

The Hungarian Rising

Background

Hungary had been treated as a defeated country by the Soviets after the Second World War and reparations had been taken from it. With the support of the USSR, a communist government had been established under Rakosi, who closely followed Stalin's rules and opposition was eliminated. When Stalin died, Rakosi was replaced by the more moderate Nagy, but in 1955 Rakosi seized power again.

Khrushchev's condemnation of Stalin and events in Poland in June 1956, where riots and disturbances had led to Khrushchev accepting a change of leader, encouraged the Hungarians to protest against Rakosi's leadership. The Hungarians hated Rakosi and his secret police because of the brutality they had shown, executing 2,000 opponents and imprisoning over 200,000. They were also protesting against the falling standard of living and increased poverty which they blamed on Soviet policies. Many in Hungary saw this as the opportunity to end Soviet domination and improve relations with the West. This they felt would bring an improved economy and a higher standard of living.

Events

- The protests increased and in October riots broke out in Budapest.
- Street fighting lasted for five days and Stalin's statue was pulled down and dragged through the streets. Prisoners were released.
- Only the security police remained loyal to the USSR.
- Rakosi was forced to resign and Soviet tanks moved in.
- The more popular Nagy became Prime Minister and the Soviet troops withdrew - the Hungarians celebrated what looked like a victory as it appeared that the USSR had been defeated by one of its satellites.
- The new Hungarian government began to make reforms; this would lead to free elections, the end of the secret police and the removal of the Soviet army of occupation.
- Nagy demanded the right to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact and follow a neutral role in the Cold War. This would mean a gap in the Iron Curtain and a break in the Soviet buffer zone with the West. This was too much for the USSR.



Soviet Control

Soviet troops re-entered Hungary on 1st November. By November 4th they had reached Budapest. Over 1,000 tanks moved into the city to crush the uprising. Nagy appealed to the West for help but none came. Two weeks of street



fighting followed but the Hungarians were no match for the Soviet forces and a new pro-Soviet communist government under Janos Kadar was set up. Nagy was captured and promised a free passage out of Hungary but was later shot. Changes were made to avoid a repeat of the events but Hungary was now firmly in Soviet control.

Results

The results of the rising for Europe and the Cold War were:

- Between 2,500 and 30,000 Hungarians, mostly civilians were killed along with 700 Soviet troops.
- Over 200,000 refugees fled Hungary and settled in the West
- There was no active support for the uprising in the West - the Americans simply protested.
- Other satellite states in Eastern Europe did not dare to challenge Soviet authority after Hungary.
- Khrushchev strengthened his position in the USSR and showed the West that peaceful co-existence had its limits.
- It marked a stalemate in the Cold War - the West did not interfere with Soviet activities in Eastern Europe.