

Documents:

**The 1956 Hungarian Student Movement in Exile:
An Introduction**

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The outbreak of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution was precipitated by demonstrations by college and university students in Budapest.¹ Students continued to play an important role in the Revolution's events even after the onset of fighting on the streets of Hungary's cities, and they constituted a substantial part of the exodus of refugees after the Revolution was crushed by Soviet troops.

The number post-secondary students who left Hungary in the wake of the Revolution has been estimated at 8,000.² With their arrival and settlement in the countries of Western Europe and the New World, began the peculiar life of a student emigration. One of the first acts of these refugee students was the establishment in exile of the organization MEFESZ or Magyar Egyetemisták és Főiskolások Szövetsége [Federation of Hungarian University and College Students] which had originally come into existence shortly before the outbreak of unrest in Budapest. Preparations for this move took place at a meeting of refugee students from fourteen countries in Lichtenstein in May of 1957. This conference was followed by a much larger gathering in Paris in October of the same year, which proclaimed the launching of the Union of Free Hungarian Students (UFHS).³

In addition to reviving MEFESZ in its new incarnation, members of the refugee Hungarian student diaspora undertook establishing their national (or, in some cases, city-based) organizations in the various countries that had admitted them in the fall and early winter of 1956. Among these organizations were the Verband der Ungarischer Studenten im Deutschland, Hungarian Students in Great Britain, Union de los Estudiantes Hungaros Libres en la Argentina, Union des Etudiants Hongrois Libres en Belgique, Verband Ungarischer Studenten (Graz, Austria),

Verband der Freien Ungarischer Studenten (Innsbruck, Austria), and the Union des Etudiants Hongrois Libres (Paris).

In North America, the United States and Canada had taken in about 1,500 post-secondary refugee students in the wake of 1956.⁴ Already in the early months of 1957 these students brought into existence the organization called Északamerikai Magyar Egyetemisták és Főiskolások Szövetsége (ÉMEFESZ, as opposed to MEFESZ) which assumed the English name "Association of Hungarian Students in North America" (AHSNA). AHSNA held its first congress in Chicago in the summer of 1957 and established offices in Boston and New York. It helped its parent organization, the Union of Free Hungarian Students, to launch two periodicals, the *A magyar diák* [The Hungarian Student] in Hungarian, and *the hungarian student* [*sic*, The Hungarian Student] in English. The latter was a bi-monthly journal with editorial offices in New York City and in St. Gallen, Switzerland. The first document reprinted below appeared in its November-December 1958 number (Vol. 3, No. 2), pp. 9-11.

* * *

The Union of Free Hungarian Students functioned for eight years after the Rome Congress of 1958. By 1965 it seems to have operated under a different name. In the press release of 1 Aug. of that year (see below) it is mentioned alternately as United Federations of Hungarian Students or United Federation of Hungarian Students. Further, the UFHS of 1965 was evidently a much poorer organization than its 1958 predecessor. It seems to have relied on brief press releases rather than a periodical to inform the public of the Western World of its activities, and it evidently could no longer afford the services of copy editors and proofreaders. The 1965 press release is written in awkward English and contains typing errors, at least one of which is quite embarrassing. The second document appended to this introductory essay is re-printed in part to illustrate the UFHS's decline between 1958 and 1965.

The truth is that by 1965 the UFHS was plagued by a number of problems. One of these was the fact that from the start, the organization depended very heavily on the Free Europe Committee (FEC) for financial support. The FEC was a New York-based private organization which in turn depended for much of its finances on the American government.⁵ Furthermore, there was internal dissention within the UFHS' leadership and there were "scandals," such as the return of two members of the executive to Hungary. But the most serious difficulty appears to have been the fact that the UFHS's various component organizations — autonomous in local matters from the start — seems to have been increas-

ingly reluctant to cooperate in joint ventures and to coordinate activities. It is not surprising under the circumstances that in 1966 the UFHS suspended its activities.⁶

Similar fate awaited the AHSNA or ÉMEFESZ. Cooperation between its American executive and its Canadian branches (by the early 1960s the only viable Canadian branch was the one at the University of Toronto) became increasingly strained. Eventually the AHSNA split into two separate national organizations which for a while continued to function within the framework of the by then moribund UFHS.⁷

The demise of the Hungarian refugee student movement of 1956-1966 illustrates the truth of the observation made by scholars of immigration history that emigre organizations tend to be ephemeral. Associations of exiled student activists are even more likely to be short-lived. After all, students complete their studies and go on to other things in life (even though some of us had done our best to remain university students for an extraordinarily long time — nearly a decade in the case of the writer of these lines). The vast majority of the Hungarian students who entered the post-secondary institutions of the Western World after the early 1960s had not been personally involved in the events in Budapest of October 1956 and, as a result, had little interest in their refugee predecessor's political agenda, and rarely shared their patriotic zeal. Hungarian student organizations continued to function at many universities of Western Europe and North America after the mid-1960s, but their attention was increasingly focused on non-political affairs.

Long before the demise of the HFHS, its early periodicals ceased to exist. By the 1960s, newsletters appear to have replaced the journals that had exited earlier. The AHSNA by then was publishing the *Hiradó* [Courier], an inexpensively produced in-house publication. Nearly a generation later, even scattered issues of the UFHS's early journals still in the possession of their original owners, are in danger of being thrown out, as the one-time student refugees of 1956 grow old and begin to move into condominiums for senior citizens. The propose of re-printing a part of one of these issues is to make sure that information which might be useful to historians of the twenty-first century has a better chance to survive.

NOTES

¹The historical literature of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 is enormous. In our journal alone more than a dozen articles have appeared on the subject over the years. Among these, a general overview is offered in Peter Gosztony, "The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 Viewed from Two Decades' Distance," see the predecessor of the *HSR*, the *Canadian-American Review of*

Hungarian Studies III, 2, (Fall 1976), 139-153. Other studies in this volume devoted to the origins and events of 1956 are: Tamas Aczel, "Between the Awakening and the Explosion: Yogis and Commissars Reconsidered, 1953-1956" 107-114; and Béla K. Király, "The First War Between Socialist States: Military Aspects of the Hungarian Revolution," 115-123. These two works are both recollections (or, in fact, eye-witness accounts) and products of scholarly research.

Some of the literature of the Revolution is given in the same volume by I.L. Halasz de Beky, "A Bibliography of the Hungarian Revolution 1956," pp. 195-202. A more comprehensive collection of essays is: *The First War Between Socialist States: The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and its Impact*, B.K. Király et al. eds. (New York: Social Science Monographs, 1984), which contains an extensive bibliography compiled by Enikő Molnár Basa. Relevant studies that have appeared in the *Hungarian Studies Review* since 1980 are: Tamás Szendrey, "Remembering 1956: Some Reflections on the Historical Consciousness of a New Generation," XIV, 1 (Spring 1987), 27-38; and Andor C. Klay, "Document: Budapest—Washington, 1956," VII, 2 (Fall 1980), 145-162.

²This figure is given in the document printed below. It has been accepted by Gyula Borbándi, *A magyar emigráció életrajza, 1945-1985* [The Biography of the Hungarian Emigration, 1945-1985] (Munich: Europai Protestáns Magyar Szabadegyetem, 1985), p. 273

³Among the participants were non-Hungarian students invited from Third World countries. The establishment of contacts with Asian, African and South American students was no doubt sought in order to spread knowledge of the oppression under which Hungarians in Hungary were suffering ever since the imposition of Soviet totalitarian rule in the late 1940s.

⁴This figure is given by Borbándi, *ibid.* For information on refugee Hungarian students in Canada see N.F. Dreisziger, et al. *Struggle and Hope: The Hungarian-Canadian Experience* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982) pp. 205-10; also by the same author, *The Hungarian Experience in Ontario*, a special issue of the *Hungarian Studies Review*, Vol. XII, No. 2 (fall, 1985), pp. 51-58. At the present, this subject is the focus of Professor Peter Hidas' (Dawson College, Montreal) research interests.

⁵Originally named the National Committee for a Free Europe, this ostensibly non-government organization served to channel funds to exiles from the Soviet bloc because the various administrations in Washington did not want to appear to be supporting opponents of regimes with whom they had formal diplomatic contacts. The Committee solicited donations from the American public. See Borbándi, pp. 96f.

⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 274f.

⁷Although the writer of these lines, who was President of the Hungarian Student Association of the University of Toronto at the time, was involved in these developments, he does not recall exactly why the separation had taken place. Part of the reason seems to have been the growth of a "Canadian" sentiment among the members who resented what they perceived to be American control of their Canadian organization.

DOCUMENT 1

Rome, 1958: Congress of the U.F.H.S.

(Reprinted from *the hungarian student* Vol. 3, No. 2, Nov.-Dec. 1958. pp. 9-11.)

On October 20, 1958, in Italy, Hungarian refugee students gathered from all over the world, for the third time, to evaluate the work and accomplishments of the past and to chart the course to be followed in the future. The meeting, influenced by the spirit of October, 1956, was characterized by the same unity displayed by the students during the Hungarian Revolution.

This is the fourth important step taken by Hungarian students. It all started in October, 1956, when the first organizations of the MEFESZ materialized during the days of oppression, and the youth printed its 16 point demand for freedom. The demands were answered by bullets, and the Revolution broke out.

When the Revolution was suppressed thousands fled from the country to freedom. But this freedom placed heavy obligations on the shoulders of the students. Obligations to work for those who remained behind. The second important step was born of this realization when, in May 1957, the Hungarian student delegates from fourteen countries gathered in Liechtenstein. The task was to establish one unified organization and to formulate the manifold duties which confronted them in exile. These duties included the maintenance of the possibility for 8,000 Hungarian refugee students to continue their studies and the creation of opportunities for them to get acquainted with the free world after the complete physical and intellectual isolation forced upon them by their oppressors.

This aim led to the third step, the International Congress of the Union of Free Hungarian Students in Paris, in October, 1957, with the participation of the representatives of students from twenty-seven foreign countries. Most of these delegates came from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. We wanted to meet the youth of these distant continents, familiar to us only through the pages of history books, and to get to know them really well as our fate has been similar to theirs so often.

A year has passed since that Paris congress. Unfortunately, time has brought little change to our country. Hungary is still in bondage. But the 8,000 Hungarian students living on free soil cannot resign themselves to this as inevitable. Scattered now in nineteen countries they have maintained the unity of their organization and they continue their work in the spirit of the Revolution.

Nineteen local organizations sent their elected representatives to the third Congress of UFHS. Hungarian students came to Rome from such faraway places as the United States, Argentina and Chile. They came from all the hospitable countries of Scandinavia, from England. The Benelux countries were represented as well as the Latin peninsulas: Spain, Italy. This list was completed by the delegations from Austria, Germany, and France. As the former president of the Union stated in his opening remarks: "We hope that the cooperation between Hungarian and other European students will bring not only Europe but the whole world closer to freedom."

The main address stressed the theme of the utilization of our bitter experiences for a common good. Aladár Merényi, the outgoing President, said among other things: "Our memories obligate us to fulfill our duties toward a community. . . Up till now we have often lived on the hopes we brought with us from home. We shall never forget our memories but from now on we must utilize them. We can utilize them as past experience, as a knowledge. With them we must continue our work with results which further the hope that Hungary will become free again without another October 23. This is what we have tried to work for since the last Congress. The solution of the problems still before us will be the task of this Congress. . ."

The opening ceremonies continued and the messages to the Congress were read. The persons and organizations conveying their good wishes to the students included heads of states and governments, rectors and professors, writers and artists as well as our fellow exiles.

The actual work of the Congress started with the reports of the outgoing officers. Our work had three major directions, the internal organization, our cultural relations, and the fate of our fellow students in Hungary. At the time of the Congress in Liechtenstein the Union consisted of student groups in fourteen countries, today Hungarians study in twenty countries. We have reasons to hope that students will be able to attend universities in Asia and Africa, too. A student association is in process of formation in Australia at the present time. How important this organizational growth is for the cultural and intellectual relations becomes apparent if we consider the fact that in these countries our students study with the aid of scholarships donated by local student bodies. We tried to follow the lives of our fellow students in Hungary closely. Unfortunately

the Union was able to help them only once, when, during a polio epidemic, we sent to Hungary 2,000 Units of Salk vaccine and about the same amount of other drugs.

The organizational and financial reports and the ensuing discussions went into the minutest details. They were followed by summaries given by the various delegations about the work of local associations.

We shall attempt to give a few examples. In Innsbruck, Austria, 125 Hungarian students were attending lectures at the university during the academic year 1957-58. Out of this total eighty students received Rockefeller Foundation scholarships while forty-five were studying with the aid of UNESCO and the Republic of Austria. There are forty medical students, six are studying theology, twenty-four law and economy, and fifty-five are enrolled at the faculty of philosophy. The students organized numerous exhibits and meetings. On February 2, 1958, they had a very successful party attended by 380-100 people, among them many outstanding educators and diplomatic or social personalities. They organized, or were instrumental in organizing, lectures, excursions both for Hungarians and for their fellow students of other nationalities. Local students helped Hungarians in securing summer jobs both in Austria and abroad. Beside these widespread activities they were able to fulfill their academic requirements.

Innsbruck is a small community of Hungarian students. An entirely different world is the one in which the Association of Hungarian Students in North America operates. There are 2,908 members in the Association which is incorporated under the laws of the state of Massachusetts. The members are scattered over the United States and Canada. Out of the total 1,485 are enrolled in universities and colleges. Local chapters were formed at the principal universities or cities where Hungarian students live. These local chapters organized over 250 lectures, discussions, and exhibits all over the United States and Canada. The Association issues a bi-weekly circular letter to keep in contact with its members. These are the means by which the Association tries to overcome the difficulties created by the tremendous distances separating the individuals and the various groups from each other.

The publication of a bilingual magazine facilitated mutual acquaintance and closer cooperation between Hungarian students and their foreign colleagues. In its efforts to place Hungarian students at universities, the Association maintained close contact with the World University Service, and the Institute of International Education as well as with different voluntary agencies. Close contact has also been established with the student organizations of the host countries and of other exiled nationalities.

The Association considered as its major task the representation of the students' interest, to keep them informed, and to support all their endeavors. In essence the Association tried to exist for the benefit of the students and to give them the opportunity of utilizing the Association to the fullest. This was the reason why the Association supported local programs, refrained from prescribing the activities of local groups, and confined itself to the coordination of student activities.

The Association held its second Congress at Purdue University, Lafayette, Indiana, in June 1958. At this congress an alumni branch was formed and a merger of United States and Canadian associations effected.

These reports, which went into great details and are given only summarily here, were part of a mosaic giving a precise picture of the life of Hungarian students in exile. They were followed by lively discussion indicating the interest of the students in each other's affairs.

The second day of the Congress charted the road for the future. The plans were crystallized in the resolutions passed by the plenary session.

Among other things the Congress held that the establishment of a network encompassing all countries in which Hungarian students are living is imperative. This network would facilitate the widening of our foreign contacts. For this reason the Congress instructed the national presidents to select as many students for this task as possible. These persons will participate actively in student events of their host country, will represent the Union at various gatherings, congresses, and will report to the Union on any event or news item, concerning Hungarians or the Union.

The Congress also found that the local member organizations have done a good job and have accomplished much in the field of cultural matters, fine arts, and applied arts. At the same time, however, it found that there is hardly any contact among the cultural and art groups of various countries. As Hungarian artists have made a considerable impression on their host countries it is important that we introduce young talents. The International Secretariat of the UFHS was therefore instructed to establish contact with individual artists as well as with groups, and to arrange for tours and exhibitions outside of the immediate physical range of the artist. At the same time the Congress requested the presidents of the member organizations to report on the cultural and artistic activities of their members. Upon receipt of these reports the Union will exchange and circulate the information among member organizations to facilitate guest tours and exhibitions among the different countries.

The Congress accepted wholeheartedly the initiative of the students in Lundi, Sweden, for a comprehensive plan of "Sunday Schools." The youth brought up under the Communist régime who learned our history

and literature only from a Communist angle or not at all, present a problem. The Congress therefore calls upon every member organization to establish such "Sunday Schools" in every city where Hungarian students are living. The schools shall conduct courses in Hungarian history, literature, and folk art, according to age and interest.

The Congress also dealt with the question of scholarships. It realized that the Hungarian exiles, as time goes on, must shoulder the responsibility of the education of the youth. For this reason it decided that a separate scholarship fund be established, the plans for which have to be submitted by May, 1959. It should function within the framework of the Union's Social Secretariat under the supervision of the President and the Congress. It should issue interest free loans to deserving and needy students graduating from high school.

The Congress dealt with matters pertaining to Asia and Africa in separate resolutions. It held that the strengthening of ties with the youth of Asia is of utmost importance. To do so is a primary duty of the Union, partly because it sympathizes with the aspirations of Asian students for freedom and democracy, and partly because of the warm friendship extended toward Hungarians by the youth of Asia at the time of the Revolution. The Congress therefore resolved that close contact be established with Asian youth organizations, institutions, mutual exchange of news and information be initiated, and the possibilities of obtaining scholarships in Asia be explored. Furthermore the Congress called upon the member organizations to report on all Asiatic events taking place in the countries of their residence. Similarly in connection with the young African nations the Congress felt that it is the duty of the Union to spread its belief in the principles of human and social justice as well as to pass on its experiences under Communist rule. The Congress called upon the leaders of the Union to realize these aims by establishing contacts with those countries in Africa in which such contact is non-existent, by exchanging information with various African youth organizations. Furthermore, the Union has to work for the realization of scholarships offered by various African countries at the Seventh International Student Congress, and it has to be instrumental in the actual placement of Hungarian students in those countries.

On October 22, the new leadership of the UFHS was elected. Géza Mihályi from Italy became the new President. Aladár Merényi from Switzerland, and László Hollósy from the United States were elected as new Vice-Presidents. The Treasurer's job was filled by Antal Löökkös while László Luka became Secretary for social work. The field of publications will be handled by the Union's new Press Secretary, László Alföldy. Furthermore, it has been decided that the Presidents of the five

largest member associations shall form a supervisory committee to give guidance to the Union leadership between congresses.

With this the actual work of the Congress has been completed. Now it is up to the new leaders, and to all of us, to implement the decisions, to fulfill the promises.

On October 23, the second anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution, the delegates of the Congress paid homage to the fallen heroes of the Revolution. The students placed a wreath on the memorial of Italy's soldiers with a short ceremony. They wanted to express their belief that liberty is indivisible everywhere. This was followed by a well attended press conference where the new leaders of the UFHS outlined their program and answered questions of the journalists gathered. The day was completed by a concert given in the Sala Borromini by young Hungarian artists.

The Congress began with bitter memories. Looking back to the past however, is a negative attitude. Such defeatism cannot be the attitude of 8,000 Hungarian students who have so much before them. The Congress was only one station in our long uphill fight. It gave us strength, confidence when no enthusiasm filled our imagination, when no friend was there to encourage us. The work started must be continued in the spirit of the Revolution for the liberty of the Hungarian people and the good of mankind.

DOCUMENT 2

Press Release

MEFESZ / UFHS UNITED FEDERATIONS OF HUNGARIAN STUDENTS

INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT P.O.B. 162, 1211 GENEVA 1.
SWITZERLAND

No. 1. /1965-66

TENTH ANNUAL JUBILEE CONGRESS OF THE UFHS / MEFESz

Dear Friends,

The Tenth Annual Jubilee Congress of the UNITED FEDERATION OF HUNGARIAN STUDENTS-MEFESz / UFHS, held in NYON (Switzerland) from 15th to the 18th July of 1965, has elected the following officers to the International Secretariat:

President: Eugene D. GABOR. Mr. Gabor is the immediate past Internal Vice-President, he is 25 years old and student in international economic sciences;

International Vice-President: Gyula VERMES. Mr. Vermes is elected as I.V.P. for a second year, he is 23 years old and student in Arts and History;

Internal Vice-President: Mariann WEIDLICH. Miss Weidlich is 25 years old and student in Law;

Secretary General: Elizabeth HORVATH. Miss Horvath is the former Vice-President for Overseas Affairs, she is 21 years old and student in economics;

Charge d'Affairs: László UNGER. [A]s formerly, Mr. Unger is the immediate-past President, he is 30 years old and candidate for doctoral examinations in economics.

AIMS AND ACTIVITIES OF THE CONGRESS:

Considering that the main political lines of the UFHS has been already based upon the resolutions of the First Congress of the UFHS, held in 1957, and according to the important changes in the international policy and in the international student policy of the last years, the Tenth Congress of the UFHS has decided that the UFHS needs a "new deal".

Considering the results of the 11th ISC, the Congress decided to revive the Basic Principles of the UFHS and has adapted a new Charter, according to, in its main points, the ISC Charter.

One of the most important point of the activity of the Congress have been the report on the situation in Hungary, presented, as a resolution, by the outgoing International Secretariat. For the first time the International Secretariat has united in May 1965, in Evian a Conference of specialists of the economic and cultural life in Hungary, with the participation of economists living abroad, and some others, coming for this occasion directly from Hungary. (A special report in English is under preparation.)

In the international field:

The Congress welcomed the representatives, or messages and cables of the following international or national student organizations and foundations:

KOSSUTH FOUNDATION—New York;
WORLD UNIVERSITY SERVICE—Geneva;
INTERNATIONAL STUDENT CONFERENCE—Leiden;
INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY EXCHANGE FUND—Leiden;
Research and Information Commission—Leiden;

Scottish Union of Students;
United States National Student Association;
Canadian Union of Students—Union Canadienne des Etudiants;
National Union of South—African Students;
Nederlandse Studenten Raad;
Verband Deutscher Studentenschaften;
National Council of University Students of India;
New Zealand University Students Association;

National Union of Iraqi Students;
Union Nationale des Etudiants de Suisse–Verband der
Schweizerischen Studentenschaften;
National Union of Australian University Students;
Federation of Turkish Students in Germany;

As to the international policy, the Congress expressed its conviction that the intensification of international student cooperation is a possible way towards the realization of world student unity.

The Congress emphasises the importance of cooperation among the National Unions of Students with different political and ideological convictions in the following activities:

- a) exchange of informations [*sic!* information]
- b) exchange of scholarship-holders and professors
- c) student travels
- d) cultural meetings
- e) regional conferences (rencontres européennes).

The Congress welcomed the signs of approach of the ISC and IUS. The Congress has voted the ISC-Charter, has required the Supervision Commission to invite [*sic!* invite?] the UFHS as an Observer to the 12th ISC.

According to our basic principles the Congress adapted the following statements of support and solidarity:

South-Africa;
South-Rhodesia;
Marocco [*sic!* Morocco];
Portugal-Colonies;
Spain;
Iran;
Paraguay;
Racial discrimination in the USA;
Santo-Domingo;

During the last year the concrete cooperation in the field of the student-exchange have been particularly good between the Nederlandse Studenten Raad and the UFHS. The Congress expressed the friendly feelings and thanks.

On behalf of all the Hungarian students members of the UFHS the Congress expressed its sincere thanks and warmest feelings to the VSS / UNES – Switzerland (and particularly to the President) for the good co-operation of the past year.

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A complete report with the texts of resolutions and proceedings of the Congress in French and in English is under preparation. It would be sent as soon as possible to all NUS that it may interest.

We send our all best wishes [*sic!* wishes?] to all our friends,

Sincerely [*sic!* Sincerely] yours:

UNITED FEDERATION OF HUNGARIAN STUDENTS—International Secretariat

Geneva, 1st [*sic!* 1st] of August 1965.