

THE FIGHT OVER IDEOLOGY

The Fight over Ideology: The Soviet Subversion of Hungarian Culture in the Cold War Era

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Abstract

In the aftermath of Nazi Occupation during World War II, Hungarians were unable to escape the clutches of dictatorial government. The Soviet Union ousted the Nazis only to assert its own control in the years following the war. To sustain its subjugation of Hungary, the USSR needed Hungarians to accept communism. The Hungarian Revolt of 1956, however, revealed Hungary's deep resentment for Soviet rule. To sway public opinion in favor of Soviet ideology, the USSR relied on propaganda, including statues, that sought to display the USSR in a positive light during the years 1945 to 1960. However, these attempts to sway public opinion were ultimately unsuccessful, with Hungarians refusing to accept the ideology of communism most clearly displayed in the Revolution of 1956.

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In February 1945, Soviet forces liberated Budapest from Nazi and Arrow Cross occupation. By April 1945, all remaining Nazi forces were defeated throughout Hungary. The Red Army's liberation of Hungary from Nazi oppression, however, set the stage for the brutality of Soviet dictatorship. Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Joseph Stalin agreed at the Yalta Conference in 1945 that Eastern European nations such as Hungary, would remain "friendly" to the Soviet Union, while allowing free election. As Hungarians quickly discovered, this was not the case.¹

The USSR systematically took over Hungary. Initially, the Soviet Union promised to preserve Hungarian democracy, liberties, and private property. Nonetheless, major Hungarian industries were nationalized. In the elections following 1945 and leading up to 1949, the Soviets methodologically gained control within Hungary's Parliament. In May of 1949, the election system was overhauled, and candidate choices were removed from Hungarian ballots. In the summer of 1949, a new constitution, identical to the Soviet Union's, was implemented. As the communist Hungarian Workers' Party took power, Soviet disrespect for democracy and Hungarian freedom became clear.²

In the eyes of the Soviet Union, there was only one correct means of lifestyle, and this was a Stalinist form of government. The Soviets, and the Soviet puppet governments, would utilize terror and propaganda as a means to instill these values into the societies. According to

¹ Laszlo Borhi, "Empire by Coercion: The Soviet Union and Hungary in the 1950s," *Cold War History* no.1 (2001): 47-48.

² *Ibid.*, 50-51.

George Schopflin, a Hungarian Member of the European Parliament, the function of communist policies was to “enforce compliance, destroy preexisting values, to break down preconceptions, to make it easier for the new revolutionary values to take root and to facilitate the politicization of society.”³ The goal and purpose of the Soviets was to completely break down Hungarian social norms and replace them with those of Stalinist Communism.

Under communist control in Hungary, any individual who opposed the government or communist ideology was severely punished. Any Hungarian perceived as untrustworthy was sent to internment camps or killed as an example.⁴ Most Hungarian opinion towards communist ideology was unfavorable, and the Revolution of 1956 reflected this.⁵ Hungarians who revolted against communist oppression faced severe consequences from the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union recognized, both before and after the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the need for ideological reform in Hungary.⁶ To remain in control, communism needed to be respected or feared. The Soviets distributed propaganda in the form of statues, literature, education, and marketing throughout Hungary. Misleadingly, this propaganda reflected the strength of the Soviet Union and the supposed gratitude of the people of Hungary to their Russian liberators.⁷

The history of Hungarian oppression and dictatorship reveals the ideological battle faced in pursuit of political power. The transfer of power from the Nazis to the Soviets showcases the fight over political control of this area and the need of these governments to subdue the

³ Borhi, “Empire by Coercion,” 53.

⁴ Ibid, 50-51.

⁵ Michael Polanyi, “The Message of the Hungarian Revolution,” *The American Scholar* 35, no. 4 (1966): 661-662.

⁶ Borhi, “Empire by Coercion,” 54-55.

⁷ Ibid.

Hungarian people. In the aftermath of widespread unrest during the Revolution of 1956, the Soviets needed to consolidate its influence and strength in Hungary even more.⁸ Various forms of propaganda, especially statues and posters, were developed to honor Soviet power and showcase the need for Soviet intervention in Hungary. The Soviet Union attempted to impress communist ideology on the Hungarian people, specifically in Budapest. Over forty statues showcasing Soviet power were erected in the city of Budapest during the early portions of the Soviet occupation and repression from 1945-1960. These pieces of propaganda remain powerful representations of how the Soviets sought to influence Hungary and gain greater control.⁹

Analysis of this propaganda is vital to understanding the Soviet campaign for ideological control of Hungary. Various pieces of propaganda, such as statues placed within Budapest, are examples of this fight for ideological influence.¹⁰ However, these attempts at propaganda were ultimately futile due to the lack of acceptance of the ideas of communism by most Hungarians. This is reflected in the actions of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, when many Hungarians revolted against the Soviet occupation.

Historiography

Discussing the 1956 Hungarian Revolution was taboo in Hungarian society during the Cold War. The Hungarian Revolutionaries faced harsh punishment for their actions, including around a million people imprisoned for activities against the state. While many Hungarians agreed with the revolutionaries, any opposition to Soviet rule faced violent consequences. Those who expressed concerns against the Soviet rule often faced imprisonment, torture, and violence.

⁸ Michael Polanyi, "The Message of the Hungarian Revolution," 661-662.

⁹ Erika J. Fustos & Helen Kovacs, *In the Shadow of Stalin's Boots: A Visitor's Guide to Memento Park* (Portland: Premier Press Ltd., 2008) 5-10.

¹⁰ Ibid.

In addition, many were put to death for protesting or supposed protesting of the Soviet regime. These harsh punishments faced by those that discussed the realities of the communist rule led to a lack of scholarship and study about the Hungarian Revolution of 1956.¹¹

There are many well-reputed sources written since the 1980s describing the causes, contexts and consequences of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. One example is Janos Rainer's *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History In Documents*. Through the discussion and analysis of this time in Hungary through primary sources, Rainer's work provides a greater understanding of the Hungarian Revolution and the significance of this event within the Cold War. Rainer's scholarship, because of this comprehensive research, can be considered one of the most beneficial works on this subject.¹²

In addition, there are various works from the Hungarian historian László Borhi that studied the cultural and political make up of Hungary in 1945-1960, which received countless awards. Borhi would specifically analyze the life of the Hungarians under the Nazi and Soviet dictatorships and argued for the understanding of the harms these dictatorships caused Hungarian society. His work surrounding the life of Hungarians under the Nazis as well as the Soviet Union led to a greater understanding of the realities of this time. He showcased the harsh experiences faced by Hungarians and brought awareness to the issues of dictatorship. Borhi is well-reputed in the area of Hungarian history, making his works very helpful for a greater understanding of Hungarian cultural history.¹³

¹¹ Zoltan Csipile, "The Changing Significance of the 1956 Revolution in Post-Communist Hungary," *Europe-Asia Studies* 63, no. 1 (2011): 99.

¹² Janos Rainer, *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History In Documents* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2002), 51.

¹³ "László Borhi," Indiana University Bloomington, <https://ceus.indiana.edu/people/current-faculty/borhi-laszlo.html>.

There are few discussions on the Soviet Union's use of propaganda from 1945 until the 1960s, besides the Memento Park Museum in Budapest. Memento Park houses statues and other items of propaganda constructed by the Soviets in communist-controlled Hungary. Memento Park provides a creative and powerful display of a wide array of artifacts that once stood on the streets of Budapest. By telling the story of Soviet propaganda, this museum serves as a reminder of the power and influence media can hold over a nation as well as the authoritarian nature of communism.¹⁴

Cultural Background of Hungary

From the beginning, cultural and political differences challenged the relationship between Hungary and Soviet Union. The Hungarians are not a Slavic people. Rather, their language is closer to other Nordic languages, such as Finnish. The Hungarian name for their language is "Magyar", linking the Hungarian heritage to the Magyar. In addition, Hungarians aligned closely with the cultural values and practices of Austria and Germany. As a member of the Hapsburg Dynasty and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Hungary fought alongside Germany in both World Wars. These differences isolated Hungary from Slavic nations, disrupting Hungary's relationship with the Soviet Bloc.¹⁵

Despite these cultural differences, the Soviet Union saw Hungary as an important geographical location bordering the East and the West. Along with this, Hungary was considered a great power in the Eastern European region, especially after the Austria-Hungarian Compromise of 1867. Hungary was previously governed by an unwritten constitution, known as

¹⁴ Fustos & Kovacs, *In the Shadow of Stalin's Boots*, 5-10.

¹⁵ Michael McCabe, "Soviet Security and the Hungarian Revolution of 1956," *The Histories* 10, no. 2 (2019): 31.

the Hungarian Golden Bull established in 1222. The first written Constitution of Hungarian People's Republic was adopted by the National Assembly of Hungary in 1949.¹⁶ This was a political difference between the Soviet Union and Hungary, with Hungary previously being ruled by a National Assembly under a written constitution. This continued to create challenges in the relationship between the USSR and Hungary.

Theologically, Hungary aligned with the Roman Catholic Church. Following the Communist takeover, the Roman Catholic Church was the last independent institution in Stalinist Hungary. Because of the Church's sovereignty, post-war Hungarian dictator Matyas Rakosi began to subjugate the Roman Catholic Church. In 1949 Rakosi arrested 225 members of the Catholic clergy and used show trials. By challenging the Catholic Church, Rakosi hoped to illustrate that the traditional values of Hungarian society would be replaced by Communism. Rakosi was influenced by the ideas of Stalin and greatly admired Stalin. Because of this, Rakosi instituted policies in line with Stalin.¹⁷

During the Potsdam Conference from July 17 to August 2, 1945, Soviet control of Hungary was largely determined by its geographical location. Because of Hungary's placement in Europe, this nation was "liberated" from Hitler's rule by the USSR. The use of the word "liberated" to describe the events in April of 1945 led to continuous debate by Hungarians and Westerners during the Soviet control of Hungary.¹⁸ Hungary bordered both the West and the East, becoming the "*cordon sanitaire*", which means a guarded line, for the Soviet Union.¹⁹

¹⁶ Da Lu, "The First Written Communist Constitutions in China and Hungary and the Influence of the 1936 Soviet Constitution: A Comparative Perspective," *Hungarian Journal of Legal Studies* 60, no. 2 (2019): 216.

¹⁷ McCabe, "Soviet Security and the Hungarian Revolution of 1956," 32-33.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁹ Rainer, *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution*, 4.

Because of the Soviet need for geographical control in these areas, social attitudes that differed even slightly from the ideas of communism were not tolerated by the puppet government.²⁰

When Europe was divided, the United States and Great Britain agreed that the nations affected by Nazi rule in World War II, which ultimately included East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania and Hungary, needed support for nation-building. This need for support was an additional incentive for Soviet control of the Eastern Bloc.²¹ The Soviet Union, intimidated by the Western NATO nations, began to unite the Warsaw Pact states under communist ideology in May of 1955. Several nations, such as Germany and Austria, were divided between Eastern and Western powers.²²

Hungary from 1945-1949

On April 4, 1945, the Soviet Red Army entered Budapest and liberated Hungary from Nazi forces. For some Hungarians, the Soviet forces that entered Hungary between 1944 and 1945 represented new freedom from Nazi rule. The terror of the Holocaust and widespread violence inflicted on the Hungarian people by the Nazis made them welcome Soviet liberation. At first, many Hungarians believed that after liberation, the Soviet Red Army would leave Hungary, allowing the nation to regain independence. Quickly, it became clear that this was not true. Instead, the Soviet Red Army attempted to gain absolute control by replacing Hungarian culture, values, and public institutions with communism.²³

²⁰ Rainer, *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution*, 4.

²¹ McCabe, "Soviet Security and the Hungarian Revolution of 1956," 29.

²² *Ibid.*, 27.

²³ Fustos & Kovacs, *In the Shadow of Stalin's Boots*, 22.

The use of the word “liberation” to describe the events of April 4 faced scrutiny in Hungary because of the authoritarian measures of the Soviet Union. While living under Nazi rule, the Hungarians underwent extreme terror. Initially, the Hungarians believed that this “liberation” by the Soviet Union could potentially lead to greater freedom. However, despite these hopes, Hungary transferred from the dictatorship of the Nazis to the dictatorship of the Soviets. The state terror established by the Soviets in the years following April 4 suggested to many that this was not a true liberation of Hungary.²⁴

The “people’s democracy”, which was the new government established by the Soviets, took actions to ensure the dominance of communists in government. The elections of 1945, however, revealed that the majority of Hungarians disagreed. The election results indicated that Hungarians wanted to merge Western and Hungarian ideals to establish a democratic form of government.²⁵ The Communist Party of Hungary claimed it needed to “set the elections right” by whatever means necessary. Using a combination of show trials and force in Budapest, communist officials were put into place in the government in 1945 by the controlling communist powers. The Soviets completed communist political control by destroying the final independent party in Budapest, the Smallholder’s party, in 1947. At this point, the Soviet Union eliminated the various political opponents to Communist rule.²⁶

The election of 1949 marked the beginning of a new era in Hungarian history. In 1949, a new constitution gave more power to the communist regime, providing additional support for the Soviet Union. The construction of the new constitution was due to the political footing gained by

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Rainer, *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution*, 13.

²⁶ Ibid.

the Soviet Union from the communist victories over the other political parties. This constitution officially established communist rule in Budapest, bringing forth a newfound control over the government in Budapest. From 1949 to 1956, the Soviets utilized intense propaganda and forceful attempts to industrialize the Hungarian economy.²⁷

Propaganda posters depicted the Hungarian people living in prosperity under the communist regime at the time of the undemocratic elections of 1949 and afterward. These colorful posters depicted smiling faces, flowers and excitement for the regime to come. For example, posters reflected children living in prosperity and happiness because of communist rule (See Appendix A).²⁸ However, the events of 1956 revealed how unrealistic this vision was for the Hungarian people.²⁹

Rakosi Regime

Political action in Budapest was similar to that of other nations in the Eastern Bloc. A communist puppet regime consolidated power by nationalizing the economy. This nationalization of the economy gave the government not only political power, but also control over the economic affairs within Hungary. The communist puppet regimes would remove all threats and viewed violence as a powerful tool to maintain control. This was seen through the number of show trials completed by the Rakosi regime, as well as the number of state administered executions of supposed enemies of the communist state.³⁰

²⁷ "Social Realism and the Continuity of the Modern Poster (1950-1955)," History, Budapest Poster Museum, <https://budapestposter.com/history>.

²⁸ Tibor Gonzci-Gebhardt, *The Children of the Workers are on Vacation*, 1950. Medium. Budapest Poster Gallery. <https://budapestposter.com/socialist-realism-and-the-continuity-of-the-modern-poster-1950-1955>

²⁹ "Social Realism and the Continuity of the Modern Poster."

³⁰ McCabe, "Soviet Security and the Hungarian Revolution of 1956," 30.

Rakosi was responsible for the bloodiest purges in the Eastern Bloc consisting of the mass executions of the accused enemies. Rakosi wanted to emphasize Stalinist control over Hungary. Rakosi described himself as “Stalin’s most apt pupil.”³¹ These purges consisted of mass imprisonments and executions of those deemed as political enemies of the puppet government. This outraged the Hungarian people because of the presumption of guilt for those accused of treason. These frustrations, as well as the economic difficulties caused by the expedited nationalization of the Hungarian economy led to the Revolution of 1956. The outrage of the people led to them tearing down statues and sacrificing their lives to end the Soviet control of Hungary.³² Rakosi desired to be worshiped as a god by leading the one-party communist state.³³ The First Congress of Hungarian Writers in 1951, which was associated with the state-controlled media, stated that “contemporary Hungarian literature owes its successes to the existence of the Soviet Union, the great Stalin and the triumphant Soviet army.”³⁴

After gaining power as the secretary of the Hungarian Workers (Communist) Party in 1944, Rakosi served as the party chief from 1949 to 1953. Rakosi utilized the police’s State Security Department to target specific threats to his government. This became known as the Authority for State Security Department (AVH). The leader of the AVH, Mihaly Farkas, stated that the role of the department was “...to look for bad things in each citizen. Looking for the good in them is not part of their job.”³⁵ The AVH would often target innocent Hungarians and put them on trial without any formal conviction. These actions significantly increased from 1950

³¹ Ibid., 32.

³² Ibid.

³³ Fustos & Kovacs, *In the Shadow of Stalin’s Boots*, 11.

³⁴ Borhi, “Empire by Coercion,” 52.

³⁵ Fustos & Kovacs, *In the Shadow of Stalin’s Boots*, 40.

to 1953, when 390 Hungarians were convicted and faced harsh punishments for alleged actions against the communist state.³⁶

The communist puppet government invested most of Hungary's gross domestic product (GDP) into the rapid industrialization of Hungary. This often came at the cost of the needs of the people, like better housing and infrastructure. Because of the struggling Hungarian economy in 1945, the communist puppet government created a five-year plan for industrialization programs. This five-year plan was based on those of the USSR created by Stalin. These programs established joint Soviet-Hungarian organizations to oversee industries such as petroleum, coal, electricity, chemicals, transportation, and machinery in 1945. The goals of these organizations did not coincide with the values of many Hungarians, which represented a free-market economy based on individual liberties. Especially following a difficult economic period for Hungary, these industrialization programs were not quick to be accepted.³⁷

The rapid industrialization implemented in Hungary based on Soviet policies of the 1920s and 1930s led to a depreciation of the Hungarian currency. In a message to the Soviet government in 1946, the American Embassy in Moscow pointed out how half of the manufacturing output from Hungary was confiscated by Soviet requirements. For example, before the war Hungary was producing around 7,000,000 tons of wheat, rye, barley and corn. Soviet forces following the war were taking around 4,000,000 tons of these grains. This confiscation hurt the standard of living of the Hungarian people, especially because the postwar production was not equal to the prewar production. Along with this, 80-90% of the iron and

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Arthur H. F. Schoenfeld. "Soviet Imperialism in Hungary," *Foreign Affairs* 26, no. 3 (1948): 556.

machine production of Hungary was absorbed by the Soviet Union.³⁸ This, in addition to dramatic growth of heavy industry, caused a stark decrease in the standard of living for the Hungarian people.³⁹

The Hungarian Revolution of 1956

The geographical placement of Hungary was important for the Soviet Union's control of Europe. The Soviet Union viewed nations within NATO as a threat. Hungary's geographical location as a western nation of the eastern bloc was an opportunity for eastern control or a western gain of power; therefore, the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 was a great threat to Soviet control in Eastern Europe. If the Soviet Union lost Hungary to the West, it feared it would only be a matter of time until other nations in the Eastern Bloc rebelled.⁴⁰

Prior to the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, there were many instances of unrest and protests against the Soviet rule. In 1952, Hungarian farmers refused to meet certain quotas that were required of them by the Communist government. Rakosi responded by emulating Stalin's tactics. He hoped to incorporate the fear tactic used by Stalin in a similar way in Hungary to solve these problems. He targeted those in the State Security Authority and the Hungarian Workers Party. While some of these individuals may have been seen as communists, they were often eliminated by Rakosi out of the need to maintain power. However, Rakosi's actions failed to resolve these issues held by the people against the Communist government.⁴¹

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Rainer, *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution*:14-15.

⁴⁰ McCabe, "Soviet Security and the Hungarian Revolution of 1956," 27-28.

⁴¹ Rainer, *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution*, 51.

In 1953, Nikita Khrushchev came to power over the Soviet Union, after Stalin's death. It took him several years to consolidate power. In February of 1956, Khrushchev gave a secret speech to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, denouncing Stalin's actions. Khrushchev's speech helped him to continue to consolidate power in an effort to de-Stalinize. This speech was intended to be secret, but after it was leaked it hurt the image of the Soviet strength that Stalin had attempted to create.⁴² On October 23, 1956, students peacefully demonstrated in Budapest protesting the Soviet control of Hungary. These students listed "sixteen points" which outlined the protestors desires and sparked a Revolution.⁴³ The Hungarian Revolution can be divided into four time periods, with the first consisting of the student revolutions with spanned from October 23 to 29. During this time of the Revolution, the people held hope that they would become free from Soviet rule.⁴⁴

Gabor Brooser was a Hungarian who served with the Hungarian resistance during the revolution. In an interview, Brooser discussed how he had previously been offered a position in 1945 to serve as an assistant to the communist politician László Rajk. However, Brooser refused and joined the anti-communist movement. Brooser worked as a doctor in a clinic during the 1956 Revolution to provide care for the freedom fighters. In this interview, Brooser recounted the instances of the communist government's abuse of power towards the Hungarian people. He recalled how the state authority offered food to young freedom fighters as an entrapment and then shot these freedom fighters in the head one by one. Along with this, Brooser discussed the

⁴² Tony Kemp-Welch, "Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech' and Polish Politics: The Spring of 1956," *Europe-Asia Studies* 48, no. 2 (1996), 181–206.

⁴³ Harrison King, "Remembering '56: The Hungarian Revolution," Origins at Ohio State University, October 2016, https://origins.osu.edu/milestones/october-2016-remembering-56-hungarian-revolution-sixty?language_content_entity=en.

⁴⁴ A. R. "The Aftermath of the Hungarian Revolution," *The World Today* 13, no. 11 (1957), 458.

difficulties of serving as a doctor during the Rakosi Regime. The Soviets had targeted the hospital, sending many tanks, even though a large Red Cross flag flew over the roof of the hospital. Brosser held a disdain for the communist regime in power and the many actions that were taken against the Hungarian people by the state.⁴⁵

During the Revolution of 1956, Budapest experienced the reality of the war. For example, an eyewitness, Erzsebet Peko stated,

When we got to the Soviet building the revolution, the whole circus in fact, was in full swing. They had already begun to paint over the red stars, standing on tall ladders. They went from shop to shop and painted them over. They may have knocked down the one on the soviet building, but the ones on the shops were painted over with red paint. We children didn't really understand what was going on. A few buildings further down the road was the police station and we saw that the army had already arrived. The soldiers were kneeling and their guns were ready to fire. They were only waiting for the order to fire into the crowd.⁴⁶

Hungarians in Budapest revolted against the Soviet control in their city, defacing the examples of communist control placed throughout the city.

Many Hungarians saw the Revolution of 1956 as an opportunity for freedom from Soviet rule. One eyewitness to these events, Patricia Kallay, stated, "then we could go out in the street and everybody was in a state of euphoria. Complete strangers hugged and embraced. I felt tremendous happiness because something had happened that everybody was cheerful about. It was like Christmas."⁴⁷ The people were excited and anticipated the events of the Revolution to come. This showcases the general distrust and dislike for the Soviet occupation and communist

⁴⁵ Gabor Brosser, "1941-1945 – Transports to the Concentration Camps, 23. 1956 Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and Fighting for Independence," June 23, 2011, Memory of the Nations, <https://www.memoryofnations.eu/en/brosser-gabor-1927>.

⁴⁶ ZKörösi & Adrienne, *Carrying a Secret in My Heart*, 16.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

government within Hungary. However, the Revolution did not end positively for Hungarians. Rather, they continued under Soviet rule until the eventual collapse of the Warsaw Pact in 1989.

Aftermath of the Hungarian Revolution

After the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the attitudes of the Hungarian people did not drastically change. The new leader of the Soviet controlled Hungarian government, Janos Kadar, inherited many problems. The Hungarian population did not trust the government and the presence of U.S.S.R. troops in Budapest caused great concern. The Hungarian government's support of the Soviet Union caused continued aggravation.⁴⁸ However, Kadar needed to remain in the support of the Soviet Union while balancing greater support from the Hungarian people. For this reason, he relaxed the great measures of Soviet control placed on the Hungarian economy.⁴⁹

Following the Hungarian Revolution, the Soviets altered some policies towards Hungary. There were still measures of propaganda, however they were focused on the failure of the Hungarian Revolution rather than the importance of the communist economy. The communists placed the "Monument to the Martyrs" in 1960 to honor the Counter-Revolution to the Hungarian Revolution. This consisted of two main monuments that were made of stone and included transcriptions upon the stone, "in undying memory of all those fighters who were faithful to their people and to the party, and who died a hero's death on October 30th, 1956 in the defence of the Proletariat power."⁵⁰ The names of these martyrs was also included on this

⁴⁸ Ivan Volgyes, "Hungary in the Seventies: The Era of Reform," *Current History* 64, no. 381 (1973): 216.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁵⁰ Victor Kallo, *Monument to the Martyrs of the Counter-Revolution*, 1960, cast in bronze, Memento Park, Budapest.

memorial. The Communist regime was incredibly clear with their messaging from this memorial. The Hungarian revolutionaries were demonized through propaganda and terror.⁵¹

Various other statues were erected that memorialized the various “martyrs” that died protecting the Soviet government during the Revolution. One such individual was Janos Asztalos. A plaque with this statue claimed, “he gave his life for the freedom of Hungary. In 1956 he was martyred in the defence of the Budapest Communist Party Headquarters.”⁵² The 1956 Revolution was memorialized through the streets of Budapest through the perspective of the Soviets. The monuments reflected Soviet praise and accomplishment, despite the lack of support from the Hungarian people. The general consensus among the Hungarian people was one of distrust and dislike for this puppet government, as reflected by the drastic measures of the Hungarian people during the 1956 Revolution. The placement of statues continued throughout the duration of the Soviet Union’s control of the nation.⁵³

While the placement of statues started to diminish after the 1956 Revolution, the Hungarian Socialist Worker’s Party continued to idealize the communist martyrs from the Revolution in various ways. The Hungarian Socialist Worker’s Party created the Worker’s militia to protect these communist powers. In 1973, a memorial plaque for the Workers’ Militia was inscribed with the words of the Hungarian poet Attila Jozsef which described the power and importance of the workers (See Appendix B). Those that were loyal to the communist government were memorialized and protected in the physical works throughout Budapest.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Istvan Janos Nagy, *Janos Asztalos Memorial*, 1968, limestone, Memento Park, Budapest.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Andras Nagy Kiss, *Memorial Plaque of the Workers’ Militia Parade*, 1973, cast in bronze, Memento Park, Budapest.

Poster Propaganda

In order to gain greater support for the communist government and the collectivization of the economy, the communist government relied on poster propaganda. Posters gained approval from the puppet government by utilizing Marxist-Leninist ideology. While Hungary's economy was in shambles, these propaganda posters depicted Hungarians living in prosperity thanks to Communist rule. The idea of "Socialist realism" idealized the lives of Hungarian workers. For instance, a poster from 1950 showed a man and woman lying on the grass in the sunshine smoking cigarettes together (See Appendix C). In Hungarian the poster read: "Finomaff cigarette: kellemeseff pihenes," or: "Fine cigarettes: pleasant and relaxing." This statement, coupled with the colorful and happy scene, led the viewer to believe that thanks to communist reform in Hungary, citizens had access to better goods, like cigarettes. While this poster does not make a direct reference to the Soviet Union, it was created by the Soviet controlled media. This propaganda showcases a simpler and more pleasant life, one that was not the reality for a majority of Hungarians during this time period.⁵⁵

A well-known artist of these propaganda posters was Tibor Gönczi-Gebhardt. Gönczi-Gebhardt designed colorful posters with communist political symbols. In the 1950s, this Soviet style of propaganda posters grew in use and popularity by the Rakosi government. One poster created by Gönczi-Gebhardt utilized bright colors to depict young children playing outside at the park on a warm summer day (See Appendix A). The children are swimming in the pool, playing in the grass, and making sandcastles in the sand box. Standing in the center is a child holding a sandcastle shovel in the air and smiling. Under the child is written, in Hungarian, "the children of

⁵⁵ Macskassy Fejes, *Tastier Cigarettes*, 1949, Medium, Budapest Poster Gallery, <https://budapestposter.com/socialist-realism-and-the-continuity-of-the-modern-poster-1950-1955>.

the workers are on vacation!” The vibrant colors in this poster and the heroic feel of the portrait of the child placed this piece of propaganda into the area of socialist realism.⁵⁶

All propaganda posters shared similar traits. These included bright, vibrant colors, smiling faces, and Soviet-styled portraits of workers. The similarities between these pieces were due to the centralization of the advertising industry. All private advertising companies were abolished and replaced by the Hungarian Advertising Agency. In Hungarian, this agency was named Magyar Hiderto, or MAHIR, and supervised all the poster publications. The government placed the posters throughout Budapest to promote these communist ideas in the city. These constant reminders confronted the Hungarians with an accurate view of reality.⁵⁷

Lighthearted posters were also created to mischaracterize tragic and harmful situations. During this time, the Hungarian economy continued to struggle due to the prior Nazi occupation as well as the drastic industrialization of the nation. This led to a decrease in the standard of living for Hungarians, including a lack of access to food and shortages of energy. Despite the drastic effects communist policies had on the Hungarian economy, the Soviet Union needed to promote these policies to maintain continued control. The propaganda posters reflected these needs and goals of the Soviets.⁵⁸

Along with this, the Soviets created media to support various Soviet holidays that celebrated communist achievements, including the 1917 uprising led by Lenin and the

⁵⁶ Tibor Gonzci-Gebhardt, *The Children of the Workers are on Vacation*, 1950. Medium. Budapest Poster Gallery. <https://budapestposter.com/socialist-realism-and-the-continuity-of-the-modern-poster-1950-1955>

⁵⁷ “Social Realism and the Continuity of the Modern Poster.”

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Bolsheviks. This holiday did not have any direct connection to the Hungarians, other than the occupation of Hungary by the Soviets.⁵⁹

Additional holidays were created to promote the Soviet defeat of the Nazis. April 4 commemorated the liberation of Hungary by the Soviets. The celebration was a selling point in the Soviet campaign to increase Hungarian support for communist policies and ideologies.⁶⁰ May 1, dubbed International Worker's Day, celebrated Marxist-Leninist ideas about worker's rights. However, as evidenced by the economic state of Hungary, workers did not experience the great rewards promised by Soviet propaganda.⁶¹ The economic state of Hungary continued to struggle under Soviet rule due to the quick industrialization of the nation as well as the amount of Hungarian goods appropriated by the Soviet government. Of the Hungarian food supply, the Soviets were acquisitioning close to all of the meat, three-quarters of the lard, a fifth of milk and dairy products and a quarter of the legumes. With an economy already attempting to rebuild after World War II, this aggressive acquisitioning was detrimental.⁶²

Other posters were created in support of Three- and Five-Year Production plans for the greater industrialization of Hungary. One propaganda poster, created by Tibor Gonzci Gebhardt in 1949, emphasized the importance of the Five-Year plan for the Hungarian people. This poster used the same elements of Socialist realism: incorporating bright, eye-catching colors, and idealist portraits of the Hungarian worker. Included in this poster was an idealistic depiction of what life would look like under the Five-Year plan (See Appendix D). Posters depicted successful factories that offered efficient production for the nation. Additionally, the artists

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Schoenfeld, "Soviet Imperialism in Hungary," 556.

depicted planes, trains, and other areas of infrastructure as successful and beneficial for the people. They pictured children learning in schools and playing games. Families were shown living in wealth and happiness.⁶³ Written, in Hungarian, was “for a joyous, strong, independent Hungary! On the path of folk democracy for socialism! Vote for the Five-Year Plan, Vote for the people’s front!”⁶⁴ This example of propaganda from 1949 Hungary exemplifies the nature of the push towards Marxist-Leninist principles in Hungary.⁶⁵

There were plentiful posters that represented the various schemes of the Soviets. For example, Gonczi-Gebhardt created a poster for the celebration of Liberation Day, April 4, which showed smiling men in front of several flags representing the Eastern bloc (See Appendix E). In the middle stood a man representing the Statue of Liberty that would rest on Gellert Hill in Budapest as a symbol of Soviet defeat of the Nazis. The use of propaganda in Hungary appeared in all areas of life in Budapest. From the posters one would see when walking the streets, to the large Statue of Liberty overlooking Budapest, the people were continually faced with the reality of Soviet occupation. The placement of these posters in Hungary, mainly in highly populated areas, acted as a continual reminder of the Soviet rule. The Soviets did not want the Hungarian people to forget their debts to communist rulers.⁶⁶

Statue Propaganda

Similar to the use of posters, the Soviet Union and the Hungarian communists placed statues throughout Budapest. Many of these statues remain on display today in the galleries of

⁶³ Tibor Gonczi-Gebhardt, *For a Joyous, Strong, Independent Hungary!* 1949, Medium, Budapest Poster Gallery, <https://budapestposter.com/socialist-realism-and-the-continuity-of-the-modern-poster-1950-1955>.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Tibor Gonczi-Gebhardt, *With Unity Against the War Inciters*, 1950, Medium, Budapest Poster Gallery, <https://budapestposter.com/socialist-realism-and-the-continuity-of-the-modern-poster-1950-1955>.

“Memento Park,” just outside of Budapest. The architect of Memento Park, Akos Eleod, discussed the paradox of these propaganda pieces resting outside of Budapest. Eleod said that this museum is,

Paradox, because these statues are both the reminders of an anti-democratic society and at the same time pieces of history; paradox, because they are symbols of authority and at the same time works of art; and finally, paradox, because despite the fact that they were without doubt originally set up for the purpose of propaganda, in assigning them a new location, I deemed it important to avoid the possibility that they would become anti-propaganda, which would have been no more than a continuation of dictatorship mentality.⁶⁷

Eleod argues that the role of these statues was obviously for propaganda and that the purpose of their existence in Hungary was to promote Soviet rule.⁶⁸

Hungarian author Gyula Illyes worked throughout the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, writing pieces that reflected the attitudes of the Hungarian people. He released his poem, “One Sentence about Tyranny” during the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and described the nature of tyranny in Hungary: “where tyranny exists, that tyranny exists, not only in the barrel of the gun, not only in the cells of a prison, not just in the interrogation block or small hours of the clock, the guard’s bark and his fists, the tyranny exists...at the opera, in the trumpet cry, in the uproarious lie, of grandiose statues, of colours in galleries.”⁶⁹ Illyes’ poetry reflects the sentiment that tyranny seeks to overtake all aspects of one’s life. Tyranny existed not just in matters of force and violence, but also in the culture, social traditions, and practices that constitute everyday life. This was a widely read poem that continues to act as a written example of the attitudes of Hungarians during the 1956 Revolution.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Fustos & Kovacs, *In the Shadow of Stalin’s Boots*, 6.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 11.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

Ilya completed this poem, writing, “because where tyranny obtains, everything is in vain, the song itself though fine, is false in every line, for he stands over you at your grave, and tells you who you were, your every molecule his to dispose and rule.”⁷¹ Ilya explains the fact that tyranny overtakes all aspects of one’s life, rewriting the past and the present to support this tyrannical nature of history. This perspective on tyranny reflected how the Hungarian people viewed the works of the Soviet regime. While some initially accepted the Soviets as their “liberators”, the Hungarians quickly realized that their supposed savior took over to implement a new rule based on Marxist-Leninist authoritarian principles.⁷²

Many children held similar perspectives. For instance, Hungarian Balaz Bosze described how as a small child, he hoped that the Russians would leave. Bosze stated, “we were just small kids, in the fourth grade, and we stole red crayons from school to write on the walls: ‘Russians go home!’. We wrote other things on pieces of paper and scattered them around like leaflets. A chaplain called Bandi caught and reprimanded us. ‘Do you want your fathers sent to jail?’”⁷³ Even the children desired for freedom for Hungary from Soviet rule.

Similar to the work of poster propaganda, statues served as a physical representation of Soviet oppression and rule. The Soviets showcased their rule on Gellert Hill, which was the tallest hill in Budapest. Following the liberation of Budapest, a liberation statue was created to commemorate this event. At the top of Gellert Hill, there was a statue of Soviet soldier holding a flag named the liberation monument (See Appendix F). This statue was constructed in 1945,

⁷¹ Ibid., 15.

⁷² Ibid., 6.

⁷³ Zsuzsanna Kőrösi, and Molnár Adrienne, *Carrying a Secret in My Heart: Children of the Victims of the Reprisals after the Hungarian Revolution in 1956: An Oral History*. (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2003), 17.

under the leadership of Marshall Voroshilov, who led the Soviet soldiers to liberate the city of Budapest.⁷⁴

The liberation statue held a palm branch over its head, symbolizing liberation and freedom (See Appendix G). However, the idea of liberation placed into this statue was not recognized by the Hungarian people. During the Revolution of 1956, the revolutionaries destroyed the statue.⁷⁵ Following this uprising, an identical statue was put into its previous place. There was a need by the Soviets to re-instate their believed significance in the role of the liberation of Hungary and restore communist power over the nation.⁷⁶

In 1956, the Soviets erected the Hungarian-Soviet Friendship memorial in the 10th district of Budapest. This memorial includes a statue of a Soviet soldier and Hungarian worker shaking hands (See Appendix H). However, the Soviet soldier extends a single hand, while the Hungarian worker extends both hands towards the Soviet soldier. This memorial showcases the belief that the Hungarians were “indebted” to the work of the Soviets and were in need of communism for the survival of their nation. The reflection of the Soviet attitude as the saviors of the Hungarian people is one of the factors leading to the frustrations of the Hungarian people, escalating to the Revolution of 1956.⁷⁷

There were many “Soviet Heroes Memorials” placed in Budapest to commemorate the work of the Soviets towards the liberation of the city. The Soviets Heroes’ Memorial was placed in the 17th district of Budapest in 1948 (See Appendix I). This memorial showcased the might

⁷⁴ Zsigmond Strobl Kisfaludy, *Liberating Soviet Soldier*, 1947, cast in bronze, Memento Park, Budapest.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Zsigmond Strobl Kisfaludy, *Hungarian-Soviet Friendship Memorial*, 1956, cast in bronze, Memento Park, Budapest.

and power of the Soviet Union. It pictured a Soviet soldier, holding a weapon high in battle. Inscribed in the memorial, in both Hungarian and Russian, was the phrasing, “In gratitude to the Soviet liberators for our freedom.” The irony of this message was that the memorial was created by the communist powers, to commemorate the communist powers. This memorial showcased the Soviet belief that Russians truly were liberators of the Hungarian people, while Hungarians believed that they were living within a new dictatorship. During the 1956 Revolution, protestors spray painted the words, “Russians go home!” Graffiti use grew in prevalence in Budapest during the 1956 Revolution. The Hungarians did not agree that the Soviets were their liberators, and instead, wanted to gain freedom for their nation.⁷⁸

The most iconic of the statues put into place by the Soviet Union was the 8-metre tall statue of Joseph Stalin (See Appendix J). This momentous statue stood in the center of Budapest, at the Felvonulási tér. Any of the national holidays put into place by the Soviet government, such as Liberation Day, were celebrated within this square. On October 23, 1956, the Hungarian revolutionaries destroyed the statue. They sawed it at the knees, leaving the boots of Stalin to be displayed within the square. This was intended to make a mockery of the communist dictator.⁷⁹

An eyewitness recounted these events to *The New York Times*. After failing to remove the statue through the use of winches and chains, “demonstrators obtained blow torches and burned through the base of the statue and amid a great shout of joy sent it tumbling to the ground.”⁸⁰ Following the fall, demonstrators destroyed the statue using knives and axes and took pieces of this statue as a remembrance of the event. It took a total of three and a half hours to take down

⁷⁸ Barna Megyeri, *Soviet Heroes' Memorial*, 1948, limestone, Memento Park, Budapest.

⁷⁹ *Stalin*, 1951, bronze, Memento Park, Budapest.

⁸⁰ "Toppling of Stalin Statue in Budapest Described," *New York Times*, Oct 25, 1956, 14.

the statue, during which the people chanted, “we want back our church.”⁸¹ The Rakosi Regime in conjunction with the Soviets destroyed the Roman Catholic Church in Hungary, despite the large number of Hungarians that belonged to the Catholic Church.⁸² The removal of the statue of the communist dictator from Budapest symbolized the desires of the people to be free of Soviet rule.

The Function of Terror, Propaganda and the Breakdown of Values

As the architect for Memento Park, Akos Eleod, explains, “these statues are a huge part of the history of Hungary. Dictatorships chip away at and plaster over their past in order to get rid of all memories of previous ages. Democracy is the only regime that is prepared to accept that our past with all the dead ends is still ours; we should get to know it, analyse it and think about it!”⁸³ Hungary’s past allows for these people to grow in a greater understanding of the nature of propaganda. These works will always be physical representations of the history of Hungary, and the ideological battle between Hungary and the Soviet Union.

Following the liberation of Budapest in 1945, the Hungarian people were freed from Nazi rule and oppression. However, as was quickly discovered, Nazi rule was simply replaced by Soviet influence and control. From 1945-1956, rapid industrialization occurred in an attempt at the complete makeover of Hungarian society to favor a Marxist-Leninist society. The dramatic industrialization of Hungary led to negative economic consequences. The USSR takeover of Hungarian society was systematic and the installation of the Rakosi regime led to the denial of many liberties and freedoms, including the mass jailing of Hungarians suspected of treason against the government.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Fustos & Kovacs, *In the Shadow of Stalin’s Boots*, 6.

The placement of statues and propaganda by the Soviet Union throughout Budapest offered reminders of the Soviet victory and showcased the superiority of communist ideals. These pieces were meant to remind Hungarians of the Soviet liberation and the Hungarians' indebtedness to the Soviets. These posters depicted the seeming prosperity offered by communism and Soviet rule. Propaganda statues offered reminders to the work completed by the Soviet Union in Hungary. As seen in the actions of the Hungarians during the 1956 Revolution, the Soviet Union failed to persuade the Hungarian people. Instead, the people resented the Soviet government and revolted against the communists. While efforts can be made to influence the attitudes of a society, if these attitudes so heavily stray from the cultural background of the nation and are pursued with force, the people will not be receptive to the messaging.

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Appendices

Appendix A



“The Children of the Workers are on Vacation!”

Appendix B



“Memorial Plaque of the Workers’ Militia Parade”

Appendix C



“Fine cigarettes: pleasant and relaxing”

Appendix D



“For a Joyous Strong and Independent Hungary.”

Appendix E



“With Unity Against the War Inciters.”

Appendix F



“Liberating Soviet Soldier”

Appendix G



“Liberation Monument”

Appendix H



“Hungarian-Soviet Friendship Memorial”

Appendix I



“Soviet Heroes’ Memorial”

Appendix J



“Stalin”