

1956

THE HOPE OF FREEDOM

THE HUNGARIAN REVOLUTION

“The people of Hungary shed blood to show the world its devotion to freedom and truth.”

(István Bibó, Minister of State, 4 November, 1956)



The communist dictatorship



The communist leadership – using the slogan of peace as a pretext – was preparing for World War III with excessive investments in heavy industry. The power plant in Tiszalök was built with the forced labour of political internees



“Where tyranny exists / that tyranny exists not only in the barrel of the gun not only in the cells of a prison”

(Gyula Illés)

At the end of World War II Hungary was occupied by the Red Army. In the defenceless country Stalin step by step assisted a communist government into power, which introduced a Soviet type, total dictatorship by 1949. In 1953 Moscow – after Stalin’s death –, to avoid a situation similar to the Berlin Uprising, made Imre Nagy the Prime Minister of Hungary instead of Mátyás Rákosi, the compromised Hungarian party leader.

During his term terror eased temporarily, but from 1955 hardliners came to the fore again. Imre Nagy was deposed, but it was not possible to return to the previous state of affairs. In early 1956 the Soviet Party Secretary General, Nikita Khrushchev – in a speech delivered at the closed session of the 20th congress of the Soviet Communist Party – denounced Stalin’s crimes. The speech, which was subsequently leaked, gave new hope to the oppressed peoples of Eastern-Europe. In Hungary the movements of the different intellectual circles – mainly those of the university students – became increasingly stronger during the year.



Magyar Távirati Iroda – Ernő Vadas



Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum – Ernő Vadas

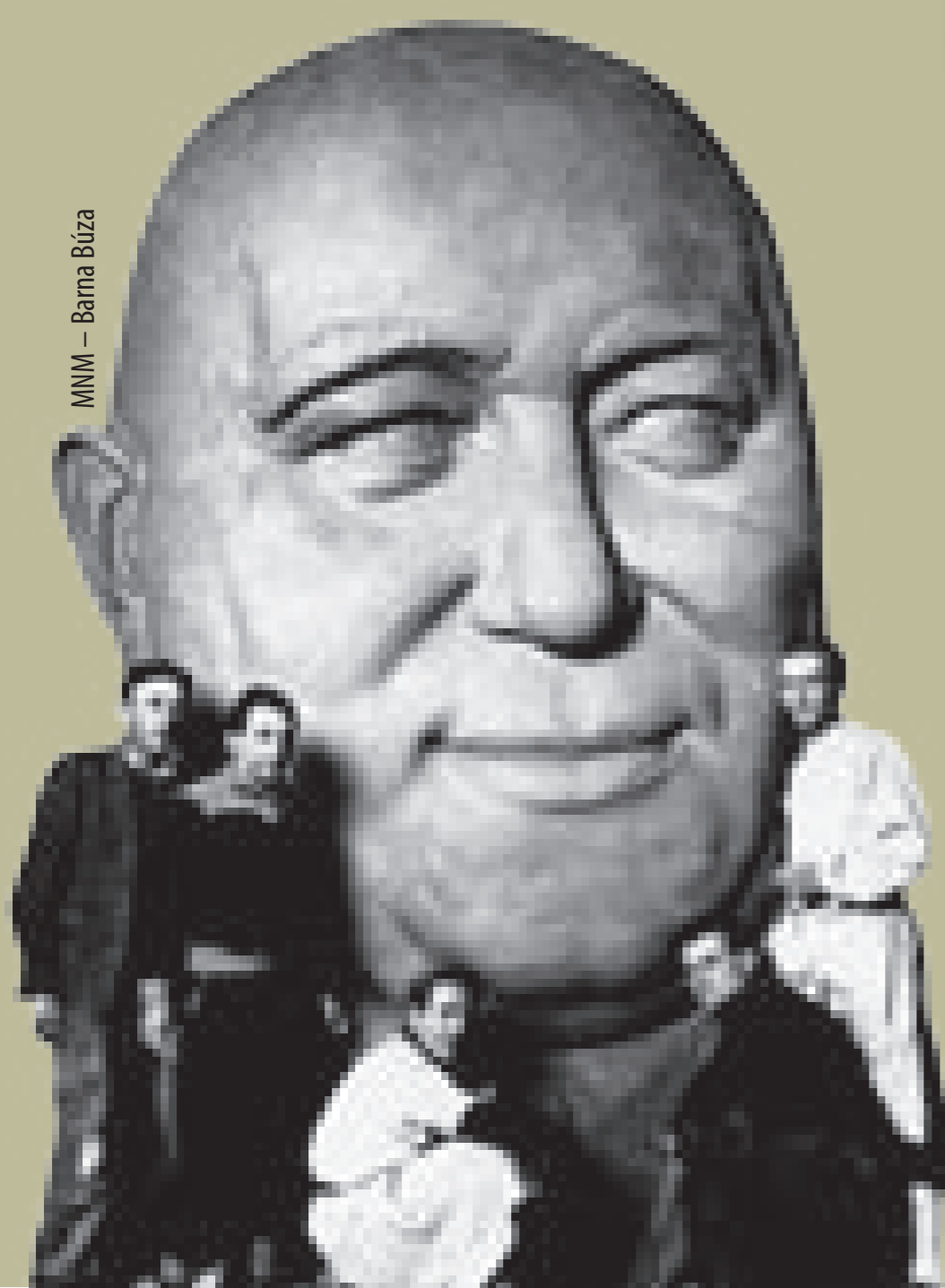
The most important symbol of the dictatorship: The grandstand with Stalin’s statue erected next to the demolished Regnum Marianum church

The dictatorship also penetrated private life. The factory nursery of the Mátyás Rákosi Works

The financial resources for forced industrialisation were raised – among other means – by the cruel pillaging from the peasantry. Policemen searching for hidden farm produce



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MNM – Barna Búza

Mátyás Rákosi’s plaster of Paris portrait was made to be a decoration at the celebration. Around the party secretary general – following the Soviet model – dictatorial power and a personality cult developed



MTI – Tamás Fényes

23th October

The first day of the revolution

The demonstration on 23th October - initiated by university students, but later joined by the whole of the capital city – began in a cheerful and trustful atmosphere

Began in a cheerful and trustful atmosphere

In the afternoon of the 23rd. October, 1956, a demonstration supporting the movement in Poland started in Budapest. The growing crowd with increasing resolution demanded the restoration of national independence and democracy in Hungary. After some hesitation, by the evening the authorities banned the demonstration and ordered the crowd to be dispersed. However, the crowd resisted and even managed to win over the soldiers who had been called out. As a result the frightened party leadership asked for the assistance of the Soviet occupation forces. The Soviet tanks were preparing for a demonstration of power, as in Berlin. It was already impossible to intimidate the youth of Budapest, they resisted the Soviets with rifles and Molotov cocktails



MTI – Sándor Bojár

Then the crowd demonstrating for freedom and democracy went to the statue of the Polish Józef Bem. He was a legendary general of the freedom fight of 1848, fighting against the troops of the Austrian Kaiser and the Russian Tsar attacking Hungary



MTI – Tamás Munk

The demonstrators first went to the statue of Sándor Petőfi. Petőfi, one of the greatest poets of the 19th century and one of the heroes of the revolution of 1848 which achieved freedom of assembly and freedom of speech and press without bloodshed and violence.



MTI – Sándor Mező

In the evening in front of the Parliament the crowd of already more than one hundred thousand demanded the return of Imre Nagy into the country's leadership.



In the evening of the 23rd. of October the demonstrators demolished the most hated symbol of the dictatorship, the statue of Stalin

Hadtörténelmi Múzeum

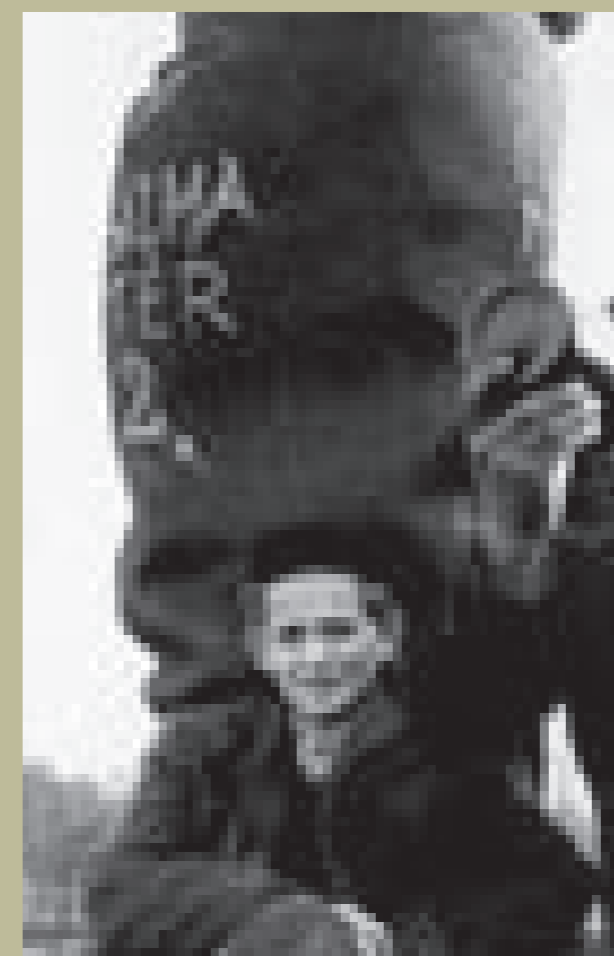


The leaflets distributed in the summer of 1956 – quoting the popular song of the day – were almost predicting the future: The destruction of Stalin's cult will also bury the dictatorship of Mátyás Rákosi.

The demolition of the Stalin statue



MTI – Sándor Bojár



Humorous words were written on the boots which remained on the pedestal:
Csizma tér 1 (Boot square 1),
Csizma tér 2 (Boot square 2).

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The 6.5 ton giant was towed to the centre of Budapest the same night, where the people of Budapest chopped it up with hammers, chisels and saws.



The building of the Radio shot to pieces.

MNM – Dr. Szentpétery Tibor

“It lied at night, it lied during the day, it lied on every wavelength”
(István Örkény)

The siege of the **Radio**

The aim of the demonstrators marching to the Radio was that their demands should be aired. In the meantime the party leadership described the demonstration as a manifestation of hostile and chauvinistic sentiment, and ordered its forcible dispersion.

After the demonstrators had been shot at from the building, the crowd obtained weapons from the soldiers who had been called out, besieged the Radio and took it by dawn.



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Fighting at night at the Radio



A tank at the Radio whose crew went over to the insurgents.



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The neighbouring Kálvin square after the fighting. The inscription on the fire wall: “Russkies go home!”

MNM – Miklós Bedő, Katalin Korbuly



An amateur photo taken in the lull of the fighting. Everyone who could was doing his best to take snapshots of these historic days

Casual orator on an occupied tank. The Kossuth Coat of Arms on the gun-barrel is a symbol of the 1848 revolution.



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INSURGENT GROUPS WERE ORGANISED

The following days witnessed a general strike and sporadic armed clashes. More and more factories and public institutions were controlled by the insurgents. The political police – State Defence Authority (ÁVH) – was gradually dissolved and the police and the military went over to the side of the insurgents. The spontaneously organised groups armed with outdated small arms – mainly consisting of young workers, trade students – occupied the traffic junctions of the city and with their resourceful tactics and determination prevented the Soviets from taking the City.



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Insurgents on their way to fight on a truck



MNM – Olivér Kiszely

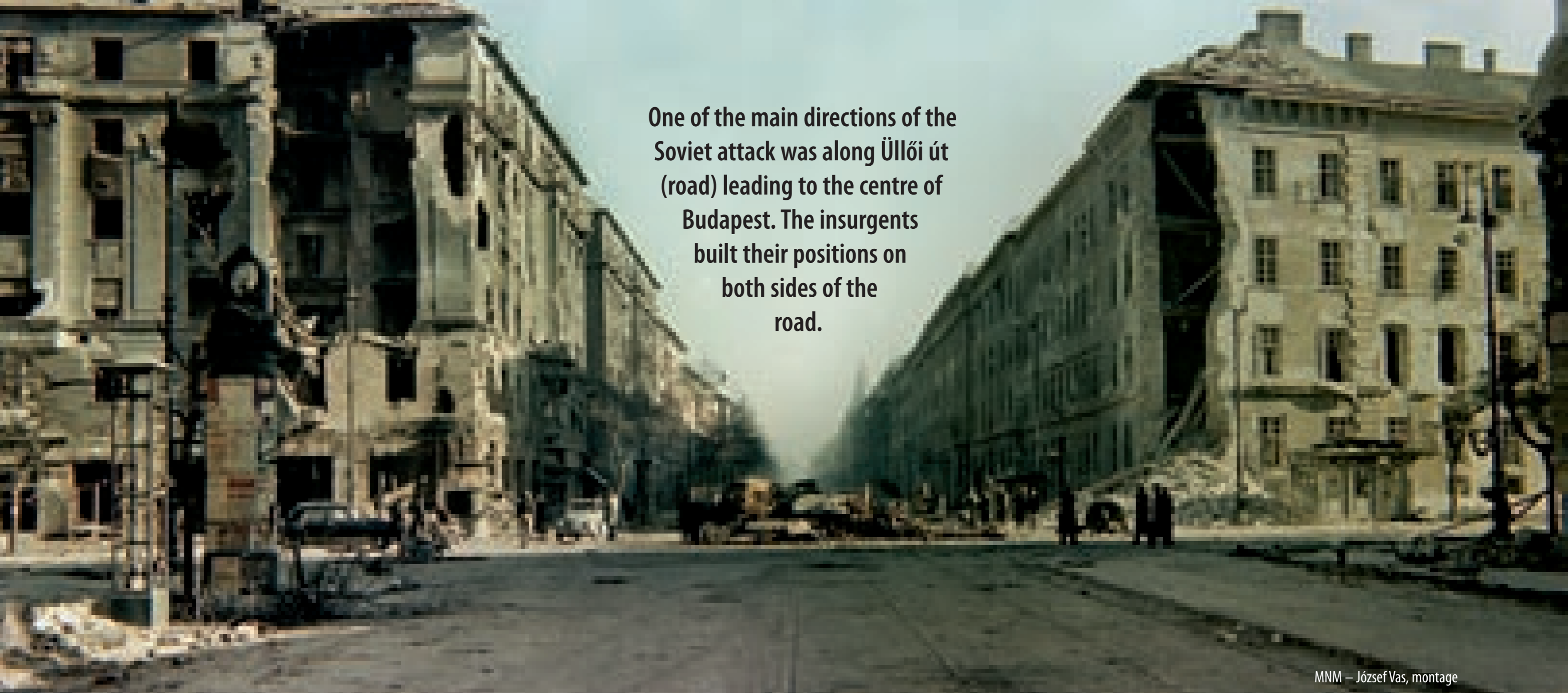
A barricade being built



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Machine-gun nest

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One of the main directions of the Soviet attack was along Üllői út (road) leading to the centre of Budapest. The insurgents built their positions on both sides of the road.

MNM – József Vas, montage

CORVIN PASSAGE – THE STRONGEST BASE OF THE UPRISING

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Insurgents at the Corvin cinema

With Molotov cocktails against the tanks



MTI – István Tóth

Armed girl with Molotov cocktail (petrol bomb). The insurgents, educated on Soviet partisan films, used these to set fire to the Soviet tanks attacking without infantry

MNM – Dr. Tibor Szempétery



The dead Soviet soldiers being put into coffins

25th October Slaughter at Parliament



Demonstrators making friends with Soviet tank crews

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THE BLOODIEST DAY

The crowd and the tanks went to Parliament to initiate talks with the representatives of power

The soldiers of the State Defence Authority – scared by the apparent friendship between the Soviet troops and the Hungarian demonstrators – , and the new Soviet units that arrived, opened fire at the crowd

MTI – Sándor Bojár



MTI – Sándor Bojár



According to some estimates the volleys claimed 150-200 dead and many wounded



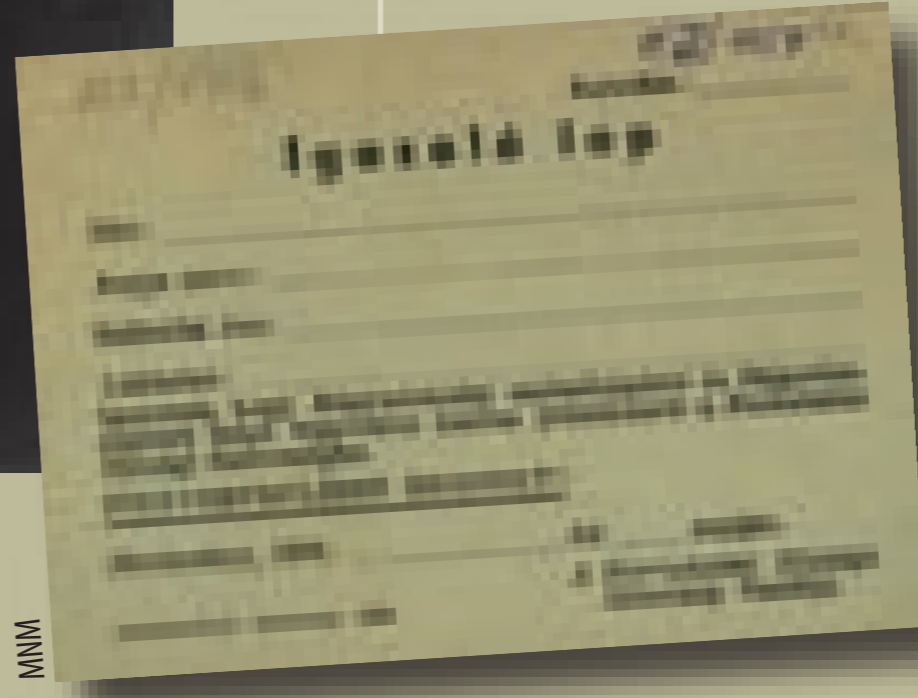
MNM – Dr. Dénes Hegedűs

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The workers of Ózd reading leaflets

The revolution of the countryside



ID card of the Revolutionary Youth Association of Jászberény. "I hereby certify that applied to participate in the armed fight for the freedom and independence of Hungary."

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... JÁSZBERÉNY, MOSONMAGYARÓVÁR, ÓZD, SZEGED ...

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Demonstration in Sátoraljaújhely, located in the North-East of Hungary

MMM – Béla Liebmann

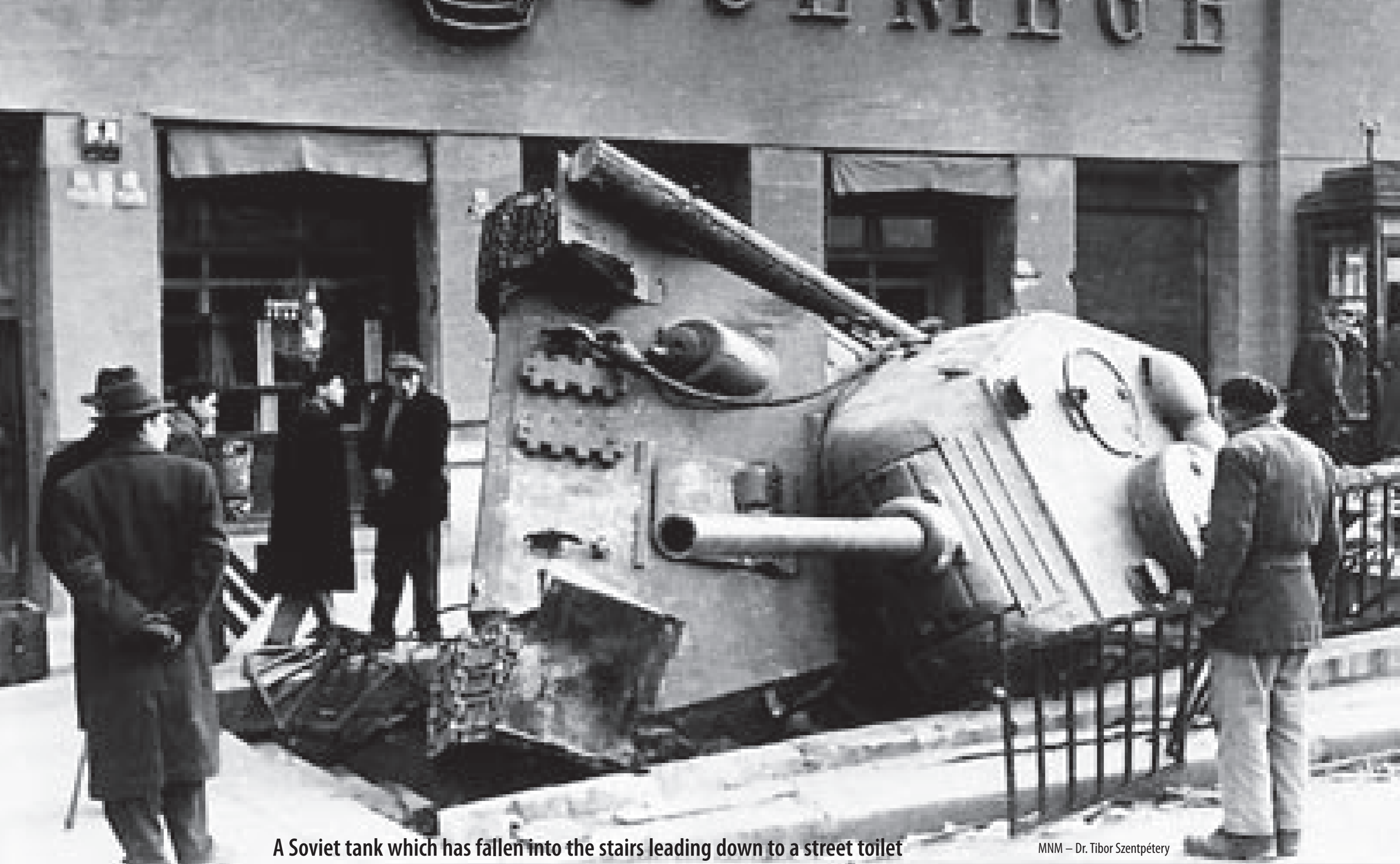


Demonstration in Szeged, a major town in South-East of Hungary

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The volley of the Border Guard claimed 52 dead in Mosonmagyaróvár, a town in Western Hungary. The funeral of the victims



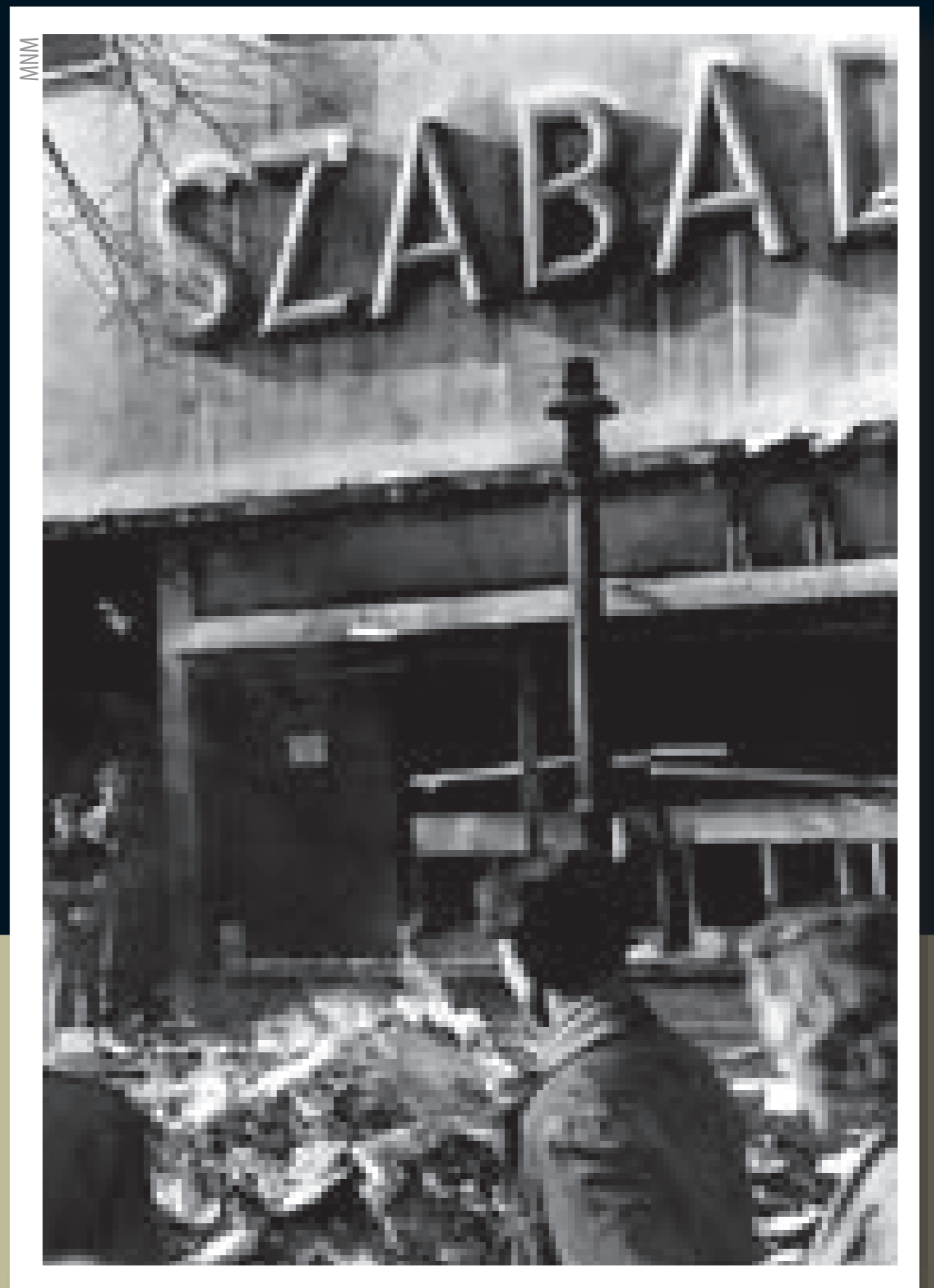
A Soviet tank which has fallen into the stairs leading down to a street toilet

MNM – Dr. Tibor Szentpétery

THE COLLAPSE OF POWER



A burnt-out police car in front of the National Theatre



Brochures being burnt in front of the headquarters of Szabad Nép (Free People), which the residents of Budapest dubbed the 'house of lies'.



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The forces loyal to the dictatorship, and the units of the State Defence Authority protecting them, withdrew into the metropolitan headquarters of the Communist Party. The insurgents besieged and occupied the building. Many of the soldiers of the State Defence Authority fell victim to mob-law. This was the last armed clash of the revolution's first phase.



A victory wreath on the gun-barrel of a Hungarian tank

The Soviet military intervention did not produce any results. After bloody fighting the old political leadership fled to the Soviet Union, and was replaced by the temporary government presided over by Imre Nagy. The new government recognised the organisations of the revolution, proclaimed an armistice and started talks with the representatives of Moscow. After Budapest the system collapsed in the whole country. Power was assumed all over the country by revolutionary organisations – National Councils, Workers' Councils. The Hungarian people overthrew the dictatorship by 29 October, the one party system was abolished, democracy established. On 1 November the government decided that the country would leave the Warsaw Pact and would declare its neutrality. Hungary was preparing for peace. The removal of ruins got under way, traffic was started, and the restarting of factories on strike was planned for Monday, 4th. November.

The revolution has won

The holed flag of the revolution flying as a symbol of victory over Corvin Passage. The state coat of arms made in the Soviet model has been cut out from the centre of the flag.



NATIONAL COUNCILS, WORKERS' COUNCILS



The remains of the Soviet memorial towering over the city became the symbol of the victory of the revolution



The coat of arms being removed from the Soviet memorial



Prime Minister Imre Nagy speaking on Free Kossuth Radio

MTI – Sándor Bojár

“Amidst the fighting for democratic national unity, independence was born”

(Radio speech of Prime Minister Imre Nagy)

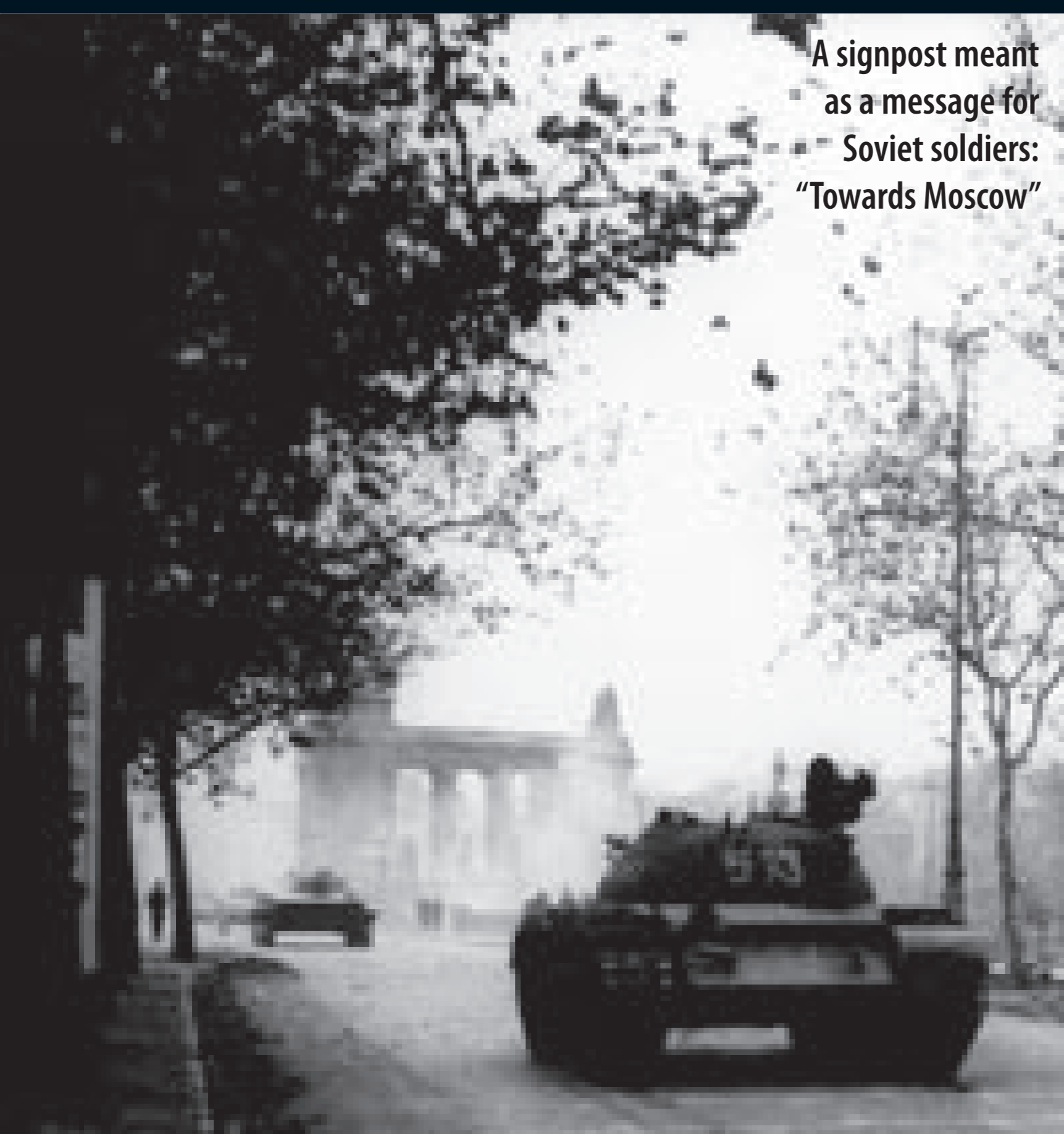


MTI – Sándor Mező

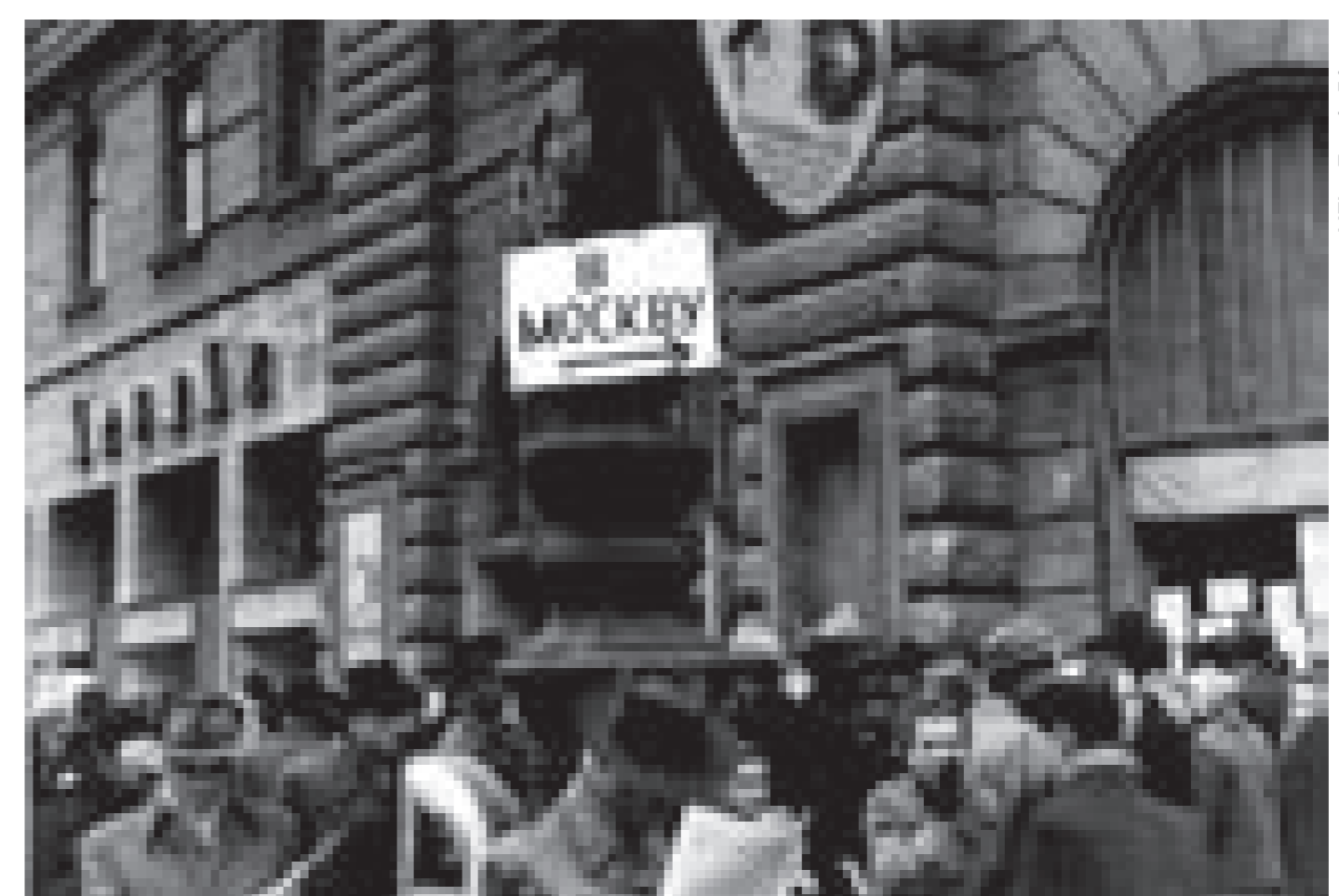
Defence minister Pál Maléter and army general Mikhail Malinin started talks about the complete withdrawal of the Soviet troops



The article of the paper of the Hungarian army about the freeing of József Mindszenty, archbishop of Esztergom.



A signpost meant as a message for Soviet soldiers: “Towards Moscow”



MTI – Tamás Fényes

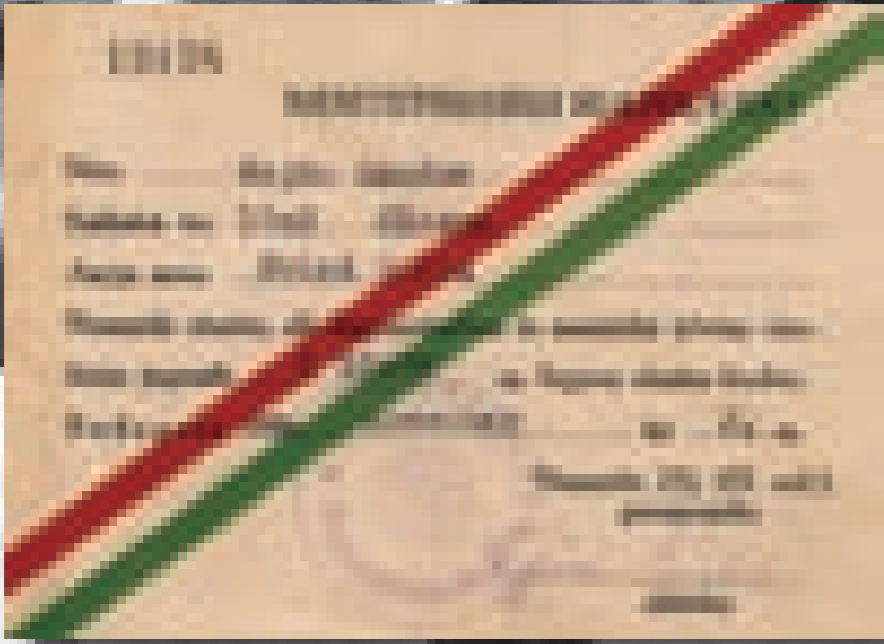
The withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Budapest finished on 31th October

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MNM – György Kiss



ID of a national guard. The revolutionary national guard was organised to maintain order



The streets of the city were covered with revolutionary placards and leaflets and with the papers and publications of the re-established political parties

MNM – Dr. Tibor Szentpétery

THE REBIRTH OF DEMOCRACY



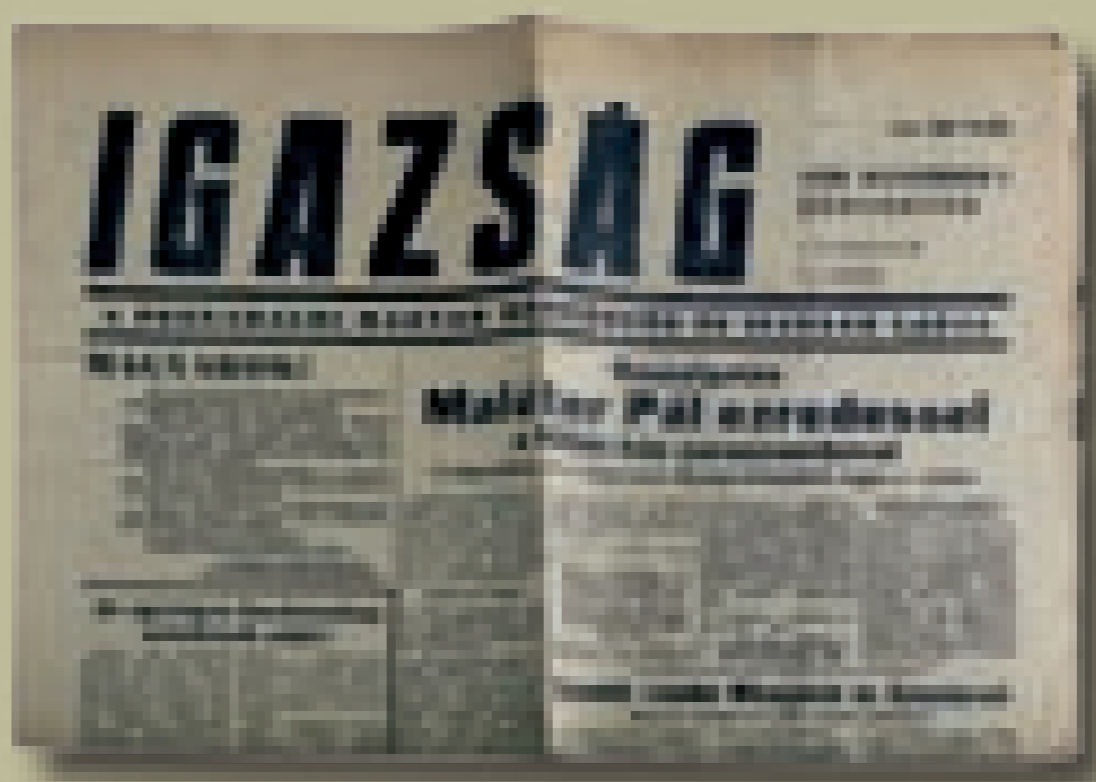
MNM – László Almásy

An assistance collection site of the Writers' Association: "The cleanliness of the revolution allows us to raise money this way for the family members of our martyrs"



MNM – Károly Eschner

The peasants donated food to the revolutionary capital



One of the papers of the revolution, Truth



The Polish population raising money for the Hungarian revolution

Swiss relief supply arriving at the airport of Budapest



Austrian Red Cross parcels being distributed in Győr

International humanitarian aid



The news about the Hungarian revolution gave rise to world wide enthusiasm and sympathy. Pope Pius XII in his encyclical letter of 26 October called for prayers for the victory of the uprising. The International Red Cross launched its first shipment of medicine, bandages and blood on 27 October, to be followed by many donations from several countries. The first solidarity actions en masse took place in Poland, but they were soon followed by movements of the people in other countries as well. Even the Hungarian students of Transylvania demonstrated, though they knew that they were facing serious retribution.



Solidarity demonstration in Warsaw



Temporary graves in Práter street. The fighting in Budapest claimed some 200 dead in Budapest up to mid-November

4th November

The second Soviet intervention

“At dawn today the Soviet troops launched an attack against our capital...”

(Prime Minister Imre Nagy)

The politicians of the major Western powers were afraid to change the zones of influence established at the Yalta conference in 1944. So much so that some of them used the events in Hungary to distract the attention of the international public from the military intervention in Suez. Khrushchov and the Soviet party leadership – despite the fact that publicly they were feeding promises to the Hungarians – soon decided that they would not let Hungary detach itself from the “empire”. At dawn on the 4th. of November – after the KGB, under the pretext of negotiations, had trapped the leaders of the Hungarian Army – the Soviet army invaded the country with some 2500 tanks and 100 thousand soldiers. At 5.20 am. the Hungarian Radio started to broadcast a dramatic announcement: “This is Imre Nagy speaking... At dawn today the Soviet army launched an attack against our capital with the obvious intent of overthrowing the legal democratic Hungarian government. Our troops are engaged in fighting. The government is in its place...”



The Museum of Applied Art

Soviet tank column moving into Budapest

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The militiamen of the new government were derisively called 'pufajkás' after their padded jackets they had received from the Soviet warehouses

"I call upon the Hungarian people not to consider as a legal authority the occupation army or the puppet government that it may set up!"

(István Bibó, Minister of State)

Communist restoration

The Soviet army with superior power was able to overcome armed resistance only after a week of fierce fighting. Prime minister Imre Nagy and his comrades fled to the Yugoslav embassy. The Kremlin created a puppet government led by János Kádár. The revolution had been crushed from a military point of view, but political power continued to belong to the Workers' Councils, who insisted on the restoration of democracy and the law. Their effective weapon was the general strike. By the beginning of December Kádár's new communist party, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party and the government, realised that they were unable to break the resistance of the Workers' Councils with political means. Instead they resorted to open violence. They arrested the leaders of the revolution, declared martial law, and dispersed the unarmed protests with bloody volleys. Only the volley in Salgótarján on 8th December claimed more than 100 victims. Despite the ever increasing terror, resistance lasted until March 1957



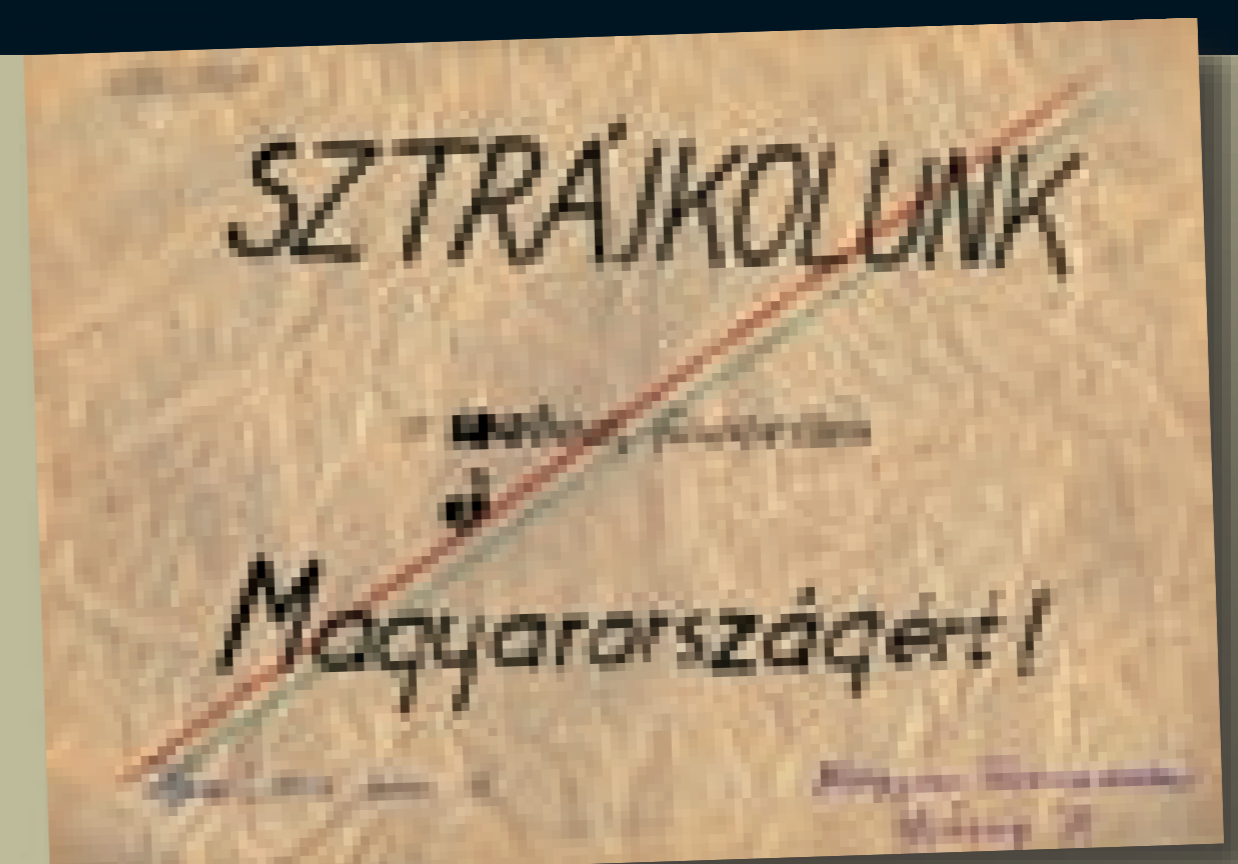
MTI – Jenő Papp

The members of the government led by János Kádár (fourth person from the left)



MTI – Tamás Fényes

An election of Workers' Councils



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A typical leaflet: "We are on strike for a free, independent Hungary!"



A place of execution in the Kozma street prison in Budapest. The majority of the revolutionaries were executed here



MTI – Imre Földi

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Imre Nagy making his last statement on 15th June, 1958. The death sentence was carried out the next day

Retribution

By December – under the protection of the Soviet tanks – the repressive organisations of the communist state were re-established and the restoration of dictatorship got under way. Kádár's proclamation of 4 November promised immunity to the participants of the revolution, but despite this retribution and cruelty on an unprecedented scale in Hungarian history began. The number of those executed went to over 300. Imre Nagy and several members of his government were condemned to be hanged. The last death sentence was carried out in August 1961. 22 thousand people were sentenced to imprisonment and 12 thousand were interned. Over 200 thousand people did not wait for retribution, they fled the country – mainly into and through Austria. A report of the political police of October 1957 still described 1 million and 200 thousand people – 20-25% of the country's adult population – as potential enemies, to be kept under observation.



MTI – Béla Jármai

The insurgents of Széna square before the court. Five out of the seventeen defendants were executed

MTI – Ferenc Vígovszky



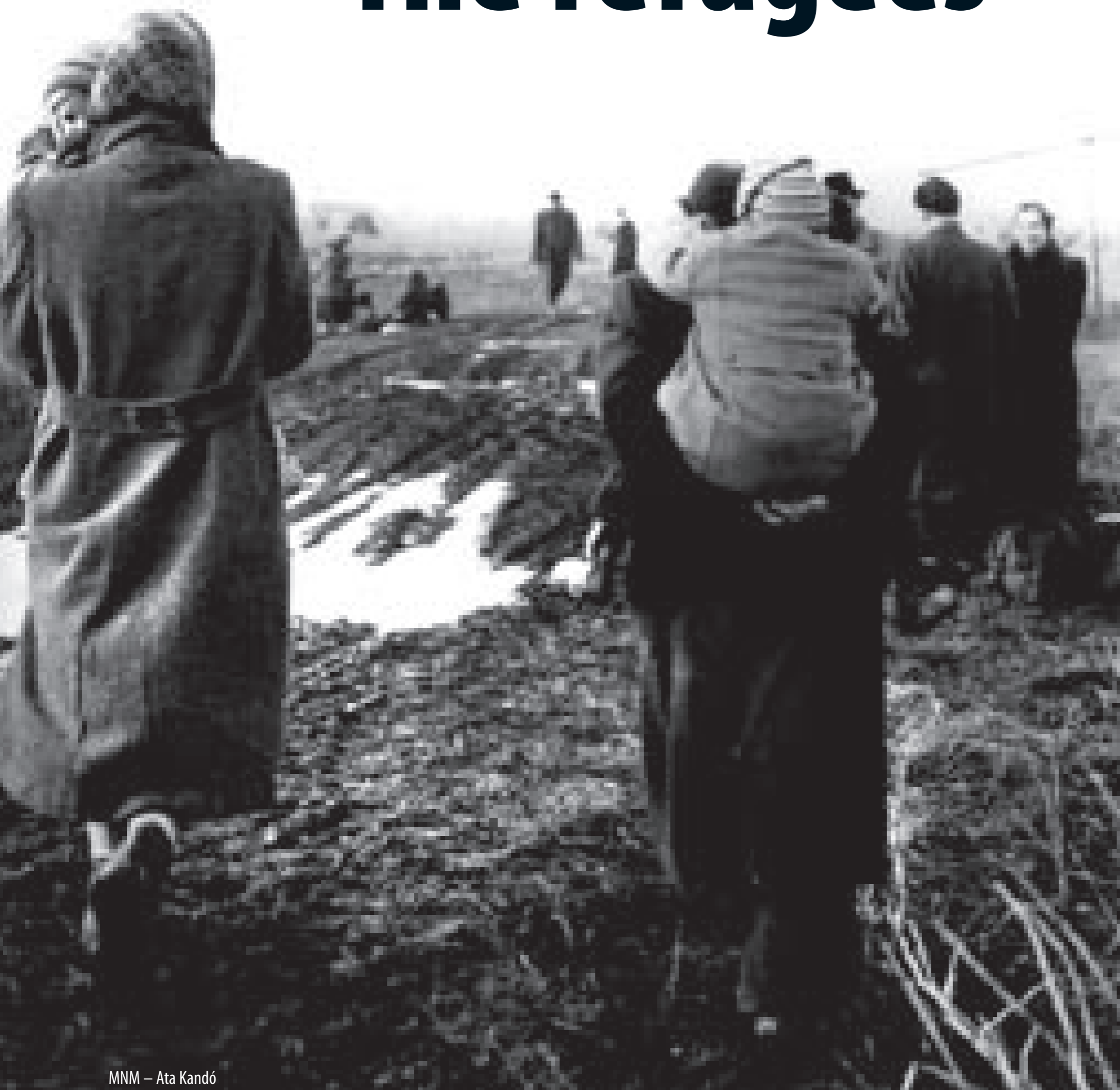
The national guardsmen of Pomáz sentenced to death in summary proceedings by the Military Court of Budapest

Plot 301 of the public cemetery in Budapest-Rákoskeresztúr, where those executed were interred in unmarked graves

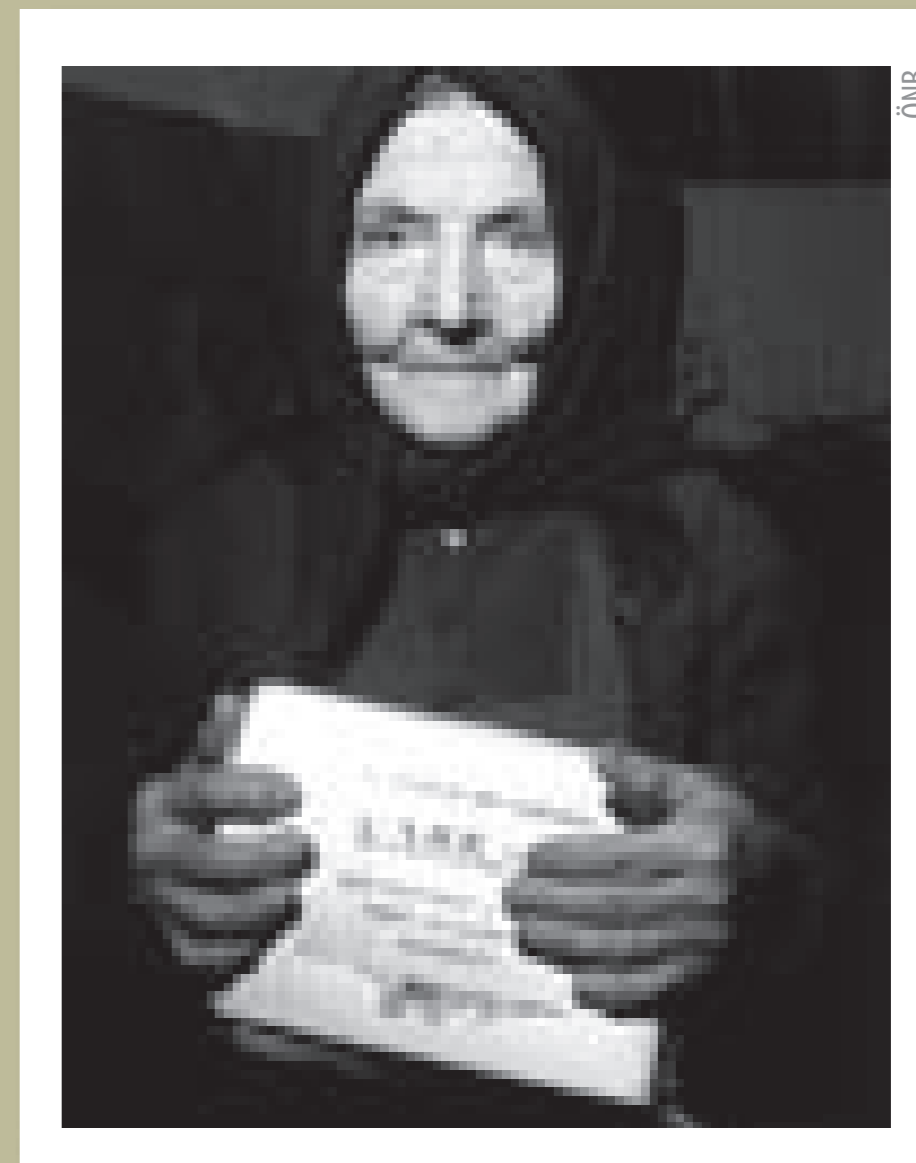


MNM – Árpád Farkas

The refugees



MNM – Ata Kándó



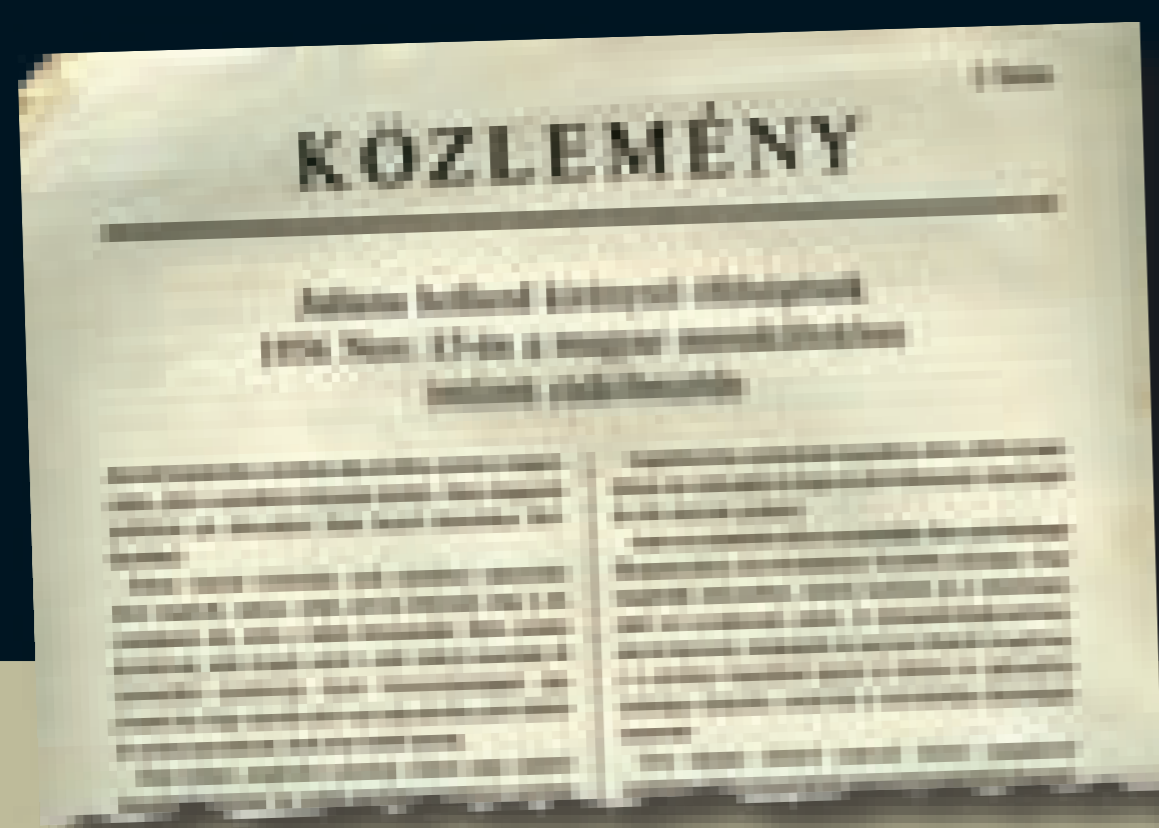
ÖNB

Old peasant woman in a refugee camp in Austria

Refugees on the Austrian-Hungarian border

“During the recent weeks our thoughts always flew to the Hungarians”
(Julianna, Queen of Holland)

The world received the refugees with great sympathy, the UN put the Hungarian problem on its agenda, but could not give substantial help. In 1962 a secret agreement was made according to which the Hungarian government would grant amnesty to the majority of those sentenced in the wake of '56 if the UN took the so-called Hungarian issue off its agenda. The revolution of 1956 put an end to the European expansion of communist ideology as controlled by the Soviet Union, and undermined illusions cherished for communist systems for good

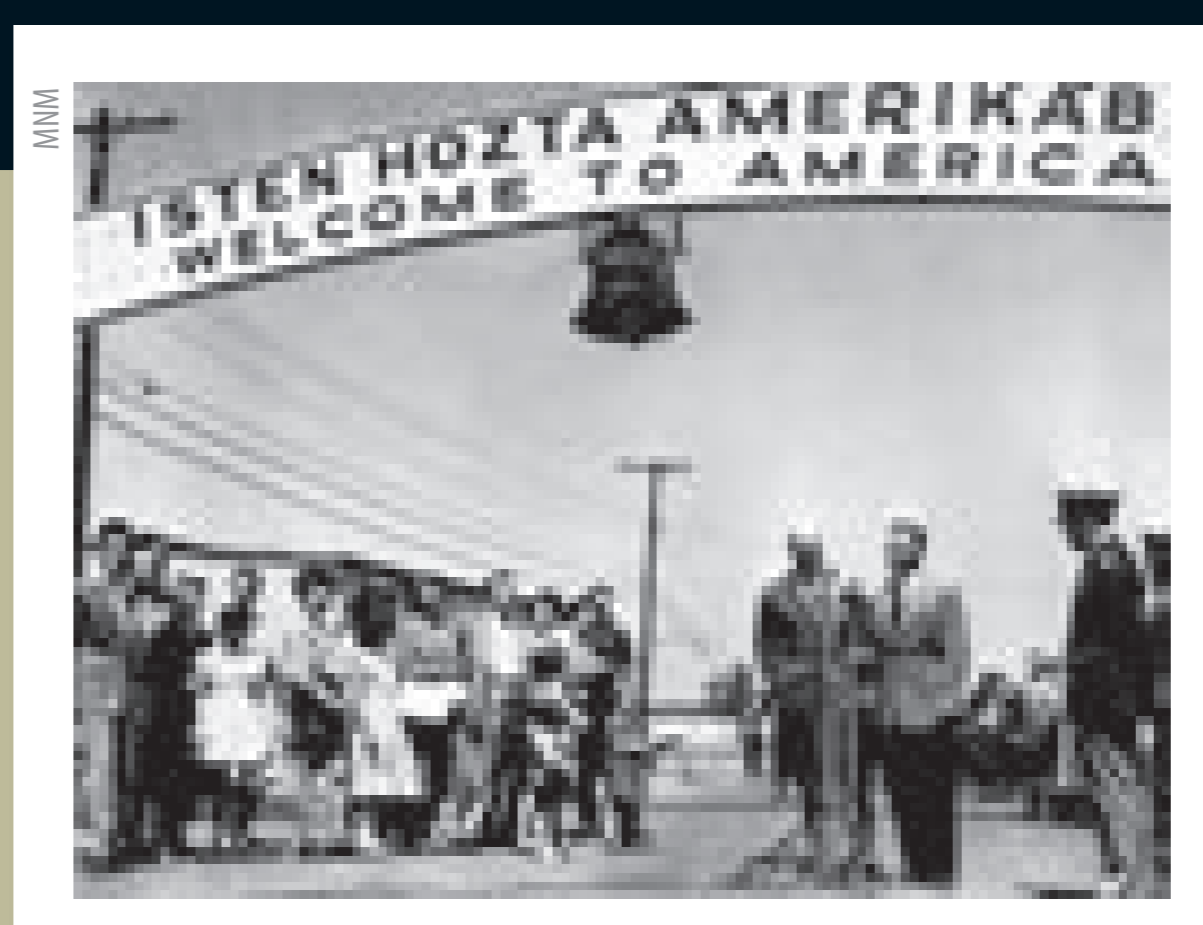


The message of Julianna, Queen of Holland, to the refugees: “During the recent weeks our thoughts always flew to the Hungarians, since the whole nation has been fighting for its freedom with such courage...”



MNM – Ata Kándó

Refugees in a camp in Austria



The first refugees arriving in the United States of America

International solidarity

Demonstration against the crushing of the Hungarian revolution in Washington



MNM – Leslie A. Toth



The title page of Time magazine on 7 January, 1957: "Hungarian Patriot, Man of the Year"



MNM

An invitation card for the first night in Germany of the documentary film "Hungary in Flames"



Ullsteinbild

Demonstrators in West-Berlin protesting against the suppression of the Hungarian freedom fight



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József Kóvágó, the mayor of Budapest, Anna Kéthly, minister of state of the Imre Nagy government and head of the Social Democratic Party, and Béla Király, commander of the National Guard represented Hungary before the UN investigation committee in January 1957

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A placard about the reburial



The reburial of Imre Nagy and his fellow martyrs on 16 June, 1989. The funeral ceremony at Hősök square

1989: THE MOMENTS OF FREEDOM

The proclamation of the republic on 23rd. of October, 1989

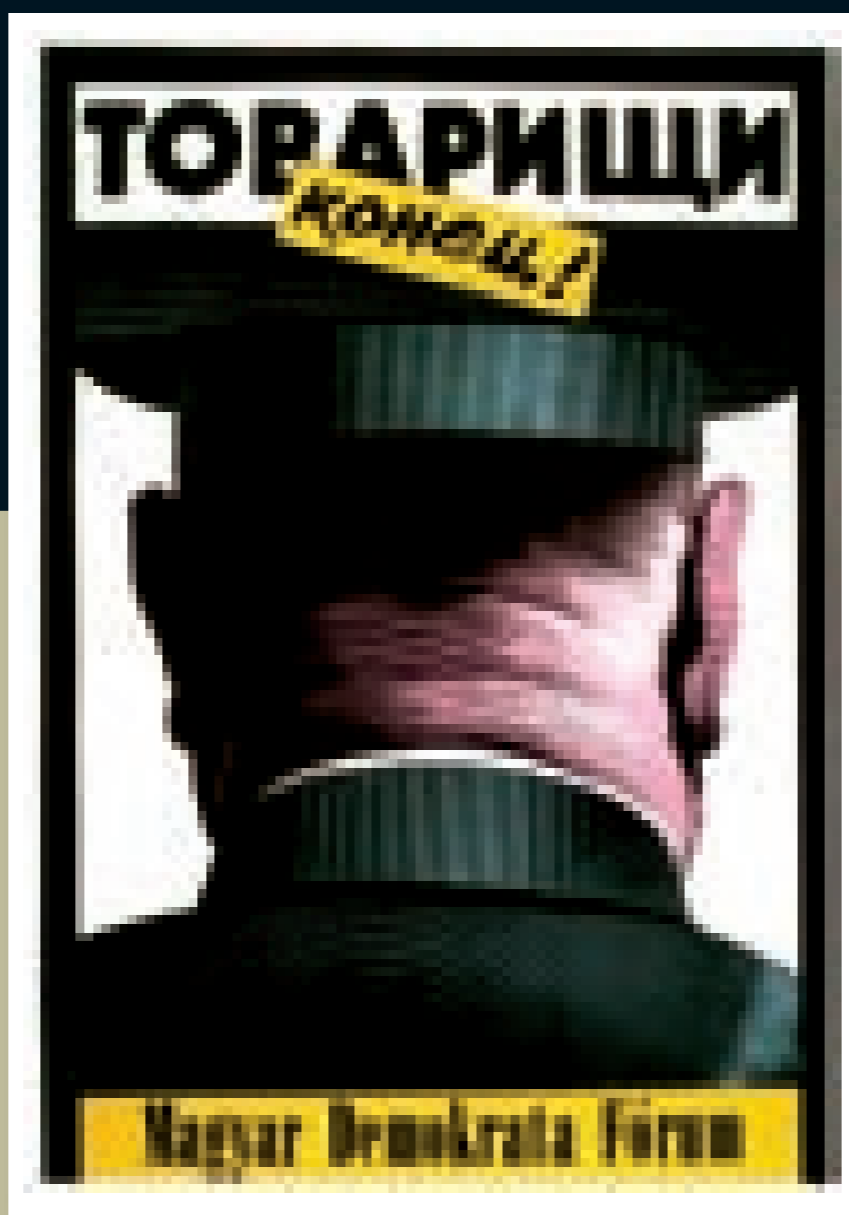


MMM – Lajos Karasz

The Iron Curtain being dismantled



MMM – Ferenc Rédei



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Comrades, finished! – announced the placard. By 1991 the last Soviet troops had left the territory of Hungary

The Kádár regime was doing its best to denigrate and suppress the memory of the revolution in all possible ways. János Kádár was afraid of a new “56” uprising until the end of his life, and in order to avoid it he was making concessions from the middle of the 1960s. By the 1970s – as people aptly put it – Hungary had become the “most cheerful barracks” of the socialist block. However, the reserves of the economy became depleted by the 1980s and it was only possible to maintain the standard of living with foreign loans. With the country fully in debt the only way-out was the liberalisation of the economy and the democratic transformation of the political system and institutions. The coup de grace for the party state was the rehabilitation of the revolution of 1956. At the demand of the opposition Imre Nagy and his fellow martyrs were reburied in 1989. It was in Hungary that the “Iron curtain” dividing Europe broke for the first time. The changes in Hungary catalysed the political processes that led to the break-down of the communist systems in the region and the collapse of the Berlin Wall.

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 AND THE
HUNGARIAN NEWS SERVICE



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