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How Imre Nagy Died

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Imre Nagy, the Hungarian national-communist leader and prime minister in the short-lived 1956 uprising, was executed without a trial together with other leaders of the revolt. So Arpad Szakasits, the former president of Hungary, is reliably reported to have told friends before his death last year. The West German magazine *Der Spiegel*, quoting the testimony of a highly-placed Hungarian official who escaped to the West last autumn, recently revealed for the first time that Imre Nagy and two journalists, Miklos Gimes and Jozsef Szilagyi, were assassinated in the cellar of the former royal summer castle at Sinaia, Rumania, by a Hungarian Secret Police commando. The 'liquidation' took place on 28 or 29 January 1957 - some 18 months before Tass, the official Soviet news agency, and subsequently the MTI, the Hungarian news agency, reported on 17 June 1958 that Nagy and his 'accomplices' had been sentenced to death for counter-revolutionary activities and high treason and executed. The brief announcement did not mention the time and place of the alleged trial, nor did it name the defence counsel, prosecutor and judge.

Two days after the official Hungarian announcement, Geza Szenasi, the Hungarian Prosecutor-General, told a packed press conference that the trial had been held in secret because of 'state interests'. He added: '*Faits accomplis* always have a soothing effect upon our people.' The official version, correct though it was in its appraisal of the effects of *faits accomplis*, is too vague to be convincing and the whispered words of President Szakasits, together with the circumstantial evidence provided by the defecting Hungarian official, seem to substantiate the fear that Imre Nagy, a life-long communist and twice prime minister of his country, met his death in the worst tradition of Stalinist lawlessness.

The Hungarian official, whose name is known to the German magazine but who prefers to remain anonymous for obvious reasons, recalled in his testimony that, on 22 November 1956, Nagy and a group of his closest associates, including the world-famous Marxist philosopher Georg Lukacs, left the Yugoslav Embassy in Budapest, where they had taken refuge when 2,000 Russian tanks

attacked the Hungarian capital. D. Soldatic, then Yugoslav ambassador in Budapest, said Nagy and his friends left the embassy 'on their own initiative and of their own accord' on the strength of a safe-conduct issued by Janos Kadar's government. A bus was to have taken them to their homes. Although Kadar in a note had given President Tito *written* assurances that 'no member of the Nagy group would have to stand trial' for their past activities and guaranteed the safety of their lives, the bus was stopped by Russian soldiers barely 300 yards from the embassy and the escorting Yugoslav diplomats ordered off. Then, flanked by two Soviet tanks, it was driven to Soviet army headquarters. Nagy and his friends disappeared. President Tito protested. Janos Kadar, in a secret reply, told the Yugoslav President that Nagy had gone to Rumania at his own wish. 'Had Nagy and his companions remained in Budapest, they might have become the victims of an assassination plot for which the Hungarian government would have been held responsible.'

According to *Der Spiegel*, in January 1957 the American Central Intelligence Agency succeeded in tracking down Nagy and his friends in Sinaia, the Rumanian winter resort, but then lost the trail. It is known that in the last week of January the women and children and lesser officials of the group were taken to Snagov, near Bucharest, and eventually allowed to return to Hungary. Imre Nagy, Miklos Gimes and Jozsef Szilagyi, however, remained in Sinaia under close guard. On 28 or 29 January a special execution squad of the AVO, the Hungarian State Security Police, arrived from Budapest and 'liquidated' the former prime minister and the two journalists in the cellar of the summer castle.

The AVO commando, carrying their stenguns in true James Bond fashion in sleek metal containers, travelled back to Budapest on 30 January in two reserved compartments. The Rumanian Secret Police saw to it that they were exempt from any controls at the frontier. During the long journey the AVO men talked 'shop'. Snatches of their conversation were overheard by the refugee official who was also travelling on the train. 'Feri's hand trembled,' said one voice, 'I saw it

clearly. He got nervous when the old man looked at him so steadfastly. That is why he knocked off his glasses. Still, Imre Nagy impressed me.' 'But the little Szilagyi was definitely ridiculous,' remarked another. 'Did you see how he hugged Lajos' knees? He would just have loved to creep back into his mother's belly . . .'

The AVO commando, was met at Budapest's Keleti Station by a colonel and driven off in two big limousines followed by a jeep. The first car carrying the head of the execution squad bore the number plate A-127. It belonged to the state prosecutor-general's office. Geza Szenasi must have overlooked this fact when, 18 months later, he announced that Nagy had been tried by a court.

Imre Nagy, the Moscow-trained communist who introduced a new brand of 'human and national communism' and had the courage to denounce at the United Nations Russia's intervention in Hungary, was not the type who could be profitably tried at a show-trial or even in the secrecy of a Koestleresque 'Darkness at Noon'. So Imre Nagy had to die without a trial, without a chance to defend himself and his actions. But, it seems, he died like a man.