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## **ROAD FROM STALINIST OFFICIAL TO THEORIST OF REFORM COMMUNISM**

András Hegedüs was one of the most important social theorists during the era of reform communism in Hungary. Through his death we lost someone who contributed as much as any other social scientist to make life livable for millions of Hungarians during the last decades of communism. We lost a socialist who never betrayed his faith in social justice and equality, a humanist who cared for ordinary people, a man of courage and moral integrity who was able to break with his Stalinist past and was willing to challenge powers, communist and post-communist alike for causes he believed in and was ready to take risks for standing by his beliefs.

I first met him in 1962. I was in charge of the foreign language journal collection of the Library of the Central Statistical Office and Hegedüs was appointed that year to become the Vice President of the Statistical Office.

Hegedüs just returned from his emigration from the Soviet Union. He escaped from Hungary during late October 1956 with other Stalinist officials. Hegedüs joined the communist movement early in life. He was active in underground political activities during the war years, and rose in the ranks of the party and state bureaucracy fast after 1945. Hungarian communist party chief, Mátyás Rákosi liked him a lot - Hegedüs even looked a little like Rákosi and for a while many Hungarians believed him to be Rákosi's illegitimate son. In 1952, at the age of thirty he was appointed Minister of Agriculture, in 1953 he became deputy prime minister in the first Imre Nagy government. When Nagy was removed he took over first as acting prime minister, later as prime minister. The October revolution found him in this position. He was among the signatories of the document, which requested the Red Army to crack down on the revolution, which at that time he called counter-revolution. He had thus good reason to escape Hungary during the revolution to seek asylum in the USSR. In 1957 he was still a firm believer in Stalinism and from Moscow he tried to persuade the Soviets to sack Kádár and bring the "old guard" back. But during his Moscow emigration he soon gave up politics and began to read sociology and by the time he returned to Hungary during the early 1960s he had a basic grasp of the sociological literature. It was not quite clear where he was heading politically and whether or not he still had political ambitions. In 1962-63 the Kádár regime was searching for a new identity and orientation and it was seriously considering that former Stalinists, like Hegedüs may be brought back to important positions. Offering Hegedüs the Vice-Presidency in the Central Statistical Office was a step in this direction. We all believed it will be only the first step and he will keep rising in the party or state hierarchy.

The rank-and-file clerks at the Central Statistical Office - including myself - were frightened by the news of the Hegedüs appointment. We believed this to be a sign of the return of Stalinism, and in retrospect, before 1963 it was indeed not obvious whether the Kádár regime will return to full scale Stalinism, or it will enter the reform communist trajectory, it eventually followed. Soon our opinions changed, however. Hegedüs did not behave like a Stalinist cadre at all. He presented himself as a smart, thoughtful and modest colleague and did not play the role of the communist boss. This was in sharp contrast with the style of the President. At the time the President of the Statistical Office was György Péter, an able

economists, who was one of the early proponents of market reform. Péter's style of leadership, however, was a rather distant one. He had a cold, aristocratic style of management. He went home for lunch in his chauffeur driven car, did not return the greetings of his subordinates in the corridors but if someone did not greet him they had to face the consequences. Hegedüs presented himself as a very different person. He joined us for lunch in the cafeteria, insisted, that he stand in line, came to the library in person if he needed a book or a journal issue. He soon became known for his excellent skills of chairing meetings. He let people talk, listened carefully and concluded the meeting with picking the right ideas presented at the meeting, even if his knowledge of the subject matter was limited or nil. We did not like him, but we learned to respect him.

In 1963 Hegedüs faced an important choice. The government wanted to remove Péter from his position. The regime disliked him, since he was his own man and according to rumours I heard in the Statistical Office he was known to fire whoever was recruited by the secret police to be their informants. Now they wanted to offer the job to Hegedüs. In the same year it was also decided that the Hungarian Academy of Sciences would set up a tiny Sociological Research Group. Until then sociology was regarded as a "bourgeois pseudo-science". They were also searching for a director of the research group. Hegedüs opted for the directorship of the tiny research group, and turned down the offer to become president of the Statistical Office, which would have guaranteed him a seat in the Council of Ministers. On March 15, 1963 he left the Central Statistical office and assumed the position of Director, Sociological Research Group at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

There were quite a few of us who wanted a position in this research group. There were at that time about a dozen young men and women - just like me - who began to read sociological literature and train ourselves as sociologists. We were also dreaming about a research job in the Academy of Sciences, which at that time was a prestigious position.

But the Research Group started as a small venture. As far as I remember on March 15 1963 only Ferenc Nemes, Mária Márkus, Károly Varga and András Szesztay were full time researchers in the Research Group, with Hegedüs as full time director. During the next year or two Ágnes Heller, Ágnes Losonczy, András Gyenes, Pál Lőcsei joined the Group as well. In 1963 I got a part-time position and had to wait for years to be appointed full time.

The next few years were spectacularly successful for Hegedüs as a social theorist. Overnight he managed to become the agenda setter for all the major debates of the time. I remember four major debates; each initiated by Hegedüs and shaped by him.

The first major debate dealt with the question of social structure. Hegedüs wrote a short book on the subject matter and that turned the theoretical debates about class and stratification around and paved the way to empirical research on social stratification and mobility, which became one of the strongest fields in Hungarian sociology. In the book Hegedüs rejected the orthodox two-class-one-stratum model of social structure advocated by Stalinist historical materialism. This theory claimed that there are two fundamental classes of socialism: the working class (state ownership) and the peasantry (co-operative property) based on differences in forms of ownership, with the intellectuals as a middle stratum (since they cannot be clearly identified with either of the forms of ownership). Hegedüs suggested that the basis of social inequality in socialism is derived from the position in the division of labour rather than from forms of ownership. Hegedüs himself did not conduct much empirical research - his mind worked too fast, he just could not do all the nitty-gritty work of empirical

investigation and he even despised us a little for crunching numbers. Still, without Hegedüs it would have been unimaginable that the kind of rigorous empirical research work on stratification, mobility and poverty, which was soon carried out by Zsuzsa Ferge first and by István Kemény and Rudolf Andorka later (and by Tamás Kolosi much later). The work I conducted with György Konrád on social inequality would have been also impossible without the opening Hegedüs initiated.

The second big debate, which was kicked off with an essay by Hegedüs focused on the question of bureaucracy. Marxist orthodoxy claimed that bureaucracy is alien to socialism. Kálmán Kulcsár, who was close to the Kádárist regime was aware that socialism is a bureaucratic society, but he coined the term "administration" to be able to write about the subject safely (Kulcsár was a great coiner of such "neutral" terms - I gather he was the one who invented the term "people in multiple disadvantages" to write about "poverty"). Kulcsár also emphasised that no complex society was imaginable without administration. Hegedüs, like Kulcsár acknowledged that bureaucracy was a necessary phenomenon in modern societies and he did not share the program of the "anti-bureaucratic" revolution of Leon Trotsky. Hegedüs, however, unlike Kulcsár and other status quo theorists, called for social control over the bureaucracy. He did not imply a multi-party system. He did not believe that a multi-party system was a realistic program in the 1960s in the Soviet block and even later he retained his reservations about "bourgeois democracy" as too formalistic a system. (Around this time and even much later I shared Hegedüs's skepticism about multi-party democracy. Once in the 1970s or early 1980s I wrote: "[O]ne party is one too many". Hegedüs believed in direct democracy, he was searching to find an alternative between formal bourgeois democracy and Kádárist paternalistic bureaucratism.

The third debate focused on economic reform. Since 1963 Hegedüs was a committed economic reformer and eventually became one of the leading figures in the Hungarian reform movement. But his contribution to the reform debate was quite original. He did understand that market reform was inevitable, but he wanted to draw attention to the contradictions of "humanization and optimalization." Hegedüs saw it with more clarity than market reformers of his time that there was an inevitable trade-off between social equity and economic efficiency. As a committed socialist he did not want to sacrifice the ideal of equality and was searching for some reasonable compromise between equity and efficiency.

Finally, Hegedüs initiated the debate, which lasts until this very day in Hungarian social sciences about "critical sociology." Hegedüs found "socio-technic" or "social engineering" boring. Fashionable social science of the time saw it its task to give advice to the government and the party about how to exercise power more effectively. In Hegedüs' view the vocation of a social researcher was to be a critical analyst. In his approach that implied that the social scientists will confront the realities of actually existing socialism with its ideals.

One could argue that there was nothing really new in Hegedüs' articles and books. His "theories" were only interesting, when one contrasted them with the stupidity of the Stalinist doctrine. Since Weber it is well known that a position in the division of labour is an important determinant of social status. Weber a few months after the October Revolution warned socialists that the new system, which was in the making in Soviet Russia, would be even more bureaucratic than the "iron cage" of capitalism. Milton Friedman was well aware of the contradictions between equality and efficiency. Lukács, Marcuse and Adorno wrote eloquently about the necessity of critical theory. Still, the Hegedüs oeuvre, which appeared in print between 1963 and 1968 is extraordinary. No one had the courage of Hegedüs to bring

these sensitive questions out into the open. No one could formulate these important problems with greater lucidity; no one could translate these rather abstract theoretical propositions into concerns, which became subjects of public discourse.

Just 2-3 years after its birth the new Hungarian sociology constituted the intellectually most exciting "scientific field" and it attracted the attention and even admiration of leading social scientist from all over the world. Parsons, Etzioni, Polanyi, Elihu Katz, Herbert Gans, Ferrarotti and many other leading sociologists of the time visited Hungary and were impressed. I acted as the translator for Talcott Parsons. When he departed he wrote a letter to me and expressed his astonishment and admiration for the quality of ideas he found in Hungary. (He was careful enough to put in the letter: I don't mean your own work, I mean the work of your institute.... Just to make sure I don't start applying for jobs with his letters of thanks...). This was all the accomplishment of Hegedüs. After he was removed from his position of director of the Institute of Sociology, Hungarian sociology rapidly fell into mediocrity and boredom.

During most of the sixties my relationship with Hegedüs was rather cold, occasionally almost hostile. For Hegedüs - a populist deep in his heart - I was the bourgeois boy from the Buda Hills. He was reluctant to give me a full time position and it was only several years after the Institute of Sociology was established that he called upon me - out of necessity since he needed a scientific secretary and I was the only person around with some administrative skills and talent. Not that I liked him all that much. For a long time I looked at him as the prime minister of Mátyás Rákosi, the person who invited the Red Army to invade the country. Still, I was the one who began to change my mind about him and see him as an ally rather than as enemy. During the early-mid 1960s he was the chief editor of the progressive social science monthly journal, *Valóság*. Given the progressive line the journal followed under his editorship he was sacked, if I recall correctly sometime around 1965. I remember clearly, I had a discussion about the firing of Hegedüs from this position with Rudi Andorka, who at the time was a close friend of mine. Rudi believed, and told me in so many words, that this was not our business, let the communists fight it out amongst each other. This may have been the beginning of the cooling of my friendship with Andorka and my first step on the road to become a political dissident. From that day onward I became the ally of those, like Hegedüs, who wanted to take the regime on and I began to distance myself gradually from those, who opted for the strategy of "passive resistance."

My difference with Hegedüs was not simply one of human "habitus." We approached some of the basic questions of the discipline differently. First and foremost: I was and remained to this very day an empirical sociologist. Hegedüs never thought much of my scholarly work, he did not like, did not value empirical, data driven social research.

We did not think the same way about the question of economic reform either.

I did understand and appreciate the insights Hegedüs offered with his distinction between "humanization and optimalisation", but unlike him, I was more committed to market reform and even believed that more reform would increase social equality in socialist redistributive economies. Our views also differed about the nature of critical social science. In this respect Hegedüs followed Lukács's line and in my judgment he and the members of the Lukács-school offered "an ideological critique" of socialism.

The critical analysis I practiced was instead a "critique of ideology." In my view the problem with socialism was not that it did not live up to "the ideals of socialism" as Hegedüs and the Lukács-school suggested. The problem was that actually existing socialism was too close to its ideals. The ideal version of socialism was simply the ideology of socialist social order, which legitimated inequalities and injustices of the system.

Hegedüs finally offered me a tenured, full time job in the Institute only around 1966. Even at that time he did this only reluctantly. Ferenc Nemes, who was the scientific secretary of the Institute between 1963 and 1966 was appointed Chair of the new sociology department at Karl Marx University of Economics and Hegedüs needed a secretary. I was the only available person who appeared to have the administrative skills and imagination (he needed help in this respect, he was a lousy administration in day-to-day management). We worked together for two years, during this time our relationship become friendlier. We often traveled abroad and we drank gallons of wine together. (During those years we both drank more than we should have.)

In 1968 our road could have been separated. In August 1968 Ágnes Heller and Mária Márkus - during the days of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia - were at a conference in Yugoslavia and they signed the "Korcula declaration", which opposed, in no uncertain terms, the invasion. Upon their return the party organisation of the Institute of Sociology - Mária Márkus was party secretary - also issued a statement of protest.

I was not a member of the Communist Party, but was asked by some friends to sign the protest statement as well. I refused. I did not see what the point was. I had predicted the invasion weeks before it happened. As an analyst I believed that the Russians would have little choice but to intervene if they wanted to keep the Empire together. While I supported the ideals of the Prague Spring I believed that the protest movement couldn't achieve its purposes, so I decided to stay out of it altogether.

The leadership of the Hungarian Communist Party was outraged. Hegedüs was removed as director of the institute and disciplinary action was taken against those who signed the declaration. From one day to the next I became the favorite sociologist of the regime. They not only rewarded me for staying out of the protest movement, but they also decided to change their science policy. Empirical sociology was supported; critical social analysis of the sort Hegedüs and his colleagues stood for was repressed. The party leadership decided to rely on me for this transition. The new director, Kálmán Kulcsár (I was actively involved in picking him as the replacement of Hegedüs) not only kept me on as scientific secretary, but he also sought my advice and for a while even followed it.

Nevertheless, after 1968 my relationship with Hegedüs and the members of the prosecuted Lukács School (Ferenc Fehér, Ágnes Heller, György Márkus, Mária Márkus) did not deteriorate at all, on the contrary, we became friends. I attempted to manage the transition from the Hegedüs to the Kulcsár "regime" without negating, or rejecting the earlier achievements of Hungarian sociology. My aim was to promote a kind of sociology, which was based on a close integration of empirical research and social theory. I tried to keep Hegedüs and his colleagues in Hungarian social science and defended them against attacks. By the early 1970s I had to realize I failed as a science politician. I resigned from my administrative position, entered a collision course with the Kádár regime and in 1975 I was expelled from Hungary. I was not allowed to return until 1982 and during the past 25 years I met Hegedüs only a couple of times.

After 1968 Hegedüs was quickly marginalised. He wrote no major work after he lost his position as director. Even dissidents turned against him. They forgot the important role he played as a critic and reformer during the 1960s and he was only remembered as the prime minister of Mátyás Rákosi.

His "autobiography" (edited by Zoltán Zsille) created big a controversy. Hegedüs just loved Zsille and he shared his innermost thoughts with him. The most controversial section of the book reports on the events which took place on October 23-25, 1956. Hegedüs claimed that he was not particularly responsible for inviting the Soviet troupes to invade Hungary. This was the decision of Gerő, then first secretary of the Communist Party. He had to take responsibility for this decision only to the extent that Imre Nagy should take it as well. According to Hegedüs during the late afternoon, early evening he was sitting in the office of Gerő with Imre Nagy and others. Gerő did the talking and they did the listening. Gerő said, "Comrades, we have no alternative but to ask the Soviet comrades to help us in this situation." He picked up the phone and made the tragic phone call, which later legitimated the Soviet action (there is little doubt the Russians would have invaded Hungary anyway and may have already been on their way to Budapest when the phone call arrived). Hegedüs claims neither he, nor Nagy said a word. He also claimed that by that time he believed Nagy replaced him as prime minister anyway.

Those who are familiar with the events of 1956 usually accuse Hegedüs of falsifying history and trying to put the blame on Nagy. I don't know. I was not in Gerő's office on October 23, 1956. But the Hegedüs I knew was no liar.

Nevertheless, for the rest of his life, 1956 remained an unbearable burden. October 23, 1956 was a "Greek" tragedy in his life, much like it was a tragedy for János Kádár. Kádár died the day Imre Nagy was officially rehabilitated by the Hungarian courts. Hegedüs died on October 23, 1999. A coincidence? For sure, but symbolic too.

He lived in horrendous times and he was no saint, he made mistakes in his life. But is there any one among us who lived in this epoch and remained faultless?

He was a modest and smart man. With his essays, written in the 1960s, he created single handedly the new Hungarian sociology and it would have been better for the profession if sociology in Hungary had remained on the road opened up by Hegedüs. The time may come when another generation of social scientists will re-read his work and will be inspired by his critical spirit. That would be the appropriate way to remember him and his legacy.