

Hungary 1956-2006 and the Elites' Propaganda*

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Whilst the Western elites have long been preparing themselves to “celebrate”, together with the “people” of Hungary, the fiftieth anniversary of the 1956 insurrection (invariably presented by the Western media as “a heroic challenge to Soviet domination”, or “a revolution against communist dictatorship” and the like), the “people” have once again disappointed the representatives of the elites who had assembled in Budapest last week. As a British historian wrote when the mass demonstrations began last month: “then, students and nationalists ripped up the communist flag. Now they tear down the EU flag”.^[1] But the similarities do not end there. The elite of 1956 called those who were in revolt at the time “counter-revolutionaries” (i.e. anti-communists) and ‘fascists’, even though the vast majority of them were demanding the socialist self-management of society. Today’s elite simply calls today’s protestors “fascists”, even though they are simply expressing their indignation against the system of the capitalist market economy and its political complement, representative “democracy”, which they have been “enjoying” since the time of the collapse of “actually existing socialism” – a fact which has led to a vast concentration of wealth at the hands of the new economic elite, to which the “socialist” multimillionaire prime minister belongs. It was the economic austerity measures of his government and the fact that he confessed to lying blatantly in order to cover up the deep economic crisis, that have given rise to the present eruption of anger.

Today, confusion is systematically being spread from various quarters on the significance of the 1956 insurrection. No wonder that the Hungarian president, speaking at a gala concert for the representatives of the foreign elites, complained: “people are not only celebrating separately, they are also celebrating different things... the fashionable slogan is that there were many 1956s”.^[2] There is no doubt, of course, that in this insurrection, as in any other insurrection in History, several heterogeneous elements took part: from reformist social democrats to revolutionary socialists and from nationalists to “counter-revolutionaries” – although there is no evidence to support that the participation of this last group was, in any way, organised, as almost all historians agree on the spontaneity of the insurrection. This is in contrast to the recent ‘pink revolutions’ which led to the establishment of pro-Western regimes in Ukraine, Georgia and elsewhere, where Western Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) –most of which are well known for their role in promoting the values and indirectly the interests of the market economy and representative ‘democracy’– played a leading organisational role. It is, therefore, far from sufficient to rely on the ‘official’ interpretation of History (either Western or Eastern), which inevitably expresses the views of the dominant elites, in order to assess the nature of a multidimensional event like an insurrection.

In the case of the 1956 insurrection, there are indisputable documents which refute the allegations made by the elites of “actually existing socialism” that the rebels were mainly counter-revolutionaries, and those made by Western elites that the rebels were simply supporters of Western ‘democracy’ who were fighting against “communist dictatorship” and “soviet domination”, as well as those made by social democrats and Left reformists alike that the rebels were simply seeking to install some form of market ‘socialism’. In fact, the resolution published by the newly formed National Council of Free Trade Unions (a Federation of the recently dissolved and Reformed trade unions) on Friday October 26, 1956, was highly indicative and summarised the demands put forward by hundreds of Workers Councils throughout the country.

The far-reaching demands were classified as political and economic demands. The main political demand was “that a broad government, comprising representatives of the Trade Unions and of youth, be constituted with Imre Nagy as its president.” However, this demand was complemented by another demand “that the police and the army be reinforced by a national guard composed of workers and young people”, the aim clearly being to secure a more effective rebel control over the government of the reformist Nagy. But it was the obviously revolutionary character of the economic demands that made apparent the real nature of the insurrection, the main one being for the “constitution of Workers' Councils in all the factories to establish:

- a) workers management and
- b) a radical transformation of the system of central planning and direction of the economy by the state”.

It is particularly significant that the above formulation of the demand for workers councils clearly differentiated the proposed system from the Yugoslav system of ‘worker control’ which, in fact, was a mixture of market ‘socialism’ and planning. In other words, the economic demands expressed what we may call today the main element of an economic democracy: worker’s self-determination with respect not only to the conditions of work and the abolition of hierarchical structures and relations, but also with respect to the basic economic decisions concerning production and distribution. So, the crucial element, which was understood by the 1956 rebels, was that “the objective of the Revolution is not just a change in the formal ownership of Property but the abolition of all special strata in society, managing the activities of others from the outside.” [3]

It is, therefore, clear that the main reason why the capitalist West did not intervene to prevent the violent suppression of the Hungarian insurrection by the Soviet army was not simply the parallel Suez crisis caused by the Anglo-French invasion of Egypt (in collaboration with the Zionists), nor even their Yalta commitments. The main reason why Western capitalists restricted themselves to oral protests was the nature of the insurrection itself, which was not only anti-bureaucratic, but also purely anti-capitalist. This was in contrast to the Polish insurrection in Poznan —a few months before the Hungarian insurrection— later to be followed by the Solidarity movement which clearly *was* dominated by counter-revolutionaries who, to a large extent, were influenced, if not controlled, by obscurantist religious forces backed by the West. It was also in contrast to the 1968 “Spring of Prague” which was dominated by reformists of the ‘social market’ variety. On the other hand, in Hungary in 1956, the aim of most rebels was not simply to replace one form of power with another, but to institute workers’ self-management, i.e. the

effective abolition of all forms of power. It should be remembered within this context that, as early as March 1919, Hungary proclaimed itself a Soviet Republic (without any Russian assistance) —only to be soaked in blood shortly afterwards by the White Terror which followed this proclamation.

Indicatively, as the *Observer* reported at the time, “... the (Hungarian) Government's plan to divert Workers' Councils into innocuous channels by 'legalising' them as organs of economic self-government, somewhat on the Yugoslav model, but denying them the right to put forward political demands or issue a newspaper, has merely led to continued deadlock in Budapest.”^[4] But it was Peter Fryer, special correspondent of the British Communist Party's organ *Daily Worker*, (which censored and finally stopped publishing his reports altogether) who aptly summarised the significance of the 1956 insurrection when he wrote that the Hungarian Revolution showed “the ability of ordinary working men and women to take their affairs into their own hands and manage them without a special caste of officials.”^[5]

* The above text is an extended version of an article which was first published in the fortnightly column of Takis Fotopoulos in the mass circulation Athens daily *Eleftherotypia* on 27/10/2006

[1] Mark Almond, “Truth in the free market”, *The Guardian* (20/9/2006).

[2] Daniel McLaughlin, “President urges unity as opposition boycott events”, *The Guardian* (24/10/2006).

[3] Andy Anderson, *Hungary 56*, (London: Solidarity, 1964).

[4] *The Observer* (2/12/1956).

[5] Peter Fryer, *Hungarian Tragedy* (Dobson Books, 1956).