

Hungarian reformers pull back from split

10-10-89 pg 24

Ian Traynor and Susan Viets
in Budapest

HUNGARY'S new ruling Socialist Party pulled back from the brink of a split last night and elected the centrist Mr Rezső Nyers as president in a deal with the radical reformers grouped around Mr Imre Pozsgay.

In what Mr Nyers termed a "full compromise" on the hotly contested issue of the party praesidium, the reformist troika of Mr Pozsgay, Mr Miklós Nemeth, the Prime Minister, and Mr Gyula Horn, the Foreign Minister, climbed

down at the end of a see-saw day of threat and counter-threat.

Mr Nyers said last night that President Gorbachev was the first to congratulate him. "Gorbachev conducts very fast diplomacy," a tired but elated Mr Nyers said. "They gave me his telegram within two hours of my election."

The Pozsgay wing had threatened to quit and form a new party if it did not gain control of the leadership, but the line-up disclosed last night indicated that Mr Nyers had triumphed with a carefully-balanced team that reflected the leader's consensual approach.

Following the closed session

of the congress, described as stormy, at which Mr Nyers and Mr Nemeth engaged in a slanging match, the Prime Minister sought to put a brave face on his opponent's victory. "This is a very good compromise. There are no more battles to be fought tonight," said Mr Nemeth.

The three reformers also took their places in the praesidium, where they were joined by half a dozen firm supporters. But the praesidium was also heavily slanted towards the centre and contained a sprinkling of leftwing members with whom the reformers had said they could not work.

The deal capped a day of drama with the opposing forces

embroiled in a frantic series of backroom bargaining sessions. Mr Nemeth at one point threatened to quit but later said the rift had been healed.

Earlier in the day, according to one of his aides, Mr Pozsgay was insisting that the reformers would only support Mr Nyers for an honorary post.

Otherwise, the source said, the reformers intended to resign, taking around 300 of the 1,200-odd delegates with them to form a new party.

There was still the possibility last night that around 100 radical delegates, branded as extremist by Mr Nyers, would leave in disillusion with a congress billed as a watershed, but

whose main hallmark had been compromise.

Delegates overwhelmingly voted to work for "a constitutional state based on a multi-party system, where the source of power is the will of the people expressed in free elections".

Even so, the reform wing says the compromises mean the Socialist Party has no clear-cut identity distinct from its Communist predecessor, thus diminishing its chances in the elections due next spring.

Mr Nyers's fudge has left plenty of scope within the new party for Communists, whereas the reformers wanted to squeeze them out.

Originally, the leadership was to have comprised 21 members, but Mr Nemeth insisted on its expansion to 24 as the price of his staying.

Mr Pozsgay's quandary is that he is the country's most popular politician and has ambitions towards the new national presidency in elections expected next month. As such, he can ill afford to be associated with too much fudging on the new party's identity.

"The compromise will definitely damage Pozsgay's public image," said Mr Tibor Huszar, an eminent sociologist and delegate at the congress.

Private help, page 6

10 October 1989

Reproduced with permission from the *Guardian*