

October 28, 1956
**Working Notes from the Session of the CPSU CC
Presidium on 28 October 1956**

Citation:

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Summary:

The notes from this session of the CPSU Presidium reveal a desire to support and strengthen the Kadar-Nagy government and the draft declaration prepared by the Hungarians for radio broadcast on October 28. Khrushchev, desiring to avoid the complications that Britain and France face in Egypt, asserts the need for a ceasefire and troop withdrawal.

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

Working Notes from the Session of the CPSU CC Presidium on 28 October 1956 (1)

Those Taking Part: Voroshilov, Bulganin, Kaganovich, Malenkov, Molotov, Saburov, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Zhukov, Shvernik, Shepilov, Furtseva, Pospelov, Zorin

On the Situation in Hungary
(Khrushchev)

Cde. Khrushchev-the matter is becoming more complicated. They're planning a demonstration.(2) Kadar is leaning toward holding negotiations with the centers of resistance.

We must set Sobolev right at the UN.(3) The workers are supporting the uprising (therefore they want to reclassify it as something other than a "counterrevolutionary uprising").

Cde. Zhukov provides information.
They would refrain from stamping out one of the centers of resistance.(4) An order was given not to permit a demonstration.

They're dismantling the railroad tracks in a number of localities. In Debrecen power has passed to our troops.(5)

Cde. Khrushchev provides information. The situation is complicated. Cde. Suslov is to fly back to Moscow. A Directory has not been declared. They propose that Hegedus be removed from the Directory (4 in favor, and 6 against).(6) The plenum is going on now.(7)

Cde. Voroshilov-they are poorly informed. Cdes. Mikoyan and Suslov are behaving calmly, but are poorly informed. We're in a bad situation. We must devise our own line and get a group of Hungarians to embrace it. Cde. Mikoyan is not able to carry out this work. What we intended to do (to send a group of comrades) must now be done. We should not withdraw troops-we must act decisively. Nagy is a liquidator.

Cde. Molotov-things are going badly. The situation has deteriorated, and it is gradually moving toward capitulation. Nagy is actually speaking against us. Our cdes. are behaving diffidently. It is agreed up to what limit we will permit concessions. This pertains now to the composition of the government and to the Directory. They are excluding Hegedus, and this means they're no longer showing regard for us. The bare minimum is the question of friendship with the USSR and the assistance of our troops. Cde. Mikoyan is reassuring them. If they don't agree, we must consider what will happen with the troops.

Cde. Kaganovich-a counterrevolution is under way. Indecisiveness of the Hungarian Communists. Kadar should make certain concessions to the workers and peasants and thereby neutralize the movement. Decisive action is needed against the centers of resistance; we cannot retreat.

Cde. Bulganin-the HWP is acting ambivalently. Kadar kept lurching. The main thing is to demand greater decisiveness from Kadar. We must act as follows-summon Mikoyan to the phone and say: The HWP Politburo must act decisively; otherwise, we will take action without you. Perhaps will have to appoint the gov't directly.(8)

Cde. Malenkov-we shouldn't lay blame for the situation on our comrades. They're firmly carrying out a line aimed at suppressing the uprising. Nagy from the

government so he can put forth a program [sic-trans].

Cde. Zhukov-regarding Cde. Mikoyan's role, it's unfair to condemn him right now. The situation has unfolded quite differently compared to when we decided to send in troops. We must display political flexibility. We must organize the CC for more flexible actions. We must organize armed workers' brigades. Our troops must be kept in full readiness. The main center of resistance must be suppressed. (9)

Cde. Saburov-agrees with Cde. Zhukov. They must take up their positions at large enterprises. A program is needed.

Cde. Khrushchev-we will have a lot to answer for. We must reckon with the facts. Will we have a gov't that is with us, or will there be a gov't that is not with us and will request the withdrawal of troops? What then? Nagy said that if you act he will relinquish his powers. Then the coalition will collapse.(10)

There is no firm leadership there, neither in the party nor in the government.

The uprising has spread into the provinces. The [Hungarian] troops might go over to the side of the insurgents.(11) We can't persist on account of Hegedus. Two options. The gov't takes action, and we help. This might soon be completed, or Nagy will turn against us. He will demand a ceasefire and the withdrawal of troops, followed by capitulation.

What might the alternatives be?

- 1) The formation of a Committee, which takes power into its hands (this is the worst alternative), when we . . .(12)
- 2) This gov't is retained, and officials from the gov't are sent into the provinces. A platform is needed. Perhaps our Appeal to the population and to workers, peasants, and the intelligentsia should be prepared, or else we're just shooting.
- 3) Would it not be appropriate if the Chinese, Bulgarians, Poles, Czechs, and Yugoslavs appealed to the Hungarians?
- 4) Decisively suppress the armed forces of the insurgents.

Cdes. Brezhnev, Pospelov, Shepilov, and Furtseva are to prepare documents.

It is agreed: the fraternal parties should appeal to the Hungarians.

Do we support the present government once the declaration is issued?(13) Yes, support it. There is no alternative.

Cde. Bulganin: . . .(14)

Cde. Voroshilov: We acted correctly when we sent in troops. We should be in no hurry to pull them out. American secret services are more active there than Cdes. Suslov and Mikoyan are. A group of comrades should go there. Arrange to form a gov't and then withdraw the troops. We sent you there for nothing.(15) (Cdes. Khrushchev and Kaganovich object.)

Cde. Bulganin: We acted properly when we sent in troops, but I can't agree with the assessment offered by Cde. Voroshilov. We should endorse the actions taken by Cdes. Mikoyan and Suslov. We must draw the right conclusion: In Budapest there are forces that want to get rid of Nagy's and Kadar's government. We should adopt a

position of support for the current government. Otherwise we'll have to undertake an occupation. This will drag us into a dubious venture.

Cde. Kaganovich: Regarding the sending of troops, we acted properly in sending them. There is no reason to attack Mikoyan and Suslov. They acted properly. It's unfair to lay the blame on them. If we don't offer support, there'll be an occupation of the country. That will take us far afield. We should do what is needed to support the gov't. Changes shouldn't be made in the declaration regarding the withdrawal of troops.(55) So that they speak about friendship. The question is how to strengthen the party. We don't need to send additional people there.

Malenkov: (16) The actions that were taken were correct. There is no point at all in condemning Cdes. Mikoyan and Suslov. We should support the new gov't. We should keep troops there with the approval of the gov't.

Cde. Malenkov: So many people were involved there that there'll have to be a guarantee of an amnesty.

Cde. Molotov: We acted properly when we sent in troops. The initial messages from Cdes. Mikoyan and Suslov were reassuring about their view of the government. The influence of the party on the masses is weak. With regard to the new government, we should support it. But regarding friendship with the USSR, they're talking about the withdrawal of troops. We must act cautiously.

Cde. Zhukov: We must support the new gov't. The question of a troop withdrawal from Hungary-this question must be considered by the entire socialist camp. The authority of the HWP CC must be raised. We should appeal to the fraternal parties so that they, in turn, will issue appeals to the Hungarians. In Budapest, we should pull troops off the streets in certain regions. Perhaps we should release a statement from the military command. With regard to the assessment of Cdes. Mikoyan and Suslov, it's inappropriate to say the things that Cde. Voroshilov did.

Cde. Saburov: We must support this gov't. The authority of the gov't must be increased in the eyes of the people. We shouldn't protest their assessments of events, and we shouldn't protest about the withdrawal of troops, albeit not an immediate withdrawal.

Cde. Khrushchev: Agrees with the cdes. We must support this gov't. We must devise our tactics. We must speak with Kadar and Nagy: We support you; the declaration-you evidently are not able to do more.(17) We will declare a ceasefire. We are ready to withdraw troops from Budapest. We must make this conditional on a ceasefire by the centers of resistance.

Cde. Molotov: Second, we must look after the Hungarian Communists.(18)

Cde. Bulganin-the regime of people's democracy in the country has collapsed. The HWP leadership no longer exists. Power has been gained by . . .(19)

Cde. Kaganovich-we're not talking here about concessions, but about a war for the people. The declaration must be adopted.(20) A troop withdrawal from Budapest.

Cde. Voroshilov: If only a group could be formed there, we could leave our troops in place. There's no one to rely on. Otherwise there's war.

Cde. Khrushchev-I support the declaration. Politically this is beneficial for us.(21) The

English and French are in a real mess in Egypt. We shouldn't get caught in the same company.(22) But we must not foster illusions. We are saving face.

Fundamentally, the declaration must be adopted. But adopt it with corrections.(23)

Life in the city must be put right.

An appeal from the fraternal parties.(24) A ciphered cable to Yugoslavia.(25)

Cde. Pospelov is to be included in preparations of the report for 6.XI.56

If there is to be a leaflet from the military command, let . . .(26)

Hegedus

Gero

Piros

them to Bulgaria.(27)

On the Situation in Hungary(28)

(Cde. Suslov)

Cde. Suslov: The situation is complicated. On 23 Oct. our troops entered.(29) On 25 Oct. only one pocket of resistance was left; we found out about it on 26 Oct. It was in the "Corvin" cinema, a group headed by a colonel from the Horthyite army.(30) Single gunshots are heard (often). They're beating officers. 3,000 wounded, 350 dead (Hungarians). Our losses are 600 dead. The popular view of our troops now is bad (and has gotten worse). The reason is the dispersal of the demonstration on 24 Oct. 56.(31) Shooting began. 70 ordinary citizens were killed. Many flags were hung up on the sidewalk. Workers are leaving their enterprises. Councils are being formed (spontaneously) at enterprises (around various cities).(32) There is an anti-Soviet trend in the demonstrations. How can we regain control of the situation? The establishment of a relatively strong gov't. Our line is not to protest the inclusion of several democrats in the gov't. Yesterday a government was formed. On the morning of 28 Oct., at 5:00, Kadar arrived and pointed out that the trade unions had demanded a reassessment of the insurgents, reclassifying the events as a national democratic uprising.(33) They want to classify it according to the example of the Poznan events. Kadar reported that he had succeeded in agreeing with the trade unions to eliminate the formula of a national democratic movement and about the organs of state security. In his address, Nagy inserted a point about the withdrawal of Soviet troops. They're also insisting on a ceasefire. Our line now: this time the gov't is recommending a ceasefire, and the military command is devising an order for the withdrawal of troops from Budapest.(34) Nagy and Szanto raised the question of removing Hegedus from the Directory.(35) There's no need to hold elections.

Translator's Notes

1 Some of the pages from this session were out of sequence in the original file. The order has been corrected in the translation.

2 Hundreds of demonstrations and meetings had been taking place in Hungary since 23 October, even after a curfew was imposed. Evidently, Khrushchev is referring here to a warning he received on 27 October in an emergency message from Mikoyan and Suslov (APRF, F. 3, Op. 64, D. 484, Ll. 131-134). The message noted that posters had gone up in Budapest declaring Imre Nagy a traitor and demanding that Bela Kovacs, the former General Secretary of the Independent Smallholders Party, be instated as the new prime minister. The posters called for a demonstration in support of Kovacs,

who was in Pecs at the time recovering from nine years of imprisonment in the Soviet Union (between 1947 and 1955). When Kovacs was contacted by the Hungarian president, Istvan Dobi, on 27 October over the phone, he tentatively agreed to serve as agriculture minister in Nagy's reorganized government. But Kovacs did not actually participate in any government deliberations until he returned to Budapest on 1 November, by which time the situation had changed a great deal. [Ed. note: An English translation of the Mikoyan-Suslov report of 27 October 1956 cited above appears in CWIHP Bulletin 5 (Spring 1995), pp. 29-30, from a copy of the document in TsKhSD, F. 89, Per. 45, Dok. 9. However, it contains a mistranslation of the passage referring to the posters which had gone up in Budapest declaring Nagy a traitor and supporting Bela Kovacs. The mistranslated portion notes that placards had appeared in Budapest at night, "in which Nagy was declared the chairman and Bela Kovacs was recommended as premier," and that a demonstration was planned "in their honor." It should have read that Nagy was called "a traitor" and that the demonstration was called on "his" (Bela Kovacs') behalf. The Bulletin regrets the error.]

3 An emergency session of the UN Security Council was convened on 28 October in the midafternoon (New York time) to discuss the situation in Hungary. The Soviet Foreign Ministry originally had instructed Arkadii Sobolev, the Soviet representative at the Security Council, to depict the events in Hungary as being inspired solely by fascist, anti-democratic elements. See "Shifrotelegramma," 27 October 1956 (Strictly Secret-Special Dossier), in AVPRF, F. 0536, Op. 1, P. 5, D. 65, Ll. 24-28. Khrushchev's statement here suggests that the Presidium must issue new instructions to Sobolev, ordering him to take account of the latest developments in Hungary.

4 Zhukov is referring here to the strongest center of resistance in the densely populated region around the Corvin film theater in downtown Budapest. Counterinsurgency operations against this area were supposed to commence on the morning of 28 October, but Nagy cancelled those plans because of the risk of heavy civilian casualties.

5 For an illuminating account of events in Debrecen, where anti-Gero demonstrations preceded those in Budapest on 23 October, see Tibor A. Filep, *A debreceni forradalom, 1956 október: Tizenket nap kronikaja* (Debrecen: Mozgaskorlatozottak Egyesulete, 1990). 45

6 Here and elsewhere in Malin's notes, Hegedus's surname is mistakenly rendered as Hedegus. The spelling has been corrected in the translation.

7 Mikoyan and Suslov were taking part in this HWP Central Committee plenum, which adjourned around 5:30 p.m. Budapest time. The HWP Central Committee endorsed the program of Nagy's new government and conferred supreme power on a new HWP Presidium consisting of Janos Kadar (as chair), Antal Apro, Ferenc Munnich, Imre Nagy, Zoltan Szanto, and Karoly Kiss. See the CC resolution in *Szabad Nep* (Budapest), 29 October 1956, p. 1. 47 This sentence fragment is highly ambiguous in Russian. The final word in the fragment, translated here as "directly," is *samim*, which literally means "by itself" or "by himself." The antecedent might be either the HWP Politburo or Mikoyan, or perhaps something or someone else. The ambiguity cannot be fully conveyed in English (which has separate words for "itself" and "himself"), but the translation tries to do so as best as possible.

8 Here again, Zhukov is referring to the center of resistance around the Corvin cinema.

9 Khrushchev is referring here to the coalition government that was formed (or actually reorganized) on 27 October. This government included, on an informal basis, representatives of parties from the pre-Communist era: Bela Kovacs, the former General Secretary of the Smallholders Party; Zoltan Tildy, the former leader of the

Smallholders Party; and Ferenc Erdei, the former leader of the National Peasant Party. Not until 30 October, however, did Nagy announce the formal restoration of a multi-party state, with full participation by the Smallholders, the National Peasant Party (renamed the Petofi Party on 1 November), and the Social Democratic Party as well as the Communists. (Other non-Communist parties soon sprang up as well, including the Hungarian Independence Party, the People's Democratic Party, the Catholic People's Party, and the Catholic National Association.)

10 Scattered defections of Hungarian troops to the insurgents had begun on the first day of the uprising, but Khrushchev was concerned that the whole army would switch sides. In later years, official Soviet accounts of the 1956 uprising acknowledged that "during the most trying days," a substantial number of "soldiers and officers from the Hungarian People's Army" had joined the insurgents in fighting "against Soviet soldiers who had been called in to help." See P. A. Zhilin, ed., *Stroitel'stvo armii evropeiskikh stran sotsialisticheskogo sodruzhestva, 1949-1980* (Moscow: Nauka, 1984), p. 93. Formerly secret documents in the main Russian military archive (TsAMO, F. 32, Op. 701291, D. 17, Ll. 33-48) include the Soviet defense ministry's complete list of Hungarian army units that took the side of the insurgents. Many other valuable documents about the role of the Hungarian army are now available in the 1956 Collection (1956-os Gyujtemeny) of the Hungarian Military History Archive, Hadtortenelmi Leveltar, Honvedelmi Miniszterium (HL/HM). For a useful volume drawing on these documents, see Miklos Horvath, *1956 katonai kronologiaja* (Budapest: Magyar Honvedseg Oktatasi es Kulturális Anyagellátó Központ, 1993). For an equally valuable survey of the Hungarian army's role in 1956 based on archival sources, see Imre Okvath, "Magyar tisztikar a hideghaboru idoszakaban, 1945-1956," *Uj Honvedsegi szemle* (Budapest), No. 1 (1994), pp. 14-27. See also Bela Kiraly, "Hungary's Army: Its Part in the Revolt," *East Europe*, Vol. 7, No. 6 (June 1958), pp. 3-16.

11 This sentence is incomplete in the original.

12 This refers to the new Hungarian government's declaration on 28 October, which Nagy would read over the radio at 5:20 p.m. that same afternoon. Among other things, the declaration called for the dissolution of the state security organs, amnesties for those involved in the uprising, the restoration of the Kossuth emblem as the national emblem, and the immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops from Budapest as well as subsequent negotiations on a full withdrawal from Hungary. The statement also rejected previous characterizations of the uprising as a "counterrevolution," saying that the events were representative of a "broad national-democratic movement" that was seeking to achieve "national independence and sovereignty" for Hungary. Unfortunately, the draft of this declaration that the CPSU CC Presidium was presumably considering at this meeting has not yet been located by scholars.

13 Nothing follows Bulganin's name in the original.

14 Most likely, the "you" (Vas) in this sentence should have been "them" (ikh), referring to Mikoyan and Suslov, the former of whom was still in Hungary. If so, Voroshilov was saying that their mission in Hungary had been worthless. It is also remotely possible that Voroshilov was claiming that Mikoyan himself had said these sorts of things about the Soviet troops who were sent to Budapest on the night of 23-24 October. Whatever the case may be, it is clear that Voroshilov was expressing strong disapproval of Mikoyan's performance in Budapest.

15 Kaganovich and other speakers are referring to possible changes in the Hungarian government's draft statement, which was broadcast in final form at 5:20 p.m. on 28 October (see Note 52 supra).

16 Malenkov's surname appears here without the standard title "Cde." The full designation "Cde. Malenkov" appears a few lines further down in a continuation of Malenkov's remarks.

17 This clearly refers to the Hungarian statement of 28 October (see Note 52 supra), not to the Soviet declaration of 30 October. At this point, Khrushchev and the others had seen the Hungarian statement only in draft form.

18 Most likely, Molotov is referring here to Rakosi, who was already in Moscow, and other hard-line HWP officials who were about to be spirited to the Soviet Union. See below.

19 This sentence is incomplete in the original.

20 Kaganovich is referring to the draft Hungarian statement of 28 October, not to the declaration adopted by the Soviet authorities on 30 October (which was considered at the Presidium meeting that day; see Document No. 7 infra).

21 Khrushchev is probably referring here to the benefits they hoped to gain for Soviet-Hungarian relations, and in international opinion generally, by announcing a ceasefire and the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Budapest.

22 Khrushchev is referring to the political, not military, problems that the French and British governments had been encountering. At this point, military action in Suez was imminent, but had not yet begun. On 26 July 1956 the new Egyptian leader, Gamel Abdel Nasser, had nationalized the Suez Canal Company. He stuck by that decision despite coming under vigorous diplomatic pressure from Great Britain, France, and the United States. On 27 and 28 October, Israel mobilized its army for an operation that was broadly coordinated with France and Great Britain. On 29 October, Israeli troops moved rapidly into Egyptian territory. The French and British joined the Israeli incursions on 31 October by launching air raids against Egyptian cities and imposing a naval blockade.

23 Here again, Khrushchev is referring to proposed corrections in the draft Hungarian statement. It is doubtful there was enough time for most such changes to be included.

24 In line with this decision, the CPSU Presidium sent a message to Gomulka and Cyrankiewicz expressing support for Nagy's new government and for the statement Nagy issued on 28 October. The Polish authorities followed up with an appeal to the HWP and the Hungarian people, published in the PZPR daily Trybuna Ludu on 29 October, which expressed "shock," "pain," and "deep disquiet" at "the tragic news coming from [Hungary]" and called for "an end to the bloodshed, destruction, and fratricidal struggle."

25 As a result of this decision, the CPSU Presidium dispatched a cable to Tito that was very similar to the cable sent to the Polish leadership. On 29 October the Yugoslav authorities published a message to the HWP, in the main Belgrade daily Politika, urging "an end to the fratricidal struggle" and warning that "further bloodshed would only harm the interests of the Hungarian working people and socialism, and would only promote the aims of reactionaries and bureaucratic deformation."

26 This sentence is incomplete in the original.

27 This is what appears in the original. Perhaps initially there was some consideration given to bringing these three officials to Bulgaria. As things actually worked out,

however, the three men and their families, as well as the former defense minister Istvan Bata and his family, were spirited to Moscow in a Soviet military aircraft on the evening of 28 October. Hegedus and Piros remained in Moscow until September 1958, and Gero stayed there until 1960. Only Rakosi was never able to return to Hungary. For an intriguing article about Rakosi's many years of exile in the USSR, drawing on recently declassified sources, see V.L. Musatov, "Istoriya odnoi ssylki: 'Zhitie' Matiasa Rakoshi v SSSR (1956- 1971 gg.)," *Kentavr* (Moscow), No. 6 (November- December 1993), pp. 72-81.

28 Judging from some of the statements below (e.g., "yesterday a government was formed") and from Suslov's presence (after he had flown back from Hungary), this portion of the meeting must have taken place either late in the evening on 28 October or early in the morning on 29 October. In either case, the CPSU Presidium members would already have heard about the statement that Nagy broadcast over the radio on 28 October.

29 The chronology is slightly awry here. The decision to send in Soviet troops was adopted on the evening of 23 October (see above), but the troops did not actually arrive until the early morning hours of 24 October.

30 The area around the Corvin cinema, on the corner of Jozsef Boulevard in downtown Pest (Budapest's 8th District), was the site of intense fighting that led to many casualties, both Soviet and Hungarian. For a useful account, see Bill Lomax, *Hungary 1956* (London: Allison and Busby, 1976), pp. 118-119, 126-127. On 26 October the fighters in the Corvin district elected Gergely Pongracz as their leader. Suslov presumably is referring to Pal Maleter when he mentions "a colonel from the Horthyite army." Early on the morning of 24 October, Maleter had been ordered by the then-defense minister Istvan Bata to move with five tanks against the insurgents in Budapest's 8th and 9th Districts, providing relief for the Kilian Barracks in the 9th District. When Maleter and his tank unit arrived on the scene, they decided to support the rebels' cause instead. Maleter then assumed command of insurgent forces in the Kilian barracks.

31 The original reads the 24th, but this incident actually occurred on the 25th. A peaceful demonstration of some 25,000 people was held on 25 October outside the Parliament Building (where Nagy's office was located, though Nagy was not inside). The precise sequence of events cannot be conclusively determined, but most evidence suggests that Hungarian state security (AVH) forces suddenly opened fire on the unarmed crowd, with additional shots being fired by Soviet tanks deployed around the building. Roughly 200 people were killed and many more were injured. As news of the incident spread around Budapest, the reported scale of the bloodshed quickly became exaggerated and most of the blame for the deaths was attributed-erroneously, it seems-to the Soviet tanks. No Soviet or Hungarian officials were held accountable for the deaths, but Suslov's statement indicates that CPSU leaders were aware that their own troops were believed to be culpable.

32 The last few parenthetical words of this sentence are ambiguous in Russian. A word has been omitted here for the sake of clarity in English, with no effect at all on the substance of the phrase. Suslov is referring to the formation of workers' councils, which had begun taking shape spontaneously on 26 October in Csepel and other industrial areas. The government formally condoned the establishment of workers' councils in instructions released on the evening of 26 October, which were then published in major Budapest newspapers the following day.

33 As noted above, this is precisely what the Hungarian government's statement on 28 October did. It described the recent events as a "national-democratic uprising" and condemned those who had depicted the situation as a "counterrevolution."

34 Nagy issued an order for a "general and immediate ceasefire" before his radio address on 28 October. Hungarian army units were ordered to "fire only if attacked."

35 Hegedus was excluded from the six-member HWP Presidium that was formed on 28 October, and he was then spirited to Moscow aboard a Soviet military aircraft on the evening of 28 October.