

20th March 1945

Dear Sir,

I have only now had the opportunity of reading your collection of essays on the "Responsibility of the Writers", with the chapter on my former periodical "Szép Szó" which, as I see, you wrote in February 1940. While in Budapest, I saw your essay dealing with "Magyarok" by Illyés in a Moscow Hungarian periodical, circulated clandestinely amongst my friends, and found it excellent in spite of disagreeing with some of its points. I need not tell you how much I have now been impressed with the thoroughness, understanding and good will you showed in your "Szép Szó" essay towards my periodical, towards many of my friends and towards myself. My chief aim in writing this letter is to thank you for this. As to the criticism you make of us, I look at it as you do when you emphasise that the whole quarrel between the "Szép Szó" group and the "village explorers", including the most conspicuous blunders of both groups, should be regarded as past history. What matters now are your conclusions, particularly in the Preface of your book, with which I entirely agree.

Nevertheless, it may be worth our while to clarify some chapters of past history and I should therefore like to make some remarks on several statements of yours.

You have devoted an extremely great attention to our writings and efforts - I wonder whether we deserved as much as that - but exclusively to those of our issues published since the death of Attila József, who had been one of the founders and editors-in-chief of "Szép Szó". I presume the previous copies have not reached you. This is a pity; not only because the co-operation of such a poetic genius and passionate thinker as A.J. in a progressive set-up would certainly have interested you, but also because it was just in those copies, before the Anschluss, at the time of a comparatively milder terrorism, that we outlined our political creed. In the issues of May and August 1936, I wrote an essay in which I urged that liberalism and democracy should do away, once and for ever, with laissez-faire in economic matters and with any reactionary partnership in political fields; I was outspoken in advocating Popular Front. Attila József, as well as Fejtő, then our assistant editor, and Zoltán Gáspár, who in the end became the editor-in-chief until our periodical was banned, subsequently made similar statements, all in favour of a Popular Front policy; Bertalan Hetvany and Géza K. Haver made some reservations - the former on account of his monarchist inclinations, the latter as an adherent of the Henry George theory - but the right of the editors to advocate Popular Front was not questioned even by them. These statements of ours have never been revoked although, for obvious reasons, they could not be repeated later. It is therefore inaccurate to describe our periodical as a rallying point of "Bourgeois Democracy"; it certainly included some radicals of the democratic bourgeoisie but it also included others, as Popular Front attempts usually do.

Your not having seen our issues of 1936/37 may also account for the fact that you ask leading questions from us about our attitude in the Spanish civil war and the non-intervention policy fostered by the Democrates. Well, we were as unequivocally pro-Republican and anti-Franco as no other paper in Hungary dared to be. Of course, we had a very limited freedom - and you are only too aware of our difficulties - but we did not make the slightest allowance for even the "non-intervention" policy, let alone Francoism. Your assumption therefore that we feared these matters likely to follow a Popular Front was unfounded. But, indeed, at that moment there were no "accesses" visible on the Budapest streets, and still less in the Hungarian provinces, except those mobilised by the Nazis. We never thought that this would always remain so; we were aware of the fact that Reaction had always been able to appeal to