

## PREFACE

Almost a year has gone by since August 1991, when the Centennial Commemorative Conference on Michael Polanyi was held in Budapest. Polanyi-researchers, coming from several countries, met on the hospitable premises of the Naumann Foundation on the occasion of this conference in order to celebrate the centenary and to participate in the exchange of ideas.

The present issue of POLANYIANA consists of participants' contributions to the Conference. Those people who were unable to participate, though they would have been interested in this meeting, now have an opportunity to get acquainted with these presentations. The publication of these contributions may as well help to promote a deeper understanding of Polanyi's work both here in Hungary and abroad.

The contributions are published in the original form given by the authors. The conference consisted of three sessions. The first, "Morality and Theology in Michael Polanyi's Thought", included three contributions. In the next session, "Epistemology and Language in Michael Polanyi's Thought", three presentations were given. The largest session was "History and Law in Polanyi's Thought", in which the number amounted to six contributions. In the last session, "Epistemology and Philosophy of Science in Polanyi's Thought", there were again three presentations.

Two short talks are included in this issue that were not read, but are firmly connected to the Conference. The first is a congratulatory talk to the participants of the Conference by Nobel prize winner John C. Polanyi, son of Michael Polanyi, who is living now in Canada. He visited Budapest last year in order to participate in the 33rd Conference of The International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry (IUPAC) held in Budapest, 1991 August, and met the representatives of the Michael Polanyi Liberal Philosophical Association. He wished to express his gratitude to the conference participants for their paying tribute to the memory of his father in his native country and for reviving his spiritual heritage that had been doomed to silence for several years. The second talk is the opening address of Erzsebet Vezer, the biographer of the Polanyi family, given on the occasion of the centennial Michael Polanyi exhibition in the Library of the Technical University of Budapest, which was on display during the Conference.

The reader will find the list of contributors at the back of this issue after the report of Richard Gelwick, the coordinator of the Polanyi Society in North America, of the Conference, which was published in a recent issue of "Tradition & Discovery". Readers' comments, criticisms, and contributions are welcome. We are willing to open a lively discourse on papers published in and subjects related to this issue of POLANYIANA in one of our forthcoming issues.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to express our gratitude for the financial support of the Conference to the SOROS FOUNDATION and to the GOETHE INSTITUT in Hungary. We are also deeply grateful to the FRIEDRICH NAUMANN Foundation for allowing us to use its building during the conference. Our heartiest thanks to the much-needed work of our moderator, Dr. Imre Hronszky. We are very glad that the relatives of Polanyi family living in Budapest, Mr. & Mrs. Striker, could participate in the Conference. We are extremely grateful to Mrs. Zsuzsa Biacs for her devoted work in organizing the exhibition on Michael Polanyi in the center of the library of the Technical University of Budapest. Last but not least, our thanks are due to the technicians and volunteers who worked hard for the success of the Conference.

Spring-Summer, 1992.

Martha Fehér - Éva Gábor - Gabriella Ujlaki

**John C. Polanyi<sup>x</sup> (Canada):**

**COMMENTS ON THE OCCASION OF THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF  
THE BIRTH OF MICHAEL POLANYI**

I am grateful for this opportunity to re-establish contact with a nation that I knew best before I was born. I have no doubt that through my parents I owe a great deal to this city and this country.

My father, Michael Polanyi, whose centennial is celebrated this year, was the youngest child of Hungarian parents, themselves born in the middle of the last century. My father went to school and to university in Budapest. He served as a junior officer in the Austro-Hungarian army in the First World War.

Following a brief period in the Ministry of Health in Count Karoly's government, he went to Germany to pursue a career in scientific research. At that time Germany was the world capital for science, as the United States is today.

From about the age of twenty-nine and for the remaining fifty years of his active life, he travelled widely, but almost never to Hungary. His home for over forty years was England, a country which he loved. But he continued in his heart to honour the liberal and creative Hungary that he had known, and the Europe that he feared had passed into history.

Few people have thought as profoundly and passionately about the tragedy of Europe as he did. He laid that tragedy at the door of perverted science. In summarizing his views in this fashion I use words that he might not have used, but I do not think that I distort his ideas greatly by doing so.

The National Socialists (the Nazis) in Germany, and the Marxists in the Soviet Union - each of whom engulfed this country in horror - held to the view that what was not part of science could not sensibly be regarded as existing. It followed that morality did not exist, except as a remnant of outdated superstitions. Truth, justice, and tolerance had been, they believed, shown to be mere impediments to scientific progress.

<sup>x/</sup> Professor J. C. Polanyi visited Budapest to attend the 33rd Conference of the International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry (IUPAC), August 17-22, 1991, organized by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. - J. C. Polanyi, Professor of Chemistry, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada.

This was a flagrant distortion of reality. The fact is that science owes its power to its commitment to precisely these values. Science respects opinions which are honestly held, and not because of the race, religion, or social class of the individual who holds the view. Science flourishes only to the extent that it respects the individual and tolerates dissent. Justice is served by requiring each new scientific proposition to prove itself before the court of scientific opinion.

Science does not need to levy fines or impose prison sentences on those who fail to acknowledge the curvature of the earth or the existence of atoms. The truth, if it is indeed the truth, does not need to be established at the point of a bayonet. Nor, if it is not the truth, will a bayonet make it true.

Far from validating the horrors of the recent past, science, with the other arts, has provided a rallying point for opposition to tyranny. And far from embracing science, the tyrants of this new age have found themselves at war with science, attempting to discredit scientific leaders (Einstein, Pauling, Sakharov, and now Fang Lizhi).

The renaissance of Europe is a marvel my father sensed, but never saw. That renaissance does not mean that history is over. Civilised values will continue to be threatened for the rest of time. Not by barbarians so much as misguided idealists, who in their impatience and ignorance urge us to jettison civilised values. We will continue to need individuals with the wisdom to warn us of these hazards. I believe that Michael Polanyi was one such person.

## **Erzsébet Vezér (Hungary):**

### **Opening Speech on the Occasion of the Exhibition on the 100th Anniversary of the Birth of Michael Polanyi**

One of the most important results of our so - called "change of regime" is that those men who created values (scientists, scholars, artists, politicians), and whose talents were dissipated by the two previous regimes can return. Some of them are still alive to visit Hungary (Edward Teller), others return in their mortal remains (Oszkar Jaszi), but most of them can only return in their works (Michael Polanyi). However, that is also of great importance to us, to the Hungarian culture. Consider the fact that we could not even publish Michael Polanyi's works until quite recently.

He was one of those men who was not only deeply devoted to his native country, but often visited Hungary until the beginning of the Second World War, not merely because of family affairs (his mother died in 1939) but in order to support Hungarian science as a research consultant of TUNGSRAM. Let me read some lines from a letter he wrote at the end of the thirties:

"I feel that I have spent almost 20 years far from home and therefore I can be of no benefit for anybody at home. I feel that I will finish my life in this way and that we will know about each others' death only by mail. Even sorrow cannot bring us together, it can only reveal the widening gaps of loneliness... In this sad moment I always think that after all I ought to go home and finish my life where it started, among those to whom I belong."

After the war he could no longer return home because his anti-communistic attitude was too conspicuous. It was taken to be outrageous by the authorities that he joined in 1950 the society called Congress for Cultural Freedom, which was the gathering place of the most outstanding anticommunist western intellectuals.

Michael was the youngest member of that Polanyi family which gave so many world-famous men to Hungarian culture. His father, the talented railway engineer, constructed 1,000 miles of railway in Hungary. His mother, the celebrated Mom Cecile, gathered around her the greatest and most renowned personalities of Hungarian science and art in her famous literary salon. His sister, Laura, enriched the Hungarian historical sciences; his brother Charles, the founding father of the Galilei Circle, became world-famous in economics. And today we have the honour of welcoming here in Hungary his son, the Nobel prize winner John C. Polanyi.

This exhibition tries to guide you along Michael Polanyi's life and serves as an introduction to that scientific conference which intends to pay tribute to the works of a distinguished thinker. His life was exemplary as far as knowledge, honour, and reliability were concerned.

I was lucky that I could get acquainted with him personally in Oxford. I have never met a more charming and more modest person in my life. Please look at these pictures with the same warm feeling I had when I was looking at the then living Michael Polanyi.

**Imre Hronszky (Hungary):**

### **Words of Welcome**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am extremely pleased that I have the opportunity to welcome you, on the occasion of this long-desired event, the Centennial Commemorative Conference on Michael Polanyi, on behalf of the Michael Polanyi Liberal Philosophical Association. Due to the generosity of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation we can hold our Centennial Commemorative Conference in very favourable conditions.

I hope that we have a successful meeting here, so that Michael Polanyi's spiritual heritage can return to his native country. Have a good time in Budapest, in the city that Polanyi loved! Perhaps the "genius loci" will help us to make Hungarian intellectual circles assess and reassess Michel Polanyi's work. He was strictly connected to the progressive trends of Hungarian culture and he had never detached himself from this tradition.

I would like to inform you about the revised program of this Conference, since there are modifications in the preliminary schedule of presentations of the participants. We hope you will have keen discussions after the presentations that will promote cooperation in Polanyi research.

Frist: we want you to become acquainted with places where Michael Polanyi had grown up: we will take you on a little excursion to see his gymnasium, then to place a wreath on the marble plaque installed at the Polanyi home on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of his birth.

Finally, I would like to invite you to a welcome reception this evening given by Mr. Stefan Musto, the president of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, and by the representatives of the Michael Polanyi Liberal Philosophical Association.