

Kadar death fails to halt Nagy trial

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Susan Viets in Budapest

THE Supreme Court acquittal hearing for the former prime minister, Imre Nagy, and eight of his associates — convicted in 1958 of organising the 1956 “counter-revolution” — had barely started yesterday when it was learned that Janos Kadar, who ruled Hungary for 32 years, had died from pneumonia in a nearby Budapest hospital.

Kadar, who was party general-secretary when the Nagy sentences were passed, was Moscow's choice after Soviet tanks crushed the uprising in 1956. His “goulash” communism was an eclectic mixture of policies designed to create a high standard for Hungarians.

Hungary experienced an economic golden age, and Kadar attained unprecedented popularity for an East bloc leader. In the 1970s such international pressures as the oil crisis affected the economy, and the country borrowed extensively to subsidise the standard of living. The foreign debt sky-rocketed and now stands at £9.2 billion, the highest per capital in Eastern Europe.

Kadar's health deteriorated during his last three years in office. It was at this time that economic reformers moved to the forefront and arranged a behind-the-scenes coup.

At the May, 1988, party conference, a visibly shaken Kadar was replaced as general secretary by Mr Karoly Grosz.

Since then the pace of reform has intensified, and the issue of 1956 has accompanied reform to the forefront of the political arena.

The Hungarian press and government now call 1956 a “popular uprising,” and Nagy was recently given a public reburial. Shortly before, Kadar, the party's symbolic head, was stripped of his post as president. The party, however, has refused to consider the issue of political rehabilitation for Nagy and his associates.

Supreme Court proceedings yesterday were confined to the legal rehabilitation of the Nagy group. The Supreme Court president, Mr Jeno Szilberek, said: “The main question is whether the accused were guilty or not, and not to go into political and ideological details.” All nine were acquitted on the ground that the proceedings violated the civil code in place in 1958.

Family members gathered in the front rows of the courtroom displayed little emotion when the final statement was read. It was the news of Kadar's death, which spread during the morning coffee break, that was greeted with surprise.

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