

The Hungarian Uprising of 1956 and the Non-aligned Movement

Summary

1956 is a well researched topic of Hungarian history, especially considering the devoted work of scholars, most notably since previously restricted archival documents became available in 1989 and thereafter. Studying Western or even Soviet aspects, therefore, would not have yielded remarkable results; the special case of the relations between Hungary and the countries later to form the Non-aligned Movement (NAM), however, can be of interest but has so far received smaller amount of attention.

These countries followed already in 1956 a set of guidelines in their politics, the “Panca Sila” or the five principles of peaceful coexistence: mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, non-aggression treaty, non-interference in each other’s home affairs, equality and mutual advantages in treaties and the doctrine of peaceful coexistence.

The relations with three countries are presented here; after giving a short summary of their respective political conditions at the time, the paper focuses on their interstate affairs with Hungary before 1956, during the aftermath of the uprising and later, approximately until the “Hungarian question” was removed from the UN agenda in 1962. Most detailed are the relations with the state officials, leaders and the press. These three countries play a crucial role in the history of the NAM and are thus valid representatives of its political mindset: Indonesia, India and Egypt.

The first President of Indonesia, Sukarno had led the struggle of his country for independence from the Netherlands, and was on relatively good terms with the Socialist Bloc and Communist China. Relations, therefore, were promising albeit of moderate intensity before 1956. Diplomatic relations were established in 1955, while a Hungarian embassy in Jakarta was set up as late as April, 1957. The first Minister to Jakarta was János Nagy, whose primary concern was to provide President Sukarno and Prime Minister Djuanda with details on the „true nature” of the events of the previous autumn.

Generally, the events of 1956 did not play a significant role in the diplomatic relations with Indonesia, as the country tended to be more or less sympathetic to the Socialist Bloc. Still, the all-time opinion of Nehru’s India usually had a strong effect on Sukarno’s politics towards Hungary. As the question of the uprising kept recurring in somewhat different shades of light according to the smooth shifts in Indonesian foreign policy, Hungary strived to popularise her own point of view, with Károly Szarka’s global trip including Jakarta, among other things. Press, in the mean time, would often compare the “imperialists’ work to undermine” the efforts of the two states.

Although Nehru has never committed himself to the official Hungarian standpoint as firmly as he has condemned the Western aggression in Egypt, his opinion had a great effect on the policy-making of other countries in the area (including Indonesia), thus the Kádár regime did its best to convince Nehru of its truth. This in turn provided the opportunity to enhance diplomatic and commercial relations, if controversies remained regarding certain issues, including the presence of Soviet troops in Hungary. Most Indians had the false impression that Hungary had in her power to form her own policy after 4 November, 1956, therefore they could not comprehend why Kádár had not let the UN observers into the country. As a result, they remained to have their reservations towards Hungary but relations tended to gradually develop over the period nevertheless.

Diplomatic relations with Egypt had been little more than formal prior to 1956; the apparent connection between the uprising and the Suez crisis, however, changed this tendency dramatically and, with the support of the Soviet Union, the two “victims” of “imperialist machinations” started to develop their ties. While Nasser, as a means of returning the favour of the USSR support during the crisis, literally let himself be persuaded of what “exactly” happened in Hungary, the Socialist Bloc saw an opportunity in his openness to approach and befriend one of the strongholds of the non-alignment as much as possible.

Almost uniquely among the researched countries, Egypt actually took an active role in developing its relations with Hungary, on the basis of some sort of common misfortune. Even so, Nasser and the Egyptian press would find Hungary and the question of the uprising all too easy targets later on, once it seemed in their interest to drift away from the USSR. This was, however, only a temporary issue and, generally, relations between Hungary and Egypt evolved over the given period on probably the largest scale, considering the three examined countries.

Indonesia, India and Egypt can be considered as representatives of three “tendencies” within the common principle of non-aligned policy which would later culminate in the formation of the Non-aligned Movement. These tendencies could be described as positive-neutral, neutral and negative-neutral, so to speak, and the research of their relations with Hungary after 1956 and their individual opinions on the question of the uprising can provide a basis for their examination in this respect as well.

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Apart from the documents in the National Archives of Hungary the following literature have been used:

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