

Andrea Buchschacher

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Hungary 1956 – remembered in Switzerland in 2006

Switzerland has a very special relationship with Hungary. In 1956 many immigrants from Hungary found refuge in Switzerland. The country welcomed them with open arms and showed solidarity. During the last weeks of October, this historical event was very present in the daily media and in the public. I'm going to give an overview of these articles from the biggest Swiss newspapers and translate some of them. Furthermore I will describe one particular Hungarian character whose history has a big connection to Switzerland and is absolutely fascinating.

Articles

19. October

When Bern wanted to save peace of the world



Budapest, at the end of October: Hungarian freedom fighters have conquered a Soviet tank.

At the beginning of November 1956 the Third World War was impending. The Soviets cut down the uprising in Hungary, in the Middle East the Suez-Crisis escalated. A hard dispute took also place in the federal office.

The article provides information on how the federal council at that time reacted on world events like the Suez-crisis and the uprising in Hungary. In addition it gives a summary of the events in Hungary.

20. October

Pictures shape the memory of the uprising



The 30 th of October in Budapest. Revolutionaries sitting on a tank of the Hungarian Army – a picture taken by the today 83-year-old Erich Lessing. He took the probably best known photo documentary of the uprising. Some reporters like the Swiss photographer Jean-Pierre Pedrazzini lost their lives.

Fatal report employment in Budapest

50 years ago the famous photographer and reporter Jean-Pierre Pedrazzini died in Hungary. His pictures went around the world. Finally, Switzerland remembers its prominent citizen.



BILD JEAN-PIERRE PEDRAZZINI/SCHWEIZERISCHE STIFTUNG FÜR DIE PHOTOGRAPHIE

The article describes Pedrazzini's life and work. On the 23rd of October the minister presidents of Switzerland and France inaugurate a bust of Pedrazzini in Hungary.

“Photography lives from drama”

Erich Lessing has taken the probably best-known photo documentary of the uprising in Hungary in 1956. The high-aged Magnum-photographer looks back.

An abridgment of the interview:

How did you experience the pre-revolutionary Budapest?

Lessing: I recognized that without a text photography is an extremely weak medium. Superficially viewed the every day life in Budapest was that of a not very rich but also not poor city. In the coffee houses at the Danube

5 o'clock tea was served and the country life seemed to be actually quite good. You could not see the bondage. It seethed under the surface.



Only the boots of the Stalin monument are remaining

21. October

To whom belongs the Hungarian revolution?

The 50th anniversary of the Hungary rebellion splits the nation: The right wing opposition wants to blackball the state ceremonies of the coming Monday.

The article is about the Hungarian people, and how split the opinions at the moment are.

It provides a chronic of events:

2500 dead Hungarians, 200 000 refugees – the chronic

April 1955: Hungary's popular Prime Minister Imre Nagy is dismissed because of his too liberal attitude. He is replaced by the Stalinist KP chairman Rákosi, now head of politics.

June 1956: During the de-Stalinization of the Soviet Union Rákosi is dismissed.

19th of October: Student assemblies all over the country demand reformations.

23rd of October: The students go to the parliament. Hundred thousands of citizens follow their example and demand the rehabilitation of Nagy. The police fires into the crowds.

24th of October: Soviet troops are in Budapest and are welcomed with resistance. Nagy gets the order to build a new government.

28th of October: The new government reintroduces the multi party system.

31st of October: Soviet soldiers and diplomats leave the country.

1st of November: Nagy explains the resignation of the Warsaw Pact and the country's neutrality.

2nd of November: KP-boss Kadar shapes an anti-government in Moscow.

4th of November: Soviet tanks are in Budapest. 2500 Hungarians as well as 700 Soviet soldiers die, nearly 200 000 flee.

February 1958: Nagy and his fellows are sentenced to death.



Right-wing Fidesz supporters remember with their protest against the Socialists also on 1956

23. October

Hungary commemorates the national uprising

In Hungary the festivities of the remembrance of the national uprising 50 years ago started. President Laszlo Solyom, Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsany and the president of parliament Katalin Szili awarded state mentions to nearly 80 people, among them many veterans. Only some of the awarded shook hands with the president. After his confession of lying during the last election Gyurcsany is under heavy pressure. Solyom said that the commemoration day has not yet arrived in the hearts of the people. “It is not enough to pass a law”, he explained.

“In unbelievable way supported”

50 years ago Laszlo Luka fled from Hungary to Switzerland. 4 weeks ago he agreed to the intensification of the foreigner law. He says that he is now a real Swiss.

It is a portrait of a Hungarian refugee.

Wreaths for the victims, a thank you to Switzerland

The Hungarians in Zurich honor the freedom fighters of 1956 by laying down wreaths, having a service and a festivity to thank the Swiss.

Over 13 000 Hungarians fled to Switzerland in 1956. They were welcomed everywhere and have been celebrated as heroes. It was the time of the Cold War. The article is about the Hungarian society in Switzerland. Most of the refugees stayed and therefore now around 30 000 people with Hungarian roots live in Switzerland. It also describes the festivities in Zurich.



24. October

Demonstrators capture a tank

Official guests from 50 countries attended the festivity on the commemoration of the Hungarian uprising 50 years ago. On the brink of the act of state it came to street battles with the police and demonstrators, which captured among other thing a tank of 1956.

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BILD TAMAS KOVACS/EPA/KEystone

Comment

I think the newspaper articles show various views and try to analyze the whole situation in a sophisticated way. I would have liked more culturally focused articles. I finally discovered some in another newspaper (NZZ), which published a whole section of essays that connected history with culture. But they are too complicated and long to translate.

MIKLOS GIMES

In June of 1958, Imre Nagy and his fellows were killed. One of them was Miklós Gimes. In Hungary he is a national hero. Miklós Gimes had a son, named after him. He was 8 years old when his father died and was living with his mother in Switzerland. Today, Miklós Gimes jr. is a well-known journalist. Because of the anniversary of the Hungarian uprising he had published a long essay in the weekly magazine he works for. The article was on the front page. Additionally he made a



film. The article is about his father, his memories of him, and how it is to live with the same name of a national hero, to be the son of someone that is not anymore a person but something higher, something out of reach. The film focuses on the other hand on his mother, she is still alive, and her life-story. With these two documents I'll summarize the story of Miklós Gimes.

Miklós Gimes was a journalist and supporter of communism. His wife had a high function in the Communist party. They worked hard, night and day. They had a lot of friends and discussions. They were well known, and belonged to the intellectuals. The couple though, lived more and more separate lives. Miklós Gimes was sent as correspondent for a newspaper to Paris. He also traveled in West Europe. As he realized how different life was in West Europe he started to see the bondage in his country. He began to write critical articles. A side story during his whole life, was his early love, he met her again in Paris and did not want to go back to Hungary. His wife and his friends forced him though. Back in Hungary he wrote very critical articles and supported Nagy. Soon police wanted him. When the revolution began he forced his wife and son to flee to Switzerland. During his arrest his early love supported him; this made him turn against his wife again. He died in his forties. In 1989 when the bodies where exhumed and buried and a national ceremony took place, two women identified the body of Miklós Gimes – his wife and his early love. The press used that story. At the ceremony however his wife stood next to his coffin and thousands of people laid roses down to show their solidarity. His wife cannot talk about this without crying.

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