

An Emerging Environmental Movement

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Following Mr. Vargha, an expert, please allow me, a librarian to say a few words, as one of those thousands of laymen, who have got the firm belief, that the carrying out of this far-reaching project must be prevented.

The Duna Kör, an informal group, leads back its rise to the winter months of 1984 to a period, when the question of the project was first taken up by the public. Open debates were held at the universities, in colleges and in local clubs of the official Patriotic Front, all of them visited by hundreds of people. Voices in scientific and professional circles and in the literary world opposing the project have also become louder. As mentioned above, the Presidium of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences suggested to stop the work in progress. Of the professional groups, it was the architects and engineers led by technical as well as by moral motives to take the lead: their national association took an official stand against the project, maintaining to this day. Dozens of eminent writers following an East-Central-European tradition of the literati being deeply concerned with the vital questions of the region, expressed their anxiety about the project, the open discussion planned by the Association of Hungarian Writers, however has been postponed due to political pressure for an indefinite time. The public in Hungary has been more and more occupied with this problem. In the beginning of 1984 a group of students and intellectuals: biologists, architects, artists, historians, lawyers, sociologists and teachers initiated the foundation of an association for the protection of the Danube. The application for registration however, has been blocked by the authorities. Nevertheless, those signing the application decided to collect and to publish information concerning the project even among such circumstances. This activity had a special significance in a time from mid-1984 to this autumn - when a rigid ban imposed on the publication of both pros and cons relating to the project existed. By this a breach was made in the information monopoly of the Hungarian water management. In the spring of 1984 a campaign for collecting signatures was also launched. Those about ten thousand signing the petition by November, 1984 demanded the government to stop the work as well as to elaborate plans in accordance with environmental requirements. The petition has been left by the government and the Parliament both unanswered. Nevertheless, the Duna Kör still insists upon the possibility of a dialogue.

Ladies and gentlemen,

spiritual and material values are both endangered by the project: the drinking water of millions, the landscape and nature, forests like those in Hamburg, dozens of species of plants and animals, the Danube-bend, one of the most beautiful parts of our country and a recreation

center for ten thousands of people as well as historical towns. Due to the complexity of what is to be protected any critical activity must be based on several branches of sciences. The Duna Kör itself could not have got along, hadn't it always been in the position getting support from eminent experts.

Like other environmental initiatives in Hungary, the Duna Kör has its roots in the general activation process of the society. Various strata, groups, professional associations etc. are striving for a greater autonomy. More and more people want that decisions concerning the present and future of smaller and greater communities should be made not behind the doors but should be based on social participation. All what has been by this honourable prize, Ladies and Gentlemen, is a reflection of this general tendency of democratization. Analysing the social composition to those signing the petition or visiting the open discussions it is a good thing to see that a pretty high rate of manual workers and of non-urban population is taking part in this ecological initiative.

"The ordinary citizen cannot judge the scientific facts. What he can and must do is bring his reason and common sense to bear on his country's whole approach to the problem", Barbara Ward says. During our activity we have been in the position to see that the number of such citizens, conscious of their responsibility, is increasing in Hungary every day. It is the opinions and beliefs of these citizens I'd like to give voice to. On their behalf I consider it as a great distinction to have the possibility to express our thanks and gratitude to the Foundation for the prize awarded to the Duna Kör.

Dr. Judit Vászheiyi