

## The Party of Peace and Quiet

A certain – not sure how large but definitely not insignificant – fraction of the people who hanker for peace and quiet also have a powerful need for dictatorship, the curtailment of civic liberties and a newspaper loyal to the party. And this demand grew very strong and vociferous during last autumn. And the people crying “revolution” on the streets sounded just as false as those who chose not to cry “counter-revolution” back – i.e. the people who saw in the protesters the “troublemakers” of 1956, and despised them for it. They accused the protesters of disgracing the dignity of the commemoration, when in fact their hatred was directed against the original cause of the commemoration. In this way, the hostility of this Party of Peace and Quiet was concealed behind a screen of opportunism.

The work I do to earn my daily bread affords me with an exceptionally good vista on this particular opinion group.

I run the opinion column of the newspaper that once acted as the mouthpiece for the former ruling party in the former one-party state. Anyone who wanted to get in touch with the former *Népszabadság* would come into contact with me and my staff: all their letters, e-mails and telephones would be directed to us. There are quite a few of them, and they all believe that, deep inside the editorial rooms, the *Népszabadság* is still what it used to be. This is quite clear from the manner in which they address us. Thus the readers restore the continuity, which I meant to break when I accepted the invitation to work there.

The obligatory *captatio benevolentiae* used by this opinion group goes something like this: *I have been a reader and a subscriber of Népszabadság for decades.* This is a demonstration of loyalty. These people see self-evident virtue in the declaration of their loyalty to one of the pivotal institutions of the old one-party state, and by implication also to the old state machinery.

Here is the topos that interprets loyalty to the newspaper: *I was a leftist in the past, and I am still a leftist today.* Loyalty to the *Népszabadság* means loyalty to the left wing. Leftism is the only thing that matters; the actual forms of fighting our adversaries can vary according to the changing external circumstances and the arbitrary fluctuations in the balance of power. It is immaterial whether we imitate

dictatorship or democracy. Members of this opinion group feel that the transition to democratic government had actually tied up the hands of the so-called “leftists”, rather than giving them more freedom; they think that the democratic transition squeezed the weaponry of “our people” into the straitjacket of parliamentary democracy, while our adversaries had been given greater room to develop theirs. The scope of discussing 1956 in a positive light broadened, while the scope of discussing 1956 in a negative light narrowed.

I would like to recite a few typical comments by callers who left their messages with our phone service:

- *Why don't you start collecting signatures in protest of Viktor Orbán's anti-Hungarian comments and actions? Isn't he ashamed of himself? Isn't it possible to punish him?*
- *My message to Kolompár-Orbán (meaning Viktor Orbán, rather than Kolompár Orbán, chairman of the Roma Self Government: it is a sly reference to Viktor Orbán's alleged Roma ancestry) is that there won't be another 1956 here, and that he better get the hell out of this country, because he has no place here. He should stop inciting unrest. Isn't he ashamed to provoke such a scandal on such an anniversary, in front of guests? (This is a typical case of the schizophrenia of 1956: we do not want a repetition of 1956, but we would like to celebrate it with dignity!)*
- *Why can't we tell these people to get on their bike, before it's too late? Why do we have to wait until they cause such havoc? We don't want another revolution! They should be stopped before it's too late, with force if necessary!*
- *Hungarians against Hungarians, aren't they ashamed of themselves? Hooligans smashing up the place, and then having the nerve to blame the police! Well, the police should have been tougher! /.../ I can't feel sorry for them. They only got what they deserved for provocation, and it was not even enough!*
- *The publication of a statement by the National Circle would be unacceptable even in the Fórum, not to mention the Népszabadság! If Aunt Marika from Piripócs reads it, the only thing she will remember that she has read it in the Népszabadság!*
- *You shouldn't pay money to people like Krómer! The readers of Népszabadság do not want to read such articles! If you insist on publishing them, you can say goodbye to your subscribers!*

- Isn't there a way to kick these people out of the country? Those who are against the government and stir up trouble have no business to be in this country!

- How can those people out on the square make a living, if they have no workplace? Can't the constitutional lawyers find a suitable paragraph to outlaw these protests?

- (That Orbán character) is a festering sore, out with him! Why do I have to read about this louse every day in my favorite newspaper? Why can't I have a break, just for one day? Can't he be arrested for inciting rebellion? We want peace and quiet! Let's put an end to it and put this guy into the cooler!

- On the occasion when the photographs of Orbán and Gyurcsány were shown on the front page side by side: How does this front page look like? It is almost as if you took a photo of Stalin and Rákosi! Why do I have to look at the face of this four-time loser, when I want to read my newspaper? Who wants to know about him? And as for Gyurcsány, did you really have to use a photograph with such conscious-stricken expression? What message does this send out? There is no need to be depressed: that little trash, that troublemaker Orbán should be kicked out!

- The HSP (Hungarian Socialist Party) always keeps quiet, when Orbán should be treated like a dog with rabies! Why don't you pay him back in kind?

- During the Fradi match, Orbán was seen in Section B, negotiating with the hard-line football supporters. Why don't you tell the police and the National Security Bureau to investigate this incident, because it was already clear back then that this filthy little Gypsy kid was up to no good? Why can't you understand that we are afraid?

- The newspaper should draw a clear line. Just as you cannot see leftwing articles in Magyar Nemzet, you should allow the Wildmann-type to publish here. Only the disgusting priests and their wretched flock read these articles, because no upright Hungarian would read it.

(János Wildmann is the editor of the Faith Forum; a representative of the liberal Catholic intelligentsia, he co-authored the church policy section of the 2003 government program, the most liberal policy so far.)

- In late September, the newspaper published an article under the title **A Strict and Cautious Budget is in the Pipeline** about next year's budget: Hey, man! What are you doing? This is only a draft! Until it is voted through Parliament, there is no use writing about it, because it'll only upset people! You are misleading many uninformed people! It is dangerous to write such things!

- Are you deliberately inciting and irritating your readers? This is only a draft! What are you doing? Use your brain!

Apparently, a certain section of society cannot endure the vacancy that the abolishment of the Agit-Prop Department of the HSWP left behind, and are trying to fill the gap.

Those who lived under the Kádár regime and had some ties to its democratic opposition will have no trouble envisioning the venomous faces behind these messages.

The desire to divide the nation and public opinion and to eliminate openness, tolerance and the “agora” is not an exclusive property of the right. And as for racism, it can most certainly be found on the other side, too.

So what is this vast umbrella called leftism, under which loyalty to HSWP, a party consolidating anti-capitalist and anti-Western dictatorship, can comfortably cohabit with loyalty to HSP, the party consolidating capitalism and western-type democracy? Since a fuller and more thorough answer would require more space than this article would permit, I would like to refer the readers to one of my earlier writings: *“The claims of the political forces positioning themselves to represent the morality of the revolution will be judged by their readiness to grant the freedoms of speech, press and education with regard to 1956 to the minority opinion group, which had deprived us of the same freedoms in the past and is depriving us still. In relation to the 1956 revolution, we must above else demand the complete freedom of judgment, speech, research, celebration and commemoration. Instead of official declarations, we want the freedom of opinion.”* (Liget, 1989/2, p. 112.)

Miklós Szabó’s dedication to human liberties is, of course, beyond doubt.

Nevertheless, he believed that, when unaccompanied by the authorities’ coercive practices, the counter-revolutionary rhetoric had actually found a ready audience only in a small group of party functionaries. By contrast, in that little piece of mine I argued that such a hostile view of the revolution had in fact a much broader base, which I tried to express as follows: *“Alongside this existed a silent popular front: the Party of Peace and Quiet. This party enjoyed the support of those who, after the Don fiasco in WW II, the deportations, the reign of terror unleashed by the State Security Police and the bloodbath of 1956, were interpreting events not in the “pairs of values” of dictatorship and democracy, independence and dependency, freedom and*

*oppression, but in the simple dichotomy of peace-and-quiet or war. This Party of Peace and Quiet, which was driven by hatred that fed on their fears, turned their wrath on all those who represented the values of democracy and independence, because in their experience these ideals had no chance of success and they would only bring war and terror on the heads of peaceful citizens. (ibid. p. 114.)*

The members of this Party of Peace and Quiet still have no faith in the reconciliation of democracy and social peace. The question is whether the present government will try to dispel such fears or will use it to destroy the democratic limitations to its power.