

HUNGARIAN REVOLT

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The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 was the first major anti-Soviet uprising in Eastern Europe and “shooting war” between socialist states. In contrast to earlier uprisings after the death of Soviet leader Joseph Stalin’s death in March 1953, such as the workers’ revolt in East Berlin (1953) and Polish workers’ rebellion in Poznan, Poland in (October 1956), the incumbent Hungarian leader Imre Nagy had *not* summoned Soviet military troops to squelch the revolution and instead attempted to withdraw Hungary from the Warsaw Pact. Hence, the Hungarian revolution symbolizes perhaps the first major “domino” in a process that resulted ultimately in the Soviet Union’s loss of hegemony over Eastern Europe in 1989.

When Stalin’s successor Nikita Khrushchev delivered his "Secret Speech" at the Twentieth Party Congress in February, 1956, not only did he expose Stalin's crimes, but he also presented himself as a patron of "different paths to socialism" that would later prove hard to uphold. All over Eastern Europe, hardline Stalinist leaders wondered fearfully how far "Destalinization" would go. Meanwhile, their opponents, who had criticized Stalinist policies, suddenly gained in popularity. The Hungarian leader Imre Nagy was one such critic and reformer. He had served as Hungary's prime minister from July 4, 1953 to April 18, 1955. But in the spring of 1955, Nagy was

dislodged by the hardline Stalinist leader Matyas Rákosi, who had been forced to cede that post to Nagy in mid-1953.

Social pressures continued to build in Hungary under the leadership of Rákosi -- Stalin's "best disciple" - who had conducted the anti-Yugoslav campaign in 1948-9 more zealously than other East European party leaders. Hundreds of thousands of Hungarian communists were executed or imprisoned after 1949. By late October, the popular unrest in Hungary eluded the control of both the Hungarian government (led by Rákosi's successor Ernő Gerő) and the USSR.

On October 23, 1956 in Budapest, several hundred thousand people demonstrated, in order to publicize their 16-point resolution and to show solidarity with Poland (where, in June, an industrial strike originating in Poznan turned into a national revolt). They demanded that Nagy replace Gerő (Hungarian First Secretary from July 18 to October 25, 1956). Fighting broke out in Budapest and other Hungarian cities and continued throughout the night.

As we know now, Soviet leaders decided on October 23 to intervene militarily. Soviet troops executed "Plan Wave ("Volna") at 11:00 p.m. that evening. The next morning a radio broadcast announced that Nagy had replaced Andras Hegedus as Prime Minister. On October 25 János Kádár (a younger, centrist official) replaced Gerő as First Secretary. However, this first Soviet intervention did not solve the original political problem in the country. New documents reveal that the Kremlin initially decided on October 28 against a second military intervention. However, on October 31, they reversed course and launched a more massive intervention (Operation *Vikhr* or "Whirlwind"). During the night of November 3, sixteen Soviet

divisions entered Hungary. Although fighting continued until mid-November, Soviet forces suppressed the resistance and installed a pro-Soviet government under Kádár.

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