

The bulk of Aptheker's book does not deal with the uprising itself, but with background material -- with the old, pre-war, Horthy Hungary, with the post-war evolution of Hungary as a "peoples democracy," and with the counter-revolutionary aims and actions of United States policy. The purpose of this section is to lend weight and plausibility to the book's main thesis. In fact, even if everything Aptheker says in this part were true, it would still prove nothing about the truth or falsity of his description of the Hungarian uprising as a counter-revolution.

Aptheker's description of Horthy Hungary, while sketchy, presents considerable information and is not fundamentally inaccurate. But even here his bias shows through in places: thus, he presents the Social-Democratic and Smallholders parties as Horthyite because they were legal and were represented in Parliament under Horthy's dictatorship. One can with as much accuracy say that the Bolshevik party was Czarist because it was represented in the Czarist Dumas!

In describing the counter-revolutionary nature of United States policy toward Eastern Europe, Aptheker does not need to depart from facts. In discussing Project X, the Kersten Amendment, the CIA, the Gehlen organization, United States support to emigre fascists, he can and does let the makers of United States policy speak for themselves. It is an impressive record, and cannot be lightly dismissed as irrelevant. But neither does it prove anything. The desire of the United States espionage agencies to play a certain role is a very different thing from the actual role they played. In discussing the Hungarian revolution it is only the actual role of United States agents that is at stake, and this must be proven directly and concretely. The facts cited by Aptheker in this section of his book tell a lot about United States policy toward Eastern Europe, but nothing about the actual Hungarian revolution.

Aptheker's chapters on the post-war evolution of Hungary seem to have a dual purpose: to justify the basic Stalinist course of those years and to explain how the Hungarian "Peoples Democracy" could collapse after eleven years of progressive social change. This is not exactly an easy job.

Aptheker manages to write with some assurance when retelling the same old story of the "benefits" of "Peoples Democratic rule" (some of which certainly existed) and depicting the Hungarian Stalinists and their fellow-travellers as sterling progressives, while all other political groups in Hungary are relegated to the camp of counter-revolution. But his explanation of what went wrong is a painful and labored effort.

Aptheker speaks of "aberrations," "mistakes," "errors, even "crimes;" but he does not even touch the basic institutional features of the Stalinist system the Hungarian people rose against: the system of one-party rule, the conversion of trade unions into instruments of state control over the workers, the growth of an economically and socially privileged bureaucracy as a new ruling stratum, the role of the secret police as an institution of rule (an omission which has the highest significance later, in Aptheker's description of the uprising). Aptheker does refer to the systematic economic exploitation of Hungary by its Russian "friend," but only to deny that economic relations between the two countries were anything but "mutually beneficial." Shamefacedly, he must mention the \$300,000,000 reparations bill a ruined Hungary was forced to pay after the war, and seek to justify it as in accordance with "normal and well-established diplomatic practise," (page 130).

This "defense" is the crudest indictment -- it is precisely against such "normal and well-established" practises of imperialism that the revolutions of our time are directed!

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The foregoing, of course, is only a sketchy criticism of this section of Aptheker's book -- far more extensive criticisms could easily be made. But the main point to this book is the view it presents of the Hungarian revolution itself -- and it is this that must hold our main attention.

Aptheker's account of the Hungarian uprising goes essentially like this:

On October 23, 1956, small groups of counter-revolutionaries organized by United States "intelligence" services took advantage of a peaceful mass demonstration to launch an armed attack on the Hungarian government. Because the government was unprepared for this attack, it was compelled to call on Russian Army forces stationed in Hungary under the Warsaw treaty to aid it in restoring order. However, the Russian forces were active only in Budapest; in the rest of the country the counter-revolutionaries got the upper hand, and they were quickly reinforced by a great number of emigre fascists, who crossed the Austrian border in order to fight in Hungary.

A full-scale White Terror broke out throughout Hungary, marked by the systematic murder of Communists and the organization of pogroms. Capitulating to this pressure, the Nagy government swung steadily to the right until by November 4, it had become a pro-Western, pro-capitalist grouping, powerless before the counter-revolution which was sweeping Hungary.

Faced with this situation, the small group of true Communists led by Kadar, sincerely interested in the democratization of Hungary and with a record of opposition to the crimes of Rakosi, had no alternative but to make a "supreme effort," form a revolutionary government, and call on the Russian army to aid it in crushing the counter-revolution. Once it had decided to make an all-out effort, the "Red Army" was able to defeat the counter-revolutionaries without any difficulties.

In evaluating this description our first question might well be, What are the credentials of the author? Aptheker is not presenting an eyewitness account of the Hungarian uprising, but what purports to be a balanced, objective historical account based on secondary sources.

Unfortunately, Aptheker's objectivity and competence in this respect are subject to the gravest doubt. For a long time, Aptheker has been a leading member of the Communist Party, an editor of "Masses and Mainstream" and "Political Affairs." As such he was responsible for propagating some of the most outrageous lies in history. Until last year, for example, Aptheker maintained that Laszlo Rajk was an agent of the capitalist countries' secret services. Today, he recognizes what was obvious all along, that the frame-up trial of Rajk was a "fearful injustice". But in his book he does not find a word to devote to the basic question why he and so many others were completely deceived by an obvious lie. It is this complete absence of the most elementary self-criticism in a place where it should be inescapable that poses the question: is there any reason to think that Aptheker is today more able to see the plain truth about the Hungarian revolution than he was

to see the truth about the Rajk trial?

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Aptheker's basic method is not that of a historian attempting to arrive at the truth, but that of a lawyer attempting to convince us of the validity of his client's case. Thus Aptheker presents only those facts which seem to bolster his case. Through a great mass of press clippings torn out of context and placed in the artificial context of his thesis, Aptheker attempts to document the counter-revolutionary character of the Hungarian uprising.

As a general rule, Aptheker takes his clippings from two sources -- the right-wing capitalist press and the official "Communist" press. His sole criterion for a quote is its usefulness -- if it is factually false or dubious, or from an untrustworthy source, Aptheker disregards these considerations and, what is worse, hides them from the reader.

The following are representative examples of this method.

On page 212, Aptheker presents the discredited story of an impending Mindszenty government by means of a quote from what he calls "a leading Paris newspaper, Aurore." The unsuspecting reader is not informed that this story was denied at the time and no proof has ever been offered for it. We are also not informed of the fact that this "leading Paris newspaper" is in fact an ultra-reactionary paper whose fondest wish would be to see a Horthy-type government in Hungary, and in Franco as well.

Similarly, to "prove" the sizable influx of Horthyite agents during the uprising, Aptheker on page 228 quotes the Austrian newspaper Oesterreichische Volksstimme affirming "the existence of 'regular headquarters' at border areas where reactionary and Horthy agents 'have recently crossed the border together with Hungarian refugees in order, as they say, to join the insurgents'". Of course, Aptheker hides from his reader the following facts which expose this story as a fabrication:

- a) The "Volksstimme" is the paper of the Austrian Communist Party.
- b) This story was not confirmed by any independent source in Austria.
- c) The "facts" alleged are completely incompatible with Austria's status as a neutral country, as guaranteed by the Soviet Union among other powers. Yet the Russian government never made a formal protest against the supposed violation of Austrian neutrality.
- d) The Austrian government made a formal repudiation of these charges, in a memorandum dated November 3, which stated: "The Austrian Government has ordered the establishment of a forbidden zone the length of the Austro-Hungarian frontier....The minister of Defense has inspected this zone in the company of the military attaches of the four Great Powers, including that of the U.S.S.R. The military attaches have thus been able to assure themselves of the measures which have been taken in the frontier zone to protect the neutrality and the frontiers of Austria. All necessary measures have also been taken at the western border of Austria to prevent emigres from infiltrating...." (1) The Russian government never denied those facts officially.

Some of Aptheker's clippings are more accurate than those, but the picture the above give of his method is valid. It is an important fact that reactionary and fascist forces were active in the Hungarian uprising with the support of the Western secret services. It is true that excesses took place, that crimes were committed. Some of Aptheker's material is thus useful, in documenting this side of the revolution. But the Hungarian revolution was a complex, many-sided event. Reactionary forces were present, but so were progressive and socialist tendencies. The key question is the relationship of forces between the two. Aptheker only sees the reactionary side. He is like the blind man in the poem -- he has gotten hold of the elephant by its trunk and assures us that this strange beast is very like a snake!

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Aptheker presents the beginning of the revolution as the work of a small organized group of counter-revolutionaries. He begins his description with an account of Gero's speech to the October 23 mass demonstration, omitting, however, its most provocative aspect Gero's refusal to accept the demand that the Central Committee meet immediately and install Nagy as prime minister, his statement that the Committee would not meet before October 31.

Then Aptheker describes the work of the counter-revolutionaries in a passage which must be quoted in its entirety (page 188):

"By now -- nearing 9 p.m. -- uglier sentiments began to appear from knots among the demonstrators: sentiments justifying Gero's characterization for a small minority certainly present from the beginning. Evidences of disciplined, preconceived schemes of provocation and disorder began to appear -- anti-Semitic remarks, false rumors of shooting, the bursting of fire-crackers. Soon contingents broke away from the main body and, very sure and very clear as to what they were doing and where they were going and who was to do what, one group headed for the broadcasting station; another for the building housing the newspaper Szabad Nep; a third for the telephone center; a fourth for a motor park containing 60 trucks; a fifth for an electrical factory recently converted into a small arms plant. A sixth went to a munitions dump.

"At the radio station were some police and guards, but they had firm orders not to shoot except in self-defense. They were attacked; the group killed several and wounded more. The firing then was returned and after a skirmish and some damage, the attack on the station broke off. At the newspaper office, after killing a woman, the group gained control, smashed a bookstore in the building and burned the books, tore down and burned a red flag that topped the building and held the presses for about 16 hours. Meanwhile the trucks had been driven off -- drivers clearly prepared and selected beforehand -- and arms and munitions were loaded into them from the factory and the dump.

"Involved in all these more or less simultaneous and swift actions were perhaps something under a thousand people. Meanwhile, many demonstrators had returned home, suspecting nothing, and even the Government seems to have been informed tardily and not very urgently of the apparently disconnected, sporadic assaults by mere handfuls of people."

Two things stand out about this description: the vividness with which the events are detailed, and the stark contradiction between this and every

previously-published non-Stalinist account of the beginning of the uprising. If this is the way it began, the Hungarian revolution most certainly was initiated by counter-revolutionary plotters.

On finishing this sensational account, our eyes naturally turned to the bottom of the page, to discover from what source the author gleaned these remarkable facts. What then was our surprise when at the bottom of page 129 we found the most astounding sight conceivable -- a blank space! Instead of evidence we are presented with -- a void. Aptheker, so liberal with references and quotes elsewhere in the book, is unable to cite a single source for this absolutely key passage!

Why this incredible lack of documentation, which a trained historian like Aptheker must realize would make this narrative unacceptable to any even vaguely critical reader? There can be only two answers -- either Aptheker is simply inventing the "facts" or he is getting his description from a source whose mere mention would be more compromising than the omission of any source! In either case, this passage is pure fantasy. Its imaginative content can best be shown by comparison to an eye-witness account of these events by an observer who cannot possibly be accused of anti-Communist bias, Luigi Fossati, Budapest correspondent for Avanti, newspaper of the Socialist Party of Italy (Nenni), which has always cooperated closely with the Communist Party.

This is Fossati's account of the events at the broadcasting station (where, according to Aptheker, a small group of disciplined counter-revolutionaries attacked "police and guards" who "had firm order not to shoot except in self-defense"):

"A large column of demonstrators leaves the square and goes toward the Radio Broadcasting building on Chardon Brodji Street. They wish to send a group into the building in order to have the radio station employees broadcast the slogans of the demonstration in answer to the speech of Gero. The security police then intervene and open fire. It is here that the first victims fall: two dead and ten wounded." (2)

And this is how Fossati describes the "events" that took place at the Szabad Nép building:

"About 11:00 I go back to the center of town, fighting is going on at several points. I hear the sound of machine-gun fire from Tolkin Street. I pass before the Szabad Nép building. No police are there to protect it: a few workers stand in front of the main door, discussing. From a window, leaflets are thrown down which state the following: 'The editors of Szabad Nép greet the powerful demonstration of the people of Budapest to speed up the development of socialist democracy and the renovation of our public life. In our conscience as communists we profoundly deplore the violent reaction of the forces of security. We believe that those responsible for this will have to render an account for their actions. The editors of Szabad Nép assure the party and the people that they will never support those who wish to answer the voice and demands of the people with shooting and terrorism. People of Budapest, we announce to you that the Central Committee of the United Workers Party is meeting in special session this very night.' The few groups standing around the building show their joy at reading the leaflet and cry 'Hurrah'". (2)

Remember that, according to Aptheker, a group of "fascist reactionary elements" had, just before, attacked the building and captured the presses!

Aptheker's description of the beginning of the uprising is thus not merely unsubstantiated, but demonstrably false. With this, the whole idea of fascist provocation supposed to be at the root of the revolution is discredited. But there were provocateurs in Budapest on October 23 -- the secret police who fired on an unarmed crowd, and the Stalinist leaders who called in the Russian army. In response to this provocation, United States agents were not needed to show the Budapest workers how to arm themselves. As in every revolution, they took the guns where they were; in the first place, from the army. This is how Peter Fryer, London Daily Worker special correspondent in Hungary, described the arming of the revolution:

"The troops in Budapest, as later in the provinces, were of two minds: there were those who were neutral and there were those who were prepared to join the people and fight alongside them. The neutral ones (probably the minority) were prepared to hand over their arms to the workers and students so they could do battle against the A.V.H. [the Stalinist secret police], with them. The others brought their arms with them when they joined the revolution. Furthermore, many sporting rifles were taken by the workers from the factory armouries of the Hungarian Voluntary Defense Organization. The 'mystery' of how the people were armed is no mystery at all. No one has yet been able to produce a single weapon manufactured in the West."(3)

This indicated another decisive point at which Aptheker's thesis breaks down. If the fighting was carried on by "something under a thousand people," why was it necessary to call in the Russian army? The security police alone should have been more than enough to crush a few fascist bands. The regular army was vastly superior in numbers, and even more in arms, to anything the "counter-revolutionaries" could conceivably muster. Why the Russians?

The answer is obvious -- the fighting was not the work of a few fascists, but of a whole population in arms, far more than the secret police could handle. And, as Fryer saw, the army was either neutral or went over to the people -- the true hallmark of a mass revolutionary upsurge. For the Stalinists in the Hungarian government, the Russian army was the sole prop against a united people. There is even good reason to believe that the decision to call on Russian troops was made well before the first shot was fired.

According to the Hungarian left-socialist Francois Fejto:

"If we analyse the events which followed each other at such a rapid pace after dark on October 23 at Budapest, we cannot avoid formulating the hypothesis of a provocation prepared in advance. The newspaper Tribuna Ludu [Polish CP central organ--SM], in its issue of October 29, confirms this hypothesis. Even before the demonstration that afternoon, in fact, the Soviet troops had left their barracks and prepared for action. This movement reflects the same intention as that which, in Poland, inspired the abortive action of Marshal Rokosovsky and his friends of the Natolin group [Polish ultra-Stalinists]: to nip in the bud an agitation which threatened to turn against the party apparatus, still dominated by the Stalinists."(4)

Aptheker claims that Nagy was co-responsible with Gere for calling in the Russian troops, on the basis of speeches he and Kadar made on October 25, when they were literally prisoners of the Russians. (According to the Revolutionary University Students Committee, Nagy made this speech "with a machine gun at his back.") (5) Aptheker scoffs at Nagy's later denial of responsibility, but of course does not mention that neither Kadar nor any other Communist refuted Nagy on this point.

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Thus we see the degree of "truth" in Aptheker's description of the start of the Hungarian revolution. His account of the development of "full-scale White Terror" has about as much truth in it.

We must here admit that unquestionably the Hungarian revolution was not free from excesses. The vengeance of a people on those who had been its torturers can be a terrible thing, and often some innocent people are made to suffer with the guilty. It was that way in all great revolutions: English, American, French, Russian, or Chinese. In Hungary the fury of the people was turned against the AVH, the secret police. The ferocity with which the AVH fought the revolution, the massacres in Magyarovar and Parliament Square, added to the hatred for these torturers and murderers.

For Aptheker, however, the secret police did not exist. Anyone killed as a secret policeman is sure to be really a "Jew," a "Communist," or a "Hungarian Army recruit," a victim of "White Terror." Thus he can place under the heading "White Terror" incidents that are nothing of the kind. Certainly we should have deplored the summary execution of the AVH men, and favored bringing them to a fair public trial. In fact, this was the stand of the Hungarian writers, many of the best of whom had been tortured by the AVH. But the murder of the Avhoists was an excess of the revolution, not a crime of the counter-revolution as Aptheker presents it.

Aptheker cites as an example of "White Terror" "the prolonged and systematic attack upon the headquarters of the Party in Budapest," quoting an outrageously exaggerated account by a reactionary English correspondent for the Beaverbrook press, which presented it as a mass murder of Communists by attackers who "strung up every man and woman they found inside the building" (page 217). The facts are somewhat different, according to the Polish Communist Wiktor Witoszylski, editor of the magazine *Nova Kultura* (6):

"Marian Bielicki, correspondent for the Polish Radio, also a Communist---SM/ has already been here for several days. Now he gives the impression of having been particularly shaken. It was hard for me to get him to tell what he had seen today.

"He was, with Krzysztof, a witness to the assault upon the Party headquarters building, where somewhat more than two hundred members of the AVH were defending themselves.

"The AVH are the uniformed divisions of the political police....An elite corps, richly paid (the salary of an AVH man was ten times the average monthly wage of a worker), tied life and death to the bloody regime of Rakosi, the janissary detachments of the AVH held the country to the very end in the iron grip of a terror of which we had no idea in Poland. After the liquidation of Beria, after the resignation of Rakosi and the

arrest of Farkas, no change had taken place in the AVH. When, on October 23, the AVH opened fire on the unarmed demonstration of the people, the cup was filled to overflowing. The insurrection broke out and was joined immediately by the army and the police. The AVH -- officially dissolved by the Nagy government -- refused to submit to dissolution and continued to sow death and provocation. Then the wrath of the people, in a great wave, submerged Budapest.

"Marian tells how the crowd, supported by a few Hungarian tanks, attacked the fortress of the Avhoists. They defended themselves furiously, their volleys laid low more than one attacker. But finally they were dragged out of the building, and then --

"Marian's lips tremble; he is very pale.

" -- I never saw a lynching like that. They were hung by the feet and some were literally torn to pieces. Finally, the organized insurgents -- the National Guard -- arrived and they protected the remaining prisoners against the crowd. But those they didn't get here in time to defend--!"

Finally, as a commentary on Aptheker's claim that the execution of AVH men was part of a White Terror directed against Communists, here is Woszylski's account of a conversation with a group of leading Hungarian Communists, in the government offices:

"Marian again tells what he had seen that morning. It is smothering him and he looks for an answer among his Hungarian comrades, among the Communists. After a moment's silence, one of them speaks up:

" -- 'Believe us, we are not sadists. But we cannot bring ourselves to feel sorry for those people.' "(7)

The summary execution of Avhoists belongs in the category of revolutionary excesses -- it has far more in common with Red Terror than with White Terror. However, there is abundant evidence that acts of a different sort also took place during the Hungarian revolution -- the actions of a reactionary and fascistic fringe which was able to raise its head in the turmoil of insurrection. These were not excesses, these were crimes. Aptheker revels in these crimes: murder, vandalism, anti-Semitism. On the basis of them, he slanders the revolution as a whole.

Was there an anti-Semitic current? Of course there was. Was the revolution marked by an organized "effort at mass-extermination of the Jews," as Aptheker claims (page 221)? Nothing of the sort is true, as proven not only by an enormous mass of eye-witness accounts, but also by an unquestionable source: the Budapest Corps of Rabbis which, together with other Jewish organizations, issued the following statement on November 2:

"Hungarian Jewry, having regained its religious freedom, enthusiastically salutes the achievements of the revolution, pays reverent homage to the heroes and identifies itself with the independent and free homeland. Hungarian Jewry appeals to Jewish organizations abroad to give quick and effective material help to the long-suffering Hungarian people." (8)

On the basis of the kind of "evidence" that we have seen, Aptheker describes the outcome of the Hungarian revolution as "the development of a

general condition of White Terror in Hungary -- directly reminiscent of 1919 -- especially after October 29, when the Red Army withdrew from Budapest, and reaching a crescendo of fury by November 4..." (page 217).

The quarter-truths have here been added up to amount to something which isn't true at all.

The fact is, that by the beginning of November the Hungarian revolutionaries were fully conscious of the presence of a fascistic scum and were prepared to crush it. All the necessary proof of this can be found in the free Hungarian newspapers of those days; from none of these does Aptheker quote.

For instance, on November 1. Magyar Honved, the newspaper of the Hungarian Army, wrote:

"At Györ, certain extreme right-wing elements wanted to hold a big meeting Tuesday afternoon. According to their program, they desired a new government to be headed by Ferenc Nagy who is at present in a foreign country. But the workers of Györ prevented them from doing it. We want no fascism, we have had enough of tyranny, whether it be the tyranny of Rakosi or of Szalasi." (9)

On November 2, Igazság (Truth), paper of the Revolutionary Youth, wrote:

"We hate the fascists who are lurking in the shadows and who want to exploit the revolution." (9)

And on November 3, the whole press carried an interview with Pal Maleter, hero of the Kilian Barracks, Chairman of the Military Revolutionary Council, soon to become minister of defense in the last Nagy government. Maleter said:

"The National Guard, the revolutionary committees and the workers councils are solidly in the hands of freedom fighters who are fighting on two fronts: against the Stalinists and against the reactionaries." (9)

And finally, we have Woroszylski's description of Hungary, as "White Terror" reached a "crescendo of fury":

(November 2) "In the course of the last 24 hours there have been no more summary executions in Budapest." (10)

(November 3, summing up the evaluation of the entire group of Polish reporters, all of them Communists) "Stabilization is beginning in the country, the government is becoming a true government supported by all the revolutionary forces.

"Today, calm reigned in Budapest. As on Friday, there were no summary executions on Saturday. Numerous Avhoists surrendered themselves to the commission of inquiry on Marko Street. We try to estimate the number of victims of the lynchings which took place in the city, that is to say, from Tuesday to Thursday afternoon. The figure closest to the truth is from seventy to eighty persons. Everything indicates that in the actual situation there is no risk that this total will increase." (10)

Aptheker's final point in his description of "Counter-Revolution" in Hungary is the claim that the Nagy government evolved toward the right to the point where it was "predominantly bourgeois" and had a "perspective of a return to capitalism."

As a major item in his "proof" of this, Aptheker asserts:

"It is significant that by October 30, Nagy was omitting 'Socialist' from his descriptions of Hungary. It is a fact that thereafter in his speeches and pronouncements and in those of other Government figures until November 4, the Socialist fundamant of Hungary is omitted." (page 204, emphasis in original)

"It is a fact" that, like so many other of Aptheker's "facts," this statement is simply not true.

On November 3, Nagy's closest political associate, Geza Losonczy (a cabinet minister), declared:

"The government has unanimously declared that it will not make any concessions as far as the positive achievements of the past twelve years are concerned, for example, in agrarian reform, the nationalization of factories, and social achievements. It also demands that the achievements of the present revolution remain intact, notably national independence, equality of rights, and the building of Socialism not on the basis of a dictatorship but on the basis of democracy. The government is determined not to tolerate the restoration of capitalism in Hungary." (11)

The governmental unanimity described by Losonczy was real, at least in terms of the stated programs of the various parties making up the coalition. Thus, on November 3, Ferenc Farkas, a leader of the Peasant Party (and a cabinet minister), stated that the government wished to retain "from the Socialist achievements and results everything which can and must be used in a free, democratic, and Socialist country in accordance with the desires of the people." (12)

On November 1, Anna Kethly, leader of the Social Democrats, wrote: "Freed from one prison, let us not permit the country to become a prison of another color. Let us watch over the factories, mines, and the land, which must remain in the hands of the people." (13)

On October 31, Bela Kovacs, leader of the Smallholders Party (and a cabinet minister), said:

"No one must dream of going back to the world of counts, bankers, and capitalists: that world is over once and for all. A true member of the Smallholders Party cannot think along the lines of 1939 or 1945." (14)

Incidentally, Aptheker's treatment of Kovacs is rather cavalier, to say the least. On the basis of an article by a leading American Catholic, George Shuster, he describes Kovacs as a faithful supporter of Cardinal Mindszenty. He does not bother to reconcile Kovacs' rejection of the past (1945 as well as 1939!) with Mindszenty's desire to return to the past. Nor does he see any need to explain the formation of a distinctly Catholic party in direct competition to Kovacs' Smallholders.

Naturally, Aptheker omits mention of Kovacs' role in the anti-Fascist resistance. Naturally, also, he does not forget to point out that Kovacs was "once jailed for counter-revolutionary activities even before Mindszenty." He only leaves out the trivial fact that Kovacs was jailed by the Russian secret police, and that he never received any trial, not even the sort of trial that Rakosi specialized in organizing.

So far, the leaders of the four coalition parties in the last Nagy government don't exactly look like "counter-revolutionaries." There was also a member of this government whom Aptheker, following Radio Free Europe, describes as "Independent." This was Pal Maleter, who occupied the key power position in command of all Hungarian armed forces in his dual positions as head of the Revolutionary Military Council and Minister of Defense. Aptheker tells us nothing about Maleter, but the man is worth knowing.

The term "Independent" in relation to Maleter is highly misleading. In point of fact, Maleter is a long-time Communist, who fought in the International Brigades in Spain, and in the Resistance during World War II. During the revolution, the English socialist journalist Basil Davidson interviewed him. As Davidson tells it:

"He still wore his little star of a partisan of 1944 (and another Red Star won in the digging of coal by his regiment at Tatabanya), at a moment when all the officers were tearing off their Soviet-type epaulettes."

Davidson asks him where the Hungarian revolution is heading.

"'If we get rid of the Russians,' he told me, 'don't think we will go backward, to the past days. And if there are people who are thinking about going backward, then we will see,' and he put his hand on his revolver holster." (15)

There are many, many arguments against the idea that the Hungarian revolution was being taken over by reactionaries. Perhaps the most powerful rested in Maleter's holster.

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By now, the reader may have become disturbed at the absence of a key factor in this discussion of the "truth about Hungary." It is as if we had reached the final act of Hamlet and the prince of Denmark had yet to make his first appearance. But in this we are only being faithful to the book we are discussing. The Hungarian working class was the central actor in the Hungarian drama -- and the working class is totally omitted from Aptheker's version of the "truth" about Hungary! More exactly, Aptheker mentions the workers only to deny that they played any role. He asserts: "the workers of Budapest by and large adopted an apathetic or passive or neutral attitude" (page 197).

It is surely not necessary to recapitulate here the great number of eye-witness accounts proving that the main fighting forces were made up of young workers, that the heaviest fighting took place in the working class districts (like Kobanya, Ujpest, -- and "Red Osepel," the proletarian stronghold of Hungarian Communism and the last center of resistance against the second Russian intervention). It should be enough to cite the curious

manner the Hungarian workers chose to show their "neutrality" --- a complete general strike and the formation of Workers Councils!

The sequel to the second Russian intervention showed the real nature and strength of the contending social forces in Hungary so clearly as to remove any possible doubt on this score (which, no doubt, is why Aptheker ends his narrative on November 4). The fascistic groups vanished into thin air (or rather, into Austria and thence other countries of the "free world," to prepare for new adventures). Mindszenty hid in the United States embassy. Bela Kovacs was invited to join the Kadar government, but refused and announced his "retirement" from politics. But the workers councils remained and carried on a fierce struggle against the Russian occupier and its Kadar puppet government. As late as December 12, all Hungary was gripped by a general strike. In the end, as we know, the Kadar government was able by the threat of starvation to break the strike. It proceeded to arrest the workers' leaders and destroy the Workers Councils, on the pretext that the Councils "have preoccupied themselves with exclusively political questions with the objective of organizing a sort of second power, opposed to the State Power." (16)

The bitter irony of a self-styled "Revolutionary Workers and Peasants Government" outlawing the only representative organs of the Hungarian working class should not blind us to the fact that with this declaration the Kadar government has definitively posed the real choice in Hungary. On the one hand, the "State Power" of the discredited Stalinist bureaucracy resting on Russian bayonets; and on the other, the "second power," the state power of the Hungarian working class exorcised through its elected democratic bodies, the Workers Councils. The Hungarian Workers Councils of 1956 were the legitimate heirs of the Workers Councils (Soviets) of 1919. Aptheker thus is closer to the truth than he suspects when he claims that the heirs of Horthy played a decisive role in the Hungarian revolution!

The real spirit of the Hungarian workers revolution was eloquently expressed by Sandor Racz, a young worker 23 years old, who was elected chairman of the Budapest Central Workers Council. On December 8 Racz gave an interview to the correspondent of an Italian newspaper, to be published only if he was arrested. He declared:

"I have a tranquil conscience because I have been the unfortunate spokesman for the will of the workers and for all those who have fought for the ideal of a free, independent, and neutral Hungary and for a socialist state....All that has been refused to us. The government knows that the country is against it, and since it knows today that the single organized force which truly made the Revolution is the working class, it wishes to destroy the workers united front." (17)

As he had anticipated, Racz was arrested the moment he went to meet representatives of the Kadar government, who had promised to negotiate with the workers. He is still in prison awaiting trial, in accordance with Kadar's "further democratization of state power" praised by Aptheker.

It would be easy to go on piling up examples of Aptheker's peculiar conception of "truth," but further refutation of the Stalinist slander of

the Hungarian revolution is surely superfluous.

One of the most unfortunate aspects of Aptheke's book is that its preoccupation with a fictitious "White Terror" prevents us from coming to grips with the real restorationist danger. I earlier referred to the universally-held capitalist view that the Hungarian revolution was aimed at achieving "Western-style democracy." A brief discussion of this is necessary here.

The claim that the Hungarian revolution oriented toward "Western-style democracy" was more than a theory; it was a political program. The leaders of the "West" knew as well as the Russians that it would be impossible to impose a new Horthy on the Hungarian people. Therefore, capitalism could be restored in Hungary only in "democratic" guise. Certain aspects of Hungarian society make this more than a utopian dream.

A majority of the population of Hungary is rural, attached to private property (Stalinist "collectivizations" did not exactly weaken this attachment), and economically drawn to the West. Furthermore, the religious majority in Hungary is Catholic. The planners of "Liberation" had good grounds to hope that the establishment of a Western-style parliamentary system would result in a government reflecting these majorities, under the leadership of emigre politicians and the Catholic hierarchy. Especially since they had powerful extra-democratic means of pressure, in the form of economic "aid" and the activities of the fascistic fringe we met earlier.

Could capitalism have been restored in this way? Certainly if the Hungarian revolution had been allowed to develop freely, there is a possibility that this would have happened. (Of course, even if this development were certain, which is not at all the case, the actual Russian intervention would still be an impermissible denial to the Hungarian people of the right to choose their own social system.)

The danger of capitalist restoration thus really existed. But nothing at all justifies the Western claim that the revolution was essentially a struggle for the "democratic" return of "peoples capitalism." The Western version of the "counter-revolution" thesis, like the Stalinist one, is false because it ignores the key factor in the revolution -- the working class.

The Hungarian working class, even though it may have been confused about many things, did not fight for "Western-style" democracy -- it fought for socialist democracy. The workers of Györ showed this when they suppressed the meeting in favor of Ferenc Nagy. The workers council of the 11th District of Budapest showed this when it demanded "free elections in which only those parties may participate that recognize and have always recognized the Socialist order, based on the principle that means of production belong to society." (18)

But the decisive refutation of the idea that Hungary was returning to "Western-style democracy" is the simple fact that the workers all over Hungary, in the heat of the revolution, created their own Workers Councils as organs of the political rule of the working class. What has this to do with capitalist "democracy"? To smash the threat of capitalist restoration, the Hungarian workers would merely have had to exert the power that already lay in their hands, to give all power to the workers councils and not, as in so

many past revolutions, give up their power to a capitalist parliament.

To grasp the loathsome hypocrisy and mendacity of the capitalist "friends" of the Hungarian revolution, the reader need only ask this question: What would be the attitude of these Dulleses, Mollets, and Edens if the workers of Paris, London, or Detroit were to form their own workers councils and attempt to establish a "Socialist order, based on the principle that means of production belong to society"?

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There remains one question of the highest interest. As we have seen, the essential part of Aptheker's book, its description of the Hungarian uprising, is a fabric of transparent falsifications in obvious contradiction to the real and widely-known "Truth about Hungary." How is it, then that anyone, and particularly a historian, could write such a book?

There are two possible explanations. One is that Aptheker, for some reason, is quite consciously falsifying the Hungarian revolution on orders from Khruschev.

I do not believe this. Not because there is evidence of great respect for truth in Aptheker's book, or in his past political role. But this is 1957, a year after the 20th Congress. If Aptheker knew his book was as false as it is, he could not avoid the knowledge that in a very short time he would be compelled to eat it publicly. Nor is it likely that anyone today would consciously leap forward to place himself in the pillory together with the authors of "The Great Conspiracy," "From Trotsky to Tito," "History of the C.P.S.U.--Short Course," and other such works.

The alternative is that Aptheker really believes that he has told the truth, to the best of his knowledge. How can this be?

I think it can be understood only if we realize that for Aptheker, the ruling group in the Soviet Union is completely identified with the cause of socialism and thus with objective historical truth. It is evident that, for Aptheker, the basic truth about the Hungarian revolution was established when the leaders of the Soviet Union declared it a "counter-revolution." After this, all that remained was to find out the details of the development of the "counter-revolution" and to weld them together into "some sort of reasonable picture," as Aptheker expresses it.

Everyone is familiar with the mirrors in an amusement park which reflect the human form as a grotesque parody. For Aptheker, the picture of the Hungarian revolution promulgated by the "Soviet" rulers is just such a mirror. In it he sees the revolution distorted beyond all recognition -- some features are exaggerated obscenely, some turn into their opposite, some disappear altogether. And by writing a book Aptheker has recorded this hallucination for all to see.

Aptheker has not broken from the past -- he is still a Stalinist. The same mirror which showed him a counter-revolution in Hungary once showed him and many others the "truth" of the Moscow trials, the "genius" of Stalin, the "fascism" of Tito, the "guilt" of Rajk....

It is late, comrade Aptheker. If you want to think as a Marxist and

act as a Communist you must learn to look reality in the face. You must learn to understand the pre-eminent value of truth. Can you realize that the worst stigma of all those borne by the Stalinist bureaucracy is its ingrained brutal and cynical contempt for truth? (Leave aside Hungary. Can you believe that Malenkov opposed peaceful co-existence? Or that the Khrushchev Report was an invention of the United States secret services?)

You must throw off the mental yoke of Stalinism, just as the Hungarian workers rose to throw off its physical rule. You must see the bureaucracy as it is -- a privileged, parasitic social formation in mortal conflict with the working class and with the needs of socialist development. Short of this, you will remain a Stalinist, not a Marxist; and despite your desire to be a Communist you will again find yourself slandering a revolution to the benefit of counter-revolution.

- End -

FOOTNOTES

- (1) Quoted in François Manuel, "La Révolution Hongroise des Conseils Ouvriers," S.P.E.L. (5 rue de Charonne), Paris, 1957, page 25.
- (2) France-Observateur, November 1, 1956, page 8.
- (3) Peter Fryer, "Hungarian Tragedy," London, Dennis Dobson, 1956, page 44.
- (4) François Fejto, "La Tragédie Hongroise," Paris, Editions Pierre Horay, 1956, page 253.
- (5) "The Revolt in Hungary -- A documentary chronology of events," New York, Free Europe Committee, 1956, page 56.
- (6) Wiktor Woroszylski, "Journal d'un Révolution" in France-Observateur, January 3, 1957, page 11.
- (7) Ibid., page 12.
- (8) "Revolt in Hungary," page 69.
- (9) Quoted in France-Observateur, January 3, 1957, page 20.
- (10) Woroszylski, op. cit., page 17.
- (11) "Revolt in Hungary," page 82.
- (12) Ibid., page 79.
- (13) Ibid., page 62.
- (14) Quoted in Fryer, op. cit., page 75.
- (15) Tribuno, November 23, (quoted in Manuel, op. cit., page 26).
- (16) Official government statement, quoted in France-Observateur, January 3, 1957, page 21.
- (17) Il Giorno, December 14, 1956 (quoted in Manuel, op. cit., page 39)
- (18) "Revolt in Hungary," page 2.