

# Hungary: The West chooses to forget

It would have been nice, even appropriate, if our prime minister had spared a moment during his recent UN address to remember Hungary. But he was too busy denouncing South Africa to mention that cold November day 29 years ago when Soviet tanks poured into Budapest.

Brian Mulroney is not the only person to have conveniently forgotten the tragedy of free Hungary: To many, the event is ancient history or simply of no importance. Hungarian-Canadians, however, remember all too well—with pain, sorrow and deep anger.

They recall how, on Oct. 23, 1956, Hungarian patriots rose up and overthrew the Soviet puppet regime. The scenes of statues of Stalin being smashed, red stars being cast down from rooftops, of Hungarian patriots brandishing their nation's flag, its communist symbols cut out like a cancer.

They remember how, for a few brief, glorious October days, Budapest was suddenly free of Soviet jackboots. The grimness of communist rule removed, all of the fire and passion, the gaiety and warmth of the Hungarian spirit burst forth. People sang, danced and cried for joy in the streets.

Like Hungary's great hero, Janos Hunyadi, who had held back the Turks 500 years before, the patriots of Budapest defeated those modern Turks, the Soviet armies. Once again, the Magyars showed that among East Europeans they, and their old allies the Albanians, were true warrior peoples. While neighbors bowed their heads before the Soviet pashas, the Magyars drew their swords.



**ERIC MARGOLIS**

Then, for 21 glorious days, Imre Nagy's free Hungarian government.

Across the vassal states of Eastern Europe coursed an electric current of hope and emotion as, for a moment, Soviet rule faltered and grew fearful. In Moscow Soviet rulers anguished over what to do, expecting at any moment that Poles, Czechs, Magyars, Roms and Slovaks would rise up in a sea of rebellion, supported by advancing NATO armies.

The Magyars raised barricades and waited, listening to western broadcasts, praying that American troops would come to relieve them. From the Voice of America came pledges of aid, calls to spread the revolt; these were echoed by other western stations. The Soviets listened, too, and watched. When their agents reported no unusual movements by NATO troops, Moscow ordered its tanks forward.

At the same time, the Soviets had been negotiating with the new Hungarian government, promising that some sort of agreement would be reached. Under pretext of peace talks, they kidnapped and killed Hungarian leaders and then began concentrating armored divisions around Budapest.

On Nov. 4, while the world was distracted by the joint British, French and Israeli attack against Egypt, Soviet T-34 and T-54 tanks rumbled into Budapest. Hungarian patriots tried to defend street barricades with submachine guns and sporting rifles: They were quickly crushed under Soviet tank treads. For 10 days Budapest was wreathed in fire and smoke as the Soviets fought from house to house. Finally, the last Magyar fighters were killed and Budapest taken by storm.

Hungary once more fell vassal to the Soviet Union and the world soon forgot the heartrending bravery of its men and women. "Goulash" communism has brought consumer goods and less oppression so that Hungary today gives the air of relaxed indifference. But walk through Budapest and you still see bullet holes in the walls, and still see Soviet troops being glared at with deep Magyar hatred.

The Hungarians are an old people whose land has been the route of many passing armies. Sometimes, in the face of overwhelming force, they have given in. But only for what is, in history, a few moments. The Soviet overlords know, as do the Hungarians, that one day the Magyars will again rise up and cast out the invaders. Beautiful Budapest will once more become a city of light and laughter.

Brian Mulroney should have remembered the Hungarians: They can teach him and all Canadians a vital lesson. Some day, some time, a man must make a stand, no matter how suicidal. The hopeless battle of Budapest's freedom fighters may have been lost in 1956 but it assures that Hungarians in the year 2056 can hold their heads high. The blood of Budapest's freedom fighters gives permanent life to the proud Magyar nation.