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The 1956 Hungarian Revolution and the Soviet Bloc Countries: Reactions and Repercussions

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## SLOVAKIA AND THE 1956 HUNGARIAN REVOLUTION

### *A comparison with Slovak perceptions of the Polish October*

Reactions by Slovak, or more precisely Czechoslovak society and its political elite to the 1956 Hungarian Revolution need analysing on two levels. The first is the immediate reaction of the public and the leaders of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPCz), and the second the context of internal political development in Czechoslovakia in 1956 and the impact of the Hungarian Revolution on Czechoslovakia's political conflicts. As the revolution began, Czechoslovakia was already undergoing a process of reorganizing CPCz control over society, after a short political thaw that followed the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). This process had culminated in April and May 1956.

Party leaders were already concerned about developments in Poland and Hungary by the summer of 1956. In June, strict state censorship began to apply to articles in the Czechoslovak press about these countries and about Yugoslavia.<sup>1</sup> Newspapers from Hungary became very popular among the Hungarian minority in Southern Slovakia and Slovaks who understood Hungarian.<sup>2</sup>

The Hungarian and Polish factors played big roles in Czechoslovak policy in the autumn of 1956, for foreign and domestic policy reasons. The CPCz leaders viewed political developments in Poland with great anxiety, for their effect on the Polish minority in the Czechoslovak area of Upper Silesia, for the approval for Polish intellectual discussion shown in Czech and Slovak intellectual circles, and not least for fear of decomposition of the Soviet bloc.

1 See the daily reports of the administration of press control of the Commissary of the Interior. The Slovak National Archives (Slovenský Národný Archív, hereafter SNA), f. Povereníctvo vnútra (PV) sekretariát, denné hlásenia Správy tlačového.

2 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS (Presidium of Communist Party of Slovakia Central Committee), kr. 931. Zasadnutie BÚV KSS 18. 10. 1956. Niektoré ideologické problémy práce strany na Slovensku.

Czechoslovaks were told nothing in the official media about the workers' revolt in Poznań or pressure to rehabilitate Władysław Gomułka, a victim of Stalinist persecution in 1949. What made Polish developments look so dangerous to Czechoslovak party leaders was the reform movement growing up within the ruling Polish United Workers' Party (PUWP). Demands to rehabilitate the victims of political trials threatened the legitimacy of some CPCz Presidium members. So the official media and party spokesmen preferred to ignore the events in Poland.

The turbulence in Hungary and in Poland caught Czechoslovak communists unprepared. On October 19, 1956, the CPCz Central Committee sent a telex to regional party committees on "shortcomings in the Polish press", also criticizing the Hungarian press, even *Szabad Nép*, the central daily of the Hungarian Workers' Party, the distribution of which was banned in Czechoslovakia on the same day, while other press imports from Hungary were restricted. The CC Secretariat of the Communist Party of Slovakia (CPS) began investigating the youth daily *Smena* after it published a photo of Gomułka.<sup>3</sup> On the day before—October 18, the eve of the 8th Plenary of the PUWP Central Committee—Soviet leaders informed the leaders of the CPCz of plans for a military intervention in Poland. On the day the Secretariat meeting began, a Soviet delegation led by the First Secretary Nikita S. Khrushchev visited Warsaw. The Soviet delegation in the Warsaw castle of Belweder awaited the response of allied communist parties. According to Polish historian Krzysztof Persak, the Soviet communists already had endorsements of military intervention from the CPCz and the German Socialist Unity Party (SED).<sup>4</sup> But in the next few days, the Czechoslovak party leadership was not distracted from developments in Poland and avoided polemics in the press, due to the outbreak of the Hungarian Revolution and the conclusions drawn at the bilateral Polish-Soviet negotiations.

A ban on imported Hungarian press materials was imposed on October 24, 1956, after the Hungarian Revolution broke out.<sup>5</sup> The CPCz first secretary, Antonín Novotný, had a meeting in Moscow with the CPSU first secretary, Nikita Khrushchev, during the night of October 24–5, 1956, and both sides concurred in describing the uprising as a counter-revolutionary upheaval and the insurgents as bandits. The same opinion was voiced by the rest of the CPCz Politburo<sup>6</sup> at a meeting on October 25.<sup>7</sup> The CPS first secretary, at a Slovak party leadership meeting on October 24, said

3 Ibid., f. Sekr. ÚV KSS (Secretariat of CPS CC), kr. 143. Zasadnutie SÚV KSS 19–20. 10. 1956. Správa o nedostatkoch v poľskej a maďarskej tlači.

4 Persak 1997, 109–10.

5 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, kr. 932. Zasadnutie BÚV KSS 24. 10. 1956. Situácia v Maďarsku.

6 The Political Bureau (Politburo) of the Central Committee was the name used then for the supreme

that neither in Poland nor in Hungary was the ruling communist party “firm enough against the counter-revolutionary forces. [...] In Poland, the cadres of the PUWP had been weakened in the period of [German] occupation” and there were various petty-bourgeois elements in the party.<sup>8</sup> According to an order issued by Defence Minister Bohumír Lomský, military units of the Czechoslovak Peoples’ Army in Slovakia would move up on October 25 to reinforce military units of the Interior Ministry on the Slovak–Hungarian borders.<sup>9</sup> The CPCz Central Committee of CPCz sharply condemned the political developments in Hungary and the policy of the new government of Imre Nagy in internal telex messages to regional party organizations, although it refrained from criticizing it publicly until the decision on the second Soviet intervention in Hungary was taken.<sup>10</sup> The leaders of the Slovak party decided on October 24 to keep a close watch on students, writers, and researchers from the Slovak Academy of Sciences. Jozef Valo, a member of the CPS Bureau, suggested focusing the attention of the army and security services on the big cities. The directors of CPS CC departments were sent to the Slovak–Hungarian borders, as were some Bureau members.<sup>11</sup> They were officially charged on October 27, 1956 with coordinating the work of regional party and state officials with that of the central organizations in Prague and Bratislava.<sup>12</sup> On October 24, a defence alert was declared for the CPCz CC-controlled People’s Militia.<sup>13</sup> Party officials in the Slovak–Hungarian border districts received instructions to establish regular contacts with adjacent districts and regions in Hungary.<sup>14</sup> An extraordinary meeting of the CPCz Politburo on October 25, 1956 accepted Novotný’s report on his Moscow

decision-making body of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, later known as the Presidium. The CPS used the expression Bureau for what became its CC Presidium.

7 Bílek–Pilát 1996, 500–501.

8 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, kr. 932. Zasadnutie BÚV KSS 24. 10. 1956. Situácia v Maďarsku.

9 Bílek–Pilát 1996, 505–6.

10 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. P. David, kr. 2223, a. j. 532. Diaľnopisy ÚV KSS za rok 1956.

11 Ibid., f. PÚV KSS, kr. 932. Zasadnutie BÚV KSS 24. 10. 1956. Situácia v Maďarsku.

12 The Bratislava regional CPS committee was headed by CC Secretary Pavol David. The Nitra committee was chaired by Slovak Trade Union Council Chairman Vojtech Daubner. The Banská Bystrica committee was headed by Jozef Valo and the Košice committee by Interior Commissioner Oskár Jeleň; *ibid.*, f. P. David, kr. 2252, a. j. 39. Udalosti v Maďarsku (1956).

13 Ľudové milície—paramilitary units directly subject to the CPCz CC.

14 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. P. David, kr. 2223, a. j. 532. Diaľnopisy ÚV KSS za rok 1956. The paper analyses the military side of reactions by Czechoslovak bodies to the Hungarian Revolution. See: Pešek 1993, 430–42; Bílek–Pilát 1996, 500–11; Štaigl 1997, 165–79.

meeting with Khrushchev. According to Novotný, the Czechoslovak party leadership saw as the crucial reason behind the crisis in the Polish and Hungarian regimes shortcomings in the standard of living. This was why Czechoslovakia had avoided such a crisis. Such arguments were also accepted by the public. On the same day, the Czechoslovak party leadership proposed “consultation with the Ministry of Interior of the USSR on the possibility of sending volunteer forces to Hungary” to combat the counter-revolution, and decided to reinforce the Czechoslovak-Hungarian borders.<sup>15</sup>

The CPS Central Committee established a special “headquarters” of Secretariat members, army officers (General Dittrich) and security personnel (Deputy Interior Minister Josef Kudrna, and Houska, the Interior Ministry director of regional administration in Bratislava). The main coordinator was Bruno Köhler, a member of the CPCz Politburo.<sup>16</sup> CPS CC Secretary Pavol David dealt with Hungarian refugees in Slovakia and later with aid to the Kádár regime.<sup>17</sup> One eminent Hungarian refugee in Slovakia was István Kossa, deputy head of the Hungarian State Planning Office, and from November 1956, Kádár’s minister of finance.

The stance of the Czechoslovak communist leaders to events in Poland and the Polish perception of Czechoslovakia 1956–7 are exemplified by cases where Czechoslovakia became a refuge for dogmatic Polish party officials. On January 5, 1957, for example, Żofia Przeczek, a Polish citizen, crossed the border near the resort of Oravice with her son Jan, according to a transcript of Czechoslovak Security Ministry officials.<sup>18</sup> She stated she had been in the resistance during World War II, worked in the communist apparatus after 1945, and been a journalist on *Chłopska Droga* (Peasant’s Way), *Głos Ludu* (Voice of the People) and *Rolnik Polski* (Polish Peasant), when she had also attended political trials. She asked for political asylum on the grounds that “Poland and the Polish nation, due to Gomulka, are being dragged steadily towards restoration of capitalism and fascism.” Her case was unusual, complicated and sensitive for the CPCz representatives. An offer of asylum

15 National Archives, Prague (Národní Archiv, hereafter NA), Archive of CPCz Central Committee (A ÚV KSČ), f. 02/2, sv. 120, a. j. 150, b. 1.

16 Pešek 1993, 431; SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, kr. 933. Zasadnutie BÚV KSS 29. 10. 1956. Zápis zo zasadnutia Byra ÚV KSS dňa 29. 10. 1956.

17 Ibid. Návrh na organizovanie ďalšej politickej pomoci maďarským súdruhom.; *ibid.*, f. Sekr. ÚV KSS, kr.143, Zasadnutie SÚV KSS 2. 11. 1956. Prerokovanie uznesenia Politického byra ÚV KSČ vo veci poskytnutia pomoci potravinami maďarským súdruhom.

18 *Ibid.*, f. Pavol David, kr. 2221, a. j. 370. Správa zo služobnej cesty v Žilinskom kraji (1957).

would mean open confrontation with the new PUWP leaders, which was not in the interests of Moscow or of Prague by January, when the priority was to restore the unity of the Soviet Bloc. Granting asylum would be an admission that there was no such unity, that communism had failed in Poland, and that Czechoslovak communists were supporting anti-government forces there. Having postponed a decision until early February, the Interior Ministry reached one that was hardly to Przewczek's liking. To avoid undesirable publicity, the security organizations wished to move her to the Polish-speaking Czechoslovak region of Ostrava. Alternatively she might remain in Slovakia, in the Žilina region, as "a worker in a factory". In either case, she would not be allowed to continue her political or journalistic activities. Emigration to Czechoslovakia had brought social demotion, but Przewczek had few choices. She was afraid to return home. According to the security officers in Žilina, this "could have negative consequences", after she had spent more than a month in Slovakia, not only for herself, but for bilateral Czechoslovak–Polish relations.

The Czechoslovak party leadership fully supported the Soviets over the second intervention in Hungary. After a meeting of communist-party representatives of the Soviet Union, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria and China on the night of November 1–2, 1956 in Moscow, the CPCz Politburo declared on November 2 its full support for the decision of the Soviet Communists: "The Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPCz [...] agrees with the realization of all necessary measures to preserve people's democracy in Hungary in a case of necessity; we are not only agree with them, but we will actively take part on them."<sup>19</sup> The most radical was Czechoslovak Prime Minister Viliam Široký, who saw Imre Nagy "in the position of an enemy" and the only legitimate Hungarian government as that of the previous prime minister, András Hegedüs. Although Czechoslovak party leaders declared readiness to take part in Soviet armed intervention in Hungary, no practical instructions to prepare for this were given to Defence Minister Bohumír Lomský. Neither Interior Minister Rudolf Barák received any practical instructions to preparing Czechoslovak military forces on it, their instruction dealt only with the ensuring of the southern borders of Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovak President Antonín Zápotocký prepared a speech against the Hungarian Revolution and Imre Nagy, which he delivered at 1 p. m. on November 3.

In the event, all the Soviet Union required Czechoslovakia to do was to close its borders with Hungary: 14,000 reservists were sent to Southern Slovakia for a four-week military exercise. Only men of Czech or Slovak ethnic affiliation were sent—no members of the Polish or Hungarian minorities. The concentration of armed forces

19 NA, A ÚV KSČ, f. 02/2, sv. 120, a. j. 151, b. 1.

peaked on November 10, and the units were drawn back from the border in the first half of December.<sup>20</sup>

The Slovak party leadership organized a massive propaganda campaign on behalf of the Hungarian communists loyal to Moscow. The CPS Central Committee established a centre for propaganda to Hungary and a press commission to oversee the press, the radio, and the publication of the leaflets for Hungary, in which two refugees—members of the HWP Central Committee—participated. Several centres of agitation were established in Slovak border districts, including two big radio transmitters and four smaller ones.<sup>21</sup> Large numbers of copies of the newspaper published in Hungarian in Slovakia were distributed in Hungary.<sup>22</sup> Leaflets, official Soviet documents, etc. were published in large numbers of copies at district and regional levels.<sup>23</sup> District party officials received instructions to establish informal contacts with Hungarian regional politicians. This was done rapidly between the district party committee in Filákovo and party officials in Salgótarján and Nógrád County.<sup>24</sup> Similar contacts were established in other fields as well. For example, Oskár Jeleň, a CPS Bureau member and commissioner in Košice sent a telex on October 31, 1956 to Karol Bacílek, first secretary of the CPS Central Committee, about his meeting with a delegation from Borsod County.<sup>25</sup> Other contacts were made with representatives from Miskolc and Sátoraljaújhely.<sup>26</sup> The purpose of such contacts was to receive information about political developments and public opinion, and to “neutralize” the influence of Budapest on regional leaders. Jeleň established contact with the workers’ council in Miskolc as well. The distribution of the press and leaflets in Hungary was entrusted to Slovak party officials who spoke Hungarian.<sup>27</sup> For example, the CPS Regional Committee in Košice sent 30–40, or sometimes 80 agitators to Hungary

20 Bílek–Pilát 1996, 505–9; Pešek 1993, 434–7.

21 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, kr. 933. Zasadnutie BÚV KSS 9. 11. 1956. Udalosti v Maďarsku.; *ibid.*, 29. 10. 1956. Návrh na organizovanie ďalšej politickej pomoci maďarským súdruhom.; Pešek 1993, 438.

22 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, kr. 934. Zasadnutie BÚV KSS 7. 12. 1956. Správa o činnosti KSS a uplatňovaní jej vedúcej úlohy na Slovensku počas udalostí v Maďarsku.

23 Pešek 1993, 437–8.

24 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, kr. 933. Zasadnutie BÚV KSS 29. 10. 1956. Udalosti v Maďarsku.; *Ibid.* Návrh na organizovanie ďalšej politickej pomoci maďarským súdruhom.

25 *Ibid.*, f. P. David, kr. 2223, a. j. 532. Diaľnopisy ÚV KSS za rok 1956.

26 *Ibid.*, f. PÚV KSS, kr. 934. Zasadnutie BÚV KSS 7. 12. 1956. Správa o činnosti KSS a uplatňovaní jej vedúcej úlohy na Slovensku počas udalostí v Maďarsku.

27 Czech State Archives, Prague (Státní ústřední archiv, hereafter SÚA), A ÚV KSČ, f. 02/2, sv. 125, a. j. 160, b. 14.

a day, with the aim of restoring the fragmented party organizations there. The work made use of personal and familiar ties across the border.<sup>28</sup> As the revolution died down, Czechoslovak propaganda was turned towards undermining the strikes, but the efficiency of that was very low, according to Jozef Valo.<sup>29</sup>

Czechoslovakia's support for the Kádár government was not confined to propaganda. There were also aid shipments to a value of 90 million Czechoslovak crowns. Regional party officials became so active in this respect that they were criticized for it by a meeting of the CPS Bureau by CC Secretary Pavel David: "I think our regional secretaries in Banská Bystrica and Košice are more of secretaries in Hungary than at home. That is why they always want to solve Hungarian problems more than their own."<sup>30</sup> The aid to Hungary primarily took the form of food, and exceptionally of textiles, shoes and other goods.<sup>31</sup> In February 1957, the Politburo of the CPCz Central Committee decided after negotiations between the two countries' Interior Ministries to supply weapons, military and operative technical instruments and other items for Hungarian security.<sup>32</sup>

Some of the many reports of border violations by Hungarian insurgents were unconfirmed and several described by Pavel David as rumours. But the report on a meeting of Soviet army officials with their Czechoslovak counterparts on November 10, 1956 is credible enough. On November 8, a group of 40 people had penetrated 5 km into Czechoslovakia and shelled the railway station at Čierna nad Tisou on the Czechoslovak-Soviet border. According to this report, there had been another case of infiltration, by Hungarian insurgents attempting to cross into Poland and to record the positions of Czechoslovak military units.<sup>33</sup> On October 27, 1956, three tank grenades shot from Esztergom fell near the Slovak village of Kamenica nad Hronom.<sup>34</sup> Some tank grenades fell on the railway station of Čierna nad Tisou on November 4, as well, causing some injuries.<sup>35</sup>

28 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, kr. 935. Zasadnutie BÚV KSS 14. 12. 1956. Stenografický záznam z besedy, ktorá sa konala 17. 11. 1956 na ÚV KSS so slovenskými spisovateľmi.

29 Ibid., 9. 11. 1956. Udalosti v Maďarsku.

30 Ibid. Zhodnotenie práce strany počas udalostí v Maďarsku (záznam z diskusie členov Byra ÚV KSS).

31 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. Sekr. ÚV KSS, kr. 144, Zasadnutie SÚV KSS 23. 11. 1956. Diaľnopis KV KSS Bratislava, Banská Bystrica, Košice – pokyny o postupe pri organizovaní pomoci pracujúcim Maďarska.

32 SÚA, A ÚV KSČ, f. 02/2, sv. 129, a. j. 169, b. 12.

33 The State Archives of the Russian Federation (Gosudarstvenny Arkhiv Rossiiskoy Federatsii), f. 9401, op. 2, d. 482, l. 57–9.

34 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. P. David, kr. 2237, a. j. 73. Správy krajských prokuratúr počas udalostí v Maďarsku (1956).

35 Ibid.

Officially, CPCz and CPS leaders presented Czechoslovakia as an island of stability in Central Europe. Certainly there were no mass public protests against the Czechoslovak communist regime. This its leaders saw as evidence that their policy was correct, leading as it had to a higher standard of living than in Poland or Hungary. CPCz and CPS leaders heaped praise on the Hungarian minority in Slovakia for its political stance, which was seen as evidence of deep patriotism. But in the author's view, it more probably resulted from experiences during and after World War II. According to a speech by Pavel David, there were no withdrawals from collective farms: "The Party was never so well knit and consistent as it is now over the events in Hungary."<sup>36</sup> These comments were quite well founded. Living standards were higher and public discontent not apparent beyond the intellectuals centred on the journal *Kultúrny Život*. But the idyll was not the whole truth, though it was presented as evidence for the correctness of party policy and a preventive against events like those in Poland or Hungary. According to Slovak historian Jan Pešek, criminal charges were brought against 655 people by November 5, 1956,<sup>37</sup> Hungarian historian Pál Germuska gives a figure of 674.<sup>38</sup> The exact number is not known, nor how many were from Slovakia. There were 130 soldiers investigated for voicing disapproval of official Czechoslovak policy, 84 of them officers, 33 dismissed from the army, and some of them charged.<sup>39</sup> Most of the last were accused of "verbal delinquency"—verbal solidarity with the Hungarian Revolution and sympathy for violence against communists. Most such utterances were made in private conversation, in pubs or on public transport. Many of those charged were workers. There were a few violent attacks on local communist officials, whose windows were broken or who were reminded about similar events in Hungary. Often the threats came for personal, non-political reasons. There were cases all over Slovakia of peasant discontent at compulsory delivery of produce to the state, and of instances of anti-Semitism, irrespective of Slovak or Hungarian nationality, as much of the public saw the reason for the Hungarian Revolution in the presence in Hungary of "the Jews at the head with Rákosi in power." Many people wanted or predicted similar events in Slovakia. There was frequent invective against state officials. One report by Interior Ministry organizations noted that people are very sensitive now and react to every bagatelle. As the Hungarian Revolution began, people were discussing developments in Poland, especially intellectuals, who had much sympathy for them, and for

36 Ibid., f. PÚV KSS, kr. 933. Zasadnutie BÚV KSS 9. 11. 1956. Udalosti v Maďarsku.

37 Pešek 1993, 432.

38 Germuska 1997, 161.

39 Bílek–Pilát 1996, 509.

rehabilitation of László Rajk in Hungary. Although the leaders of the CPCz did not intend this, people expected rehabilitation of Rudolf Slánský and Gustáv Husák to ensue. It is typical of societies lacking a free exchange of information for false rumours to circulate, consisting in this case of predicted leadership changes involving First Secretary Karol Bacílek being replaced by Jozef Valo and of communists in the countryside burning their party membership cards. People expected Pavel David, Augustín Michalička (CPS CC Secretary responsible for ideological issues), and others to be ousted. Another rumour was of political power going to a National Front from which the CPCz would be excluded. It was also rumoured that the Hungarian army would occupy Southern Slovakia and annex it to Hungary. There was widespread gossip about a forthcoming strike of railway workers.

More educated people were discontented with the slow progress with democratization, the limited chances of travelling abroad, etc., and workers and the less educated spoke mainly of low pay and high food prices. Farmers criticized low producer prices and often expected the collective farms to disintegrate. On the other hand, many people assumed the country's higher living standard meant that steps like Hungary's were unnecessary.

At the beginning of the Hungarian Revolution, there were some signs of sympathy for it on the Kráľovský Chlmec District Committee of the CPS, in a district with an ethnic Hungarian minority. Excited discussions on the situation in Poland and Hungary were noticed in several places of work. Groups of local Hungarians were also seen on the streets of towns in Southern Slovakia, publicly listening to Hungarian Radio, which was generally listened to more often than usual. Hungarian employees in some places of work did not work all day.

The CPCz leaders were vigilant on October 28, anniversary of the establishment of independent Czechoslovakia, especially in the Czech lands.<sup>40</sup> The advice was "not to provoke futile conflicts."<sup>41</sup> A large number of political jokes were circulating,<sup>42</sup> but when mention was made of initiating activity, people replied that the best thing to do is to keep working and not meddle in political matters. Most people, irrespective of national affiliation, saw the Hungarian events as futile: nothing could be achieved by them and innocent people would suffer. But the attitude to Soviet intervention was another matter.

40 Pernes 1996, 515; NA, A ÚV KSČ, f. 02/2, a. j. 149, sv. 120, b. 12.

41 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. P. David, kr. 2223, a. j. 532. Diaľnopisy ÚV KSS za rok 1956.

42 Ibid., kr. 2237, a. j. 73. Správy krajských prokuratúr počas udalostí v Maďarsku (1956).; *ibid.*, kr. 2252, a. j. 39. Udalosti v Maďarsku (1956).; *ibid.*, kr. 2253, a. j. 40. Maďarsko, Poľsko.

The sympathy for the Hungarian Revolution in Slovakia was not confined to members of the Hungarian minority, although the latter were more enthusiastic not only for national reasons, but because they were better informed, by Hungarian radio. Germans and Hungarians in Bratislava attempted on October 31, 1956 to organize a collection to support the people of Hungary. Three days later, a Hungarian teacher in Podunajské Biskupice attempted to organize aid for the injured in Hungary in the form of medicines, dressings and sugar. Hungarian students in Bratislava repudiated an official declaration of support for Soviet intervention made by the leaders of CSEMADOK, the cultural organization of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. Local CSEMADOK groups in Baka, Šamorín and a few villages in the district of Šamorín reacted similarly. CSEMADOK's office in Štúrovo was used to copy anti-Soviet leaflets. People in a few villages sang the Hungarian anthem. According to a report by the regional department of the Ministry of Interior in Bratislava, the general mood of citizens of Hungarian nationality in the villages of Southern Slovakia is unsatisfactory; they expect similar events in this country to those taking place in Hungary.

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Both sides noticed, of course, instances of chauvinism and of hostility between Slovaks and Hungarians. Hungarians talked of Southern Hungary being returned to Hungarian rule and Slovak immigrants being expelled. On the other side, for example, graffiti against Hungarians appeared on walls overnight on November 4–5, 1956, and Hungarian shields on shops were painted out. Slovak priests reacted negatively to the Hungarians.

Nonetheless, marks of sympathy for the Hungarian Revolution were widespread among Slovaks as well, in mixed cities and villages, and in purely Slovak areas. Leaflets and slogans were noticed, for example, in Zemianska Olča, Komárno, Dunajská Streda, Liptovský Hrádok, Kubrá, Bratislava, Trnava, Spišská Nová Ves, Myjava and Žihárec. There were some cases of public listening to Western radio in pubs, for example in Borský Jur and Bučany. In Vyšná Radvaň, the local Orthodox priest translated leaflets from Hungarian in the pub. Employees in some enterprises repudiated official resolutions, for example in Filakovo, Veľké Rovné, and Martin, and in a few enterprises in Bratislava, Piesok and Kysucké Nové Mesto. Disapproval of official CPCz policy was manifested by individuals in Trnava, and by secondary-school students in Bratislava, where was the greeting “čépé” (“čakáme prevrat”—“we’re awaiting the coup”) spread. This sympathy was not inspired solely by political factors. Social factors were also important. At factories in Vrbové, Komárno and Piešťany, workers demanded higher salaries, while at others, discontent was observed, for example in Nitra, Pezinok, Skalica, Holíč, Nové Mesto nad Váhom, and

Oščadnica, and among Slovak workers in the Czech town of Hodonín. In the city of Topoľčany, doctors were demanding higher pay.

Discontent was also observed among peasants. Those of purely Slovak villages near Bratislava refused to make the compulsory October 25 deliveries of produce to the state, and in some villages and towns, there were leaflets in Slovak and Hungarian against these (Šahy, Revúca, Záhorská Ves). Members of some collective farms stopped work and attempted to secede. Workers on the state farm of Balvany near Komárno rejected the resolution stating that Hungarian insurgents are counter-revolutionaries.

The party and security organizations were especially concerned about attitudes of young people. Students at Košice Technical University, instead of approving the resolution against the Hungarian Revolution, paid homage to the victims of Soviet intervention. The organizers, students Roman and Leško, were excluded from studies. Students of the Medical Faculty of the Comenius University in Bratislava demanded restoration of old academic titles and cancellation of exams in Marxism–Leninism. Students of Nitra Agricultural University demanded an end to the teaching of Russian. Secondary-school students in Bratislava asked at a meeting of the Czechoslovak Youth Union why Hungary could not be a neutral state like Switzerland or Sweden. No secondary-school principal or teacher could give them an answer. The most turbulent event was a students' meeting in the Electro-technical Faculty of the Slovak Technical University in Bratislava, on November 2, 1956. There students said Czechoslovakia had the right to nationalize the uranium mines at Jáchymov, just as Egypt had right to nationalize the Suez Canal. They said there was no equality in relations between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, just as there was not in the case of Hungary, and they asked official speakers from the CPS and youth organization if the Kádár-led government was a government of workers or not. Hungarian undergraduates in Bratislava supported their colleagues in Hungary, as did Hungarian secondary-school students in Lučenec.<sup>43</sup> Solidarity with the Hungarian people was expressed by members of the Slovak Gold Eagle group of pacifist Scouts with a Christian orientation. In issues of their secret journal *Táborák* (Campfire), they rejected Soviet intervention and declared that each country had a right to choose its own path.<sup>44</sup> Ten members of the organization were imprisoned.

However, Slovak writers during the Hungarian Revolution judged it “better not to discuss, not to be against, and to express reservations later”. Many thought it was

43 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. P. David, kr. 2237, a. j. 73. Správy krajských prokuratúr počas udalostí v Maďarsku (1956); *ibid.*, kr. 2252, a. j. 39. Udalosti v Maďarsku (1956); *ibid.*, kr. 2253, a. j. 40. Maďarsko, Poľsko.

44 *Ibid.*, kr. 2249, a. j. 401. Obžaloba proti Jánovi Manasovi a spol. (1957).

useless to engage in open conflict with the regime, including the editor of *Kultúrny Život*, Juraj Špitzer.<sup>45</sup> The party group in the Central Committee of the Slovak Writers' Union rejected the official October 24 interpretation of events in Poland, seeing the cause in tardy progress with democratization, not in democratization itself, and preparing a resolution demanding the abolition of censorship, freedom of literary work, freedom for travel, and cultural exchange.<sup>46</sup> A protest was also prepared against the dissolution of its Hungarian counterpart, on the initiative of Špitzer. But other members did not want to address the issue, and there was no public support for the Hungarians from Slovak writers. Leaders of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union, meeting at Budmerice on October 26, adopted the official position after "intervention by the Party", with the Czech writer Pavel Kohout the only one abstaining.<sup>47</sup> The same writers who criticized Czechoslovak Stalinist policy defended Soviet policy against the Hungarian Revolution at public meetings in Southern Slovakia,<sup>48</sup> proving unable to step out of the frames of communist ideology. But such compliance did little to help Slovak writers, whom Rudolf Strechaj, chairman of the Board of Commissioners said were silent only for fear of more radical persecution.<sup>49</sup>

The mood of Slovak society became apparent in various ways. One was a run on the shops<sup>50</sup> and the banks, especially in big cities.<sup>51</sup> Another was the passivity and low attendance at Czechoslovak Youth League meetings.<sup>52</sup> An attempt to recruit more young Hungarians into the organization was unsuccessful.<sup>53</sup> The State Security was also looking for Hungarian speakers in Southern Slovakia. Many of those approached refused to become involved out of fear, because of the general hostility towards security people, under the influence of their wives, etc.<sup>54</sup> At public meetings, people

45 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. P. David, kr. 2267, a. j. 43. Uznesenie Sekretariátu ÚV KSS zo dňa 9. novembra 1956 o kultúre.

46 Ibid., kr. 2253, a. j. 40. Maďarsko, Poľsko.

47 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, kr. 946, Zasadnutie BÚV KSS 5.–6. 4. 1956. Niektoré otázky práce strany medzi inteligenciou.

48 Ibid., f. Sekr. ÚV KSS, kr. 144, Zasadnutie Sekr. ÚV KSS 23. 11. 1956. Návrh na zvolanie besedy niektorých straníckych funkcionárov so spisovateľmi o skúsenostiach zo straníckej práce v dňoch pokusu o kontrarevolúciu v Maďarsku.

49 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, kr. 933, Zasadnutie BÚV KSS 9. 11. 1956. Udalosti v Maďarsku.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid., kr. 2252, a. j. 39. Udalosti v Maďarsku (1956).

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid., kr. 950, Zasadnutie BÚV KSS 19. 5. 1957. Návrh na zvolanie 6. valného zhromaždenia Kultúrneho zväzu maďarských pracujúcich v ČSR

asked the questions: “Why did the events in Poland and Hungary take place?” “Was the Soviet intervention in Hungary right?” “Why is uranium ore from Hungary and Czechoslovakia exported to the USSR?” etc.<sup>55</sup>

As violence escalated in Hungary and the second Soviet intervention took place, public sympathy for the Hungarians began to decline. There was disappointment with the policy of Western states, which was branded as “betrayal on the Hungarian nation.” Most people had expected American intervention on the revolution’s behalf, and later criticized Western radio propaganda for arousing such expectations.

Manifestations of solidarity with the Hungarian Revolution fell largely to passive resistance or individual views expressed in private. Most Slovaks stayed loyal to the regime, wooed by measures to improve the living standard (consumer price cuts). They lacked any lengthy experience of greater political freedom and there was no sizeable reform (or critical) wing in the top structures of the communist party. So it was impossible for pressure for democratic reforms to build up. Negative or indifferent attitudes to the Hungarian Revolution were helped along by the national stereotypes found in most of Slovak society and by the view that communism regime was there to stay and it was fruitful to expect changes. People had adjusted themselves to the communist regime. Although signs of discontent and of sympathy with the Hungarians continued into November 1956, official occasions to mark the anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution on November 7 went ahead smoothly.<sup>56</sup>

The CPCz leadership saw the Hungarian events as a vindication of its policy—confirmation of the correctness of its persecution. Pavel David put great emphasis on the decisive role that young people were ostensibly playing on the “counter-revolutionary” side. This perception in the CPCz leadership led it to focus its repression on youth and the intelligentsia. At the meeting of the CPS Bureau, Rudolf Strechaj demanded purges not only in the cultural field, but in the central state offices in Slovakia.<sup>57</sup>

The Peoples’ Militia was reinforced. A document entitled “Some knowledge of the work of the Hungarian Workers’ Party” was drawn up by the CPCz leaders at the beginning of December 1956, to present its views on the causes of the Hungarian Revolution and the lessons to be drawn from it in Czechoslovak domestic policy.

54 NA, A ÚV KSČ, f. 02/2, sv. 125, a. j. 160, b. 14.

55 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, kr. 934. Zasadnutie BÚV KSS 7. 12. 1956. Správa o činnosti KSS a uplatňovaní jej vedúcej úlohy na Slovensku počas udalostí v Maďarsku.

56 Ibid., f. P. David, kr. 2237, a. j. 73. Správy krajských prokuratúr počas udalostí v Maďarsku (1956); *ibid.*, kr. 2252, a. j. 39. Udalosti v Maďarsku (1956); *ibid.*, kr. 2253, a. j. 40. Maďarsko, Poľsko.

57 *Ibid.*, kr. 933. Zasadnutie BÚV KSS 9. 11. 1956. Udalosti v Maďarsku.

The roots of the events were found in the period of the 1953–5 Imre Nagy government, when views hostile to the regime were presented and never denied after his removal. The results were economic difficulties as well as a struggle among factions within the party. The crucial conclusions for Czechoslovak domestic policy were that applying a “professional” approach to decisive areas of the economy or state administration, rather than one based on “class principles”, was dangerous, and ignored in the long term the economic demands of the working people. The CPCz leadership saw as the big mistakes made by Hungarian communists the failure of their work with intellectuals and their “liberal approach to ideological chaos”.<sup>58</sup>

As mentioned before, the turbulent developments in Hungary drew the attention of the CPCz leaders away from events in Poland and led them to avoid polemics in the press. However, relations with Poland remained strained. In November 1957, the “Polish October” was seen as resulting from the anti-Soviet campaign after the 20th Congress of the CPSU. The Czechoslovak consulate in Szczecin reported that Gomułka’s speech at the 8th Plenary of the PUWP Central Committee had negative consequences. Open conflict between Czechoslovak and Polish diplomats broke out at a reception at the General Consulate of the USSR in Gdańsk, on the November 7, 1956 anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, when the new regional secretary of the PUWP, Laski, asked the Czechoslovak consul when democratization would occur in Czechoslovakia.<sup>59</sup>

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On the other hand, monitoring of Poland by security and party organs continued. An important role was played by regional Party committees in the border regions. Although the CPCz leaders officially approved of Gomułka’s policies, the internal evaluation was rather different. Czechoslovak communists sought information mostly from dogmatic groups and from security structures that had a negative attitude to liberalizing the regime. They established discreet links with regional party and security officials unknown to the top leaders of the PUWP.

According to Barák, Poland had been building a national brand of socialism “like Yugoslavia’s”, so that leading positions were going to people that have “nothing to do with the construction of Socialism.” Czechoslovak communists to see the dissolution of the monopoly youth organization and the collapse of collective agriculture, and most of all, the campaign against the Polish state security and the liberal attitude to free movement of Hungarian refugees in Poland. Despite officially declared moderate

58 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, kr. 934. Zasadnutie BÚV KSS 7. 12. 1956. Správa o činnosti KSS a uplatňovaní jej vedúcej úlohy na Slovensku počas udalostí v Maďarsku.

59 NA, AÚV KSČ, f. 02/2, sv. 124, a. j. 159, b. 7, Politické byro ÚV KSČ 17. 12. 1956. Informace o Polsku.

support for Gomułka's policies, the report of Czechoslovak Interior Ministry told of conspiratorial meetings of Stalinists "ready to resist even by force".<sup>60</sup>

Very active in developing regional political contacts with dogmatic groups within the PUWP was the regional CPS secretary of CPS in the Prešov region of North-Eastern Slovakia, Vasil Biľak.<sup>61</sup> He continued his activities even after the Polish parliamentary elections.<sup>62</sup> He met on the Slovak–Polish border with Władysław Kruczek, regional PUWP secretary of Kraków, at the latter's request. Although his attitude to Gomułka's policy had become positive by March 1957, he told to his Slovak host that the parliamentary elections had let "a lot of rabble" into the Sejm. Biľak went on to classify him as an "honest comrade." Kruczek was interested in Czechoslovakia's evaluation of the international situation. According to Biľak's report, the PUWP was "literally paralysed" and lacking firm leadership. In his recommendations of how the CPCz should develop its policy towards Poland, Biľak included stronger cooperation with party officials of Poland's border regions. In fact, his suggestions are the "soft variant" of the CPCz policy on the Slovak–Hungarian border in the autumn of 1956.

Although the views of Czechoslovak Communists on Poland changed after the "flawless elections", problems were still seen in the situation there. Zdeněk Fierlinger, a CPCz Presidium member and speaker of the National Assembly, stated in April 1957, "It will take a long time before the influence of bourgeois nationalistic prejudices has been minimized."<sup>63</sup> Poland was still viewed negatively even in December 1957. A State Security report on the situation on the "ideological front", sent by Pavol David to Antonín Novotný, first secretary of the CPCz and to other CPS secretaries, considered that there was chaos, now intentionally increased. The expectations of the report's author, and indirectly of David were rather pessimistic: "It is impossible to predict the subsequent developments, all the more because the Party organizations are operating only formally; there is no Party discipline or Party life [...] The damage caused among students by the ideological chaos could not be repaired even after successful restoration of the leading role of the party."<sup>64</sup>

60 Ibid.

61 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. Pavol David, kr. 2252, a. j. 10. Záznam o prítomnosti poľských štátnych príslušníkov v kraji Prešov (1957).

62 Ibid., kr. 2267, a. j. 50. Správa o stretnutí so súdruhmi z PĽR (1957).

63 NA, AÚV KSČ, f. 02/2, sv. 135, a. j. 176, b. 1b), Politické byro ÚV KSČ 9. 4. 1957. Neověřený záznam z diskuze na schůzi Politického byra ÚV KSČ dne 9. 4. 1957 ke zprávě ÚV KSS o činnosti a dalších úkolech ze zjezdu KSS.

After the end of 1957 and suspension of the weekly *Po Prostu*, the situation in Poland fell from the agenda of the CPCz leadership. Unlike the situation in Hungary, that of Poland was not a priority. The CPCz felt no need to develop its own policy on the country, although it rated the situation there poorly, especially in relation to certain liberal reforms.

The Hungarian Revolution had an influence on the Hungarian ethnic community in Southern Slovakia. The circulation of home-grown Hungarian-language newspapers and periodicals increased after press imports from Hungary were stopped.<sup>65</sup> The cultural life of the Polish minority, however, was curtailed and there was even talk of dissolving its cultural institution, the Polish Cultural–Educational Union (Polski Związek Kulturalno-Oświatowy).<sup>66</sup>

As with Poland, cultural exchange with Hungary was restricted, for neither Kádár's nor Gomułka's policies were seen as orthodox. Moreover the authorities saw curbs on communications with their “mother countries” as a means of binding the minorities more closely to Czechoslovakia, if not of ethnic or linguistic assimilation. The cultural and political aim was to turn them into Hungarian or Polish-speaking Czechoslovaks. After the fall of the Hungarian Revolution, some press imports from Hungary were permitted again, but in smaller quantities than before—in some cases less than 50 per cent. Most copies were distributed in big cities and centres of tourism and only minimal numbers reached districts where the Hungarian minority was concentrated. That applied not only to daily papers, but to professional, scientific, technical and arts journals as well. Wider propagation of the press from Hungary was forbidden.<sup>67</sup> However, there was some rejuvenation among the leaders of CSEMADOK, who would later play a role in the reform process in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s.<sup>68</sup>

The '56 Hungarian Revolution caused no upheaval in CPCz policy. Any idea of altering the political course towards reforms and democratization had been rejected

64 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. Pavol David, kr. 2252, a. j. 11. Správa o hospodárskej a politickej situácii v Poľsku (1957), 6. 12. 1957.

65 Ibid., f. PÚV KSS, kr. 933. Zasadnutie BÚV KSS 16. 11. 1956. Návrh na zmeny vo vydávaní maďarskej tlače na Slovensku.

66 NA, f. 05/3, sv. 32, a. j. 249. List pracovníka Ministerstva školstva a kultúry Rudolfa Tomisa pracovníkovi oddelenia agitácie a propagandy Otokarovi Zemanovi, 11. 12. 1956.,

67 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. Sekr. ÚV KSS, kr. 154, Zasadnutie SÚV KSS 13. 6. 1957. Návrh zásad pre dovoz a distribúciu tlače z Maďarska.

68 Ibid., f. PÚV KSS, kr. 950, Zasadnutie BÚV KSS 19. 5. 1957. Návrh na zvolanie 6. valného zhromaždenia Kultúrneho spolku maďarských pracujúcich v ČSSR.

by Novotný at the National Party Conference in June 1956.<sup>69</sup> Some decisions, such as removal of Juraj Špitzer from the journal *Kultúrny život*, were reversed due to the Hungarian Revolution, as the CPCz leaders would not risk conflict at home while events in Hungary and Poland were escalating. But the previous political course was intensified, not altered. As for *Kultúrny život*, it was not suppressed until later than planned, in April 1957, after the CPS Congress.<sup>70</sup>

Hungary's revolution and Poland's October had an influence on Czechoslovakia that extended beyond the situation of the two national minorities. The CPCz leaders had been ready before October 1956 to suppress the reform movement, but held back for fear of domestic political conflict. When the awaited liquidation of the group of Slovak reform intellectuals around the journal *Kultúrny život* took place only in April 1957, its informal leader, Ondrej Pavlík, was expelled from CPCz, and although he sympathized more with Gomułka, he was accused of seeking to play an "Imre Nagy role in Czechoslovakia".<sup>71</sup>

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69 Celostátní konference KSČ. *Nová mysl* June (1956).

70 SNA, f. PÚV KSS, kr. 949, Zasadnutie BÚV KSS 25. 4. 1957. Stanovisko ÚV KSS k niektorým nesprávnym názorom a zjavom na ideologickom úseku.

71 Niektoré otázky práce stany medzi inteligenciou. Ibid., kr. 946, Zasadnutie BÚV KSS 5.-6. 4. 1957.

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