

ENEMY OF THE STATE

Miroslav Kusý (*1931)

He was imprisoned in 1989, just prior to the Velvet Revolution, as part of a group dubbed the Bratislava Five. Philosopher Miroslav Kusý was a professor of Marxist philosophy, a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the head of its ideological section. Later, however, he became a critic of the party. He signed Charter 77, was regarded as an enemy of the state and was one of the final political prisoners of the Communist era. What brought about this transformation in his life?

As with other hitherto committed Communists, the turning point in Miroslav Kusý's life was the day Warsaw Pact troops invaded Czechoslovakia. For many such people, the occupation that began on 21 August 1968 was the nail in the coffin of reform of a regime whose mistakes and errors they had ascribed to the bad decisions of individuals. He too realised that a system he had voluntarily become part of was beyond reforming.

Miroslav Kusý, who was born on 1 December 1931 in Bratislava, arrived at ideas of social equality and justice in early childhood. He grew up in modest circumstances in a proletariat family that leaned toward leftist and Communist thinking. It particularly appealed to his father, who was jailed for a year in the Slovak state period for possession of a Communist-themed flyer.

Miroslav's mother was also convicted but, however, did not have to serve her sentence due to having two children. As a talented student Miroslav was admitted to an eight-year grammar school in Bratislava in 1942. When he graduated in 1950 the Communists had been in power in Czechoslovakia for two years. As supporters of leftist ideology, the whole family viewed their government positively. Years later Miroslav Kusý re-evaluates how they perceived things at that time, under the influence of propaganda. *"We listened to the trials that they broadcast by loudspeaker on the street and believed they were traitors publicly confessing to their crimes. It was despicable, terrible. But our attitude was, why would they confess if they hadn't done it?"* he told Post Bellum.

Kusý continued his studies at the University of Political and Economic Sciences. However he was there only two years as it shut down. He began his third year at the Faculty of Arts at Charles University, where his focus was Marxist philosophy. As he puts it, there was no other kind.

His first doubts about the correctness of the ideology he had believed in for many years arrived in 1953, shortly after the deaths of Stalin and Gottwald. He learned about lapses on the part of the regime but still regarded them as mistakes of the system.

Until 1957 he was an official at the ministry of education. In 1962 he returned to Bratislava, where he became expert assistant to a professor at the Faculty of Philosophy at Comenius University.

In 1968, a year of reform, he headed the Communist Party's ideological section. There was cautious discussion in society of the regime's mistakes and the crimes of the 1950s and, despite the objections of Communists, the first tentative rehabilitations of non-party members and victims of judicial murder were seen. Kusý was among those who believed in Dubček's model of socialism with a human face and the 1968 invasion came as an enormous shock.

His expulsion from the party in the normalisation period, which in practice also meant the loss of one's post, spelled a complete sobering-up. He found new work as a documentarian at the Institute of Journalism Studies. He was later a librarian at a university library. In no time the ambitious Communist had become an enemy of the state. His views also changed very radically.

This was one reason he became the third signatory of Charter 77 in 1977. Another factor was that many of its initiators were his friends. From then on he was in the sights of the State Security, who tried to get him to leave the country. He was also sacked from the library and could only find work as a labourer.

A merry-go-round of regular summonses and interrogations began. In the 1980s he had a great opportunity when he began sending analytical articles about the situation in Communist Czechoslovakia to Radio Free Europe. The State Security responded by threatening that something could happen to his children.

However, Renegade, as he was dubbed by his secret police monitors, carried on. He became involved with the writers linked to Ludvík Vaculík's Padlock Editions and Václav Havel's Dispatch Editions, two samizdat series. He maintained contact with them and other Charter signatories.

The idea was born in August 1989 to place flowers at spots where victims of the occupation had been murdered. Instead, however, the Bratislava Five, who had planned to take part, were arrested. These were Kusý, Ján Čarnogurský, Hana Šolcová-Ponická, Vladimír Maňák and Anton Selecký. It was the regime's final attempt to strike fear into the opposition. In fact it made them more united. A petition to release the Bratislava

Five was drafted and signed by dozens of figures, including the secretly ordained bishop Ján Chryzostom Korec and Milan Šimečka, another party expellee.

The indictment against Kusý stated: *“The outcome of the investigation fully proved also the subversive activities of Dr. Miroslav Kusý. With his essays, editorials and articles sent in the course of 1989 to be made public on the radio stations Radio Free Europe and Voice of America he actively joined the leadership of the psychological war against our country and our system. He attacked the constitutional principle of the leading role of the CPC, urged citizens to change the political and economic system of the CSSR, defamed leading representatives of the party and the state, cast doubt on the goals of thorough social reconstruction and encouraged distrust of socialist law and the socialist state’s organs of authority.”*

Kusý was convicted of treason and sedition and shortly before the Velvet Revolution received a nine-month sentence. Husák later gave him a pardon, which he refused, but in the verdict was rescinded.

Kusý was publicly active during the revolution. He became deputy chairman of Public Against Violence, was briefly director of the Federal Office for Press and Information, served as a Federal Assembly deputy and was later rector of Comenius University, where he also headed the Department of Political Science.

Miroslav Kusý is the author of 11 books. He founded the Milan Šimečka Foundation and the Slovak Helsinki Committee for Human Rights.

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