

Columbia University  
in the City of New York

NEW YORK 27, N. Y.

PROGRAM ON EAST CENTRAL EUROPE  
400 WEST 117TH STREET

File in Hungary  
folder

May 15, 1957

Mr. Henry Wiggins  
Columbia University Press  
Journalism Building

Dear Henry:

Here at long last is a synopsis of the book on the Hungarian revolt which I propose to do for you.

Since we first discussed this subject, several reports on the Hungarian events have seen the light of day. More can be anticipated. None obviate the necessity of the sort of study I would like to do.

The reports which have appeared include eye-witness accounts or quick documentaries such as Francois Fejto's La Tragedie Hongroise which is in fact a long rehash of Hungarian developments since the war with a chronology of the highlights of the revolt. For the most part these reports are breezy and descriptive. Some, like Michener's Bridge at Andau, are woefully inaccurate. All lack scope and depth of analysis.

The works now in preparation belong largely to the category of memoir literature. Valuable as they will be, they too are likely to be limited to the presentation of personal views in narrative form by participants.

I know of no other serious scholarly work now in progress, other than my own, which would aim at a systematic analysis of the revolt, including its immediate antecedents and its immediate aftermath. Nor can any other university at present match our resources in this respect.

The intrinsic importance of the revolt as a self-contained historic event of major proportions hardly needs elaborating. Publication of a compact (200 pages), readable yet scholarly study putting the revolt in perspective not too long after the occurrence of the actual events, to

my mind would have considerable merit. As I told you, I am confident that such a study can be produced.

Further examination of documentary sources (all of them in Hungarian and many of them in the form of personal notes or memoranda which are not likely to be published) and lengthy conversations with Hungarian refugees have been most encouraging in revealing a wealth of highly interesting material. I will be in Europe during the summer where I expect to talk to scores of other knowledgeable people. It should be possible to cull a large amount of exciting data from them.

My ideas on what should go in the book are roughly as follows:

1. The introductory section to concentrate on an analysis of the intellectual ferment from the beginning of 1956 with special reference to the role played by the Petof Circle as a catalyst for conflicting critical ideas and a forum for debate.

In addition this section ought to assess the division of minds among the Communist leaders; the seesawing struggles for power within the Communist Party; the degree of participation in and awareness of what was taking place by various groups and social strata, notably students, workers and the urban middle class (or what remained of it); the limits of change and the direction of change formulated during this period. (While the ferment undoubtedly paved the way for revolution it did not consciously aim at anything like it).

2. The main body of the work to attempt to analyse:

- a. The events that triggered the revolt, the manner in which the shooting started, including the Communist version of these things as given then (at a time when no one could foresee how swiftly Communist authority would be swept away) and after the lapse of several months;

- b. The spread of the revolt to the provinces and of the relative ease or difficulty with which Communist authority was destroyed there as contrasted with Budapest;

- c. The personality and role of the evanescent Imre Nagy;

d. The collapse of the totalitarian power structure built up by the Communists since 1945, including the Party, the institutions of government, and the instruments of coercion (police and army);

e. The rise of new organs of revolutionary power, especially the students and workers councils, their organization and functioning, relations between them, their leadership, (including some case studies of people who rose to the top in very short order literally from nowhere);

f. The role of various social classes and groups, taking workers, peasants, middle class, students, the military and intellectuals as the major elements to be investigated;

g. The political, social and economic aims of the revolt, including differences in view with regard to major issues or the lack of clear-cut notions with respect to certain important aspects of Hungarian national life;

h. The international aspects of the revolt, including the behavior of Soviet troops, the tactic of the Soviet Union, the policy of the United States and the role of the United Nations.

3. The concluding section to consider:

a. Attempts at restoring the Communist Party and rebuilding a totalitarian political and economic order after the revolt (a significant portion of this section would be devoted to the incredible and little known period of about two weeks following November 4 when the Soviet army was in military command, the revolt was crushed, yet because of the total smashing of the Communist apparatus and unavailability of both personnel and institutions with which to enforce the will of the ruling clique, the rebels, especially through the medium of the workers councils, remained the sole effective political authority in the country);

b. The general lessons of the revolt, including some comparisons with other great European revolutions.

I hope that after you read the outline, you will share my enthusiasm for the undertaking and will agree to contract for publication.

With best regards,

Yours,  
  
Paul E. Zinner