

# *Light on Hungary*

A review by **JESSICA SMITH**

**THE TRUTH ABOUT HUNGARY**, by Herbert Aptheker, *Mainstream Publishers*, New York, 1957. 256 pages. Cloth \$3.00; Paper \$2.00.

**T**HE PUBLICATION of this book is an important event, especially in view of the new effort to stir up anti-Soviet hysteria through the publication of a one-sided report on Hungary by a Committee of the United Nations (which remains silent on the bloody French repression of the Algerian independence movement.) Dr. Aptheker's book, representing a massive amount of research and carefully documented from a multitude of conservative and non-Communist sources, is a powerful antidote to the poisonous UN report.

Dr. Aptheker reviews Hungary's historical background, stressing the fascist-dictatorial political form adopted after World War I and maintained, following the suppression of the short-lived Bela Kun government, for twenty-five years. He describes the extreme chauvinism of its ruling circles; the dominant and reactionary role of the Catholic Church; the feudal land system; the weakness of the trade unions; the rampant, legalized anti-Semitism; the subservience of the Social

Democratic Party to the Horthy dictatorship, which continued even during the latter's war alliance with Hitler; the extent to which Nazism infected large sections of the population and the resultant limited nature of the resistance movement during the war.

The author then traces the steps, following the liberation of Hungary from Hitler by the Red Army, that led to the formation of the Hungarian People's Republic in 1949. One might wish at this point some consideration as to whether Hungary's fascist background should not have made advisable a slower pace in the building of socialism than was then undertaken. Yet, at the time, many non-Communist participants quoted by Dr. Aptheker conceded the great importance of the role of the Hungarian Workers' (Communist) Party in pushing through the Land Reform Act when others held back, of their initiative in the nationalization of basic industries, secularization of the schools and other urgent reforms. The book contains a detailed account of the subsequent course of internal developments, the mistakes and crimes of Hungary's leaders and later efforts, too little and too late, at rectification. It covers both

positive and negative aspects of Hungarian-Soviet relations, and gives a detailed account of the origins and course of the October uprising and the events that followed.

In a particularly important section on "Counter-Revolution and the Cold War," Dr. Aptheker adduces a mass of evidence from official sources and numerous public and newspaper reports, "establishing the fact that the United States has, in fact, been practicing a policy to damage or overthrow, by counter-revolutionary violence, the Socialist Governments," and that special attention was given to Hungary in these efforts. He shows that the destruction of socialism was the implicit purpose of the cold war as launched by President Truman, and its announced purpose when "liberation" became official government policy under the Republican administration. He traces the implementation of this policy through the 1950 Lodge Act providing for the recruitment of an anti-Communist "Foreign Legion" to be trained on U.S. soil, the 1951 Mutual Security Act under which \$100,000,000 a year is allocated for the promotion of subversion in the Soviet Union and Eastern European Countries, and the well known activities of the Central Intelligence Agency in this direction. He gives a wealth of data on the activities of various anti-Communist groups with American backing both in this country and Europe, the Voice of America, Radio Free Europe and so on, and on American support to various reactionary Hungarian emigre groups plotting to return to power.

One does not necessarily have to believe that all these forces conspired together to bring about the specific events of October 23 which began, as Dr. Aptheker makes clear, as part of a legitimate protest movement. But no fairminded person could read the record of U.S. policies without concluding that they played a very large role in preparing the ground as well as the active reactionary forces for the transformation of justified protest into an actual counter-revolutionary uprising. When one adds to this the unbridled terror against all Communists that followed, the coming to fore of the clerical-fascists as the Nagy government lost all control, the mobilization of the fascist scum of Europe to support the insurgents, the calls

for military intervention by the West at the risk of a new world war, then the question of what would have been the alternative to the use of Soviet troops must be squarely faced. Dr. Aptheker states that alternative in these words: "At the least, a full scale civil war in Hungary (a Korea in the middle of Europe), at the worst, the ultimate catastrophe to mankind, a Third World War."

To be fully cognizant of the role of the Western "liberators" and internal reactionary forces both in preparing for and taking advantage of the tragic events in Hungary, is to absolve neither the Hungarian Communist leaders nor the Soviet Government of the errors which made it possible for such a counter-revolutionary situation to develop. Dr. Aptheker sums up these errors as follows:

"1) A failure to properly evaluate the national feelings of the Hungarian people; 2) a persistence in a badly one-sided economic policy resulting in a halt to the improvement of the material conditions of the masses, and for certain periods a decline in such conditions which never, at any time, had exceeded rather limited standards; 3) an insistence on monolithic unity in all spheres of life, enforced with terrible rigidity, deteriorating into crass administrative bullying and intolerable violations of legality, humanity, and sheer decency; 4) a failure to preserve the revolutionary clan and purity of the Marxist-Leninist Party."

The question of how such distortions of socialism could have taken place, remains beclouded. For this the author is not to blame. Such an analysis must await fuller information than is yet available about interrelated events of the Stalin era in both the Soviet Union and Hungary.

Dr. Aptheker pulls no punches on the sources of popular discontent in Hungary. He emphasizes that "without the mistakes and crimes of those building socialism" the tragic events in Hungary of October-November, 1956, would never have occurred." Yet, while considering these mistakes and crimes decisive in the actual outburst of the upheaval, his final conclusion is that "the fundamental sources of the upheaval were in the machinations and pressures of imperialism."

The present reviewer would put the two sources in more even balance. With full

recognition that imperialism by its very nature must seek to destroy socialism, and of the magnitude of its efforts to accomplish this, there remains the responsibility of the leaders of a socialist state to create such a solid foundation in the support of its people through fuller democracy, fuller satisfaction of their needs, and devotion to the high moral and humanist principles that must characterize a true socialist society, that a situation so suited to imperialism's purposes as that which developed in Hungary, would be impossible.

Believers in socialism and participants in socialist societies thus have the double responsibility of making the kind of searching re-evaluation and correction of

past policies which would prevent recurrence in any socialist society existing or to come of the conditions out of which the Hungarian events arose, and of intensifying their efforts to bring about an end to the cold war which the imperialists are using for their destructive purposes.

Among the requirements listed by Dr. Aptheker to achieve this are the right to dissent and protection of the full legal rights of each citizen in a socialist society, extension of democracy, dedication to humaneness, improved living conditions. His book is an indispensable arsenal of the facts needed to understand the Hungarian situation and the lessons to be drawn from it. It should be widely read.