

# The 1956 hungarian revolution

[History](#), [Revolution](#)



The events of 1956 in Hungary, in the months of October and November, are considered by Westerners as one of the darkest moments of the Cold War. Indeed had President Eisenhower and his US officials observed the spontaneous national uprising in Hungary with shock and perplexity. « Truman's doctrine of Containment » had been preserved since the mid 1940's, and a revolution against the USSR's rule in Soviet sphere of influence was seen as a huge victory against communism. Wise Eisenhower however dared not to risk and jeopardize the atmosphere of improving relations with the newly empowered Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev.

Nikita Khrushchev, born in 1894, was of poor background. He used to work as a pipe fitter in the mines. He fought in the Bolshevik Revolution and is known for participating in the bloody defense of Stalingrad, an anecdote he took great pride in throughout his life. In 1953, when Stalin passed away, Nikita returned to Moscow as one of Stalin's close advisers and was eventually pronounced new leader of the USSR. On February 25, 1956, at the Twentieth Party Congress, he delivered the " Secret Speech", vilifying Stalin. Khrushchev's new domestic policies, aimed at improving the lives of ordinary citizens, were often ineffective, especially in the area of agriculture. He also backed the progress of the early Soviet space program. Hoping to rely on missiles for national defense, Khrushchev ordered major cuts in conventional forces. Despite the cuts, Khrushchev's rule saw the tensest years of the Cold War, culminating in the Cuban Missile Crisis. However in the Secret Speech, Khrushchev openly denounced Stalin's cult of personality, and criticized Soviets who pictured him as a divinity on an altar and blindly approved of him on whichever aspect.

At that time in Hungary, the revolution was about to burst. In 1955, Imre Nagy, famous for his belief in communism with "a human face", was replaced as Hungarian prime minister and expelled from the communist party over liberal policies. Early 1956 saw Polish anti-communist revolts by imposing the Martial Law. Reformist Wladyslaw Gomulka was eventually elected head of the communist party. These events steered a student revolt in the streets of Budapest in October 23. The few students were soon joined by 200,000 other Hungarians, fuelled by the lukewarm prospect of liberation. The swelling demonstration then headed for the parliament where Nagy failed to connect with the crowd, and attended the retrieval of the angry mob to Radio Budapest. The most optimistic had hoped for the permission for a broadcast which included the demand of the withdrawal of Soviet troops and Hungarian Independence. The AVH secret police opened fire to disperse the crowd.

Over the course of the next week, Nagy underwent a remarkable transformation, from a more or less dutiful pro-Moscow Communist to a politician willing to sanction unprecedented political, economic and social reform. These included the establishment of a multi-party state in Hungary and insistent on the withdrawal of all Soviet forces from the country. By November 1st, Nagy took the dramatic step of declaring Hungary's rejection of the Warsaw Pact and appealed to the United Nations for help in establishing the country's neutrality.

Surprisingly, on October 23 the revolt seemed like it was on the verge of an amazing triumph. The entire nation appeared to have taken up arms against

the regime. On October 31, the tide seemed to turn in the revolution's favour when Pravda published a declaration promising greater equality in relations between the USSR and its East European satellites. One sentence of particular interest stated: "The Soviet Government is prepared to enter into the appropriate negotiations with the government of the Hungarian People's Republic and other members of the Warsaw Treaty on the question of the presence of Soviet troops on the territory of Hungary."

However, the apparent atmosphere derived from reality. Even CIA Director Allen Dulles described the succeeding uprising as a "miracle." But the upcoming events evinced the untrustworthiness of the misleading declarations of the Kremlin. The latter believed that the rebellion directly threatened Communist rule in Hungary. Poland strangely did not suffer Soviet aggression contrastingly to Hungary, perhaps because Wladyslaw Gomulka and the Polish Communists "solely" challenged Kremlin rule and not the whole Communist system as the Slav students had. The Kremlin also forecasted the West to judge their lack of response as a sign of weakness, which could encourage future uprisings of neighbouring satellite states and leaders.

After the events of October 23 in Budapest, unarmed demonstrators were targeted by Soviet tanks. The angry and fed up people of Hungary called for a symbolic general strike. Janos Kadar was freed and became Nagy's deputy. The revolution spreaded to the countryside. Nagy felt optimistic about the inauguration of negotiations with the Soviets. On November 1st, Nagy officially announced Hungary's withdrawal of the Warsaw Pact. The Kremlin

contemplated and deduced no other choice but to invade Hungary's Republic. The fourth, Soviet forces launched a major attack on Hungary aimed at crushing once and for all the spontaneous uprising. Within hours, Nagy himself sought asylum at the Yugoslav Embassy in Budapest while his former colleague and imminent replacement, János Kádár prepared to take power with Moscow's backing. On November 22, after receiving assurances of safe passage from Kádár and the Soviets, Nagy finally agreed to leave the Yugoslav Embassy. But he was immediately arrested by Soviet security officers and flown to a secret location in Romania. By then, the fighting had mostly ended, the Hungarian resistance had essentially been destroyed, and Kádár was entering the next phase of his strategy to neutralize dissent for the long term. The Russians had once again demonstrated to be harsh and hostile when confronted to a revolt in its Empire. Some Hungarians are still embittered by the hypocritical approach the Soviet performed to crush the revolt. No other uprising was observed until the 1989 call for democracy. The history of the events of 1956 was effectively sealed to Hungarians. Even to mention the name of Imre Nagy in public was to risk punishment.

At the exact same time the Hungarian revolution took place in the month of October, another crisis nearby began in Suez. On July 26, 1956, the Egyptian president, Gamal Abdel Nasser, nationalized the Suez Canal. The canal had been owned by the Suez Canal Company, which was controlled by French and British interests. The Suez Crisis was provoked by an American and British decision not to finance Egypt's construction of the Aswan High Dam, as they had promised, in response to Egypt's growing ties with communist Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union. Vengefully, Abdel declared martial law

in the canal zone and seized control of the Suez Canal Company, predicting that the tolls collected from ships passing through the canal would pay for the dam's construction within five years. Britain and France feared that Nasser might close the canal and cut off shipments of petroleum flowing from the Persian Gulf to western Europe. When diplomatic efforts to settle the crisis failed, Britain and France secretly prepared military action to regain control of the canal and, if possible, to depose Nasser. They found a ready ally in Israel, whose hostility toward Egypt had been exacerbated by Nasser's blockage of the Straits of Tiran (at the mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba) and the numerous raids by Egyptian-supported commandos into Israel during 1955-56. Britain and France, following their plan, demanded that Israeli and Egyptian troops withdraw from the canal, and they announced that they would intervene to enforce a cease-fire ordered by the United Nations. On November 5 and 6, British and French forces landed at Port Said and Port Fuad and began occupying the canal zone. This move was soon met by growing opposition at home and by U. S., which quickly put a stop to the Anglo-French action. On December 22 the UN evacuated British and French troops, and Israeli forces withdrew in March 1957.

In the coldest year of the Cold War, the world's attention was diverted from Hungary. OIL, the black gold, was the main interest of the power-hungry leaders of the time. This was more or less a strategic war, aimed at keeping the prosperity of the capitalist nations. France and England could have intervened in Hungary, but their concerns were to maintain European influence on Egyptian soils. The Suez Canal was situated in a crucial and strategic location, where taxes financed the British and French economies.

The two countries also did not want to test the Soviet super-power and begin an open conflict with the communists, when they already were a problem at home. President Eisenhower also assumed that US intervention in Suez would be seen as self-interested, and a US support in the Hungarian revolution would have been obnoxious to the USSR. Eisenhower's policy was indeed to promote the independence of the so-called captive nations, but only over the longer-term. The policy of Containment had evolved into a more nonbelligerent and poker-face aspect, where military involvement had proved not to be the exclusive answer to deal with a communist situation. The president was not ready to jeopardize the increasing pacifistic atmosphere of tolerance, world peace and cooperation which had been perceived over the last few years. The Hungarian revolt could have ended in a nuclear war opposing East and West, but fortunately, the Suez crisis and Eisenhower's wisdom and skepticism inhibited the catastrophic scenario.

Nasser emerged from the Suez Crisis a victor and a hero for the cause of Arab and Egyptian nationalism. Israel did not win freedom to use the canal, but it did regain shipping rights in the Straits of Tiran. Britain and France, less fortunate, lost most of their influence in the Middle East as a result of the episode.

Children of Glory :

Children of Glory is a movie from Hungarian-American writer Joe Eszterhas. The two main characters are Karcsi, a water polo champion, and student activist Viki. Children of Glory traces the love story of two young Hungarians confronted to the violence and desperation of a conflict in their home

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country. We contemplate different ways people of Hungary opposed to the Soviet domination. Many students were similar to Viki, consumed by Communist rule, and sought to gain their independence by violence if necessary. Even if at first the student revolt seemed insignificant, it is a crowd of 200,000 people that Nagy witnessed in front of the Parliament. Karcsi is drawn by his love for Viki in the middle of the bloody revolt, and grows increasingly affectionate towards the girl and in agreement with her revolutionary ideas. The boy is however more pacifistic, as we never clearly feel an urge for him to exert violence. His passion is undoubtedly water-polo, and he seems pleased with the lifestyle he leads. However, his life changes when he meets Viki and sees his interest aroused by this intriguing fiery angel. She is fierce and direct for exposing her ideas, and shows great skills when it comes to defend her opinions. This strong character melts Karcsi's heart, and he soon cannot be deprived of her for long, and wishes to follow her in her revolutionary projects. When Viki asks him to represent Hungary in Melbourne for the Olympics, it is with real bewilderment that he is informed of Soviet advance on Hungarian soil. Karcsi and his team-mates are then confronted to one of the most arduous decisions to make: continue the Olympics and defeat the Russians in the final. With support of the coach and leadership of Karcsi, the team's challenge is attained, and Hungary brings home the gold. Their country was honorably represented, and it is therefore a minor victory over the Soviet tyrants, as an oasis of hope or a wink to every Hungarian back home. The team's achievement was world-wide followed, as it was televised and used as propaganda against the USSR. People watching the game might have been impressed by the determination

and will of the young Hungarians to defeat their oppressors. They might have thought, « Wow, these blokes are brave ». These televised Olympics were the second to attach great importance to the surreptitious message they can deliver. In 1936, Jesse Owens had embarrassed Hitler by defeating Aryan-race athletes in the jumping and racing events. Hitler was absent to every medal the black man received. However, the Olympics had demonstrated Germany's power and « magnificence » throughout Goebbels propaganda techniques. Twenty years later, the message the Olympics undermined was different ; even under total dominance of the USSR, Hungary and its people were still united, alive and gleaming with pride. The oppressor had been defeated in a peaceful way, which consequently gave hope and courage to the Hungarian people, overwhelmed by Soviet tanks and bodies to bury.

I personally believe that this movie, however produced fifty years after the events, is still honest and accurate to describe the atmosphere at that time. It exhibits lives of common people at that time, and authentically shows how common people compared to David, dealt with the big Russian Goliath. They virtually had no possibilities to triumph in their conquest of liberty, but still, they fought for what they thought was right, and it is honorable. Many were killed. 2006 was a perfect year to release a movie in commemoration of these antagonistic joyful and morbid events. The story is clearly romanced, but this aspect is welcomed in such somber times. People are emotionally affected by a tragic ending, with a disappointed Karcsi who will never meet his beloved again. Despite, the ending then, I think the movie is 86% accurate. There is a Soviet perspective of the story which I cannot debate on because I do not know their side of the story. I however believe the atrocities

of the conflicts and the courage people manifested was overly authentic. Lately, archival records have been excavated and analysed, and even US government records have recently been re-reviewed and released in more complete form.

Many people suffered during that time, it has been remembered as an obscure part of Hungarian history, and this is why the general public can be aroused by this movie.

Still today, sports are a source for propaganda. Politics have infiltrated every aspect of our society, and we are controlled and influenced by the leaders at the top of the pyramid. However, the heroes of 1956 are no soldiers for once, but a team of water-polo. A group of young men supporting the weight of the pride and the hope of a whole country, with in return, the backing and the blessing of this same country.