Hungary 1956 – Czechoslovakia 1968 Essay, Research Paper

History teaches us that dictatorships can only be defeated by the very people it is imposed upon. During the Cold-War foreign relations experts, journalists and politicians of both the Soviet Union and the United States, had agreed on one thing: the democratization of Central and Eastern Europe as well as the re-unification of Germany could only be achieved by US military action which would ultimately lead to World War III. Non of the so called experts even considered the possibility that the native populations of these oppressed countries could free themselves. And indeed this is exactly what have happened in 1988-89. But these dramatic changes couldn’t have occured without examples of patriotic resistance against Communism. During the 1950s and 1960s the three Central European Soviet satellite countries of Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia had their own fights against the inhuman Communist regimes that were imposed on them by Russia. Although the 1956 Pozdan Riot is an important example of anti-Stalinist resistance, it did not have the far reaching political effects that the 1956 Hungarian Revolution or the Prague Spring had. Both “56″ and the “Spring of Prague” were crushed by the Soviets who by doing so revealed their true face and the nature of “Communist brotherhood” to the world. Both have forced the Russians to re-think their position in Central-Europe, and eventually forced changes and reforms in their Governments’ domestic policies. Although these great uprisings have simular aspects they also have very important differences. The Hungarian Revolution in 1956 was not a sudden reform movement as the much shorter Prague Spring was, but the end product of political and economic reforms that started more than three years earlier. In June 27 1953 the Central Committee of the Hungarian Communist Party condemned the Stalinist regime that ruled the country, the “New Course” reform program which was introduced by Imre Nagy, a liberal communist and patriot, was put into effect. Nagy was installed as chairman of the Council of Ministers. The political reforms and the economic liberalization outlined in the New Course promised more consumer goods for “regular people, negotiated not forced collectivization of the farms, and the end of the police terror. Although no longer the Premier, Rakosi still remained head of the Party a powerful post which he used to sabotage Nagy’s reform movement. After a one and a half year period of limited political reforms Rakosi was reinstated by Khrushcev who himself replaced Malenkov in the Kremlin. It was believed in the Soviet Communist Party that only Rakosi could prevent the collapse of the whole system in Hungary. The intencified police terror which was unleashed on liberal Communists and on the general population by Rakosi even frightened the Soviets, and after a writer’s revolt in Budapest and a successful strike in Poland, he was ousted again in July 1956. His successor was Erno Gero a hard line Stalinist himself, had no intention of introducing reforms. Imre Nagy out of office and virtually without political power had no chance to put the New Course into effect, so he turned to extraparty organizations in an effort to “induce the Communist Party itself to join the reform movement”. The rewived Patriotic Peoples Front openly supported Nagy and quickly gained members from the intelligentsia, but also undermined the authority of the Party which was a sin that the Kremlin couldn’t pardon. Throughout these years one of the most important and effective sources of liberal ideas were the writer’s unions such as the Petofi Circle and their newspapers like the “Irodalmi Ujsag”. They supported the reform movement and much like their Czechoslovak counterparts like “Literarni listy” a decade later, published the demands of the revolutionary students. On October 19th to the 22th, 1956 the students in three Hungarian universities held meetings to show their support to the Polish reform movement, and to write down a list of their demands. One of the student’s 16 points called for a multiparty system:”We demand general elections…with universal suffrage, secret ballots, and the participation of several parties to elect a new parliament.” They also called for the release of pro-democracy leader Cardinal Mindszenty, and for the withrawal of Russian troops stationed in the Hungary since the end of the Second World War. Nagy was against the idea since he new that it was an open invitation for the Soviet Army to invade the country. On October 23rd about 250,000 people, many of them soldiers, gathered in front of the Parliament building. The crowd burst into tears after singing the National Hymn, and started to call for the resignation of the Government. They wanted Imre Nagy as President, but Nagy was not yet in the position to act. After the Radio refused to broadcast the demands of the students, a large crowd, mostly students, went to the Radio building and started to demand entry. But the students did not expect the secret police, AVO, to be there. The AVO started to shoot the demonstraters and the park in front of the station was soon filled with the bodies of dead university students. This was the spark that set off the armed revolution which was led by the workers who knew were the arms were stored. Like in many of the great revolutions the police and the Armed Forces did not attempt to stop the revolt but changed sides and helped them in every way they could. On the 24th Erno Gero, still in power, called in the Russian troops to restore order. Mikoyan, a member of the Soviet Presidium, arrived from Moscow only to fire Gero and to instruct Nagy. Believing that the Russian tanks will quickly solve any problem he returned to the USSR. However the Russian troops first did not want to fire on the students, in fact many of them joined the revolution. On the 25th about 120.000 people and 50 tanks with Hungarian tricolor on their top, gathered in the Parliament square when the AVO started to fire on the people from the roof tops. The Russian tanks blew them away quickly but somehow they got the impression that they were being attacked by revolutionaries who themselves had heavy casualties as the result of the shooting. Soon a bloody battle developed between the Russian and the Hungarian troops. Many Russian refused to fire, many deserted and at the end 250 tanks were destroyed and close to 10,000 people were dead. On October 29 the withrawal of Soviet troops was announced trough the radio, and “agonized appeals were made to the rebels to stop the fighting because they had won”. Moscow issued a statement in which the full equality of the socialist countries was embraced. The printed statement acknowledged the mistakes made by the Soviet Union and its satellites, and the right to National independence. This document was delivered by Mikoyan who had just returned from Moscow. On the 30th Nagy invited politicians from the old parties into his Cabinet and after abolishing the one-party system he announced that free elections were going to be held. On that very day Soviet troops began to move toward Budapest, while the original Russian troops were still leaving Hungary. Mikoyan arrived once more on November first to overthrow Nagy’s Government and install Janos Kadar as premier. Nagy issued a statement in which he said that the invasion violates the Warsaw Treaty and threatened Moscow that if the new Soviet troops wont leave Hungary will leave the Warsaw Pact. When his pleas fell on deaf ears he denounced the Warsaw Pact and as a last gesture of defiance he declared neutrality. Everyone in Moscow, and probably in Washington too, expected that the 4000 “state of the art” heavy tanks and the 200,000 Soviet troops who invaded the country would annihilate the Hungarian freedom fighters with their 250 older tanks in a day or two, but it didn’t happened. For two and a half weeks the bloody fighting went on between the Soviet troops from Siberia, and the badly equipped workers, students and children with gasoline bombs. Over four-hundred Soviet tanks were destroyed and over six-thousand Soviet troops were killed, although the official numbers are less. Hungarian losses amounted to 30,000 civilians dead, most of them children the age of 12-19. Around two thousand palaces, buildings have been destroyed by tanks often because of one sniper. The Government of Janos Kadar was installed and the borders were closed at the end of November, after more than 300,000 refugee left Hungary. The battle has ended but the Hungarian people s opposition to the Soviet invasion did not. The heavy industrial workers of Csepel and many others still held out even after repeated threats and warnings from the Government of Kadar. Their strike continued for three months and as a result the whole country came to a halt. Only after numerous pleas and promises from both the Hungarian Parliament and the Kremlin did they returned to work. The workers defiance startled Communist parties everywhere because industrial workers were generally believed to be the pillars of Communism.

The western Press did report the events and even simpatised with the Hungarian Revolution, but the American Government had no intension to send any other kind of help than moral support. Although the Soviets thought that they successfully destroyed the reform movement in Central-Europe it wasn t so. Twelve years after the Hungarian Revolution a new reform movement developed in Czechoslovakia. The Prague spring of 1968, as it later became known, had many of the same attributes that 56″ had but it vas an entirely different revolution.Like in Hungary the intelligentsia played a vital role in the events that unfolded in 1968 in Czechoslovakia. In both cases the workers joined the revolution making it stronger and more credible. The Action Program of the Czech Party served the same function as its counterpart the Hungarian students 16 Points. Its goals were: freedom of speech, assembly and organization, freedom of press, freedom of movement inside and out the country, freedom of religion, protection of the citizens rights, and the guarantee of the national life and identity of the German and Hungarian minority. The most important difference between the Hungarian and the Czechoslovak reform movements is that the Action Program and the movement was launched by Dubcek and his associates after they have won key posts in the Party and Nagy had to carry out all of his programs with only the Executive branch of the Government in his hands, later without even that. Dubcek was in a much better position than Nagy was, and he succeeded in putting the reforms into effect before his movement was crushed. He tolerated political pluralism and even went as far as to propose a multiparty system, and new elections. This political reform movement was supported by the Czechoslovak Press, in fact in many cases they themselves proposed new reforms which were, unlike in Hungary, considered and often applied by the Party. It was believed that even in the case of an election the Czechoslovak Socialist Party, which on April 4th publicly announced that it is non-Marxist, would win. After the elimination of Stalinist elements from within, the Czech Party became very popular and its membership quickly grew, although other parties were coming back. Another advantage that Dubcek had was that his reform movement was widely supported by other Socialist States in Central and Eastern-Europe. The friendly encouragements of these Governments was very different than what Nagy got in 1956. Also there were no Soviet troops stationed in Czechoslovakia. Dubcek accomplished much more than Nagy did in much less time but he, unlike Nagy, did not realize that by declaring free elections with multiple parties, undermining the Party s monolithic authority, he openly challenged the Kremlin. The most important pillar of the Communist ideology is the unchallenged power of the Party. The Soviet Union could not tolerate a move like this which in their opinion would mean the collapse of the whole system. Like in the case of the Hungarian Revolution this was the reason why the Soviets came to the decision to invade a sovereign country. When on August 20th 1968 the Soviet troops entered Czechoslovakia they encountered a very different scene than when they first came in 1945. Than ovation, celebration, flowers and very graetful women greeted them, in 68′ the streets were full of outraged citizens who loudly protested against the invasion. The invasion this time was not carried out by Asian Soviet troops, as in the case of Hungary, but by all the major Warsaw Pact Allies: East-Germany, Poland, Hungary and of course the Soviet Union. The Governments and the people of Poland and Hungary opposed the invasion of their neighbor, but they themselves were threatened by the Kremlin. Bloodshed was avoided in Czechoslovakia, only 67 died, thanks in part to the simpatethic troops, and the peaceful nature of the Czechs. A new Government was installed, faithful to the Kremlin, and most of the reformers along with Dubcek were sent to a camp in Siberia. Like in 1956 the Soviets silenced the leaders of the reform movement. They did not kill them, like they did with Nagy, only made their lives impossible. Like in 1956 they believed that they heard the last of the reform movements, and it would be forgotten. They issued a statement, much like they did in 56 after the invasion, that their military intervention was necessary to defend the people from the Right-Wing Counterrevolutionary Forces that were endangering the rule of the working class. The West did not offer any military or financial help to the agonizing Czech effort, they simply gave the moral support, the same which helped so much in the case of Hungary twelve years earlier. The western Press did not help much either. The lack of understanding of the real inner context and their references to a handful of intellectuals who had succeeded in ousting Novotny and turning Czechoslovak policy in an other direction only served to provide the Soviets with ammunition for the fight against revisionism and counterrevolutionary elements in the shape of certain journalists, artists and writers . Although the Hungarian and the Czechoslovak revolutions were crushed, the reform movement was not defeated. Both revolutions had far reaching political implications. In the West anti-Soviet and anti-Communist policies gained support, western communist organizations were being challenged by their members, the Soviets revealed their true nature.In Hungary Janos Kadar s Government slowly but surely continued the reforms, and only three years after the Revolution the so called Goulash Socialism , which was a consumer oriented Socialism, started to develop. Economic reforms reached their climax in the 1970’s. Consumer goods became widely available, one in four families owned a car and a weekend house. Political reforms continued until the Goulash Socialism finally evolved into a fully democratic system in the late 1980’s. By the early 60’s people were no longer afraid of the secret police, there was no forced collectivization of the farms, and stand up comics even made jokes about the Government. Kadar himself was very popular among the people thanks to his relaxed domestic policies. In Czechoslovakia the de-Stalinisation of the Party continued until the 1980’s. Domestic policy became consumer oriented although there were often severe sorthages in food and other supplies. The freedom of movement inside the country and out, which was demanded in the Action Program of 1968, partially became a reality. Czech citizens, often once a month, went to Hungary to by the goods they could not by at home, but traveling to a non-Socialist country was still very difficult. In Hungary people could go where ever they wanted as often as they liked, but only every three years to a non-Socialist country. The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and the Prague Spring had reached their goals after they have been defeated: a human faced Socialism . They served as examples for the events that shook the World in the late 80’s and early 90’s. Today Hungary and the Czech Republic have fully democratic, openly elected Governments, with many old veterans of the Revolutions as ministers, and functionaries. Both became members of the NATO in March 1999, both are in their way to become full members of the European Union by 2002. But this would not have happened without 56″ and the Spring of Prague . Bibliography Mnacko, Ladislav: The Seventh Night, Taste of Power,First Edition, E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc. (New York, 1969) Michener, James: The Bridge At Andau First Edition, Random House (New York, 1957) Fleming, D. F.: The Cold War And Its Origins , The Revolutions in Poland and Hungary, October 1956,First Edition, Doubleday & Company, Inc.(Garden City, New York, 1961) Krivosheev, G. 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