

Foreword

In 1956, Tamás Kiss was a leader of the first free student association behind the Iron Curtain (the MEFESZ of the city of Szeged in Hungary). He brought that news to the Technical University of Budapest. In this fine book of his, he describes the events of the 1956 Hungarian fight for freedom and provides authentic documentation for those events. Truth is important, documented facts are important, because Hungary has not yet digested her own past. She still lacks openness to dialogue, to discussion and lacks the willingness to calmly compare the facts, the points of views. This lack of a clear and commonly held understanding of the past results in public frustration, violent arguments, a civil-war-like mentality, which is paralyzing, because a nation, all nations need a common memory before they can build a common future.

The book itself provides much needed facts for the Hungarian public that is used to hear the former henchmen of Communist rulers to sling mud at those patriots whom they sentenced to death. Yet, in this introduction to his book, I will try to acquaint the reader with the spirit, the emotional atmosphere of the revolution. Let me begin with a few paragraphs from my own book, which describe Tamás Kiss's role at a student meeting in Budapest on the 22nd of October:

‘...I was scraping the corrosion off my »gold« ring, which had cost me thirty-six forints and must have had some copper in its heritage, because it was turning green. I was spitting on it, rubbing it, and was just beginning to make some progress when I felt Attila's elbow in my side. He was pointing down to the speakers' platform, where there was some commotion. The murmur in the aula stopped. Now there was total silence. In startled curiosity the dozing students were beginning to wake up. We were sitting up and starting to pay attention. Now you could hear a pin drop and then, from the middle of the tumult at the microphone, a voice rose: ‘I represent the MEFESZ of Szeged! I want to speak!’

It was unprecedented! Extraordinary! The air was thick with tension. We did not know who had spoken, did not understand what was happening. All we could see was that the DISZ penguins were shoving a fellow away from the microphone. He was a student like us, and he was talking, gesticulating, but we heard nothing-the blue-jacketed DISZ operatives had pushed him all the way to the wall.

Then the Party secretary, Mrs. Orbán, came to the microphone and admonished us, 'You have only one duty! Your duty is to study!' She was almost screaming. 'You don't want the MEFESZ of Szeged! You don't want any ideas from Szeged!' I could not imagine why Szeged was suddenly such a bad place. I did not particularly care what she was saying but I was hypnotized by this mini-hero, this crazy guy from Szeged.

My mind raced on: I do not understand him. I do not understand what he wants. Is he out of his mind? Does he not know that he will be kicked out of the university? Not only that, he will also be thrown in jail-that is, right after they beat the shit out of him. Does he not understand that we are nobodies, that our collective name is 'Shut Up'? Does he not understand that he is nothing, that I am nothing that we have no say in anything? Does he not understand that the microphone is only for the Party collaborators and nobody, but nobody, else talks into it? Does he not know that even the DISZ penguins dare only read their prepared statements? And that even then, they wait until they are told that it is their turn to read?

Attila muttered my own racing thoughts when he said, 'I just don't get it!'

Then we saw the members of the military department, the only people who possessed arms at the university, marching onto the speaker's platform, and we got very quiet. You could have cut the tension with a knife. My throat was dry, my breath bated. All eyes were on the officers. Then suddenly, from a distance, we heard a voice. It was that of a fifth-year architecture student, a blond, very tall, by the name of Jancsi Danner. He yelled, 'Let him speak!'

My heart stopped. Nothing like this had ever happened since the Red Army had occupied Hungary. I stared at Jancsi. His ears were red,

his mouth was trembling, but he did not blink; he faced the bewildered and frightened stares of two thousand students.

‘God, he has lost his marbles!’ I said.

In the meantime a new and angry sort of murmur was building up, replacing the previously astonished silence, and now, a few rows in front of us, Laci Zsindely, a classmate of mine, hesitantly started to clap. It was then that the miracle occurred!

First one, then two, then four or five students joined in, and suddenly this sparse clapping turned into a hurricane, a burst of thunderous applause the likes of which I had never heard. I saw Attila clapping like a madman as he shouted to me, ‘Applaud or I will never speak to you again!’

I had never seen anything like it. As some of the students stood up, the ovation continued, and the Party officials around the microphone became nervous, surprised, angry-and just a bit uncertain. I had never seen them uncertain. This was something new. My flesh was creeping, and I was clapping as though my life depended on it, as if I were out of my mind. And during all this, my mind was racing. Is this possible? Can we actually have a say? Can we contradict them like this, directly to their faces? Is it possible that I matter, that what I think matters? Is it possible that I do not have to hold my tongue all the time? Is it possible that I am not alone?

Now, it was total chaos. The Party secretary ran to the telephone. The rest of her penguins were white as sheets. The hands of the officers of the military department had moved to the guns on their belts while the chief of DISZ kept screaming into the microphone. And then, through all the pandemonium and over the thunderous applause, we heard his voice once more: ‘I represent the MEFESZ of Szeged! Allow me to speak!’

Now I really felt hypnotized. I stood up and began walking toward that voice and saw Attila doing the same thing. From other directions, another twenty, then thirty, students were also starting to move toward the voice. This was all completely spontaneous. We walked without knowing who was walking with us. We were drawn toward the



speaker's stand, toward the angry but scared penguins who had encircled the boy from MEFESZ. The circle thinned as we got closer and we just started pushing the whole group toward the microphone. I saw my hand rise, reaching for one of the fat penguins. Five more meters and we would have it! I pushed with all my might. The DISZ resistance faltered. Now, Jancsi Danner grabbed the microphone and proclaimed, 'I ask the representative of the students of Szeged to speak!'

There was a deafening ovation that took quite a while to taper off until there was total silence. I saw the six-foot-four Jancsi Danner reaching down as he gave the microphone to the delegate from Szeged. I just stood in the protective ring around him, and my eyes filled with tears as he started to speak in a strong voice: 'Fellow students! Hungarians!'

I saw the flash of cameras. I saw strangers rushing to the telephones. Floodlights started to glare and film cameras begun to buzz. And the fellow from Szeged was oblivious to it all as he started to speak: 'Once again, the wind of freedom is blowing in from Poland. The Polish exchange students at our university are asking for our support. Russian troops are surrounding Warsaw, but the Polish army is also encircling the Russians. The city of Poznan is also free, but surrounded. Poland is showing the way and is asking for our solidarity. We will not let them down! We, the students of Szeged, have decided to follow the Poles in establishing our independent student organization, the MEFESZ. Please join us. Please do not believe the lies. Please form your own MEFESZ!'

Well, this was how our revolution started and this was when I first heard the voice of Tamás Kiss. The next time I heard it was 50 years later, when he asked me to write this preface.

This book describes how the Hungarian Revolution revealed the true face of Communism to the World and mortally wounded the Red Empire by exposing it for what it really was, a barbaric and brutal dictatorship. The Soviets used more tanks against the kids of Budapest

than Hitler did in occupying France. In crushing our fight for freedom, they killed 3,800, deported 40,000 to Kazahstan. In addition, the Hungarian puppet government they installed, hanged 350 and caused 250,000 to flee. This loss of Hungary's best educated young people, – 3% of her population –, would be the equivalent of the loss of 8 million Americans. In spite of their military victory, the Soviets lost, because tanks can not destroy ideals. It is these ideals: the spirit of the revolution, that I would like to acquaint you with.

My monthly stipend of 140 forints was in my pocket when the Revolution started. A few days later I dropped 120 of that into an unguarded collection box on a street corner, which was put there to pay the funeral expenses of the fallen. My remaining 20 forints I could not spend for 35 days. During these days the secret police was searching for me, so I could not go home. I ate at the table of strangers I slept in the beds of strangers, nobody ever accepted any money from me. The national tricolor of my National Guard armband was sufficient payment to all.

When we repelled the first Soviet attack, we became a family, a patriotic family of 10 million, willing to give our lives for the freedom of Hungary. For this reason, the honor of the Revolution was important to all of us and because honorable people do not steal, the goods stood untouched behind the broken windows of the stores. Everybody wanted to participate in this struggle, so the farmers from the villages streamed to the capital to bring food, which they distributed free of charge.

200 destroyed Soviet tanks were still smoking on the streets when Kruschev decided to withdraw his army from Budapest and started negotiations to end Hungary's occupation.

Then, on the 31st of October, France and England attacked Egypt and started to bomb the Suez Canal, while Eisenhower was busy with his reelection campaign. This changed Kruschev's mind. He attacked again and we fought, while the West did nothing to help. We were abandoned. Two of my friends died in my arms. One, a girl, lying on the floor in her own blood, appeared to move her lips. I put my ear to

her lips and heard, what could have been her last words: 'There is candy in my pocket, take some'.

500 years earlier, in 1456, the Hungarian army defeated the Turks at Nándorfehérvár and we received the noontime bell in her churches, as Europe's gratitude, which was later followed by our nation's dismemberment at Trianon and our abandonment to the Soviets at Yalta. 500 years later, in 1956, the kids of Budapest mortally wounded Europe's arch enemy, the Soviets, and in gratitude the West stabbed us in the back in 1956 and in 1989 gave us the Reagan-Gorbachev deal and abandoned 5 million Hungarians, Europe's largest indigenous national minority.

I don't want to end this preface on such bitter note! Let me say, that in spite of these facts, the example of the author of this volume Tamás Kiss and the history of my 1000+ years old nation makes me to believe that our spirit will overcome the reversals and we will not repeat our past. We will learn that we should unite as a society and also unite with our neighbors. We should learn not expect anything from Western Europe, but defend our interests ourselves. The way to do that is to establish a Danubean Federation. The economic and political power of this 100 million Central European Federation will than be able to defend our interests and to once again rebalance Europe. This is an immense task, yet compared to mortally wounding the Soviet Empire, it should not be that difficult!

Béla Lipták