

50<sup>th</sup>  
ANNIVERSARY OF  
THE  
1956  
HUNGARIAN  
FREEDOM  
FIGHT

*Questions and Answers*

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## *GRATEFUL THANKS*

*To the Australian Government and People  
for their help and sympathy  
during and after the  
1956 Hungarian Revolution and Freedom Fight*

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# 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the 1956 Hungarian Freedom Fight

## *Some Questions and Answers.*

### *Q: What was the Hungarian Uprising of 1956 about?*

It happened 50 years ago. I was a student about to commence my studies at the Budapest Technical University. It was 1956, just over ten years after the devastation of World War II. It had been a devastating year for me also. I was just recovering from serious surgery after breaking my spine and had spent the whole summer after graduating from high school encased in a plaster cast and with very limited mobility. As a result my only source of information was the radio, which I listened to during most of my waking hours.

My attention was riveted by some interesting news that autumn. Younger and older Hungarian intellectuals started to discuss the ‘glorious’ results of our socialist society and either the Hungarian Communist Party had not been strong enough to put a stop to those discussions or they had allowed them as a ‘safety valve’ hoping to calm the people down for fear that otherwise the whole system would explode.

1956 was an ‘interesting’ year, following the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the USSR and the ‘secret’ speech of Khrushchev. In Hungary, the communist party had split and Mátyás Rákosi, the Stalinist leader, had been expelled. A new leadership tried to stabilize the situation with the majority of the people nearly starving 10 years after the end of the World War. I had personally experienced that hunger and bitterness during my years in secondary school. Now, in October, after having the plaster cast removed I hoped to visit the University for the first time. I was more than happy to walk through the gates of the University that October 15<sup>th</sup>. I was still weak physically but six weeks had already passed since the start of term and any further absence would have resulted in the start of my university studies having to be postponed by 12 months.

Next day I bought a copy of the student paper *Szabad Ifjúság* (Free Youth) and read in it a declaration of the university students of the University of Szeged (Southern Hungary, on the River Tisza) summarized as the Sixteen Points. I had a feeling that history was in the making. The following day our class had a meeting and resolved to dissolve the communist youth organization (DISZ) and reconstitute the ‘old’ organization (MEFESZ) in-

stead, MEFESZ had been banned when the Rákosi-led Communist Party seized power in 1948. As a new student I also voiced my opinion. Fortunately no one remembered me during the time of retribution which followed next year.

The following Monday we received information that the miners in Poland were going on strike against the system. The students at my University decided to organize a demonstration of support in the streets of Budapest. The date of this demonstration was the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October. Since I was still unable to walk any considerable distance, I visited my secondary school asking the students to join the demonstration. On arriving home, I heard the Interior Minister, László Piros on the radio banning the demonstration. Half an hour later he had changed his mind and the radio announced that the demonstration could go ahead after all. This clearly demonstrated to me a shocking indecisiveness and lack of leadership in the upper hierarchy of the party and government. It was a beautiful, sunny, late autumn day. The demonstration proceeded without violence.

At 8 o'clock in the evening the First Secretary of the Hungarian Workers Party, the name given to the Communist Party at that time, Ernő Gerő, declared the demonstration fascist and labeled the university students as rebellious hooligans. I was horrified and wondered what would be the consequences of that speech. I received a clear answer to my question next morning as I was walking to take the tram to the University. An ambulance passed by and shots were fired barely missing me by a few inches. The noise of weapons could be heard from the direction of the city 10 miles away. The Uprising had begun.

***Q: Hang on please! What were they uprising against?***

In 1948, Hungarian communists, trained by the Russians and supported by an army of occupation, seized power. They instituted a reign of terror. This explicit support resulted in the uprising, initially against the Hungarian communist government then against the Russian armed forces in a fight for freedom.

***Q: You have mentioned a Freedom Fight. Hungary was an independent state with a socialist government. What did the Hungarians try to free themselves from? Isn't there a serious contradiction somewhere?***

The reality was quite different from what was publicized as part of the political propaganda. Yes – Hungary was a socialist country and a member of the Socialist Block of Nations. However, in common with some other 'free'

countries, such as Poland, Hungary's government was closely supervised – practically ruled – by the Soviet Union. After World War II the peace treaties signed mainly in Paris 'assigned' the Middle and Eastern European countries as 'spheres of influence' to the Russian Empire, referred to at that time as the Soviet Union. By 1956 the Soviet Union had extended its rule over 15 European and Asian countries and imposed on them a Bolshevik type of social and political organization based on its own ideology. Officially, Hungary was not a part of the Soviet Union and in this sense Hungary was 'free'. However she was not independent. The ruling party called itself communist and Moscow, which pursued Russian interests, dictated the policy it pursued. The Hungarian people, particularly those in universities and factories wanted to shape their own lives free of the colonial rule imposed on every aspect of life by the Soviets. Thus they demanded freedom and saw the ultimate instrument of oppression as the Glorious Soviet Red Army and its support for its puppets, the Hungarian communists in their oppression of the people.

***Q: Why was the Soviet Red Army referred to as 'glorious'?***

That was a regular tribute given by the Hungarian Communists to express their gratitude for their victory over the Royal Hungarian Army thereby allowing them to assume absolute power. Hungarians generally did not consider this army to be glorious since they had suffered serious damage to their cities, the economy and in civil life. The Russians herded young men for *malenykij robot* (to do a little work) in Siberia and other forced labour camps in the Soviet Union. Over 600,000 people were captured in this way from them over 200,000 were killed. For them and their families the Red Army was anything but glorious. The 'heroes' of the army raped over a million women. They robbed, killed Hungarians and they devastated the country. I once met members of this army in Jena in 1978 and the impression I got was that of a disorganized rabble.

***Q: What was the aim of the Soviet Red Army?***

The Soviet Red Army arrived in Hungary towards the end of World War II. After the signing of the peace treaty between the Soviet Union and Austria they remained under the terms of the Warsaw Pact. Hungary provided a suitable base for the army in case it was ordered to mount an attack towards the West and in particular towards southern Europe. Over 250,000 soldiers were stationed on Hungarian territory and they were equipped with rockets including nuclear warheads. Their other role was to hold up the western 'enemy' in case of a Third World War for at least 20 minutes. This would have resulted in the complete annihilation of the Hungarian population and

devastation of the territory. In the meantime Hungary was required to provision these Soviet units and, ultimately, realize the Bolshevik ideas.

***Q: Is the Bolshevik idea reactionary? I understood it to be a progressive idea?***

The tenets of the Bolsheviks are based on the writings of Marx; it is a 20<sup>th</sup> century variation of Marxism, a utopian communist idea the so-called *dialectic materialism*. The Bolsheviks distinguished themselves from the Mensheviks within the Russian Communist Party at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (since 1903). Both words are Russian: Bolshevik means ‘majority’ while Menshevik means ‘minority’. They were factions within the Russian Communist Party. The Mensheviks had policies that were more democratic and akin to those of the social democrats while the Bolsheviks espoused the notion of the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’. In 1917 it was the Bolshevik faction led by Lenin that seized power.

***Q: Why did an uprising start in a communist country if, as people were told, communism is good and communists are progressive people?***

Communists considered their ideology to be beautiful and the ultimate condition of humankind. Life in a so-called communist country (at that time referred to as being only socialist) was however painfully different. The war-cry of the progressive ideology was: *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity*. The propaganda was fashioned around this war cry. Each part of the slogan is noble and expresses the ardent wish of all people. To be free from oppression, to express an opinion without fear of punishment, to be able to change one’s place of residence without permission are indeed basic for the happiness of humankind. There are other wishes also such as being able to obtain sufficient food for the family at a reasonable price, to have a secure home to live in, without the fear of an early morning knock on the door by the secret police and to have work paid for at a reasonable rate in order to be able to buy the needs and wants of life. It is also delightful to have a trusted friend, one to share ones grievances and joys. People were wary of ‘friends’ who might prove to be inbuilt informers. An unguarded and careless utterance might result in a visit from the dreaded AVH. Unfortunately the socialist system did not ensure the provision of these needs. The air was full of slogans but if a person survived a morning without a visit from the AVH or its previous incarnation, the AVO, the armed secret police, one could consider oneself lucky indeed. We faced new challenges each day, to survive without breakfast or proper lunch; to listen to the endless seminars

about the superior living conditions; to watch our mouth around our neighbours to avoid becoming victims of the ÁVH that night.

***Q: What were the ÁVO and the ÁVH?***

It was an important part of party ideology that a progressive society could not be built without resistance from reactionary elements who wanted to prevent the formation and development of the People's State. Therefore the progressive forces were at war with the reactionary forces. The ÁVO and later the ÁVH were the 'clenched fist' of the Communist Party. Literally ÁVO means: State Protection Department whilst ÁVH means: State Protection Authority. Initially these units were subordinated to the Ministry of the Interior but the Communist Party made sure that they were under their control. Once communist rule was consolidated the ÁVO became the ÁVH, an autonomous authority responsible to the Hungarian Communist Party alone. Its task was to eliminate all persons accused of espousing 'rightist' ideas and to ensure the absolute dominance of the official leftist ideas. Among the populace generally, the terms ÁVO and ÁVH was used interchangeably until after the Revolution of 1956.

***Q: What do the terms 'leftist' and 'rightist' mean?***

This terminology dates back to 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century England where the 'conservatives' or 'Tories' sat to the right of the 'Speaker' while the 'progressives' or 'Whigs' sat to the left in the Parliament of the day. Thus the term rightist became synonymous with conservative or even 'reactionary'. The term leftist became synonymous with progressive, labour, even socialists or communists.

***Q: Why are the rightists reactionaries?***

This concept was refined during and after the French Revolution of 1789 and the Communist Manifesto of Marx. All who espoused it were labeled as progressive whilst those who opposed it were dubbed 'reactionary' and therefore to be eliminated by any means. Intellectuals with leftist ideas declared themselves to be progressive and furthermore to be the only progressive ones because they were the enlightened.

***Q: Did the enlightened people organize the Revolution in 1956?***

No, not at all. Revolution according to the concepts of the Marxist ideology means a total change of society be it in a country or ideally the world. The Hungarian Revolution of '56, according to this definition was a counter-revolution. In the accepted sense of the word it was a real revolution but the International Communist movement declared it a '*Counter-revolution*'.

***Q: Why was it declared a ‘Counter-revolution’?***

It was because the ‘56 revolution did not follow the concept of the enlightened Left and was indeed contrary to their value of social progress through communism.

***Q: Was it a revolution at all?***

Yes it was although it did not have the identifying marks of revolutions organized by leftist movements. The primary aim of this revolution was to remove the oppressive rule of the communist dictators over the Hungarian people. It did not concern itself with changing the social order according to conservative principles or back to what it was prior to 1945. In fact it initiated the formation of worker councils, superficially a communist concept.

***Q: Why were the people rising up against a progressive social democratic system?***

The system was only propagated as progressive on the theoretical basis of Hegelian philosophy as modified by Marx and Lenin, The superiority of a society without class or private property was declared and any movement which aimed to achieve this were considered progressive. At the level of reality, people in this social system were equal when reduced to the minimum level of sustenance since no one should have any property to call one’s own. The state became the owner of land, factories and businesses and most means of production. It became a planned economy with disastrous outcomes. There was little impetus for people to work conscientiously. The shops were empty and most of the population had to queue to have their most basic needs satisfied. The state provided for education, health and social needs but at an extremely low level. The system was declared to be democratic and this entailed a compulsory electoral system. However there was no choice of candidates, the Communist Party nominated the single candidate. The electors were only given a choice of ‘yes’ or ‘no’. If in a particular electorate the ‘no’ votes exceeded a given level (5-6%) the ÁVH started to investigate the cause and many people disappeared after these elections. Thus the system was not democratic and the people living under it did not consider it progressive.

***Q: Was it an uprising against the communism?***

Again, surprisingly, it was not. So-called reform-communists had an important role in the preparation of the population before the start of the demonstrations. The Budapest intellectuals – young writers congregating in the Petőfi Circle and intellectuals of technical bent in the Kossuth Clubs – dis-



cussed the long-term economic and social state of the country. Their concerns, in line with the communist majority of these groups, were primarily social rather than reactionary. They wanted a Bill of Rights included in a new constitution. They also wanted to end oppression and tyranny, to have a life free of the worry of a visit from the ÁVH, arbitrary arrests or secret trials and a higher standard of living. They wanted a Hungary that was independent and neutral and they wished to remain Hungarian and not be forced to imitate all things Russian. Before the eruption of the Freedom Fight the reform communists had some effect but once fighting started the wish of the populace came to the fore. The immediate organization of the workers' councils is evidence that the revolutionaries did not fight for the restoration of the pre-1945 system. Rather real democracy and an improvement to the very low living standard still prevailing ten years after the end of the war.

***Q: Why did this uprising happen in Hungary?***

This form of 'democracy' was oppressive and ten years after a devastating defeat in World War II Hungarians did not have anything to lose but their lives. Their life was not secure. Agriculture was collectivized on the Soviet model resulting in rampant-hunger. This was not specific to Hungary but was general in all the so-called Peoples' Democracies of Eurasia.

***Q: Where did the Uprising start?***

The university students decided to support the political movement of the Polish miners and organized a demonstration in the streets of Budapest. The students were aware that both the political leadership in Hungary and extremists of the right would disturb the demonstration and therefore decided to keep it closed and not let anyone outside their groups to join. It started in the afternoon of the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October. The marchers proceeded to Bem Square in Buda (Figure 1), where already over one hundred thousands of demonstrators were gathered.

***Q: What was the significance of Bem Square?***

Joseph Bem was a Polish General who became a hero of the Hungarian Freedom Fight of 1848-49. The aim was to have a meeting at the feet of General Bem, as a sign of solidarity of the Hungarians with the Polish workers. Parallel with the demonstration, the Association of Hungarian Writers and Poets declared a meeting of remembrance at the same place.

***Q: Did the Revolution and Uprising start at the Bem Square?***

Actually they did not. There were only pro-Polish speeches and poems celebrating freedom and the wish of Hungarians to be free from foreign oppression. Meanwhile the streets of Budapest started to fill with a crowd of young workers and intellectuals after work. Soon the communist emblem of the Hammer and Sickle was cut from the flags. The mass of people initially moved to the Parliament building. They expressed a demand for Imre Nagy, a leading reform communist, to head a new government. Another group moved to the Hungarian Radio Station in Budapest and demanded the reading of their 14 points. The points compiled the need for basic democratic rights, the removal of the Russian Army



**Figure 1 People at the demonstration at the Bem Square on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1956**

from Hungary, a relationship with the Soviet Union based on equivalence, revised economy and acceptable living standard for the workers. The broadcasting of the 14 points was peremptorily refused. It was at this time that Ernő Gerő, the President of the Hungarian Workers Party, on his return from Yugoslavia, gave his 'famous' speech referred to earlier, thereby further heightening tensions. When a small delegation tried to enter the radio building shooting started. ÁVH men, whether there were orders or not is uncertain, started a massacre of the unarmed crowd in front of the building.

***Q: Who was involved in the fighting?***

The people involved were mainly young workers and university students. Later many members of the Hungarian Regular Army joined them. Ranged against them were members of the ÁVH joined later by some Russian Army units. Initially, the Hungarian Regular Army was neutral but later

they sided with the Hungarian people. The Soviet Army sided with the ÁVH and used heavy weapons including 4-5 ton aerial bombs.

***Q: Was there any precedent for such an uprising in the communist world?***

There was in 1953. There were demonstrations in the streets of Berlin – the ‘capital’ of the German Democratic Republic – also under Soviet rule. The Soviet occupying forces appeared on the streets with their tanks and the demonstration was soon over. However the organizers and participants were quickly rounded up and punished cruelly.

***Q: Who started the fighting?***

The fighting started at the Hungarian Radio building. The ÁVH fired tear gas into the crowd but they did not move or give up their demand to have their 14 points proclamation read. Later, during the night the members of the ÁVH started using live ammunition and many in the crowd were killed or wounded. Those who tried to give first aid to the wounded were also shot. Finally ambulances arrived but instead of bringing doctors and nurses they tried to smuggle in ÁVH reinforcements. By this time the protesters had armed themselves and the siege of the building started. Shortly after midnight Soviet Red Army tanks arrived and intervened in the fighting.

***Q: Why did the Soviet Red Army intervene?***

The answer is rather complex. Officially, the Hungarian Government did ask the Glorious Red Army ‘to give aid in fighting fascist hooligans’ at 8 AM on 24<sup>th</sup> October. However the Soviet tanks had already arrived in Hungary the day before the demonstration. They started their journey from Odessa on the Black Sea a few days before and they intervened at the Radio building at 2 AM and not 8 AM as the official propaganda stated. The Soviet leadership has ordered this intervention already on the 18<sup>th</sup> October since the students in their points demanded that compulsory Russian be abolished in schools. They decided that this was anti-Russian and against the interests of the Soviet Union.

***Q: Was the revolution an uprising against the Russians?***

Again, it was not. At one level, however, it was against the Russian presence in Hungary. Hungarians preferred their mother tongue to speaking Russian. The Soviets appeared as oppressors who kept the Communists in power and therefore they wanted to send the Russians home. The Uprising was not against the Russians as such but against tyranny, despotism and autocracy. Since the Red Army was the power behind that autocracy it was

the Soviet leadership and not the Russian people who were the representatives of this tyranny. Soviet soldiers did shoot at unarmed Hungarians and Soviet tanks and their crews were destroyed using Molotov Cocktails.

Some Soviet soldiers were killed (according to our recent knowledge there were killed 650-700 and injured around 150) but many left their units and joined the Hungarians. Neither the uprising nor the revolution was aimed at the Russians; the aim was to live freely and without oppression in a democratic country.



Figure 2 shows the crowd before the Parliament House on 25<sup>th</sup> October. The tank is a Soviet one. The picture was taken before the massacre started from the houses opposite and the tanks did give some protection to the demonstrators by fighting back. However a couple of hundred of demonstrators without any weapon did die before the parliament that day.

Figure 2 Demonstrators on a Soviet tank before the House of Parliament

It is also worth recording that many Soviet soldiers refused their orders to shoot. They were later returned to the Soviet Union and court-martialled. Some of the soldiers left their units and joined the freedom fighters. Evidently their fate was death whether in the street or later before a firing squad.

***Q: What is a 'Molotov Cocktail'?***

The youth of Budapest learned from Soviet movies how to produce a 'weapon' from a bottle filled with petrol. The Soviet tanks arrived in Budapest but were not accompanied by infantry. The people worked out a technique of throwing Molotov cocktails onto the engines of tanks from the upper stories of houses. The tank would ignite and explode together with its ammunition killing those inside. Molotov was the Soviet Minister for For-

eign Affairs for a decade from the beginning of World War II and it was he who ordered the use of such bottles of petrol, which was very effective against the German Army. Thus they became known as Molotov Cocktails.

***Q: Who was fighting against the Soviet Red Army?***

It was the Hungarian people generally and particularly the youth. Some regular soldiers took part, mainly conscripts. A few officers also took part but their role once fighting started was not significant.

***Q: Where did they obtain the weapons from?***

The people confiscated weapons from members of the ÁVH and there was a stream of aid coming on the morning of 24<sup>th</sup> October from the suburbs of Budapest where people obtained weapons from friendly army barracks and police stations as well as from the central weapons factory in Budapest. Most of the freedom fighters were young, under 24 years and in many cases 14-15 year old children.

***Q: Where did the young men learn to use their weapons?***

It now appears to be ironic, but they were compulsorily shown endless movies of Soviet partisan actions in World War II. In addition there was compulsory military training in the high schools and universities and many freedom fighters had already completed their conscript service. Some of these had training in heavy weapons. They soon organized themselves and elected their own commanders. There were a couple of areas where heavy fighting took place. The best known of these was the Corvin-köz where the commanders were the Pongráz brothers, one an agricultural engineer, the other a worker.

***Q: What was the attitude of the Hungarian population generally? Did they support the fighters practically?***

Yes, they did. Both the citizens of Budapest and those living in the country supplied the fighters with food, materials, messages and reports concerning the movement of Soviet units. They provided a lot of the freedom fighters as well. There was an amazing unity of the Hungarian people within Hungary and indeed throughout the world.

***Q: How long did the Uprising last?***

There were two stages to the revolution and freedom fight. The initial uprising lasted from the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October to the 29<sup>th</sup> by which time Russian units appeared to be leaving Hungary. The freedom fight however continued after the 4<sup>th</sup> of November when Soviet troops returned and launched a

war of attrition with heavy devastating weapons including the use of air power. The freedom fighters continued until they ran out of ammunition. The military resistance did not cease until mid-November.

***Q: What happened after fighting ceased? Did the Hungarians surrender?***

Actually they did not. A passive resistance started when fighting ceased and this resistance extended all over the country and lasted for years. Initially workers' councils organized this resistance. They called a general strike in the whole of the country, which was very effective. A government was formed in Moscow headed by János Kádár and it tried to gain control but the organization of the workers' councils was too strong and had popular support. The new puppet government then made promises of immunity from prosecution for those who took part in the fighting or the protests but the people generally had had enough of such promises. They saw the Soviet army units on the streets and the newly organized party police and decided to flee from communist rule in Hungary. Soon streams of refugees of over 200,000 appeared in Austria.

***Q: Why did many people flee from Hungary? Did they not believe the promises?***

The people had had bitter experiences with the communist regime. They were well aware that vengeance would be harsh and cruel and the promises were lies designed to calm the situation. Freedom fighters had good reasons to leave the country. The members of the workers' councils however remained and they presented the main focus for revenge. The communists could not forgive the people for choosing as their representatives those who were not communist activists.

***Q: Who were the refugees?***

The refugees represented a cross-section of the population. Many were simple workers, others, highly skilled and educated, were not willing to sell themselves again as slaves to the party bosses. The people were aware of the essence of the 'Promised Land' and freedom in their private life was more important than any level of living standards. However the lure of bettering themselves materially also had mobilizing power. Over 200,000 Hungarians left the country between mid-November and mid-January before the new government in Budapest finally managed to hermetically seal the border again. This was done with a wide zone of minefields, barbed wire fences and watchtowers along the western border with Austria. Thus

Hungary was turned into a huge concentration camp and it remained so for half a decade.

***Q: Where did the refugees go?***

Their first destination was Austria, which reacted immediately and accepted most of them. Once this route was sealed off many people escaped to Yugoslavia but most were not allowed to proceed further. They were generally returned to Hungary and faced serious charges for illegally crossing the borders. Other countries then resettled the refugees who were in Austria. Most settled in the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand and many European countries including Switzerland and Sweden.

***Q: How many people were killed?***

There are as many figures as there are reports. There are estimates of Hungarian killed in the fighting ranging from two to twenty-two thousand. There were estimates of over seven thousand Soviet soldiers killed. Official numbers for the are 2,502 dead and 16,700 injured, no official figure was given for the loss of the Russians. According to our recent knowledge 650-700 Russians were killed and 1540 were injured. These figures do not contains the victims killed after the uprising was crushed when many Hungarians were executed by hanging, were tortured to death, or kept in forced labour camps and jails for several years.

***Q: Was there a breakdown of civil order during the uprising?***

A very heartening feature of this ‘revolution’ was the complete respect for civil order. Goods remained untouched behind broken shop windows. There were no unprovoked atrocities on the streets other than those committed by members of the ÁVH. The population hated the ÁVH operatives but wanted to have them judged in courts according to the prevailing laws and not by street justice. There were scattered violence mostly provoked by the ÁVH, which ended in lynching the ÁVH men in a few instances. The revolution was clean during the ten days it lasted – particularly after its seeming victory. Maintenance of civil order was essential and it was largely achieved.

***Q: Did the freedom fighters receive any military aid? Were there any foreign troops or groups involved?***

Western propaganda including – Radio Free Europe and the Voice of America –, egged on and encouraged the fight for freedom by promising assistance. None was forthcoming. Western countries left the freedom fighters in the lurch and to their own devices.

***Q: What was the reaction of the free world?***

The reaction was mixed. The people in the street expressed their greatest admiration and sympathy. Material aid for the Hungarians soon started to stream into the country after the uprising was crushed. This aid was most welcome and essential for the Hungarian people to overcome their difficulties. The workers were however disillusioned as a result of the crushing of the uprising and responded with a general strike lasting several weeks. The economy was slow in starting again.

There was also a strong political effect of the Hungarian Freedom Fight. It demonstrated to the western world the real essence of the Soviet Empire. As a result of these events and particularly the cruel Soviet response the leftist movements, particularly the communist parties, lost a large measure of their support throughout the world, this was felt very clearly in Australia. The people organized demonstrations of support and influenced their representatives in the UN to keep the matter of the crushing of the Hungarian Revolution 'alive' for years.

***Q: What was the response of the UN?***

The Security Council responded immediately as a result of the Australian initiative. Prime Minister of Australia, R.G. Menzies in a statement on 30<sup>th</sup> of October expounded the standpoint of his government and questioned the legality of the Soviet action. The Security Council met in emergency session on the 28<sup>th</sup> of October and the 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> of November and in regular session on the 12<sup>th</sup> of November. It kept the Hungarian Question on its agenda until 1962 but the Soviet Union vetoed any decisions it attempted to promulgate in every case and decisions of the General Assembly were simply disregarded.

***Q: What was the role of the Australian Government in formulating the response of the UN?***

Australia (Walker) was an elected member of the Security Council. Despite the opposition of some of the Permanent Members, it was the initiative of the Australian representative, which called for a meeting of the Security Council for the 3<sup>rd</sup> November though that motion was lost.

Again, it was the Australian Representative, who, once the matter was passed to the General Assembly, kept the Hungarian Question on the table and did not allow it to be removed until the end of 1962. It was long after many of the more influential members had lost interest and would have preferred the matter archived.



Australia signed the Trianon Treaty and was therefore involved in the dismemberment of Hungary after World War I. She also signed the Treaty of Paris in 1947, which confirmed that dismemberment. The Australian government was afraid that Soviet Union hurt these peace treaties by the military invasion of Hungary. However the Australian Government made ample amends by its forthright stance in both the Security Council and the General Assembly in 1956 and subsequent years and by her very generous acceptance of Hungarian Refugees consequent on the crushing of the Hungarian Revolution.

***Q: What did the western powers do?***

They made moving speeches, declarations and promises, accepted large number of refugees, donated aid to Hungary but did not take any steps against the Soviet Union. They were distracted in another part of the globe by the danger of military confrontation with the Soviets and consequently left Hungary to suffer Soviet cruelty alone.

***Q: What was the distraction?***

The Suez affair was that distraction. It is possible that Soviet soldiers were initially directed to the Suez Canal area. Many Hungarians reported speaking with Soviet soldiers and being asked whether the body of water in Budapest was indeed the Suez Canal.

***Q: Why did these soldiers show such confusion?***

The Soviet Union wanted to obtain control of the Suez Canal in order to be able to access the Indian Ocean. Their ally was Egypt. Private, mostly British, investors owned the Suez Canal and its traffic served the interests of the western powers. Egypt decided to nationalize the Canal. Israel, France and Britain initiated military action in November 1956 to protect their interests. The Soviet Union responded by sending military aid and advisers to Egypt and this enabled Egypt to succeed in the nationalization.

***Q: What was the extent of the oppression?***

The governments of the other communist states allied with the Soviet Union supposed the Kremlin's cruel suppression of the Hungarian Revolution as a warning to their own population of what would happen if they were to rise up. They claimed tens of thousands were to be executed as revenge. The new government in Hungary however decided to wait until things calmed down and the borders were hermetically sealed. There were movements such as the one, which appeared as a wall poster in Budapest: „*We will start again in March!*” and this caused the oppressors to worry. They

waited until after January 1957 before making their first arrests according to the introduced martial law and the first execution. The arrests and the executions then intensified and continued for the next years. The last victim was hanged in early 1963.

***Q. How many people were executed?***

After the uprising revenge was harsh. Over 350 people were hanged (the official figure is only 229) while an estimated over one thousand were tortured to death and over 22 thousands were jailed or placed into forced labour camps. Over half of those hanged did not take part in the fighting. Their crime was that they accepted membership of workers' councils and thus acted as representatives of the people. The charge resulting in the death penalty being imposed for most of them was 'conspiracy against the socialist state'.

***Q: Did any children die?***

A considerable number of children died in the fighting or were killed in the repression that followed the crushing of the uprising. A large proportion of those who died in the street fighting were teenagers since the freedom fighters were predominantly below the age of 18 years. There were even some reports of youths being shot in the head immediately after being disarmed. Propaganda had it that those who surrendered would not be harmed but the reverse was true in reality. Once the government felt itself to be strong enough arrests and arraignments started in earnest. Many young people were rounded up from mid-



**Figure 3 Peter Mansfeld one of the teen-aged victims of the revenge**

1957 and sentenced to lengthy jail terms or even hanged. Children under

the age of 18, according to the law in force at the time, could not be tried in an adult court of law and be sentenced to jail or death by hanging. Capital punishment for minors was against the law for crimes that they might have committed as minors. However the government was not particularly sensitive to such nuances: they simply waited until their victim reached the age of 18 before carrying out the execution. The communist thirst for revenge was limitless. There was 188 young people (students, industrial apprentices, undergraduates).

***Q: Who was the youngest victim of the revenge?***

The name of the youngest freedom fighter to be executed was Peter Mansfeld (see Figure 3). He was just 18 at the time of his death on 21st March 1959, nearly three years after the uprising was over. The brutal government waited until he turned 18 before hanging him the very next day. He was a young worker and the government ordered a lot of party members to watch the event and thereby demonstrate what revenge would be wrought on traitors of the working class. He was hanged but in such a way that he suffocated and that took over 13 minutes. The inhumanity of the communist system was clearly demonstrated by this barbarous act.

***Q: Why did they use such an inhumane and barbarous method for killing such a young man?***

He was 15 years old at the time of the uprising and his crime was that he disarmed a policeman. He did not kill anybody. He was a young boy and the 'humane' system showed its true inhumanity. The system demonstrated its power to its own members in order to show its revenge against all traitors to the ideology. Peter was a young worker and the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party regarded his opposition as treachery.

***Q: What was the most important feature of the uprising?***

It is hard to select the most significant feature but the one that stands out is the unity shown by the Hungarian people as a united nation and their solidarity in their stand against tyranny. The people were unified in the uprising and their unity was further reinforced during the fighting. They reacted to the oppression with dour resistance lasting months. This united action and lack of anarchy was extremely important.

***Q: How did it influence the thinking of the people?***

The influence of the freedom fight and revolution on the people's thinking was tremendous. First of all, the people were forced to realize that the western powers were unwilling to provide help for them to escape Soviet

tyranny. They would have to stand up for themselves alone and unaided. The other impact was the realization of the inhumane character of practical communism. 1956 showed that it was possible for people to act together for their collective security and life. It became evident that the system could not be overthrown by military means and it became even more important to allow it to collapse under its own impotence. The party also changed its policy. The compulsory seminars ceased and propaganda turned to other areas. Executions continued until mid-1963 when continued passive resistance led to a measure of reconciliation. More freedom was provided to Hungarians and they were increasingly allowed to visit western countries. Their economy became increasingly profit-oriented and the government did not force its citizens to act like Russians.

***Q: What was the outcome of the uprising?***

In summary: it resulted in the death of thousands. There was also a substantial loss of Hungarian intelligentsia. Hungary lost a large part of its trained work force to the west. The weakness of the communist system was demonstrated by the collective passive resistance of its citizens against it.

The communists also lost many supporters and the communist world fractured in a way, which was to lead to the collapse of the whole system decades later. Western communist parties lost most of their supporters. This was particularly true in the case of Australia where the communist parties practically ceased to exist as a result of the Soviet intervention in Hungary. The remaining parties loosened their subservience to Moscow and refused to accept Soviet leadership. The notion of a European Union based on a socialist system headed by the Russians collapsed in 1989. The push to unite Europe using communist ideals died as a result of the uprising in Hungary.

The uprising was not anti-Communist in its inspiration, however it effectively resulted in destroying this kind of social organization. The system of worker's councils without the leadership of the communist was one of the most threatening features for the communists.

***Q: How did it change people's lives?***

After an initial period of revenge and repression the standard of living of the population generally started to rise. They began to have more freedom to visit western countries and political pressure decreased. A mixed capitalist-socialist economy was adopted and people were able to earn more as a result of more work. Political freedom was also enhanced and the role of party membership also changed. Earlier remaining out of the party had serious consequences. Increasingly party membership was only required of

those who wanted to have leading positions in their places of work. Discrimination continued to exist but it lost its harshness. Establishment of civil organizations and groups outside of the communist party was allowed. Anti-clerical and anti-Christian policy also softened.

***Q: Did people lose their jobs because of the uprising?***

No, but they did as a result of the Bolshevik social system. Work was compulsory and salary was only enough to buy some meager goods. The social system was like a forced labour camp, many people lost their right to work in the area where they lived, far from their families and far from other human and social contacts. All those effected numbered several thousands while many others were forced to work below their level of qualification. Thus research scientists were forced out of their research institutions and had to perform heavy physical work in agriculture and mining instead. The benefits went to the working elite and the Party Center in Moscow. This feature, however changed after 1963 when a more realistic economy and a less suppressive policy was introduced.

***Q: What was the impact of the '56 Revolution' on world events?***

Its greatest impact was on the loss of influence of communist movements. Many members of European Communist Parties resigned from their membership. Intellectuals -mostly young students in universities -turned to opposing Soviet communism. The Soviet Union lost its credibility. It showed its face as an ideology presiding over a cruel, inhumane social system. The center of the International Communist Movement, the COMMINTERN, practically collapsed and in 1989 the communist social systems and state organizations in Europe also disintegrated. Thus the danger of communism in Europe was eliminated.

Another imminent effect was its impact on the events around the Suez Canal. The Soviet Union was unable to intervene effectively in that crisis, their power was evidently weakened by the events in Hungary and consequently the danger of World War III breaking out receded.

***Q: Were the Hungarians thanked for advancing the collapse of communism?***

Unfortunately they were not. Signs of a possible collapse and a change to the western financial system were already visible by the early 1980's. The communist countries accepted huge international loans in an attempt to shore up their system. However it did not help them. The communist countries in Europe collapsed one by one. By 1989 most had adopted democratic systems of government. In 12 December 1991 the Soviet Union fi-

nally disintegrated, its member states having declared their independence and each of them to a greater or lesser extent adopted western style democratic and economic systems. The Hungarian uprising and the freedom fight was the most serious impact to the crack of the Soviet social system and organization.

***Q: What is the message of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 to the youth of today?***

The uprising was a spontaneous action against tyranny and despotism. It was an uprising against lying and anti-democratic politics. It was an uprising against humiliating conduct by the rulers. It was an uprising of the Hungarian nation against its rulers. Hungarians showed tremendous solidarity and cooperation during the uprising. They demonstrated that they were brothers and supported each other.

The revolution was a spontaneous act. It was constructive and not as devastating as other revolutions organized by leftist movements worldwide. It was pure in its aspirations and untainted by corruption. The workers' councils started to organize themselves immediately to create a better society. The essence of the new order was its respect for the equality of the people. This was the most important feature of the revolution.

The fight for freedom showed the absolute solidarity of the people and the bravery of the youth and particularly teenagers. The demand for freedom was so strong among Hungarians that it was more important than life itself. The creativity and initiative of the people showed its power.

The world also reacted and showed its loyalty. This reaction was particularly evident in Australia where there were massive demonstrations by Australians expressing their full solidarity with a nation fighting for its life. The people of the free world accepted refugees fleeing from Hungary and provided them with a chance to start a new life. For this Hungarians remain grateful. Refugees showed their ability to fit into their host societies and proved by their activity, work and social life that the propaganda spread about them from the communist world was false. Hungarians proved to be constructive and creative members of their host societies.

Thus, the message of the Hungarian uprising, revolution and freedom fight is that people can achieve their individual goals when they join forces, are in solidarity with each other, act collectively and for each other. Bravery and initiative will yield their fruit. Social notions are for society and not for party propaganda and ideology. People should take their life in their own hands and not believe lofty ideas unless they themselves realize that those ideas are for their social benefit.