

November 2, 1956

**Record of Conversation from Premier Zhou's
receiving of the Hungarian Ambassador to China
Ágoston Szkladán on his Farewell Visit**

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Summary:

Zhou Enlai and Hungarian Ambassador to China Ágoston Szkladán discuss the ongoing Hungarian Revolution, and Szkladán asks for economic assistance from the other Communist countries for this issue.

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Participants on our part: Ji Pengfei, Li Huichuan
Interpreter and minute-taker: Xiang Zhongpu

Ambassador Szkladán: I come to bid farewell in a difficult situation. My train leaves on Sunday, I shall leave Beijing and travel to Moscow. In Moscow I shall see what the news is, and then I shall decide.[1]

Premier Zhou: The Chinese people maintain a friendly relationship with the Hungarian people, and we hope that the cause of socialism in Hungary can proceed. Have you read the Soviet government's declaration, and our statement in connection thereto?[2]

Szkladán: I have read the Soviet government's declaration, and heard the Chinese government's statement only from the translation of Chinese-speaking comrades. At present, the situation in Hungary is still unclear. We also receive news from home, but these news items contradict each other in turn. Revolutionary committees are being formed everywhere, and the Foreign Ministry is not functioning.

Zhou: Has a revolutionary committee also been formed in the Foreign Ministry?

Szkladán: We receive telegrams and instructions from the Foreign Ministry's Revolutionary Committee.

Zhou: The people in their entirety want to follow path of socialism, this is laid down in the constitution, and not imposed by others.

Szkladán: Yes.

Zhou: But then if you leave the socialist camp, this will damage the people's interests.

Szkladán: This is Hungary's tragedy. After the liberation, three million peasants received land, and the workers gained power. If those who criticized the government in the past saw that this is the restoration of capitalism, they would be sorry.

Zhou: Nagy has declared neutrality, he wants [Hungary] to leave the Warsaw Pact, and demands that the four great powers assure its neutrality.

Szkladán: We also received this news from the Revolutionary Committee. When

[they] see that this is restoration, they too will stand bravely on the side of the Soviets.

Zhou: Nagy's statement yesterday is that he wants to leave the socialist camp.

Szkladán: The people around Nagy think this way, but the vast majority do not agree.

Zhou: I hope that conscious people will be able to reverse the situation. How do you see it?

Szkladán: I myself don't know how this situation could be resolved. According to the most recent news, the workers have declared that if their demands are not met, they will not resume work. They have economic demands, and it is possible that they have political ones too.

Zhou: What is Comrade Kádár's opinion? I spoke with him at the time of the eighth congress.[3]

Szkladán: Kádár is First Secretary of the Party, member of the Cabinet,[1] he reorganized the Party and changed its name. The president of the Social Democratic Party, Anna Kéthly, is a long-time opportunist.

Zhou: And Kádár?

Szkladán: In general, I would say that Kádár is a serious man. He has spent time in prison but can cast aside his personal passions, and he approaches problems on the basis of principles. When we came to China together, I too spoke to him on the airplane. I also agree with the speech he delivered at the Chinese Party congress.

Zhou: When I spoke to Kádár, I said that Hungary proceeded calmly against Comrade Rákosi. Along with pointing out his errors, his achievements were also pointed out at the same time. Comrade Kádár also agreed with this opinion.

Szkladán: Comrade Rákosi also practiced self-criticism.

Zhou: Hungary committed some serious errors in the past, under the influence of Stalin. The masses demand that these errors be rectified. But the present leadership has led the masses in the opposite direction. How about Nagy?

Szkladán: There were continuous problems with Nagy. Rákosi frequently criticized him. He however thought that Rákosi was criticizing him for personal reasons, while these were all questions of principle. It now appears that Rákosi was right. Who would have thought that Nagy would waver like this? It is possible that he was scared. He said there were a few things that he did not do. He said that when he first gave a radio speech, it was because others forced him to do it. It is possible that the Revolutionary Committee forced him.

Zhou: Is the Revolutionary Committee not the seven-member Cabinet?

Szkladán: The Revolutionary Committee is something different, it is not the seven-member Cabinet. They say that they convey the opinion of the people, demand that the Soviet army should leave, and so on. In other words, they are those counterrevolutionary elements.

Zhou: Is Nagy in the Revolutionary Committee?

Szkladán: He is not. The Revolutionary Committee presents its demands toward Nagy. It appears that Nagy's position is between the Party and the Revolutionary Committee. What sort of people constitute the revolutionary committees? Of the National Revolutionary Committee, I do not know Dudás, I have never heard of him. The Foreign Ministry Revolutionary Committee has seven members, of whom I know some. When I was ambassador to Moscow, one of them was my secretary, but as he was a believer and wanted to be a pastor, I sent him home. Another is the son of a factory owner, who was earlier dismissed from the Foreign Ministry, and only regained his position later. A third is from the Far East Department.[4] They are all lower-ranking people.

Zhou: Have they all been rehabilitated, irrespective of what kind of errors they committed?

Szkladán: Yes. The Foreign Minister, [Imre] Horváth is a communist, and has now been replaced. Nagy himself acts as Foreign Minister.

Zhou: From whom does the Embassy now take orders? Those of Nagy, or of the Revolutionary Committee?

Szkladán: When we received the message from the Revolutionary Committee, I advised that we should not accept it, but the "revolutionary" youth supported [it].

Zhou: Has the country's coat of arms changed?

Szkladán: Yes. These young people do not understand the meaning of the coat of arms.

Zhou: What was the meaning of the original coat of arms?

Szkladán: The coat of arms which was taken down[5] was the coat of arms of the people's democratic power: hammer and sickle. The coat of arms with which it has been replaced is the 1848 coat of arms of Kossuth. The only difference is that the crown has been removed. They changed it into the symbols of three hills and two rivers, which refer to the fact that the Hungarians' ancestor Árpád founded the country on this soil.

Zhou: At the Embassy, are those who agree with the Revolutionary Committee's initiatives in the majority or the minority?

Szkladán: They are in great majority.

Zhou: Are you the minority?

Szkladán: Yes. There are many debates within the embassy. Yesterday we held an assembly with the participation of more than fifty people, and debated the matter of forming a revolutionary committee. I did not agree with the formation, and said that if it came into being, it could become the object of ridicule. Some experts agreed with my opinion. In the end it did not come into being. Now they slowly come to understand that the people's democracy is in danger.

Zhou: What is the situation with the counselor?

Szkladán: He has gone to Japan. I think he too agreed with the initiatives of the Revolutionary Committee. He too has been dissatisfied with the Party in the past. With the sole exception of attaché Szabó, all diplomatic staff of the embassy are Party members. The position of First Secretary Endre Galla is unclear. To what I say, he does not oppose; to what others say, he does not oppose. The Second Secretary, Barna Tálás, is a wild revolutionary, his wife is Polish. He says that we must follow Poland's example.

Zhou: Do these people come from workers' families, or are they of petty bourgeois origin?

Szkladán: The great majority are from workers' families. The First Secretary is the son of a miner, the Second Secretary the son of a railway worker, and attaché [Béla] Blahó is of peasant origin. The counselor is from an intellectual family.

Zhou: When did they join the Party? After the liberation?

Szkladán: They all joined the Party after 1945-46.

Zhou: Under the influence of Stalin's great-power chauvinism, some errors were committed. The workers and peasants were dissatisfied, and there is a reason for this, it is in order. It is the intelligentsia that leads the movement, the bourgeois intelligentsia support the Petöfi Circle.

Szkladán: Those who are rallying and demonstrating are primarily young people, students, and writers.

Zhou: Are the workers also going on to the streets to demonstrate?

Szkladán: The workers are on strike, but I have not come across any trustworthy news items according to which the workers too would go out onto the streets to demonstrate. There are some foreign news agency reports of such, but it is not certain that they are true.

Zhou: Have not many people who emigrated come back home?

Szkladán: Yes. According to the public figures the number is not great, but the Austro-Hungarian border has been opened, and it is certain that a good few have entered.

Zhou: How many had left?

Szkladán: Between twenty and thirty thousand people, the precise number is difficult to say.

Zhou: They are dissatisfied with socialism, and defying authority.

Szkladán: Clearly. Nagy said that the current riots are economic in character, but this is not true. Paris radio said that there are many people in Hungary who acquired military training on the Austrian border, and that they would return once again to Hungary.

Zhou: Among the demands of the crowd, there may those of economic character, but

the bourgeois reactionaries and the imperialists want to overthrow the authorities. The leaders must unite with the great majority of the crowd, and they must fight against the reactionaries. But at this moment they are heading in the opposite direction.

Szkladán: The imperialists sow discord in the middle, want to profit from the middle. Unfortunately, upright people also took part in the demonstrations, they were too naïve, perhaps now they will see more clearly.

Zhou: Are there many in the crowds' number who follow the Revolutionary Committee?

Szkladán: A rather large part of them do. But as people come to see clearly the character of the Revolutionary Committee, they will see that they are striving for restoration, and it is possible that they will no longer believe in the Revolutionary Committee. In the embassy this is precisely the situation. As they see this danger, they will come to stand on the side of the Party.

Zhou: To what extent are the people dissatisfied with the Soviet Union?

Szkladán: As far as I can tell, more and more bitterly.

Zhou: Is this because of the past, or because the Soviet army is now helping to re-establish order in Hungary?

Szkladán: The Revolutionary Committee successfully fanned the flames of anti-Soviet sentiments. They say that the relationship between our countries is not equal, and so on. They say that Hungarian-Soviet friendship must be developed on the basis of equality.

Zhou: How many Party members are there?

Szkladán: 750,000 people. Some have been killed, and we are receiving an ever increasing number of names of Party members committing suicide.

Zhou: Some have been killed?

Szkladán: Yes. I do not know the exact number, but the number is growing.

Zhou: There is surely reactionary activity.

Szkladán: Yes.

Zhou: Is it not the case that the counter-revolution was not put down thoroughly in the past?

Szkladán: It is.

Zhou: During the suppression of the counter-revolution, the crowds were not mobilized, and not as Comrade Luo Ruiqing[6] said at the 8th Party congress?

Szkladán: Yes. Many people have been rehabilitated.

Zhou: Are there many rehabilitated among the intelligentsia?

Szkladán: Yes.

Zhou: Are the old intelligentsia many?

Szkladán: Their number is many. They constitute the majority of the intelligentsia.

Zhou: And the old intelligentsia are many in the scientific, educational and industrial institutions?

Szkladán: They all stayed there.

Zhou: Have you carried out ideological re-education work?

Szkladán: We have tried.

Zhou: As in China?

Szkladán: No. Only on a rather superficial level. We gave out some honors and medals, this is how we wanted to win them over, we carried out very little ideological training work.

Zhou: We only took up the intellectuals' question afterward, and proclaimed the Hundred Flowers policy once the counterrevolutionary suppression campaign and ideological re-education had run their course.

Szkladán: We also suggested many times that we should learn from China's experiences, but it is too late now.

Zhou: We also paid insufficient attention to you. Naturally, our experiences cannot be forced upon others, they are not wholly applicable to others. In the past, we did very little in the area of becoming acquainted with and researching your real situation.

Szkladán: [Our experiences are] not wholly applicable, but we can learn from each other. Comrade Kádár likes Comrade Ho Chi Minh's attitude very much, he also wants to learn from Comrade Ho Chi Minh's attitude.

Zhou: You are an old Party member. How many old Party members are there in Hungary?

Szkladán: Not many.

Zhou: How many?

Szkladán: There are not many left from the era of the underground movement. For example, in the Szuhakálló coalmining region there are many workers. Rákosi said that this region is our stronghold. Before the liberation, 30-40 percent of the workers there were Party members; in other regions the number was 4-5 percent. After the liberation, Social Democratic Party members were in the majority. When I was Party Secretary in northern Hungary, I was given the task of expanding the Party. It was only after three years' hard work that we reached the point where the number of our Party members in this region exceeded that of the Social Democratic Party. In this

region, the total number of the two parties' members gave us 50-60 percent, they had 40-45 percent.

Zhou: What was the proportion of the two parties' members?

Szkladán: The parties united in 1948. At the time of unification the Communist Party membership came out at 80 percent, the Social Democratic Party's at 20 percent. If we add those Social Democratic Party members who joined the Communist Party before the unification, the proportion of social democrats among members of the Hungarian Workers' Party was 30 percent.

Zhou: An exceptionally difficult period is ahead of you.

Szkladán: It is very unfortunate. We hope that we can find a way out.

Zhou: It will be very tough.

Szkladán: Yes. It is my personal opinion that the fraternal countries might extend a little assistance to Hungary in the economic sphere, so that we avoid Hungary relying directly upon America. In the past, investment during the course of [national] construction was too much, and the total of our debts to the western countries is very high.

Zhou: Whether the West's control will materialize in the sphere of economics, that is only one question. But what is even more important is politics. You want to leave the socialist camp, you want to exit the Warsaw Pact - this is dangerous. There may be such people who are against this, and there will be more struggles in the future. The future is very tough. The question is whether it will be possible to organize the conscious people and continue the fight for the reversal of the situation. The Chinese people support the Hungarian people, and the struggle of Hungarian Party members for democracy, equality, independence and socialism.

Szkladán: Thank you.

Zhou: The people fighting for socialism and the Party membership can count on the support of the Chinese people and Party.

Szkladán: Thank you.

Zhou: Are you leaving tomorrow?

Szkladán: The day after tomorrow. I am going to Moscow by train, and I shall stay a while in Moscow. I shall wait and see how the situation takes shape. I left my homeland seven years ago already, and I do not know the situation too well. Although the situation is very confused at present, we shall fight with all our strength.

Zhou: I support your position.

Szkladán: Is there any difficulty at the Chinese Embassy in Hungary in which you need assistance?

Zhou: The flag on the Ambassador's car was torn off by the so-called revolutionaries. This too is one kind of chauvinist manifestation. But we shall not bother with them, they do not represent the Hungarian people.

Szkladán: There are correct people in the masses, but there are bad people too. I am sorry that such a case has come about.

Zhou: It is a trifling matter, the important thing is that you do not leave the socialist camp.

Szkladán: Right now we are working to convince the Embassy staff. They say that they do not want to reject socialism, but they consider the Revolutionary Committee able to solve their problems.

Zhou: The Revolutionary Committee does not want socialism, they want Hungary to be neutral.

Szkladán: The honest people recognize this.

Zhou: Work must continue, one cannot lose hope.

Szkladán: Yes. We must continue to work steadfastly. Thank you for your encouragement.

Zhou: One must move forwards even in times of difficulty, one must move vigorously forwards.

Recipients: [Mao Zedong] Chairman, [Liu] Shaoqi, [Zhou] Enlai (2), Zhu De, Chen Yun, [Deng] Xiaoping, Lin Biao, [Lin] Boju, [Dong] Biwu, Peng Zhen, [Luo] Ronghuan, Chen Yi, [Li] Fuchun, [Peng] Dehuai, [Liu] Bocheng, He Long, [Li] Xiannian, [Zhang] Wentian, [Lu] Dingyi, [Chen] Boda, Kang Sheng, [Bo] Yibo, [Wang] Jiaxiang, [Tan] Zhenlin, Tan Zheng, [Huang] Kezheng, [Li] Xuefeng, Liu Lantao, [Yang] Shangkun, [Hu] Qiaomu, [Xi] Zhongxun, [Li] Kenong, [Luo] Ruiqing, [Ye] Jizhuang, [Liao] Chengzhi, Steering Committee, CC Propaganda Department, CC Liaison Department, CC Control Department, CC Military Committee Central Intelligence Department, Ministry of Domestic Security, Deng Tuo, [Wu] Lengxi, deputy ministers (2), ministerial aides (2), Office (3), heads of departments, heads of units, heads of offices, (to be given to deputies)

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[1] That is, on his further duties, and possible journey back to Hungary.

[2] He refers to the Soviet government declaration of 30 October on relations between the Soviet Union and the socialist countries, and the PRC government statement of 1 November.

[3] The HWP delegation to the 8th CPC congress held between 15-27 September was led by János Kádár.

[4] Kádár was one of the seven-member Preparatory Committee working on party reorganization.

[5] The coat of arms of the Rákosi era was taken down from the Hungarian embassy building in Beijing during the revolution.

[6] See CPC CC member Luo Ruiqing's speech on the overall situation of the struggle against counterrevolutionary elements, Kína Kommunista Pártjának VIII.

kongresszusa. 1956. szeptember 15-27. Rövidített jegyzőkönyv (The 8th Congress of the Communist Party of China. 15-27 September 1956. Short Minutes) (Budapest: Kossuth, 1956), 229-252.