

## **SOCIOLOGICAL HERITAGE**

### **PREFACE TO LÁSZLÓ CSEH-SZOMBATHY'S WRITING**

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Did we know member of the Academy László Cseh-Szombathy sufficiently while he was alive? The question is quite unambiguous, but I am sure an answer either in the affirmative or in the negative would be rather far from reality.

I, who he honored with his attention in 1974, and later on with his friendship, thought until a short while ago that I had known him well. This was also confirmed by our last meeting shortly before his death, when he requested me upon my instigation to write two letters in his name. He meant one of them for the Prime Minister. This letter was to contain his resignation from the already only formally existing Governmental Committee on Population Policy. In the other letter he wished to inform the President of the Republic about our gravest demographic problems. I never wrote the requested drafts, based on the experience of former years, could not even think of it (he was in such a good condition at that time!) that soon he would not be amongst us. He was just the same on that occasion, too, as I had always known him. Modest, reserved, rather remaining in the background, yet attentive (since my illness two years earlier there never was an occasion he did not inquire about my health), and meticulous. At that time the precise aim of my visit just before lunch and the noontime bells was to get letters signed related to the Demographic Foundation. He listened to me and then, with the thoroughness characteristic of him studied the letters one after the other, put some questions then signed them.

Next time we 'met' at his burial. And once again, when his son, Márton Cseh-Szombathy handed over his father's 101-page memoirs composed in 2002, at the age of 77. He meant this writing primarily for the family and grandchildren, but not only for them. As a proof of my assumption that this writing was also addressed to the public, I would call attention to his other piece entitled *Seven Generations*, published in the *Hungarian Review* in April 2004. That publication is partly identical and partly different from the memoirs. It is worth reading a passage from the writing published at that time:

One tradition of family histories is when the last member of a family dies without successor we speak about the extinction of the family, and the symbol of the family, its coat-of-arms is hung upside down at the act of farewell. This symbolism spread primarily among the aristocratic families, but considering Hungary as a whole in fact it

would be justified to do so in every family, indicating the demographic danger the Hungarian population is in.

When I read the above lines in 2004, the unambiguous nature of its wording did not strike me, presumably because our views coincided.

His memoirs read in the early autumn of 2007, reviewing the focal points of his life, were a revelation to me. A hitherto unknown László Cseh-Szombathy smiled 'back' to me from the lines. The profundity, precision and good style of the Professor did not surprise me, but all the more did the clear-cut and incredibly concise expression of his opinion and value judgments, presenting and characterizing a given person, event or situation so accurately that it even hurts. The Professor, so long as I had known him up to his memoirs was always circumspect or rather cautious when wording his opinion and stand, and the doubts of the scholar as well as the acquired and suffered life experience also played a role in it. In this writing however, a man 'spoke' to me who was resolute, clearly aiming at his objective, without any beating around the bush, and disregarding sensitivities and reservations provoked by his thoughts.

We should thank his son, Márton Cseh-Szombathy that we could get acquainted with him in this 'cross-section', who was not against the publication of the memoirs. I believe that those who read this passage of the memoirs describing the Professor's years spent at the Institute of Sociology, would have a similar experience I had, and would agree that the publication of the full material would not only make the image more colorful but would significantly supplement and enrich the portrait we have so far developed about László Cseh-Szombathy.

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