

## **The Spark Of Revolution (1956) – The Association Of Hungarian University And College Students (AHUCS)**

---

The Association of Hungarian University and College Students (AHUCS) founded in Szeged on 16 October 1956<sup>1</sup> was one of the most significant youth movement of the Hungarian 20<sup>th</sup> century. Several facts seem to justify this proposition. First of all there was the ruthless retaliation of power beginning around the spring of 1957 (only in Szeged nearly a hundred students became the victims of revenge: being expelled, in custody or convicted). Secondly, it was a clear sign of state paranoia that they could and/or did not dare to dissolve or suppress AHUCS, its dissolution rather happened according to a previously refined strategy. From April 1957, after infiltration and gaining overall majority within the association, the original cohesion was gradually destroyed and finally it was merged into the Young Communist League. My goal is to prove the importance of AHUCS as a student movement and an organisational attempt and to show that, in some respect, it had left its mark on the politics of youth and education, since after the restart of tertiary education in February 1957 nothing could entirely be the same as before the revolution.

### **About The Nature Of A Civil Movement**

Civil movements serve as mirrors in the case of social and political development<sup>2</sup>:  
”mainly the most urgent problems create them and their shape reflects back the whole, its

---

<sup>1</sup> The name of the organisations appears in different forms in different places. It is our historical duty to make it clear that AHUCS was not the legal successor of Magyar Egyetemisták és Főiskolások Egységes Szervezete operating until 1948, it is not the Magyar Egyetemek és Főiskolák Szövetsége founded at a student conference in Balatonlelle in July 1945 and it is misleading to mention it as Magyar Egyetemi és Főiskolai Egyesületek Szövetsége. But all of them have the same acronym, MEFESZ. Throughout the history of the movement it had always been problematic to write the acronym out in full. It was not properly written out even in the first journalistic account (Délmagyarország, 18 Oct. 1956) about its forming: „A vita eredményeként új ifjúsági szervezetet alakítottak a Magyar Egyetemisták és Főiskolások Egységes Szövetségét...” The first official document (Diáktestvéreink!, 17 Oct. 1956) of the movement helps clarify this question: „Mi, a Szegedi Tudományegyetem, a Szegedi Orvostudományi Egyetem, a Szegedi Pedagógiai Főiskola, a Szegedi Zenetanárképző hallgatói 1956. október 16-án létrehoztuk saját egyetemi ifjúsági szervezetünket a Magyar Egyetemisták és Főiskolások Szövetségét.” The document was signed as follows: „A szegedi MEFESZ.” It is obvious that the members of AHUCS did not deal with this small detail during the days of the revolution, what is more, not even in the phase of forming (as the tape record of the general assembly held on 20 October proves it), they rather dealt with creating the democratic foundation of the organisation and formulating curricular and political demands. The question of the name has thoroughly been discussed in lots of publications. We find that the second „E” in the acronym (MEFESZ) was only included in order to make pronunciation easier.

<sup>2</sup> SZABÓ MÁTÉ: *Társadalmi mozgalmak és politikai tiltakozás.* [Civil Movements And Political Protest] Villányi úti könyvek, Politikatudományi sorozat, Budapest, 1998. See: [http://www.hallgatoimozgalom.hu/site/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=410:szabo-mate-alternativ-tarsadalmi-mozgalmak-es-reform-magyarorszagon&catid=35:tanulmanyok](http://www.hallgatoimozgalom.hu/site/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=410:szabo-mate-alternativ-tarsadalmi-mozgalmak-es-reform-magyarorszagon&catid=35:tanulmanyok) Last download: 2011. szeptember 6. 22:32

determinative structures and mechanisms. Civil movements take part in social learning, innovation and reforms while they can teach us and show how to acknowledge social problems. [...] A civil movement can only become the engine of development in rare historic moments. [...] The historic role of civil movements has an indirect and a more positive effect. Civil movements can, as a kind of catalyst, come up with questions and answers concerning the political structure which can be canalised by political entities and institutionalised during reforms. However, this can lead to the disappearance or the institutionalisation of the civil initiative.”<sup>3</sup>

Communal initiatives based on movement-like objectives form a special group within the sphere of informal communities concerning their motifs and development, because, in most cases, they appear as flexible organisational structures in which the process of defining different values does not seem to cease.

*“Because it happens once in a century that you can lead a crowd in action in two days and you feel everybody agrees with you, everybody is keen and follows you. The situation made it inevitable, the dictatorship of the previous ten years. And only ten years had passed since World War II, brains were not washed as during the thirty years of the Kádár system. Everybody kept something in there what set on fire – and exploded. That was the reason why the same events happened in Budapest a week after our assembly. People just walked, no one knew who led them, there was no leader of the revolution.” (Tamás Kiss)<sup>4</sup>*

Still, they have a significant common feature which creates their cohesion: the social problem generating the movement and another group identified as the generator of this problem. In many cases defining the „other group”, measuring its distance from the movement and dividing the aims into different programmes can lead to a spontaneous forming of a movement-network, but sometimes it is enough just to identify the lack of a certain value (or representation of common values/interests) as a starting point.

*“The university students had no autonomous organisation, there was only, exclusively AWY from 1948 as a youth alliance and it was mandatory for everybody. The life within AWY was that the AWY secretary said a platitude or read a brochure up or something from Szabad Nép every month.” (Tamás Kiss)<sup>5</sup>*

## **The Social Environment Of Hungarian Higher Education In The Fifties**

Higher education was cut off from the other social subsystems due to the lack of autonomy and to the centralised planning of general figures while it served short-term economic purposes.

Between 1949 and 1955 the number of Hungarian higher educational institutions increased from 19 to 36. The largest universities were in Budapest: the Lóránd Eötvös University (its old name, Péter Pázmány, was abandoned in 1950), the University of Economics (it bore the name of Karl Marx from 1953), the University of Technology and the Ignác Semmelweis University of Medicine. The University of Chemical Industry was founded in Veszprém, the University of Construction Industry in Szolnok, the College of Public

---

<sup>3</sup> SZABÓ ibidem.

<sup>4</sup> The interview was made by Csaba Jancsák and András Döbör. See: [http://www.mefesz.hu/mefesz.php?oldal=emlek&nev=kiss\\_tamas&p=7](http://www.mefesz.hu/mefesz.php?oldal=emlek&nev=kiss_tamas&p=7) Utolsó letöltés: 2006.10.15. 16.12

<sup>5</sup> „Ötvenhatnak az a megismételhetetlen hangulata” [The Unfathomable Atmosphere of Revolution] – an interview with Tamás Kiss. (Jancsák Csaba – Döbör András) *Belvedere Meridionale*, 2000/5-6, 52

Administration (after winding up the academies of law in 1949) in Budapest, the Lenin Institute to train Russian teachers (1949) and the College of Foreign Languages (1951).<sup>6</sup>

When Imre Nagy became the Prime Minister in 1953 the political climate changed in higher education, too, and more and more people thought there would be an opportunity to create a lively university and intellectual life capable of developing. This optimism was further strengthened when the Prime Minister stated in his government's programme that: "There is a kind of exaggeration in the educational sphere of training young, new intellectuals"<sup>7</sup> As a result of the programme the Minister of Education, Tibor Erdey-Grúz got to points during a Chancellors' Meeting held on 18 December 1953 which had long been considered as vital higher educational issues among lecturers and students: „we gradually need to turn towards forming higher educational teaching and learning methods, making students work independently, making them do serious research into certain questions ... we have to see it clearly that there is no high-level university education without scientific creative work.”<sup>8</sup>

The Political Committee of the Hungarian Workers' Party discussed the reform of higher education according to the above-mentioned ideas at its meeting held on 23 December 1953, though centralised decision-making was to be maintained and university autonomy would not be restored. The changes, however, resulted in giving more power to chancellors within the political field of higher education. And while it is true that the Political Committee of the Hungarian Workers' Party resolved on 10 February 1954 that secondary educational methods should be abandoned in tertiary education in order to raise its quality, some months later the reforms started to take a turn to the old direction again.

"There was a 20% cut in the higher educational share of the budget between 1953 and 1956."<sup>9</sup> Constraints certainly caused a sense of depression. Andor Ladányi mentions it that there could be felt a constant fear of losing one's job which was eased by puns (the "MÁV köszönés[greeting]" meant "Még állásban vagyok[I'm still employed]"). Ladányi also quotes the report of the Party Executive Committee of Lóránd Eötvös University: "Both university lecturers and students do not trust their leaders in many respects".<sup>10</sup>

The previously announced policy of reforms came to a halt by the spring of 1955. "At the meeting of the Central Board of the Hungarian Workers' Party held between 2 and 4 March they declared that they were going to return to the politics of the pre-1953 era due to the right-wing deviation."<sup>11</sup> As a result of restoration the Minister of Education, Tibor Erdey-Grúz said the followings at a Chancellors' Meeting held on 8 April 1955: "Our main task is to ... restore learning discipline, to fight with the means of ideology against the disseminators of hostile, disruptive views and to, where it is necessary, make consistent administrative steps. ... Fresher air should be let in universities."<sup>12</sup>

*„The right-wing deviation of the 1953 June Resolution took an extreme shape at universities and led to a critical political situation. ... An attack has been launched against the results of our higher educational policy – bound timetables, the social composition of students, teaching marxism-leninism, Russian language and military education – and the largest institutions. Nationalist, chauvinistic, irredentist, antisemitic views have come back again, even the traces of narodnik*

---

<sup>6</sup> ROMSICS IGNÁC: *Magyarország története a XX. Században*. [Hungary In The 20th Century] Osiris, Budapest, 2000, 361

<sup>7</sup> LADÁNYI ANDOR: *Felsőoktatási politika 1949-1958*. [Higher-Educational Policies Between 1949 And 1958] Kossuth, Budapest, 1986, 87

<sup>8</sup> Quoted by: Szögi László [ed.] *Az Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Története*. [The History of Loránd Eötvös University] ELTE, Budapest, 2003, 339

<sup>9</sup> SZÖGI 341

<sup>10</sup> LADÁNYI 119

<sup>11</sup> SZÖGI 343

<sup>12</sup> LADÁNYI 125-126

*ideology among peasant youth. ... Some of our lecturers do not stand by the politics of the Party openly. In the past one and a half years, due to right-wing deviation, the political activity of party-member professors and lecturers has decreased significantly. ... The attitude and political development of young lecturers is less than reassuring. Most of them are not interested in marxism-leninism. The setbacks of party activity have also helped the strengthening of bourgeois ideology. Our young, mostly inexperienced local party leaders cannot be equal partners with the university leaders. ... The Central Board has concluded that the Ministry of Education and university leaders are both responsible for this intolerable situation. ... This rotten liberalism should be stopped with proper regulations – including administrative steps – so as to secure a working atmosphere suitable for the politics of the Party and building socialism. University leaders should be made responsible for the political situation on universities. ... The lecturers who are not capable of the political training of students and of doing their teaching-researching jobs on a certain level should gradually be substituted.” (The resolution of the Central Board of HWP, 30 June 1955)<sup>13</sup>*

A gust of "fresher air" reached 12 students who were expelled from Hungarian universities in the spring of 1955. Expulsions continued during the next schoolyear. Throughout the schoolyear of 1955/56 "200 students were expelled from universities."<sup>14</sup> Lecturers were also included in order to raise the number of lecturers coming from worker-peasant families.

As a result of these ideological-political efforts more than 66% of the admitted students came from a worker-peasant background by the middle of the decade. It was far more complicated for youngsters with intellectual parents to get into higher education. Nearly 69% of them were not admitted in 1955.<sup>15</sup>

By the beginning of 1956 it became clear for many of the concerned (lecturers, other employees, students, parents, experts) that Hungarian tertiary education had reached a crisis. After recognising it different groups of experts<sup>16</sup> and later party and state bodies formulated their higher educational reform ideas.

Students, however, had already become very active during the spring semester of 1955/56. Stirring started in the autumn of 1956.

*„There was a kind of effervescence. A year earlier it would never have happened that students had a conversation in a corner or in a room of a Youth Hostel and talked about political matters. It was a taboo. Nobody dared to risk it, to express an own opinion. You could definitely feel in September 1956 that a change was going on. Something was going to happen, something was happening around us.” (Kiss Tamás)<sup>17</sup>*

These processes made it clear (we have to emphasise the change of the climate, the emerge of the faith that communism can be improved which could be detected after the speech of Nikita Khrushchov kept on the XXth Congress of the Communist Party of the USSR between 14 and 25 February 1956 had become public<sup>18</sup>) that the reform of the system would be inevitable and, in the meantime, others also recognised that reforms could not happen without redefining values and roles.

<sup>13</sup> MOL M-KS 276 53/239 őe

<sup>14</sup> SZÖGI 344

<sup>15</sup> PUKÁNSZKY BÉLA - NÉMETH ANDRÁS: *Neveléstörténet*. [History of Education] NTK, Budapest, 1996 (12.2. Az „ötvenes évek”)

<sup>16</sup> E.g.: DISZ (AWY) Petőfi Circle, ELTE Kolhoz Circle, József Attila Circle. See also: PÉTER LÁSZLÓ: *1956 előtt, alatt, után*. [Before, During And After 1956] Belvedere Meridionale, Szeged, 2006. About the higher educational debates of the eighties see: PALOVECZ JÁNOS: *Magyar felsőoktatás helyzete*. [The State of Hungarian Higher Education] OKI, Budapest, 1981.

<sup>17</sup> „Ötvenhatnak az a megismételhetetlen hangulata” [The Unfathomable Atmosphere of Revolution] – an interview with Tamás Kiss. (Döbör András – Jancsák Csaba) *Belvedere Meridionale*, 2000/5-6, 53

<sup>18</sup> See: <http://www.mult-kor.hu/cikk.php?article=12916> és <http://hvg.hu/vilag/20060312grajewski.aspx> Last download: 2006.10.15. 23.12

As Jürgen Zinnecker<sup>19</sup> put it there are moments when youngsters create their own patterns and their orientation of values and their drives deteriorate from norms.<sup>19</sup> The basis of AHUCS as a student movement was the more and more important role of generational autonomy and its "hotbed" was becoming experienced about the mechanisms of the state and the political system, about the relationship of ideas and reality<sup>20</sup> and we have to add here the traditional Humboldtian<sup>21</sup> sense of university autonomy as well. University youth turned from followers into makers of patterns on 16 October 1956.

*"We need a new organisation that only defends our particular interests. No other organisation is capable of it. In AWY not only the problems of university youth are at stake. For example, if a case of a young worker is more important then it would be discussed first, not our case. We cannot wait on every occasion, if we feel that our case is urgent. Anyway, we lost confidence in AWY so the significance of the new organisation is clear." (Justification of section 1/a of the rules and regulations of AHUCS)*

There were two higher educational institutions in Szeged in 1950, the University of Szeged and the College of Didactics. The university consisted of five faculties: law, arts, natural sciences, medicine and pharmacology. Although the University of Medicine became separated in 1951 its political leadership remained the task of the old university party unit. The Faculty of Pharmacology actually belonged to the Faculty of Natural Sciences. The College of Didactics was an independent body but it was supervised by the University and College Executive Committee of the Party. Though the training of health visitors and music teachers was already a part of the system in the fifties, it did not give a degree, just a certificate. Their problem was included in the programme of AHUCS on 20 October 1956, namely "9th point: We claim that the school of music should be regarded as a college and we demand proper university student rights for its students." and "10th point: We claim that the health visitors' training school should be regarded as a college and we demand proper college student rights for its students."<sup>22</sup>

## The First Steps Of Organising AHUCS

From 10 October Tamás Kiss and András Lejtényi kept thinking about the idea of forming a new, independent organisation representing university and college students beside AWY.

---

<sup>19</sup> ZINNECKER, JÜRGEN.: Fialok a társadalmi osztályok terében. Új gondolatok egy régi témához. [Youth In The Sphere Social Classes. New Thoughts On An Old Issue] In. *Ifjúságszociológia* [Sociology of Youth] [eds. Gábor Kálmán és Jancsák Csaba] Belvedere Meridionale, Szeged, 2006, 69-95

<sup>20</sup> "I do not think it was a political idea, rather a kind of emotional affection, a series of adventures I previously mentioned: that I could not gain an admission to the university despite my outstanding high school certificate because my father and my mother were teachers, namely intellectuals. I saw that the so-called possessors of power, the workers and peasants may have lived in bigger poverty, under a tighter suppression. And it is not poverty, since after the war it was almost natural, the poor conditions of living. But how much they were terrorized!" (Tamás Kiss) [http://www.mefesz.hu/mefesz.php?oldal=emlek&nev=kiss\\_tamas&p=1](http://www.mefesz.hu/mefesz.php?oldal=emlek&nev=kiss_tamas&p=1) 2006.10.15. 16.24

<sup>21</sup> Az egyetemek a Tudomány várai. See also: JOHN HENRY NEWMAN: *Az egyetem eszméje a tudás célja önmaga*. [The Concept of University Is The Objective of Knowledge Itself] [trans. Endreffy Zoltán] [http://www.ifjusagsegito.hu/belvedere/tan/x\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_john\\_henry\\_newman\\_az\\_ egyetem\\_eszmeje\\_a\\_tudas\\_celja\\_ o\\_nmaga.doc](http://www.ifjusagsegito.hu/belvedere/tan/x_____john_henry_newman_az_ egyetem_eszmeje_a_tudas_celja_ o_nmaga.doc), továbbá TÓTH TAMÁS: A napóleoni egyetemtől a humboldti egyetemig. In: *Az európai egyetem funkcióváltásai: Felsőoktatás-történeti tanulmányok*. [ed. Fábri György] Professzorok Háza, Budapest, 2001 <http://www.fil.hu/tudrend/Tt/egy-kot/toth2.htm> 2006.10.15. 16.30 and KOZMA TAMÁS: *Kié az egyetem?* Új Mandátum, Budapest, 2004

<sup>22</sup> KISS TAMÁS: *Magyar Egyetemisták és Főiskolások Szövetsége – 1956, Szeged*. [The Association Of Hungarian University And College Students – 1956] [ed. Jancsák Csaba] Belvedere Meridionale, Szeged, 2002, 116

„... We [Lejtényi, Kiss and Imre Tóth – JCs.] worked out the temporary rules and regulations in Virág Confectionary. These contained approximately the followings: it is an organisation defending interests (we did not give a name to it then), it deals with academic, social and cultural problems of the students. It would operate beside AWY. It would be constructed by general elections. Its highest organ is the University Student Council without any decision-making right, just an executive organ. Then follow the faculty councils, representatives of grades and the learning groups. We planned decision-making rights for the student general assembly, the faculty and grade assemblies.”<sup>23</sup>

In the meantime Helmut Alaxa, a law student got a letter from the Faculty of Arts of Budapest and he discussed it<sup>24</sup> with Lejtényi and Kiss. The students of the Faculty of Arts of Budapest called for a strike with the claim of turning Russian language into an optional subject. Kiss, Lejtényi and their mates decided to not only formulate their own demands, but also to make an attempt to form their student organisation.

In the morning of 15 October they accepted the first version of the rules and regulations in the Student Club and a temporary name, Student Alliance. They also formulated a proposal that each faculty should elect three members who would represent their faculties in the Committee of 18 which would work out the programme and the final version of the rules and regulations. There was a spontaneous mass gathering in the Auditorium Maximum of the Faculty of Arts on 16 October, the students, in the presence of some hesitating AWY leaders, decided to form AHUCS and to write down their claims and to approach every student of the country and offer them the opportunity to join AHUCS.

„This was a noisy evening, no need to mention. Although only a few of us stayed together (Lejtényi, Gönczöl, Imre Tóth, some others and me [Tamás Kiss – JCs.] and went to a youth hostel. We formulated an appeal titled “Join us!” to every student of the country on a small typewriter. Then we declared that we had established AHUCS in Szeged.”<sup>25</sup>

“Student Brothers! We, the students of the University of Szeged, Medical University of Szeged, College of Didactics of Szeged and the College of Music Teacher Training formed our own university youth organisation on 16 October 1956, the Alliance of Hungarian University and College Students. Our aim is the freedom of thought, to brush off the burden forced on us by Stalin and Rákosi. We want to defend our special student interests, we want to go on and improve free. AWY, as we see and the leading board of AWY also admits, has lived up its credit and has not kept the pace of development as the Party. We cannot wait for it catching up with the Party. We cannot wait until the house collapses onto us. That is why we, in the spirit of the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress, have formed a new, independent organisation which only represents the interests of college and university students of today. We, the students of Szeged made the first step, we call you to join us!!! Let's spread AHUCS to a nationwide organisation! Brother of us! It is about you as well, Your interests are at stake. United we stand! Join AHUCS! Szeged, 17 October 1956”<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> The testimony of Imre Tóth. The trial of Tamás Kiss and his mates. CSML B. 1249/1957 169

<sup>24</sup> As László Péter pointed it out, it was (in the 2 Sept 1956 issue of Művelt Nép) Károly Gáti (in an article titled Az iskolának vagy az életnek?) who first claimed that Russian language would be an optional subject. Péter assumed that these lines might have inspired the students from Budapest: “We must first claim that Russian language should be optional!” Károly Román, a student from the Faculty of Arts from Budapest sent this letter to his friend, Helmut Alaksza and then he showed it to his grademates, Kiss and Lejtényi. (PÉTER LÁSZLÓ: Vita Gáti Károllyal. [Arguing With Károly Gáti] lobby@list.hungaria.org)

<sup>25</sup> „Soha, sosem az Én került az előtérbe, hanem mindig a Mi” – an interview with Tamás Kiss. In: Kiss Tamás: Magyar Egyetemisták és Főiskolások Szövetsége – 1956, Szeged. [The Association Of Hungarian University And College Students – 1956] [Notes by Csaba Jancsák] Szeged, Belvedere, 2002, 138

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in: KISS 178

After the meeting they had to form AHUCS at the faculties, elect three representatives and formulate programme points concerning the students of the given faculty. A characteristic of the events was that each faculty would organise their own bodies and claim their own educational reform ideas based on what they had heard on 16 October.<sup>27</sup>

*"As it turned out later (and we knew nothing about it, of course) they had squeakers everywhere, a whole network. By the end of the day of 16<sup>th</sup>, the party committee had already been informed. There is a big trouble here, comrades, the university youth has revolted, they demand the withdrawal of the Soviet troops, they demand elections, the abandonment of Rákosi and his mates and they also have educational claims! Something must be done! Then the AWY Committee was ordered to keep a session and now it seems to me they did not feel strong enough to simply break us down, they rather said: 'Right, let us find those ten students, they at least must be fired and may be sentenced for incitement and get a two-year imprisonment!' They were not strong enough. So they appointed the university AWY Committee to get in touch with the leaders and try to persuade them to stay within AWY and then AWY would overtake these problems."<sup>28</sup>*

The negotiations with AWY went on in the presence of Géza Sipos (the leader of a local department of the Party) and Miklós Kuszin (the secretary of the Csongrád County Committee of AWY).

*"The AWY leaders were sitting there around a long table and we sat down at the other end of it, may be a dozen, or something like that, out of the 18, I don't know. Formally, we had not come into being yet, it could not happen without a permission but we considered it to be established and that was enough. We actually spent two days with arguing about staying within AWY and not setting up an own organisation because we were still all AWY members and, what is more, there were several AWY group leaders among us, though they were not upper leaders. So they advised us to stay within AWY and demand those rights within its framework. But the decisive majority of the committee of 18 and basically me, Andris and Totya as well, said we had nothing to do with AWY, we were fed up with them, they had lied to us, they had fooled us too many times! We do it alone."<sup>29</sup>*

## The Aims of AHUCS

*"The aim of the alliance is that the youths leaving the universities and colleges who are dedicated to represent the mind of the nation should not be an indifferent, passive crowd, a layer of coward, supple and mean ones, but an army fighting bravely and soulfully for the nation, the country and for a merrier future. These people should not be in fear of talking about the truth, but they should serve the nation and the country with their skills, knowledge and ability." (Section 5 of the rules and regulations of AHUCS)*

Formally AHUCS came into being at the assembly held in the Auditorium Maximum of the Faculty of Arts on 20 October. The National Radio recorded the event. Inspired by Gyula Pálffy from the College of Didactics György Garai arrived from Budapest and recorded the whole meeting.<sup>30</sup> Dezső Gönczöl, a student from the College of Didactics greeted the gathered people, András Lejtényi, a law student, read up the latest version of the rules and regulations, then Tamás Kiss, another law student, the programme of AHUCS, namely the list of educational and political claims. Kiss stressed that the programme and the claims belonged to the local AHUCS body of Szeged, faculty claims would be formulated at faculty assemblies. According to us this statement meant that the

---

<sup>27</sup> In the matter of the College of Didactics see: NAGY ISTVÁN (2005): „... a fiatal szívek forradalma.” [‘Revolution of Young Hearts’] Szeged, Bába

<sup>28</sup> KISS 138. The negotiations started at 8 a.m. on 18 October.

<sup>29</sup> KISS 140

<sup>30</sup> KISS 163; the tape record of the gathering can be read here: [www.mefesz.hu](http://www.mefesz.hu)

new organisation was based on the principle of subsidiarity, it wanted to be an organisation building itself from bottom up.

Subsidiarity and its application is a product of civil organising in the long history of European democracies. The idea that local problems can be the most efficiently resolved by an organised local community is a widespread practice in Western democracies. Subsidiarity is not only an areal division, but also a rational way of dividing roles and tasks. It is even more true in the case of higher education where student matters are handled by involving students in different institutions who gradually bear a larger sphere of authority in these concerns.

Local governments are the basic tools of preserving democratic institutional working practices. These peculiar organisational frameworks of civil self-governing are both suitable for expressing professional and political interests. Asking questions and raising issues, directing and delegating is a common interest of public and state actors.

Since self-governing has proved to be viable and successful in large systems, it was implemented into the specific system of higher education. Representing interests, raising issues, resolving problems are tasks which can best be handled by student representatives whose motivation is natural.<sup>31</sup>

*"We know our interests best, it is our task to represent them and to defend them, if it is necessary. An organisation standing outside of us, with leaders who are not only our representatives, can not represent our interests as strongly as we can. We are not kids who cannot separate right from wrong. Our experience is that we can only reach what we fight for." (Section 2/c of the rules and regulations of AHUCS)*

These recognitions led to the establishment of self-governed student bodies at the dawn of the change of regime. Now we know that student movements started at the same place, on 16 October 1956 and on 24 October 1988, in Szeged.

In connection with student movements the most important expectation was that student interests were to be expressed and represented by students, since the world of students and their interests are particular. This springs student movements into motion and does still. Here we also have to mention that all three subsystems of higher education (administration, educational institutions, self-governed student bodies) share the common interest that the representation of student interests should be efficient.

## **The Educational Claims of AHUCS And Their Topicality**

*The educational claims of AHUCS were the following<sup>32</sup>:*

1st point: The political screening of university youth should be done in the spirit of the party declaration concerning intellectuals published in August.

2nd point: The periodical Szegedi Egyetem should be the forum of university and college students, which must be reflected in the content and outlook.

3rd point: The members of the student welfare committee should be elected by the faculty assemblies.

4th point: We claim the right of arranging free theoretical debates.

5th point: Overexertion must be terminated:

---

<sup>31</sup> I would like to thank here László Benked, András Levente Gáll, Balázs Csirke, László Hamvas, Péter Kádár, Gábor Kátai, Tamás Kucsera and Tamás Ocsovai, as former student leaders, for the exhausting conversations about the topics of self-governing and subsidiarity being frequent from 1996 to 2006. They really helped the understanding of the principle of student movements after the change of regime.

<sup>32</sup> KISS 116-117



- a/ martial education should be terminated in the case of girl students and should be reduced to two lessons per week in the case of boy students,
- b/ in the case of extracurricular subjects the graduation should be: meets demands or does not meet demands, we want more special elective lessons and less mandatory lessons.

6th point:

- a/ We establish a housing committee which declares the maximum price of rents.
- b/ The youth representative of a Youth Hostel can veto the appointment of the manager.
- c/ Youth hostels should be made out of free public buildings if it meets demands.

7th point:

- a/ Travels should be organised abroad, to the East and West as well.
- b/ We claim a 50% allowance for interior travels.

8th point: We claim a general ticket price allowance for every cultural event.

9th point: We claim that the school of music should be regarded as a college and we demand proper university student rights for its students.

10th point: We claim that the health visitors' training school should be regarded as a college and we demand proper college student rights for its students.

11th point: Let there be university autonomy.

Some of their demands (though a lot has changed in the last fifty-five years) still seem to be valid. Szegedi Egyetem is still the periodical of the university (leaders) with a professional background and staff. Although students occur regularly in it, it is rather a tool for marketing purposes. Students have the right to continue free theoretical debates apparently, but these are actually forbidden in order to keep the educational institution distant from politics. The basis of the present training system is obviously the freedom of choosing a higher educational career, still, the evaluation of extracurricular subjects is different from the meets demands/does not meet demands scale. Despite the credit system the syllabus is usually bound, there are just a few elective classes and most of the classes are mandatory in the present system, too. The appointment of youth-hostel managers can only be reported but not vetoed by the student bodies. The age of capitalism has brought the disappearance of student allowances at cultural events. The other claims are now parts of our reality. Here we would like to add that the school of music (the Music Conservatory of Szeged) became a faculty of the university in 2003, so it only happened nearly after fifty years.

## **The Cradle Of Hungarian Student Movements**

After the analysis of documents and interviews made with the leaders and founders of AHUCS it is time to evaluate the role of the Alliance.

The idea of an independent university youth organisation derived from university students of Szeged (from Tamás Kiss and András Lejtényi). It was not an initiative of the power. The original purpose of the organisers (until 16 October) was to form a youth organisation building from bottom up which was to serve as a tool to solve educational and social problems of youth. They thought student solidarity would create its cohesion. Some of their objectives were really monumental, reaching beyond educational and social claims, the right of free theoretical debates, for example.

*„The members of AHUCS have the right to rely on the solidarity of AHUCS in a serious and correct case. One of the main duties of AHUCS is to protect the interests of students as much as possible. The alliance consists of the sum of the given members, so a member should rely on its solidarity in every case which concerns the interests and the authority of the alliance. Without it the members would not dare to confess proposals and claims which would be addressed to the leaders of the state or the party, for example the recent question concerning Russian language. AHUCS, of course, will not stand by anyone if the given person breaks the moral standard, the law or any kind of regulation.” (2nd article section 5 of the rules and regulations of AHUCS)*

*„AHUCS was founded to defend the interests of university and college students. Every AHUCS member has to strive for – on the basis of rationality – defending these interests which are our own. Do not forget that we are all for one and one for all.” (2nd article section 6 of the rules and regulations of AHUCS)*

AHUCS was based on direct democratic values. They secured for its members the freedom of thought, opinion and decision in the rules and regulations. One-person leadership, "leadership cut off from the crowd" was excluded in its constitution.

*„AHUCS is an independent, free organisation. [...] The basic principle of AHUCS is democracy, spreading to the widest range of affairs. As a consequence, and in order to avoid one-person leadership decisions can only be made by the majority of the members. So as to avoid the devastating system of instructions coming from above decisions can only be made by the members.” (1st article section 2.a of the rules and regulations of AHUCS)*

*„AHUCS is the organisation of university and college students. The right to debate must be secured and must be given to every student and every member of AHUCS by which the issue of direct democracy is maintained. The right of voting is also concerned the same way. It was really problematic that the members did not dare to express their opinions. So it can be considered to be correct that let us have a public forum where everybody can tell their point of view without any restriction, without facing reprisal or pushback.” (2nd article section 3 of the rules and regulations of AHUCS)*

*„If a theory goes to the wall during a debate, it is obviously unjust. What is right, it is the interest of all. What is the interest of all of us, it is obligatory to fight for it. Our envoys should not be leaders (in the incorrect sense of the word), but the faithful and exact executors of the will of youth. The system of commands coming from up is theoretically full of mistakes and practically unjust.” (2nd article section 7 of the rules and regulations of AHUCS)*

AHUCS was a student initiative, but, as an organisation, it could not start its own life due to the forthcoming revolution, invasion and retaliation. As a social movement it serves as a mirror, because it came into being as an answer to serious social, educational and youth problems. AHUCS was based on movement-like principles and objectives, its most important features were that it declared values and it had a flexible organisational form (e.g. it was a conscious decision not to elect a presidency or a president). The appeal titled "Student Brothers!", however, talked about the establishment of a national student council. This intention was repeated in the constitution accepted on 20 October.

*„The character, task and aim of the alliance: AHUCS is an organisation of the masses of university and college students which includes the whole number of youths participating in education.” (1st article section 1 of the rules and regulations of AHUCS)*

They also formulated nationwide political claims beside the intention of forming an organisation and demanding educational and social reforms on 16 October. Most of these claims were accepted as the programme of the AHUCS unit of Szeged recorded by the National Radio on 20 October. Three days later many of them became the claims of the Revolution.

„The political claims of AHUCS:

1. We press for bringing those into justice who are responsible for the crimes of the last era and the trials should be public!
2. We press for the freedom of information! The press should comment everything in full details!
3. We press for reelecting Imre Nagy and György Lukács into the Central Leading Board!
4. We claim a salary reform! The upper limit of incomes coming from the state should be announced and the improvement of low salaries should be accelerated!
5. We press for abolishing death penalty concerning political crimes!
6. We press for a reestablished, free, democratic system of elections!
7. We claim that university youth should play a greater role in directing the political and other matters of the country!
8. The national celebration of 15 March should be restored!
9. Russian troops should be withdrawn!
10. The mandatory delivery of peasants' surplus should be abolished!
11. Let there be university autonomy!”<sup>33</sup>

The cohesion of the movement was based on two things. Firstly they experienced certain social problems and, secondly, there was the other group, the Alliance of Working Youth (AWY), something they could fight against. So they started to revolt against the organisation which had kept them iced and treated them as infants, then they turned against the paternalistic state. AHUCS planned to transform the youth scenario, which had been kept under control by a totalitarian system, and to take part in the public matters of the university. This activity was considered to be subversive and revolutionary both by the state and the party.

After the assembly kept on 20 October they sent envoys to all parts of the country. The envoys carried the message of AHUCS. Several AHUCS units came into being in the next few days: 21 October - Sopron (Dimitrov Square Dormitory), Veszprém; 22 - Gödöllő, Debrecen (Benczúr Street Youth Hostel), Budapest (University of Technology, College of Horti- and Viniculture); 23 - Mosonmagyaróvár (Academy of Agriculture). The most well-known assemblies may have been the ones kept at the University of Technology (Budapest) and Benczúr Street (Debrecen) on 22 October where a lot of students joined the new organisation. They formulated their own claims based on the programme of AHUCS which appeared on the demonstrations (in Budapest and in Debrecen).<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Some parts of the political claims of AHUCS read up on 20 October can be heard here:

<http://www.mefesz.hu/mefesz.php?oldal=doku>, the script of the tape record can be found here:

[http://www.mefesz.hu/mefesz.php?oldal=doku&nev=19561020\\_nagygyules](http://www.mefesz.hu/mefesz.php?oldal=doku&nev=19561020_nagygyules) (The original tape record is in the archives of the National Radio: D. 565 sz. 1-9. tapes)

<sup>34</sup> *A vidék forradalma 1956 I. kötet*. [The Revolution of The Countryside in 1956 vol. 1.] [eds. Á. Varga László, Szokolczai Attila] 1956-os Intézet, Budapest, 2004; *A vidék forradalma II*. [The Revolution of The Countryside in 1956 vol. 2.] [ed. Attila Szokolczai] Gondola Nova Kiadó, Budapest, 2006; BILL LOMAX: *Magyarország 1956*. [Hungary 1956] *Aura, Budapest, 1989*; Filep Lajos: *Debrecen 1956. Forradalom, nemzeti ellenállás, megtorlás*. [Revolution, National Resistance, Retaliation] Csokonai Kiadó, Debrecen, 2000; FRIVALDSZKY JÁNOS: *Ötvenhat műegyetemistái*. [The University Students of 1956] Kráter, Pomáz, 2006; IFJ. SARKADY SÁNDOR: *A soproni MEFESZ az 1956-os forradalomban*. [The AHUCS Body of Sopron In The Revolution] Nyugat-Magyarországi Egyetem, Sopron, 2006; LIPTÁK BÉLA: *35 nap*. [25 Days] BBS INFO Kiadó, Budapest, 2003; *Magyarországi felsőoktatási intézmények az 1956-os forradalom és szabadságharcban*. [Hungarian Higher-Educational Institutions During The Revolution And The War of Independence] [eds. Osváth Zsolt – Zsidi Vilmos] Magyar Felsőoktatási Levéltári Szövetség, Budapest, 2007; MORDÉNYI ENDRE – SEPETÁN RÓBERT: *Gödöllő, 1956. A forradalom és szabadságharc krónikája*. [Gödöllő, 1956. The Chronicle of The Revolution And The

It is common knowledge that a civil movement can only become the engine of change in rare historic moments, when the new political system undertakes and institutionalises the issues and suggestions of the given movement.<sup>35</sup> It could not happen in the case of AHUCS due to the paternalistic, totalitarian nature of the regime. The first student movement which tried to build itself from bottom up since WW II is not a case of institutionalisation, but of being the catalyst of revolution as it raised important issues in the right historic moment.

The most significant effect of AHUCS on the policy of education was the moment when Dezső Baróti and some other professors decided, in November 1956, to legalise the spontaneously reoccured university autonomy (originally it was a claim of AHUCS), therefore they put together the draft of a new law about the status of universities. It was certainly rejected by the ministry of education.<sup>36</sup>

All in all we can state that the students of Szeged played a vital role in showing higher educational matters to Hungarian society and drawing the public's attention to the problems of youth. After the assembly kept on 20 October AHUCS had a huge impact on national politics by its claims and envoys.<sup>37</sup> It became the spark of revolution and the forerunner of today's student movement<sup>38</sup> started back in September 1988. In our view AHUCS was the most important attempt to create a democratic student organisation in the 20th century.

---

War of Independence] Gödöllői Városi Múzeum, Gödöllő, 1999; PACZOLAY GYULA: Az 1956-os forradalom eseményei a Veszprémi Vegyipari Egyetemen. [Revolution At The University of Chemical Industry of Veszprém] *Egyetemünk* (Veszprém) 2006/6., 23 (1. rész) és 2006/7., 20-21 (2. rész)

<sup>35</sup> KOZMA 2004, SZABÓ 1998

<sup>36</sup> ÚJSZÁSZI ILONA: *A szabadság pillangója*. [The Butterfly of Revolution] Belvedere Meridionale, Szeged, 2006

<sup>37</sup> As Gallicus, a presenter noted it in the programme Reflektor on Szabad Európa Rádió [Radio Free Europe] on 21 October 1956: "There is a storm in Szeged, a devastating storm. [...] There is a storm in Szeged, though it is due not to the forces of nature but to the elemental uprising of young souls. [...] It is likely to be devastating for the system but may be or surely it is purifying and improving for the nation." The original tape record can be heard here: <http://www.mefesz.hu/mefesz.php?oldal=doku>

<sup>38</sup> About the student movements before the change of regime (1988 and 89) see: [www.hallgatoimoizgalom.hu](http://www.hallgatoimoizgalom.hu)



20-10-1956, University of Szeged, Auditorium Maximum



20-10-1956, University of Szeged, Auditorium Maximum



20-10-1956, University of Szeged, Auditorium Maximum



20-10-1956, University of Szeged, Auditorium Maximum