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THE RENEGADE OF RÁKOSIST EMIGRATION

We are burying a one-time prime minister. There is no orchestra, there are no official wreaths. No wonder, we have lived to see several political turns, and no new system will bury the late premiers of previous systems. The deceased, however, is not one of the many prime ministers of the second half of the 20th century whom even well-informed newspaper readers would be hard pressed to locate in time. They know who András Hegedüs was. For one thing, his premiership coincided with truly historic times. He was a premier who is distinctly differentiated from the heads of all other governments by something. Not by his having been the youngest prime minister ever in Hungary, but by the fact that his renown and historical prestige were connected very loosely and indirectly to his one-time premiership.

From his university years his life was intertwined with many major processes and events of 20th century Hungarian history. The Györfly College was the meeting point of the ruralist and the communist movements. Students of the college constituted an important squad in the Hungarian resistance movement. Converted into the so called People's College, the institute became the central institution of training communist leaders. Its members really had the fieldmarshal's baton in their haversack. After the year of the turn, he became first in rank among the senior functionaries picked for the front-line of future party and state leaders. As a "cadre" of Gerő, the number two leader in the Rákosist kernel decisively shaped his political personality. This is what helps us to understand the immensity of the human turn caused by the break with the Rákosist emigration in Moscow in 1956 which Gerő had just been appointed to lead. This turn made András Hegedüs's life unique. Prior to that turn, however, several major events played a great role. He was a member of the delegation of party leaders sent to Moscow in 1953 to receive the Soviet decision to replace Rákosi by Imre Nagy. When Moscow dismissed the more and more openly anti-Stalinist and democratically open Imre Nagy government and had the Hungarian party leadership issue the "March resolution" condemning Imre Nagy's "June journey", Hegedüs became the key person of the "March resolution" line. His place in the new leadership can best be characterised by his appointment to premiership in 1955. In this capacity, he signed the founding charter of the Warsaw Pact. The line of the "March resolution" implied a partial restoration of the pre-1953 state of affairs. "Hard dictatorship", however, did not return. The members of the "March command", among whom he was first in rank, were primarily opposed to the "June line", to the NEP policy of Imre Nagy's government, but they no longer wished to implement the next period of governance with the "old" cadres who had compromised themselves in the events prior to 1953. The "June command" already excluded Révai; Farkas also failed because he had joined Imre Nagy's government. The apparatus of the "March resolution" - András Hegedüs, Lajos Ács, Béla Végh, István Hidas - were considering the possibility of excluding Rákosi and Gerő, or at least, not passing back the helm into their hands. When in 1956 Rákosi fell, Gerő wanted to push Hegedüs to the fore as party chief, but he had the dignity to refuse to act as the microphone stand for his still idolized party leader. On the afternoon of October 23, it was Gerő who asked for Soviet aid on the phone, but Hegedüs agreed to sign the official document sent to the Soviet government. He signed it, antedated: he was no longer the premier, but he wanted to save reluctant Imre Nagy this embarrassment. It was not a "gesture to Imre Nagy" but served to sever the leader of the party opposition from his following. From 1953 to

October 1956 he was involved in important decisions. He was not the decision-maker, but he was no mere extra. He is not to blame for anything alone, but he is also to blame for everything.

When Imre Nagy's about face of '56 took place - the government went over to the side of the uprising - Hegedüs left the country as a compromised member of the Gerö leadership. In Moscow, he was a member of the Rákosist replacement squad which the Soviet leaders held in the fire as second iron to blackmail Kádár, or, had Kádár refused to collaborate, to use them to set up a collaborating government. That was when the historic turn came in his career. As the only emigrant Rákosist, he broke with this countercurrent of emigration which Moscow still needed to keep Kádár at bay and went over to Kádár's side in early 1957. At that point, it was not yet more than switching over from the losing to the winning camp. True, it was a lesser evil. His about-turn was not a triumphal procession. In the months of pacification, the Kádár leadership wanted to gloss over the continuity with the Rákosi regime, so his coming from the Rákosist camp did not help. His switch was not given any publicity. Hegedüs became the vice president of the Statistical Office with the prospect of succeeding president György Péter, an economic reformer rumoured to have had "ties to Imre Nagy".

Had this appointment taken place, he would have returned to the nomenclature in a leadership position - even if at the lowest level. Rumours spread that he kept dragging his foot: he would not sign anything as vice president because he had signed the Warsaw Pact and that made him fed up with signatures. That was a funny way of trying to distance himself from his past. It indicated that the break was serious. The deputy head of an important government agency joking about the Warsaw Pact ran risks. It revealed two human traits of his personality: civic courage which increasingly became the motor of his life, and humour that helped him handle delicate political situations. By this humorous-discrete allusion to his reservations concerning the policies of the Kádár regime he suggested he was determined to find a way out of the nomenclature. He could take this step when he became the leader of the sociological research group, and later, the head of the institute his efforts helped create. The regime wished to use him. He was entrusted with guarding Marxist sociology permitted to exist very reluctantly so that the regime could turn down Sándor Szalai who was regarded as far more dangerous. But the Kádár regime proved to be wrong. Soon he caused them more trouble as a sociologist than anyone else would have. I met him first as the leader of the sociological research group, myself also an associate of an institute of the Academy located in the Castle district. He held lectures to the researchers of other sister institutes of the Academy, all based in the Castle area, in order to have sociology, which was still fighting for survival, officially acknowledged. He held lectures in an easy-going manner, not in the usual party lingo, which was so hard to swallow. He did not talk about why sociology must be based on Marxism but about what everyone was truly interested in hearing from him: Why he broke with Gerö and his clique in Moscow in October-November 1956. He answered the questions we did not dare to ask. He brilliantly connected it to sociology. He told us that he, who had been interested in sociology as a university student, changed over to this branch of research as a civil profession in Moscow. Around that time some awkward steps were taken in the Soviet Union too to concoct a sort of Marxist imitation sociology. I still remember Comrade Changli. He described her as a sort of commissary of party-governed Soviet sociology for whom sociology meant using questionnaires to inquire into the secrets of the "ace-workers" and to find out about the Stahanovites' success. He said he had called sheer party propaganda "changliese". In his lecture popularising sociology he said that the "Changli experience" was the last straw that deterred him from his previous party alignment. That was a wink at us since he was clearly aware of our political stance. These lectures were feelers towards a base, and this base was

already outside the bastion of Kádárism. The lecture exposed his sense of humour and his ability to use humour for political goals.

Another memory of Hegedus I still cherish from that time reveals another important human trait of his personality which was also part of his being as a politician. The personnel of academic institutions in the Castle district had lunch in a huge self-service restaurant. Once I happened to get a place at the table of the sociological group. Director Hegedüs was having lunch there surrounded by young female administrators and several young researchers. A cordial chat was going on without any hierarchic tension. For his young colleagues he was a jolly and humorous collaborator, not the director who is the "boss" even in merry-making. I suddenly realised that the lunch groups of the other academic institute heads were like the courts of Louis XIV compared to that of Hegedüs. His intimacy and easy-going ways with people were the main strengths of his political influence.

He left the Rákosist boat at the moment when it started to sink, but he turned against the Kádár regime when it was on the peak, in the mid-sixties. It was a sign of dissent when as a leading Marxist sociologist, he argued that Djilasiades and his work still provided important insights into the interpretation of bureaucracy as a power factor. He became the advocate for workers' self-government of the Yugoslav type. When the committee for the new economic mechanism was set up Hegedüs was made responsible for the subcommittee in charge of workers' self-government; and he managed to sneak elements of workers's participation into the reform package.

Nineteen-sixty-eight offered him the opportunity to go over to the side of dissenting intellectuals. As the party representative and head of a state institute, he protested against the intervention in Czechoslovakia at the Central Committee of the party. The "Trial of the Lesser Philosophers" removed him from public view in 1972. From then on he belonged to the growing number of opposition intellectuals. He joined in the activities of the democratic opposition from the late '70s. He signed protest sheets, gave biographical interviews compiled into a book to emigrant activists of the opposition which the Hungarian public could only get acquainted with from a series of broadcasts by Free Europe radio, and he held lectures at the Monday Free University. He was in search of possible ways for direct democracy. He became an advocate for political pluralism but he couldn't come to terms with its classical western variant, the system of many parties. We, the members of the opposition at the time, argued with him, learning a lot from the experience of a fellow fighter who knew the measured operation of power from the inside.

At the great political turn of 1989-90 he didn't even try to join in the reorganisation efforts of the socialist party. Not joining any side, he drifted off the mainstream, to the margins of the transformation. Heroes emerging from obscurity, who were nowhere near the intellectual resistance to the Kádár regime of which he was a weighty figure, spotted the one-time party-dictated prime minister in him. Maybe these people were really ignorant of the fact that András Hegedüs dared to speak up when they held their mouths tightly shut. His humour, love of life and humanity helped him overcome the anguish of being neglected in the past ten years. His Workers' Academy did not fit in the political style after the change, but it exemplifies that there is more than one style for a democratic transformation.

We are taking farewell of a public figure who has jumped over his shadow. We are giving him his place in our private pantheons convinced that he will get his due place in the pantheon of historical memory.

(Delivered on November 12, 1999, in the Farkasrét cemetery)