

November 2, 1956
**Working Notes from the Session of the CPSU CC
Presidium on 2 November 1956**

Citation:

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Summary:

The CPSU CC Presidium is confronted with reports from Hungary of mass demonstrations, armed counterrevolutionary groups, and the support for Nagy by the opposition. The CC is told about the Hungarian decision to declare neutrality and the likely confrontation between Soviet and Hungarian troops should the former continue to advance toward Budapest. Also discussed is the split within the HWP and possible Soviet responses.

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

Working Notes from the Session of the CPSU CC Presidium on 2 November 1956, with Participation by J. Kadar, F. Munnich, and I. Bata(1)

Those Taking Part: Bulganin, Voroshilov, Kaganovich, Mikoyan, Molotov, Saburov, Suslov, Brezhnev. Cdes. Munnich, Kadar, and Bata

Exchange of Opinions about the Situation in Hungary

An assessment.(2) The intelligentsia is taking the lead; the oppositionists are supporters of Nagy; the armed groups are headed by party figures, including Dudas, an engineer.(3) When the uprising ended, they spoke with the rebels; these were workers, the leaders of the group; they arrived at the coalition government; they didn't want this; they're seeking the ouster of the Rakosi clique. They fought for the withdrawal of troops and for the order of people's democracy.(4) Mass demonstrations are taking place on the periphery; these didn't include any goal—to destroy the order of people's democracy; many demands about democratization, and social demands. I personally took part in one meeting (of the conference), and no one wanted counterrevolution. But when we spoke with the leaders of the armed groups, inside these groups—armed groups of a counterrevolutionary nature have emerged. I have to say that everyone demanded the withdrawal of Soviet troops. We didn't clarify how the counterrevolutionaries managed to disseminate this counterrevolutionary propaganda. The strike is a demand for the withdrawal of troops: we'll starve in the process, but the troops must be withdrawn. Yesterday there was a conference. They were speaking about the Declaration of the Soviet government and the Declaration of neutrality.(5) Stated that we will go back to work. But Soviet troops were being redeployed, and the news quickly spread. The government will not be considered to have any authority because of the coalition nature of the government. All forces are seeking the restoration of their parties. Each group wants to take power into its own hands. This undermines the authority of the government even further. The Soc.-Democrats are especially distinctive in this regard. In the inner cabinet the Soc.-Dems. Were given one spot. But they haven't named a candidate; they don't want to act in solidarity with Nagy.(6) Nagy's policy has counterrev. aspects to it. The soldiers freed Cardinal Mindszenty.(7) The Austrians support a fascist organization (in West Germany—a Hungarian organization) 35 thous. people (Horthyites). The weak link is the HWP; it has ceased to exist: some have been killed (workers), some were saved. The leaders of 1/3 of the obkoms are taking part in revolutionary committees (for the region and province). Local bodies have been destroyed. On 1 Nov. at noon—the point of view in the government is that it's necessary to hold discussions with the Soviet gov't and to have the troops withdrawn by a certain time. But this isn't accurate.(8) The coalition parties don't want counterrev. Tildy and other cdes. are afraid of Ferenc Nagy.(9) Those in the emigre community: they're afraid of them. Tildy is afraid of Kovacs, but he's better than Tildy and is a smart man. Kovacs gave a speech in Pecs: (10) we are creating a Smallholders party, but we can't struggle on the basis of the old program. He is against the return of the landowners and capitalists. But they aren't putting forth demands that are popular in the nation. Hour by hour the situation is moving rightward.

2 questions:

- 1) the gov't's decision about neutrality,
- 2) the party.

How did the decision about neutrality emerge? The strong impression is that there's an organized departure of troops. The Declaration—a good impression and a reassuring gesture. But the masses are very stirred-up and are reacting harshly. There were movements of Sov. troops, which alarmed the gov't and masses.(11) The gov't is doing one thing, and the troops another. They reported that Soviet troops had

crossed the border in transport vehicles. Hungarian formations are entrenched. What should be done—to shoot or not to shoot? They summoned Andropov. Andropov said that these are railroad workers. Hungarians at the border sent back telegrams saying that these definitely are not railroad workers. Then they reported that Soviet tanks are moving into Szolnok. This was at noon. The government has been thrown into a nervous state. They summoned Andropov. He responded: the withdrawal of wounded soldiers. Nagy was convinced that a strike against Budapest is being prepared. Tildy requested that Hungarian tanks approach the parliament. In the army—a Rev. Council, Maleter, Kovacs,(12) and Kiraly are not subordinate to the gov't. They don't want bad ministers. The whole gov't was inclined to the view that if the troops move toward Budapest, the city must be defended. In this atmosphere the idea of neutrality arose. The initiator of it was Zoltan Tildy. Everyone supported it. I was a supporter of the view that no sorts of steps should be taken without having spoken with Andropov. The whole cabinet, other than Kadar, declared that the Sov. gov't is deceiving the Hungarian gov't. They deferred it for two hours. The Sov. gov't's explanation didn't satisfy them. They told Andropov that they'll be taking this step.(13) When Andropov left, they took their step about neutrality and decided to issue an appeal to the UN. If these are just maneuvers, they'll withdraw the question from the UN. When Andropov left, Kadar voted for neutrality, too. The renaming of the party: the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (a name used back in 1925). The HWP has been compromised in the view of the overwhelming masses. The peak of the HWP's authority was in 1948 (the alliance with the Soc.-Dems.). The Rajk affair shattered its authority. About the future. Yesterday I voted for these two decisions of the government. If they will withdraw Soviet troops in the near future (within two-three months)—the decision on the withdrawal of troops is the important thing—our party and other parties would be able to fight against the counterrev. But I'm not sure this will be successful. There's no unity within the coalition. My point of view is: if the Soc.-Dems. And the Smallholders party are going to operate on the basis of their old programs, they will be deceitful.

The people believe in nationalism and regard it as their affair.(14) If the Communists declare that they support nationalism, the authority of the other parties will stop increasing. The looming danger—the counterrevolution wouldn't embolden these coalition parties. My view is that there's another path. The armed forces could be deployed to support Hungary. But then there will be skirmishes. The use of military force will be destructive and lead to bloodshed. What will happen then? The morale of the Communists will be reduced to zero. The socialist countries will suffer losses. Is there a guarantee that such circumstances will not arise in other countries? The counterrev. forces are not meager. But this is a matter of struggle. If order is restored by force, the authority of the socialist countries will be eroded.

Munnich: A gloomy situation. Why did this situation arise? The isolation of the leaders from the masses. Certainty that the regime exists and is preserved only through the support of the USSR.(15) This is the source of anti-Soviet sentiments (facts: soccer, radio broadcasts).(16) In Hungary: total chaos. What would be the result if the troops are withdrawn—this would respond to the sentiment of the masses. Counterrev. elements are receiving reinforcement, and their actions are not being stopped. We have no more forces left. On the military nature of the events. Anti-Soviet sentiments are being spread by counterrev. elements.

Cde. Kadar—a concrete request: preserve the party cadres.

Cde. Bata: The question is pointedly raised about the withdrawal of Soviet troops. Everything all of them are doing will lead to a confrontation of Soviet and Hungarian troops. I was a witness when a Hungarian unit opened fire on Soviet troops. The Soviets didn't respond. Further such restraint couldn't be expected from even the most disciplined army. Whether deliberately or not, the gov't is laying the groundwork for a confrontation of Soviet and Hungarian troops. Order must be restored through a military dictatorship. Change the policy of the government.

Translator's Notes

1 No formal protocol for this session has been found (unlike the other session on 2 November recorded in Document No. 13 *infra*).

2 These initial comments are not attributed to anyone in Malin's notes, but it is clear that the speaker was Kadar. The notes of Kadar's remarks contain a few third-person references to himself, but this is because Malin sometimes jotted down the speaker's name rather than using the pronoun "I."

3 Jozsef Dudas, a former Budapest city official who had been imprisoned during most of the Communist period, was one of the most radical leaders of the October-November uprising. He was in charge of the rebel forces headquartered in the Szabad Nep building. Dudas and other rebel leaders insisted that Nagy must meet the protesters' demands. Dudas was detained by Hungarian police on 1 November. After Soviet troops intervened on 4 November, he took a leading part in the military resistance. He was arrested by Soviet troops on 21 November and was executed two months later. His name is incorrectly rendered as "Dusak" in Malin's notes; the spelling is corrected in the translation.

4 Kadar is referring here to negotiations that he, Munnich, and others had held in the parliament with one of the insurgent groups headed by Istvan Angyal. Angyal was not as radical as most of the other rebel leaders, but he was insistent on the need for far-reaching changes. Angyal was executed in November 1958. See Laszlo Eorsi, ed., "Angyal Istvan sajat kezu vallomasai, 1956 december," *Multunk* (Budapest), Vol. 40, No. 4 (1995), pp. 133-182.

5 The references here are to the Soviet declaration of 30 October and to the declaration of neutrality adopted by the Hungarian government on the evening of 1 November. Nagy announced the declaration in a nationwide radio address.

6 On 3 November, Anna Kethly was named as the Social Democratic representative in the government. See Note 96 *supra*.

7 On 31 October the Hungarian government announced that, on the previous evening, Cardinal Jozsef Mindszenty had been freed from house arrest in Felsopeteny. He had been detained there for some 15 months after his release from prison. As the Primate of the Hungarian Catholic Church, Mindszenty had been sentenced to life imprisonment during an anti-religious campaign in February 1949. Mindszenty's statements in the autumn of 1956 were restrained, but clearly supportive of the revolution. When Soviet troops intervened on 4 November, he sought refuge in the U.S. legation in Budapest. Subsequently, Kadar's government prohibited Mindszenty from performing clerical duties of any sort from the legation.

8 It is unclear precisely what Kadar was saying here. (Malin inadvertently may have omitted some comments just before this line.) At the noontime meeting, the Hungarian government reached no final decision on whether to demand the immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops and whether to issue the declaration of neutrality. Those decisions were not approved until the evening session, as Kadar explains below.

9 Ferenc Nagy, one of the former leaders of the Independent Smallholders' Party who had been living in exile in the United States, came to Vienna in late October to display solidarity with the insurgents. On 31 October, however, the Austrian authorities forced him to leave the country on the grounds that his presence might be deemed incompatible with Austria's neutral status.

10 Bela Kovacs had been recuperating in Pecs from his nine years of imprisonment. The government's evening session on 1 November was the first activity in which he took part in Budapest.

11 On the alarm generated by the Soviet troop movements, see Andropov's ciphered telegrams from 30 October, 1 November, and 2 November in AVPRF, F. 059a, Op. 4, P. 6, D. 5, Ll. 15-16, 17-19, and 20-22, respectively.

12 The name "Kovacs" here refers to General Istvan Kovacs, not Bela Kovacs. General Kovacs had become chief of the Hungarian General Staff on 31 October and was also a member of the Revolutionary Defense Committee. He was arrested on 3 November along with the other members of the Hungarian delegation that were negotiating the withdrawal of Soviet troops. He was not released from prison until 1960.

13 Andropov's own account of his attendance at the inner cabinet's evening session, which tallies very well with Kadar's version, is in "Shifrtelogramma," 1 November 1956 (Strictly Secret), in AVPRF, F. 059a, Op. 4, P. 6, D. 6, Ll. 17-19.

14 The word used here for "nationalism" is natsionalizatsiya, which normally means "nationalization" (i.e., the assertion of state control over property), but Kadar seems to have in mind the notion of reasserting Hungarian national control over Hungary's internal affairs, rather than leaving important matters under Soviet control.

15 This again is a telling indication that East European and Soviet leaders were fully aware of the popular resentment caused by Soviet preponderance in Eastern Europe.

16 Presumably, Munnich is referring to nationalistic slogans that had been shouted during Soviet-Hungarian soccer matches and to the influence of Radio Free Europe and other Western broadcasts. The Hungarian scholar Janos M. Rainer adds the following explanation for the reference to "soccer": "It was widely believed at the time that the celebrated Hungarian [soccer] team of the period, the 'Golden Team', which won against nearly every country it played, was not allowed to beat the Soviet Union for political reasons. (Their matches usually ended in a draw.) In actual fact, the first Hungarian win against the Soviet team took place some weeks before the revolution." See Janos M. Rainer, "The Road to Budapest, 1956: New Documentation of the Kremlin's Decision To Intervene," pt. 2, in *The Hungarian Quarterly* Vol. 37, No. 143 (Autumn 1996), p. 31 n. 28; readers interested in following the exploits of a fictionalized Hungarian basketball team of this era are advised to read Tibor Fischer's novel, *Under the Frog* (Penguin: London, 1993).