

MEMORANDUM

June 1967

TO: The Files

FROM: Andre Tarchaver

SUBJECT: Report on the Conference of Hungarian Students in the United States

The minutes of this Conference will be published shortly by the newly created Association of Hungarian Students in the United States. This memorandum will therefore limit itself to comments, which are those of an observer at most of the Conference sessions, all of which, except for the final one, were held in the Hungarian language, the general sense of which being conveyed to me through consecutive interpretation.

The Conference, which was held on the University of Chicago campus, June 12 to 14, 1967 inclusive, was called together by the provisional Hungarian-American Student Association, P.O. Box 78, Cambridge 38, Massachusetts, for the purpose of setting up a permanent organization of Hungarian students in the United States, of working out its structure and constitution, of setting up its goals and platforms as well as for the purpose of electing its officers. Hungarian students in various colleges and universities throughout the United States held local elections in order to select their delegates, each of whom had a number of votes in proportion with the size of the group which he represented. Approximately 80 student delegates were in attendance.

Observers and guests were invited. A majority of the latter attended only the last session during which most of them made short addresses to the delegates. Among these guests, were Mr. Donald Schank of the Institute of International Education, Mr. Christopher Emmet of the American Friends of the Captive Nations,

Mr. John Simon of the Foundation for Youth and Student Affairs, Father Kilian and other HCWC representatives, representatives of the World University Service, the United States National Student Association, the Federation of Newman Clubs, Pax Romana, Free Europe Committee, several Hungarian emigré groups and myself for Columbia University. Among invited observers were representatives of the Freedom Fighters Association as well as other groups including Mr. Sandor Kies, Hungarian Revolutionary Council; Mr. Paul Jonas, ex-President of the Petöfi Circle; Mr. Gabor Bodnar, Hungarian Boy Scout Organization; Mr. Andras Kovacs, Hungarian Student Service; Mr. Aladar Maranyi, President of the International Federation of Hungarian Students in Exile.

The University of Chicago put its Ida Noyes Hall at the disposal of the Association. The delegates and most of the guests resided and took their meals at nearby International House. The USNSA (United States National Students Association) has closely cooperated with the Association since its inception and was of great assistance in organizing the Conference. Expenses to cover the latter as well as future operations of the Association were contributed by the Foundation for Youth and Student Affairs.

One of the principal reasons for setting up an organization (referred to hereafter as AHSUS—Association of Hungarian Students in the United States—official name adopted by the Conference) of Hungarian students in the United States was to elect representatives to the International Conference of Hungarian Students which was to be held in Turin, Italy. Since it became known however that the International Conference would not be held it was decided that the AHSUS would be represented at a Paris International Student Conference held partly to counteract this summer's Moscow Youth Festival.

The matter of whether the AHSUS should send representatives or favor representation from free countries at the Moscow Youth Festival was energetically debated and settled as follows. At first, the general sense of the Conference was that representation from the West was most desirable so that representatives of the countries at the Festival be "told the truth" about the Soviet system in general and the Hungarian situation in particular. There appeared to be trust in the effectiveness of the method of their conveying facts to the youth of the Soviet world and particularly to the Asians and Africans. However, the USNSA representative made it clear to the Conference that his own organization is against United States and other Western representation in Moscow. Also that the few, much publicized by the Soviet press, American representatives have no sponsorship and that effective propaganda activity in a Festival organized by the Soviet government is a most unrealistic prospect. Since it was embarrassing for the AHSUS to be at odds with the USNSA on this issue, the resulting vote defeated the proposal for representation in Moscow by a relatively narrow margin. But not after an amendment was added, stating that the AHSUS would do all it can to convey to whatever American representatives attending the Festival, facts about the Hungarian Revolution and its suppression by the Soviet Union so that they may properly influence delegations of other lands. The occasion of this discussion was chosen to emphasize the need for the International Federation of Hungarian Students in Exile, in cooperation with COSEU, to send representatives to various countries, but particularly the now independent nations of Asia and Africa, in order to counteract Soviet influence and propaganda.

A report was made by Mr. Tapsanyi, a student and pianist, regarding Communist activities among emigré groups, principally the press. The report

was rather long and impassioned, containing numerous and lengthy seemingly pro-Communist quotations, mostly from the newspaper Eszer (some of these were quoted out of context I am told). Although there was applause for the report, no special action seems to have been taken by the Conference as a result of it.

Much time was devoted to the working out of the constitution for the AHSUS. A good many points of substance and form were discussed at great length with interest and perseverance. Among these: to what extent the AHSUS is to be political, whether the Association is in favor of a free, democratic and neutral Hungary, procedures for expulsion of members.

For the first of these points, it was agreed that the "non-political" status of the AHSUS meant no affiliation with any political émigré or other party. However, it was felt useless to deny the general political character of the Association in that it was anti-Communist, was in favor of a change in the political regime in Hungary, and would use all of its individual and collective efforts and influence to that end.

The question of including the concept of striving toward a free, democratic "and neutral" Hungary was warily debated. In spite of one delegate's remarks that it might not be right to include this point in the AHSUS statement of aims while the Association and its members are taking advantage of American hospitality, the Conference voted two to one in favor of including the word "neutral".

The matter of procedures for expulsion from the AHSUS was treated in detail with the apparent fear in the back of some delegates' minds that other organizations might attempt to infiltrate their ranks. In particular, I was informed, they were thinking of the Freedom Fighters Association. The method

finally adopted had none of the totalitarian earmarks proposed at first and resembled procedures traditionally used in organizations of a democratic character.

After adopting the constitution, the Conference voted its program for the following year. Among the program's principal features were: action regarding the Moscow Youth Festival referred to above, action to help Hungarian students in Yugoslavia, action to obtain scholarships for all qualifying Hungarian students in the United States willing and able to pursue their studies.

Following the adoption of the constitution and program, the Conference proceeded to elect its officers by way of secret and individual ballots for each post to be filled. Ballots were received, counted and tabulated by three observers designated by the chairman. Candidates were nominated and presented; a proposal to describe candidates' qualifications and background was voted down. The chairman, Mr. László Papp, was elected to the Presidency by an overwhelming majority. Mr. Bela Liptak, the provisional Association's president was elected Vice President and Mr. Ferenc Gardonyi Secretary General by substantial majorities. The latter position is a full-time permanent paid job requiring residence in Cambridge, Massachusetts and carrying an annual salary of \$3,400.

During the morning session of the Conference's last day, a panel of leaders from various Hungarian emigré groups, old and new, answered delegates' questions. The relative merits of the various pre-Revolution emigré groups were discussed with some stress on the difficulty of cooperation and united action among the various groups. However, there did not appear to be any unduly emotional outbursts.

As mentioned above, the final session of the Conference included short addresses by representatives of American organizations as well as by the president of the International Federation of Hungarian Students in Exile. On behalf of their organizations, all American speakers wished the AHSUS well and expressed sympathy and support for their cause. Most of the speakers described their activities in connection with the Revolution and/or the arrival of Hungarian refugees in this country. Some speakers gave the student representatives some words of advice regarding their future life among American students. The president of the International Federation of Hungarian Students in Exile also spoke at this time.

Upon completion of the various speeches, a reception for all participants was held at the Faculty Club. A cultural program including music, folk dancing, etc. followed and closed the Conference. Throughout the proceedings, the Conference Secretariat occupied a number of offices in the Ida Hoyer Hall. An exhibit of various objects, documents, and mementos relating to Hungary was held during the three days in the same building. Items shown ranged from a striking, approximately 500 year old, statue of a Hungarian king to a very small piece of Stalin's mustache from the cast-iron statue torn down in Budapest during the Revolution. Part of the objects shown as well as food and entertainment at the reception were contributed by local Hungarian groups.

Motion pictures were shown at the Conference. These included a full length documentary film on Hungary through the ages made in Germany very recently as well as American network newsreel films. Much footage was devoted to the Revolution, detailed scenes of which produced excitement, comments, applause, and emotional tension in the audience.

In conclusion, it must be said that the Conference as a whole made an excellent impression on me and all observers, both American and Hungarian, with whom I had exchanged views on the subject. I personally expected a more emotional, less orderly, and less realistic approach on the part of the participants. Much of the credit for the orderly way in which the Conference proceedings were conducted must go to Mr. Fapp who chaired all of the meetings. He displayed an amazingly effective combination of strength, tact, friendliness, and organization, all of which came across the language barrier. Although no written material in English was to be found even immediately prior to the Conference, the appropriate draft constitutions, programs, agendas, etc. in Hungarian were prepared and ready for use by interested participants. All of the above combined with the enthusiasm and hard work of the other officers and all participants accounted for what turned out to be a constructive and successful conference. The agreement of all concerned that in the final analysis the students' principal efforts should be directed toward the continuation of their education in order to be ready to serve their country in the best possible way at the first opportunity, lent the Conference a general tone of friendly dignity and seriousness of purpose, the end result of which only time can show.