

December 17, 1956

**Diary of Soviet Official K. A. Krutikov, Record of
Conversation with Hungarian Envoy Ezhef Sall**

Citation:

"Diary of Soviet Official K. A. Krutikov, Record of Conversation with Hungarian Envoy Ezhef Sall", December 17, 1956, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RGANI f. 5, op. 28, r. 5195, d. 479, l. 74-81. Obtained and translated for CWIHP by Austin Jersild.
<https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/116817>

Summary:

Conversation about the mood among the foreign Hungarian colony in PRC. The most of the conversation concerns the reasons for the 1956 uprising in Hungary. A lack of knowledge among the Hungarian leadership (with a predominant Soviet background) about the actual situation in Hungary, and the failure of the Soviet Embassy in Budapest to establish contacts with non-Russian speaking Hungarians, are here presented as main reasons for the Hungarian uprising.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

Secret. Copy No. 1
File 64-5 8.1.57

From the diary of
K.A. KRUTIKOV

RECORD OF CONVERSATION

With official on Hungarian affairs in the PRC Sall
17 December 1956

I received Sall at his request. We exchanged information concerning the latest news, pertaining basically to Hungary. Sall said that he wanted to explain to me the mood among the foreign Hungarian colony.

During the conversation Sall spoke often about the mistakes of the previous Hungarian leadership. Sall repeatedly emphasized that the former leaders of Hungary did not know the actual situation in the country. They did not know the mood of the population, as for 20-30 years they lived in the Soviet Union. During this period they did not follow and were not in a position to follow the mood of the Hungarian people. The most difficult thing was that the former leaders did not even try to investigate the situation in the country. They did not want to hear any talk about deficiencies in the leadership of the country. Whenever negative things or inadequacies were pointed out to them, they would immediately put a stop to the critical talk. They were against people who tried to shed light on the negative state of things, even accusing them of being people of a hostile or reactionary mood. Sall said that once he himself happened to be talking to Rakosi about the mood among the Hungarian youth. Sall was convinced of the accuracy of his conclusions, however Rakosi would not listen to him, and suggested that he was even passing on nonsense.

Sall informed me that for people who had lived in Hungary over the course of the past decade, who knew well the life of different parts of the Hungarian population, the past events were not completely unexpected, as everyone understood well how deeply entrenched and maintained in the heads of many people were various reactionary, including even fascist convictions, among the population.

Sall suggested that fascism had a very solid base in Hungary. In the country there were many convinced and zealous fascists. It was sufficient to say that in the fascist party there were some 800,000 people. Another portion of the population did not adopt the fascist program, but they were not interested in opposing it. For emphasis Sall offered an example from his own life: in 1943 he tried to create an underground organization in a factory. At first he intended to organize simply an anti-fascist, and not communist, organization. He appealed to people who seemed to him to be the best workers, and old members of the socialist party and so on. However even the majority of such people would not enter the organization; they informed him that it was not worth it to struggle against the established order in the country. In the factories, noted Sall, the fascists deceived many with their demagoguery; they even organized strikes, and managed to poison the consciousness of a significant portion of the working class.

In the countryside, Sall maintained, the fascists also managed to attract to themselves a large part of the peasantry. They proclaimed various slogans tempting to the peasantry, and promised to divide the latifundia of the landlords and make everyone a well-off, prosperous owner. Many peasants did not manage to sort out this demagoguery.

The Hungarian population, informed Sall, did not experience any special hostility in regard to the German troops. In Hungary the Germans tried to restrain themselves, as allies. They did not allow the excesses that took place in other European countries. In the countryside the Germans paid for goods and other services. As the result the German fascists did not arouse the hatred for themselves from the Hungarians, which they inspired in all the other countries. Besides this, the war did not arrive in its fullest extent to Hungary until the very end.

Regarding chauvinistic moods in Hungary, Sall said that under Hitler Hungary annexed regions from Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, not even speaking about Transylvania. This was the foundation for the chauvinistic mood in the country, and, undoubtedly, exerted an influence in a political sense on all parts of the population.

Sall directed attention to the very wide dissemination of anti-semitism in Hungary. In Hungary there were some 600,000 Jews, of them 200,000 lived in Budapest. The reactionary forces always used anti-semitism for their ends. After the war the majority of the Jews joined the party and occupied many leadership posts in various areas of the party and state administration. There were many Jews among the former leaders of Hungary: Rákosi, Gero, Farkaš, Lukacs, Santo and others. Many Jews were in the CC, the government, and in local administration, which was poorly accepted by many Hungarians. In the words of Sall, this development inspired general indignation, but it was ignored by the party leadership.

Sall further pointedly addressed a series of mistakes of the former leadership, about which have already been discussed in a series of other conversations. Sall particularly emphasized the absence in the past of unity in the ranks of the party. Among the leadership of the party there was always a division between those who lived in emigration, and the comrades who remained in Hungary. Sall maintained that comrades like Kadar, Rajk, Kalai and others all the time lived in Hungary. They knew well events in the country and how these events were remembered by the people. They knew everything about the country and they knew everyone. But they, emphasized Sall, did not listen, and then—repressed [people]. Within the party there was always a battle among various cliques. The emigrants occupied the very highest positions in the party, divided between, above all, those emigrants who had returned from the USSR, and comrades who had returned from different countries. And within these groups there also existed several smaller groups. The presence of cliques and groups were felt everywhere. The young party cadresYoung party cadres routinely heard open conversations among authoritative leaders about how other leaders in the party were bad and even worthless. This undermined trust in the leadership within the party.

Sall said that the inadequacies and mistakes of Rakosi and others in Hungary were always associated with the name of Stalin. It was considered that everything in Hungary was done at the will of Stalin. And therefore reactionary forces tried to incite in the population hostile feelings against Stalin, and, to a lesser extent, even against the Soviet Union.

Sall said that in his opinion, the Soviet embassy in Budapest is to a certain extent guilty of that has been said above. The Soviet comrades did not investigate the situation in Hungary because they did not want to see too much and looked at everything through the eyes of Rakosi and those who surrounded him. In my opinion, said Sall, the workers of the Soviet embassy committed two mistakes. The first mistake was the choice of people that they met with. The Soviet embassy was always connected to people who were in emigration in the Soviet Union. These people speak Russian, and those Soviet comrades who could not speak Hungarian found it easier to work with them. It was easier for them to converse with these Hungarians because the latter understood better how to talk and what to talk about with the Soviet comrades. The Soviet comrades, it follows, did not have contacts with the people who did not live in the Soviet Union but had close ties with the Hungarian

people and deeply understood their problems and moods.

As an example [of these problems] Sall named the former minister of supply Altamare. Sall suggested that Altamare was completely worthless. He lived for many years in the Soviet Union, where he was the director of a small beer factory. Altamare was promoted by Rákosi. In the words of Sall, Altamare was a laughing stock in his own ministry, in the Soviet of Ministers, and everywhere he happened to be. Altamare did not know his own business, poorly paid attention to people, and in general thought in a primitive way. Altamare was not Hungarian in nationality and his Hungarian was weak. Often at home and with many people he preferred to speak Russian. He is a Soviet citizen. Sall said that once Altamare rejected receiving his Hungarian diplomatic passport for a trip abroad and informed a deputy minister of foreign affairs that he possessed a better document, a Soviet passport. In the words of Sall, this event inspired at that time a strong reaction among a rather wide circle of Hungarian comrades. And indeed it was Altamare, said Sall, who was constantly in conversation with comrades from the Soviet embassy. Altamare, for example, considered it his duty to be at the train station during the arrival and departure of every attaché from the Soviet embassy, even when a commander from the protocol department for the handling of foreign ambassadors was present. This fact was widely discussed among many in Budapest.

Another mistake of the comrades from the Soviet embassy, said Sall, was that they did not want to listen patiently to those Hungarian comrades who had significant critical observations to make about the order then prevailing in Hungary. Sometimes Soviet comrades sharply rebuked them. These workers at the USSR embassy even created among the Hungarian comrades the impression that it was impossible to discuss things openly with them, that it was useless and even dangerous. Sall informed that he himself was convinced of this in his regular meetings with Soviet comrades in Budapest. Once he shared his ideas about economic problems in Hungary to a Soviet comrade, who treated his words as if they were sedition and began to refute them, referring to the newspaper "Sabad nép." I, Sall said, informed him that such reports do not correspond to reality. These facts were known to be true by the very Chairman of Gosplan, with whom Sall was close, he told me, and the other facts were in effect falsified.

Sall pointedly returned during the discussion to his thesis about how the Soviet comrades in Budapest do not genuinely know the Hungarian cadres. As an example he referred to an event in 1951 when the Soviet prize was awarded to the writer Atsel Tamash. In the words of Sall, Atsel was very little known in Hungary, and his work "Under the passage of freedom" was weak and completely unworthy of such a great prize. For everyone in Hungary the granting of the award to Atsel was a great surprise. Atsel had neither talent nor any inclination to social activism. He was an opportunist and an adventurist....

Regarding the mood among the foreign Hungarian colony, Sall said that following the improvement in the situation in Hungary itself, Hungarians here [in the PRC] have adopted a more sober and correct assessment of basic matters. However in recent times, Sall noted, the many letters from Hungary had created a bad influence upon the mood of people. Almost all of these letters, in his words, contain ideas in one way or another directed against the USSR, communists, and the government of Kadar. Before there were few letters, and we, said Sall, were able to convince many comrades of the correctness of the policies of the revolutionary workers-peasants state. Now people often argue about facts they are receiving from the homeland. The arguments in these cases have become significantly more difficult. In the words of a new Hungarian trade representative not long ago arriving in KNDR [North Korea], the situation in Budapest still remains strained. As this Hungarian comrade communicated, on the street it is impossible to call oneself a communist, as you might get killed. In the enterprises the workers' committees obstruct the creation of party organizations.

In the words of Sall, the majority of those Hungarians living in Beijing now maintain that the strengthening of order is necessary, in order to restore the economy of the country, but many people as before are not in agreement with various concrete measures proclaimed by the party and government. A portion of these people still maintain the illusion that Hungary might become a neutral country, that some other path is possible in Hungary, and so on. In general, said Sall, much is mixed up in the heads of our people. Sall emphasized, however, that in the majority of cases all the comrades are honest and good. He thinks that all the comrades, in the end, will look into to their mistakes, but this will require a long period of explanatory and educative work. Sall noted that the matter is especially complicated among the trade representatives, which relates to the advisers as well. Among the specialists there are people who in the past were owners of small enterprises or who occupied well-paid posts in private enterprises. So, in one group of specialists (battling corrosion in tropical conditions), of 6 people there are two who were small business owners in the past. Everyone in this group was strongly against the entry of Soviet troops into Hungary. Four specialists from this group were among those Hungarians who refused to attend a reception put on by the Soviet embassy for Hungarians. Two of them openly oppose the majority of points in the program of the government of Kadar. Much work, Sall said, also has to be done among Hungarian students.

Sall said that he regularly conducts general and small group meetings with comrades on komandirovka and their families, and tries to make use of printed material and radio broadcasts from Hungary. Radio broadcasts at night can be recorded on tape. Every morning at the trade representative bureau he gathers all the citizens to listen to news, and every day they discuss the news for some two-three hours. After this the specialists go to work, including at Chinese organizations. The Chinese embassy also helps out the embassy in the work with [our] citizens. Sall said that he conducts individual work with many citizens, inviting them to his home for dinner and discussing contemporary problems with them. In particular, he held such discussions with students and several specialists.

Regarding the work of the party organization, Sall said that earlier there were 32 party members. Previously ambassador Skladan, embassy attaché Blakho and trade representative Freind visited. During the events a new bureau was selected, which included trade representative Uaikhazi, his deputy Laiosh, embassy 2nd secretary Galla, and two specialists. Twenty-six of these 32 people expressed their desire to quit being members of the party. However, many of these 26 comrades were passive and were communicating ideas that did not reflect their own conscience. The new bureau has become more active, but there are people, like Uaikhazi, who are not fit for the leadership of party work.

Sall quickly discussed Uaikhazi. In social background Uaikhazi belonged to a land-owning family, [but] he is a good specialist, an honest and reasonable person. For many years he was a trade representative in London. Working there at a highly difficult time, he distinguished himself as a useful and loyal worker. However, in regards to politics he is weakly prepared. He entered the party just a year ago, when a comrade from the party organization recommended this to him. In recent times he has behaved appropriately, but has contributed little to overcoming the lagging mood among members of his collective. His deputy Laiosh is somewhat more active, who is an old member of the party. Laiosh was repressed after the Rajk affair, and this influenced to a certain extent his mood and convictions. All the same, Laiosh is one of the more or less most active members of the bureau. Among those people who were completely confused during the course of events and before then is another deputy trade representative, Chillag. In the words of Sall, Chillag before anyone else began talking with the Yugoslavs and representatives of western countries.

Speaking of the embassy itself, Sall informed that the workers of the embassy already some time ago overcame their doubts and mistakes. But, indeed, not all of

them energetically work among the citizens. Sall communicated that he is very disturbed by the close contact established by embassy attaché Sabo and the Hungarian press correspondent Il'iash with the first secretary of the Yugoslav embassy, Shestan. They meet with Shestan practically every day, who persistently dispenses his various Yugoslav theories. Under the influence of this Sabo and Il'iash often share incorrect ideas regarding the situation in Hungary. He, Sall, was sufficiently upset with this that he tried to discuss the matter with the Yugoslav ambassador Popovič. However, Popovič gave him a rather rude rebuff.

Official on affairs of the USSR in the PRC K. Krutikov