

DOCUMENT NO. 9

Situation Report from Malenkov-Suslov-Aristov, November 22, 1956

This report from the Malenkov group covers a wide variety of topics and summarizes the political, military and economic situation in Hungary. The most topical issue, however, was the agreement between the Hungarian and Yugoslav governments over the Imre Nagy group, according to which the refugees were supposed to leave the Yugoslav Embassy in the evening of November 22. A written guarantee from the Kádár government notwithstanding, the report refers to a plan to kidnap the group as soon as they left the mission: "The necessary measures in this connection have been prepared together with comrades Serov and Münnich."¹⁰²

Despite the Soviets' unquestionable military victory, Malenkov and his colleagues are forced to report here that the consolidation process is moving slowly. Their account emphasizes the "reactionary" role of the worker's councils as being a major obstacle to the strengthening of the Kádár government. The Hungarian leader is seen fundamentally in a positive light: "Comrade Kádár gives the impression of a politically prepared and educated official." Yet, they voice some reservations as well, including the view that "[b]y his personality" Kádár appears to be "somewhat soft."

Of particular interest in the document is the opinion, expressed by Kádár and his followers, on the "national question," which they suggest ought to be the main topic of discussion at the upcoming meeting of the socialist countries' communist parties.¹⁰³ "[T]he national question, in light of the Hungarian developments, is primarily a question of sovereignty and independence," Kádár declares, emphasizing the importance of elaborating Hungary's special approach to building socialism in order to strengthen communist rule in the country. Although the Soviet leaders present in Budapest claimed that the CPSU CC supported the idea, the notion of a Yugoslav-style "Eastern neutrality," raised by György Aczél, was already unacceptable for Moscow.

November 22, 1956

Central Committee of the Communist Party

We are sending you the information about the situation in Hungary.

I.

In the course of the last several days we had to devote a lot of time to issues regarding the Imre Nagy group.

¹⁰² On the kidnap plan, see the headnote for Document No. 98.

¹⁰³ Concerning this meeting, see Document Nos. 106, 107 and 108.

Late last night the negotiations between comrade Kádár and Vidić were concluded. As comrade Kádár informed us, as a result of the negotiations they reached agreement on removing the right of asylum for Imre Nagy and his group by the Yugoslavs.

In the letter to the Yugoslav government, the Hungarian government stated their position with regard to this affair. At the same time, [the latter] announced that in connection with the request of the Yugoslav government, it would guarantee the safety of the persons involved, and that it would not call them to justice for their past actions.

Today Vidić informed comrade Kádár that the Yugoslav government agreed with the results of the negotiations.

In the evening of November 22, Nagy and his group are supposed to leave the Yugoslav Embassy. The necessary measures in this connection have been prepared together with comrades Serov and Münnich.

II.

According to the information of the officials from the military commandant's office of the Committee on State Security, our Hungarian friends, and our own observations, the general situation in the country is gradually normalizing, although very slowly.

Since November 12, our troops have not been engaged in any military operations; only isolated units follow small bands of rebels into the countryside in order to eliminate them. During all this time, there have been no armed clashes in Budapest at all, not even small ones.

Most of the participants in the riot have either given up or abandoned their weapons. By November 20, according to comrades Konev and Serov's information, the following quantity of weapons was confiscated from the rebels and the population, or was abandoned: small arms--181,766; machine guns--3,172; various mortars--40 barrels, and 64,000 grenades. We repeatedly heard positive statements about the behavior of soldiers and commanders of the Soviet Army from our Hungarian friends both during the military operations and now.

The positions of the Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' government are improving. However, this process is proceeding slowly and unevenly. In some locations and mainly in Budapest, the openly hostile attitudes toward the Kádár government are still quite strong. The counterrevolutionary elements are engaged in active work in order to compromise the revolutionary government in the eyes of the people by stating that it betrayed the national interests when it appealed to the Soviet government for military assistance.

The "Workers' Councils" created under the Nagy government still play a big role in the political life of the country. In many "Workers' Councils", which have substantial influence on the workers, the leading role belongs to the reactionary elements who are using the councils in their fight against the government.

Having lost the opportunity to fight by means of armed uprising, the reactionary forces use new methods to pursue their counterrevolutionary goals--primarily, strikes and sabotage.

Last week, the reaction attempted to involve a large segment of workers and service personnel in a general strike in the main branches of industry and on the railroad.

Exploiting the situation, where the party organizations at the enterprises were destroyed during the days of reaction and were being rebuilt very slowly, the reactionary elements began to infiltrate the plants and the mines. They try to undermine the work in various ways by inspiring the workers to go on strike until the government satisfies their demands for the withdrawal of Soviet troops, for bringing Imre Nagy back into the government, and for allowing a multiparty

system. These demands were presented everywhere, and we tend to believe that they were disseminated from one center. Journalists, writers, and a segment of students play the most active role in the dissemination of the above-mentioned demands.

As a result of the political action and the repressive measures toward several of the organizers of the strikes beginning on Monday, November 19, the number of strikes has definitely declined. More and more industrial enterprises resumed operations. Almost all big industrial enterprises, a number of mines and railroads resumed work. It has to be noted though, that in a number of enterprises it is still the minority of workers who have returned to the job. In almost all big cities and industrial centers the public services, food industries, and retail network function normally. In Budapest, they began the work of cleaning the streets, and repairing buildings and transportation routes.

However, we have to note that as far as eliminating the strike movement at the enterprises, the situation is not yet stable. Yesterday, according to comrade Kádár, the Budapest Workers' Council decided to announce a two-day strike in all enterprises except the food enterprises. This time the main demands were the following: freedom for those arrested in connection with the riots and recognition of the Workers Council by the government. Today, workers in many Budapest enterprises stopped work again, and we are receiving information that the number of those participating in the strike is growing.

The Hungarian government is undertaking measures of a policing as well as political character. Our Hungarian comrades plan to influence the Budapest Workers' Council, relying on those of its members who are not negatively inclined toward the government and who expressed their desire to help get rid of those subversive elements in the Council. The Hungarian organs, with the help of our state security officials, will implement the police measures.

At the same time, today the Csepel Workers' Council of the biggest industrial complex in Budapest made the following decision: (1) To condemn the decision of the city of Budapest Workers' Council regarding the general strike. (2) To go back to work (3) To appeal to all workers of the country to go back to work (4) To create a new Workers Council of Budapest, because the current members of the Council do not represent the opinions of the workers.

The acute shortages of fuel and electric power present a serious danger to further stabilization of industry and transportation, and also to further normalization of national life. The country's coalmines, which under normal working conditions produced up to 80,000 tons of coal a day, produce only 2,000 to 3,000 tons at the present time. The majority of the mines work only at 10 to 15 percent of their capacity. There are practically no reserves of coal in industry and at the railroads. While the demand is 900 megawatts of electric power a day, only 300 megawatts is produced. Currently, the Hungarian comrades implement measures for organizing work at the coalmines and for increasing the extraction of coal.

Both in Budapest and on the periphery, the trade in food products is going well. There are sufficient reserves of flour, sugar, oils and meat. Out of 3,500 food stores in Budapest 3,100 are opened. The population of Budapest is worried about the possibility of inflation. Out of 1.2 billion forints in deposits, 400 million forints were withdrawn within several days. There are long lines at the consumer goods stores every day. Our Hungarian comrades proposed to resolve the situation by rapid cuts in investments, limitations on expenses for the army, and perhaps by credits from other countries.

In order to find and eliminate underground rebel centers, our security officials, together with the Hungarian police, worked on arresting and detaining persons who participated most actively in the armed riots. Altogether, 1,473 people were arrested in addition to 5,820 persons

who were detained and remain under investigation. Leaders and organizers of the riots, persons who supplied the rebels with weapons and ammunition, and also members of the so-called revolutionary committees active during the riots are subject to arrest.

The following prominent organizers of the riots have been arrested: police Colonel Kopácsi, who is one of the most closely trusted of Imre Nagy's people, Dudás--one of the leaders of the rebellion, Szabó--the leader of the rebels in Széna Square, and others. So far, we have not been able to arrest the military leader of the rebellion General Király, and an important ideological leader of the rebels, the journalist Gimes. Our comrades, together with Hungarian comrades, are engaged in the search for those people.

Currently comrade Münnich is implementing measures for strengthening the organs of the political police. Comrade Serov and his officials are actively helping comrade Münnich.

III.

The Hungarian Workers' Party used to have more than 800,000 members. During the rage of the fascist terror, the party organs were either destroyed by the counterrevolution or fell apart. The majority of HWP members left active political life during the last days of the Nagy government as a result of the actions of the counterrevolution. A segment of party members turned to the rebel side and some of them fought with weapons in their hands.

As we know, even under the Nagy government, the Politburo of the Central Committee of HWP decided to transform the HWP into the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party. On November 6 of this year, the provisional committee [sic] of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party published an appeal to all party members. It said: "Each member of the party who is relying on the masses, and is ready to fight for the power of working people, for the policy of our party, should immediately appear at his party organization and begin work!"

However, during the 15 days since that appeal was published, the process of party reunification is moving slowly and in a disorganized fashion. The Provisional Central Committee of the Socialist Workers' Party consists of 21 members, 15 of which are former members of the Central Committee of the HWP. The City Committee of the party works in Budapest and provisional party committees exist in almost all regions of the city. A portion of them were elected at conferences of the party aktiv and the Central Committee nominated another part. District Committees of Budapest consist of five-to-eleven people each. In the majority of cases, secretaries of the district committees are new people because the former secretaries of the district committees were removed from their positions. So far, the district committees possess quite an insignificant aktiv (20-30 people) and have almost no political base in the enterprises and in the organizations.

In the last three or four days the district committees began re-registering party members more actively. According to our information, the largest number of those who were re-registered live in Csepel. More than 500 people have re-registered here (out of 12,000 HWP members counted before October 23); in the rest of the districts the number of those re-registered is still in the tens.

Local party organizations are beginning to emerge on the enterprises.

Several days ago, the Central Committee held a conference of the party aktiv of the city of Budapest. Approximately 200 people attended the conference. The speakers fully approved the program of the Kádár government and the measures implemented by it. Only one person spoke against it. Conferences of the party aktiv were held in the majority of Budapest districts.

County party committees were created in all the counties. However, we know very little about their constitution and size. The Provisional Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party has sent their representatives to the county committees.

IV.

In the course of these days we met with comrade Kádár repeatedly, which allowed us to get to know him better. He leaves a good impression. As far as we can judge by his actions and his behavior in recent days, he began to realize much better the necessity of implementing a firmer line in the fight against the reaction. Now he is showing a much higher level of decisiveness in regard to arresting counterrevolutionaries, even though up until recently he was somewhat unsure in this regard under the pressure of those from his close circle who are not convinced. He is very firm in his position on the measures toward Imre Nagy and his group, and he upheld the party line very well during negotiations with Vidić and Soldatić.

Comrade Kádár gives the impression of a politically prepared and educated official. By his personality, he is somewhat soft; therefore in a number of cases we saw that some doubting persons from his close circle influence him. However, we have to say that on the issues of principle, which we had to decide with him, and on other issues, about which we know he was under another sort of influence, comrade Kádár was able to orient himself very quickly in the situation. He arrived at correct decisions, which he later practically always implemented in the Executive Committee, and in the government.

Comrade Kádár enjoys full support in the Executive Committee, and all the most important measures are implemented by consensus. Comrades Münnich, Marosán, Apró, Kis Károly and others behave very well.

At the same time, we have to say that two members of the Executive Committee--Lajos Fehér, editor of "Népszabadság" newspaper, and Béla Biszku, secretary of the Budapest city committee--are negatively disposed. One of them (Fehér) most clearly expresses feelings of dissatisfaction with the policy of the CPSU, and apparently completely shares the Yugoslav position, including what was stated in Tito's last speech at Pula. He does not agree with the "Pravda" criticism of that speech. Using his position as editor, Lajos Fehér is trying to get his views and feelings out through the press, and he manages to accomplish that when comrade Kádár does not have time to look after him or to show decisiveness when it is necessary.

We are aware of the fact that Lajos Fehér prepared a sharp polemical article against "Pravda" in connection with the known criticism of Tito's speech in "Pravda." It was only because of comrade Kádár's pressure that the article was not published. He, Fehér, allowed the article with a biased representation of the results of the Soviet-Polish negotiations to be published in the newspaper. We will have a substantive conversation with comrade Kádár and members of the Executive Committee about Lajos Fehér, having in mind that we can not tolerate his lack of discipline as editor.¹⁰⁴

The pro-Yugoslav mood and the negative feelings toward the CPSU are quite strong among members of the Provisional Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party.

¹⁰⁴ Lajos Fehér was relieved of his post as editor-in-chief of Népszabadság at the November 24 meeting of the HSWP Provisional Executive Committee. One of the main reasons for this decision was a strike by the newspaper's staff against the spiking of the article mentioned above. See, A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt ideiglenes vezető testületeinek jegyzőkönyvei, vol. 1, pp. 119-122.

V.

We had conversations regarding the conference of representatives of Communist and Workers' parties of socialist countries with comrade Kádár, and then with all members of the Executive Committee of the Socialist Workers' Party. Later we will prepare a special memorandum for the Central Committee, in which we will develop our suggestions on this issue. However, below we are reporting the most important information that we learned regarding the mood of the Hungarian comrades on the issue of the conference, how they see the idea and the substance of the conference.

The Hungarian comrades reiterated that it would be necessary to hold a conference of representatives of Communist and Workers' parties of the European countries of people's democracy, the Soviet Union, China and Yugoslavia in the nearest future, within the next three weeks. They do not have any proposals developed in final form, so they have outlined the goals and the tasks of the conference only in general form.

Comrade Kádár and other members of the Executive Committee believe that the main question that we should discuss at the conference is the national issue. In their opinion, this question took on special political importance in light of the Hungarian developments not only for the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, but also for other fraternal communist and workers' parties. Because of this, it is important to develop this question in principle and in practice. Our party, said comrade Kádár, should publish some kind of a program statement with the goal of winning the masses over to our side. The national issue, in the general sense of the word, should occupy the main place in such a program.

We asked our Hungarian comrades to tell us more concretely what they had in mind when they spoke about the national issue.

The Hungarian comrades responded that they were not going to raise territorial questions, of course. In our view, said comrade Kádár, the national question, in light of the Hungarian developments, is primarily a question of sovereignty and independence. In our speeches before the Hungarian people, we emphasized the issues of independence and sovereignty of Hungary, but we stated the question in a very general form, which is difficult to comprehend. The people are not sufficiently clear about it, and do not understand this very well. The masses want to know, what is it exactly that we are promising, and how is the question about relations between Hungary and the USSR, and also with other socialist countries, going to be decided in the future.

The problem is, said our Hungarian comrades, we spoke about the principles of sovereignty, independence and non-interference in each others' affairs, as principles, on which we were building relations between the USSR and the countries of people's democracy many times before. However, we did not always abide by those principles in practice. We made many mistakes. We should analyze those mistakes and learn the relevant lessons. We should tell the people, precisely, how these principles will be implemented in the future. We should bring clarity to the relations between the parties, and then to state relations, and we should present a clear perspective on these issues.

After fraternal parties discuss these questions, we could, said comrade Kádár, develop and make more concrete the Declaration of the Soviet government from October 30, 1956.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ See Document No. 50.

That would give the Hungarians and us an opportunity to present the program of the party and the government on the issue of the sovereignty and independence of Hungary in a positive way.

The Hungarian comrades believe that it is necessary to develop a program of building socialism that would be applicable to Hungarian conditions as soon as possible. Comrade Kádár said that at some point in the past it was stated that the people's democracy was a new form of dictatorship of the proletariat, but in practice they tried to build everything in Hungary after the Soviet model.¹⁰⁶ The main issue is to develop forms of building socialism that do not exist in the USSR but that fit Hungary's special conditions. Such specific forms that would be new for Hungary in comparison with the Soviet Union would help us attract all progressive forces of the country to our side.

We should mention that during the session of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, which took place on November 11 of this year,¹⁰⁷ some members of the Committee raised the issue of the sovereignty and independence of Hungary somewhat differently from the way it was presented by comrade Kádár and by other members of the Executive Committee in their conversations with us.

Thus, for example, György Aczél stated in his speech: "Unquestionably, it is necessary, as [comrade] Kőböl has already mentioned, to work out in detail how we conceive of our national independence. Even if we had planned it systematically, we could not have ruined our reputation more effectively than we did. We should now establish a scheme of independence that the Soviet Union can accept as well; a neutrality [which is] not western neutrality on the model of Austria, but rather eastern neutrality on the model of Yugoslavia or any other example." Member of the Central Committee Miklós Somogyi¹⁰⁸ supported this statement of Aczél. László Földes¹⁰⁹ made a similar statement also.

From our conversation with the Executive Committee members, and from their speeches at the Central Committee session of November 11 of this year, we can draw the conclusion that some Hungarian comrades are inclined to subject to criticism the CPSU policy towards the countries of people's democracy, and also the internal policy of some of the communist and workers' parties of the European countries of people's democracy. The assessment of the policy of the CPSU toward the countries of people's democracy expressed by some Hungarian comrades, especially during the session of the Central Committee on November 11 of this year, repeated what Tito had said about it in his speech in Pula on many issues.

In our conversation with the Executive Committee members, we confirmed that the Central Committee of the CPSU was positively inclined toward holding the conference that they proposed. We told them that we would report the opinions of the Hungarian comrades to the CPSU CC, and that we would additionally contact them later regarding the practical issue of convening the conference after we consult with the relevant fraternal parties.

¹⁰⁶ The declaration that the "people's democratic system" was actually a form of "proletarian dictatorship" was first announced by Rákosi in an article in Szabad Nép on January 16, 1949. This signaled the end of the "popular front policy" followed from 1945 and the beginning of the country's Sovietization.

¹⁰⁷ See Document No. 95.

¹⁰⁸ Miklós Somogyi was chairman of the National League of Hungarian Free Trade Unions and a member of the HWSP PCC from November 1956.

¹⁰⁹ László Földes was a candidate member of the HWP CC from July to October 28, 1956, and a member of the Military Committee between October 24-28. After the revolution he became a member of the HWSP PCC and was head of the Cadre Department from February to December 1957.

During the same Executive Committee meeting, we spoke substantively with the Hungarian comrades about the pressing issues of political life in Hungary, and also about our assessment of the international situation.

During the conversation, on our part we paid special attention to the need for following a firm line on the necessity of a crushing defeat of the reactionary forces, the speediest rebuilding and strengthening of the party and party organizations, on correcting the mistakes that were made with regard to party personnel when party officials were defamed without discretion because of their work under Rákosi.

According to our impression, the Hungarian comrades agreed with us in their statements, with the exception of Fehér and Béla Biszku, who took an incorrect line toward the cadres who worked under Rákosi.

VI.

Romanian comrades Dej, Chivu Stoica, and Bodnăraș have just arrived. So far, we have only had a brief meeting with them since they were in a hurry to get to comrade Kádár's reception.¹¹⁰

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Note:

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¹¹⁰ The top-level Romanian delegation arrived in Budapest to discuss plans for transporting the Nagy group to Romania.