



July 9, 1956

**Working Notes from the Session of the CPSU CC
Presidium on 9 and 12 July 1956**

Citation:

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Summary:

In their meeting on July 9 and 12, 1956, the CPSU Presidium calls for an article to be prepared on the subversive activities of "imperialists" in Poznan and Hungary. Italian communist, Palmiro Togliatti, is to assist in writing an article in the Italian press. The working notes also refer to the situation developing over the rehabilitation of Hungarian communist, Laszlo Rajk, with a reference to HWP leader Rakosi.

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

Working Notes from the Session of the CPSU CC Presidium on 9 and 12 July 1956 (Re: Point IV of Protocol No. 28)(1)Those Taking Part: Bulganin, Voroshilov, Kaganovich, Malenkov, Molotov, Pervukhin, Khrushchev, Shepilov, Belyaev, Pospelov, Brezhnev, Zhukov Ciph. Teleg. No. . . . from Budapest(2)(Khrushchev, Voroshilov, Zhukov, Ponomarev)(3)We should call Cde. Mikoyan so that he'll go take a vacation on Lake Balaton.(4) An article should be prepared in our press about internationalist solidarity to rebuff the enemy. The subversive activities of the imperialists— in Poznan and Hungary. They want to weaken internationalist ties; and in the name of independence of paths, they want to foment disunity and destroy [the socialist countries] one by one. To Cdes. Pospelov, Shepilov, and Ponomarev. (5)Perhaps the Italian cdes. could publish something in the press. Perhaps Cde. Togliatti will write an article.(6)On the Rajk affair(7)—there must be an easing of the situation Rakosi(8)(Malenkov, Khrushchev, Voroshilov).(9)Cde. Mikoyan should confer with Kovacs, and he should speak firmly.(10)Translator's Notes

1 Protocol No. 28 was the formal protocol drafted for this session, which is now stored in Tsentral'nyi Arkhiv Sovremennoi Dokumentatsii (TsKhSD), Moscow, Fond (F.) 3, Opis' (Op.) 14, Delo (D.) 41, Listy (Ll.) 1-2. The session was held on both 9 and 12 July 1956, but the item covered here (Point IV) was discussed solely on the 12th.

2 This refers to a ciphered telegram from the Soviet ambassador in Hungary, Yu. V. Andropov, on 9 July 1956. The lengthy telegram, stored in Arkhiv Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii (APRF), F. 3, Op. 64, D. 483, Ll. 151-162, recounts a discussion that Andropov had with the Hungarian leader, Erno Gero, three days earlier. Gero had spoken about the disarray within the Hungarian leadership and the growing ferment in Hungarian society.

3 Here and elsewhere in Malin's notes, the listing of surnames in parentheses after the title of a session means that these individuals spoke, in the sequence indicated, about the given topic. The formal protocol for this session, as cited in Note 1 supra, reveals that Molotov, Kaganovich, and Bulganin also spoke about the subject.

4 Mikoyan arrived in Budapest the following day (13 July) and was there until 21 July. The most important of the ciphered telegrams, secure phone messages, and reports that he and Andropov sent back from Budapest during this time were declassified in 1992 and published in "Vengriya, aprel'- oktyabr' 1956 goda: Informatsiya Yu. V. Andropova, A. I. Mikoyana i M. A. Suslova iz Budapeshta," *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, No. 4 (1993), pp. 110-128. Lake Balaton, the largest lake in Central Europe, is a popular Hungarian vacation site that was also favored by party and government leaders.

5 This means that preparation of a lead editorial for Pravda was entrusted to Pospelov, Shepilov, and Ponomarev. (The formal protocol for the session, as cited in Note 1 supra, explicitly stated: "Instruct Cdes. Pospelov, Shepilov, and Ponomarev to prepare, on the basis of the exchange of opinions at the CPSU CC Presidium session, an article for publication in the press about the internationalist solidarity of workers in the countries of people's democracy and about the intrigues of imperialists who are carrying out their subversive work to weaken ties among the countries of the socialist camp.") The article, published on 16 July, denounced the "intrigues of imperialist agents" who were seeking to exploit the ferment in Eastern Europe after the 20th CPSU Congress. It claimed that members of the Petofi Circle in Hungary had "fallen under the influence of imperialist circles" and were "disseminating their anti-party views under the guise of a discussion club."

6 Togliatti was indeed contacted by the Hungarian newspaper Szabad Nep, at Moscow's behest, on 12 July 1956 about the possibility of giving an interview to explain the "significance of proletarian internationalism" and how to "strengthen the positions of the popular-democratic order in Hungary." Before the interview could be conducted, however, Mikoyan informed the CPSU Presidium, shortly after his arrival in Budapest on 13 July, that the situation in Hungary would never improve so long as Rakosi remained the leader of the Hungarian Workers' Party (HWP). Acting on behalf of the Soviet Presidium, Mikoyan engineered the dismissal of Rakosi from the HWP leadership and all other posts, a step that Rakosi's colleagues welcomed, but had not dared to pursue on their own in the absence of a direct Soviet initiative. The new information from Mikoyan caused the CPSU leadership to send a new cable to Togliatti on 13 July ("Shifrtel'gramma," 13 July 1956, in TsKhSD, F. 3, Op. 14, D. 43/2, L. 2) urging him to be aware, in any interviews he might give about Hungary, that Rakosi would not be in power much longer. Moscow's willingness to rely on Togliatti is somewhat surprising because a recent interview with Togliatti, published in the Italian Communist daily L'Unita on 17 June 1956, had provoked dismay in certain quarters of the HWP leadership. The Soviet ambassador in Budapest, Yurii Andropov, had noted these misgivings in an important cable he sent to the CPSU Presidium on 9 July. See

"Shifrtelgramma," from Yu. V. Andropov, 9 July 1956 (Strictly Secret—Special Dossier), in APRF, F. 3, Op. 64, D. 483, Ll. 151-162. Andropov had recommended that newspapers in East Germany and Czechoslovakia be asked to publish articles in support of Rakosi, but he made no such recommendation about L'Unita.⁷ Laszlo Rajk was one of the leaders of the HWP until 1949, when he fell victim to the Stalinist purges. In October 1949 he was sentenced to death on trumped-up charges, a case that Rakosi helped mastermind. Following Stalin's death, rehabilitations of the "unjustly repressed" began in all the East-bloc countries, albeit at varying rates. This process moved rather slowly in Hungary and did not initially extend to Rajk and his associates, but calls for the rehabilitation of Rajk steadily increased. After Rakosi staged a comeback in March-April 1955, he tried, for obvious reasons, to deflect the growing pressure for Rajk's rehabilitation. In early 1956, however, the process of rehabilitation in Hungary gained greater momentum because of the limited "thaw" inspired by the 20th Soviet Party Congress. On 28 March 1956, Rakosi finally gave in and announced the formal rehabilitation of Rajk, though his announcement (published in Szabad Nep on 29 March) contained no admission of personal responsibility for the case. On 18 May, Rakosi did acknowledge a degree of personal culpability for the repressions of 1949-1952 (though not for the Rajk case), but this was not enough to curb political unrest in Hungary. Rakosi was dismissed from his posts as HWP First Secretary and an HWP Politburo member by the HWP Central Leadership (i.e., Central Committee) on 18 July 1956. (At Mikoyan's behest, the dismissal had been arranged by the HWP Politburo on 13 July and was then formally endorsed by a plenum of the HWP Central Leadership five days later.) Subsequently, Rakosi was stripped of all his other posts. On 26 July 1956, Rakosi fled to the Soviet Union, where he spent the remaining 25 years of his life in exile. Back in Hungary, Rajk and three other high-level victims of the purge trials in 1949 (Gyorgy Palffy, Tibor Szonyi, and Andras Szalai) were reinterred in formal ceremonies on 6 October 1956, an event that contributed to the growing social unrest in Hungary.⁸ This passage in Malin's notes is ambiguous because Rakosi's surname, like other foreign surnames that end in vowels other than "a," does not decline in Russian. Most likely, Khrushchev was saying that "we must alleviate Rakosi's situation." It is possible, however, that Khrushchev was saying that "Rakosi must alleviate the situation," which would imply the need for Rakosi to step down. Unfortunately, there is no way to determine which of these two, very different interpretations is correct. The Hungarian edition of the Malin notes fails to take account of this ambiguity. See Vyacheslav Sereda and Janos M. Rainer, eds., *Dontes a Kremlben, 1956: A szovjet partelnokseg vitai Magyarorszagrol* (Budapest: 1956-os Intezet, 1996), p. 19. Sereda and Rainer opt for the former interpretation ("we must alleviate Rakosi's situation") without even considering the latter.⁹ Here and elsewhere in Malin's notes, the inclusion of surnames in parentheses after a statement or proposal means that these individuals supported the statement or proposal.¹⁰ The formal protocol for this session (see citation in Note 1 supra) contained the following point on this matter: "Instruct Cde. Mikoyan to travel to Hungary for discussions with the leadership of the Hungarian Workers' Party." The reference here is to Istvan Kovacs, a top Hungarian Communist official who fled to Moscow at the end of October 1956, not to Bela Kovacs, the former Secretary General of the Independent Smallholders' Party. Soviet leaders knew that Istvan Kovacs had long been dissatisfied with Rakosi's performance. See "Telefonogramma v TsK KPSS," from M. A. Suslov to the CPSU Presidium and Secretariat, 13 June 1956 (Top Secret), in APRF, F. 3, Op. 6, D. 483, Ll. 146-149.