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Report from Anastas Mikoyan on the Situation in the Hungarian Workers' Party, July 14, 1956

Between July 13 and 21, CPSU CC Presidium member Anastas Mikoyan visited Budapest incognito to hold meetings with leaders of the Hungarian Workers' Party. In this report, he judges the situation to be far more serious than Mikhail Suslov depicted it a month before, when Suslov was on a similar mission: "One can see how day after day the comrades are further losing their grip on power," Mikoyan observes. "A parallel center is forming from enemy elements operating actively, decisively, and self-confidently." Mikoyan sees the impotence of the HWP leadership and weakening party influence on the press as real dangers. The subordination of the HWP to Moscow is again illustrated by the fact that the Political Committee fully accepts Mikoyan's scenario for handling the crisis, including consenting to their own leader, Rákosi's, resignation. The Soviet leader's comments to his negotiating partners in Budapest are essential to understanding the Soviet Union's behavior during the revolution: "it was impermissible that anything unexpected and unpleasant should happen in Hungary. . . if they needed any help--advice or anything else--our CC was ready to come through for the Hungarian comrades in order to correct the situation."

July 14, 1956

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CPSU CC

On July 13, at 11:00 a.m., immediately upon my arrival in Budapest, I had a two-hour conversation with cdes. Hegedüs, Rákosi, Gerő, and Secretary of the CC Vég,⁸² who also came to meet us. Cde. Andropov was present. After the conversation, we all dined together, and agreed to convene a conference of Politburo members, candidate members and secretaries of the CC immediately afterwards; it lasted over four hours. All Hungarian comrades spoke sincerely without any time limitations. I am sending the record of speeches separately. Below I present our impressions, and also the outlined decisions.

I asked the Hungarian comrades to inform us about what was going on in the country and in the party, and what the CC was undertaking to implement [the measures] that were discussed with cde. Suslov. I emphasized that our CC and the entire socialist camp were concerned about the state of affairs in Hungary, because it was impermissible that anything unexpected and unpleasant should happen in Hungary. I stated that if they needed any help--advice or anything

⁸² Béla Vég was secretary of the HWP CC from 1953 to October 24, 1956.

else--our CC was ready to come through for the Hungarian comrades in order to correct the situation.

In an open conversation, all the comrades acknowledged the unpleasant picture.

Apart from the published CC resolution of June 30 directed against the enemy elements,⁸³ nothing is being done; the comrades prepare reports for Plenums of the CC, while enemy elements act among the masses and in the country unpunished; they expand their influence further and further, and engage new circles, including the workers, in the struggle to remove the party leadership.

One can see how day after day the comrades are further losing their grip on power. A parallel center is forming from enemy elements operating actively, decisively, and self-confidently.

The press and radio are not under CC control any more.

Although the CC resolution of June 30 was made unanimously, there is no unity in the CC either on issues of principle or on practical questions of party management. Some CC members, who voted for that resolution, now not only do not support the resolution, but also do not obey the CC's instructions, and even speak against the CC decision. The editor of the party's central organ,⁸⁴ the most widely distributed paper, does not agree with the CC line, and the CC still has not done anything about it because, you see, he is a CC member.

Discipline among CC members has fallen apart, and many Communists, especially among the intelligentsia, have dispersed into the petty bourgeois milieu, which is in opposition to the government. The Petöfi discussion club has turned into an active ideological and opposition center. A practically parallel CC, opposed to the Central Committee of the party, has been created, which acts freely and without any impediments. Leading Hungarian comrades have not taken any measures against those enemy elements, and they do not even have any plan in that respect.

Every day, the influence of the hostile, opposition mood supported by hostile Western radio propaganda and agents residing in the country, as well as Yugoslav radio, press and agents supporting and encouraging those opposition elements is expanding. Right-wing elements within the party, in particular those oriented toward Imre Nagy, and in addition several hundreds of party activists who were previously subject to reprisals and have now been released from prison and are residing mostly in Budapest, cannot tolerate having Rákosi and his supporters, who caused their misfortunes, remain in power.

To my question, why did they not undertake reprisals and arrests of the leaders of the hostile elements, Rákosi stated that the situation had worsened and tensions had increased so much that arrests would not help: if we arrest some, others would appear, and if we arrest those the third wave would arise, and there would be no end to that.

I explained to the Hungarian comrades that it is an intolerable violation of internal party discipline when officials of the CC apparatus do not carry out the decisions of the elected party organs, the collective leadership, and conduct their own policy directed against the CC. The CC apparatus should not have its own policy; it should be an executor of the CC's decisions. Therefore it is necessary to expel all such elements from the CC apparatus immediately. A situation where newspapers and the radio cease to serve as channels of the CC line also

⁸³ This was a HWP CC resolution targeting the Petöfi Circle and suspending its activities.

⁸⁴ Márton Horváth, as indicated earlier in this chapter, was editor-in-chief of Szabad Nép from 1954-1956.

represents a violation of internal party democracy. Therefore it is necessary to get rid of all press and radio staff, who are unwilling to implement the CC's line.

In this dangerous situation, the party leadership practically exists in a state of prostration [*prostratsiya*].

After the discussion, the Hungarian comrades had to admit that although in practice power had not yet slipped from their hands, it was slipping away, and the process was leading to a loss of power.

Comrades like Gerő, Hegedüs, [István] Kovács and others understand all the danger of such a situation, but they have not proposed anything, although from their statements one could understand that everything comes down to the question of Rákosi, but none of them wanted to pose this question.⁸⁵ It was apparent that all of them were waiting for us to raise the issue of Rákosi, because they feel bound by our line on this matter, which was transmitted to them on behalf of our CC by cde. Suslov in the form of his statement that Rákosi's removal now would be a gift for the Americans. Cde. Kovács stated this directly in his conversation with cde. Andropov.

When I raised this issue, they emphasized that the main problem, the biggest obstacle, was the issue of responsibility for violations of the law, i.e. the issue of responsibility for reprisals against communists, which took place before 1953. The Central Committee is under attack on this issue from all sides, and the CC cannot defend itself. Everybody thinks that it is not so much Farkas as Rákosi who is to blame.

When, during a preliminary discussion in a narrow circle, I raised the question whether it would have been better, in the interests of the party and taking the existing circumstances into account, for Rákosi to resign on his own in order to make it easier for the party to preserve its leading position and defeat the opposition and the hostile elements, it was clear that cdes. Gerő, Hegedüs and Vég were pleased with the suggestion, and even breathed easier. Cde. Kovács also received that suggestion with a certain pleasure, as he told me in a personal meeting.

Later, during a Politburo session, everybody spoke in favor of the expediency of cde. Rákosi's resignation. Gerő even said: "We dragged the decision on this issue on to the last hour."

The Hungarian comrades agreed with my statement that cde. Rákosi's departure from the leadership would help to achieve a genuine unity in the Central Committee and would make it easier to fight against the opposition and hostile elements. Success here could ensure simultaneous implementation of the following order of measures: first--the resignation of Rákosi, who was the target of all the opposition strikes and whom everyone considers responsible for the violations of law to a greater extent than Farkas; second--the inclusion within the leadership of a new group of officials, especially of Hungarian nationality, who have shown themselves to be steadfast in the struggle for the party line during the period of the latest complications; third--a simultaneous blow against the leaders of the hostile elements and defeat of their centers. Further, it is necessary to engage in an active struggle on the ideological front against the anti-Marxist, anti-Lenin positions and statements from among the party members. Finally, they need to reinstate party discipline among all the party members, regardless of

⁸⁵ The last phrase "...but none of them wanted to pose this question," does not appear in Sovietskii Soyuz i vengerskii krizis, but does in the original document and also in the version published in the Hungarian-language edition of Vyacheslav T. Sereda and Aleksandr S. Stykhalin, eds., Hiányzó lapok 1956 történetéből: dokumentumok a volt SZKP KB levéltárából (Budapest: Móra Ferenc Könyvkiadó, 1993), 40-46.

personalities, as Lenin did at our Tenth Congress after the Central Committee had been practically split on the eve on the Congress.

When I asked what the issues were on which there were disagreements of principle among the CC members, one of the CC members noted that those CC members who disagree mostly drop hints and do not say everything they are thinking. Many of them hide their views. Then Gerő responded to this question in the following manner, with which everybody apparently agreed. The CC members who disagree with the CC line do not have either a defined platform or any system of views. One can speak only about separate issues. The first group of issues is related to the collectivization of agriculture. CC member Zoltán Vas formulated it more directly than anyone when he said that collectivization should be postponed for another ten years, and that tractors, for instance the "Universals," should be sold to individual peasants. There were also other statements, for example, to allow the law of costs [*zakon stoimosti*] to work in the economy without any limitations, by permitting competition; to build the system of economic management not after the Soviet, but after the Yugoslav model, which they regard as the more democratic one, in their opinion. And finally the question of democratization: many of them, especially under the pressure of Western propaganda, are sliding down the slope toward formal bourgeois democracy.

As far as Imre Nagy is concerned, I said that our CC did not discuss him, but that I had my own opinion and I know the opinions of some of our CC members. We believed previously, and we believe now that it was a mistake to expel him from the party, even though he deserved that with his behavior. Had Imre Nagy remained in the party, he would have had to obey party discipline and carry out the will of the party. By expelling him, the Central Committee has complicated its own struggle against him. It is necessary to explain to Nagy very directly that he cannot return to the party by fighting against it. The path of fighting against the party is one that will inevitably lead him to prison. Alternatively, if he changes his behavior, he can count on being reinstated to the party. A number of comrades stated that although this was correct, yet in the existing situation if they reinstate Imre Nagy to the party it would be perceived as his victory, and the right wing of the party would grow stronger. Some time later, after he takes a number of steps on behalf of the party, and in the direction of correcting his own mistakes, then they could return him to the party. During my conversation with cde. Kovács on this issue, he told me that such a talk on their part with Imre Nagy would not make any impression on him. However, if you--Kovács said addressing me--could speak to Imre Nagy on behalf of your CC, that would be a totally different matter.

Cde. Rákosi conducted himself correctly both during the preliminary session and the session of the Politburo. He stated that the idea of resignation had come to him long ago, but that he kept postponing raising this issue because he wanted to correct his mistakes in leading the party through his own efforts, and then to resign. He was not able to do this, and now taking into account the interests of the party, which are ultimately important for him, he considers it necessary to resign.

Szalai essentially said that he was in favor of Rákosi's removal from the leadership, but he expressed his concern that the hostile elements wanted to remove not only Rákosi, but also his supporters--as he has put it, "all his milieu"--from the leadership. He expressed his own opinion as well as the opinion of the younger Politburo members and CC secretaries promoted by

Rákosi--such as Hidas, Vég, Bata, Egri, and Mekis⁸⁶--who also expressed concern about their fate.

Many comrades expressed the opinion that the Plenum of the CC could possibly overthrow the entire Politburo.

Szalai himself introduced a proposal, taking these concerns into account and also, lest the enemy perceive Rákosi's resignation as their victory, to relieve Rákosi of his duties as first secretary, while at the same time establishing the honorary position of Party Chairman for him. Nobody supported his proposal, and many people openly spoke against it. Szalai himself did not insist on it.

At the Politburo [session] they agreed to undertake the following measures:

1. The Politburo decided to satisfy cde. Rákosi's request to resign his post as first secretary and CC Politburo member, and to give him permission to make an appropriate statement at the CC Plenum. In this connection, it was decided that it should be not Rákosi but another comrade who should make a presentation on the internal political situation at the CC Plenum.

2. To prepare proposals to enlarge the composition of the CC by including young cadres of Hungarian nationality who have proven themselves during the struggle with the opposition, and who are connected with the masses; and to introduce this proposal at the CC Plenum.

3. To prepare and carry out a practical plan for striking a blow against the anti-party hostile groups, to defeat the established centers of their activity in the next several days.

4. Without waiting for the CC Plenum, to begin an attack against the opposition immediately, toward which end:

- a) to immediately start publications in the press and on the radio of resolutions of party organizations, especially the party organizations of industrial enterprises, which support the party and which are directed against the opposition; up until now the press has refused to publish such resolutions;

- b) to publish articles against incorrect statements in the party press;

- c) to remove from their posts those newspaper editors and radio officials who refuse to implement the CC line; to bring them to account before the party;

- d) to carry out measures for the removal from the CC apparatus of all officials who disagree with the CC line or are engaged in a struggle against the CC line;

- e) to prepare a Politburo discussion of the behavior of those CC members who speak against the CC decision on fighting the opposition and the hostile elements, having in mind in this way to achieve a restoration of party discipline for CC members.

During the break between the sessions, I spoke with cde. Kovács. He makes a good impression as a party person, does not come across as someone likely to be involved in intrigues. He reflects the opinion of his Budapest party organization, and fully trusts the Soviet Union. Everybody says that his party apparatus within the City Committee holds up much better than the CC apparatus.

The Politburo decided to consider questions about the composition of the Politburo, about the post of first secretary and about the CC tomorrow, and to consult with us.

Mikoyan

⁸⁶ József Mekis was a member of the HWP CC from 1948-1956 and deputy prime minister from 1954-1956.

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