



The American Hungarian Federation

Serving the Community since 1906 - Fidelissimus ad Mortem

Keynote Address on the Occasion of a Fundraiser benefitting the Victims of the Toxic Red Sludge Disaster in Hungary - Bryan Dawson, AHF Executive Chairman, May 1, 2011, Stuart Street Theatre, Boston Massachusetts.

Why are we here tonight? In the practical sense, we owe it to a man who, with a big heart and big plans, recognized a need and built a team. This Bostonian-Hungarian-American is named Jimmy Buzgó (which so appropriately means ardent or zealous), AHF's Massachusetts representative and Committee Chair for this event. His leadership brought together a dedicated team. I thank Consul Gábor Garai and Ildikó Losonci from the Honorary Consulate General of Hungary in Boston; and Ágnes Virga and Mariann Polgár-Turcsányi of the Hungarian Society of Massachusetts for their tireless support and help (would the committee please stand?). I and the American Hungarian Federation are not only proud to count them as members; I am proud to have had a chance to work with them.

We appreciate Ambassador Károly Dán from the Hungarian Consulate in New York, for his participation tonight. And I would be remiss if I didn't recognize Jazz Virtuoso, Berklee professor, great Hungarian-American, and AHF Patron, László Gárdony. Most importantly, I thank the volunteers, the artists (Zsuzsa Szegedi, Mónika Merva, and Bálint Varga), the donors and all of you for coming to this event and for supporting this noble cause. This event is a testament to what one person can initiate and what can be accomplished when we, as a larger, diverse community of Hungarians and non-Hungarians, from different religious and political backgrounds, join forces for good.

We are also here tonight because we share a desire to help those in need. A legacy of its own Soviet Story, the Toxic Sludge Catastrophe is the worst ecological disaster in Hungarian history.

Edmund Burke said: "Those who don't know history are destined to repeat it." **The communist past must not be forgotten..... It must not be repeated.**

To those of us affected by the communist legacy, whether it be our 1956 Freedom Fighters who braved Soviet tanks in the streets of Budapest, or the Poles in Poznan, or the undesirables in the Gulag, "The Soviet Story" is also our story.

This week marks the 25th anniversary of Chernobyl. We honor those that died and pray for the survivors. In the wake of the nuclear disaster in Japan, we must be reminded that there are more Soviet-era reactors in operation today – almost all deployed on the European border of Russia.

Lack of environmental regulation and oversight and Soviet-era practices continue to plague former Soviet-occupied nations. There are other "Toxic Time Bombs"... cyanide spills into the river Tisza emanating from Rumania, rusting heavy industrial plants lining the Danube's banks and..... yes..... other toxic sludge reservoirs in Hungary. **But threats to our health and the environment are not the only chapters in our Soviet Story.**

While democracies have emerged and developed in Central and Eastern Europe since the collapse of Communism, a brutal, autocratic regime still reigns in Belarus and vestiges of intolerance and discrimination against national minorities linger even within some countries that have joined western institutions. But 50 years of coursework in “totalitarianism 101” is hard to unlearn. **Denial and revisionist history undermine the pillars of democracy.**

In 2009, Slovakia, home to a sizeable historic Hungarian community, passed their repressive “Language Law,” which among other things, makes the use of Hungarian in official communication punishable in towns and villages where the ethnic Hungarian community has dropped to less than 20 percent of the total population. Thankfully, an amendment to forbid Hungarian in churches was later withdrawn.

Over 20 years after the fall of Communism, the historic Hungarian community still waits for Rumania to live up to its legal obligations and stated commitment to Western values and return church and synagogue properties confiscated by the communists and to allow bilingual signs and instruction in the historic Babes-Bolyai University in Kolozsvár. Formerly autonomous Hungarian regions wait for their autonomy to be restored in Serbia’s province of Vojvodina and in Transylvania now in Rumania.

Hungary has a millennia-old democratic tradition. The previous regimes under Soviet occupation tried to erase this history. “All for the people and all by the people. Nothing about the people without the people. That is Democracy...” Lajos Kossuth, leader of the 1848 Hungarian War of Liberation, spoke these words in 1852, over a decade before Lincoln’s famed “for the people, by the people” speech given at Gettysburg. His prophetic words are relevant today. Now that democracy has been restored to Hungary, “the people” should expect and demand accountability and transparency.

What we will see tonight in the “The Soviet Story” is deeply disturbing..... It highlights the Soviet regime’s unspeakable crimes, such as the Great “Holodomor” Famine in Ukraine where millions of people were intentionally starved to death, the Katyn massacre in Poland, and the medical experiments in the Gulag. The film contains newly discovered footage and describes the collaboration between two evil empires - Stalin’s Soviet Union and Hitler’s Nazi Germany - a collaboration often ignored or forgotten.

On this 25th Anniversary of Chernobyl, we will learn that the Soviets built their Soviet-era nuclear facilities along the border with Europe. They knew very well which way the wind blows. Eleven of Russia’s reactors are of the RBMK 1000 type, similar to the one at Chernobyl. Critics say that these reactors are of an “inherently unsafe design” and cannot be modernized, as some parts are impossible to replace. Despite reaching their “end of life,” these reactors have been extended and updated in output by about 5%.

Hungarians and the Irish have many similarities including musical styles and love of poetry. As I am of both Irish and Hungarian heritage my blood cannot resist closing my talk with a short poem by György Faludy entitled, “A Gólyák Kimaradnak.”

A gólyák kimaradnak, kevesebb a virág,
a kis tavak eltűnnek, megrohadnak a fák,
az ivóvíz is egyre mocskosabb lett, **kihal**
a rák a patakokból, a folyókból a hal.

Buda dombjai éles kontúrja elmosódott,
piszkos foltokat látsz csak, nem zöldelő bozótot,
a szennyes lég megrágja a házakat, a rostos
üregeket tüdődben s a szobrokon a bronzot.

Ordíthatnék, mikor a pusztulás karmát látom.....
a réteken, a gyermek bőre mögött s a fákon.
Másutt se jobb. A német, a francia, az **osztrák**
harcol a romlás ellen, s a harcot nem titkolják.
Segítségüket kérni persze nincsen okunk.
Fajtánk kiirtásáról magunk gondoskodunk.

Today, May 1st, as communist countries celebrate this May Day, let us bear witness to the Communist and Nazi Legacy so that this tragic history is not forgotten and NEVER repeated. As we are in some way the protagonists in the continuing Soviet story, we and our next generations have a say in how the story ends.....

Please.... support the Federation and its local members. There is much work to do and we cannot accomplish it alone – only in unity can we find strength.

Ísten Áldjon, köszönöm.