

## Preface to the Polish edition

Being published in a foreign language is a significant event for every author. For me, however, beyond this general pleasant feeling, it is an extraordinary source of pleasure to have my memoirs published in Polish this time. How many and how strong the links are connecting the two nations is often recited both in Poland and Hungary. My life and my intellectual development is also an example of this feeling of relatedness.

I wrote my dissertation in 1955-1956, later to be published as *Overcentralization in Economic Administration*. The reception of the book was ambivalent. First, before the 1956 revolution it was received with enthusiastic agreement in Hungary, but after the suppression of the revolution the reviving repression condemned it. The book was later published also in English, attracting the attention of Western economists. Apart from Hungary there was only one country in communist Eastern Europe where a review was published about the book (not even on the basis of the English but on the original Hungarian edition), and it was Poland. I do not know till today who authored it, behind the initials J. W., writing in the May 26, 1957 issue of *Zycie Gospodarcze*: „Kornai’s book is the clinical diagnosis of the overcentralization of economic government. ... Discrediting fetishes, a precise economic and political analysis — that makes Kornai’s work valuable for readers in other countries as well.” That was when I first experienced the intellectual community of Polish and Hungarian researchers eagerly searching for truth.

I am a self-educated economist. In the first, most difficult years following the revolution I educated myself, during the difficult years of political persecution and police harassment, having been kicked off from an academic position I tried to learn from books what is taught to students by excellent lecturers at western universities. First I read books in German. When I started to learn English, the first book I struggled myself through, with a dictionary at hand, was the classic study about the theory of socialism by Oscar Lange, the great Polish economist. It was a decisive intellectual experience.

The works by Oscar Lange and Michael Kalecki meant the first Polish influence on my intellectual development. On my first visit to the West in 1963 the recent Nobel-laureate Leo Hurwicz, of Polish origin and a former assistant of Oscar Lange, supported me with attention and expert advice. Later we exchanged views in writing and I also met in person

several other Polish colleagues, mainly those who, like I, were considering market oriented reforms, and wished to apply modern mathematical methods in economic analysis, and to contribute to economic theory with their work.

Most of my books published in English have appeared in Polish as well. I have visited this country several times. It has been a wonderful feeling to experience that this intellectual influence operates in two directions. Not only have I learnt from Polish economists, and if I may add, also from Polish sociologists, philosophers, and writers, poets, filmmakers. I have the impression that my works have echoed also in the circles of Polish readers. In my memoir I quote a Krakowian sociologist claiming that reading the *Economics of Shortage* completely changed his worldview.

The Polish edition of my book *By Force of Thought* seems to be the climax of these series of contacts giving me so much joy. This is, after all, not the analysis of an economic thought or a political-economic process — here I present the reader the story of my life. I hope the Polish reader will appreciate my honesty in describing the events that have happened to me. I reveal what I thought about my works when I was writing them — and what I think about them now. I have tried to place my story in the context of historical events, without, however, transferring the responsibility for my own fate to social circumstances.

I am full of excitement about the reaction on my book in Poland. Whatever the reception will be, I am grateful for the sheer opportunity of meeting the Polish readers to the publishing house Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, the translators: Sebastian Szymanski and Jan Okuniewski, and the editor: Lukasz Zebrowski.

Budapest, May 2008.

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