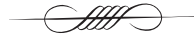


JANCSÁK, CSABA PHD

csaba.jancsak@gmail.com
University of Szeged

Voices of the Revolution



— *The History of Scroll No. MR D565* —

ABSTRACT The Association of Hungarian University and College Students (AHUCS), founded in Szeged on 16 October, 1956, was one of the most significant youth movements in 20th-century Hungary. The students of Szeged played a vital role in showing higher educational matters to the Hungarian society and drawing the public's attention to the political and social problems. AHUCS was the first student movement to set up a bottom-up organization after WW II, however it could not go through the process of institutionalization. Instead, it fulfilled the role of catalyst in the revolution, as it raised important issues at a historic moment. Apart from their intent to form an organization and demand educational and social reforms, the students in Szeged also drew up nationwide political claims on 16 October. Most of these claims were incorporated into the program of the Szeged unit of AHUCS at their great assembly on 20 October. Three days later (on 23 October, 1956), many of their political claims became the claims of the Revolution, and AHUCS had a tremendous impact on national politics not only by its claims but also through its delegates: it became the spark of the revolution. At the great assembly of AHUCS, held on 20 October, a tape recording of the event was made by György Garai of the National Radio. During the retaliation that followed the revolution, all the actors of the new communist regime believed Scroll MRD565 to have burnt on 23 October, at the siege of the building of the Hungarian National Radio. It was only due to the fact that this scroll had been labelled as 'material destroyed' that the lives of student revolutionists were spared in 1957. However, the Scroll did not burn: the records of revolutionary claims were finally revealed. As part of my research, I published the material on the homepage of AHUCS.

KEYWORDS history, 1956, Hungarian revolution, student movement, MEFESZ, AHUCS

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www.belvedere-meridionale.hu

One week prior to the popularly known date of 23 October, a spontaneous rally of students had taken place in the Auditorium Maximum (Great Hall) of the University of Szeged, on 16 October, 1956. Students participating agreed to collectively resign from the Union of Working Youth (Dolgozó Ifjúság Szövetsége, DISZ), the only youth organisation at the time, run by the communist regime, and establish a new, bottom-up organisation of university students, namely the Association of Hungarian University and College Students (AHUCS). It was also decided that another great meeting would be held, where the operational rules and programme of the organisation would be accepted and approved. Moreover, all (educational) institutions in Szeged would organise school meetings in the following three days to elect representatives and draw up their claims, which claims would then be incorporated into the demands of the organisation after the discussion on 20 October.

On 17 October, typewritten leaflets were made and distributed with the aim of notifying all university and college students of the country that "...We have now formed our own youth organisation for university students. (...) We aim to achieve freedom of thinking, throw off the intellectual yoke forced on us by Stalin and Rákosi. Join us! Let us expand AHUCS all over Hungary!"

In the days that followed general assemblies were held by students from the three faculties of the University of Szeged, that is the Faculties of Medicine and Pharmacy, and the College of Education.

At that time, Gyula Pálfi, assistant lecturer at the College of Education, was informed of the rally having taken place on 16 October, and the one to be held on 20 October. He immediately intervened at the Radio so that a report be made on the rally of 20 October. Led by György Garai, the recording team of the National Radio participated in the meeting and recorded the events on 20 October.





General assembly of AHUCS (University of Szeged, Auditorium Maximum, 20-10-1956) ❖ (Photo: Béla Liebmann)

In addition to accepting the text of the operational rules, the 500 students present went on to develop into a great political meeting, then drew up and accepted AHUCS's demands of 11 points, including their claim for free and democratic elections and the withdrawal of Russian troops from Hungary. Thus, the following claims were listed: **1.** We demand the public trial of those responsible for the sins of the recent past; **2.** We demand freedom of information, detailed reporting and commentaries on all issues by the press; **3.** We demand that Imre Nagy and György Lukács be admitted to central leadership; **4.** We demand a wage reform, determination of a lower limit to state-financed incomes and acceleration in pay increases; **5.** We demand abolition of the death sentence for political crimes; **6.** We demand the establishment of a free election system set on a new foundation; **7.** The university youth should receive a bigger role in the management of Hungary's political and other issues; **8.** 15 March should be a national holiday, the 1848 Kossuth coat of arms should be set back; **9.** Russian troops must be withdrawn from Hungary; **10.** The termination of mandatory delivery of products by the peasantry to the state; **11.** Let there be university autonomy." (Jancsák 2011: 84).

On 21 October, the day following the rally, student delegates set out to the cities of Budapest, Debrecen, Eger, Gödöllő, Pécs, Sopron and Veszprém, bringing there the word of AHUCS's establishment as well as their claims. In the days to follow, students in universities and colleges of Hungary held great rallies, and joined AHUCS. The constituent meetings are, chronologically, as follows: Sopron and Veszprém, 21 October; Pécs, Gödöllő, Debrecen and Budapest, 22 October; Mosonmagyaróvár, 23 October.

Demands recorded in Szeged immediately became claims made by AHUCS, an organisation having gained a foothold all over the country, and then these claims were adopted by the revolution on 23 October.

On 23 October, protesters were adamant to have their demands announced in the National Radio, therefore they marched to the Radio's headquarters in Brody Sándor street. Here Valéria Benke, then president of the Radio, denied announcement of demands. A fire fight between ÁVH (State Protection Authority) officers and protesters followed. From that night onwards, broadcasting of the National Radio was made from the Parliament building, that is Kossuth square.

After the spark of revolution was born in Szeged, it then flamed out all over Hungary to be quenched in two weeks' time.

Retaliation by the Kádár regime against the founder of AHUCS swung into action in the spring of 1957. Tamás Kiss, one of the founders, was arrested on 29 May, then committed to prison on 1 June. The ensuing investigation lasted for almost a year. The so-called AHUCS-trial, that is the "trial of Tamás Kiss and his associates" began on 6 January, 1958, prosecuted on charges of "initiating or conducting conspiracies to overthrow the democratic order of the state".

Broadcasting was relocated from the Parliament building to Brody Sándor street in April, 1957. During this period, the spirit of the National Radio was again determined by Valéria Benke. Working in various political jobs in chief functions from 1945 on, she actually was a politician of the Communist Party. Working from 1954 as president of the National Radio, she was eventually removed from her position during the 1956 Revolution, and became reappointed to manage the organisation in August, 1957. "The Radio is far more like a closed institute than an open centre of mass communication as it is guarded by armed soldiers and the police from both inside and outside." (Stefka 1996: 407).

As we know from the police report of 2 September, 1957, the investigational subdivision of the Szeged County Police approached Valéria Benke, head of the National Radio, in the autumn of 1957. Due to Benke's being away on holiday, a "Comrade Molnár" provided information to the investigator. The first name of "Comrade Molnár" is unknown to us, it may be one of two journalists working for the Radio at the time: either Mihály Molnár, director, or Tibor Molnár, editor. (See also Tertinszky Edit 1996: 389, Stefka 1996: 407). Molnár informed the inspector that "it was György who attended the AHUCS assembly in Szeged", however, he was unable to say who had instructed or invited Garai to travel to Szeged. Molnár told the investigator that "the magnetic tape simply cannot be acquired, firstly because of the fact that the part of the building where they were stored were hit". Moreover, he also added that György Garai had already "defected" Hungary. It was Molnár who directed him to János Nemes, the other leader of the Radio at the time when the revolution broke out. Nemes worked in the "headquarters of Szabad Nép" (newspaper of communist party) in 1957, yet according to police documents "even *he himself* was unable to tell who had instructed or invited Garai to travel to Szeged".

The tape recording definitely could have provided incontestable evidence for the trial starting in January 1958.

According to penal law in force in Hungary in 1957, "Each person is punishable for a crime if committed as any acts aimed at overthrowing democratic order of the state or the people's republic itself determined in the Constitution of the People's Republic of Hungary; it is also punishable to initiate movements or conspiracies, or provide them substantial financial support." (Criminal Code [BHÖ] 1/1) Moreover, "it is also punishable to actively participate in or promote movements or conspiracies determined in paragraph (1)." (CC 1/2) Those brought to justice for charges in CC 1/1 faced at least ten years' imprisonment, or death sentence, at worst. As for charges determined in CC 1/2, the highest sentence imposed was ten years' imprisonment. (See also Kahler 2005).

During the AHUCS trial, prosecution asked for “the most severe sentence to be imposed” on the defendants. The court at first instance sentenced Tamás Kiss to eight years’ imprisonment, with the verdict reduced in the second instance to five years in 1959. Most probably the perishing (or its not being present) of the sound recording contributed to a lenient court judgement.

The recording made by György Garai of the National Radio at the great assembly of AHUCS kept on 20 October, 1956, was eventually found by Tamás Kiss in the early 90’s. János Molnár mentions the radio recording in a book written on the misdeeds of the ‘counter-revolution’ of 1956 and supported by the communist Kádár regime, titled *Counter-revolution in Hungary* (1967). Here a reference was made (National Radio Archives D. 565 scrolls 1-9). The book was found Tamás Kiss when working under the aegis of the Historical Committee for Making Justice after the end of Communist rule in 1989. He immediately called a friend at the Radio to check whether the recordings mentioned by Molnár were still available.

This is how the records of revolutionary claims were finally revealed. It was only due to the fact that they had been labelled as ‘material destroyed’ that the lives of student revolutionists during the retaliation in 1957 were spared.

Recordings can be listened to at www.mefesz.hu.

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