Commemorating the Hungarian Revolution

by Phyllis Schlafly October 18, 2006

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This month we commemorate the 50th anniversary of one of history's most momentous events. With hindsight, we can now see that the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 started the unraveling of Soviet Communism that finally came to pass in 1991.

The Revolution started on October 23, 1956 as a peaceful student protest, but after the Russian soldiers fired on the students, it escalated into a full-scale revolution against the tyranny of Soviet Russia. By October 28, the Freedom Fighters had chased out their Russian oppressors.

For the next five days, there was a political and military stalemate. The fate of a nation hung in the balance.

We in the United States believed then (and still do) that President Dwight Eisenhower should have immediately granted diplomatic recognition to the newly formed free Hungarian government in order to warn Russia against returning, but he didn't. Instead, the Eisenhower Administration sent a message to the Communists that was and is still an embarrassment to Americans.

On November 2, 1956, the U.S. State Department sent this cable to Marshal Tito of Yugoslavia that sealed Hungary's fate: "The government of the United States does not look with favor upon governments unfriendly to the Soviet Union on the borders of the Soviet Union." That gave the Soviet Union the green light to return with full military force, secure in the knowledge that the United States would do nothing to save the free Hungarian government.

At 4 a.m. on November 4, the Russians roared back into Budapest with 200,000 soldiers (including trigger-happy troops from Mongolia), 5,000 tanks, and masses of heavy artillery. They were directed by Nikita Khrushchev, known forever after as "the butcher of Budapest."

Radio Budapest appealed to the United States and the United Nations: "We ask you to help us, to support us. Time is short. Help Hungary, help us, help us. . ." But nobody answered their desperate cries for help.

The Hungarians fought bravely against overwhelming odds with homemade weapons like Molotov cocktails that destroyed 320 Soviet tanks. They fought in the tradition of Patrick Henry: "Give me liberty or give me death."

The odds against Hungary were too massive. In a terrible blood-bath that shocked the world, freedom was crushed and the Hungarians faced more decades of cruel Communist slavery.

But the valor of the Hungarians who fought in the streets gave courage to other countries. The dream was rekindled all over Eastern Europe that the day would come when they, too, might have the opportunity to throw off their captors.

The effect of the Hungarian Revolution in the United States was dramatic: it changed the debate about Communism and punctured the Communist lie of

peaceful coexistence. Americans stopped believing that the Soviet empire was a permanent fact of life.

Grassroots Americans got off the defensive and began to be pro-active. Congress soon passed a resolution calling on our President to proclaim the third week of every July as Captive Nations Week, manifesting our national belief that Communist tyranny was not permanent or inevitable, and that we should keep alive the hope of freedom among the peoples in Communist captivity.

Every July, Americans held public ceremonies and parades to show our solidarity with the Captive Nations. People everywhere began to hope — and to believe — that some day the Captive Nations would be free.

Then one day in 1980, we elected a President who had told his radio audience in 1978 of his hope to free the "millions of people in bondage," and that America did not have to accept a future of coexistence with the evil empire. Ronald Reagan believed that we must work for victory over Communism so that "The march of freedom and democracy will leave Marxism-Leninism on the ash heap of history."

Ronald Reagan dared to demand freedom for the Captive Nations on June 12, 1987, at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, when he flung down the gauntlet to the Soviet dictator and said, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this Wall!" When the Berlin Wall started to crumble in 1989, the most exciting images Americans saw on television were the young people running to freedom through Hungary.

The Hungarian Freedom Fighters stood up in 1956 against a super power, cracked the Soviet empire, lit the lamp of freedom, and gave us an example of courage that will live forever in the history of free men.

Monuments are good reminders of history's heroes. In September this year, Americans at last broke ground for a monument in Washington, DC to the victims

of Communism. Also in September, the Hungarian people erected a statue of their friend, Ronald Reagan, in Budapest City Park.