



# The American Hungarian Federation

*Serving the Community since 1906 - Fidelissimus ad Mortem*

## **The Hungarian 1956 Revolution and Freedom Fight:**

### **A Nation of Heroes**

The American Hungarian Federation, founded over 100 years ago and the oldest and largest umbrella Hungarian American organization in the United States, honors those whose enormous sacrifice seemed futile 56 years ago but that today is universally recognized as having contributed to the ultimate demise of Soviet domination of Central and Eastern Europe and the restoration of constitutional democracy and independence in Hungary and the region.

Fifty-six years ago, Hungarians from all walks of life rose up against insurmountable odds to fight the brutal Soviet-installed Hungarian Communist government. Many died fighting, others were tortured and executed, while 200,000 were forced to flee their homeland.

We must never forget the heroes of 1956 – the students, the intellectuals, the workers, the farmers, indeed the cross-section of the entire Hungarian nation -- who were prepared to realize their dreams at great personal sacrifice. They fought and died for nothing that had not been promised them -- freedom, a multi-party democracy and independence from the Soviet Union.

Two of our great presidents, among many others who cherish freedom and the courage to struggle for it, remembered the Hungarian Revolution as follows:

"October 23, 1956, is a day that will live forever in the annals of free men and nations. It was a day of courage, conscience and triumph. No other day since history began has shown more clearly the eternal unquenchability of man's desire to be free, whatever the odds against success, whatever the sacrifice required." - John F. Kennedy, on the first anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution.

"The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 was a true revolution of, by and for the people. Its motivations were humanity's universal longings to live, worship, and work in peace and to determine one's own destiny. The Hungarian Revolution forever gave the lie to communism's claim to represent the people, and told the world that brave hearts still exist to challenge injustice." - Excerpt from Ronald Reagan's Presidential Proclamation issued on October 20, 1986.

1956 was not the first time in Hungary's thousand year history that the Hungarian nation -- the people -- stood up for liberty, independence and democracy. One just needs to remember the Revolution of 1848 when Hungarians rose up against Hapsburg oppression and with Lajos Kossuth at the helm championed freedom and democracy. Or one can recall July 1944 when a Hungarian armored division blocked the deportation of more than 200,000 Jews in Nazi-occupied Hungary. Or one can point to 1945 when despite Soviet occupation, Hungarians resoundingly rejected the Communist Party and elected the Smallholders Party.

In elections held on November 4, 1945, that democratic party won 57 percent of the votes while the Communist Party won a mere 17 percent. Then in the August 31, 1947 elections, the Communists could still only garner 22.3 percent of the votes despite Soviet intervention, fraud and intimidation. Hungarians once again unequivocally came down on the side of democracy and fundamental freedoms. These were precursors for what would happen in 1956 when Hungarians at a tremendous cost demanded and fought for political rights denied them by a brutal quisling regime and its Soviet masters.

If one can characterize a nation, there can be no doubt that Hungarians not only give lip service to the vaunted principles of democracy and national independence, but also, as their history so eloquently and repeatedly demonstrates, sacrifice life and treasure to achieve them.

Although unfamiliar with the details of this rich history and national character, a few today are quick to conclude (and have the international community believe) that the Hungarian people are less than committed to democracy when, in fact, Hungarians continue to be strong adherents of democratic values. As a member of NATO, Hungarians also continue to serve the cause of freedom, as they participate in the NATO-led ISAF and KFOR missions.

Consistent with its practice of fifty-five years, the American Hungarian Federation is committed to keep the memory of the heroes of 1956 alive. We also recall the impact the massive Soviet invasion and the brutal crushing of the unequivocal expression of Hungarians to be free had on the Hungarian communities in states neighboring Hungary and how minority rights are denied some of those communities even today. As we contemplate the promise of Hungary 1956, we are reminded that that promise must never be forgotten or abandoned, as the heroes of 1956 deserve nothing less.

American Hungarian Federation

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President

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