

PART I

Denying the Revolution in Post-1956 Hungary: An Introduction

Nándor Dreisziger

The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 was crushed in November of 1956 by Soviet troops. Over the next few months the regime of János Kádár consolidated its power. The regime lasted till the collapse of the Soviet Empire in Eastern Europe in 1989. Throughout this period, and especially during its early phases, the memory of the Revolution was wiped from the Hungarian nation's collective recollection. Its events and ideas could not be discussed, or were distorted by the regime's propaganda machine. An aspect of this treatment of the events of 1956 had been discussed in a study that appeared in the 2007 volume of our journal: in Professor Beverly James' essay "Early Cinematic Representations of Hungary's 1956 Revolution."

In part I of this volume we return to this theme. In a study entitled "The 1956 Revolution and the Melbourne Olympics: The Changing Perceptions of a Dramatic Story," Professor Emese Ivan, in collaboration with her sports-historian father Dezső Iván, outline how during the Kádár regime the events of the Revolution, in particular as far as the Hungarian participation in the Olympics of 1956 were concerned, were first suppressed and then presented in a falsified way. Only with the passing of communism in Hungary could the country's public get to know the real story.

This paper is followed by Professor Károly Nagy's survey, entitled "Teaching a Fraudulent History of the Revolution During the Kádár Dictatorship," of the perversion of the Revolution's history that was presented in the school textbooks published in Hungary from the 1950s to the 1980s.

The last section in this part of our volume is a lengthy book-review of a biography of Júlia Rajk who was the widow of László Rajk, one of the most notorious victims of the Stalin era purges in Hungary. Rajk's connection to the Revolution was a post-humus one. It was his exoneration and public re-

burial in early October that, according to some historians, unleashed the chain of events that lead to the outbreak of the Revolution a little over two weeks later. The injustices committed by Hungary's regime against Rajk, and later against his persecuted widow, are ironic in-so-far as both were devoted — and in the case of László, also ruthless — communists. Though loyal to the ideology to the end, in the Kádár era Júlia Rajk struggled against the regime's policy of falsifying history, especially as far as her husband's historical role was concerned — and also in the case of many other victims of the regime or, in many instances, their surviving relatives.

The Kádarian brainwashing of Hungary's people ended in 1989. Ever since then, the country's historians have been trying to “undo the damage” but it is a big task. Between 1956 and 1989 a generation had grown up on denials and lies. Some aspects of the events of 1956 and their treatment in the history books subsequently are coming to light only now. We hope that in a modest way our volume will contribute to this process.