalists, and members of the underground noncommunist parties, namely that Rákosi's dismissal is just the first step to the liquidation of the Central Leadership's unity; it only masks the process; Gerő's appointment is "playing with fire"; he "will not last more than a year."[156] Even as late as October 24, one day before his dismissal, Soviet leaders apparently believed Imre Nagy's assurances that only people "from below" *(snizu)* were calling for Gerő's resignation, not those at the Central Leadership level.[157] In fact, Kádár and other party officials believed Gerő was a poor choice. On November 3, on the eve of the second invasion, Khrushchev candidly admitted, "Mikoyan and I are to blame for suggesting Gerő rather than Kádár. We gave in to Gerő."

Speaking after Khrushchev, Kádár further developed the theme: "It is worth discussing mistakes . . . why in the summer they chose Gerő as secretary. The Soviet comrades always helped, but there was one mistake: only 3–4 Hungarian comrades enjoyed the full trust of the Soviet comrades: Rákosi, Gerő, Farkas. But among others there are many orderly people. Three to four individuals monopolized relations between Hungary and the USSR. This is the source of many mistakes."[158]

A key event intensifying the popular unrest occurred on October 6, during Gerő's absence from Hungary, when about two hundred thousand people gathered in Budapest to rebury László Rajk's remains. Although this ceremony was later dubbed "rehearsal for a revolution," it remained nonviolent. However, archival documents reveal the anxiety Hungarian officials experienced. Two days before the event, Géza Kassai, Deputy Minister of Education, told

M. I. Petunin, second secretary in the Soviet embassy, how unfortunate it was that the reburial had to occur so late, when the situation was so tense. If it had been scheduled four or six weeks after the July Plenum, he said, it would not endanger the party, "but right now it is not clear how this measure will end." Kassai stressed the importance of getting the party to organize the funeral; keeping it peaceful; hiding signs of nervousness; and coopting the widow, Júlia Rajk. "If the reburial takes place without her participation," he repeated several times, "then it will be a serious loss to the unity of the party." Although perhaps her demand that the casket be placed in front of the Parliament building was excessive, he said, "one must compromise with her *[poiti ei na ustupki]* because the party will only lose otherwise." In Kassai's opinion, Rajk had not even been a very authoritative leader in the party, but "the Rajk trial personifies all the unfairness and illegality committed toward a series of honest communists, all dedicated to the cause of the working class."[159]

Directly after the Rajk reburial (October 6) members of Budapest University's Faculty of Philology organized a demonstration, which technically could be considered the "first" student demonstration of the Hungarian revolution.

Once the MDP leaders permitted the Rajk reburial, Nagy's readmission to the party was inevitable. "The question of Nagy ripened *[nazrel],*" Kassai said. Much attention has been paid to the method of solving problems by discussing them, so "Nagy is right in demanding that his mistakes be concretely defined."[160] By October 12, Andropov foresaw that the MDP would probably have to readmit Nagy to the party and "maybe even to the Politburo."[161] The next day, October 13, Nagy was brought back into the MDP, a week before the first student revolt.

Conclusion

In sum, given its history, political culture, and language, Hungary was prone to anti-Soviet sentiments, which explains in part why Hungary was the first satellite to try to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact. The Soviet leaders did not control Hungarian politics as much as formerly believed. Ironically communism and Soviet expectations of Hungary's strict obedience to the "first socialist state" blinded the Moscow leaders to Hungary's intrinsic anti-Slavic sentiments and contributed to a flawed image of the satellite country. They harbored misleading or ambiguous beliefs about Nagy, Rákosi, and Gerő, and about the source of the Hungarian conflict in general. Hence the CPSU leaders were their own worst enemy.

Hungarian officials also managed tactfully to influence Moscow's opinions. While the early removal of Rákosi may have prevented the revolution, however, one must shun single-factor explanations. Hungarian party officials are not beyond blame; they might have tried to engineer Rákosi's overthrow more energetically. Moreover, U.S. intelligence activities in East Central Europe may have buttressed the Kremlin's belief that Rákosi's strict governance was crucial. The dissatisfaction among workers and managers due to low wages and other hardships caused by the inefficient Stalinist model imposed on the Hungarian economy also paved the way toward the uprising. Other causal factors include the dissatisfaction of the peasants in the countryside, and the long-simmering anger and guilt of the intellectuals since 1953.