

Note by André de Staercke on the situation in Hungary (27 October 1957)

Caption: On 27 October 1957, André de Staercke, Permanent Representative of Belgium to the Council of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), drafts a confidential note on the political situation in Hungary.

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Confidential

The situation in Hungary

Note from the Deputy Secretary-General for Political Affairs

The revolution in Hungary has now been raging for three and a half days and shows no signs of abating.

It erupted on Tuesday evening. A large but peaceful demonstration had been held in the afternoon to demand a series of reforms that went further than those promised to date by the government. At the end of the afternoon, Erno Gero, the Party Secretary, returned from a visit to Marshal Tito and delivered on the radio an incendiary Stalinist speech. Armed groups then began to roam the streets, and, the next morning, a genuine revolt broke out. The Central Committee met during the night and replaced Prime Minister Andras Hegedus by the pro-Tito leader Imre Nagy.

In the early hours of the morning, Soviet forces clashed with the rebels. It is not known who called in the Soviet troops nor who gave the order to deploy, but it is unlikely that Imre Nagy did little else but to resign himself to accepting the *fait accompli*, and it is doubtful that the Politburo was able to review the situation. It would appear that the worst damage was done by Erno Gero and Nikita Khrushchev. [...] Since Wednesday, the military situation on the streets of Budapest has been that the two sides have by turns been advancing and falling back and that the revolution is spreading to the provinces. The Communists have retained control of most of the important public buildings in the capital, including the radio station. However, entire neighbourhoods of the city appear to be in the hands of the rebels. Large regions in the south and west of the country are also up in arms, and Hungary's second industrial city, Miskolc, located in the north-east, appears to have been taken by the rebels. They have also taken over at least two regional radio stations. According to reports received this morning (Saturday), Soviet troop reinforcements from Ukraine have reached Hungary. Most correspondents acknowledge that the Hungarian army has done little or nothing to crush the revolt, and many individual soldiers have joined the rebels.

Imre Nagy has appealed several times to the rebels and has issued a series of ultimatums demanding their surrender. While a few have taken up the offer of an amnesty, the revolution has nevertheless continued to spread. However, some political concessions have been made. Erno Gero has been replaced by the pro-Tito leader Janos Kadar, and Imre Nagy has promised to ask the Russians to withdraw as soon as order has been restored. He has also pledged to put together a *national front* government, including some non-Communists. However, as of this morning, he had not released the names of the new cabinet members. He is probably having trouble finding individuals whom the people trust.

The question now is whether a government with Communist members, but not a Soviet military government, might help to stabilise the situation. In Poland, the solution has been overtaken by events. Either the Russians must bow to the will of the people and withdraw, or they will have to intervene on a massive scale. The cost of the latter option in terms of human lives would be appalling, and we must try to find the means to convince them that they would do better simply to withdraw.