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“Every Day Is 1956”: The Hungarian Revolution Today **by James Bovard**

Friends of freedom should doff their hats to the Hungarians this week. Fifty years ago, the Hungarian people bravely expelled Soviet tanks from Budapest and proclaimed their intention to create a democracy. Shortly thereafter, the Soviets returned with almost 5,000 tanks, killing thousands of Hungarians and chaining that nation back into serfdom to Moscow.

But at least the Hungarians had the gumption to stand up and sacrifice their blood to cast off tyranny.

I was in Hungary shortly after the 30th anniversary of the uprising. There were no official celebrations then, perhaps because the Soviets still occupied the nation and were watching warily as the Hungarians made passive economic reforms intended to make socialism efficient.

The buildings in downtown Budapest appeared to have different sets of bullet holes — the first from the fierce fighting in 1944 when the Red Army drove the Nazis out of the city, and another set from a dozen years later, from when the Soviets crushed the Hungarians’ demand for freedom.

I have not forgotten the row of new black Mercedes cars parked outside Communist Party headquarters near the Danube River in Budapest. When I interviewed one of the regime’s top trade officials, he was as smug as the day is long, oblivious to the cascading evidence of Hungarian economic failure. (The Reagan administration was cozying up to Hungary at that point, and the “experts” at the U.S. embassy sounded like pimps for the Hungarian government.)

Two and a half years later, it was the Hungarians who, more than any other Eastern Europeans, brought the Iron Curtain crashing down. In May 1989, Hungarian government officials cut the barbed wire on the border with Austria. A tidal wave of East Germans and other Soviet Bloc serfs were soon stampeding through the opening. The Soviet tanks did not roll — and the rest is history.

The celebrations in Budapest of the 50th anniversary of the uprising have been riotous. This is in part because Hungarians again feel betrayed and oppressed by their government.

The socialist party — the direct descendant of the Communist Party that tyrannized the country for so long — now rules Hungary. The socialists secured control in elections this past April.

Last month, a secret tape recording made shortly after the election leaked out. Hungarians heard Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsany summarize the party's election campaign: "We lied in the morning, in the evening, and at night. I don't want to do this anymore." Gyurcsany said that the government's claims about the economy were brazen falsehoods. The government now admits that the government budget deficit is almost twice as large as it claimed during the election campaign.

The tape's release sparked widespread protests that escalated with this week's anniversary. More than 100 people have been injured, including many hit by police rubber bullets. Hungarian state radio reported that "police beat some of the protesters — including women and elderly people — with rubber batons, and some had head injuries," according to the Associated Press.

Tibor Navracsics, one of the opposition leaders, warns, "Hungary is in a moral crisis. If people are deceived, then they can't make responsible decisions." The opposition is demanding a public referendum within five months on the government's policies. The government is scorning its demand.

Gyurcsany's defenders stress that he recently won a "vote of confidence" in Parliament. The fact that weasel-like politicians did not object to political lying is not exactly a moral clean bill of health for the government.

So are Hungarians too immature to realize how much deference they owe lying leaders?

Here in America, students are taught in school that they are obliged to obey politicians who win elections fair and square. Then, at some point, an asterisk pops up — and people are notified that they must obey even if politicians seized power by gross deceit. Unless people can irrefragably prove that the rulers seized power wrongfully, they are obliged to submit.

And how can they prove that the politicians seized power illegitimately?

Only if the politicians confess. No other evidence can be admitted: the word must come from On High.

This was the case in Hungary.

But it doesn't matter because the socialists refuse to relinquish the power they wrongfully snared. Regardless of how politicians capture power, they still supposedly have the right to send police to bust the heads of people who refuse to submit.

"Every day is 1956" read the graffiti painted by protesters in Budapest this week. Some of the protests have been violent, as has the government's response at times. Many commentators are lamenting that the big anniversary did not spur an uplifting display of Hungarian unity.

But maybe Americans should look at Hungary more closely. For decades, Americans have been far too docile to the lies of their leaders. Whether it is Nixon lying about Vietnam, or George

H.W. Bush lying about Panama, or Clinton lying about Kosovo, or George W. Bush lying about Iraq and Afghanistan — many Americans have responded as if they were born to be cannon fodder for the ruling class. George Bush openly proclaimed last year, “In my line of work you got to keep repeating things over and over and over again for the truth to sink in, to kind of catapult the propaganda.” The vast majority of Americans ignored the comment, if they even noticed it. But if lying is simply another perk of the presidency, then Americans should at least have the decency to stop preening about being self-governing.

If the citizenry does not punish liars, then it cannot expect the truth. Hungary again reminds us that we do not need to bow down to whomever manages to capture political power.

James Bovard is the author of [Attention Deficit Democracy](#) [2006] as well as [The Bush Betrayal](#) [2004], [Lost Rights](#) [1994] and [Terrorism and Tyranny: Trampling Freedom, Justice and Peace to Rid the World of Evil](#) (Palgrave-Macmillan, September 2003) and serves as a policy advisor for The Future of Freedom Foundation.

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