

Miklós Mitrovits

Institute for Central European Studies, Ludovika University of Public Service

Institute of History, HUN-REN Research Centre for the Humanities

Orcid: 0000-0002-4774-8046

Doi: 10.51918/ceh.2023.1-2.2

### **Abstract**

Czechoslovakia's attitude to the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 is a little-known story. Papers published in the past three decades have presented only the reaction of the Czechoslovakian and Slovakian political leaders.

This study promises more than that. It is the first attempt to present, in a complex way, not only the documents of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ) and Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS), but also the documents of the Czechoslovak People's Army, the Interior Ministry and the economic documents, in order to show how Czechoslovakia reacted to the Hungarian Revolution and how it helped the Hungarian government headed by János Kádár, which was formed after the suppression of the Revolution, in the process of consolidation.

This study provides a synthesis of thousands of pages documents from the archives of Prague and Bratislava relating to the events of the Hungarian Revolution.

### **Keywords**

Hungarian revolution of 1956, Hungarian-Czechoslovakian relations, Soviet Union, communism, Kádár regime, economic relations, Cold war

Miklós Mitrovits

## The role of Czechoslovakia in the Revolution of 1956 and in the consolidation of the Kádár regime

The international context of the revolution of 1956 is rather well known. Historians have been particularly interested in the behaviour of the Soviet Union, especially the decision-making process within the Kremlin.<sup>1</sup> Some attention has also been paid to the reactions of other neighbouring countries to the uprising. Hungarian–Yugoslavian and Hungarian–Romanian relations have engaged the attention of researchers since these two countries played an active role in developments in Hungary.<sup>2</sup> However, Hungarian–Czechoslovakian relations have not received as much attention. To address this lack, this paper benefits from some recent publications that are especially valuable due to their focus on primary sources.<sup>3</sup> The studies that are available mainly discuss the impact

- 1 See the Hungarian translation of the most important Soviet sources: Gál, Hegedüs B., Litván, and Rainer M., eds., *A „Jelcin-dosszié.”*, Szereda and Sztikalin, eds., *Hiányzó lapok*. Hegedüs B., Kende, Litván, Rainer M. and S. Varga, eds. *Döntés a Kremlben*. In English, see Békés, Malcolm Byrne and M. Rainer, *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution*.
- 2 The most relevant collections of documents about Hungarian–Yugoslavian and Hungarian–Romanian relations in 1956–1958 were published in Hungarian, see: Ormos, Vida, Kiss and Ripp, eds., *Magyar–jugoszláv kapcsolatok.*, Méliusz, ed., *Magyar–román kapcsolatok*, Nagy, *Snagovi jegyzetek*. Key literature on Hungarian–Romanian relationships in 1956 and afterwards: Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for all Seasons.*, Bottoni, *Stalin’s Legacy in Romania*.
- 3 The most widely read account of the events of the year 1956 in Czechoslovakia is: Blaive, *Promarněná příležitost*. However, this primarily talks of domestic affairs and says little about the ways the KSČ responded to the Hungarian revolution. An even more recent study is: Simon and Michálek et al. *Revolúcia v susedstve*. Also, in Hungarian language, Simon ed., *Az 1956-os forradalom visszhangja Csehszlovákiában*. For more on the echo of the revolution of 1956 in Czechoslovakia see: Janek, “*Czechoslovakia and the Hungarian Revolution in 1956*” Bencsik, “*Csehszlovákia és Magyarország 1956-ban.*” Tűma, “*The Impact of the Hungarian Revolution on Czechoslovakia, 1956–1968*”. On the reactions within

of the revolution on Czechoslovak politics and society, especially on the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia. It is not common knowledge that Czechoslovak politics had a profound impact on how Hungarian politics unfolded. Having analysed Czech and Slovak archival material, one may conclude that Czechoslovakia – after the Soviet Union – played a central role in stabilizing János Kádár's regime. The assistance it provided in the domains of politics, the economy and internal investigation significantly contributed to the restoration of "socialist order" and to establishing the new outline of politics in Hungary.

This paper takes a complex approach and in addition to presenting the way the revolution affected the Czechoslovakian political leadership it also analyses their response and the outcome of the measures they took.<sup>4</sup> Both the events of 1956 and the subsequent emergence of the Kádár regime were transnational historical processes in the East-Central-European region.

### Preventing a revolution: the countermeasures of the KSČ

Czechoslovakia differed from the other East Central European Stalinist-type state socialist states in many ways. Two factors need to be highlighted that had a bearing on the events discussed here. First, it is necessary to recognize the importance of the fact that Klement Gottwald, the Stalinist leader, had died in 1953, shortly after Stalin. The second factor was the comparatively better economic conditions of the country.

1) The party got rid of its Stalinist leader, Gottwald, with his natural death. The other leading Stalinist figure, Rudolf Slánský, was executed during Gottwald's rule. It is important to add that the newly elected leaders – Antonín Novotný, who became the first secretary of the party, Viliam Široký who was elected prime minister, and Antonín Zápotocký who was appointed to be the head of state – had already occupied key positions in the Gottwald regime. Thus, at first, they tried to emphasize signs of transformation. The separation of these posts was a necessity, but this decision pushed

---

the Slovak party leadership see: Pešek, "Maďarské udalosti roku 1956 a Slovensko"; Kiss, "1956 ősze Szlovákiában", Marušák, "Az 1956-os magyar forradalom és Szlovákia".

4 Here I would like to express my special thanks to Péter Bencsik. Between 2015 and 2018 we conducted joint research in Czech and Slovak archives, and as a result of this work we published more than 300 documents in Hungarian translation, see: Bencsik and Mitrovits eds., „A Szovjetunióval örök időkre és soha máshogy!”

the leadership towards taking collective decisions in place of the much-criticized cult of a single leader. Criticism of Gottwald did not begin right away, and there was even an attempt to construct a cult of personality for him with quasi “religious” devotion. However, in February 1956, when Nikita Khrushchev launched his campaign against the cult of Stalin, the Czechoslovak leaders were able to claim that they had already established a collective leadership immediately after Stalin’s death. At the same time, they did not intend to take De-Stalinization further (such as by admitting the Stalinist crimes and rehabilitating its victims) since most of them had been personally involved in the terror of the previous years. Therefore, when De-Stalinization appeared on the agenda in 1956, they blamed everything on Gottwald and Slánský.

2) The better economic conditions and higher standards of living compared to other state socialist countries were also superficial phenomena. However, the growing social tensions only sparked protest demonstrations when the leadership announced a “monetary reform”. In reality, this reform involved nationalizing the savings held by individual households. The reaction of Czechoslovak society was straightforward. There were protests in hundreds of settlements, including Plzeň. The party leadership put these uprisings down violently, employing units of the Ministry of the Interior and the military to suppress them. They also drew conclusions about this popular reaction. They declared that the policies of a “new phase” would be launched and introduced measures to improve standards of living in subsequent years.<sup>5</sup> The impact of the latter could already be felt in 1954, during the 10<sup>th</sup> congress of the KSČ. So much so that the leadership decided to halt the “new stage” and was returning to previous policies.

Despite the two factors mentioned above, Czechoslovakian leadership, just like their Polish, Hungarian, East German or Bulgarian counterparts, were also concerned about various manifestations of social unrest and tried to prevent them. The workers’ unrest of 1953 was a recent memory both in Czechoslovakia and in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Moreover, decisions taken at the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the CPSU and the secret speeches that Nikita Khrushchev delivered about Stalin’s sins had begun to mobilize the societies of East Central European countries.

In February 1956, members of the delegation of the KSČ were confident when they arrived at the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Only a few weeks had passed since the first meeting (27–28 January) of the Political Con-

5 Mitrovits, “The First Phase of De-Stalinization,” 188.

sultative Committee of the Warsaw Pact had been held in Prague. However, Novotný received signals that made him rewrite his speech that would have included a section on the greatness of Stalin which the KSČ Political Bureau (PB) had approved of. Instead, he chose to spoke about the efficiency of collective leadership.<sup>6</sup>

The KSČ quickly adapted to the new situation and made use of the opportunity that the modified leadership structure created. By August, they had managed to stabilize their situation and kept voices of dissent under control. In April some writers had voiced dissent, while in May, university students spoke up and sometimes protested openly, but none of these groups managed to win the support of wide sections of Czechoslovak society, unlike in Poland and in Hungary, in the second half of the year. The country's leadership responded by expressing moderate self-criticism then attacked the initiatives that came from below. Fabricated court cases from the Stalinist era were not reviewed, and rehabilitation of political opponents was unthinkable. Moreover, the leadership blamed Slánský as the mastermind of the terror even though he himself fell victim to a show trial. While in Hungary, one of the most notable victims of the show trials, László Rajk, was rehabilitated and received a proper and public second funeral, this could not have happened in Czechoslovakia in the same period. The KSČ could afford to take such an approach because there was no charismatic personality, like Władysław Gomułka in Poland or Imre Nagy in Hungary, behind whom internal opposition could have rallied.<sup>7</sup>

The KSČ leadership called a party conference instead of a congress for the summer of 1956. It was an achievement in itself that the leadership managed to refuse demands for an extraordinary congress to which local party organizations could have elected representatives. Importantly, it was the right of district level party organizations to appoint the delegates that would take part in the national party meeting. The leadership argued that there was no need to change the policies that the party had been following until then, as the collective leadership was able to solve the problems that had arisen, thus, there was no need to hold a congress. Accordingly, the first speakers at the conference claimed that the congress of 1954 had taken the right direction. Eventually, the

6 See the draft of Novotný's planned speech in National Archives (Národní Archiv) of the Czech Republic (hereafter NA), fond (f.) 1261/0/11, svazek (sv.) 83. archivní jednotka (aj.) 101/8. See Novotný's actual speech in *Rudé právo* (Prague), 17 February 1956.; More details see: Pernes, *Krise komunistického režimu*. 128–172.

7 For more details of the political events in Czechoslovakia see: Matthews, *Majales*., and McDermott and Sommer, *The 'Club of Politically Engaged Conformists'?*

meeting introduced some measures of decentralization but the Plzen decrees issued by the leadership ordering decrease of prices in the shops more than once before the end of the year proved to be more important.<sup>8</sup>

The political line that the KSČ followed differed from that the approach which the Polish and the Hungarian communist parties adopted in several aspects. In Hungary, the political struggle between Imre Nagy and Mátyás Rákosi caused swings between De-Stalinization and Re-Stalinization. The events of 23 October 1956 thus released social tensions that had built up for some time. By October 1956, when political change began in Poland and the revolution started in Hungary, the Czechoslovakian party leadership had consolidated its position and attempted to take advantage of the unclear conditions in neighbouring countries to showcase the success of its own policies and to gain support by playing on the fears of the public.

### The KSČ and the Hungarian revolution

Despite all its efforts to prevent social unrest, the leadership of KSČ could not be certain that Czechoslovakian society would not swing into action due to impulses that might cross the border. It was not only the workers' uprising in Poznań that were a source of concern. Groups of intellectuals and media channels such as the Petőfi Circle in Hungary and the newspaper *Po Prostu* in Poland) kept intellectuals in a state of fermentation and the influence of these movements permeated into the society at large in Hungary and Poland. Hence, it is not surprising that the leadership of KSČ closely followed the developments in neighbouring countries and tried to prevent these from influencing the domestic situation.

The leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia observed the events in the Hungarian People's Republic (MNK) with apprehension and exceptional interest from the very beginning. On 24 October, KSČ General Secretary Antonín Novotný accepted an invitation from the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev, to visit Moscow, where he attended a meeting of the Presidium of the CPSU Central Committee and was therefore able to gain first-hand background information regarding the initial Soviet military intervention in Hungary the previous

8 Zápotocký's speech in NA, f. 1481/0/3, sv. 4., aj. 38.; Novotný's speech in NA, f. 1261/0/43, inv. č. 100., ka 67., and NA, f. 1481/0/3, sv. 4., aj. 39.

day. CPSU officials had originally invited Novotný and other leaders of the socialist camp to Moscow in order to discuss the changes that had taken place within the leadership of the Polish United Workers' Party, although the situation in Warsaw had stabilized in the meantime and the uprising that had begun in Hungary on 23 October thus became the main item on the agenda of the meeting.

With General Secretary Novotný away in Moscow, President Antonín Zápotocký chaired a session of the Political Bureau of the KSČ Central Committee, during which Interior Minister Rudolf Barák presented a report<sup>9</sup> on the situation in Hungary and those in attendance held a brief round of deliberations. Zápotocký declared during this convocation of the PB in Prague that “the situation is serious—our positions have weakened.” The Czechoslovak head of state furthermore emphasized that public opinion must be informed and that the KSČ must strengthen its connection to the masses. Zdeněk Fierlinger expressed support for Zápotocký's views, while Viliam Široký and Jaromír Dolanský strongly criticized the leadership of the Hungarian Working People's Party (MDP) and issued anxious assessments of the situation. Nearly all of the KSČ Political Bureau members present at the meeting expressed their unease. Fierlinger asserted that the events in Hungary would entail unpleasant consequences, although he added that “we will see if they weaken us or not. Maybe this will strengthen agreement [within the socialist camp], assuming that we overcome the difficulties. [...] We will see the degree to which the new regime is capable of overcoming the difficulties and containing reaction.” PB members agreed that they must establish contact with the Polish and Hungarian leaders and work closely with the CPSU because they could achieve nothing without Soviet assistance.<sup>10</sup>

During this session of the KSČ Political Bureau, the PB endorsed an order issued by Interior Minister Barák (order no. 108/1956) commanding all Interior Ministry entities to put themselves in a state of readiness and to exhibit “unity of action and the high-

9 NA, f. 1261/0/11, sv. 120, a.j. 147/zápis.

10 We could not find documentation regarding the deliberations that took place during this meeting of the KSČ Political Bureau. However, they are quoted in the following book: *Kaplan, Kronika komunistického Československa*, 440–441. One should note that the latter book erroneously states that KSČ General Secretary Novotný and Interior Minister Barák presented an oral account of the events in Hungary at a PB meeting on 23 October. This meeting actually took place on 26 October. Also on the latter date, Barák ordered all Interior Ministry sections to place themselves in a state of full alert by 28 October. Kaplan's book otherwise contains exceptionally valuable source materials regarding the period from 1953–1956.

est degree of vigilance.” This order specified a 50-percent state of readiness for both the police and other armed security detachments in the Slovak regions.<sup>11</sup> The PB also adopted a resolution calling for the body to provide the KSČ with information regarding the events in Hungary and to draw attention to the party’s proper political course.<sup>12</sup>

One hour after the beginning of the KSČ PB meeting in Prague, the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS) convened in Bratislava and in accord with the resolution of the national party composed a telegram informing the regional and district committees of the KSS of the events taking place in Hungary. The KSS Political Bureau also prohibited the distribution in Slovakia of newspapers and periodicals published in Hungary<sup>13</sup> and ordered that the People’s Militias be placed on high alert.

The thinking of Czechoslovak leaders regarding the events in Hungary had already begun to take a definite shape by 24 October. The KSČ Political Bureau declared in a resolution that party policy had been correct because it had never diverged from the political course adopted at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and had steadfastly maintained the unity of the party and the working class and the close connection between the party and the people. Moreover, KSČ policy strove to continually increase the standard of living in the country, to fortify and develop people’s democracy, strengthen its friendship with the Soviet Union, mobilize the masses and improve the productivity of the centrally planned economy. According to the KSČ resolution, should the party fail to clearly define this political course it would lead to internal power struggles and as in Hungary provide counterrevolutionary forces with the opportunity to organize a putsch aimed at removing the country from the socialist

- 11 Tajný rozkaz ministra vnitra, ročník 1956, číslo 105 in Security Service Archive (Archiv bezpečnostních složek) Prague (hereafter ABS), A6/3-1047, Sign.: TRMV-105/1956.
- 12 Informing the masses was naturally to the task of the party and the secretaries of the regional and district committees. On 24 October, 1956, neither *Rudé právo*, the official newspaper of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, nor *Új Szó*, the Hungarian-language newspaper of the Communist Party of Slovakia, carried any information about the events taking place in Hungary. The first news of the uprising appeared on 25 October, when newspapers reported that “counterrevolutionary forces” had launched an unsuccessful putsch.
- 13 Predsedníctvo ÚV KSS, Október, rok. 1956, k. 932. in Slovak National Archives (Slovenský národný archív), Bratislava (hereafter SNA). The Secretariat of the Communist Party of Slovakia had already decided on 19 October, 1956, to subject the distribution in Slovakia of newspapers and periodicals published in Hungary to prior approval from party press authorities. SNA, Sekretariát ÚV KSS, Október–November, rok 1956, k. 143.



camp. However, some Czechoslovak leaders expressed optimism at this time. Interior Minister Rudolf Barák, for example, declared in his previously mentioned secret order that “the attempt of the imperialists to provoke upheaval is destined to fail.”

On the same day, the commander of the Second Military District (Slovakia and some territories in Moravia), Colonel Václav Vitanovský, who also served as the head of the ČSLA general staff operational department, flew to Bratislava in order to inspect the situation along the Czechoslovak–Hungarian border. The next day, the National Defence Minister, General Bohumír Lomský ordered that “units of the army and units belonging to the Interior Ministry be placed in a state of readiness in accordance with orders aimed at maintaining calm and order and the security of the state borders.”<sup>14</sup>

The General Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Antonín Novotný returned to Prague from Moscow early in the morning of 25 October. Later on that same day, Novotný presented the results of his talks in Moscow to the KSČ Political Bureau. He told the PB that the CPSU’s General Secretary, Khrushchev had essentially confirmed the assessment of the KSČ that events similar to those taking place in Hungary could be avoided through the continual increase in living standards: “They won’t listen to malignant voices if their bellies are full.” The party general secretary noted with satisfaction that Khrushchev had cited Czechoslovakia (ČSR) as a positive example.<sup>15</sup>

The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia leaders also took every possible measure to prevent even the slightest disturbance from taking place in the country. They placed particular emphasis on forestalling possible agitation on the impending anniversary of the foundation of the Czechoslovak state on 28 October, 1918, an interwar-period red-letter holiday on which communist security services had always prepared for possible mass demonstrations. The commanding officer in charge of public security placed Interior Ministry Directorate VII on full alert beginning at 1 p.m. on 26 October and ordered that 75 percent of its personnel patrol the streets of Prague from 5 p.m. to 1 a.m. until further notice.<sup>16</sup> On this same date, Interior Minister Barák issued secret order no. 110/1956 stating that “even the smallest provocation among reactionary elements under the influence of the events in Hungary must be prevented.” Barák therefore ordered all Interior Ministry units to go on full alert from 1 p.m. on 27 October to 10 p.m. on 28

14 Military History Archive (Vojenský historický archiv), Prague (Hereafter VHA Praha), MNO 1956, k. 465, sg. 2/8.

15 NA, f. 1261/0/44, ka. 133, inv. č. 305. sign. 124.

16 ABS, Rozkaz náčelníka VII. správy MV, ročník 1956, číslo 25, H-669-3.

October.<sup>17</sup> Later on 27 October, the KSČ Political Bureau adopted a resolution containing this order.<sup>18</sup> Also on that day, Barák issued secret order no. 112/1956 instructing all Interior Ministry units to maintain access to sufficient arms and ammunition and for all members of these units to carry the prescribed amount of ammunition for their service weapons.<sup>19</sup>

At the same time similar measures were taken not only in the Interior Ministry but also in the army. On 26 October, the Chief of Staff of Czechoslovak People's Army, Colonel General Václav Kratochvíl described the measures that had been taken in the Second Military District during a meeting with the Minister of National Defence, Bohumír Lomský and members of his advisory council.<sup>20</sup> Colonel General Kratochvíl stated that the 560-kilometer southern border of Slovakia had been divided into six sectors. Kratochvíl reported that the 30-kilometer section of the border on the right bank of the river Danube around the Bratislava bridgehead had received the greatest reinforcement – 1,022 ČSLA and Interior Ministry troops operating under the authority of the commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, with 24 tanks, four 76mm guns and three self-propelled guns.<sup>21</sup>

On 29 October, Czechoslovak People's Army Colonel General Kratochvíl and Lieutenant General Jaroslav Dočkal, who served as the head of the ČSLA operational directorate, issued a report warning that "counterrevolutionary forces" may attempt to incite insurrection in Czechoslovakia:

The possibility that counterrevolutionary forces will attempt to infiltrate our territory and spread the uprising to Slovak regions cannot be excluded. It is also possible that counterrevolutionary groups will be driven onto our territories in the process of their liquidation. In this case, the enacted measures will not be sufficient.<sup>22</sup>

17 ABS, Tajný rozkaz ministra vnitra, ročník 1956, číslo 107, A6/3-1049, Sign.: TRMV-107/1967.

18 NA, f. 1261/0/11, sv. 119, a.j. 146/4.

19 ABS, Tajný rozkaz ministra vnitra, ročník 1956, číslo 109, A6/3-1051, Sign.: TRMV-109/1956.

20 VHA Praha, MNO – sekretariát ministra 1956, k. 3. Sign.: 1/10.

21 The decision to concentrate ČSLA forces around the Bratislava bridgehead was based on the need to defend the most important city in Slovakia as well as on the fact that a large group of Hungarian insurgents had attacked Czechoslovak border guards near Mosonmagyaróvár on 26 October. VHA Praha, MNO 1956, k. 476. sg. 001474.

22 VHA Praha, MNO 1956, k. 476. sg. 001474.

One of the members of Minister of National Defence Bohumír Lomský's advisory council declared during an extraordinary meeting on 29 October that "voices supporting territorial demands vis-à-vis Czechoslovakia have begun to surface among the insurgents." Nevertheless, Lomský rejected the idea of ordering a partial mobilization because "this would arouse the sentiment that we are mobilizing against the Hungarian People's Republic."<sup>23</sup>

The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia did not adopt an official position towards the government led by Prime Minister Imre Nagy that had come to power in Hungary on 24 October, although it explicitly qualified the events taking place on the streets of Budapest as a *counterrevolution*. As early as 24 October, directives approved at a session of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of Slovakia Central Committee referred to "counterrevolutionary bands," "counterrevolutionary elements" and "counterrevolutionary speech." While the contents of a report that the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia Political Bureau adopted on this same date are unknown, one may presume that the KSČ PB articulated many of the same ideas regarding the uprising in Hungary in this document as the Slovak branch of the party did in its directives. Articles published in Czechoslovak newspapers on 25 October referred to the events in Hungary as an attempted "counterrevolutionary putsch" in accordance with the established positions of the KSČ and KSS. On 26 October, the commanding officer in charge of public security in Prague issued an order that characterized the Hungarian uprising as a "counterrevolution."

The Czechoslovak communist interpretation of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution greatly magnified and exaggerated the extremely marginal role that fascist elements and members of the Horthy-era political élite had played in the uprising. KSČ and KSS rethoric regarding the revolution referred repeatedly to "reactionary elements," "belligerent rogues," "counts," "émigrés," "Horthyite-fascist officers" "landowners," "capitalist exploiters," "old failed parties," "complete anarchy," "tumult," "street demonstrations," "bloodshed," and "the merciless depredations of [private] property." Czechoslovak party officials concluded that the establishment of a "fascist dictatorship" via the "counterrevolution" in Hungary would result in the reemergence of territorial revisionism in the country. This notion was to form one of the primary elements of official Czechoslovak propaganda.<sup>24</sup> It is important to note that there was no political program or even slogans

23 VHA Praha, MNO – sekretariát ministra 1956, k. 3. Sign.: 1/10.

24 The ethno-nationalist interpretation of the events of 1956 was also dominant in Romania. Both regimes gave this as reason for the repressive measures against the Hungarian minority.

during the protest demonstrations of 23 October 1956 or later that called for reconstituting the pre-war regime. That is, the return of the Horthy-regime was not on the agenda of the revolutionaries.<sup>25</sup> The political program of the revolution was essentially a leftist one (as it was founded on the idea of workers' self-governance) and, due to the Soviet intervention, it was also a movement for independence. The purpose of the Czechoslovakian propaganda was to incite fear among Czechs and Slovaks. Presenting the situation in Hungary to the Czechoslovak public as it actually was would not have produced the desired outcome for the regime. The leaders of the KSČ calculated that Czech and Slovak society despises the pre-World War II Hungarian regime and if they project the revolution as a revisionist project they would win over the support of society.

On 2 November 1956, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia's General Secretary, Antonín Novotný and the ČSR Prime Minister Viliam Široký met in Bucharest with the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Nikita Khrushchev,<sup>26</sup> who informed them that the Presidium of the CPSU Central Committee had decided to intervene militarily in Hungary. After returning to Prague later that same day, Novotný immediately convened a meeting of the KSČ Political Bureau at which he and Široký notified the PB members that the Soviet Union was preparing to suppress the "counter-revolution" in Hungary by force. The members of the Political Bureau agreed that "they [the Soviets] should take all necessary measures in order to preserve the people's democratic system in Hungary; in case of need, [the KSČ PB] will not only sanction these measures, but will actively participate in their implementation as well."<sup>27</sup>

A day after the KSČ's leaders learned that the Soviets were preparing to intervene militarily in Hungary, ČSLA Chief of Staff Václav Kratochvíl issued order no. 1 calling for the deployment of military units to defensive border positions located in the Second Military District. Colonel General Kratochvíl's order signalled the beginning of the redeployment of ČSLA forces in the district and their reinforcement through the call-up of 15,000 Czech and Slovak reservists over the following four days.<sup>28</sup> This fortification

25 The sole exception was the speech by Cardinal József Mindszenty demanding the restitution of large estates. However, Mindszenty did not actually influence the way the revolution unfolded.

26 Czech and Slovak academic literature often erroneously states that this meeting took place in Moscow. See Bílek and Pilát, "Bezprostřední reakce československých politických," 502, and Marušiak, "Az 1956-os magyar forradalom és Szlovákia," 67.

27 NA, f. 1261/0/11, sv. 120, a.j. 151/1.

28 Bílek, Dufek, Fidler, Pilát, Selner and Šlosar, eds., *Vojenská a další opatření Československa*. 86-89.

of the Hungarian-Slovak border in fact represented one aspect of the first coordinated military operation based on the 1955 Warsaw Pact: along with the reinforcement of Romanian People's Army units stationed along the Hungarian-Romanian frontier, it was designed to prevent "counterrevolutionaries" from crossing into neighbouring Eastern Bloc states during the Soviet invasion of Hungary.<sup>29</sup>

On 3 November, ČSR President Antonín Zápotocký delivered a radio address during which he naturally made no reference to the impending Soviet military intervention in Hungary, although for the first time he employed certain rhetorical devices that came to constitute a completely independent narrative about the events that were taking place south of the border. Zápotocký declared at the very beginning of his speech that "The counterrevolution raging in neighbouring Hungary over the past few days has instigated fascist white terror against the working people." The president of Czechoslovakia then identified the instigators of the "counterrevolution" in Hungary:

Reactionary elements, belligerent rogues, counts, fascists and various other émigrés who fled from Hungary in 1945 in order to escape the Soviet army and later on in order to elude the wrath of the people are slowly sneaking back into the country from the West. Horthyite-fascist officers have begun to make noise within the army.<sup>30</sup>

The first rhetorical element of President Zápotocký's address that subsequently became a fundamental component of KSČ and KSS propaganda about the 1956 Hungarian Revolution was its portrayal of the "working people" as the passive victims of "white terror." Party officials consciously omitted any reference to the role that workers had played in the revolution, particularly their participation in the spontaneously formed workers' councils that had helped put an end to the Hungarian Working People's Party monopoly on power in Hungary. The second element of Zápotocký's speech that became an essential component of Czechoslovak party propaganda regarding the revolution was its depiction of former members of the Horthy régime who had returned to Hungary from exile, that is, fascists who had fled to the West following the Second World War, as the leaders of the uprising. The purpose of such propaganda was to arouse fear among Czechoslovak citizens – many of whom maintained vivid memories of interwar Hungarian revisionism, the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia in the years 1938–1939

29 Bílek and Pilát, "Bezprostřední reakce československých politických a vojenských organů na povstání v Maďarsku," 507–508. See more: Michálek and Štefánský, *The Age of Fear*, 259–262.

30 NA, f. 1261/0/35, sv. 34. a.j. 1023. Új Szó (Bratislava), 5 November 1956.

and Regent Miklós Horthy's entry into the city of Kassa/Košice on horseback following the annexation of southern Slovakia by Hungary via the First Vienna Award in November of 1938 – in order to increase their support for KSČ policies.<sup>31</sup>

On 4 November, the defence minister's advisory council formulated the following policy statement during another extraordinary meeting:

As long as Hungarian units do not cross the frontier, Interior Ministry organizations will be responsible for border security working in the closest possible cooperation with units of the army. The moment the state borders are transgressed, the commanders of the divisions and regiments will assume control and responsibility in their own zones.

Moreover, this policy called for "opening fire" on Hungarian aircraft that entered Czechoslovak airspace if they did not respond to warnings.

Four Soviet generals participated in this meeting during which they transmitted a request by the USSR's Minister of Defence, Marshal Georgy Zhukov that the ČSLA lend the Soviet army ammunition for 100mm anti-tank guns and 122mm howitzers and an additional 10 tons of fragmentation ammunition.<sup>32</sup> Also on 4 November, the Czechoslovak Minister of National Defence, Lomský ordered that ČSLA units stationed in the Second Military District be placed at a 50-percent state of readiness.

### The KSS assisting the propaganda of the Kádár regime

The situation that developed in Hungary as a result of the revolution presented the Communist Party of Slovakia, specifically its General Secretary, Karol Bacílek, with the most significant challenge it had ever faced. This challenge stemmed partially from the fact that the "opposition faction" of the Slovak intelligentsia that had coalesced around the Union of Slovak Writers weekly *Kultúrny život*—specifically the periodical's chief editor Juraj Špitzer, former KSS Central Committee Political Bureau member Ondrej Pavlík, writers' union secretary Ctibor Štítnický and poet Ivan Kupec, some of whom

31 See David's speech to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Assembly, *Rudé právo* (Prague), 7 November 1956; Rudolf Barák's speech at the mass meeting in Brno, 7 November 1956. ABS, A2/1-1979; Viliam Široký's speech at the mass meeting in Prague, *Rudé právo* (Prague), 8 November 1956; Viliam Široký's speech at the National Assembly, *Rudé právo* (Prague), 2 December 1956.

32 VHA Praha, MNO – sekretariát ministra 1956, k. 3. Sign.: 1/10. (see: 97. dok.); and VHA Praha, MNO 1956, k. 476. sg. 001474.

were regarded as the “Slovak Imre Nagy”—had refused to accept all of the resolutions that the KSČ had adopted at its summer 1956 party conference and continued to demand the rehabilitation of the victims of the Stalinist purge such as Vladimír Clementis, Gustáv Husák and the associates of the latter. By the autumn of 1956, the KSS leadership had sensed the prevailing mood and planned to put an end to this opposition. The General Secretary of the KSS, Bacílek, who was also a member of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia Political Bureau, therefore convened a meeting of the KSS PB on 18 October and in the presence of KSČ General Secretary Novotný called for a campaign against improper viewpoints. The KSS Political Bureau then adopted a resolution stipulating that Juraj Špitzer be dismissed as editor-in-chief of *Kultúrny život*.<sup>33</sup>

The KSS leadership also feared that revolutionary attitudes could spread into Czechoslovakia from Hungary as a result of the ease with which the border between the two countries could be crossed, the large number of Hungarians living in Slovakia and the distribution in the ČSR of newspapers and periodicals published in Hungary. Before the October uprising, between 3.5 million and 4 million copies of 220 such newspapers and periodicals were distributed in Czechoslovakia.<sup>34</sup> Readers could either subscribe to these publications or purchase them at newsstands and post offices. KSS leaders were particularly concerned about the content published in the Hungarian Writers’ Union weekly *Irodalmi Újság* and, later on, the Hungarian Working People’s Party daily newspaper *Szabad Nép*. On 19 October, 1956, the Communist Party of Slovakia Political Bureau therefore decided to make the distribution of newspapers and periodicals published in Hungary contingent upon authorization from the party press authority, which “will not permit inappropriate things to appear,” and furthermore prohibited the dissemination of that day’s issue of *Szabad Nép*.<sup>35</sup> On 23 October, the press authority again banned the distribution of that day’s issue of *Szabad Nép* in Czechoslovakia—this time because the MDP daily had published an unabridged translation of the speech that Polish United Workers’ Party General Secretary Władysław Gomułka had delivered to

33 Following the suppression of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and the consolidation of the post-revolution Kádár régime in Hungary, the Communist Party of Slovakia Political Bureau decided in April 1957 not to dismiss Špitzer from his post as chief editor of *Kultúrny život* after all. Cf. Marušiak, “Slovakia and the 1956 Hungarian Revolution,” 95.

34 Cf. SNA, Predsedníctvo ÚV KSS, Október–November, rok. 1956, k. 933; and SNA, Sekretariát ÚV KSS, rok 1956, k. 154.

35 SNA, Sekretariát ÚV KSS, Október–November, rok 1956, k. 143.



the Eighth Plenary Session of the PZPR Central Committee a few days previously. On 24 October, the KSS Political Bureau prohibited the further distribution of newspapers and periodicals from Hungary.<sup>36</sup>

As a result of this measure, the availability of the Hungarian press in Czechoslovakia was limited to a few periodicals dealing with technology, science and art that were obtainable exclusively at the Orbis Publishing House's foreign press shop in Bratislava. Orbis provided only a few prominent subscribers with a very limited number of Hungarian political dailies and weeklies—e.g., 47 copies of the daily newspaper *Népszabadság* that was founded in November 1956, 24 copies of the literary weekly *Élet és Irodalom* launched in May 1957 and 12 copies of *Népakarat*, the temporary successor of the trade-union newspaper *Népszava*. It was only much later, on 19 June, 1957, that the KSS Political Bureau decided to ease these restrictions.<sup>37</sup>

On 16 November, 1956, the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of Slovakia decided to compensate for the drastic restriction of access to the press published in Hungary by authorizing the launch by the Cultural Association of Hungarian Workers of Czechoslovakia (CSEMADOK) of a new Hungarian-language weekly entitled *A Hét* with a circulation of 11,000 copies.<sup>38</sup> In addition to permitting CSEMADOK to publish this 24-page cultural journal, the KSS PB increased the circulation of the following Hungarian-language periodicals: the daily newspaper *Új Szó* from 50,000 copies to 70,000 copies; the women's biweekly magazine *Dolgozó Nő* from 15,000 copies to 19,000 copies; the agricultural weekly *Szabad Földműves* from 13,000 copies to 17,000 copies; and the youth weekly *Új Ifjúság* from 6,000 copies to 10,000 copies.<sup>39</sup>

However, the KSS leadership not only prevented the Hungarians of Slovakia from obtaining newspapers and periodicals published in Hungary and provided them with publications that disseminated "correct viewpoints," but also strove to propagate the party's own interpretation of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution among the Hungarian population living south of the border. The Hungarian-language radio station in Rimaszom-

36 SNA, Predsedníctvo ÚV KSS, Október, rok. 1956, k. 932.

37 See 36. dok.

38 Former *Új Szó* editor Viktor Egri was appointed to serve as editor-in-chief of this new weekly. SNA, Predsedníctvo ÚV KSS, December, rok. 1956, k. 934.

39 SNA, Predsedníctvo ÚV KSS, Október–November, rok. 1956, k. 933.



bat (Rimavská Sobota, Slovakia)<sup>40</sup> and the special issues of the Bratislava daily *Új Szó* that were published specifically for distribution in Hungary beginning on 28 October, 1956, played a significant role in this undertaking.

On 29 October, the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of Slovakia established two control centres—one for organizational purposes and the other for supervising propaganda operations. The PB appointed the Central Committee department chairmen Eugen Turzo and Matej Petrína to lead the organizational control centre and the propaganda control centre, respectively, and CSEMADOK President Gyula Lőrincz<sup>41</sup> to serve as the collective director of both organizations. Furthermore, the KSS Political Bureau established party offices at the following locations in order to provide support for operations along the Czechoslovak–Hungarian border: Révkomárom (Komarno); Párkány (Štúrovo); Ipolyság (Šahy); Fülek (Fil’akovo); Rozsnyó (Rožňava); Szepsi (Moldava nad Bodvou); and Kassa (Košice).<sup>42</sup>

The PB of the KSS also formed a 40-member group of Hungarian-speaking functionaries that was intended to facilitate communication between the party leadership and regional and district officials and to conduct agitation at the local level. As a result of personal connections, the KSS Central Committee was able to provide the party’s lower echelons with precise information and implement organizational measures.<sup>43</sup>

The newspaper *Új Szó* was the official Hungarian-language daily of the KSS Central Committee. Beginning in 1955, the subservient CC member Ferenc Dénes served

40 Hungarian-language broadcasts reached the territory of Hungary from six radio stations in Slovakia—two large ones and four smaller ones. SNA, Predsedníctvo ÚV KSS, Október–November, rok. 1956, k. 933.

41 The Cultural Association of Hungarian Workers of Czechoslovakia functioned under rigorous party oversight. On 29 October, 1956, Csemadok publicly condemned the Hungarian revolution. This condemnation was then published in *Új Szó* the following day. This denunciation of the uprising in Hungary prompted around ten percent of the members of Csemadok to withdraw from the organization. However, the majority of Hungarians living in Slovakia reacted passively to news of the revolution—to the satisfaction of the party leadership. On the response of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia to the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, see the following works: Szesztay, *Nemzetiségi kérdés a Kárpát-medencében*, 36–44 and 66–73; Simon, “A szlovákiai magyarok és az 1956-os forradalom,” 41–55. and 85–92; and Popély, *Fél évszázad kisebbségben*, 218–223.

42 SNA, Predsedníctvo ÚV KSS, Október–November, rok. 1956, k. 933.

43 SNA, Predsedníctvo ÚV KSS, December, rok. 1956, k. 934 and SNA, ÚV KSS, Zasadnutia plén, 12–13. 12. 1956, k. 1836.

as the editor-in-chief of *Új Szó*, while a group of four to five people operating under the strict supervision of the party headquarters determined the newspaper's content—most of which consisted of strictly censored Czechoslovak News Agency (ČTK) reports and Hungarian-language translations of articles from the previous day's issue of *Rudé právo*. Very few independently written articles appeared in *Új Szó*.<sup>44</sup> On 29 October, 1956, the KSS Political Bureau retroactively approved the publication of special issues of *Új Szó* intended for distribution in Hungary.<sup>45</sup> A total of 25 such special issues of *Új Szó* were published during the periods from 28 October 28 to 11 November and from 20 November–2 December with an average circulation of 50,000 copies. These editions of *Új Szó* were not, however, identified as special issues and displayed the same volume and number as the regular edition of the newspaper. Many of the articles published in the special issues of *Új Szó* distributed in Hungary were identical to those that appeared in the “mother publication” and thus reflected the official positions of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Both editions of *Új Szó* cost 30 fillér, the subunit of the Hungarian forint and the Hungarian-language name for the subunit of the Czechoslovak koruna (*halér* in Czech and *halier* in Slovak). In addition to the special issues of *Új Szó*, around 20,000 copies of four issues of the youth periodical *Új Ifjúság* and 3,000 copies of one issue of the women's magazine *Dolgozó Nő* and 10,000 copies of two KSS Central Committee–drafted Hungarian-language leaflets were distributed in Hungary.<sup>46</sup>

KSS party workers of Hungarian ethnicity illegally transported these publications across the border into Hungary, primarily to the northern counties of Győr-Sopron, Komárom, Nógrád and Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén. KSS leaders attempted to convince themselves that Hungarians in Hungary would be interested in Hungarian-language publications and radio transmissions from Slovakia.<sup>47</sup> However, most Hungarians living south of the border in fact rejected the Czechoslovak party propaganda disseminated via these print and broadcast media.<sup>48</sup> Party committees from the Nitra, Banská

44 Popély, “Az Új Szó szerepvállalása,” 5–18.

45 SNA, Predsedníctvo ÚV KSS, Október–November, rok. 1956, k. 933.

46 SNA, Predsedníctvo ÚV KSS, December, rok. 1956, k. 934.

47 See, for example, Augustín Michalička's report to the Communist Party of Slovakia Political Bureau on 9 November, 1956 (SNA, Predsedníctvo ÚV KSS, Október–November, rok. 1956, k. 933) and Július Bielík's account of the 17 November, 1956, meeting between members of the KSS PB and writers from Slovakia (SNA, Predsedníctvo ÚV KSS, December, rok. 1956, k. 935).

48 One report described this attitude thus: “I do not completely share the opinion that our news-

Bystrica and Košice (Nyitra, Besztercebánya and Kassa, respectively, in Hungarian) regions of southern Slovakia nevertheless dispatched several dozen operatives per day to the northern counties of Hungary<sup>49</sup> in order to conduct agitation, collect intelligence, perform reconnaissance and advise local communists.

In addition to conducting propaganda in both Czechoslovakia and Hungary, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and its regional affiliate in Slovakia enacted measures aimed at coordinating the operations of the state security services, the police and the army at the time of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. During the first days of the uprising, representatives from the KSČ, the KSS, the security services and the army established a joint staff with its headquarters at the office of KSS General Secretary Karol Bacílek in Bratislava. A Stalinist member of the KSČ Political Bureau, Bruno Köhler served as the leader of this staff, which also included Major General Dittrich, Deputy Interior Minister Josef Kudarna and the head of the Interior Ministry's Bratislava regional directorate, Josef Houska.<sup>50</sup> The most important initiatives of this staff, which essentially exercised the functions of the Political Bureau, were subject to approval from the Secretariat of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia Central Committee in order to ensure unity of action throughout the country.<sup>51</sup>

Both the KSČ and the KSS played a role in the consolidation of the János Kádár-led government that came to power in Hungary following the suppression of the 1956 revolution. On 17 December, 1956, the Ambassador of Czechoslovakia to Hungary, István Major stated in a telegram that the Central Committee of the post-revolutionary successor party of the MDP, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP), had requested that the second volume of the *Fehér Könyv* (White Book)<sup>52</sup> be printed in the

---

papers helped so effectively. A really strong anti-Soviet mood prevailed there [in Hungary]. If our newspapers began with news about the Soviet Union, many people immediately ripped them up" (SNA, Predsednictvo ÚV KSS, Október–November, rok. 1956, k. 933). Czechoslovak News Agency reporters also described the anti-Czechoslovak atmosphere in Hungary at this time to members of the Communist Party of Slovakia Political Bureau. NA, f. 1261/0/11, sv. 122, a.j. 155/22.

49 See Marušiak, "Az 1956-os magyar forradalom és Szlovákia," 70.

50 Ibid, p. 66.

51 See the report that Karol Bacílek presented at the December 1956 plenary session of the Communist Party of Slovakia Central Committee in SNA, ÚV KSS, Zasadnutia plén, 12–13. 12. 1956, k. 1836.

52 See *Ellenforradalmi erők a magyar októberi eseményekben*.

ČSR. The *Fehér könyv* presented the Kádárist narrative of what it characterised as the counterrevolutionary events that had taken place in Hungary in October 1956. The book presented facts and photos that the Hungarian state security service had gathered along with distorted or fabricated stories. The publication aimed to prove that the revolutionary events were actually anti-Socialist and counterrevolutionary and, thus to justify Soviet military intervention and confirm the legitimacy of Kádár's government. Until 1989, these publications constituted the foundation of the official narrative about the birth of the Kádár regime. Therefore, these books were of the utmost importance for Kádár and his circle.

István Major claimed in the telegram that printing the second volume of the book in Czechoslovakia was necessary for the following reason: "They [members of the MSZMP Central Committee] said that the printing-house workers are sabotaging the publication of the *Fehér könyv*. This is why it took one month to publish the first volume." The ambassador noted that the MSZMP Central Committee had stipulated that 150,000 copies of the 64-page book be printed on 60-gram rotary paper.<sup>53</sup>

On 21 December, 1956, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia Central Committee Secretariat decided to undertake the task of printing the second volume of the *Fehér könyv*. The KSČ CC Secretariat ordered 13 tons of the paper that would be required, which was delivered in early January 1957. However, on 16 January, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party Provisional Central Committee (PCC) informed the Secretariat that the book would be longer than previously planned, thus its printing would require an additional 19 tons of paper. Károly Kiss, a member of the MSZMP Provisional Central Committee, subsequently requested in a letter that the third volume of the *Fehér könyv* also be printed in Czechoslovakia. Kiss noted that the printing of this volume of the book would require 40 tons of paper.<sup>54</sup>

53 Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Archiv Ministerstva zahraničních věcí), Prague (hereafter AMZV), Teritoriální Odbory – Tajné, 1955–1959, Maďarsko, kr. 1, obal 6.

54 SNA, Predsedníctvo ÚV KSS, Február–Marec, rok. 1957, k. 941. The official daily newspapers of the KSČ and the KSS both published a series of lengthy articles regarding the *Fehér könyv* in December 1956. *Rudé právo* published it in three instalments that appeared on 14, 15 and 16 December and *Új Szó* did so in six instalments that appeared under the title "The Depredations of the Counterrevolutionary Forces in Hungary" (Ellenforradalmi erők garázdálkodása Magyarországon) between 15 December and 21 December.

On 13 February, 1957, the KSS Political Bureau recommended that the KSČ Secretariat authorize the acquisition of the 19 additional tons of paper needed to print the second volume of the *Fehér könyv* and approve the request for 40 tons of paper to print the third volume of the book. The KSS PB also decided on this date to send the initial 30,000 copies of the second volume of the *Fehér könyv* to Budapest along with a KSS delegation led by Pavol Tonhauser that would be traveling to the city on 16 February.<sup>55</sup>

In addition to delivering these copies of the *Fehér könyv*, Tonhauser and the Director of the KSS Agitprop Department, Matej Petrina met with Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party General Secretary János Kádár and other high-ranking MSZMP functionaries such as Antal Apró, Oszkár Betlen, István Szirmai and Károly Kiss in the course of their three-day visit to Budapest. These officials agreed during their consultations from 16–18 February to organize a series of meetings between the members of the KSS Central Committee and the MSZMP Provisional Central Committee in Budapest at the end of the month. MSZMP officials also asked Tonhauser and Petrina to ensure that the remaining 69,400 copies of the second volume of the *Fehér könyv* be delivered as soon as possible and requested that the previously stipulated 40 tons of paper be sent directly to Budapest so that the third volume of the book could be printed there rather than in Czechoslovakia.<sup>56</sup>

Communist Party of Slovakia General Secretary Bacílek sent a report regarding the talks that had taken place in Budapest to the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Novotný and asked him for permission to hold the requested meetings between the KSS CC and the MSZMP PCC.<sup>57</sup> On 5 March, 1957, the KSČ Political Bureau authorized this conference, which was eventually held between 3 May and 5 May. The five members of the KSS Central Committee delegation that travelled to Budapest for the consultations—Pavel Tonhauser, Matej Petrina, František Dvorský, Augustín Michalička and Václav Moravec—also visited the Ganz Works during their stay in the city and attended an official dinner in the company of several members of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party Provisional Central Committee members, including János Kádár, György Marosán, Antal Apró and Sándor Rónai at which the MSZMP general secretary expressed his appreciation for the assistance that Czechoslovakia had provided Hungary. At the end of the three-day visit, the MSZMP PCC representatives who had

55 SNA, Predsedníctvo ÚV KSS, Február–Marec, rok. 1957, k. 941.

56 NA, f. 1261/0/11, sv. 131, a.j. 171/11.

57 Ibid.

participated in the talks—Károly Kiss, Miklós Somogyi, József Sándor, József Prieszol and Sándor Jakab—proposed the publication of a joint declaration expressing their gratitude for the support that the KSS had furnished “during the counterrevolutionary events in October.” However, the Communist Party of Slovakia delegation rejected this proposal.<sup>58</sup> Presumably, they did so because they had reasons not to admit that they had helped. First, the leaders could not estimate how far the Hungarian minority living in Czechoslovakia sympathized with the revolution. Second, although the standards of living were higher in Czechoslovakia than they were in Hungary, the government did not want society to know that they had provided food to “rebellious Hungarians” when Czechoslovakia had their own economic issues.

### **The role of KSČ in the political consolidation of the Kádár-regime**

On 15 November 1956, an eight-member ČSR government delegation composed of the following officials arrived in Hungary: Prime Minister Viliam Široký; Minister of Health Josef Plojhar; Local Economy Minister Josef Kyselý; Deputy Foreign Minister Ladislav Šimovič; Deputy Foreign Trade Minister Alois Hloch; State Construction Industry Committee President Emanuel Šlechta; trade representative Jan Bušniak; and academic and United Agricultural Cooperatives President Ivan Málek.

Prime Minister Široký was the first head of government to make an official visit to Hungary following the Soviet intervention on 4 November that had put an end to the revolution that had begun in Budapest 12 days earlier. The political situation had not yet stabilized in the country by the time of the Czechoslovak government delegation’s visit, as Ambassador Major reported in telegrams he sent home on 13, 14 and 15 November, asserting on the first of these dates that “the government does not enjoy the support of the broader masses.”<sup>59</sup> The Interior Ministry Directorate station chief at the Czechoslovak embassy in Budapest, Ladislav Křováček (Děkan)<sup>60</sup>, also sent reports to Prague describing the continued political unrest in Hungary, claiming that he had witnessed manifestations of extreme nationalism and revisionist sentiment in the country following the Soviet intervention.<sup>61</sup>

58 NA, f. 1261/0/11, sv. 142, a.j. 185, bod 12.

59 AMZV, Teritoriální Odbory – Tajné, 1955–1959, Maďarsko, kr. 1, obal 6. (Major 0439).

60 His pseudonym was “Nezval”.

61 ABS, f. I.S-8, reg. sz. 80353/000, č. 1. 38-39. “Nezval” sent his reports to Colonel Jaroslav

Široký and the other members of the Czechoslovak government delegation wanted to meet the MSZMP general secretary in person, in order to gain a better understanding of his viewpoints and to demonstrate to the world that the countries of the socialist camp supported the new leadership of Hungary that had come to power with the help of the Soviet Union.<sup>62</sup> During his talks with the Široký-led delegation, Kádár recounted the events that had taken place in Hungary between 23 October and 4 November, often distorting or intentionally ignoring the facts surrounding his activities during this period. Kádár told the members of the Czechoslovak delegation that the failure of former Hungarian Working People's Party First Secretary Mátyás Rákosi to recognize his own mistakes even after the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU and the ability of the MDP leader to dupe Soviet officials into maintaining their support for him had been the primary causes of Imre Nagy's rise to power and the increase in anti-Soviet sentiment in Hungary even within the party intelligentsia.<sup>63</sup> The Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party general secretary falsely claimed that he had served as an intermediary between the party and the demonstrators on the day of 23 October and had participated in a collective decision to request a Soviet military intervention on the evening of that date. Kádár also made the unfounded assertion during his meeting with the Czechoslovak government officials that the "counterrevolution" had been "an action based on a precise military plan." The MSZMP leader obviously intended by making these misrepresentations to obscure the reality that he had been a member of the first Nagy government formed after the outbreak of the revolution and to exempt him from the necessity of explaining why he had dissolved the Hungarian Working People's Party.<sup>64</sup>

In a moment of candour, Kádár presented the Czechoslovak government officials with a frank assessment of the first Soviet intervention that began on 24 October, claiming in much the same way as Tito had during his speech in Pula that this intervention had failed to quell the unrest in Budapest because "the uprising's base of support had

---

Miller, who then forwarded them to the Interior Minister, Rudolf Barák.

62 Delegations from the German Democratic Republic and Romania subsequently made official visits to Budapest as well.

63 For more details regarding Kádár's statements to the Czechoslovak government delegation, see AMZV, *Politické zprávy II.* (1945–1977), Budapešť 1956.

64 Kádár's duplicity regarding his actions during the uprising had little impact on Novotný, who had learned the true reasons for the Soviet military interventions in Hungary during his consultations with Khrushchev in Moscow on 24 October and in Bucharest on 2 November.

broadened [. . .] the people believed that they were defending state sovereignty by fighting against the Soviet units.”<sup>65</sup> The MSZMP general secretary claimed that Imre Nagy and the members of his cabinet had adopted the democratic slogans of the insurgency because they knew that they would lose power in an election conducted via secret ballot and thus had to remain loyal to the demands of the street. Kádár said that counter-revolutionary groups organized abroad, specifically former gendarmes and “Horthyite officers” who “had been under arms for eight years in West Germany,” had infiltrated Hungary via Austria and transformed the legitimate national movement into a “chauvinist counterrevolution.”

This interpretation was also presented in the decision that the Central Committee of the MSZMP made on 5 December 1956. This false narrative served to excuse the Soviet military intervention and legitimize the Kádár regime. The Czechoslovak leaders also subsequently adopted this interpretation and eagerly utilized it to describe the uprising in Hungary.

In the course of his deliberations with the Czechoslovak government officials, Kádár attempted to separate the working class from the “counterrevolution,” which the MSZMP general secretary claimed “began during the final stages of the Imre Nagy government”—thus after he had left the cabinet and gone to Moscow in order to request that the Soviets intervene to defend socialism in Hungary. This argument revealed that Kádár was in a difficult situation. Kádár acknowledged that “neither the party nor the trade union exercises any impact over a significant portion of the Budapest working class,” although he attributed this lack of authority to deception and the armed intimidation of the workers.

Following Kádár’s discourse, Czechoslovak Prime Minister Široký repeated almost verbatim the speech that KSČ officials had already delivered several times at locations throughout the ČSR. Široký criticized the Hungarian Working People’s Party’s leaders for failing to utilize the opportunities that had emerged as a result of the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, which had thus resulted in factional strife within the MDP and alienated the party from the masses. The Czechoslovak head of government declared that the forces of “reaction” and “counterrevolutionary” groups that had previously been active in Hungary following the overthrow of the Soviet Republic in 1919 and were at

65 On 11 November, 1956, Tito expressed his opinions regarding the Hungarian uprising and the essence of the Soviet system during an address to League of Communists of Yugoslavia activists in the Istrian port city of Pula. Népszabadság, 17 November 1956.



this time operating in the service of international imperialism had exploited this division between the Party and the people in order to gain the allegiance of the masses through appeals to their legitimate discontent in an attempt to detach the country from the socialist camp and transform the region into a hotbed of conflict. Široký showed no interest in the reality of the complex political conditions that prevailed in Hungary in November 1956, focusing entirely on the international repercussions of the stifled uprising and the need to preserve the unity of the socialist camp. He therefore furnished Kádár with no practical advice regarding the possible means of consolidating his power.<sup>66</sup> It soon became clear that the aim of the KSC leadership was to put pressure on Kádár to resist the processes of decentralization more decisively, instead of vacillating.

The Czechoslovak party and government leaders frequently referred to the main principles proclaimed in the CPSU Central Committee resolution of June 1956. On 15 November, ČSR Prime Minister Viliam Široký declared during talks with MSZMP General Secretary János Kádár—who also served as Hungary’s head of government—that “Western imperialist circles” had recognized the positive impact that the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU had had on the “peace movement” and the campaign to liberate colonized peoples and that it “has therefore tried to turn back the wheels of history in at least a few places in the world.” The prime minister of Czechoslovakia warned the general secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party that these forces were attempting to provoke discord between the people’s democratic states:

They want to undermine the unity of the socialist camp at any cost and have attempted to drive a wedge between various countries that are fighting against imperialism. This is why they launched a war against the Egyptian people as well. Imperialist circles seek to destroy the unity of the socialist camp at every turn.<sup>67</sup>

Široký told Kádár that the failure of the Hungarian Working People’s Party to apply

66 Kádár thus provided only a very short account of his consultations with Czechoslovak officials on 15 November during a meeting of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party Provisional Executive Committee held the following day. Sipos, Némethné Vágyi and Balogh eds., *A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt*, 61.

67 Communist Party of Czechoslovakia General Secretary Antonín Novotný employed this same reasoning in a speech he delivered during the two-day plenary session of the KSC Central Committee that began on 5 December, 1956. This conclusion also appeared in the subsequent Central Committee resolution and the report that the CC submitted to the body’s Secretariat on 3 January, 1957.

the tenets articulated in the CPSU Central Committee resolution had diminished the outlook of the working class, transforming Hungary into a fertile ground for the efforts of the “Western imperialists” to plant the seeds of dissent.<sup>68</sup> The Czechoslovak head of government, slightly altering Klement Gottwald’s previously cited maxim, cautioned the MSZMP general secretary that “When the party does not speak, when the Central Leadership does not formulate the political program for socialist construction, various social groups such as the Petöfi Circle, the writers and the students understandably devise their own policies.” Finally, Prime Minister Široký asserted that “Hungarian reaction” and the “Hungarian bourgeoisie” had successfully exploited the legitimate popular dissatisfaction with the low standard of living in Hungary, noting that these forces had twice instigated “counterrevolution” and “white terror” in the country since the end of the First World War.<sup>69</sup>

Marshal Tito proffered an alternative perspective that had a much greater impact on the course of political events in Hungary than the Soviet-Czechoslovak narrative. On 11 November, 1956, he expressed his opinions regarding the Hungarian uprising and the essence of the Soviet system during an address to activists of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia in the Istrian port city of Pula. Tito stated at the beginning of his speech that many “members of the working class and people of progressive mindset” had engaged in armed struggle against the Soviets on the streets of Budapest, declaring that “This was a justified revolt against a clique that transformed into an uprising of the entire people against socialism and the Soviet Union.” The Yugoslav leader maintained that “reactionary forces” had intervened in the rebellion only after the Hungarian Working People’s Party had split into two factions, emphasizing that “it was not Horthyites who fought there, but the entire nation.” Tito claimed during his address that Stalin’s “foolishness” had placed the socialist camp in a very difficult situation and that the per-

68 These allegations appeared in the reports of ČSR Ambassador to Hungary István Major, see AMZV, Teritoriální Odbory – Tajné, 1955–1959, Maďarsko, kr. 1, obal 6. (Major 0504); and AMZV, Teritoriální Odbory – Tajné, 1955–1959, Maďarsko, kr. 1, obal 6. (Major 0512). ČSLA Colonel Jaroslav Miller also expressed them in one of his reports, see ABS, f. I.S-8, reg. sz. 80353/000, č. I. 50–52. For the Czech-language version of this report, see Pavel Žáček, “‘Napětí v Budapešti trvá.’ Hlášení rezidentury Správy rozvědky ministerstva vnitra, 1956–1957,” part 1, *Sborník Archivu bezpečnostních složek* No. 14 (2016) pp. 431–471; and Žáček, “‘Napětí v Budapešti trvá.’ Hlášení rezidentury Správy rozvědky ministerstva vnitra, 1956–1957,” part 2, *Sborník Archivu bezpečnostních složek* No. 15 (2017) pp. 339–377.

69 For Široký’s speech, see AMZV, Politické zprávy II. (1945–1977), Budapešť 1956.

sonality cult that had surrounded the CPSU leader had been an organic product of the Soviet system. The president of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia told the party activists that the initial Soviet intervention in Hungary in October had been “completely misguided,” while the second intervention in November could have been avoided had Prime Minister Imre Nagy not let events progress to the point at which “Soviet troops had to prevent the victory of the counterrevolution.” In conclusion, Tito asserted that the victor of the struggle between the old “Stalinist” orientation and the “new course” had not yet been determined, noting that the latter had “in fact started in Yugoslavia.”<sup>70</sup>

Tito’s address greatly angered the leaders of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, who summarized their opinion of the speech in a KSČ Political Bureau memorandum that was sent personally to CPSU General Secretary Nikita Khrushchev on 21 November, 1956.<sup>71</sup> The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia PB memorandum accused Tito of attempting to propagate the “Yugoslav example” abroad, specifically in Poland and Hungary, and described his address in Pula as “an appeal for factional conflict between communist parties and a flagrant intervention in the internal affairs of [other] communist parties.” The KSČ’s leaders raised the possibility of again severing relations with Yugoslavia and recommended holding regular consultations between communist parties and launching an international theoretical journal.<sup>72</sup>

Tito’s speech remained on the agenda of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia Central Committee the following month. On 6 December, the KSČ CC adopted a resolution rejecting debate on the Yugoslav model on the grounds that the unity of the international communist movement — “the source of the power and success of the struggle for the victory of socialism” — needed to be preserved.<sup>73</sup> KSČ leaders thus conspicuously avoided the issue of alternative models of socialism and its connection to the Hungarian uprising. The speeches by Marshal Tito and other Yugoslav leaders were consequently not published in Czechoslovakia.

70 *Népszabadság* (Budapest), 17 November 1956.

71 NA, f. 1261/0/11, sv. 123, a.j. 156/per rollam.

72 Almost all of the KSČ Political Bureau’s ideas were implemented: by the spring of 1958, relations with Yugoslavia had been almost completely terminated; in the autumn of 1958, the theoretical journal *Problems of Peace and Socialism* was launched in every country that belonged to the socialist camp; and regular consultations between the leaders of Warsaw Pact member states also began during that year.

73 *Rudé právo* (Prague), 8 December 1956; *Új Szó* (Bratislava), 9 December 1956.

It seems that Kádár actually did consider the introduction of some form of “national-self-governing reform concept” that he envisioned within the framework of a formally multi-party system.<sup>74</sup> In mid-December he planned to set up committees of economic reform and would have involved workers’ councils in this work. This would also have been accepted by the leadership of the other socialist countries.

On 11 November, the MDP CC adopted a decision to ask the Soviet leadership to organize a summit of the Communist Parties’ leaderships to discuss the situation in Hungarian domestic politics. Kádár had thus sent a letter to Khrushchev before the visit of the Czechoslovak delegation, requesting a meeting between the first secretaries of the communist parties be convened shortly to discuss the “relationship between the socialist countries and the national issue” in the light of the experience of the events in Hungary. Khrushchev’s reply arrived two days later, stating that the summit would take place from the 1st to the 4th January 1957 in Budapest. Meanwhile, A. B. Aristov and M. A. Suslov, the secretaries of the CC of the CPSU and Malenkov, had already arrived in Budapest.<sup>75</sup>

The fragmentary sources available regarding the 1–4 January consultations indicate that MSZMP General Secretary Kádár was genuinely thinking in terms of “national–left-wing plebian bloc politics” at this time.<sup>76</sup> According to memoranda that KSČ General Secretary Novotný prepared about the meeting, Kádár considered “Rákosism and bureaucracy” to be great dangers and was considering the introduction of some kind of multi-party system including the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party, the Smallholders’ Party and, presumably, the National Peasant Party, while he and other MSZMP leaders wanted to “assert the Yugoslav line” and “limit central bureaucratic control to a minimum.”<sup>77</sup>

74 On 2 November 1956, János Kádár was present at the Chairman’s meeting of the Central Committee of the CPSU where he defended the parties, especially the Smallholders’ Party, that had taken part in Imre Nagy’s coalition: “The coalition parties don’t want a counter[revolution].” He quoted Béla Kovács who claimed that: “we are creating a Smallholders party, but we can’t struggle on the basis of the old program.” Kádár argued that the communist party alone is not sufficient to stabilize the situation, but together with the parties of the coalition, the counter-revolution will be defeated.” Kádár was also present at the meeting on the next day. At that time, he stated that: “This government must not be puppetlike, there must be a base for its activities and support among workers.” See: Mark Kramer, “The “Malin notes,”” 396–397.

75 National Archives of Hungary (hereafter MNL OL), M–KS 288.f. 9/1956/7. ő.e.

76 See Kalmár, *Történelmi galaxisok vonzásában*, 107–108.

77 NA, f. 1261/0/44, ka. 49, inv. č. 57. sign. 13.

The joint communiqué issued following the conference referred neither to Hungary's future political and social systems nor to Nikita Khrushchev's 1955 Belgrade declaration recognizing the right of individual states to follow their own roads toward socialism, nor to the October 1956 Soviet government proclamation. However, the communiqué did contain the following paragraph about Hungary's economy:

Only after the restoration of production and normal economic conditions, the development of the people's economy, the increase in labour productivity in both agriculture and industry, the decline in the cost of production for products and the generation of socialist accumulation can a rise in the living standards of the people and the strengthening of people's democratic Hungary be ensured.<sup>78</sup>

This condition fundamentally excluded the adoption of any kind of alternative model or pursuit of an "independent pathway." The Soviet, Czechoslovak, Bulgarian and Romanian communist-party leaders had in effect rejected Kádár's proposals. This "rump session of the Warsaw Pact" was the first time that CPSU, KSČ, PMR and BCR leaders collectively intervened in the internal affairs of another socialist state, thus essentially laying the foundations for the Brezhnev Doctrine introduced in 1968.<sup>79</sup> At that moment, it became clear that there was no possibility of introducing a multi-party system in Hungary in any form. The leaders of the other socialist countries would not even accept the implementation of the Czechoslovakian model. Speaking in confidential circles, Kádár mentioned several times "it happened this way historically" that there was no multi-party system in Hungary. Based on the documentary evidence it can credibly be supposed that between early November 1956 and early January 1957, Kádár would have been willing to enter into a coalition with parties that accepted socialism and to integrate workers' councils in the process of decision making in the field of economic policy. He would have done so out of tactical considerations, to bolster his own legitimacy.

This debate did not only take place in Hungary. Władysław Gomułka was reluctant to accept the Soviet policy according to which there were no alternative paths to Socialism. The Polish leader had earned his popularity by having declared that he would follow a more independent line vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, thus inching close to the Yugoslavian model. However, by the autumn of 1957 he had been forced to accept

78 Népszabadság (Budapest), 6 January 1957.

79 For more on this see: Kalmár, *Történelmi galaxisok vonzásában*, 108.

the Soviet model – even though this meant that his promise would remain unrealized. Disbanding the editorial board of the paper *Po prostu* that had been the most vocal in demanding reforms was a sign of this change. A joint declaration of the communist and workers' parties followed the conference. This document was the outcome of the Moscow summit of November 1957 and also meant the partial withdrawal of the declaration that the Soviet government had made on 30 October 1956. The later document added an important qualification to the principles of equality, territorial integrity, independence, sovereignty and non-intervention: “mutual fraternal help in which the ideas of socialist internationalism are embodied.” This clearly represents the foundation of what was to become the Brezhnev-doctrine: if the socialist order comes under threat in a country, other socialist countries might provide help. The declaration also posited that “socialist revolution and the development of socialism are based on a series of contingencies that are true of every country that choose the pathway of socialism.”<sup>80</sup> In November 1957, the Soviets revealed everything that they had put forward in January in Budapest. The only party that did not sign the proclamation was Yugoslavia.

Debate regarding the possible introduction of the Yugoslav model in Hungary ended in the spring of 1957 for two main reasons: first, the launching of criminal proceedings against former Prime Minister Imre Nagy and his political associates had compelled János Kádár to place himself firmly behind the Soviet Union;<sup>81</sup> and second, the significant aid that Hungary had received from the states of the socialist camp, primarily the USSR, China and Czechoslovakia, following the 1956 uprising produced economic consolidation and rising living standards, thus slowly lending the Kádár-led party and government social legitimacy.

80 See: “A szocialista országok kommunista és munkáspártjainak nyilatkozata (16 November 1957).” 19–30.

81 Kádár twice publicly condemned Yugoslav “national communism” at meetings of Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party activists held in the weeks following the “five-party summit meeting”—first in the Budapest district of Csepel on 27 January and then in Salgótarján on 2 February. During his speech at the party-activist meeting in the latter city, Kádár equated national communism with national socialism. The MSZMP general secretary also began to reinterpret the role that Imre Nagy had played in the “counterrevolution” at this time. See Huszár, *Kádár János politikai életrajza*, vol. 2. 29. Diplomats posted at the Czechoslovak embassy in Budapest took note of Kádár’s change in political course following the inter-party meetings held from 1–4 January. See AMZV, Teritoriální Odbory – Tajné, 1955–1959, Maďarsko, kr. 1, obal 5. (Rázga 0142).

## Czechoslovak Economic Assistance for Regimes' consolidation

The most important tool of the Kádár policy of consolidation was the improvement of standards of living. Kádár – reasonably – believed that Hungarians revolted against the “Rákosi-regime” as a result of the unbearable fall in standards of living. The events in October and November caused economic indicators to deteriorate even more. Contemporary economists estimated that the damage and loss resulting from the uprising amounted to 20 to 22 billion Hungarian Forints, a fifth of the national income, between the end of 1956 and early 1957. Armed struggle, strikes and the shortage of coal and energy further deepened the crisis in economic terms. The central bureaucracy disintegrated, financial discipline weakened, and inflation soared. Mass unemployment and overall economic collapse became real threats. Towards the end of the year, without imports it would have been impossible for the government to provide the population with basic food items.

Kádár needed the material support of socialist countries to make his regime look better than the previous one. Although Comecon existed for such reasons, it was a slow and bureaucratic organization burdened with debates. The Hungarian government could hardly count on it for help. Instead, the new Hungarian regime tried to negotiate bilateral agreements with those socialist countries that could provide aid. Poland was not among these since it also faced economic hardship<sup>82</sup>. Moreover, Gomułka was unhappy with the Soviet military intervention in Hungary and Kádár-government.<sup>83</sup>

Besides the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, the GDR and Romania could be approached for help. Kádár expected that Czechoslovakia would contribute the most. On 24 October, Khrushchev praised the achievements of the Czechoslovakian economy, and this reassured Kádár. However, negotiations proceeded more slowly than expect-

82 The Polish government provided 100 million zł worth of grant-in-aid during the days of the revolution. However, the aid that individual members of Polish society put together voluntarily was even more important and was worth 2 million USD.

83 Gomułka was not willing to acknowledge that there had been a counterrevolution in Hungary and did not want to host Kádár in Warsaw for years. He visited Budapest for the first time on 9 May 1958, following lengthy preparations. Since Imre Nagy and his fellow politicians were executed a month after his visit, he felt that Kádár had tricked him and he was outraged. For more details see: Mitrovits, *Lengyel, magyar „két jó barát”*, 18–23.



ed. It turned out that the Czechoslovakian economy depended on the Polish economy, which was in crisis, and that it also had profound structural problems.

On 5 November, 1956—the day after the Soviet invasion of Hungary—Kádár issued an appeal to the states of the socialist camp to provide the country with aid, specifically food, medicine, bandages, building materials and heating fuel. The following day, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia Political Bureau founded a “Solidarity Fund for the Workers of the Hungarian People’s Republic” to operate under the authority of the Czechoslovak Red Cross and opened an account for the collection of private donations and proceeds derived from surplus labour. The KSČ Political Bureau also ordered the Deputy Prime Minister, Ludmila Jankovcová, to determine in cooperation with the Planning Office the quantity of medicine, glass, lumber and other construction materials the ČSR could send to Hungary in the form of relief aid. The Political Bureau furthermore instructed Foreign Trade Minister Richard Dvořák to take measures aimed at ensuring that Czechoslovakia promptly satisfied its specified commodities-exchange obligations toward Hungary for the year 1956.<sup>84</sup> Finally, the PB stipulated that the form and amount of relief aid to Hungary should, if possible, be determined before the visit of a Czechoslovak government delegation to the country scheduled for 8 November.

Also on 5 November, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia Political Bureau drafted a telegram for the KSČ and KSS regional committees that praised the “crushing of the counterrevolutionary conspiracy” and summoned the citizens of the ČSR to help the people of Hungary “heal the painful wounds.”<sup>85</sup> The PB also notified the regional committees that, in addition to money, they were expected to provide commodities such as agricultural products and building materials to the newly established “Solidarity Fund.”

The Czechoslovak leaders subsequently cancelled the planned visit of government officials to Budapest primarily because their Hungarian counterparts could not guarantee their safety. This security concern was probably not unwarranted: on 10 November, the Ambassador of Czechoslovakia to Hungary István Major noted in a telegram that “for the first time today it has been possible to take a look around the city without signif-

84 NA, f. 1261/0/11, sv. 120, a.j. 149/21.

85 Ibid. The 5 November, 1956, issue of the Hungarian-language daily of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Új Szó carried the following banner headline on its front page: “The Hungarian People Has Broken the Counterrevolution” (A magyar nép letörte az ellenforradalmat).



icant danger.”<sup>86</sup> MSZMP General Secretary Kádár and Provisional Central Committee member and industrial affairs minister Antal Apró told Ambassador Major and other officials from the Czechoslovak embassy during a subsequent meeting that the cancelled visit should be rescheduled as soon as possible because “it would help to stabilize conditions.” Major and his fellow diplomats agreed to recommend to their superiors that Czechoslovak government officials spend a single day in Budapest for talks, although they informed Kádár and Apró that “other programs (i.e. activities) would not be possible for security reasons.”<sup>87</sup>

On 11 November 1956 Kádár sent a letter to Khrushchev. He asked for direct economic assistance, while urging the Soviets to put pressure on the Czechoslovak, East German and Polish parties to help overcome the difficulties of the Hungarian economy. Kádár described the Hungarian situation as follows: “There are no conditions for a satisfactory supply of coal and electricity to industry in the coming months on our own strength” [...] “Now, such a situation threatens us that we will be in a state of insolvency within a very short period of time.” Khrushchev’s response arrived in Budapest three days later, in which he promised help.<sup>88</sup>

The postponement of the Czechoslovak delegation’s trip to Budapest provided Deputy Prime Minister Ludmila Jankovcová and State Planning Office Chairman Otakar Šimůnek with the opportunity to formulate detailed proposals regarding relief aid to be sent to Hungary. On 12 November, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia Political Bureau decided, based on these recommendations, to send 90 million koruna (Kčs) worth of the following commodities calculated at retail prices to Hungary: 32.4 million Kčs in textiles, shoes and industrial products; 25.1 million Kčs in food, including 5,000 tons of flour, 5,000 tons of potatoes and 100 tons of meat; 17.5 million Kčs worth of medicine, including the immediate shipment of 10,000 doses of gamma globulin; and 15 million Kčs worth of building material, including 10,000 tons of lime, 5,000 tons of cement, windowpanes, logs and lumber.<sup>89</sup> The KSČ PB planned to gather these commodities from state and ministry stockpiles and donations from the Central Cooperative of Consumer and Production Cooperatives, the United Agricultural Cooperatives and from individual farmers.

86 AMZV, Teritoriální Odbory – Tajné, 1955–1959, Maďarsko, kr. 1, obal 6. (Major 0423)

87 AMZV, Teritoriální Odbory – Tajné, 1955–1959, Maďarsko, kr. 1, obal 6. (Major 0428)

88 MNL OL, M–KS 288.f. 9/1956/7. ő.e.

89 NA, f. 1261/0/11, sv. 121, a.j. 152–154/27.

On 13 November, the Czechoslovak government issued resolution no. 2569 endorsing the Political Bureau's planned shipments of relief aid to Hungary. The government then forwarded a letter providing information regarding this assistance to MSZMP General Secretary János Kádár via the Ambassador of Hungary to Czechoslovakia, József Gábor.<sup>90</sup> Both the Hungarian-language daily newspaper of the Communist Party of Slovakia *Új Szó* and the official newspaper of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, *Népszabadság* published reports on the planned 90 million Kčs in Czechoslovak relief aid to Hungary.<sup>91</sup>

It was after this that, as described above, the eight-member Czechoslovakian delegation led by Viliam Široký negotiated political and economic issues in Budapest on 15 November. The Industrial Affairs Minister of the Kádár government, Antal Apró and the Minister of Commercial Affairs, Sándor Rónai received the Minister of Health of the Široký government, Josef Plojhar and Local Economy Minister Josef Kyselý as well as Czechoslovak State Construction Industry Committee President Emanuel Šlechta. During this meeting, Apró presented the officials from the ČSR with the following requests: 40 million dollars in long-term trade credit specifically for the purchase of raw materials; 10 million dollars in non-refundable trade credit for the acquisition of other commodities; and a further 10-million-dollar long-term foreign-currency loan. Apró and Rónai also called upon Plojhar, Kyselý and Šlechta to ask their government to accelerate the delivery of the goods stipulated in the 1956 Hungarian—Czechoslovak commodities-exchange agreement and to extend the deadline for Hungary to satisfy the conditions of the agreement itself.<sup>92</sup>

On 20 November, the Hungarian Deputy Finance Minister, István Antos specified further details regarding the requested Czechoslovak aid to Hungary during a visit to Prague. He conveyed the government's request that the 10 million dollars (40 million roubles or 72 million Czechoslovak koruna)<sup>93</sup> in non-refundable trade credit be allo-

90 AMZV, Teritoriální Odbory – Tajné, 1955–1959, Maďarsko 4, Obal 9.

91 These reports appeared in both *Új Szó* and *Népszabadság* on 15 November—the same date on which the Prime Minister Viliam Široký-led Czechoslovak government delegation finally arrived in Budapest for talks.

92 AMZV, Teritoriální Odbory – Tajné, 1955–1959, Maďarsko 4, Obal 9.

93 The currency equivalents that appear in documents pertaining to the Hungarian deputy finance minister's visit to Prague show that they were based on the following exchange rates: 1 dollar = 4 rubles and 7.2 Czechoslovak koruna; 1 ruble = 1.8 Czechoslovak koruna; and 1 Czechoslovak koruna = 1.6 Hungarian forints.

cated for food, furniture, motorbikes, bicycles, medical supplies, cotton, wool, leather footwear, woven goods and clothing, to be delivered by 15 January, 1957;<sup>94</sup> and that the 40 million dollars (160 million roubles or 288 million Czechoslovak koruna) in long-term trade credit be disbursed in two instalments—8 million dollars by 31 December, 1956, for the purchase of mining timber, firewood, brown coal, cement, synthetic fibres, leather and other commodities and the remaining 32 million dollars by 31 March, 1957, for the purchase of 17.5 million dollars in already determined products and 14.5 million dollars in undetermined goods.<sup>95</sup> The Czechoslovak officials immediately rejected most of these requests and furthermore informed Antos that the ČSR would not be able to provide Hungary with the stipulated 10-million-dollar long-term foreign-currency loan.

Antos also asked the Czechoslovak officials to postpone the impending deadline for the Hungarian government to repay one-third of the principal on a 15-million-Swiss-franc (CHF) loan that the ČSR had made to Hungary in February 1956.<sup>96</sup> The Kádár government's deputy finance minister also requested the liquidation of Hungary's remaining obligations connected to a 27 April, 1951, "agreement regarding the development of the aluminium industry and the mutual provision of electricity."<sup>97</sup>

On 13 December, 1956, deputy ministers of the Široký government, including Deputy Prime Minister Ludmila Jankovcová held consultations that produced the following recommendations in connection with Czechoslovak relief aid for Hungary: instead of the proposed 10 million dollars (40 million roubles or 72 million Czechoslovak koruna) in non-refundable trade credit, the ČSR would provide Hungary with only 33.8 million Kčs (4.7 million dollars) in repayable trade credit; and the ČSR would not grant Hungary the requested 40 million dollars in long-term trade credit.<sup>98</sup>

The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia Political Bureau met on 17 December and 27 December to discuss the issue of assistance to Hungary. The KSČ PB adopted resolutions during these meetings that contained the following stipulations regarding this aid: they would ensure the delivery of all the commodities specified in the interstate

94 AMZV, Teritoriální Odbory – Tajné, 1955–1959, Maďarsko 4, Obal 9.

95 Ibid.

96 This 15-million-CHF loan was composed of two parts—10 million CHF with a maturity of two years and 5 million CHF with a maturity of one year, both of which carried interest rates of two percent.

97 AMZV, Teritoriální Odbory – Tajné, 1955–1959, Maďarsko 4, Obal 9.

98 Ibid.

goods-exchange agreement for the year 1956 with the exception of coal, magnesite, rolled materials and firewood;<sup>99</sup> the provision of 48.3 million Kčs in long-term trade credit composed of 37.5 million Kčs in commodities through the Ministry of Foreign Trade and 10.8 million Kčs in commodities through the Ministry of Domestic Trade;<sup>100</sup> guarantee the shipment of 45 million Kčs in goods—primarily automobile tires, various chemical products, building materials, paper and lumber—that had been destined for export to the West as well as to the German Democratic Republic and Poland throughout 1957 rather than during the first quarter of the year as Hungarian Deputy Finance Minister István Antos had requested during his visit to Prague on 20 November.<sup>101</sup> They also agreed to postpone the initial repayment of 5 million Swiss francs of the 15-million-Swiss-franc loan that the ČSR had granted to Hungary in February 1956 and to renegotiate the terms surrounding the 1951 “agreement regarding the development of the aluminium industry and the mutual provision of electricity.”

The KSČ Political Bureau resolutions noted that by the end of 1956 Hungary would have arrears of 167.7 million Kčs, 130.4 million Kčs of which would have to be compensated by other socialist countries and 37 million Kčs by capitalist countries, and that Czechoslovakia planned to export 97.2 million Kčs worth of commodities to Hungary during the first quarter of 1957, of which nearly 95 percent could be compensated via capitalist markets, and that as a result of Hungarian liabilities and the repayment of ČSR-disbursed credit by 31 December, 1956, Hungary would have liabilities of 42.3 million Kčs towards the Czechoslovak foreign-currency treasury and 72.4 million Kčs in credit debt.<sup>102</sup>

The KSČ Political Bureau had therefore offered Hungary 93.3 million Kčs worth of commodities in the form of long-term trade credit.<sup>103</sup>

99 The KSČ Political Committee decided at its 27 December meeting to use coal to generate electricity for Hungary rather than shipping it directly to the country. (Cf. NA, f. 1261/0/11, sv. 125, a.j. 159/14.; and NA, f. 1261/0/11, sv. 125, a.j. 160/7.) Firewood was likely exempted from delivery because it had already been sent along with the special relief transport. These exemptions meant that 25 million Kčs of the remaining 87.5 million Kčs in 1956 Czechoslovak obligations could not be satisfied. NA, f. 1261/0/11, sv. 125, a.j. 160/7 (see appendix III, I.4. ad. 4).

100 NA, f. 1261/0/11, sv. 124, a.j. 159/14. (See appendices IVb and IVc).

101 Ibid., appendix IVe.

102 Ibid. appendices IVf, IVg and IVi.

103 The 27 December KSČ Political Committee resolution instructed Finance Minister Július

By 10 December, 1956, 82 million Kčs of the 90 million Kčs in trade-credit commodities that the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia Political Bureau had decided to send to Hungary the previous month had already been delivered to the country.<sup>104</sup>

On 27 December, the KSČ PB confirmed that the ČSR would send 50 Csepel trucks to Hungary in order to help with the cleanup of debris from the armed conflict that had taken place in the country in October and November.<sup>105</sup>

One should note that the 60 million dollars (240 million roubles) in trade credit and foreign-currency loans that the Minister of Industrial Affairs of the Kádár government, Antal Apró had requested on 15 November was only slightly less than the 248.2 million roubles in commodities that Czechoslovakia had delivered to Hungary during the whole of 1955. There was, however, one significant difference between the goods that Czechoslovakia had delivered to Hungary in 1955 and those that Hungarian officials had requested in November 1956: whereas machinery had constituted 38.6 percent of the value of all the commodities that the ČSR had sent to the MNK in 1955, no machinery appeared on the list of requested goods in 1956.<sup>106</sup>

On 28 December, 1956, Foreign Trade Minister Richard Dvořák informed the Ambassador of Hungary to Czechoslovakia, József Gábor, that the ČSR would not be able to grant the MNK the 10 million dollars in non-refundable trade credit and the 10-million-dollar foreign-currency loan it had requested. Dvořák told Gábor that the KSČ Political Bureau had, however, approved 93.3 million Kčs in trade credit for Hungary.

On 8 February, 1957, Commercial Affairs Minister of Hungary, Sándor Rónai and the Deputy Finance Minister, István Antos travelled to Prague in order to try to convince Czechoslovak party and government officials to increase the amount of assistance it would send. During meetings with the KSČ General Secretary, Novotný, Deputy Prime Minister Jankovcová, Foreign Trade Minister Dvořák and State Planning Office Chairman Šimůnek over the following four days, Hungary's Commercial Affairs Minister, Rónai not only requested that Czechoslovakia grant Hungary the 10 million dollars in

---

Đuriš to allocate 93.3 million Kčs from the 1957 budget of the ČSR for trade credit to Hungary. NA, f. 1261/0/11, sv. 125, a.j. 160/7.

104 NA, f. 1261/0/11, sv. 124, a.j. 159/14 (see appendix IVd).

105 The KSČ PB specified that these trucks be returned to Czechoslovakia, noting that, if necessary, spare parts could be acquired in Hungary.

106 NA, f. 1261/0/11, sv. 124, a.j. 159/14 (see appendix IVa).

non-refundable trade credit and 10-million-dollar foreign-currency loan it had previously stipulated, but that the ČSR augment the requested 40 million dollars (160 million roubles) in long-term trade credit with 138.7 roubles in long-term credit for the acquisition of industrial equipment. Rónai referred during his talks in Prague to the clause contained in a joint Soviet–Czechoslovak declaration of support for Hungary issued on 30 January, 1957, stating that the ČSR had not provided as much assistance to the MNK as other socialist countries had by that date. This was not entirely true, however. Although Czechoslovakia had provided only 10 million roubles worth of aid to Hungary<sup>107</sup> according to official data, which probably referred to the 90-million-Koruna pledge made on 15 November, Hungarian data showed that it was in fact worth 15 million roubles. According to the figures collected by Hungarian state organs, the GDR had pledged to provide 8.5 million roubles in aid, Bulgaria 5 million roubles, Poland 10 million roubles, Romania 4 million roubles and Yugoslavia 2 million roubles worth of assistance, apart from the 40 million roubles promised by the Soviet Union.<sup>108</sup> Thus, Czechoslovakia was second only to the Soviet Union in terms of the immediate help it offered with the purpose of stabilizing the Hungarian economy. Rónai and his team was also wrong in stating that Czechoslovakia had been the only state to partially decline the request for a long-term loan and hard currency loan. In fact, they put together an offer for 93.3 million koruna that was equal to 17.45 million USD at the time. One may argue that considering the strength of its economy, Czechoslovakia should have offered proportionately more since the much poorer Romania was able to loan goods worth 10 million USD besides a 5-million-USD-loan. Bulgaria promised to loan goods amounting 7 million USD while the GDR promised a loan of goods to the amount of 15 million USD.

Novotný informed Rónai and Antos that Czechoslovakia would be unable to provide the requested aid to Hungary because the ČSR had received less than one-third of the expected amount of coal from Poland that year and was thus unable under the prevailing circumstances to satisfy the demand for special goods (i.e., weapons) from countries in the Middle East.<sup>109</sup> However, the KSČ general secretary nevertheless offered to nearly double the amount of credit that Czechoslovakia would extend to Hungary to 180 million Kčs from the 93.3 million Kčs that the party's Political Committee had

107 NA, f. 1261/0/11, sv. 129, a.j. 169/6.

108 See the MNL OL, XIX–A–16-i 1. doboz; and Honvári, “A szovjet és a keleti hitelek,” and Feitl, *Talányos játszmák*, 131.

109 See MNL OL XIX–A–16-i 3. doboz; and Honvári, “A szovjet és a keleti hitelek.”

proposed on 27 December.<sup>110</sup> This 180 million Kčs—or 100 million roubles—in credit would be composed of the following three elements: 48.2 million roubles in long-term investment loans—17 million for the machinery and equipment needed for the power station being built in Tiszapalkonya, 16 million for the repayment of previous investment credit, 6 million for construction projects in the new city of Sztálinváros (Stalin City) and 9.2 million to cover the cost of electricity imported from Czechoslovakia in 1955; 26.8 million roubles in credit so that Hungary could make the planned purchases of consumer goods from the ČSR for the year 1957; and 25 million roubles in long-term trade credit. According to the proposed conditions for these loans, Hungary would repay the 26.8 million roubles in loans for consumer goods in three instalments—6.8 million roubles in 1958 and 10 million roubles in both 1959 and 1960—and would compensate Czechoslovakia for the remaining 73.2 million roubles credit worth of debt through the delivery of bauxite to Czechoslovakia in five equal annual quantities beginning in the year 1959. Moreover, Czechoslovakia was projected to generate a surplus of nearly 100 million roubles in trade with Hungary for the year 1957, thus essentially representing the provision of further credit to Hungary.<sup>111</sup>

Rónai and Antos were not satisfied with the support offered, however. Rónai stated before leaving Prague that “the Czechoslovak response fell profoundly short of our expectations,” adding that Novotný “is aware that we are not leaving satisfied.”<sup>112</sup>

On 21 February, 1957, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia Political Committee approved the proposed 100 million roubles (180 million Kčs) in aid for Hungary and decided to send the Foreign Trade Minister, Richard Dvořák and the Chairman of the State Planning Office, Otakar Šimůnek to lead a delegation to Budapest in order conduct further talks with Hungarian officials.<sup>113</sup>

The Hungarian Minister of Commercial Affairs, Sándor Rónai announced during the talks conducted from 25 February–1 March that Hungary would be unable to repay the 100 million roubles in Czechoslovak loans as KSČ General Secretary Novotný had specified in Prague a couple of weeks earlier. Rónai requested that Hungary instead be permitted to repay the loans over a period of ten years beginning in 1960, noting

110 NA, f. 1261/0/11, sv. 129, a.j. 169/6.

111 AMZV, Teritoriální Odbory – Tajné, 1955–1959, Maďarsko 5, Obal 2.

112 MNL OL XIX–A–16–i 3. doboz. See also Honvári, “A szovjet és a keleti hitelek.”

113 NA, f. 1261/0/11, sv. 129, a.j. 169/6.

that the country had a budget deficit of 3.7 million forints and would require 1.9 million forints to liquidate its existing debts. The commercial affairs minister added that Hungary would also have to pay 23 million roubles in instalments from the 1951 credit agreement in the years 1958 and 1959.<sup>114</sup>

The Czechoslovak delegation offered Hungary the following concessions in return: exemption from its obligation to deliver 265,000 tons of brown coal to Czechoslovakia in 1957; a reduction in the amount of aluminium oxide to be supplied to the ČSR in 1957 from 39,400 tons to between 15,000 and 20,000 tons; and the export of 355 million kWh of electricity to Hungary, 35 million kWh of which was designated for the production of 84,000 tons of iron bars for Czechoslovakia.<sup>115</sup>

Hungarian and Czechoslovak officials furthermore jointly determined that industrial capacity in Hungary that might be used to satisfy the import needs of the ČSR could be generated primarily through an improvement in labour productivity.<sup>116</sup>

The delegation led by Richard Dvořák and Otakar Šimůnek agreed to modify the repayment terms of the proposed 100 million roubles in Czechoslovak credit, requesting that Hungary instead compensate for this loan via the annual shipment to the ČSR of ten equal amounts of bauxite beginning in 1960 with an annual interest rate of two percent. The Czechoslovak officials also agreed to jointly invalidate the 1951 credit agreement and to settle Hungary's outstanding debts under this arrangement within the framework of future mutual commodities-exchange accords.<sup>117</sup> Finally, the talks produced a compromise settlement regarding the price of electricity exchanged between Hungary and Czechoslovakia at 7.61 kopeks per kWh.<sup>118</sup>

114 NA, f. 1261/0/11, sv. 134. a.j. 174/5.

115 Ibid.

116 Ibid. (see appendix no. 1).

117 The invalidation of the 1951 credit agreement required Hungary to maintain its obligation to deliver between 210,000 and 320,000 tons of bauxite per year to Czechoslovakia until 1960 and stipulated that ČSR must make 18.2 million rubles available to the MNK in the years 1957–1958 for the acquisition of equipment for the power plant being constructed in Tiszapalkonya. Czechoslovak and Hungarian officials also determined that Hungary would repay the remaining 35 million rubles owed to Czechoslovakia for machinery used in the bauxite and aluminium-oxide industries in three instalments—16 million rubles in both 1958 and 1959 and 3 million rubles in 1960. AMZV, Teritoriální Odbory – Tajné, 1955–1959, Maďarsko 4, Obal 9 (see appendix no. 3).

118 Hungary used 9.2 million roubles of the 100 million roubles in new Czechoslovak credit to repay its outstanding debt for electricity that the ČSR had supplied to the country in 1955.



The agreement on the 100 million roubles in Czechoslovak credit for Hungary was finally signed on 19 July 1957. However, prior to this agreement, Czechoslovak and Hungarian officials had targeted an 11.2-percent year-on-year increase in the volume of bilateral commodities exchanged for the year 1957. However, due to the rapid consolidation of conditions in Hungary and the better-than-expected agricultural yields, this target was increased by 15 percent one month later to an unprecedented volume.<sup>119</sup>

On 9 November, 1956, Pavol David, a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of Slovakia, reported during a meeting of the KSS PB that Hungarian officials had requested supplies of both power and coal from the ČSR:

Yesterday a delegation from Győr met with Comrade Bacílek and asked for coal and electricity. Their power plant is on strike and they asked us for more than the planned amount of electricity. (They said that) We should also supply them with coal because miners at their mines in Tatabánya are not working.<sup>120</sup>

On 12 November, the Hungarian government officially asked the Czechoslovak government to increase peak output from 65 MW to between 110 MW and 130 MW.<sup>121</sup> The Deputy Finance Minister of the Kádár government, István Antos essentially repeated these requests during his visit to Prague on 20 November, although Czechoslovakia had by this date already begun to export the increased amount of electricity to Hungary.<sup>122</sup>

However, the depletion of domestic coal reserves nevertheless resulted in a significant reduction in the supply of electricity in Hungary. According to a report prepared for the Hungarian government of 4 December, 1956, , “the available electricity is not sufficient to satisfy the demand of the population and a restriction of around 50–60 MW must be imposed.” This report also stated that power shortages would become worse after the middle of December:

The situation with regard to the supply of electricity is becoming increasingly critical. Compensation for the shortfall [in power production] will require 1,500–2,000 tons

119 NA, ÚV KSČ–AN II. ka 131. inv.č. 299. 77.

120 SNA, Predsednictvo ÚV KSS, Október–November, rok. 1956, k. 933.

121 During the first 10 months of 1956, Hungary used 0.83 GWh of power per day in accordance with the annual plan for that year. Following an agreement concluded between the Czechoslovak and Hungarian governments on 12 November, Hungary’s daily consumption rose to as high as 2 GWh. AMZV, Teritoriální Odbory – Tajné, 1955–1959, Maďarsko 4, Obal 9.

122 AMZV, Teritoriální Odbory – Tajné, 1955–1959, Maďarsko 4, Obal 9.

of coal per day. If this cannot be generated via domestic production or imports, then the shortfall in electricity output will increase to 90–100 MW. [. . .] A large portion of the country will remain without power as a consequence. Transportation will be shut down and the plants at which production has been launched will not be able to operate either.<sup>123</sup>

On 4 December, Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party General Secretary Kádár sent a letter to Czechoslovak Prime Minister Široký in which he requested that Czechoslovakia continue to export between 110 MW and 130 MW of electricity to Hungary until 20 December.<sup>124</sup>

The Czechoslovak leadership complied with Kádár's appeal, forwarding electricity imported from the German Democratic Republic and Poland to Hungary as well as increasing domestic power production to cover the shortfall in that country.

On 7 December, Kádár dispatched another letter to Široký in which he requested that the ČSR continue to send the previously stipulated amount of power to Hungary until 15 January, 1957, noting that "otherwise, we must count on enormous restrictions with regard to the provision of household electricity and immense difficulties in the supply of water and gas, which would further impede the process of normalization and the launching of industrial production."<sup>125</sup>

On 13 December, the Commercial Affairs Minister of the Kádár government, Sándor Rónai stated during a meeting with diplomats from the embassy of the ČSR in Budapest that "over the past few days, supplies of electricity transferred [to Hungary] from Czechoslovakia have been a life and death matter."<sup>126</sup>

However, according to a Czechoslovak report on 6 December, "the amount of electricity stipulated in the trade agreement for the year 1956 could be reached by 10–12 December."<sup>127</sup> Therefore, on 15 December, the Czechoslovak government issued a reso-

123 Report to the Revolutionary Worker-Peasant government regarding the coal and energy situation. MNL OL XIX–A–16–i 1. doboz. This report also appears in Honvári, "A szovjet és a keleti hitelek."

124 AMZV, Teritoriální Odbory – Tajné, 1955–1959, Maďarsko 4, Obal 9.

125 Ibid.

126 AMZV, Teritoriální Odbory – Tajné, 1955–1959, Maďarsko 4, Obal 6.

127 NA, f. 1261/0/11, sv. 124, a.j. 159/14 (see appendix IVh).

lution “regarding assistance to the Hungarian People’s Republic in the form of electrical energy” stipulating that the ČSR export 15 million KWh of power to Hungary by 31 December with a maximum output of 85 MW.<sup>128</sup> The Political Bureau of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia approved this resolution at meetings of the KSČ PB on 17 December and 27 December.<sup>129</sup>

Thus, Czechoslovakia provided a 37.5-million USD loan (270 million Czech Koruna = 432 million Hungarian forints) to Hungary. On top of this there was the 25 million USD Czechoslovakian trade deficit vis-à-vis Hungary in 1957 which amounted to an indirect loan. (180 million Czech koruna = 288 million Hungarian forints). Altogether, between November 1956 and December 1957 Czechoslovakia provided 62.5 million USD in the form of trade loans and hard currency loans. This was 16% of the 380–390 million USD in credit that the Hungarians expected to receive from the socialist bloc. Only the Soviet Union and China gave more than Czechoslovakia.<sup>130</sup> If we add that Hungary primarily used these credit facilities for buying food stuff and consumer goods instead of the machinery stipulated in previous trade agreements and that Czechoslovakia provided energy to the Hungarian population and to its industry well below the market price, we can conclude that the Czechoslovakian contribution was even more significant than the loan amounts suggest.

Loans facilities and aid coming from socialist countries not only contributed to Hungary’s economic consolidation but also made it possible for the Hungarian government to increase salaries. In early 1957, 70–75% of the population received a raise. This constituted the most important element of the social legitimacy of the Kádár regime.

It is true that Hungary wanted more than it eventually received. On the one hand, this is also a common negotiation tactic, where one party asks for more than it needs and the other gives less than it was asked for. Finally, in Budapest the leaders also expected that the Czechoslovak industrial and economic lobby would not want to fulfil all the demands of the Kádár government.

128 AMZV, Teritoriální Odbory – Tajné, 1955–1959, Maďarsko 4, Obal 9.

129 NA, f. 1261/0/11, sv. 125, a.j. 160/7 (see appendix III, point II.1).

130 MNL MOL XIX–A–16–i 1. doboz., Honvári, “A szovjet és a keleti hitelek.”

## Czechoslovak Assistance for Interior Ministry Organizations in Hungary

During the period of post-revolution political consolidation, Hungarian political leaders sought help from Czechoslovakia in their efforts to reorganize the Interior Ministry and police, to establish the new Workers' Militia (Munkásőrség) and to furnish these organizations with the required weaponry and equipment. Initially, the Hungarian authorities thought that they would use the Czechoslovak party militia, (Lidová Milícia) as a model for the Hungarian Workers' Militia. As early as November 1956, Rudolf Rónai, who held the title of government commissioner, went to Prague in order to learn about the structure of the Lidová Milícia. Initially, this would have been a body of guards protecting industrial sites. The party leadership eventually decided, based on a proposal by Kádár, that the Militia should be subordinated to the Ministry of the Interior instead of to the Party and that its scope should also be expanded. According to a governmental decree of 7 February 1957, the duties of Workers' Militia are "to enhance the protection of people's democracy, prevent disturbances among working people and in the process of production, as well as to offer more effective protection against counter-revolutionary attempts." Providing arms for the militia proved difficult for the Party, however. At first, they received guns from the Soviets and "from the street". The supply of adequate equipment soon became an acute problem. According to a plan approved on 21 February 1957, 5241 members should have been armed by 10 March especially in Budapest and in the larger towns. At the next stage of the plan, between 20 March and 1 April membership should have increased to 15 408.<sup>131</sup> The party leadership expected that a new wave of demonstrations and revolt might begin on 15 March, on the anniversary of the revolution of 1848, which had been a national holiday before the Communist regime came to power.<sup>132</sup>

On 15 December, 1956, Deputy Interior Minister Tibor Pöcze told an official posted at the Interior Ministry *rezidentúra* at the Czechoslovak embassy in Budapest that Hungary was receiving sufficient supplies of weaponry from the Soviet Union, although it

131 Kiss, „A Munkásőrség megalakítása,” 238–277.

132 In reality, there was no such thing as the “We Start Again in March” movement (Márciusban Újra Kezdjük – MUK) but the slogan had appeared in graffiti in Budapest. The Czechoslovakian ambassador to Budapest also reported that something might happen on 15 March.

still needed 5,000 truncheons for the national police force.<sup>133</sup> On this same date, First Deputy Prime Minister Ferenc Münnich sent a letter to the Czechoslovak Interior Minister, Rudolf Barák in which he asked the ČSR to send 5,000 truncheons to Hungary on loan.<sup>134</sup> However, the Czechoslovak Interior Ministry did not have the stipulated number of surplus truncheons and therefore had transported only 450 truncheons to Hungary by 23 January, 1957.<sup>135</sup> On 6 February, 1957, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia Political Bureau issued an order for the Matador factory in Bratislava to manufacture and deliver the remaining 4,450 truncheons within three weeks.<sup>136</sup> By the end of February, Matador had produced 2,500 truncheons and promised to manufacture the remaining 1,950 by 20 March.<sup>137</sup>

On 12 January, the Hungarian First Deputy Prime Minister, Münnich wrote another letter to Czechoslovak Interior Minister Barák in which he requested that the ČSR send various types of weaponry and equipment to Hungary and invited the Czechoslovak Deputy Interior Minister Karel Klíma to Budapest in order to personally discuss these deliveries.<sup>138</sup>

On 21 January, Deputy Interior Minister Klíma and Interior Ministry Directorate IX leader Colonel Karel Šímek travelled to Budapest, where they met Münnich, as well as the chief Soviet advisor in Hungary, Aleksey Dmitrievich Beschastnov, the former State Protection Authority (ÁVH) Colonel Mihály Jamrich, the head of the Budapest police and Hungarian intelligence officials.

During these talks, Münnich gave Klíma and Šímek a list of the weapons, ammunition and intelligence-gathering equipment that were required, including the following specific items: 500 6.35mm pistols; 50 small submachine guns; 8 hunting rifles; 3 million 7.65mm cartridges; 500,000 6.35mm cartridges; 50,000 9mm cartridges; transceivers; tape recorders; cameras; and camera lenses.<sup>139</sup>

133 ABS, f. I.S-8, reg. sz. 80353/000, č. l. 48–49.

134 ABS, H-669-1.

135 Ibid.

136 NA, f. 1261/0/11, sv. 129, a.j. 169/12.

137 ABS, H-669-1.

138 Ibid.

139 For the complete list, see ABS, H-669-1.

On 15 February, Deputy Interior Minister Antal Bartos, who had succeeded Tibor Pőcze in this position, requested that the Czechoslovak Interior Ministry deliver the requested 7.65mm cartridges to Hungary as soon as possible.<sup>140</sup>

The Economic Directorate of the Czechoslovak Interior Ministry determined that the weaponry, ammunition and equipment that Hungarian officials had requested was worth 2.51 million Kčs, but that the ministry would be unable to deliver items valued at 590,000 Kčs that included tires for Škoda trucks and Magnola cameras.<sup>141</sup> On 29 January, Deputy Interior Minister Klíma delivered some of the requested operative instruments to Münnich.<sup>142</sup>

On 21 February, 1957, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia Political Bureau approved 1.99 million Kčs in material support for Hungary and a further 200,000 Kčs in assistance for the Hungarian intelligence services in order to purchase the necessary equipment for its operatives.<sup>143</sup> Czechoslovak Interior Minister Barák subsequently informed Hungarian First Deputy Prime Minister Münnich that 1.87 million Kčs worth of the requested items would be delivered to Hungary on 5 March via the Komarno/Komárom border crossing in six trucks and in two passenger vehicles. Barák noted that this shipment would include all of the requested weaponry and optical equipment with the exception of four hunting rifles and two Magnola cameras and furthermore stated that 2,500 truncheons would be delivered to Hungary on 15 March.<sup>144</sup>

On 21 March, the Czechoslovak Interior Ministry issued a summary report showing that 1.95 million Kčs in assistance had been sent to Hungary and that in return the MNK had delivered three Csepel motorboats worth 447,000 Kčs to the ČSR, thus resulting in a difference of slightly over 1.5 million Kčs. The report stated that the Interior Ministry had paid 54,924 Kčs for a visit by Hungarian state-security officials to Czechoslovakia, noting that 20 of these officials were still in Karlovy Vary.<sup>145</sup>

140 ABS, f. I.S-8, reg. sz. 80353/013, č. I. 67.

141 ABS, H-669-1.

142 For the specific instruments, see ABS, H-669-1.

143 NA, f. 1261/0/11, sv. 129, a.j. 169/12.

144 ABS, H-669-1. The delivery of these truncheons on the Hungarian public holiday commemorating the outbreak of the 1848 Revolution against Habsburg rule was a symbolic gesture.

145 Ibid.

In essence, Soviet arms were initially used for the rapid training of the Workers' Militia, thus the vehicles, truncheons and other weapons were of fundamental importance to prepare the organization to be ready to act in case of an eventual uprising breaking out on 15 March – although this did not happen. However, the documents reveal that it was not only the Workers' Militia that received much help from Czechoslovakia. The state security forces that were in the process of reorganization also benefited from the supplies to a large extent.

## Conclusion

At the time of the outbreak of the Hungarian revolution, the KSČ had been in a secure position for about three months. It had either suppressed or channelled initiatives coming from below to its own aims. In Czechoslovakia, there was no revolutionary atmosphere in October 1956. This made it possible for Antonín Novotný to strengthen his own position in Moscow. He was present at a series of meetings that discussed and assessed the situation in Hungary: on 24 October in Moscow, on 2 November in Bucharest and between 1 and 4 January 1957 in Budapest. During the first two meetings, he argued that the revolution needed to be put down through military means and he offered Czechoslovakian resources for doing so. The Czechoslovakian party leadership closely followed events in Hungary from the first day and took measures in both internal and foreign policy with three related objectives in mind. First, they wanted to make use of the revolution to strengthen their own position. Second, they wanted to make sure that the revolution would not spread to Czechoslovakia. Third, they wanted to assist and influence the new Kádár-led government of Hungary as much as they could.

In order to prevent the spread of revolutionary ideas, they closed the border with Hungary completely and also mobilized the army units that were in Slovakia. At the same time, they launched anti-revolutionary propaganda spread through newspapers, radio and leaflets both in Czechoslovakia and in Hungary. They set up an Operations Team and tried to engage in propaganda activities along the border, including by infiltrating Hungary, with the help of Hungarian-speaking members of the party. After the Kádár government was formed, they helped Hungarian government propaganda by supplying paper to it.

The KSČ had an important role in advising the Kádár-government. The “summit” meeting in Budapest on 1–4 January 1957 was even more important in this regard than the visit of the Czechoslovakian government delegation to Budapest on 15 November 1956. Despite the fragmented nature of archival material documenting the meeting in January, it can be concluded that the KSČ played an important role in convincing Kádár to change the course of his policies. In place of a decentralised model of socialism based on multiparty government,<sup>146</sup> he opted for the centralised Soviet model and (even if we consider subsequent reforms) remained essentially loyal to this until 1989.

Having observed the actual steps that indicated that decentralisation had stopped – and in order to make up for the loss that the change caused – the Czechoslovakian government provided large-scale economic assistance to Hungary. The size of the package of loans issued by Czechoslovakia was third only to those extended by the Soviet Union and China, even though the material and financial assistance it rendered burdened the Czechoslovakian economy and could not satisfy all requests that Kádár’s government had made. This was vital for enabling the Kádár government to improve the standard of living in the country besides stabilizing its own position already in 1957. Finally, the Czechoslovakian Ministry of Interior provided equipment to its Hungarian counterpart so that it could set up a security force to suppress any further dissent.

## Archival Sources

Národní Archiv (NA) [National Archives of the Czech Republic, Prague]

f. 1261

f. 1481

KSČ – ÚV – AN II

Vojenský historický archiv (VHA Praha) [Military History Archive, Prague]

MNO 1956

MNO – sekretariát ministra 1956

<sup>146</sup> It should be borne in mind that between 1945 and 1989 Czechoslovakia and Poland formally had multiparty parliamentary systems. These parties de facto accepted the leading role of Communist parties but they had a role in legitimizing the regime in the eyes of the population.



Archiv bezpečnostních složek (ABS) [Security Service Archive, Prague]

A6/3-1047 Organizační a vnitřní správa federálního ministerstva vnitra

A2/1-1979

f. I.S-8

ABS H-669-1 Události v Maďarsku a Polsku

Rozkaz náčelníka VII. správy MV

Tajný rozkaz ministra vnitra (TRMV)

Archiv Ministerstva zahraničních věcí (AMZV) [Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prague]

Teritoriální Odbory – Tajné, 1955–1959, Maďarsko

Politické zprávy II. (1945–1977), Budapešť 1956

Slovenský národný archív (SNA) [Slovak National Archives, Bratislava]

Predsedníctvo ÚV KSS

Sekretariát ÚV KSS

ÚV KSS, Zasadnutia plén

Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (MNL OL) [National Archives of Hungary, Budapest]

M–KS 288. fond

XIX–A–16–i

## Printed Sources

Rudé právo

Új Szó

Népszabadság

## Bibliography

“A szocialista országok kommunista és munkáspártjainak nyilatkozata (16 November 1957)” [Declaration of the communist and workers’s parties of socialist countries]. In *A nemzetközi kommunista mozgalom dokumentumai* [Documents of the international communist movement] 1945–1976. 19–30. Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1977.

Békés, Csaba, Malcolm Byrne and János M. Rainer. *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, Budapest: CEUP, 2003.

Bencsik, Péter, and Miklós Mitrovits, eds. „A Szovjetunióval örök időkre és soha máshogy!” – Az 1956-os magyar forradalom csehszlovák dokumentumai... [“With the Soviet Union it is forever and never otherwise”. Czechoslovakian documents on the Hungarian revolution of 1956.] Budapest: MTA TTI, 2018.

Bencsik, Péter. “Csehszlovákia és Magyarország 1956-ban, illetve a CSKP reakciói a magyar forradalomra” [Czechoslovakia and Hungary in 1956 and the reactions of the KSČ to the Hungarian revolution]. *Belvedere Meridionale* 29, no. 1 (2017): 77–92. <https://doi.org/10.14232/belv.2017.1.7>

Bílek, Jiří and Vladimír Pilát. “Bezprostřední reakce československých politických a vojenských organů na povstání v Maďarsku” [The immediate reaction of the Czechoslovak political and military authorities to the uprising in Hungary]. *Soudobé Dějiny* 3, no. 4 (1996): 500–511.

Bílek, Jiří, Jiří Dufek, Jiří Fidler, Vladimír Pilát, Jaroslav Selner and Vladimír Šlosar eds. *Vojenská a další opatření Československa v době povstání v Maďarsku na podzim 1956: sborník vybraných dokumentů, vol. 1.* [Military and other measures taken by Czechoslovakia during the uprising in Hungary in the autumn of 1956: a collection of selected documents] Prague: Historický ústav Armády České republiky, 1993.

Blaive, Muriel. *Promarněná příležitost. Československo a rok 1956.* [A missed opportunity. Czechoslovakia and 1956] Praha: Prostor, 2001.

Bottoni, Stefano. *Stalin’s Legacy in Romania: The Hungarian Autonomous Region, 1952–1960.* Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018.

*Ellenforradalmi erők a magyar októberi eseményekben*, [Counterrevolutionary forces in the events of October] vols. 1–4. Budapest: Magyar Népköztársaság Minisztertanácsának Tájékoztatási Hivatala, 1956–1957.

Feitl, István. *Talányos játszmák. Magyarország a KGST erőterében 1949–1974*. [Strange games. Hungary in the force field of the Comecon, 1949–1974] Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2016.

Gál, Éva, András Hegedüs B. György Litván and János Rainer M., eds. *A „Jelcin-dosszié”: Szovjet dokumentumok 1956-ról*. [“The Yeltsin folder”. Soviet documents about 1956] Budapest: Századvég Kiadó – 1956-os Intézet, 1993.

Hegedüs B, András, Péter Kende, György Litván, János Rainer M. and Katalin S. Varga, eds. *Döntés a Kremlben, 1956: A szovjet pártelnökség vitái Magyarországról*. [Decision taken at the Kremlin, 1956. Debates of the Soviet leadership about Hungary] Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 1996.

Honvári, János. “A szovjet és a keleti hitelek, segélyek szerepe a Kádár-rendszer stabilizálásában” [The role of Soviet and Eastern credit and aid in the stabilization of the Kádár regime] *Archívnet* 7, no. 2 (2007)

Huszár, Tibor. *Kádár János politikai életrajza, 1957. november–1989. június*. [János Kádár’s political biography] vol. 2. Budapest: Szabad tér–Kossuth Kiadó, 2003.

Ivaničková, Edita and Attila Simon eds. *Az 1956-os magyar forradalom és Szlovákia*. [The 1956 revolution and Slovakia] Somorja–Pozsony: Fórum Kisebbségkutató Intézet–Szlovák Tudományos Akadémia Történettudományi Intézete, 2006.

Janek, István. “Czechoslovakia and the Hungarian Revolution in 1956”. *West Bohemian Historical Review* 7, no. 1 (2017): 181–213.

Kalmár, Melinda. *Történelmi galaxisok vonzásában. Magyarország és a szovjetrendszer 1945–1990*. [Gravitating towards historical galaxies. Hungary and the Soviet regime, 1945–1990] Budapest: Osiris, 2014.

Kaplan, Karel. *Kronika komunistického Československa. Dobá táni 1953–1956*. [Chronicle of Communist Czechoslovakia. The Time of Thaw 1953–1956] Brno: Barrister & Principal, 2005.

Kiss, Dávid, „A Munkásőrség megalakítása” [Creating the Workers’s Guard]. *Múltunk*, 54. no. 3 (2009): 238–277.

Kiss, József. “1956 ősze Szlovákiában” [The autumn of 1956 in Slovakia]. *Fórum Társadalomtudományi Szemle* 8, no. 3 (2006): 3–20.

Kramer, Mark. “The “Malin notes” on the crises in Hungary and Poland”. *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 8–9, (1996/1997): 396–397.

Marušiak, Juraj. “Az 1956-os magyar forradalom és Szlovákia” [Slovakia and the 1956 Hungarian Revolution]. *Múltunk*, 52, no. 1 (2007): 58–103.

Marušiak, Juraj. “Slovakia and the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. A comparison with Slovak perceptions of the Polish October” In *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution And The Soviet Bloc Countries: Reactions And Repercussions*, edited by János M. Rainer and Katalin Somlai, 79–96. Budapest: The Institute for the History of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, 2007.

Matthews, John P. C. *Majales: The Abortive Student Revolt in Czechoslovakia in 1956*. CWIHP Working Paper, No. 24. Washington: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Cold War International History Project, 1998.

McDermott, Kevin and Vítězslav Sommer. *The ‘Club of Politically Engaged Conformists’? The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Popular Opinion and the Crisis of Communism, 1956*. CWIHP Working Paper No. 66. Washington: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Cold War International History Project, 2013.

Méliusz, József, ed. *Magyar–román kapcsolatok 1956–1958*. [Hungarian–Romanian relations 1956–1958] Budapest: Paulus-Publishing Bt. and Nagy Imre Alapítvány, 2004.

Michálek, Slavomír and Michal Štefanský. *The Age of Fear: The Cold War and Its Influence on Czechoslovakia 1945–1968*. Stuttgart: ibidem Press, 2019.

Mitrovits, Miklós ed. *Lengyel, magyar „két jó barát”: A magyar–lengyel kapcsolatok dokumentumai, 1957–1987*. [Polish and Hungarian people are good friends. Documents of the Polish–Hungarian relations 1957–1987] Budapest: Napvilág, 2014.

Mitrovits, Miklós, “The First Phase of De-Stalinization in East-Central Europe (1953–1958): A comparative approach” In *Influences, Pressures Pro and Con, and Opportunities. Studies on Political Interactions in and Involving Hungary in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Zoltán Ripp. Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2014.

Nagy, Imre. *Snagovi jegyzetek – Gondolatok, emlékezések 1956–1957*. [Notes from Snagov. Thoughts and memories, 1956–1957] Budapest: Gondolat, 2006.

Ormos, Mária, István Vida, József Kiss and Zoltán Ripp, eds. *Magyar–jugoszláv kapcsolatok I–II*. [Hungarian–Yugoslavian relations] Budapest: MTA Jelenkori-kutató Bizottság, 1996 and 1997.

Pernes, Jiří. *Krise komunistického režimu v Československu v 50. letech 20. století*. [The Crisis of the Communist Regime in Czechoslovakia in the 1950s.] Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2008.

Pešek, Jan. “Maďarské udalosti roku 1956 a Slovensko” [Hungarian Events of 1956 and Slovakia]. *Historický časopis* 41, no. 4 (1993): 430–442.

Popély, “Az Új Szó szerepvállalása az 1956-os magyar forradalom idején” [The role of Új Szó during the Hungarian revolution of 1956]. *Eruditio – Educatio* 11, no. 4 (2016): 5–18.

Popély, Árpád. *Fél évszázad kisebbségben. Fejezetek a szlovákiai magyarság 1945 utáni történetéből*. [Half a century in minority. Chapters from the post-1945 history of Hungarians in Slovakia] Somorja [Šamorín]: Fórum Kisebbség-kutató Intézet, 2014.

Simon, Attila, “A szlovákiai magyarok és az 1956-os forradalom” [Hungarians in Slovakia and the revolution of 1956]. In *Az 1956-os magyar forradalom és Szlovákia*. [The 1956 Hungarian revolution and Slovakia] 41–56. Somorja–Pozsony: Fórum Kisebbségkutató Intézet–Szlovák Tudományos Akadémia Történettudományi Intézete, 2006.

Simon, Attila, Slavomír Michálek et al. *Revolúcia v susedstve. Maďarská revolúcia v roku 1956 a Slovensko* [Revolution in the Neighbourhood. The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and Slovakia]. Šamorín – Bratislava – Budapest: Fórum inštitút pre výskum menšín – Historický ústav SAV – Nemzeti Emlékezet Bizottsága, 2017.

Sipos, Levente, Karola Némethné Vágyi, and Sándor Balogh eds. *A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt ideiglenes vezető testületeinek jegyzőkönyvei*. [Protocols of the Provisional Governing Bodies of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party.] Budapest: Intera vol. 1, 1993.

Szereda, Vjacseszlav and Alekszandr Sztikalin, eds. *Hiányzó lapok 1956 történetéből: Dokumentumok a volt SZKP KB levéltárából*. [Missing pages from the history of 1956: Documents from the archives of the former Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union] Budapest: Móra Ferenc Könyvkiadó, 1993.

Szesztay, Ádám. *Nemzetiségi kérdés a Kárpát-medencében, 1956–1962. Az ötvenhatos forradalom hatása a kelet-közép-európai kisebbségpolitikára*. [The problem of nationalities in the Carpathian Basin, 1956–1962] Budapest: MTA Kisebbségkutató Intézet–Gondolat Kiadói Kör, 2003.

Tismaneanu, Vladimir. *Stalinism for all Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

Tůma, Oldřich. “The Impact of the Hungarian Revolution on Czechoslovakia, 1956–1968”. In *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution and the Soviet Bloc countries: reactions and repercussions*, edited by Rainer M., János and Katalin Somlai, 69–78. Budapest: 1956 Institute, 2007.

Žáček, Pavel. “»Napětí v Budapešti trvá«. Hlášení rezidentury Správy rozvědky ministerstva vnitra, 1956–1957” (part 1) [Tensions Continue in Budapest”. Report of the Residency of the Intelligence Administration of the Ministry of the Interior, 1956–1957], *Sborník Archivu bezpečnostních složek*, no. 14 (2016): 431–471.

Žáček, Pavel. “Napětí v Budapešti trvá”. Hlášení rezidentury Správy rozvědky ministerstva vnitra, 1956–1957” (part 2) [Tensions Continue in Budapest”. Report of the Residency of the Intelligence Administration of the Ministry of the Interior, 1956–1957], *Sborník Archivu bezpečnostních složek*, no. 15 (2017): 339–377.