

October 31, 1956

Working Notes from the Session of the CPSU CC Presidium on 31 October 1956

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Summary:

Khrushchev and members of the CPSU CC Presidium decide to not withdraw Soviet troops from Hungary. Negotiations with Tito and the situation in Yugoslavia are also mentioned.

Credits:

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Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

(Re: Point VI of Protocol No. 49) (1)

Information about Discussions with Gomulka

Regarding the Situation in Poland and Hungary(2)

(Khrushchev)

A meeting with Cde. Gomulka (in the Brest region) was proposed.

On Hungary

Cde. Khrushchev sets forth the various considerations.

We should reexamine our assessment and should not withdraw our troops from Hungary and Budapest.(3) We should take the initiative in restoring order in Hungary. If we depart from Hungary, it will give a great boost to the Americans, English, and French-the imperialists.

They will perceive it as weakness on our part and will go onto the offensive.

We would then be exposing the weakness of our positions.

Our party will not accept it if we do this.

To Egypt they will then add Hungary.(4)

We have no other choice.

If this point of view is supported and endorsed, let's consider what we should do.

Agreed: Cdes. Zhukov, Bulganin, Molotov, Kaganovich, Voroshilov, Saburov(5)

We should say we tried to meet them halfway, but there is not now any government.

What line are we now adopting?

We should create a Provisional Revol. Gov't (headed by Kadar).(6)

Best of all-a deputy.

Munnich-as premier and min. of defense and internal affairs.(7)

This government-we should invite them to negotiations about the withdrawal of troops and resolve the matter.

If Nagy agrees, bring him in as dep. premier.(8)

Munnich is appealing to us with a request for assistance. We are lending assistance and restoring order.

We should negotiate with Tito.

We should inform the Chinese comrades, the Czechs, the Romanians, and the Bulgarians.(9)

There will be no large-scale war.

Cde. Saburov-after yesterday's session this discussion is all pointless.

It will vindicate NATO.

Cde. Molotov-yesterday was only a compromise decision.

Cdes. Zhukov, Voroshilov, Bulganin: We should reject the view that we are reexamining our position.

Cde. Furtseva-What further should be done?

We showed patience, but now things have gone too far. We must act to ensure that victory goes to our side.

Cde. Pospelov-we should use the argument that we will not let socialism in Hungary be strangled.

Cde. Shvernik-Cde. Khrushchev's proposal is correct.

Cde. Molotov-we should not defer the creation of organs in localities. We should act simultaneously in the center and in the localities.

Cde. Zhukov is instructed to work out a plan and report on it.(10)

Shepilov, Brezhnev, Furtseva, and Pospelov are to handle the propaganda side.(11)

An appeal to the people from the military command or the government.

An appeal to the people from the Prov. Revol. Gov't.

An order from Cde. Konev.(12)

We should send a group to the region of Cde. Konev's headquarters.(13)

Cde. Rakosi-favors Munnich (as premier)(14)

Cde. Hegedus- "

Cde. Gero- "

Apro(15)

Kadar

Kiss Karoly(16)

Boldoczki

Horvath

On Negotiations with Tito

(Cdes. Khrushchev, Molotov, Bulganin)

Draft a telegram to Tito about the meeting.(17)

To Brest: Khrushchev, Molotov, Malenkov.

To Yugoslavia: Khrushchev, Malenkov.

To discuss with you the situation that has emerged in Hungary. What is your view of it? If you agree, our delegation will visit incognito from

1. XI in the evening to

2. XI in the morning your time.

Confirm the telegram to the Soviet ambassador in Belgrade.

(1) In the formal protocol of this session, Point VI was given the title of "On the Situation in Hungary" (O polozhenii v Vengrii), the same as the previous segment. Malin's working notes do not provide a list of participants, but the following list is given in the formal protocol: Khrushchev, Zhukov, Bulganin, Molotov, Kaganovich, Voroshilov, and Saburov. It is also clear from Malin's notes that Furtseva, Pospelov, and Shvernik took part at certain points.

(2) These "discussions with Gomulka" were conducted by Khrushchev over the

telephone. The two leaders agreed that Khrushchev, Malenkov, and Molotov would meet the next day (1 November) in Brest with Gomulka and Cyrankiewicz. The formal protocol of the session notes that "in accordance with the exchange of opinions at the CPSU Presidium session, Cdes. Khrushchev, Molotov, and Malenkov are empowered to hold negotiations with representatives of the PZPR CC."

(3) In a speech at a mass rally in front of the Parliament Building on 31 October, Nagy declared that his government had already "opened negotiations for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the country and for the renunciation of our obligations under the Warsaw Treaty." Clearly, he was referring to the negotiations he had been holding that morning with Mikoyan and Suslov, who had generally seemed receptive to Nagy's demands. These negotiations are briefly recounted in Tibor Meray, *Thirteen Days That Shook the Kremlin: Imre Nagy and the Hungarian Revolution*, trans. by Howard L. Katzander (London: Thames and Hudson, 1959), pp. 163- 165. See also the first-hand comments by Gyorgy G. Heltai, the Hungarian deputy foreign minister under Nagy's government, "International Aspects," in Bela K. Kiraly and Paul Jonas, *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 in Retrospect*, East European Monograph No. XL (Boulder, Col.: East European Quarterly, 1978), esp. pp. 52-53. It is conceivable that Nagy's expressed desire to renounce Hungarian membership in the Warsaw Pact, which was promptly transmitted to Moscow by telephone, was one of the factors that led to Khrushchev's change of heart at this session. Although Nagy had spoken in earlier years (especially after he was ousted by Rakosi in 1955) about the desirability of neutrality for Hungary, his decision to raise the matter with Mikoyan and Suslov at this critical moment must have come as a jolt to Soviet leaders.

(4) Early on the morning of 31 October, the French and British launched bombing raids against Egyptian cities and imposed a naval blockade against Egypt, thus aiding Israeli's ground incursions. By the time the Presidium met on the 31st, reports of the French and British operations were pouring in, conveying a greater impression of "success" than later events warranted.

(5) The inclusion of Saburov's name in this list is odd, as will become clear in his remarks below. Initially, he was disinclined to reverse the Presidium's non-interventionist stance of the previous day.

(6) It is unclear at what point Soviet officials approached Kadar about becoming the head of a provisional government. Kadar's statements at the CPSU Presidium meeting on 2 November suggest that he was not yet aware he had been chosen to perform this function.

(7) On the evening of 1 November, the day after this Presidium meeting, Kadar and Munnich were secretly flown to Moscow aboard a Soviet military aircraft. They were brought back to Hungary when Soviet troops launched Operation "Whirlwind" three days later.

(8) It is extraordinary that even as Khrushchev was calling for a full-scale invasion, he was still apparently willing to consider including Nagy in the soon-to-be-formed Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government.

(9) It is interesting that Soviet leaders were concerned most of all about informing the Poles. As indicated above, a meeting with the Polish leadership had already been set up for the following day in Brest. Informing the leaders of these other countries was important, but not as high a priority. Soviet Presidium members informed the visiting Chinese delegation about the decision on 31 October, just before the Chinese officials flew back to Beijing. After the meetings in Brest on 1 November, Khrushchev and Malenkov continued on to Bucharest, where they met with Romanian, Bulgarian, and Czechoslovak leaders. The two Soviet officials then traveled to Brioni to confer with Tito on 2-3 November. Khrushchev and Malenkov returned to Moscow on the morning of the 3rd.

(10) The formal protocol for this session states that "taking account of the exchange of opinions at the CPSU CC Presidium session, Cde. Zhukov is instructed to devise an appropriate plan of measures connected with the events in Hungary, and to report on them to the CPSU CC."

(11) The formal protocol from this session notes that "Cdes. Shepilov, Brezhnev, Furtseva, and Pospelov are instructed, on the basis of the exchange of opinions at the CPSU Presidium session, to prepare all necessary documents and submit them for the

consideration of the CPSU CC." Among the key documents they prepared over the next few days were: an "Appeal of the Hungarian Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government to the Hungarian People," which Kadar announced when he was installed in power on 4 November; an "Appeal by the Command of Soviet Troops in Hungary to the Hungarian People and the Officers and Men of the Hungarian Army," which was broadcast in translation over Hungarian radio and distributed via leaflets at the outset of the invasion; and Order No. 1 issued by Marshal Konev (the supreme commander of the invasion) to all Soviet officers just before the start of Operation "Whirlwind." The English-language texts of the first two items and other "propaganda documents" prepared in Moscow can be found in Paul E. Zinner, ed., *National Communism and Popular Revolt in Eastern Europe: A Selection of Documents on Events in Poland and Hungary, February- November 1956* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), pp. 473-481.

(12) For the final text of this order, see "Prikaz Glavnokomanduyushchego Ob"edinennymi vooruzhennymi silami No. 1, 4 noyabrya 1956 goda," reproduced in Lieut.-General E. I. Malashenko, "Osobyi korpus v ogne Budapeshta" (Part 3), *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal* (Moscow), No. 12 (December 1993), p. 86.

(13) It is unclear what "group," if any, was actually sent. Presumably, the reference here is to a group of Presidium members.

(14) The three former Hungarian officials listed here-Rakosi, Hegedus, and Gero-had fled to the Soviet Union within the past few days. No doubt, Khrushchev had solicited their views beforehand about the proper course to pursue in Hungary. It is also possible that the three were asked to take part in this phase of the CPSU Presidium meeting, and that they offered their views directly.

(15) The five Hungarian officials listed here were among those who were slated to take part in a forthcoming "provisional revolutionary government." The first three were still in Budapest (though Kadar was spirited out the next evening), Boldoczki was in Moscow (in his ambassadorial post), and Horvath, the foreign minister in Nagy's government, was on his way to a UN General Assembly session, but was delayed in Prague.

(16) Kiss's name is incorrectly rendered in Malin's notes as Kisskar.

(17) The formal protocol for this session "affirms the text of the telegram to the Soviet ambassador in Belgrade for Cde. Tito." A copy of the telegram is attached to the protocol, which further notes that "if the answer [from the Yugoslav side] is positive, Cdes. Khrushchev and Malenkov are authorized to hold negotiations with Cde. Tito."