

THE NEW YORK TIMES AND THE MEMORY OF THE 1956 REVOLUTION

INTRODUCTION

The New York Times is one of the “big five,” the best-known American dailies in Europe, including, of course, Hungary.¹ Carefully monitored by the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the Cold War, it is now freely available in the EU, and is a recognized trend setter, especially among liberal intellectuals and media actors. The *Times* now has a searchable database covering all published articles since 1851. This makes it possible to conduct a complete survey of the paper and see what it has had to say about the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, since the beginning of 1957. The *Times* was selected for review for two main reasons. Firstly, it published more articles about the Revolution than the other four of the “big five” (of the American dailies) combined, and, secondly, the paper has been the target of some well-founded but also some unfounded criticism from the politically active ‘56ers in the United States. The fiftieth anniversary of the Revolution calls for historical analysis and offers the possibility to reconsider some of the criticism directed at the paper.

Historians rarely get to play the numbers game, but when they do they enjoy it. The historical *New York Times* database returns 1,944 hits for an advanced keyword search combining Hungary and 1956, covering the period between January 1, 1957, and March 31, 2006. Excluding accidental hits, Olympic scores and irrelevant articles, the total score is well over five hundred articles of interest. The same keyword search with a shorter time frame, January 1, 1957, to December

31, 1989, yields 1,638 hits. This means that the *Times* devoted over 1,500 articles to the Revolution (and related issues) for the first thirty-two years, and only three hundred during the next sixteen years, since 1990. This goes a long way toward showing that we are dealing not simply with memory but with strategies of remembering. In other words, before 1989, during the communist period in Hungary, the *New York Times* wanted to remember and remind its readers of the Revolution on a regular basis. Since 1989, when Hungary officially recognized the October–November 1956 events as a “Revolution,” the paper felt it no longer had such a mission, and confined its coverage to factual reporting on anniversaries and new historical revelations. In the broader time frame mentioned above, the Hungarian Communist leader, János Kádár, gets 1,039 mentions, with 307 linking him to 1956, and 207 to both 1956 and the Soviets. When combined with 1956, the leader of the revolutionary government, Imre Nagy, gets 207 hits, while Cardinal József Mindszenty gets 125. This clearly indicates that the *Times* repeatedly connected all three of them to the Revolution of 1956. Before offering more statistics about choice of words at the end of this essay, we must look at the general tone and attitude of the paper and the types of articles it printed in connection with the Revolution.

OVERVIEW: THE CHANGING TONE AND ATTITUDE OF THE *TIMES*

Initially, the *New York Times* was taken aback by the brutal repression of the Revolution by superior Soviet force. Its tone remained hostile toward Kádár, the Soviet occupation, and Hungary. Regular reports, sometimes exaggerated, of the execution of young freedom fighters helped maintain this attitude. The next shock came in June 1958, when Imre Nagy and three others were executed, despite the safe conduct Kádár had granted them initially. The official statement released by the Hungarian authorities was taken apart by Soviet expert Harry Schwartz. Hostile reporting was combined with extensive reviews of books dealing with the Revolution, with regular refer-

ences to Cardinal Mindszenty's asylum at the American Legation (later Embassy) in Budapest, and even with such reports as the Greek government releasing a commemorative Imre Nagy stamp in 1961.

The partial amnesty granted by Kádár for those who did not take part in the armed conflict brought about the first editorial calling for possible normalization of relations with Hungary. Yet the real turning point was President Lyndon B. Johnson's "bridge building" speech in 1964. It encouraged the new tone reflecting surprise that Kádár could consolidate his power so fast. The *Times* began to display a less bellicose, more tolerant stand in the matter of communist Hungary, a sort of wait-and-see attitude. Heated exchanges between Washington and Budapest were reported word for word, but so was the American offer to raise the level of diplomatic relations from temporary chargé d'affaires to ambassador.

Chargé d'Affaires ad Interim János Radványi's defection from the Hungarian Embassy in Washington in 1967, set back relations for three years, yet it was rarely mentioned in connection with the Revolution. Anniversary coverage continued, and the general tone remained resentful. The joint Warsaw Pact intervention against the Prague Spring during the presidential election campaign in 1968 was perceived in the paper as the revival of the spirit and the ghosts of 1956.

Richard Nixon's election to the White House, and his new policy toward Eastern Europe, marked the beginning of a new phase in US-Hungarian relations. Four major talking points were agreed upon in the summer of 1969, and by 1973 all but two outstanding issues had been settled. Cardinal Mindszenty left Hungary, the two countries signed a consular agreement, and wartime claims (some dating back to World War I) were settled. William P. Rogers became the first American secretary of state to visit Hungary while in office, a Hungarian travel agency (IBUSZ) office was opened in New York City, and Hungarians could legally manufacture blue jeans (Trapper farmer). The two countries cooperated in the preparations for the Helsinki Conference on European Security, and Hungary was invited to supervise the armistice in Vietnam. President Nixon's resignation over the Watergate scandal set back his policy of détente as well as US-Hungarian relations. The Carter administration agreed to return the Holy Crown and the coronation regalia to the Hungarian people in January 1978, and a bilateral Most Favored Nation (MFN) trade agreement was signed two months later.

The *New York Times* had the beat of these developments, and reported on them favorably. Hungary became a “favorite son” for the paper, and Hungary profiles became more regular and more positive. So much so, that in 1977 a one-page tourist guide was printed for the country, and by the early 1980s Hungarians had come to “fight the Russians” with the “one weapon available,” anti-regime street jokes. The tone of these articles was appreciative, especially of Kádár’s achievement of some level of legitimacy through improvements in the standard of living, while anniversary reporting remained resentful. And this duality in tone was maintained until Hungary broke free from Soviet rule in 1989–1990.

A general review of the ever-changing attitude of the *Times* towards the Kádár regime and Hungary indicates that editorial preferences revolved around two major issues: maintaining Cold War pressure on Budapest on the one hand, and trying to encourage Hungary to loosen its ties with the Soviet Union via preferential treatment and complimentary remarks on the other. It is hardly surprising that letters to the editor from émigré Hungarians carried repeated, and often justifiable, criticism of this policy of the paper. After all, the *New York Times* did use a double standard in reporting that other dailies such as the *Wall Street Journal* or the *Chicago Tribune* did not. While the *Times* spoke of an “affluent” Hungary in 1972, the *Wall Street Journal* in 1986 declared that “Hungary Doesn’t Deserve Model Communist Image.”²

There was, there simply had to be, a third editorial concern about choice of words about the Revolution, but before reviewing it, we shall take a closer look at the different types of articles dealing with the Revolution and its many memories. In an admittedly arbitrary system of categorization with multiple overlaps, ten different types of articles will be identified and analyzed with a view to gaining further insights into the editorial preferences and strategies of remembering on the part of the *New York Times*. The ten categories are: memory, country profiles of Hungary, political coverage, editorial comments, letters to the editor, Mindszenty articles, human interest stories, obituaries, book reviews, plays, movies, TV programs, and political advertisements.

MEMORY

The most relevant type of article published in the *New York Times* dealt with the memory, anniversaries and anniversary celebrations of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution; therefore, these get extended review and special attention in this paper. Nineteen sixty-one and 1971 passed almost unnoticed, 1971 brought the first open call for reconciliation (by Professor Charles Gati), while 1976 and 1986 got most of the attention. Two thousand and one was the first major anniversary without a single commemorative article or editorial in October–November. These commemorative articles covered a wide range of issues from Hungarians and Americans in the US celebrating the anniversary through personal recollections of “the 13 days that shook the Kremlin” to Kádár and official Hungary trying to forget, or misrepresent, the events of 1956. Next is a chronological survey of the most interesting articles and tendencies in these articles on memory.

Although the year of 1958 was dominated by the execution of Imre Nagy and some of his fellow revolutionaries, it also saw the publication of three different articles dealing with the memory of the Revolution. Lisa Larsen authored a photographic essay on “Hungary, Twenty Months After,” in which she recalled her experiences of a visit to Budapest.³ She reports on the physical destruction still apparent, and maintains that

Hungarians do not believe their revolution was in vain. They become strangely alive when they talk about it, as if it had been the most wonderful event in their lives. They are proud of the way they acted. They did the best they could, and now that they realize they never could have won they try to make the best of life as it is.

She goes on to say that Hungarians resent high food prices, and that most Hungarians dream of owning a car. She then tells an anecdote: one Hungarian told her that he would not get a car even if he could, because his neighbors would think he had become a communist, referring to the fact that only high-ranking Party officials could afford an automobile.

Two other articles from 1958 deserve attention. The *New York Times* reported on a rally held at Carnegie Hall, attended by more than 2,000 people. On October 20, Republican and Democratic keynote speakers convened to make this tribute bipartisan. A commemorative plaque was awarded posthumously to *Times* reporter John MacCormac, and presented to his widow by a prominent freedom fighter, Gergely Pongráz. Governor Averell Harriman addressed the rally by letter and announced his decision to make October 23 “Hungarian Freedom Fighters’ Day.”⁴ On December 4, M. S. Handler reported from Vienna on the official Hungarian “recollection” of the “counter-revolution.” Citing information acquired during a short visit to Hungary, Handler correctly identified the official Party rhetoric revolving around two major themes. Mistakes had indeed been made before 1956 by the erstwhile dictator, Mátyás Rákosi, and his Stalinist associates, but the revolt soon turned into a counterrevolution (when demands were made to return private property to its prewar owners) and students and workers abandoned it. From then on, events were driven by criminal elements.⁵ In fact, this remained the official Party rhetoric in the press, textbooks and pseudo-academic publications until 1989.⁶

1958 thus confirmed and further developed some key myths about the Revolution. The Larsen piece inadvertently strengthened the communist-generated myth that freedom fighters were really just people who fled Hungary in hope of a better life and a car; the rally at Carnegie Hall earned additional rhetorical support for the myth of the freedom fighters,⁷ while the Handler article introduced the official Hungarian Party line (and self-explanatory mythology) on the Revolution to the American public. This trend continued throughout the first half of the 1960s with some interesting extensions on the basic themes. In 1959, on the anniversary of the outbreak of the Revolution, the State Department issued an official statement praising the Revolution and saying that it failed “in the face of ruthless Soviet military intervention.”⁸ A similar statement was issued and reported in 1960.⁹ Also in 1959, Nikita S. Khrushchev paid an official visit to Hungary, and remarked in one of his speeches that there had been some disagreement in the Kremlin over Hungary in 1956. The paper also quotes him saying, “The saliva of the imperialists was running in their mouths at the prospect of Hungary’s leaving the Socialist camp.”¹⁰ The beginning of the UN debate of the Hungarian question was

welcomed by the *Times* in the form of a half-page, day-by-day chronology of the revolutionary events in Hungary.¹¹ In 1960 and 1961, the Vienna correspondent (Handler) reported on Hungarian expatriates and Austrian students remembering the Revolution,¹² and in 1962 the paper featured an Imre Nagy commemorative stamp issued by the Greek government.¹³ Reports on Hungarian economic recovery (by Handler) also commented on the communist version of the events, and reference was made to a picketing of the Soviet UN mission building on the fifth anniversary of the Revolution.¹⁴ By 1965 Hungary had become synonymous with unjustifiable military intervention: the American Socialist Party compared the American intervention in the Dominican Republic to the Soviet invasion of Hungary.¹⁵ Former Vice President and future President Richard Nixon got into a heated verbal exchange with Soviet students at Moscow University over the American use of force, and he replied, "If you want to talk about force, then we should talk about Soviet action against the Freedom Fighters in Hungary."¹⁶

By 1966, the tenth anniversary of the Revolution, the image of freedom-fighting Hungary, originally created by Louis Kossuth during his tour of the United States in 1850–51, had been fully revived and was deeply embedded in the American political mind and in American memory. Over time, this memory would fade, but in 1966 it provided sound basis for the first big anniversary. Accordingly, another commemorative rally was held at Carnegie Hall, this time a musical event with some political speeches mixed in.¹⁷ The first official Hungarian commemoration of the crushing of the "counterrevolution" was also reported (from Vienna). The article cites a *Népszabadság* editorial admitting some of the mistakes of Rákosi and his associates, and describes Kádár as the Party chief "who came to power after Russian tanks crushed the uprising."¹⁸ This article represents two major trends already identified in the *Times*. On the one hand, it recites the official Hungarian myth of mistakes and criminal elements in the Revolution, and automatically dismisses it as a lie. On the other hand, the stern tone of the piece, especially the comment on Kádár, did not match the tone of earlier articles reporting the improvement of American-Hungarian relations, most notably the raising of diplomatic relations to ambassadorial level. As has been pointed out above, such a dichotomy of tone seemed acceptable to the paper on the whole.

The most important output in 1966 was Timothy Foote's seven-page feature article on Hungary in the Sunday magazine section on November 20, titled "The Road Back to Budapest." Foote was a foreign correspondent in Hungary during the Revolution and revisited Budapest ten years after in the capacity of book editor of *Time-Life*. Much of the article is Foote's own recollection of the events and his impressions of October–November 1956, all of them frank, shocking and bloody, as he himself was slightly wounded. The final third of the piece takes an extended look at Hungary in 1966. He claims that the Cold War changed into some sort of peaceful coexistence, and both major blocs have learnt their lessons. He touches upon, and then dismisses, another myth about the Revolution:

As far as Hungarians are concerned, the dislocation brought about by the rebellion merely delayed reforms and rewards which would have come sooner by themselves. Since it is probable that, if the uprising could have been peaceably stopped at midcourse, reforms would have been made with less bloodshed, this argument bears the shadow image of one kind of truth. Such talk, however, is both seductive and destructive of the will.

He draws a parallel with the American Revolution, claiming that a similar argument could possibly be made: the colonies should have waited another few years and asserted themselves economically, thus breaking away from Britain without bloodshed. Then he goes on to ask, "But would we have stood for anything in history? Would we, in fact, have been the same country and people we have become?" He then points to the fact that the Kádár regime "has done its best to erase not only many of the grievances which gave birth to the rebellion but the fact of its existence at all." He reminds the reader that there is still an electric fence surrounding the country, that there are 60,000 Soviet troops stationed in Hungary, and that the mine fields around the borders were removed in a face-saving operation, after several Austrian schoolchildren had been blown up. He takes on the new myth of economic prosperity in Kádár's Hungary, but calls it a disappointment by Western standards. He notices a subdued rather than cheerful attitude, and attributes it to the rather low standard of living. He then records the

disappointment of Hungarians with America and maintains that Hungarians in the US and in the mother country confirm that the apparent lack of interest on the part of Hungarians in Hungary in talking about or thinking about their rebellion is genuine.

They are not interested in having far-off relations from a distant country stir them to discontent with what they have. That is a road they have already trod, only to see their hopes crushed. They believe that what they have is what they must live with. They expect no help from the Russian Government, and they no longer look to America for leadership. In this sense they are profoundly neutralist, and sadly realistic. Hungary is still a one-party country, and they know that what the Government permits today it can repress tomorrow.

The passages above speak for themselves. Such sympathetic yet accurate analysis from an American journalist would not be printed in the paper for quite some time. Foote's article is a textbook example of topical overlap: it is an article on memory and a profile of Hungary at the same time.

The next ten years brought political turmoil and East-West détente, and the *New York Times* focused on these issues. This left little room for remembering. Two lengthy articles reviewed the political achievements of President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1969 and 1971 respectively.¹⁹ The latter was a feature article in the Sunday magazine section on February 7, and it marks the beginning of "Eisenhower revisionism," of seeing the former war hero-turned-president as a political genius in the White House. The Revolution in Hungary gets but a passing mention here. Two articles on Radio Free Europe (hereafter RFE) raised questions about American responsibility for 1956. Unsurprisingly, in "Embattled Radio Free Europe Defends Role," David Binder devotes a whole subsection to 1956, and describes it as a watershed. He reports on the large-scale changes in personnel after the Revolution, and quotes one employee saying that before 1956 RFE was an "agitation station," but since then it has become a "detached, constructive critic."²⁰ Next year, in 1972, RFE got six-page Sunday magazine section coverage from Henry Kamm, under the title, "The Station That Fulbright Wants to Shut Down." The timing was by no means acciden-

tal: the CIA had just admitted that it had been secretly financing RFE and Radio Liberty, and the two stations were under fire in Congress. Kamm deals with 1956 extensively. In a fair summary he recalls that after the Revolution RFE was accused of inciting rebellion and promising the “rebels foreign assistance.” He quotes RFE research department head James F. Brown saying that “there was an absence of control during the critical four days.” This, in turn, brought about the realization that “RFE had a potential for provoking violence,” the decision that it should not use this potential and the realization that it would be accused of doing it nonetheless.²¹ He too lists personnel changes and changes in the strategy of the station, and offers an insightful interview with István Bede, the head of the Hungarian service. Bede recalls a classic joke: the Hungarian economic reforms in 1968 were supported only by Kádár and RFE. He also claims the days of “rollback” rhetoric are gone, and he has to accept “goulash Communism,” if the people in Hungary believe that socialism is here to stay. He says RFE would “not broadcast the views of Hungarian émigré politicians because they live in the past.”²² Détente had clearly arrived at the English Garden in Munich by 1972, and RFE and Voice of America journalists would officially be allowed into Hungary six years later to cover the return of the Holy Crown and coronation regalia.

The Prague Spring and the joint Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia earned extensive coverage in 1968. Comparisons between 1956 and 1968 were offered on a regular basis. A July 19 article in the *Times* went beyond the general trend by reviving the memory the Revolution: “Czech Crisis Recalls Crushing of Hungarian Rebellion in 1956.” The unsigned article claims that besides the obvious similarities the one key difference between 1956 and 1968 is that while in 1968 the two superpowers were trying to improve relations, in 1956 the “United States was...actively calling in radio broadcasts for the revolt of Eastern European nations.” It then tells the story of the first Soviet withdrawal from Budapest and, for the first time in the *Times*, recalls the Soviet trapping and arrest of Pál Maléter. On November 5 the *New York Times* ran a short article noting that Kádár and other Hungarian officials commemorated the “martyrs” of the “counterrevolution.”²³

Kádár’s attempts to win acceptance and reconciliation hit home with prominent 1956ers by 1971, the fifteenth anniversary of the Revo-

lution. Columbia University Soviet expert Charles Gati penned a longer piece with the tell-tale title, “In Hungary, It’s Now a Question of Making the Best of It.”²⁴ He correctly identifies the sweeping changes in Hungary since 1956, but cannot help being amazed by the very same changes: “What is most difficult to understand is that this is not the country we left behind.” He reports that the general feeling in Hungary is that Kádár is “the best man Hungary can have under the circumstances.” He points to a marked shift in the frame of reference: Hungarians look to the West to see what they want (computers) and to the East “to learn what you should be careful not to want (tanks).” He sees the political subculture of antiregime jokes, and sees them as some kind of a political safety valve. He concludes his piece by saying that Kádár’s (by Soviet standards extended) liberalism “goes a long way to explain why most Hungarians have come to accept, if only grudgingly, their present situation. After all, with the high hopes of ’56 gone, perhaps forever, they have the best of what can be had under the circumstances.”

1976 was a special year for Americans and Hungarians alike. The United States celebrated her bicentennial, while Hungarians abroad remembered their suppressed Revolution of twenty years before.²⁵ It was also election year in the US, and one of the Ford-Carter TV debates had a peculiar effect on both memory and voter behavior. As usual, the *New York Times* covered the events with great interest. Articles on memory are discussed here, while the nature and political implications of the TV debate will be addressed in the subsequent chapter on political reporting.

The first commemorative piece, in fact an article on memory combined with a country profile of Hungary, came from the pen of the former freedom fighter Charles Fenyvesi.²⁶ He recalls his return to Hungary as “bittersweet.” He records the achievements of the Kádár regime in pacifying the country and bringing about, to a certain degree, an acceptable life in Hungary. He then reminisces about the Revolution and the subsequent repression, and identifies by full name all three people who were executed together with Imre Nagy in June 1958. He then goes on to argue that “in some ways, the 1956 revolution has won.” Fenyvesi supports his argument by citing some of the key demands of the Revolution and explaining how these have been met. Stalinist ter-

ror is gone, and so are the old Stalinists, and with them the all-pervading fear of the 1950s; which is basically correct. He tries to demonstrate, however, with less success, that three other demands of the Revolution have also been met. We now know from historical analysis that the Soviet stranglehold on the Hungarian economy was never relaxed, the “nationalism” of the Kádár regime did not prevent the Romanian dictator, Nicolae Ceausescu, from destroying ethnic Hungarian villages in Transylvania even as late as the 1980s, and discrimination against non-Communists and the interwar elite of Hungary never really ceased. He also looks at the philosophical followers of György Lukács, recalls the deportation of the aristocratic families in the early 1950s, and concludes the article on a somewhat melancholic note. Commenting on the Hungarians’ “fatalistic acceptance of Moscow’s suzerainty for generations to come,” he wonders what inspired armed resistance twenty years before:

There was no plan for a revolution, only a momentum that was unstoppable. There was no rational calculation, only total desperation...It was a historic dream of glorious defiance that united fiery Social Democrats and bitter ex-Stalinists, silver-tongued writers and workers who felt they had nothing to lose but their chains, students possessed of the all the righteousness of youth, and all the nameless people of Budapest who took to the streets.

Fenyvesi here revives some of the key myths of the Revolution and challenges the official Hungarian view, which he too cites earlier. The Revolution in Budapest was indeed spontaneous, and not preplanned as Kádár’s official history claimed, but national unity behind the Revolution did not last long.²⁷ Fenyvesi, like Gati five years before, accepts the new reality of the 1970s: “For my generation, now middle-aged with dreams discounted or abandoned and horizons narrowing, October of 1956 is a sacred corner in time when we were beautiful and powerful and pure—a youth that can never come again.”

A week later a one-page article (with a half-page photo) was published by the exiled General Béla K. Király, the commander of the National Guard (i. e. the freedom fighter forces) in 1956.²⁸ The picture shows two (presumably) Soviet tanks in the background, and a dead freedom fighter stretched out in the front. Király tells a story from the

Revolution, when the former head of the secret police, General Béla Berecz, came to him to surrender. Without concluding the story, he switches to memory, and tells the story of a successful revolution, and then identifies three reasons why the Soviets invaded Hungary: (1) the USSR needed Hungary for missile bases, (2) Moscow had its own domino theory for the possible collapse of its empire if Hungary “fell,” and (3) the Chinese Communists pressured Moscow into intervention. Just as in his academic publications, Király calls the Soviet intervention in Hungary “the first war between socialist states.” By way of conclusion, he recalls his final encounter and conversation with Prime Minister Imre Nagy, a story he would tell over and over again, after returning to Hungary.

Two articles round out the 1976 coverage on the memory of the Revolution. On October 29 Malcolm W. Browne reported from Budapest that the anniversary had passed “nearly unnoticed” in Hungary.²⁹ He states that 60,000 of the 200,000 refugees have returned since the Revolution, and that limited criticism of the government has become acceptable. He reports peaceful student demonstrations but “no violent clashes since 1956.” And with a final quote from an unidentified Hungarian he shares the conclusions of Gati and Fenyvesi before him: “It’s better to be practical and have whipped cream for your coffee than to spend the rest of your life nursing old sores.” Equally important was a special article by David Binder on November 30, in which he linked recent CIA revelations to the Revolution.³⁰ Citing two contradictory sources, Binder contends that the Eisenhower administration tried to combine the publication of Nikita Khrushchev’s secret speech of February 25, 1956, given at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, with armed uprisings started by specially trained CIA operatives behind the Iron Curtain. He quotes one of his sources, saying that the “premature release of the speech, which The [New York] *Times* published on June 4, 1956, provoked nationalist risings in Poland, Hungary and Romania too soon for the covert operational groups to respond.” These special CIA units were disbanded in 1958. Both his sources, Binders says, are critical of the détente policies of the Nixon and Ford administrations.

The next ten years brought about the most symbolic and most contested American gesture toward Hungary during the Cold War: the

return of the King St. Stephen's coronation regalia to Budapest.³¹ Such demonstrations of goodwill were soon gone, following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iran hostage crisis in 1979. A new Soviet-American confrontation loomed large on the horizon, the two superpowers mutually boycotted the Olympic Games on the territory of the other, and Solidarity surfaced in Poland and questioned the very ideological basis of the regime. "The second Cold War" was in full flow. By the thirtieth anniversary of the Revolution the "old guard" in Moscow was dead and gone, and Mikhail Gorbachev was teaching Russian words like "glasnost" and "perestroika" to the American public and press. Memory again was linked to political developments, with one notable exception. In 1978 Stephen G. Esrati wrote a lengthy piece on shortwave radio and radio memories. He listed five formative radio memories, among them Henry Cabot Lodge's UN speech during the Soviet invasion of Budapest on November 4, 1956, and "Radio Free Budapest signing off with 'help us' and an unidentified march; and then returning to the air some time later as Radio Budapest with a Soviet view of events."³²

Nineteen eighty-six, which turned out to be the last decennial anniversary of the Revolution before communism collapsed in Hungary, followed the trends set by 1966 and 1976: the *New York Times* reported anniversary celebrations in the United States and commented on the attempts on the part of the Kádár regime to suppress, or reinvent, the memory in Hungary. Skeletons were out of the closet as early as June 23, when Michael T. Kaufman reported from Budapest on the obscure cemetery parcel, "Section 301, Where Hungary's Past Is Buried." This was the first time the paper told the story of the relatives trying to locate the remains of their beloved and trying to get a proper reburial for Kádár's victims. In October and November Kaufman reported from Budapest, Szolnok, and Warsaw. The first article begins with a summary of and some statistics about the Revolution, and continues (along the familiar line) with a look at Kádár's status in the country: "[He] is still very much in power, but these days no one calls him the 'butcher of Budapest' as once they did." He quotes the dissident intellectual Miklós Haraszti about Poland and Hungary: "for the Poles the most important thing is remembering, while for many Hungarians the most important thing is forgetting." This, in turn, is followed by the

official version of the Hungarian government, but with an amazing twist. Kaufman tells of a three-part series on TV about the “counterrevolution,” and supplements it with sections of an interview with the director of the series. This director, whom he identifies as a Dezső Rodzianyi, claimed that after carefully studying still photographs of the demonstrators he concluded that the students had been gradually replaced by gypsies, thus equating the “criminal elements” of the Kádár mythology with an ethnic minority.³³ In his article penned in Szolnok, Kaufman tells about the celebrations Kádár and Party official János Berecz (whom he identifies as an historian) staged to commemorate the birth of their regime on November 4, 1956. Kaufman quotes Berecz extensively, but points out the inconsistencies in his statements. When asked about “the gaps in the historical account” and Kádár’s sudden turnaround, Berecz responded, “We still do not have a minute-by-minute account of what happened between the first and fourth of November.”³⁴

Kaufman contributed a third piece printed on November 10, this time from a Warsaw suburb, where he attended a Catholic mass and rally that unveiled a marble plaque to the memory of “the Hungarians killed in the 1956 uprising.” He quotes Father Leon Kantorski saying that Poles do not want any socialism anymore. He concludes with an insightful remark about Hungarian dissidents: “The model they admittedly dream about is that of Poland, where an underground culture actively competes with the official one” about interpretations of the past.³⁵ Articles like this explain why there was no street access to the *New York Times* in Hungary during the 1980s, and why the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs paid special attention to the paper.

In an article from New Brunswick that sounds more like a flashback to the sixties than a product of the Reagan era, Priscilla Van Tassel adds a hitherto undiscussed dimension to the study of strategies of remembering: ethnic revival mixed with academic memory.³⁶ She contends that “bittersweet” celebrations of the thirtieth anniversary of the Revolution have triggered wholesale demands from students in the area to be offered courses in Hungarian history and culture. Rutgers University hastily revived its Hungarian program dropped twenty years earlier, and Mercer County College joined the project. Van Tassel attributes this new interest to the coming of age of the second and third generations of the refugees and quotes five students of Hungarian origin sup-

porting these programs and telling about rediscovering their roots. References are made to the contributions of the American Hungarian Foundation, and its president, August (Ágoston) Molnár, is interviewed. Molnár expresses his doubts about the sustainability of such high level of interest in things Hungarian. Of course in 1986 no one could imagine what 1989 would bring.

Nineteen eighty-nine is remembered in Hungary as “the year of miracles.” It witnessed the total collapse of the Soviet empire in a mostly peaceful way, but at amazing speed. In Hungary, 1989 was as much about 1956 as it was about the future. “Counterrevolution” became “popular uprising” in late January, Imre Nagy turned out to be a national hero and not a criminal and a traitor, and both Kádár and his victims were buried in a proper way during the summer. By October Hungary became a republic (and not a people’s republic), and 1956 officially became a Revolution and War of Independence, as well as a national holiday. The *New York Times* published more than 150 articles about Hungary in 1989, in which memory and political reporting mixed inseparably. The reburial of Imre Nagy and his fellow victims received more coverage from the paper than any other event since the Revolution. Like the Revolution in 1956, the diplomatic accord between the Vatican and Hungary, Mindszenty’s departure from Budapest, and the return of the Holy Crown, the reburial also became front-page news and a topic for several editorials. Still, the general trend the paper followed was to let Hungarians speak their mind.

The *Times* dutifully reported Minister of State Imre Pozsgay’s famous speech about the “popular uprising,” raised the issue of the reburial as early as February 8, quoted a liberal Soviet view of Hungary supporting Hungarian neutrality in 1956 on February 11, lauded the rebroadcasting of Imre Nagy’s famous November 4 speech on May 7, and welcomed revelations by historian Mária Ormos that Kádár had a hand in kidnapping and executing Nagy.³⁷ Coverage of the reburial was followed by a report that the Hungarian Supreme Court fully rehabilitated Imre Nagy on July 6.³⁸ Kádár was presented as a respected elder statesman following his death, and Henry Kamm filed a special article on his funeral.³⁹ The anniversary was reported from Budapest under the title, “New Hungary Marks ’56 Uprising: ‘Gorby!’ and ‘Russians Out!’ Mix. A New Hungary Celebrating the 1956 Rebellion.”⁴⁰ By the end of

1989, 1956 had taken its due place in Hungarian memory. Hungarians legitimately could and have ever since remembered their Revolution.

Unsurprisingly, since 1990 the *New York Times* has pursued a more factual, and less spectacular, policy of remembering. In 1991 two major issues dominated *Times* reporting: what East European historians could (and perhaps should) do about the Communist past, and how far should retaliation for Communist crimes and abuses go. The former issue was briefly revisited in 1996 and 1997,⁴¹ while the latter was repeatedly revived, most notably in 1994 and 1999.⁴² The big scoop in 1992 was the so-called Yeltsin-dossier, a compilation of Soviet Politburo documents on Kremlin decision making in 1956.⁴³ The dubious role of RFE was on the table again in 1995 and 1996, when radio archives were opened.⁴⁴ The 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games revived memories of the bloody battle during the Melbourne Olympics in the pool between the Hungarian and Soviet water polo teams, just when the Soviet invasion was taking place in Budapest.⁴⁵ In 2006, a documentary (*Freedom's Fury*) and a feature film dealt with this topic. (For the record, Hungarians went a perfect 2–0 in these two games.)

SPECIALS FROM HUNGARY: COUNTRY PROFILES

The second major group of articles of interest for the purposes of memory preservation is a series of special articles on Hungary; for want of a better term, country profiles. These articles range from half-page single-topic pieces to multi-page coverage in the Sunday magazine section. With a few early but notable exceptions, they share a positive, approving attitude towards Kádár's Hungary. They usually present Kádár as a tragic hero-turned-master-politician, and maintain that Hungary had a "tragic" uprising in 1956, but since the restoration of communist power the country came a long way to become the happiest barrack behind the Iron Curtain. In this regard, country profiles have, in some way, balanced the critical tone of the anniversary articles. What follows is a sampling of the most interesting pieces, with a focus on memory preservation and/or strategies of forgetting.

"Defiance in Hungary" by Handler from 1961 is the first interesting piece.⁴⁶ It reports on the post-1956 state of the arts and literature in

Hungary, and identifies “internal emigration” as the underling trend. Soccer games are more of a concern for Hungarians than nuclear tests or Soviet Party congresses, and the only cheerful thing the author sees is “bright-eyed, handsome children, well dressed and pampered by parents who are hard pressed to make both ends meet.” Quiet resistance to the regime, total state control of culture (even composing at the Liszt Academy of Music), and poverty taken with pride are the key themes for Handler. Nineteen sixty-two marks a change in tone, and the turnaround is completed by 1964. By December, Hungary and Kádár would become the “favorite sons” of the paper and would remain that until 1989.

Nineteen sixty-two saw the publication of two interesting pieces in the *Times*. Drama critic Howard Taubman touring the Iron Curtain countries, reported from Budapest that the Kádár regime had developed a new, rather liberal attitude toward the arts.⁴⁷ In an article that is mostly concerned with a shift in theme from cooperative farms to human interest stories on stage since 1956, Taubman comments on the Revolution and its official Hungarian interpretation. He cites the Party line that liberalization was well on its way and the “counterrevolution” had set it back considerably, because enemies of the regime forced “renewed surveillance after 1956,” although the will to liberalize on the part of the government overcame all such obstacles within a year. Taubman did not have to dig too deep to find that this view was not widely shared, as not many of the people he contacted considered the events leading up to the Revolution as “liberalization.” Paul Underwood went a step further and began his piece printed on September 27 with the following remark: “Liberalization in Communist-ruled Hungary has gone so far as to raise the question in some minds of who did win the 1956 revolt, after all.” He reports that non-Communist Western newspapers are freely available in Budapest (even for Hungarians), that “Kádár has curbed the powers of the secret police,” and that the “new atmosphere of ‘humanism’ has induced many of the ‘silent’ writers, who had retired from active work in protest against the crushing of the 1956 revolt, to resume their creative effort.”⁴⁸

Max Frankel’s special from Budapest on the state of US-Hungarian relations,⁴⁹ like the Taubman piece cited above, represents a transition between the extremes of Handler on the one hand and Underwood on the other. Frankel correctly identifies sources of tension

between the two countries, then points to signals of goodwill on both sides: Kádár's partial amnesty granted to those who did not fight in the Revolution and the US decision to remove the Hungarian Question from the UN agenda. He sees Cardinal Mindszenty's stay at the American Legation in Budapest as the key issue to be settled before relations could be "normalized." The Revolution gets two mentions in the article: first, it is identified as the point in time when bilateral relations cooled off, and it is mentioned again in connection with Mindszenty. He does call the events a "revolution."

"Bridge-building" brought about a supportive public relations campaign in the paper on behalf of Kádár—not because he suddenly came to live up to American ideals of democracy but because his Hungary could be perhaps an example for other Iron Curtain countries. Genuine enthusiasm about major positive developments in Hungary and in international relations mingle with mixed acceptance of the status quo and the unconscious desire to praise the regime to death. As will be shown later, such reporting earned critical remarks in the letters to the editor section of the paper. The all-around change in the tone of reporting in the paper was largely due to the efforts of Max Frankel and David Binder. Frankel describes Hungary as "A land of Euphemism" and is the first to observe the effects and role of political humor in stabilizing the Kádár regime.⁵⁰ In a highly controversial, six-page Sunday magazine article Binder claims that "10,000,000 Hungarians Can't Be Wrong."⁵¹ Turning evil into virtue, he describes Kádár's ascension to power as a rags-to-riches story, elegantly dodging disturbing details by saying that the "complete story of Kádár's activities during that fateful year of 1956 has yet to be disclosed." He describes Kádár as a victim and survivor of Stalinist purges, who knows all too well what to do and what not to do. He calls the challenges facing the ruler of Hungary "large and familiar:" Kádár must be able to toe the line, adjusting to changes in Moscow, must reform the economic system of Hungary, must "contend with Magyar nationalism," and must find a solution to "the corruption, apathy and cynicism that are endemic to East European societies." He concludes with words of praise for Kádár's character. This article, like Binder's "Pleasantly Pampered Hungary" from a year later,⁵² stands out as the classic country profile piece identified in the introduction of the present chapter.

Two possible ways to further develop the positive image of Hungary were to narrow and/or widen the focus of reporting. Accordingly, single-topic pieces were printed on the one hand, while the broader context was provided with the new slogan, “A Thaw in East Europe’s ‘Ice Age.’” In two articles published two days apart and echoing earlier catch-phrases, C. L. Sulzberger analyzed Hungarian foreign policy. In “Foreign Affairs: Not Titoist or Polycentrist”⁵³ he describes Kádár as a supporter of better East-West relations and bilateral contacts, and calls him a liberal and a nationalist: “The interesting thing about Kádár, who has followed a rocky road from prison to opposition to revolution and counterrevolution and then to power, is that he is neither a Communist intellectual nor a pragmatic technician, but in between.” Sulzberger continues by saying that “although he was primarily responsible for inviting in Soviet troops in 1956, there is no doubt he is a nationalist,” and supports peaceful competition between “the Communist and capitalist blocs.” In “Foreign Affairs: Hungary between Two Symbols,”⁵⁴ Sulzberger raises the already familiar concept of the Revolution winning through the back door, and compares Kádár to Nagy. He is presented as a tragic hero-turned-master of Realpolitik, bringing a “human aspect” and “liberalism” to his country. Sulzberger explains the “two symbols” in his title the following ways: “Human and responsible, he seems bigamously wedded to Hungary’s national pride and to Communism, a man caught between the symbols of the ideological tyrant Rákosi and the ideological renegade Nagy.”

Widening the focus meant coverage of the various Soviet satellites in a single article. In this, Frankel was the trend-setter, reporting from Vienna on January 18, 1965, with the headline, “Changes in Eastern Europe: A Country-by-Country Profile,” and the subheading, “Speed of Thaw Varies in Region.” He cites Western analysts marking changes in the Eastern bloc by degrees of “de-Stalinization” and “desatellization,” and claims that East Europeans “use much the same standards” in evaluating their own lives. He discusses seven countries in the region and contends that they are all different cases—the first open challenge to the image of the monolithic Soviet bloc in the paper. Hungary stands out not just as an example to follow in the text, but Kádár’s photo is also placed in the center of the article. Frankel proposes an interesting thesis, which became the underlying theme of

reporting on Hungary: "Hungary, which eight years ago made the most dramatic bid for escape from the Soviet bloc is today the best example of how far de-Stalinization can proceed without much significant de-satellization."⁵⁵ Kádár's achievements are listed but are contrasted with his loyalty to Moscow: "National pride was encouraged, but there was never a suggestion that the national interest deviated in the slightest from that of the Soviet Union." Quoting unidentified Hungarian sources, he lists three possible explanations: (1) he is loyal to Khrushchev, who put him into power after 1956; (2) domestic opposition forces him closer to Moscow; and/or (3) he wants to control reforms so that they would not get out of hand like before. The "thaw" theme was further developed by Edmund Stillman in a nine-page Sunday magazine special on August 21, 1966.⁵⁶ Stillman, a former diplomat, looks at the region with a diplomat's eye and sees clear signs of decay in the bloc: "snubbing Russians" is "common sport," he says, the Russian military has become invisible, and resistance to Moscow and "challenge to the Soviet hegemony" is spearheaded by Ceausescu's Romania. Hungary gets two mentions: first in connection with 1956, which "was the year of popular revolt in Eastern Europe," and then in connection with Romania's defiance of Soviet power, when Stillman openly questions Moscow's willingness to flex muscle again, like it did in 1956.⁵⁷ The article carries four photos, with one coming from the Revolution, the famous "Ruszkik haza" [Russians go home] shop-window shot.

With no significant change in message, subsequent country profiles on Hungary could add but little to the themes developed between 1961 and 1966. In 1969 and 1974 the paper reported that Hungary was "nervously building ties to [the] West," and in 1972 open praise for Kádár was printed again, with the usual street joke for starters, and a photo in the middle.⁵⁸ In these, the Revolution remains a simple reference point for the time when Kádár came to power and when things began to change for the better. A personal, intimate account of a visit to Budapest was printed from the exiled Czech writer Alan Levy in 1976,⁵⁹ and in 1977 the paper published a one-page summary which amounts to a condensed guidebook to Hungary, Paul Hofmann's "What's Doing in BUDAPEST."⁶⁰ The Polish crisis of 1980-81 brought back memories of 1956 and 1968, and yielded even more street

jokes. So much so, that John Darnton's special from Budapest in 1980⁶¹ is more a collection of jokes than actual reporting. The one that stands out is the one that links Soviet interventions in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Afghanistan. The question is: What is the new Moscow phone number for "friendly assistance?" The answer: 56-68-79. Kádár is described toward the end of the piece as "the aging party leader installed 24 years ago during the Soviet invasion." Unlike his counterparts in other Soviet satellites, he is "genuinely popular," and "allows himself to be spoofed occasionally." Another, more serious piece published in the same year brings together reviews of Hungary, Romania, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria from five different journalists, with the tell-tale title, "East Europe Measures Its Freedoms Inch by Inch."⁶² The last country profiles of Hungary to mention the Revolution were both put out in 1989. "Hungary at a Glance" is a short, facts-and-figures type introduction to the country with a sketchy map, and one comment on the Revolution: "The uprising of 1956 and its brutal suppression with Soviet tanks shocked the world and were viewed as a historic turning point for the Soviet bloc."⁶³ The other, "Hungarians, Maestros of Ambiguity, Confront a Whole New Political Process," by R. W. Apple, Jr., is a mixture and summation of the classic country profile themes.⁶⁴ He begins with two jokes, reflects upon the upcoming referendum on the future of the country, reports the end of "bittersweet humor," and lists the challenges facing the new Hungary he sees. He senses a new "feeling of neocolonialism experienced by long-term residents" of the country, and cites an American businessman about the possibility of an American and West European "invasion" of the country (and its economic system): "It is inevitable....Two, three years, and there will be a backlash against this capitalist exploitation."

The quality of country profiles on Hungary is rather mixed, but these articles served a major purpose by developing Kádár's clearly positive image in the paper. While this has worked against the trends identified in the articles on memory in the previous chapter, country profiles do retain their importance for memory preservation, and work against strategies of forgetting inherent in them, by constantly reminding the reader of the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956.