What I Did in November 1989?

Ľuba Trubíniková

I was rebelling…what else?

At that time – after tree years of working at a geological institution – I was a doctoral student at the Department of Geotechnologies of the Slovak Technical University in Bratislava. I had successfully passed my comprehensive exams and was shortly before finishing my dissertation on mechanics of soils.

At first I didn't have an idea what was going on. I didn't watch TV out of principle (I don't like to be manipulated into passive consumption), I didn't read newspapers (anyway they usually published some uninteresting garbage), I didn't have time to listen to the radio, politics was boring, monotonous. There were so many other important things – alongside my work and household chores these were mainly books, music, nature and hiking, sometimes sports, various hobbies…and of course my partner my friends, highs school classmates…Even then I felt I didn't have enough time for all of this…

Monday morning I was as usually going to my "grad office" on the 17th floor. The aula on the first floor was packed with undergraduate students, strangely noisy. There was tension in the air. "There's something going on downstairs, there are loads of people in the aula," I told to my office mates. My colleague Rudo looked at me in surprise: "You don't know? There was a demonstration in Prague and students got a terribly beating there." In that moment my November began.

Everything got into motion.

After the undergraduate students also we – employees, teachers, graduate students gathered in the aula. The undergrads were prepared; their presentations were clear, revolutionary, straightforward. The presentations of discussants from the ranks of teachers were varied…

Things were running faster and faster.

Then we had a meeting of the Department: no usual teasing, informal conversations. All were occupied by their own thoughts; all were watching what was going on. The address of the head of the Department was brief and matter-of-factual. At the end of the meeting one question sprang up: What are we going to do? What stance is the Department going to take? And then there was silence; straight faces, all deep in thoughts.

I don't know why I did it. It hadn't usually been my style to join discussions at our department meetings. But in that moment it was totally obvious to me that something had to be done. When nobody said anything for a long while, I spoke up. I don't remember the words, but the message was clear: I think we should support the undergrads. When injustice is happening it should be paid serious attention. Violence is not the right answer.

After me my colleague Rudo said about the same. And then the doyen of our department whom we liked for his jovial humor stood up: There are times when reason is expensive and courage is cheap. Today, reason's got cheaper and what is expensive is courage. He thanked us, young colleagues, for our courage and said that by our stance we had made them - older colleagues - feel small. And then things just moved on by themselves. This was the moment when November started at our Department.

Things were speeding up.

Cooperation, new relations between us at the Department ("Luba, thumbs up", one associate professor complimented me after the meeting), with grad students from other departments, with undergrads at our college and others; constant meetings, discussions, agreements, constant watching of events and the news; constant pondering, deciding, organizing. At night I would be typing up copies of leaflets and various materials on my home typewriter. Meetings in the squares. To the first one we went right from our school – we walked filled with excitement: What's going to happen next? Are they going to take any action? That evening was a revelation to me. It was a real disenchantment. I don't know how to describe it briefly and succinctly. It simply was ABSOLUTE LIBERATION. I knew one thing: This is it. And definitively.

In that moment November started everywhere. And for life.

We went to all meetings and many other things happened: elections at the Department; the start of the coordination committee at our Faculty - with Rudo and a few others we represented grad students in it; public speeches – at the meetings, on the school radio, in the theater. Constant communication everywhere and with everybody, constant organizational work, absolute intensity.

Things at the Department and Faculty were running by themselves☺.

I went to help at the Public Against Violence.[1] When I wiped some dishes and carried something to a post office I didn't have the feeling they really needed my help. But there was a lot of work at the Faculty. And I put my grad studies aside – of course, what else…

Four of us were elected to the chamber of graduate students of the newly created academic senate. We already worked intensely on the reform of the study as well as on the organization and management of the school. Simply, it was a revolutionary zeal…and naivety – until these days the reform is not finished…

And then I went to SNP Square. There was an oblong typewritten paper posted on wall next to a department store: We are establishing the Green Party. Come to help us…So I came.

But that was already in December.

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[1] The Public Against Violence (in Slovak: Verejnosť proti násiliu, VPN) was the leading political movement of the Velvet Revolution in Slovakia. It that was established in Bratislava, on November 19 1989 – 2 days after the trigger student demonstration in Prague. It was the Slovak counterpart of the Czech Civic Forum (Translator's note).

And things started to run fast again. Even faster…

And the have never stopped.

Translated by **Eva Riečanská**

Ľubica Trubíniová – environmentalist and civic activist. She witnessed the establishment, work and demise of the first (federal) Green Party in Slovakia (1990-1993). A foundaer and for 10 years the head the Slovak Greenpeace office; the leader of its antinuclear campaign (1993-2003). She worked also for various (mainly environmental) NGOs and civic initiatives. She interrupted her graduate study in the spring of 1990. She has never finished it.