

June 13, 1953

**Transcript of Conversation between the Soviet
Leadership and Hungarian Workers' Party
Delegation in Moscow**

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Summary:

Discussion of the reorganization of the Hungarian government and various reforms following Stalin's death.

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Kremlin, 13 June 1953.

Cde. Malenkov: They had a discussion recently with Comrade Rákosi about the Hungarian situation. After that conversation, it seemed necessary to discuss certain questions in a wider range. He recommends as the procedure for discussion that the Hungarian comrades unfold their views primarily regarding three questions that relate to fields where not everything is in order in Hungary:

1. certain questions of economic development;
2. the selection of cadres;
3. certain questions of the state administration (abuses of power).

After discussing these questions, the ways to correct the mistakes must be discussed. [...]

Cde. Malenkov: We view Hungary's situation with a critical attitude. We would like the comrades to be critical as well, and to tell us their opinions about the problems. Our impression is that the Hungarian comrades underestimate the problems. Without a thorough debate of the questions, it is impossible to find proper solutions. The facts that we are familiar with indicate that the situation in the field of agriculture is not good. The quality of animal husbandry is not improving; on the contrary, it is declining. Regarding the [agricultural] co-operatives, the situation is not too good there either. As far as we know, 8-10,000 families left the co-operatives last year. They say the harvest was bad. That cannot explain everything. There were excessive orders during the compulsory delivery of the [agricultural levy]. It was not proper to collect the entire sunflower and rice harvest. Many peasants are sentenced by the courts, because they do not fulfill their obligations to the State. There are problems in the area of trade as well. They provide few commodities for the population.

Persecutions were initiated against 250,000 people in the second half of 1952. It is true that 75% of the persecutions were stopped; yet, the number is still rather high. In 1952, they brought sentences in about 540,000 cases of transgressions within 9 months. All these provoked dissatisfaction among the population.

To return to the [question of] co-operatives, there is evidence according to which the income of the co-operatives' employees is less than that of individually working farmers. It is also a mistake that [only] a small sum is appropriated for investments in the field of agriculture. Regarding the cadres. It is appropriate that many [of them] study. But if the leaders are always studying, they are not working. The leaders are virtually turned into students.[...]

Cde. Beria: He agrees with what Comrade Molotov said. When comrade Rákosi was here last time, it was brought up that certain questions should be discussed with more comrades. Not that they do not trust Comrade Rákosi or that Comrade Rákosi does not represent Hungary, but just so that they would get to know more comrades.

Comrade Rákosi himself suggested this on several occasions.

It cannot be said that there is no improvement in Hungary. The positions of the people's democracy are continuously becoming stronger. The point is that the situation should become even better. The international and internal conditions will not always be this favorable. This is exactly why now the internal situation must be strengthened. We must be stronger than we are now.

Let us look at agriculture from this point of view. The collective sector in Hungary

could work much more effectively if the Central Leadership [KV] and the government paid more attention to agriculture. In that case, there would not be 750,000 ha. fallow land. The situation wouldn't be such that the peasants leave agriculture and move into industry. The situation wouldn't be such that the peasants are significant debtors to the State. This debt constitutes 400 million forints according to our information. The situation wouldn't be such that the peasants do not know how much levy they would have to surrender to the State the following year. Comrade Imre Nagy was excluded from the PB [Political Bureau] because he recommended that the collective movement should be developed more slowly. This was not correct. The comrades who lead the KV and the Council of Ministers do not know the countryside well, and they do not want to get to know the countryside.

The large number of major investments contribute to the bad situation in the villages. The Hungarian industry is not small. If the Hungarian industry were rectified and broadened a bit, it would be possible to develop metallurgy and certain other industrial branches more slowly. This would allow them to pay more attention to light industry, to the industry that serves the population.

Regarding legality and law enforcement, Comrade Malenkov is right. Comrade Rákosi once again misunderstands us in this question. The issue is not that comrade Rákosi mentioned 30 40,000 arrested, and their number is somewhat higher.

Could it be acceptable that in Hungary--a country with 9,500,000 inhabitants--persecutions were initiated against 1,500,000 people? Administrative regulations were applied against 1,150,000 people within two and a half years. These numbers show that the interior and judiciary organs and the ÁVH work very badly, and the Ministry of the Interior and the ÁVH must merge precisely because of this. A respectful comrade must be placed in the leadership of the Ministry of the Interior; someone who will be able to change the situation that developed there. Several leaders replaced each other at the ÁVH and the M. of Interior; it is not even possible to know exactly what the situation is now. And Hungary will be the object of the attention of many capitalist countries, of the USA, and of England for a long time. There is a big and well-qualified Hungarian emigration in the West that keeps in touch with the leading foreign imperialist circles. It is to be expected that certain capitalist countries will try to flatter; others will send diversionists to Hungary. They have one goal: to overthrow the existing authorities and to restore the power of the capitalists. There are many elements in Hungary who could be exploited by the enemy. And there are many who are unsatisfied with the policies of the Party. Why does he treat this question so extensively? Because it has great significance in the relations of the peoples' democracies, but also in the Soviet Union.

There is another way to improve the situation. The personal intervention of the President of the Council of Ministers or of the Party's First Secretary in the questions of the Ministry of the Interior. Comrade Rákosi does that. This intervention is not always appropriate. Even Comrade Stalin made a mistake in this question. He directly gave instructions for the questioning of those arrested, etc. Comrade Rákosi would be even more likely to make mistakes.

It is not right that Comrade Rákosi gives directions regarding who must be arrested; he says who should be beaten. A person that's beaten will give the kind of confession that the interrogating agents want, will admit that he is an English or American spy or whatever we want. But it will never be possible to know the truth this way. This way, innocent people might be sentenced. There is law, and everyone has to respect it. How investigations should be conducted, who should be arrested, and how they should be interrogated must be left to the investigating organs.

Thus, there are two ways to improve the situation. One of the methods: a responsible person is placed to the top of the Ministry of the Interior who becomes the supervisor

of the area and corrects the mistakes. The other method: Comrade Rákosi directly directs the work of the Interior and ÁVH organs. This latter method is not correct. Comrade Rákosi tells who is to be arrested, etc. This is how we reach the point that comrade Rákosi is never wrong; all the other comrades are wrong. This situation leads to a point where comrade Rákosi will not be respected, but feared. [He] is the Party's [First] Secretary, the President of the Council of Ministers, and the director of the ÁVH in one person.

Cde. Malenkov: Here we are correcting the mistakes that we made in this area.

Cde. Beria: The issue of Péter's arrest. Bielkin, a person arrested by the Soviet State security, confessed that he spied together with Gábor Péter. Later he withdrew his confession.

Comrade Rákosi said that Péter could not be released because he had other sins.

Two people were beaten at the ÁVH until they died. This [was] a serious mistake. Comrade Rákosi appears as a most important person. It is not right that he does everything. It was not even right for Comrade Stalin to be everyone in one person. One person is only one person. When Comrade Rákosi says the people would not understand if he were released from his position as First Secretary, he overestimates himself. Those comrades who are here and the other comrades at home are not accidental [sic] people either. It would be better if the President of the Council of Ministers were Hungarian. Comrade Stalin told Comrade Rákosi several times that the Hungarians should be promoted more. It is said that many of them served Horthy. If they are honest people and now they serve us, they must be supported. Today the Red Army is still in Hungary, but it will not be there forever. Therefore, we must prepare and become stronger so that nobody can do any harm to us.

If comrade Nagy becomes the President of the Council of Ministers, Comrade Rákosi should remain at the head of the Party as a comrade rich in experience who is faithful to the cause of the Party. Comrade Nagy would be satisfactory as the President of the Council of Ministers (faithful to the Party, Hungarian, knows the agricultural sector).

Comrade Rákosi in his telegram misinterpreted the suggestion that Comrade Gerő should be the Minister of the Interior.

Comrade Molotov: The comrades had a chance to become convinced that even though we are talking about Hungary, the issue is not only Hungary, but all the peoples' democracies.

The criticism is severe, but the comrades have to get used to severe criticism. He [Molotov] agrees with Cde. Malenkov's and Cde. Beria's speeches. He also agrees with what has been said about Comrade Rákosi. The tendency for bossiness that plagued Comrade Rákosi as well originated in the Soviet Union. This mistake must be corrected as soon as possible.

Is the MDP's political line correct? In my opinion, it is not entirely correct. There have been many mistakes made in the economic field that must urgently be corrected. The speed of industrialization is exaggerated; it is beyond our capabilities. There is a disease in almost all peoples' democracies that leads them to want to establish autarky. This is a children's disease. They do not take into account the Soviet Union's existence. What happened in Hungary? The number of people working in industry grew by 500,000 people within 3 years. This is dangerous and detrimental for Hungary.

They want to invest 19 billion [forints] this year.

There is a virtual wave of oppression against the population. They initiated persecution against 1,500,000 people in a population with 4.5 million adults in three and a half years. There were 1,500,000 violations during this time. They punish for everything, and punish insignificant acts arbitrarily. The constitution was established in 1949 according to which a Bureau of State Attorney should be set up. It still has not been set up. This state of affairs is intolerable.

They resort to all kinds of manipulations to ensure a forced industrial development. For instance, there was [only] 57% wool in a particular fabric. They left the name and price of the material, but they took the wool out of it. They significantly worsened the quality of milk. This resembles fraud. They have lost contact with the population; they do not express the interest of the population in many questions. Is this why we chased the bourgeoisie away, so that afterwards the situation would be like this? Comrade Rákosi's bossiness played a role in this. He knows everything, sees everything and is capable of doing anything.

We talk with you, Comrades, in a totally frank and honest way. The necessary conclusions must be drawn.

Cde. Bulganin: We had not discussed anything in advance; we have no such habits. There are many facts that I only heard for the first time from Comrade Beria's presentation. All that was said by the comrades authorizes me to observe that a catastrophe will occur if we do not improve the situation. The whole situation might be entirely different if the Red Army were not there. It is a fact that the elements of power abuse exist; the population's standard of living has declined. This is not the road to socialism, but the road to a catastrophe.

The question of the army. It is intolerable and not allowable that the army is constantly being purged. Of course, there should be no dubious elements in the army. But it is not possible to keep purging the army for 8 years. Continuously purging the army and keeping it in a feverish state means disarming the army morally and counterpoising it with themselves [with the Party]. In 1952 and in the first quarter of 1953, 460 officers and generals were discharged for political reasons. The army was not established in 1952. Why was it necessary to discharge this many people for political reasons? If Comrade Rákosi and the KV looked at these 460 people, it would become clear that some of them are our friends, our people. Thus they turn honest people into traitors. There were 370 desertions in 1952. There were 177,000 disciplinary punishments in the army in one year and 3 months. There was almost one punishment for each person.

There are many signals coming in that Comrade Farkas likes glamour too much and strives to present himself as a great commander. Rather thorough steps must be taken urgently to improve the situation.

Cde. Mikoyan: Comrade Malenkov and Comrade Beria brought up these questions as openly as they would have [just] between themselves. This is a sign of great trust and friendship.

I have known Comrade Rákosi for a long time. The comrades analyzed comrade Rákosi's mistakes correctly. Comrade Rákosi has become very full of himself. There is a certain kind of adventurism in the question of economic planning. For instance, the forced development of their own metallurgy. Hungary does not have its own iron ore, nor its own coke. All this must be imported from abroad. Nobody has calculated yet how much 1 ton of raw iron and steel costs Hungary. They are building ironworks in Hungary for which nobody had promised the iron ore. In 1952, they had a lack of

700,000 tons of coke. They [Russians] helped based on the instruction from comrade Stalin so that the ironworks would not stop. The coke is not secured for next year either. There are great excesses in the field of major investments. The construction of the metro could have waited 5-6 years. The amount of money invested in heavy industry has quadrupled since 1950. They are implementing [agricultural] collectivization without the appropriate economic basis, and, as a consequence, the co-operatives had a lower productivity rate than the individual producers.

This is a serious mistake.

The party newspaper reported [cases of] sentences in which [a] peasant was imprisoned for one year and fined for 3,000 forints because he fed 1.5 q sugar canes [to his animals]. The peasantry cannot respect a system like this.

They ask for equipment for the army in the value of a quarter million [?] Rub. when Hungary has problems with food supplies. Hungary has a debt of 360 million Rub. to the people's democracies.

They draw up strenuous plans that they cannot fulfill. The goods available to the populace in Hungary are of bad quality and expensive. There are no goods with good quality, because they export those to try somehow to achieve trade balance. The situation is not improving but getting worse. Everything is growing in Hungary, but the amount of goods provided for the population is decreasing. (Examples for decreasing quantity: textiles, soap, etc.)

Hungary has all the potential to bloom. It was generally developing well until 1951, until success blinded the leaders and they started to make audacious plans.

The mistakes must be corrected instantly.

Cde. Khrushchev: He agrees with the criticism that the comrades developed. Comrade Beria's passionate criticism was aimed at helping to correct the mistakes. Certain comrades think that the Russian comrades did not form an entirely correct opinion when they directed their criticism against Comrade Rákosi. Comrade Rákosi is primarily responsible for the mistakes. Comrade Rákosi observed that coal production grew by 25%, and in spite of this there were no protests in certain schools or hospitals. Even though Comrade Rákosi commented on this in the form of self-criticism, he is still responsible for it. It is possible that comrade Rákosi practiced self-criticism because he saw that things were going badly and this way he could avoid criticism.

Hungary used to be famous for her well-developed agriculture and for being a rich country. Now, even the middle peasantry is in uncertainty because of the extremely rapid pace of collectivization. The peasantry needs oxen, power for the ploughs, etc. If the peasantry sees that sooner or later they will have to join the co-operatives, they will not develop their farms. This is how individual farming declines. We should not even be surprised if all of a sudden they started to do away with the vineyards.

My impression is that there is no real collective leadership, [that] a true collective leadership has not developed. Comrade Nagy criticized the leadership; therefore, they excluded him from the Politburo. What kind of respect for [critical] opinions is this? Far reaching consequences must be drawn from the criticism toward Comrade Rákosi. Is it not possible to produce a collective leadership made up of Hungarians? It is impossible that a people with 9.5 million cannot produce people that are suitable leaders. This situation in which one has not finished studying yet, the other one just started, must be changed; thus, there are no leaders with sufficient values.

Comrade Rákosi cannot work collectively. There are capable people; they must be promoted and the relationship [of the party] with the Hungarian people must be improved.

They are building the metro in Budapest. In [the] SU they only started to build it in 1932. Moscow is the capital of a country with 200 million people. The Hungarian comrades are mistaken to start with the assumption that since it exists in Moscow; therefore, it must be quickly built in Budapest as well.

Cde. Malenkov: Certain questions must have surprised the comrades. They would need to stay for another 2 3 days to develop and discuss the main regulations. We should meet once again. We could meet on Tuesday afternoon.

The [Hungarian] comrades who spoke said themselves that things were not going very well in Hungary. It is not an issue of minor details, but the correction of the political line has become necessary, because there are problems with fundamental questions, and it also has to do with the question of leadership. Last time, when Comrade Rákosi was here, we talked with him in more immediate circles. Comrade Rákosi could not name anyone among the Hungarians as his primary deputy. This was an unpleasant surprise for us. Whenever someone's name came up, Comrade Rákosi always immediately had some kind of objection, thus finally he could not name any Hungarian as his primary deputy. In connection with this came the idea that the comrades should be invited and we should discuss certain questions together. No matter what kind of candidate's name came up, there were always immediate objections. This was what worried us, and made it necessary to talk with more comrades, this way. Comrade Rákosi's telegram also had this kind of effect. And then we saw that we needed to help the comrades and we would have to talk about this question openly. It is not a coincidence that the question of bossiness came up. It is one thing to paint things very beautifully in the movies, but reality is another thing.

Why do we bring these questions up so harshly? We, as Communists, are all responsible for the state of things in Hungary. The Soviet Union is also responsible for what kind of rule exists in Hungary. If they say that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union advised certain incorrect things, we admit to that, and we correct the mistakes too. We admit to the extreme military demands, but the comrades executed these demands even beyond what was expected. Why should an army be maintained with such a size that it bankrupts the state[?] The point is, we have to develop regulations together that are suitable to correct the mistakes, and these regulations must be put into writing. It must be determined how power can be allocated to the right places and distributed properly. We have to come to the conclusion that the president of the Council of Ministers should be Hungarian. Comrade Rákosi will find his own important position as the [First] Secretary of the Party. A respectful person must be recommended as the Minister of the Interior; Comrade Gerő should take over the leadership of the Ministry of the Interior. The Politburo must take its own place; the Secretariat and the Council of Ministers should also take their own place. It is an impossible state of affair that persons in the Council of Ministers keep silent regarding the question of [agricultural] levy [only] because it had been previously decided on by the Secretariat.

Recommendations must be made as to who should be placed where. They must not favor for anyone with regards to who should be placed in what field. It is our sacred responsibility to place everyone in the proper position. Whoever is placed in a responsible position must be respected and full rights must be insured for him. There is no reason for people in responsible positions to work as employees next to the master. Nothing good could come of it, besides all the harm. That is a petit-bourgeois habit.

These questions must be considered thoroughly, and the recommendations must be

prepared. We will meet on Tuesday, and then we will discuss the recommendations.

Cde. Rákosi: Regarding hubris, that's an illness that one cannot detect, just like one cannot smell one's own odor. If the comrades say this is the case, I accept it. (Beria: Comrade, what do you think?)

It must be said that I never wanted to be the President of the Council of Ministers. (Cde. Molotov: But you wanted a President for the Council of Ministers that would have had no say in decisions.)

Cde. Beria: We like you and respect you, that's why we criticize you. You had told comrade Stalin even before being elected as the President of the Council of Ministers that the power was already in your hands. Comrade Stalin reported this.

Cde. Rákosi: The comrades said that it was us who wanted a big army and military industry.

Cde. Malenkov: We wanted you to develop the army. We [will] correct this mistake. There are 600,000 people in the army. (Comrade Rákosi: Including the reserves.) So you carried the Soviet Union's wishes to the extreme.

Cde. Beria: The development of the army was discussed with comrade Stalin. Comrade Stalin gave incorrect instructions.

Cde. Rákosi: We tried to execute the instructions. My heart was aching about the fact that we had to maintain such a big army.

Cde. Malenkov: When you asked us to decrease our demands to build barracks, we withdrew our requests immediately.

Cde. Rákosi: 26% of the farm land is in the hands of co-operatives. We achieved this in 5 years. The peasantry knows that collectivization will happen sooner or later.

Cde. Beria: The policy toward the middle peasantry must be changed.

Cde. Malenkov: One or two things can be explained, but not everything. The issue of Comrade Rákosi's telegram. Comrade Rákosi started to expand in the telegram on something other than what they had talked about and agreed on. The issue is that there should not be three Jews in the leadership. However, Comrade Rákosi in the telegram made it sound like we had given such an advice, and answered that he did not really understand it, but he accepted it.

Cde. Beria: If the great Stalin made mistakes, Comrade Rákosi can admit that he made mistakes too. It must not be prescribed who should be beaten by the ÁVH. Everyone will be afraid. Comrade [István] Hidas is afraid too; that's what his speech reflects. Provocation can reach everything [sic], if the methods are like these. People must not be beaten.

The Council of Ministers must make the decisions about important questions regarding production. The organs of the Party's Central Leadership must be preoccupied with the education and the question of cadres.

Why is it necessary to invest 1 billion forints in crude oil production? Romania has got enough oil. In Hungary, the aluminum industry should be developed more.

Cde. Gerö: The criticism is justified and correct not just in general, but also regarding the question of bossiness. The leadership is not collective, and we did not raise Hungarian cadres. He often wanted to raise the question but never got to it. The situation really got to the point that whenever Comrade Rákosi gave a speech, the newspapers really exulted it, and the KV's staff made sure that it would appear before the people as some extraordinary achievement. Such bossiness undoubtedly exists, and I am primarily responsible for it second to Comrade Rákosi. I did not have the courage to bring up the question. By expressing our mistakes this openly, the comrades helped us tremendously. It is a shame that we could not do this ourselves. It must be admitted that such bossiness happened in my case too, but I discontinued it during the last few years. The enemy tries to take advantage of these things. Bossiness is also practiced by Comrade Farkas. In fact, there is bossiness even at the lower levels, at the smaller organs. The county and village secretary, the president of the co-operative, everyone is a boss in their realm. This kind of bossiness exists, and it must be uprooted thoroughly. In our case, bossiness is intertwined with petit-bourgeois phenomena; he [Gerö] also agrees with the comrades on that. We just had parliamentary elections. After the elections, a picture was published in the Szabad Nép, depicting Comrade Rákosi voting together with his wife. Comrade Rákosi did not arrange for this himself, but he did not protest it either.

Regarding mistakes in the economy. We noticed in a number of questions that there were mistakes, but we did not bring up these questions so openly. For instance, the issue of the metro. It is actually fortunate that they did not listen to the military advisers who recommended that the metro should be built such that tanks and military trains could commute on the metro line. There was great excess in the case of the metro.

[...]

Cde. Malenkov: It seems like we all agree on recommending comrade Imre Nagy. He [Malenkov] explicitly asked for Comrade Rákosi's and comrade Dobi's opinions. Comrade Rákosi and Comrade Dobi agreed with the proposal, too.

[...]