

18 October 1957

THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE UPRISING by Ronald Farquhar

[Advance for release not before Sunday, 20 October 1957]

Budapest, October 19 (Reuters)

Rumor, hope and fear stalk each other across troubled Hungary as the first anniversary of the Magyars' tragic 1956 revolt approaches. It will be exactly a year on October 23 since Budapest street demonstrations for reforms and freedom exploded into a country-wide armed uprising which Soviet tanks crushed two weeks later after bloody fighting that claimed thousands of casualties. On the surface, life looks normal in the Hungarian capital today with only some battle-scarred buildings and scaffolding as reminders of the ravages of the revolt. But an air of mounting nervousness pervades the city and its dingy espresso coffee bars buzz with speculative and conflicting whispers of what the anniversary may bring.

Some say people will wear mourning black and stay away from restaurants, theatres, bars and night clubs. Another story has it that the government plans to close all places of entertainment at 8 p.m. anyway to avoid possible trouble.

A man glances over his shoulder and whispers there will be many arrests in the days before the anniversary. His neighbor claims to know that a big amnesty will be announced on November 7, the 40th anniversary of the Russian 1917 revolution.

So the rumors spread and grow. Nobody knows how they start. But nearly every day brings a new one.

Hardly anyone speaks seriously of an active demonstration to make the day. Observers say the Hungarians, wearied and worried by a year of repression and reprisals, seem resigned to the futility and hopelessness of any open gesture of defiance. They would stand little chance against the tough, well-armed forces of police, militiamen and workers' guards -- an auxiliary body recruited in factories and other enterprises -- which the government of Communist Premier Janos Kadar has built up in the last year. Behind these is the might of the Soviet army, with strong garrisons all over the country.

Riots earlier this month in Warsaw, capital of Communist Poland, have charged the atmosphere here with added tension. They reminded Hungarians of fiery events in Poland last -- the Poznan riots and the "Little October Revolution" -- which helped to spark the Hungarian explosion.

Police here were understood to have reacted to the recent Warsaw troubles, which started from students' demonstrations, by keeping a close eye on Budapest students, who were in the forefront of the insurrection here. Even before the Polish events, a Hungarian Government leader, Gyoergy Marosan, Minister of State, warned the nation that all had better be at their workplaces on October 23d. If there were any street demonstrations, he said, "The workers' power will be there in 10 minutes and make order." He warned students in a tough speech that he would come personally to see who was absent on that day.



Observers here interpreted the tone of Marosan's remarks as betraying a nervousness which ill-fitted repeated government claims to have won the confidence of workers. These observers conceded that outward signs of violent hostility towards the Kadar Government had faded in the year since it deposed the regime of "national communist" Imre Nagy, who was swept into power in the revolt.

They agreed that the government could justly claim as a major political triumph the protest against the United Nations debate on Hungary signed last month by prominent Hungarian writers who until then had refrained from public action which could be construed as support for the Kadar regime.

But, they said, there was little to show that the Government had gained any substantial popular support among the general public despite its undoubted success in speedily restoring the country's industrial and economic life after the damage caused by the uprising.

Materially, most Hungarians live better now than they did before last October with more consumer goods in the stores although prices have risen and earnings declined in recent months.

But this apparently is not enough to overcome passive opposition which seems likely to persist as long as the Kadar regime pursues a tough, repressive policy, these observers said. In their view, the dilemma of the country's communist rulers appears to be that they fear to slacken the reins appreciably in case slumbering discontent rears again into open unrest.

Signs have come to the surface of a tug-of-war about this within the socialist workers (communist) Party, formed last November and now reported to have 380,000 members out of Hungary's population of about 9,000,000. Differences have been admitted over the severity of reprisals against "counter-revolutionaries".

The outcome has been a confusing pattern of harsh punishments and conciliatory gestures. Executions, arrests, internments, deportations to other parts of Hungary have gone on at the same time as the government confirmed the abolition of peasants' compulsory crop deliveries to the state - a measure introduced during the uprising by the Nagy Government - and permitted better facilities for religious instruction in schools, western books, music and plays and limited vacation travel to western countries.

A western diplomat summed it up as "the Kadar one - two policy -- a friendly clap on the shoulder with the right hand and a full-blooded punch on the jaw with the left." Many Hungarians say they see little immediate prospect of a change in this policy or improvement in their lot as long as east-west relations remain as strained as now.

Until there is a thaw in the latest cold war, they are resigned to a rigid regime working under the watchful eye of Moscow. The goals which seemed within grasp a year ago look a long way off today.