

FINAL REPORT

For the Visegrad Scholarship at the Open Society Archives

Project title: Ideological and Cultural Aspirations (and their roots) of anti-regime movements in Soviet-type Societies

The So-Called Héderváry Papers

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1. Background of the research

It is hard to find a parallel anti-regime movement in the history of the Cold War to the 1956 Hungarian revolution, that became a real source of resistance in the years after it was suppressed, a constant point of reference, a memory not fading and a sign of ongoing ideological and cultural dissent when its political expression was hardly possible. While the history of the revolution is greatly documented and narrated by scholars and participants both inside and outside Hungary, there was much less researched and published about its international responses, particularly at the most important organization that was assigned to be instrumental in such crises, the United Nations. One of the reasons could be the lack of sources in this respect, as the UN Archive is only partially accessible concerning the Hungarian revolution and in other archives no more than pieces of the documentation is provided, it is hard if not impossible to create the “big picture”. The role of the UN however was extremely important both in the critical days of the revolution, being a final hope to avoid the military suppression; then following the Soviet intervention, expecting either help from the UN or observance of the UN’s Charter by its very member states. Failing in both a Special Committee on the Problem of Hungary was established by a General Assembly resolution, to investigate what happened in Hungary and then to regularly report about its finding to the UN. Still the hope existed in Hungary that once the UN failed to deal with the situation during the days of the revolution the consequences of the Report concluding in a resolution may drive the Soviets out of the country. This hope was the same vain as many other attempts of the UN that however kept the “Hungarian question” on its agenda until 1962. This meant collecting documents, informing those assigned to deal with it, putting some pressure on the USSR and on Hungary inside the UN to obey the Charter they signed, and indirectly encouraging anti-regime movements to submit information to the international organization as the last hope to stop the revenge, to smooth the harsh sentences and to express the dissent with the brutal Kadarian “consolidation”.

2. The significance of the Héderváry Papers

The digitized collection of documents named after Héderváry Klára (Claire de Hedervary) at the OSA and the sound recordings kept jointly is a unique and invaluable source to study, to reconstruct and to understand the events concerning Hungary and the UN after the critical days of the revolution. Its

significance is enormous and still hard to evaluate, as the size of the collection is huge (8633 digitized items, approximately 30.000 pages and 77 hours of sound recordings), that can be positioned in the context of different collections both inside the OSA (Béla Király Papers, RFE files, different Cold War documents and the 1956 Digital Archive) and outside the institution, as the Hungarian National Archive, the Historical Archive of the State Security Services contain relevant documentations, just like the National (Széchenyi) Library that owns the original copies of these files. Ms. Hedervary was a junior expert joining the UN as a technical assistant and translator, then became very instrumental both in the work of the Special Committee (due to her Hungarian knowledge, her devotion and her diligence) and she remained in the center of the activity also later as the assistant of the special representative dealing with the Hungarian question until it was on the UN agenda. During this time she realized the historical importance of the work she was involved in, and preserved as many documents (both her own ones and those belonging to others) as possible, and kept those in her office and in its vicinity then, in a well-chosen moment she could obtain permit to ship those out of the UN building. This very act saved the collection for the future, as due to UN regulations documents were either destroyed or archived, yet many relevant files concerning the 1956 Hungarian revolution are still inaccessible in the UN Archive. The collection was first kept in Ms. Hedervary's New York apartment then it was offered to the 1956 Institute, yet no answer was given, so it was later deposited at the Hoover Institution, from where finally the documents were transported to Hungary, with the assistance of the OSA.

3. The types of documents in the Hedervary Papers

The collection was born in the process of the historical events, reflecting those from a distance and trying to influence them with the authority of an international organization. Documentation of the facts played the same important role in the creation of this special and personally composed archive, as the intent to interfere these very events. Ms. Hedervary's wisdom was to preserve all types of papers in this process undistinguished, loose sheets with drafts, scribbles, instructions as well as different versions of official documents created in this process. The variety of the origination and the character of the documents that are often undated, unsigned or fragmented mean a real challenge for the archivist, trying to systematize and arrange the collection, while it is a great source for those familiar with the background and with the dynamics and intents of people involved to come to significant conclusions, based on inductive and on comparative research. The logic of arranging the papers could follow both the (I) chronology of the events in which the documents were created while focusing on the (II) different types or "genres" of papers originating in the process. The first logic (I) suggests the distinctions based on the time frames, starting with the (1) establishment of the Special Committee on the problem of Hungary (January 15th 1957), to be continued in the process of the (2) investigation of the fact-finding body (January 18th through April 15th 1957), concluding in the (3) creation and publication of the Report (April 15th through June 20th 1957). Even if the original mandate of the Committee clearly expressed by the General Assembly resolution was to publish further reports, this happened only once and exclusively under the pressure of circumstances, after the (4) execution of Imre Nagy and of the other leaders of the revolution, that finally was followed by a Report of the Special Committee on the Problem of Hungary (July 14th 1958). The time after the

publication of the first Report until the dissolution of the Special Committee and the fading away of UN interest in Hungary (5) there were many documents created and preserved, from June 20th 1957 through September 1962 obtaining and limitedly distributing the information received. Regarding the (II) “genres” of papers the most varied types can be found in the first two phases of the work (1), (2), when (a) official documents were “translated” into methodological and practical guidelines (instructions, background materials, locating and obtaining relevant sources) and then by the process of investigation these were concluding in the creation of the first-ever description of the process, reconstructing and documenting historical events. The “heart” of the collection is the “narrative” provided by the persons participating in the revolution, often passionate, always personal and quite complex, preserving their experiences both (b) vocally (on the sound recordings) and in (c) writings (translated and transcribed in the Verbatim Records), submitting different types of documentation as well. The background negotiations by the members of the Committee were also registered and, sometimes but not always transcribed, dealing with the problems arising in the process. This is completed with different types of (d) papers, including official documents of different types, and with (e) unofficial papers focusing on the needs of the investigation committee. The creation of the Report being the next phase (3), thus documents include (a) sketches, drafts and instructions for the (b) writing of the chapters of the final document, that meant also many rewrites and the creation of several versions later discussed, corrected then modified and accepted, many of which were preserved in the collection. The testimonies given by the witnesses were completed with the information obtained both from the (c) press including printed and broadcasted news both from the East and from the West, and with many (d) messages, letters, studies, memos, overviews and data obtained and forwarded to the UN. These were listed as “Communication Received by the Committee” then the list was distributed among the members. In the last two phases (4) and (5) of the activity of the UN regarding Hungary the primary sources were hardly existent any more. In the creation of the (4) second Report the focus was more on (a) documenting the activity of the Special Committee after June 1957, commenting upon those aspects that determined the fate of the leaders of the revolution, referring to the many (b) rejections of the Hungarian and Soviet authorities of the UN’s request to provide reliable information about the repression, including the secret trials that were going on in Hungary. In the process of the writing of the second Report the debates of the members of the Committee were (c) documented, fist the issuance of the communiqué condemning the execution then the Report dealing in depth with the legal revenge. After 1958 the Special Committee on the Problem of Hungary ceased to exist, a Special Representative was elected Sir Leslie Munro, who continued his work with Ms. Hedervary in a significantly smaller scale than his predecessors. In this process (5) a complex set of (a) press reviews gave a reliable and thorough picture of the situation in Hungary, with the listing of different (b) types of information arriving to the UN (letters, messages, even descriptions of phone calls from persons involved) still included very dramatic ones until 1960-1962 and concluding in the (c) reports of the Special Representative that became a mere formality on the General Assembly agenda.

4. The focus and description of my research

In the beginning of the research at the OSA I was not aware of the richness and the real amount of the relevant material that made me slightly modify my original plans. Firstly I was surprised by the greatly selected and extremely vast background material collected for the investigation that included the Hungarian Constitution, the Warsaw Treaty and many official documents besides a variety of books on history, studies on political science, collections of statistical data and many more manuals to provide a complex and reliable context for those involved in the investigation. The second surprise was the thorough debates and studies obtained and consulted about the methodological issues in connection with the investigation, as the work of the Committee was unprecedented in the history of the UN thus it could also serve as a “pilot-program” for investigating of later crises. It also made the activity of the Committee more significant than “only” that of a fact finding body.

My primary focus was the crucial phase of the work, the selection then the hearing of the witnesses, interpreted in the documented testimonies. In the Hedervary Papers this process could be followed as well, as different alternatives, a variety of attempts and several relevant ideas were raised, discussed and accepted or rejected during the work, many of which were carefully preserved. List of names and different types of data of possible witnesses were available as well as descriptions of different issues to obtain further information about. The working of the secretariat of the Special Committee in connection with the needs of the members was also documented thoroughly. When the hearings started the testimonies registered gave a detailed and complex account of the events of the revolution highlighting important episodes and conclusively creating a general picture as well. The questions posed by the members of the Special Committee to the witnesses and the responses given were also preserved and these could reveal the dynamics of the sessions and the focus of the investigators.

In the collection of papers there were many “Provisional Summary Records” of the meetings of the Special Committee that included highly important details discussed both for the working of the fact-finding group, for their legal mandate and for the composition and publication of the Report. This was also documented in some cases on the sound recordings, thus comparison was also possible with the written version. In important moments when the verbatim recorders were sent out of the room yet the meeting continued and was also registered on tape but not transcribed, this source is also extremely important.

Ms. Hedervary preserved a great amount of “List of Communications Received by the Secretariat”, that was composed to properly and exactly documenting all the information flowing about and from Hungary (the last meaning often great risk for those submitting it) to the UN. There were also direct observations sent through diplomatic channels and documents provided by international organizations focusing on Hungary (like the International Commission of Jurists). These lists provided an extremely complex and in-depth picture of different facets of the Kadarian “consolidation” that was also unparalleled in its complexity. These lists clearly prove that the UN was aware of the many facts in Hungary that obviously broke the Charter, violated human rights and concluded in the legal revenge. Press reviews and clippings also refer to the tragic situation in Hungary that was publicly known, even if sometimes giving exaggerated or inaccurate numbers about the victims of the ongoing suppression.

The collection gave a very vivid picture of the Special Committee's practical "dissolution" after 1957, before its mandate was over yet the substantial activity of the fact finding body slowed down and then stopped. Relevant information about what was still happening in Hungary was not submitted to its members though this information was available. When the dramatic news about Imre Nagy's execution arrived to the UN on June 17th 1958 there were hardly any members of the Special Committee present and those who were there had no information of the (otherwise well documented) developments preceding the event. This determined the reaction of the Committee that was urgently called into session, yet they were uncertain if the mandate of the Special Representative (the president of the General Assembly Van Vaithaikan of Thailand, whose activity was not documented in the collection) was valid or they were assigned to deal with the situation.

The files also offered a great view about the ideological and cultural aspirations of anti-regime movements that included the documents and information of the different facets of such activity inside Hungary, that of writers, of other intellectuals, of "renegade" communist party members and representatives of different former political movements. Hungarian refugees in the West also played an important role forwarding available information to the UN as the ultimate hope for action. These actions were greatly documented in the papers, both in its complexity including people of different political convictions, social background, cultural context, and also in its extensity as from October 1956 through July 1962 these types of documents were constantly received and filed.

Finally my focus was on some crucial issues that a senior member of the Secretariat of the Special Committee Povl Bang-Jensen raised, as I made thorough research on his activity some years ago and in the light of the recently available archival documents the research continued. His concerns and conflicts originated in the given assurances to the witnesses that they may remain anonymous if so wish, and my focus was if that promise was observed throughout the process of the investigation. Bang-Jensen was also concerned about the security of sensitive documents and about relevant data at the UN, as this was also a condition for submitting them not to fall into unauthorized hands. Bang-Jensen greatly contributed in writing chapters of the Report, his worries included that certain facts remained unmentioned, plus omissions lack of corrections, controversial facts may undermine the credibility of the Report. He also felt that the mandate of the Special Committee regarding the publication of supplemental reports was not wholly observed in spite of the many burning issues that would require the creation of such reports. Finally his worries included those in Hungary who may get into serious troubles for submitting information to the UN if confidential information may leak out.

5. Preliminary conclusions

The richness of the collection became a major challenge regarding the approach of the great amount of information and the distinction between documents of crucial importance and those of secondary significance. When describing the collection I suggested also a possible structure to apply or to further elaborate.

In consulting the documents it became soon clear that the preparations for the work of the Committee with the background information obtained already determined to go much beyond the simple description of facts, while all these was supported by a very professional team that assisted the members in putting the information into a larger context, including history, sociology, political science. This greatly contributed to the creation of a successful Report in a relatively short time and with limited sources available. The collection contained the records of many relevant sessions in this respect, unknown for me before consulting the Hedervary Papers. These also revealed the importance of the methodological issues applied and its importance for the work of the Committee.

The most significant question was obviously the selection of witnesses and the arrangement, execution and documentation of the hearings. The collection offered a great chance both for the analysis of the dynamics of the hearings, focusing on the testimonies first and the questions and answers then, with further details examined. The process of the hearings was also of great significance as the members of the Committee were directly confronted with the persons behind the facts they were assigned to investigate and to report about. To be able to listen to the sound recordings while reading the Verbatim Records simultaneously offered the possibility for a comparison between the two. While it needs further "micro-philological" research (a young scholar already started interesting work on that field), some conclusions are already possible to draw. First, the translations were mainly accurate and faithful, yet in several cases significant details remained absent, not properly translated or misunderstood. Secondly, the corrections were usually made during the transcription of the testimony, however the witnesses were denied to have access to the transcript of their own testimony and eventually to control, to modify or to correct it though in several cases they requested it. Thirdly, while a preliminary chronology and draft Report was completed by the end of February, yet the knowledge about the facts of the revolution obtained by the Committee was random and incomplete. During the hearings explanations and elaborations of seemingly irrelevant fields were needed, later this aspect diminished. Fourthly, it was hardly possible to have reliable information about important facts and events, or to double check them (for example Kadar's where about after November 1st, the circumstances of Malater's arrest, the Soviet troop movements prior November 3rd, etc.). Often different estimations contradicted to each other (how many demonstrators were at the Parliament square on October 23rd, what the size of the fighting were at certain places after November 4th, how many victims the resistance required, etc.) and no other source was provided for the reliable numbers. Important facts referring to the violation of human rights or the Geneva Conventions were based on testimonies alone (rape of women, killing of revolutionaries already capitulated, deportations, etc.) and obviously impossible to double check these as well.

Besides the testimonies the series of questions posed by the members of the Committee proved to be an important source for further analysis. The Chairman's role was mainly formal yet fundamental in giving assurances before the testimony started to the witness that his or her name will not be revealed. This was often the very condition of the testimony otherwise such revelations would have been obviously rejected, not risking neither the lives nor the safety of family members in Hungary, plus that of the friends and of the freedom fighters mentioned in the testimony. It is also important to emphasize that the UN was often blamed by the revolutionaries for its inaction in the critical days, and many witnesses referred later to their exclusive trust in Povl Bang-Jensen, when he was

prescreening them and giving his personal word for their safety, in exchange that he could keep a list with the names and other relevant data of the witnesses, also for administrative and financial matters.

The composition of the Committee was a conclusion of difficult negotiations (documented in the UN Archive) yet once these were done the distribution of roles served the scope of the fact-finding group. The most active and seemingly most controversial member was the Ceylonese representative R.S.S. Gunewardene as the documents reveal posing often delicate or arrogant questions, challenging the credibility of the testimony or prejudicing some of its aspects. Later he informally justified his strategy as by his cross-examinations he focused on obtaining the most faithful narrative of events. The Uruguayan member E.R. Fabregat's questions were directed mainly to the issue of human rights, of eventual anti-Semitic actions and of the ban for executions, while the Tunisian M. Slim was a professional and experienced politician, himself familiar with the fight for freedom and with the consequences of repression, expressing also an unconditional sympathy for those revolting. Finally the Australian representative and the Rapporteur of the Committee K.C.O. Shann was highly professional when questioning the witnesses in a systematic way, later his role became determinant for creating the Report yet in this phase of the work it became somehow clear that he well knew that the last word will be his.

The identification of the members of the Committee in the sound recordings was easy as their talk was preceded by mentioning them as "representative of" the relevant country, later they were not necessarily introduced, so the voice and the language they used was the key for determining their identity (Fabregat spoke Spanish, Slim French). It was also crucial that they represented their states and not the UN as that was also discussed at the earlier phases of the sessions. Further research may provide a more complex picture of these diplomats involved in the investigation, as each of them had an important story to be told both before and after their participation in the Committee.

The sound recordings and many of the printed reports revealed further aspects of the working of the Committee that were unknown before. The participation of D. Protitch Yugoslav international civil servant, that time the head of the UN department in charge of the Committee contributed a lot to the background activities, so did W. Jordan the principal secretary of the Committee, as documented both in the sound recordings and in the written collection. Other members of the secretariat made also important announcements when dealing with practical questions of travelling, of obtaining information, etc. that could be also of interest and help to understand the atmosphere and the many important practicalities of the work.

The collection contains many references to witnesses, like the "Fact sheet" with basic and extensive data about those giving testimonies (for example Tamás Aczél: poet, winner of the Stalin prize, referring to his age, of his Jewish origin, of travels he took, of his ex-military rank, etc.), and many other documents were preserved concerning the testimonies, referring to the submitted documents, etc. There are several lists with names of possible witnesses by different Foreign Ministries, plus materials submitted by them, like reports of embassies in Budapest about the revolution (sometimes providing a very complex and thorough description of the events like the British Ambassador L. Fry or

the French Cultural Attaché Turbet-Delof). Later the same diplomatic bodies were commenting upon the preliminary Report, correcting mistakes and commenting on the tone of the UN document.

When the hearings were over, many versions of the chapters of the Report and the background instructions, corrections, inclusions and exclusions reveal the extremely complex and very careful creation of the official UN document. Each chapter was assigned to certain members of the secretariat then other colleagues worked on the text, based on the instructions from the Rapporteur transmitted by the principal secretary. The process of correction overlapped the editing itself, thus the point of view of the Rapporteur had to be observed and followed. Shann and Jordan were in daily contact with the UN Secretariat as revealed in other archival research (in the UN Archive and in the British Foreign Office files, as well as in the US State Department documents). The difficulties with the final consent and in the signing of the Report originated in the political changes in Ceylon (even if Gunewardene later falsely claimed of having a huge list of corrections as pre-condition of his signature and conclusively omitting dozens of pages from the final version).

One of the most important archival revelations was the great amount and carefully documented information about the repressions after November 4th and particularly after March 1957 that did not diminish after the execution of Imre Nagy on June 16th 1958, on the contrary. The regularly submitted data about the number of trials, accusations, sentences, etc. were often confirmed by clandestinely forwarded messages from Budapest, referring also to secret trials, to the movements of the arrested Malater, to confidential resolutions of communist party circle's, etc. With very few exceptions (one being a letter written on 20th December 1957 by the Committee to obtain information from Budapest) these information were only listed by the date, sender and vague reference to the subject and circulated among the members, with no real effect whatsoever and the original copy filed in the secretariat. Compared to the amount of information to the concrete steps the UN took one may well feel that the inaction or even indifference in these respects was fatal. In some cases lives could be saved by international "uproar" (like in the case of Jozsef Gali and Gyula Obersovszky) and the Committee was aware of the role the international community could have putting pressure on the Budapest government, but failed to live up to the expectations. The materials sent from Hungary meant particularly great risk for those submitting it as recent archival revelations suggest, as providing information to the UN was considered high treason and in several cases the investigation was supported by some secret service provocation (agents were used by refugee groups as messengers, unknowingly) and in one "conspiracy case" three death sentences were executed, in another case a women was sentenced to death for similar charges.

The collection contains probably the most extensive and complex set of press reviews and clippings referring both to the refugees leaving Hungary after the revolution and also to the situation in Hungary (from 1957 through 1962). Mainly American, British, French and German newspapers and magazines were continually observed and relevant articles preserved, meanwhile Soviet and Hungarian newspapers, press conferences and radio broadcasts were included into the collection in official transcripts. The analysis of these responses to the events could be also a great field of research referring to the ideological and cultural characteristics of anti-regime movements, as seen in the press coverage.

One of the most dramatic revelations based on the analysis of the Hedervary Papers was the resonance of the Imre Nagy execution. The Committee hardly existed as a body by then, yet efforts were made to issue a communiqué then a Report. The greatly documented process clearly shows that there were no preparations for any supplemental reports after June 1957, even if the General Assembly's resolution requested that. The special representative concerned, the ex-General Assembly president from Thailand was not even in touch with the Committee and traces of his activity are hard to find.

Finally the continuation of my former research and its present renewal based on recent archival evidence clearly proved that many of Bang-Jensen's concerns were more than relevant. Besides the issue of the supplemental report he rightly claimed, his major problem was the possibility of the identification of the witnesses. The sensitive documents of the collection, the different data containing names, the fact-sheets, lists, references may have well revealed the identity of both the anonymous and of the secret witnesses. These documents were obviously not safeguarded, once they could end up in a collection of a junior member of the Committee's secretariat. The sound recordings as well as the Verbatim Records were also crucial sources for the possible and probable identification of witnesses and also for the reconstructions of the events. This process was scheduled simultaneously in New York but also in Hungary for greatly different reasons by the communist police and by the "people's courts". Parallel research in the Historical Archive of State Security Services proved that the Hungarian UN Mission (with secret agents planted there) was extremely diligent in obtaining data and information useful for the Budapest "Center", while at other UN organs that hired Hungarians were also approached by the secret services. The security measures and methods are themselves secrets as A. Cordier, the deputy of the UN's General Secretary argued when rejecting Bang-Jensen's concerns about the handling of sensitive documents, however even if these rules and regulations were secret, many of the confidential papers were all available, ending up in a collection that was never seriously safeguarded. During the process of collection these were in the office where Ms. Hedervary worked and in its vicinity, actually in the corridors of the department directed by a Soviet UN official.

6. Other relevant archival sources

Besides the many research options mentioned above to have a complex and thorough picture of the events both inside the UN and outside during and after 1956, there are many traces to follow. The most important revelations could result in the declassification of documents in the Archive of the UN that was repeatedly approached with no success yet. Other archives with relevant documents would be those of the ex-Soviet Union in which important files could be available, as recent exchange of messages refers to (with the Hungarian Archival Delegate working there). Contacts were established with the National Archive of Australia (due to the Rapporteur's nationality and his determinative role) that failed so far due to technical difficulties, while the Sri Lankan records could be also of great interest (scholars were contacted in the area but only promises received). It seems to be advisable to introduce a new Freedom of Information Act concerning Bang-Jensen in the USA, as the last one was requested in the 1980ies in different circumstances (the National Security Archive's assistance could

be considered). A large collection of documents is deposited at the Hungarian Association at New Brunswick that could be also approached and elaborated in the near future (deposited there many years ago as rescued from destroying them at the UN). In Hungary I continued the work in the National Archive where newly declassified files became available together with the documents of the communist (Hungarian Workers', then Hungarian Socialist Workers') party, while in the Historical Archive of State Security Services both the documents of the Washington "rezidentura" (secret service center) became available and also the secret services summary about the foreign aspects of the "counter-revolution".

7. Publications planned

The Hedervary Papers being partially restricted my planned publications include only those fragments that are available on the internet and even this may not be imminent. Once the research is concluded I plan to write and to publish first a series of articles and studies both in Hungarian and in English about important aspects of my research, based on the archival revelations. These studies may result in the future in a book focusing on the Hungarian revolution and the UN, with special attention on controversial issues and on the role Bang-Jensen played in revealing those, going deeper in the work as I could when finishing my research 10 years ago. The planned book will be followed by a shorter one written to the international audience in English, containing all the conclusions of the research and eventually further revelations that the final steps may bring.

8. Thanks

Finally I would want to thank wholeheartedly the generous assistance I received from the OSA, first to Gabriella Ivacs who mentioned me the possibility to apply for a Visegrad grant and assisted me throughout the work. Judit Hegedus and Clare Svetla Lewin had great achievements on working on the Hedervary Collection, their contribution was crucial for my research. Andras Mink had always great ideas to share and Katalin Gadoros was wonderful with the grantees, assisting administratively and warmly welcoming us to the institution. Finally I would want to thank Istvan Rev for envisioning, establishing and running this institution that could serve as a model for many similar ventures in Hungary and beyond.

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