

October 25, 1962

Minutes of the Meeting of the Hungarian Revolutionary Worker's and Peasant's Government (Council of Ministers)

Citation:

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Summary:

The document includes Hungarian Council of Ministers meeting minutes from 25 October 1962. The minutes are dominated by János Kádár's detailed overview of events leading up to the current international situation. The overview is preceded by the Council of Ministers approving the government's public statement on the Cuban Missile Crisis. During the session Kádár summarizes US provocation, Cuban and Soviet responses, and the military mobilization of different countries and military alliances, and Hungary's political campaign in support of Cuba. Kádár notes negotiations between Cuba, the US, and Soviet Union initiate the day before. The minutes also include exchanges between Kádár and other Council of Ministers representatives.

Credits:

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Original Language:

Hungarian

Contents:

Translation - English

Participants:

Comrade János Kádár, Prime Minister of the Hungarian Revolutionary Worker's and Peasant's Government,

Comrade Béla Biszku, Deputy Prime Minister of the Hungarian Revolutionary Worker's and Peasant's Government,

Comrade Jenő Fock, Deputy Prime Minister of the Hungarian Revolutionary Worker's and Peasant's Government,

Comrade Gyula Kállai, Deputy Prime Minister of the Hungarian Revolutionary Worker's and Peasant's Government,

Comrade Dr Ferenc Münnich, Minister of State,

Comrade Sándor Czottner, Minister of Heavy Industry,

Comrade János Csergő, Minister of Metallurgy and Machine Industry,

Comrade Frigyes Doleschall, Minister of Health,

Comrade Ödön Kisházi, Minister of Labor,

Comrade István Kossa, Minister of Transport and Postal Affairs,

Comrade Imre Kovács, Minister of Food Administration,

Comrade Pál Losonczi, Minister of Agriculture,

Comrade Ferenc Nezvál, Minister of Justice,

Comrade Ms József Nagy, Minister of Light Industry,

Comrade János Pap, Minister of the Interior,

Comrade János Péter, Minister of Foreign Affairs,

Comrade János Tausz, Minister of Domestic Trade,

Comrade Dr Rezső Trautmann, Minister of Building and Construction

Members of the government

Comrade György Aczél, First Deputy Minister of Culture,

Comrade Gyula Karádi, First Deputy Minister of Foreign Trade,

Comrade Jenő Köteles, First Deputy Minister of Defense,

Comrade György Lázár, Vice-President of the National Central Planning Office,

Comrade Béla Sulyok, First Deputy Minister of Finance,

Representing the ministers in absentia

Comrade Sándor Rónai, Speaker of the Parliament,

Comrade János Brutyó, Secretary-General of the National Council of Trade Unions,

Comrade Attila Borka, First Deputy-Chairman of the Central People's Supervisory Committee,

Comrade György Péter, Chairman of the Central Statistics Office,

Comrade Géza Szénási, Attorney General,

Comrade József Veres, President of the Executive Committee of the City Council of Budapest,

Comrade Dr Tivadar Gál, Head of the Secretariat of the Council of Ministers,

Comrade Géza Neményi, Head of the Information Office of the Council of Ministers, as permanent invited participants of the government meetings.

Before discussing the agenda:

1./ Comrade János Kádár announces that Comrade István Dobi is on leave, Comrades Pál Ilku, Jenő Incze, and Dr Miklós Ajtay are abroad, Comrades Rezső Nyers and János Oczel are visiting places outside Budapest, and Comrade Lajos Czinege is sick.

The Government acknowledged the announcement.

Agenda:

1./ Information on the international situation.

Presenter: Comrade János Kádár

Comrade János Kádár informs the members of the Government on the international situation that has arisen as a result of the aggressive steps taken by the USA against Cuba and on the measures taken by the Hungarian Government.

He proposes that the Government should retroactively approve the government statement[1] drafted on 23 October (and then published) by the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Ministers, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs as well as the measures that have become necessary in the international situation which has emerged.

The Government approvingly acknowledged the measures that had been taken.

Comrade János Kádár proposes the Government to authorize the Prime Minister to take, together with the Deputy Prime Ministers, the Foreign Minister, and the Defense Minister, any pressing measures that may become necessary in this tensed situation on behalf of the Government.

The Government granted the requested authorization.

Dated as above.

[signature] [signature]

/János Kádár/ [signature]/Dr. Tivadar Gál/

Prime Minister [signature] Head of the Secretariat,

Hungarian Revolutionary [signature] Hungarian Revolutionary

Worker's and Peasant's Government [signature] Worker's and Peasant's Government

Comrade János Kádár: I welcome all the comrades and hereby open the session of the Council of Ministers. I announce that [Minister of Defense] Comrade [Lajos] Czinege is sick and is undergoing medical tests in the hospital. [Chairman of the Presidential Council] Comrade [István] Dobi is on leave, Comrades Ilku and Incze are abroad, and Comrades Nyers and Oczel are visiting places outside Budapest.

We have convened the Council of Ministers to provide information on the Cuban situation.

The current tension is due to the statement made by United States President Kennedy on 22 October and the measures specified in the statement. You, Comrades, know the statement, so I will cite only the main points. The first measure was the announcement of a blockade around Cuba, which means a blockade both in the air and on the sea. They are monitoring the situation in Cuba and will deem any attack coming from Cuba as an attack by the Soviet Union. They evacuated all the family members from the American stations in Cuba and commanded nearly 100 vessels to the waters surrounding Cuba. The United States' troops were put on high alert, the granting of leave was discontinued, military service at the naval forces was extended by one year, and other measures were taken to complement these steps.

In the same speech they called upon the Soviet Union to withdraw their arms from Cuba as they had been informed that the Soviet Union has mid-range missiles in place in Cuba. The statement concludes by saying that the Cuban people are oppressed and calls upon them to rise in revolt. This statement was complemented by another statement issued by the United States government in which it was published that the blockade would begin on 24 October at 3 p.m. Central European Time.

The Soviet and the Cuban governments gave an adequate response to this decision of the United States government. They evaluated the American steps, basically stating that the blockade and the additional steps breach a wide range of international laws and violate Cuba's sovereignty, while the obstacle to free navigation also violates the sovereign rights of every country. The statements made it clear that the steps taken by the United States were warlike and unlawful, which the statements rejected by saying that the Soviet Union and Cuba would take the necessary measures to prevent the USA from realizing these steps.

It is worth noting a few things about the various steps that the United States has taken. I have already mentioned the 100 warships; these are quite large vessels and the number of effective force serving on them may be as many as 20,000. Two naval command headquarters were set up, as is usual under warlike circumstances: one for commanding the forces in the coastal area and one for the open waters. The USA put its forces stationed in Europe on high alert, and here the most important thing is that the number of patrol aircraft equipped with nuclear weapons was increased significantly. The number of these aircraft—which have been constantly in the air for years—is usually 4, 5 or 6, but now it was raised to 42 in the Mediterranean region and Europe.

As far as the NATO High Command is concerned, no special military measure that would be binding for the NATO countries was taken. If I remember well, the only thing that happened was that Italy's air force and air defense were put on alert, and so was the Greek army.

On our side, the following events took place: the existing effective force of the Soviet Union's army was put on alert. The granting of leave was discontinued, but those on leave were not ordered to return, nor were the reservists called up. Certain units of the Soviet army carried out the maneuvers that are necessary in such a situation. Part of this was putting the army of the German Democratic Republic on alert.

As far as the member states of the Warsaw Treaty are concerned, the Polish People's Republic mobilized significant troops along the Oder border section, and so did Bulgaria along the Turkish--Greek border. All the member states of the Warsaw Treaty put their existing troops on alert.

In this situation we also need to consider what to do. It was necessary to make a political statement. We drafted the statement of the Hungarian government on the basis of the proposal made by the Foreign Minister [János Péter] and, given the urgency of the matter, we had it approved by the deputy prime ministers and had it published.[2]

The commander-in-chief of the Warsaw Treaty [Marshal Andrei Grechko] is maintaining proper contact with and has informed the commanders of the Hungarian People's Army that are under the command of the Warsaw Treaty. The commander-in-chief requested us to take measures and inform him about them. We did that. Comrade Kőteles[3] and other competent comrades worked out the proposal, which we approved and informed the commander-in-chief of the Warsaw Treaty about them. The essence of the measures involved putting some troops of our army on alert, primarily in the air force and the air defense force. In other units we

discontinued granting leave without ordering all those already on leave to return to service and without calling up reservists. Currently, the various commanders stay closely together and are in union. In addition, we made preparations internally to take further action if need be: the fuel reserves of the divisions were filled up, etc., and anything else that appears to be necessary in a situation like this [was done]. We also informed Marshall Grechko of our measures. He expressed his thanks for providing such effective support for him as the commander-in-chief in the present situation.

In my view, this is the most serious international conflict that has emerged since the Second World War. As for the steps taken by the US government, it should be known that there was no negotiation with the allies in advance, and that's what the reaction to them by some of the NATO member states reflects. Essentially, the NATO member states officially endorse the US steps but their informal statements make it very clear that they are offended and feel that they should not take part in any such military action. This is what the French and the English positions seem to suggest.

This step of the US government is especially dangerous because it suggests some kind of conceited arrogance, some frenzy by certain American politicians, which is based on the fact that ever since the USA was established as a capitalist state it has never been defeated anywhere, and also on the belief that America has control over the entire world. This is supported by a wide range of facts. The American capitalists made incredible amounts of money during the First World War. The USA rarely got involved in dangerous or risky situations in the Second World War. They made a lot of profit during the Cold War period too, ousting their allies from different places whenever the occasion arose, e.g. Indochina or India. They even undertook to support the Algerian freedom fighters to some extent just to soften up the French in another respect.

We must understand the USA's motives very well because we need to consider the situation on the bases of these motives. They keep bragging, suggesting that they can make it in every situation, they are very strong, and nobody can face up to them. The Americans are characterized by the politics of bluffing; they find pleasure in scaring others. This is one of the aspects of this thing, although it is quite dangerous because it may lead to undesirable steps.

The other thing coupled with it is an atmosphere of panic, which has a number of realistic reasons. The position of the USA has become weaker in connection with most of the key international issues. The Common Market raises a lot of problems, which hit the American capitalists hard too. Their position regarding the issue of West Berlin is very bad. In Laos they were happy to be able to get out of the situation, and they don't have much to expect in Vietnam either. I could continue this list on and on as far as mentioning the fact that the UN is gradually slipping out of their hands too. There is an obvious deterioration in their general position. It is also important to know that there are very effective weapons in Cuba.

It is also worth considering that the position of the current US government is not rosy at home either. It looks like the Kennedy cabinet had a lot of progressive votes during the presidential elections; the trade unions supported them and cherished great hopes in a positive sense, but nothing has really been fulfilled. These supporters are already dissatisfied, and so are many of the aggressive monopolist circles. This is the kind of situation in which they decided to take this step. They deserve to be called a country playing with fire in a hazardous manner, and anything can come out of it.

In addition to the measures mentioned before, we have decided on launching a certain political campaign too. We can mobilize the Hungarian public in the correct manner regarding this issue. There are ad-hoc political meetings in the factories. Ten days ago I was asked to give an interview to Cuban journalists, and it seemed right to make use of this opportunity.[4] We also have some ideas how to proceed. We will

continue with the campaign and we are planning to organize an important meeting today where several different representatives of society will voice their position. This meeting will be held this afternoon in the Sports Hall.[5]

We have introduced a duty service in the Worker's Militia, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Party. As far as we can tell now, the Hungarian people have taken the developments of this situation soberly. Some comrades kept calling us during the night asking what the latest news was. One of the county party secretaries was working on his report; another one said there was some positive concern in his county. The Ministry of the Interior complained that it could hardly dissuade a youth group from going out to protest. There is a healthy sense of sympathy with Cuba among the public.

This had been the situation until last night. Of course, there had been various developments on both sides in terms of both military and political action. As far as the political aspect is concerned, it's worth mentioning the document that is known to all the comrades already: all the three governments involved, the USA, the Soviet Union, as well as Cuba, demanded to convene the [UN] Security Council, all of them expressing the view that some kind of negotiation is required. This claim provided some basis for the work of the Security Council, which was complemented by several other things. The different governments issued a wide range of [draft] resolutions, including the governments of the socialist countries. In addition, a group of 40 non-allied states within the UN also discussed the situation and took action. Apart from a group of African countries, three neutral European states, Finland, Austria and Switzerland, also participated in this action. They also worked out their own position, urging negotiations and for every party to make an effort to prevent a military clash. The UN Secretary-General [U Thant] spoke in this spirit at the session of the Security Council held during the night, suggesting that the United States should lift the blockade and the Soviet Union should stop supplying Cuba for two weeks. Neither the USA's, nor the Soviet Union's, response to this suggestion is known at this point.

Other viewpoints on the situation cannot be disregarded either. Peace movements have also made their force tangible. [British philosopher Bertrand A.W.] Russell has also emerged, and what actually happened was that Khrushchev, Kennedy, and Russell began exchanging messages, some of which gave rise to hopes that it might be possible to prevent the further intensification of the conflict, and some of the positions appear to support the truth of our position politically. It is worth noting that the statement of the Soviet government[6] issued the day before yesterday was regarded even by the English and several others as very moderate and as calm as was possible in a situation like this. The Soviet government's statement has made a very good impression. Russell acted in accordance with this, primarily condemning the USA. In his telegraph sent to Khrushchev he asked the Soviet party to try its best to avoid being provoked. In his message to the US president he called upon the US to stop provoking the other party. Making the best of this opportunity, Khrushchev gave a very good response, pointing out several important political aspects and unveiling the dangerous nature of the American position. Khrushchev said that if a particular situation emerged, the Soviet Union would take action by using its defensive weapons. The response makes it clear that there is room for negotiation and it also demonstrates that the Soviet Union is ready to participate in a summit meeting too. This approach made a good impression on the entire American public.

Yesterday there was a critical point in the afternoon when the blockade and the ships should have clashed. With respect to this, the tension has eased a little bit since then, as there is no news on any clash yet. So far there has been no clash between the ships that keep up the blockade and the ships that are bound for Cuba with supplies. It seems now that the most critical danger is over and diplomacy has come to the fore. I need to add though that the danger is certainly not over yet.

I request the Government to acknowledge the government statement that has been

issued and the measures that have been taken to increase defense preparedness. The Government should give authorization to take any other necessary action in case of an emergency in consultation with the deputy prime ministers and the ministers of defense and foreign affairs. The situation changes from hour to hour, so prompt action is crucial at such times.

As a general task we suggest that the level of readiness that applies to us should be maintained but otherwise we should continue to work as usual. Whenever we have a chance to talk to people at various events and meetings, we should promote our fair standpoint and request the support of the Hungarian people. We should make it clear that this support requires discipline, composure, and, especially, hard work. We may have made a mistake when we omitted one section of the Soviet government's statement which was specifically addressed to the Soviet people, expressing the view that in the current situation the Soviet government is sure that the Soviet people will work even harder and will do everything they can to increase the defense capabilities of the country and accomplish any other goals of their work. This part was omitted from our statement but it should be taken into consideration when the tasks are being carried out.

[Minister of Domestic Trade] Comrade János Tausz: Since this situation emerged, we have been monitoring the sales of goods more intensively, as is usually the case at times when people are likely to hoard goods. There are signs of hoarding here and there but they are quite sporadic, not general at all, so there is no cause for concern in view of the situation we saw in the morning. I understand that our task is to bear in mind that the requirement to be prepared also applies to us in the sense that we should run our reporting service with even more vigilance.

As far as the supply of goods is concerned, I believe we should continue with our correct policy of not imposing any restrictions. Restrictions tend to backfire, generally costing more than what we can gain by them. Should any local problems arise, we will try to localize them.

Comrade János Kádár: Obviously, we should pay attention to all sorts of phenomena; however, we should make sure that our reassuring measures do not drive people to believe that there should be chaos. I don't know the reporting service of domestic trade but it must be a huge organization. If any extraordinary tasks are given to the reporting service there, maybe one hundred thousand people will get the order and the same number of people will begin to wonder why there is no panic when there should be panic. Comrade Tausz should not order the reporting service to carry out any extraordinary tasks; our domestic trade organization is socialist enough already to report to the competent authorities should any signs of a hoarding craze break out. Instead we should approve of the normal procedure with respect to our reserves; that is, the reserves should be filled up. This point of time is not bad with respect to hoarding; it would have been a lot more inconvenient at the beginning of June.

[Minister of Metallurgy and Machine Industry] Comrade János Csörgő: Not underestimating the dangers inherent in the US steps, it occurred to me whether these steps and the [US mid-term Congressional] election campaign that is underway are related. Isn't it just a mere election trick?

János Kádár: It's unlikely that the two are related but the issue should be viewed in accordance with its significance. The weakening of the position of the Kennedy cabinet is not temporary, it has been obvious for some years now, and it is not characteristic of the current period only. It should not be seen as a mere election bluff, though. We should not assume that they commit such a stupid [action] and use a short-term bluff like this because it would result in complete political destruction. The elections will be held on November 6. This crisis cannot be maintained at this level until that time. Certainly, the internal political situation has a role in it too.

Now I would like to inform the comrades about some of the diplomatic steps that the US government has taken recently. The US chargé d'affaires to Budapest [Horace G. Torbert, Jr.] contacted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs yesterday at around 10 a.m. and requested to be urgently received by a senior official of the ministry. We were busy working on the government statement, so we put it off a bit, and eventually the audience took place in the afternoon at around 4 p.m. The ambassador's deputy handed over the USA's statement to our government and added some remarks that can be seen as threatening. He said it would be a grave mistake to doubt the resolution of his government because it will implement all the steps that are contained in the statement. He also requested that the Hungarian government should continue to ensure communication between the American mission in Budapest and its administration. That was a clear signal as to how serious the situation really was.

Last Saturday [October 20] our chargé d'affaires in Washington [János Radványi] was summoned by the State Department and was given a piece of paper. This was part of trying to figure out the Hungarian position through diplomatic channels that has been going on since the summer. This time it was a specific proposal submitted by the American party to the Hungarian government. Its essence can be summarized as follows: they said if the Hungarian government was to declare, of its own free will, that nobody was in prison due to the 1956 events, the American cabinet would be willing to do a number of things. In such a case the US would be ready to take action in the UN and state that there have been changes in Hungary and the US no longer believes that the Hungarian issue should be put on the agenda. In addition they listed a number of other things that could be done: agreements have been proposed, disputed issues could be negotiated, the Mindszenty issue[7] could be discussed, ambassadors could be exchanged, etc. It could be called a real peace proposal. It appears that the USA's position is not very good regarding this issue either; therefore, they are seeking a way out.

We ordered Comrade Radványi to say, if the parties concerned happen to meet, that he has sent this proposal to Budapest where it will be studied carefully. The percentage of the votes on the Hungarian issue at the UN General Assembly is seen even by Western observers as a defeat for the US government, which does not seem to be too promising for them going forward. The US is also in a bad position as far as the issue of mandates is concerned.

I propose that the Council of Ministers should approve the government statement that has been issued and the measures that have been taken, and should authorize the government to take any other steps if need be.

As for the meeting planned for today [i.e., the mass rally in the Sports Hall in Budapest], we think it should be organized by the Party Committee of Budapest, the Popular Patriotic Front, and the Council of Trade Unions. There will be two key speakers: Comrade Gyula Kállai and the Cuban ambassador. Comrade Gyula Kállai will speak on behalf of the Central Committee of the Party and represent our well-known position. I request the government to acknowledge that.

[Minister of Food Administration] Comrade Imre Kovács: Does anybody know what the Soviet Union is planning to do regarding its future supplies for Cuba? To what extent will the Soviet Union take into account the blockade and will its ships be defended?

Comrade János Kádár: I am aware of the legal position and the most important thing here is the joint statement issued by the Cuban and the Soviet governments in September which declared that the Soviet Union is supplying Cuba with weapons that can help Cuba preserve its independence. The latest Soviet government statement says that the US step is illegal, and then there is Khrushchev's letter, which puts it in a popular language, saying that you should not give a robber just part of your money because he will come back for the rest anyway. I don't know anything more specific

regarding the other things, I could only present assumptions but there's no point in doing so.

I don't know what each of the two parties is doing on the sea. The sea is huge, it's dark at night, but there has been no clash so far. The US wants to kill Cuba and the socialist world should not let it happen, nor should the progressive forces accept it because if they shut their eyes to it, the Americans would attack us the next day. All the relevant international laws say that our position is right and the USA's aggression is directed not only at the socialist countries but it also affects the fundamental norms of international life.

Cuba has taken adequate measures and ordered mobilization. The Cuban people are resolute and obviously count on the support of the socialist world.

[1] The Hungarian government's statement was published in the HSWP's daily, Népszabadság, on 25 October. The declaration of the Hungarian government-CB and MK.

[2] The Hungarian government declaration adopted on 23 October was published in Népszabadság on 25 October. It is worth noting that Kádár gives no explanation, why the declaration was published only on 25 October, and not the day before, if preparing it had allegedly been so urgent that an ad hoc group had to do it on behalf of the government-CB and MK.

[3] Jenő Köteles, lieutenant-general-First deputy minister of defence who was acting minister while Minister of Defence Lajos Czinege was hospitalized during the crisis-CB and MK.

[4] Indeed, Kádár received the Cuban ambassador along with two journalists of the Cuban paper Revolution and their conversation was published on the front page of Népszabadság next to the Hungarian government declaration on 25 October-CB and MK.

[5] A detailed account on the mass meeting, including the speeches of deputy prime minister Gyula Kállai and Cuban ambassador Quintin Pino Machado, was published in Népszabadság on 26 October. At the rally a message was adopted to be sent to UN Secretary-General U Thant asking for his mediation to solve the crisis-CB and MK.

[6] The Soviet government declaration of 23 October was published in Népszabadság on 24 October-CB and MK.

[7] Cardinal Mindszenty, the head of the Hungarian Catholic Church, sought refuge at the US legation on 4 November 1956 at the news of the Soviet military invasion, crushing the Hungarian revolution of 1956. He stayed at the mission for fifteen years, eventually leaving Hungary in 1971, after long and complicated negotiations among Hungary, the US, and the Vatican-CB and MK.