

## **The Hungarian Revolution of 1956**

Hungary in 1956 seemed to sum up all that the Cold War stood for. The people of Hungary and the rest of Eastern Europe were ruled over with a rod of iron by Communist Russia and anybody who challenged the rule of Stalin and Russia paid the price. The death of Stalin in 1953 did not weaken the grip Moscow had on the people of Eastern Europe

Since 1945 Hungary was under the control of Moscow. All wealth of whatever nature was taken by the Russians who in turn showed their power by putting thousands of troops and hundreds of tanks in Hungary. The Hungarian leader, Rakosi, was put into power by Stalin. When Stalin died the Hungarian people hoped they might be free from Russian oppression. However the new Russian leader Khrushchev attacked the ideals of Stalin and in July 1956 he made a gesture to the people of Hungary. Rakosi was forced to resign. The Hungarians expected more but did not get it. This situation combined with a bad harvest, fuel shortages and a cold and wet autumn all created a volatile situation in Hungary.



The Hungarian people tore down statues of Stalin.

On October 23<sup>rd</sup> 1956 students and workers took to the streets of Budapest (capital city of Hungary) and issued their Sixteen Points which included personal freedom, more food, the removal of the secret police and the removal of Russian control. Poland had already been granted rights in 1956, which it gained from street protests and displays of rebellion.

Imre Nagy was appointed prime minister and Janos Kadar foreign minister. They were thought to be liberal and in Moscow this was felt to be the best way to keep happy the “hooligans” as the Moscow media referred to the protestors. As a gesture, the Red Army pulled out and Nagy allowed political parties to start again. The most famous Hungarian to criticize the Russians was released from prison – Cardinal Mindszenty.

On October 31<sup>st</sup> 1956 Nagy broadcast that Hungary would withdraw from the Warsaw Pact. That pushed the Russians too far. Kadar left the government in disgust and started a rival government in eastern Hungary which was supported by Soviet tanks. On November 4<sup>th</sup> Soviet tanks went into Budapest to restore order and they acted with intense brutality even killing wounded people. Tanks dragged round bodies through the streets of Budapest as a warning to others who were still protesting.



Actual picture of Soviet tanks entering Budapest.

Hundreds of tanks went into Budapest and probably 30,000 people were killed. To flee the expected Soviet reprisals, probably 200,000 fled to the west leaving all they possessed in Hungary. Nagy was tried, executed and buried in an unmarked grave. By November 14<sup>th</sup> order had been restored. Kadar was put in charge and Soviet rule was re-established.

President Eisenhower said *"I feel for the Hungarian people"*

J.F. Dulles, American Secretary of State said:

*"To all those suffering under communist slavery, let us say you can count on us."*

But the U.S.A. did nothing! – Why?

1. If the USA helped then there would have been war, probably nuclear
2. Economic boycott would not be effective – Russia took what it wanted from the countries it already occupied.
3. The Suez Crisis was more important and of greater relevance to the west.