

**A message from Bernard Chavance**  
**Emeritus professor, University Paris Diderot**

It is a great pleasure to send this video message, on the occasion of the publishing of the book *Constraints and Driving Forces in Economic Systems*, a collection of studies in honour of János Kornai. I find it welcome, as the system paradigm is a central theme in his prominent work.

I encountered Kornai's thought at the beginning of the 1980s, as a researcher on socialist systems. I was among the few initial introducers of his ideas in France. I was captivated by the originality, the depth and the creativity of his theories. Since that time, they have been present in my teaching, in my research, as the work of a classic.

I rank Janos Kornai among the classical authors, the classics of social science. They are the thinkers whose work is a necessary mediation in the training of social scientists, and also whose ideas and theories are imperative to confront, including through criticism, in any creative and innovative research. Living with the classics has sadly tended to disappear in economics, less so in sociology. Kornai explicitly said how classical works inspired his own research by mentioning Marx, Schumpeter, Keynes and Hayek – by the way claiming the controlled eclecticism of his writings. His own thinking has, I think, assumed a classical character. He also represents the figure – in great shortage nowadays – of the economist as a social scientist.

In the french language, we have four books (and two collections) of Kornai : *Economics of Shortage*, *The Road to Free Economy*, *The Socialist System*, his Memoirs, and many articles. *Anti-Equilibrium* was not translated, but widely read in English at the time in France ; I first heard of it by economists who had been impressed and sometimes shaken by it. Personally, my preferred books are *The Socialist System* and his *Autobiography*. The first is a true masterwork, combining history and theory in a manner comparable to Marx and Schumpeter, and putting to use a deep inside knowledge of the system and a critical synthesis of great theories.

With a comparative perspective, there is an irony in the fact that the very factors that Schumpeter saw as pointing to the decay of capitalism, were actually present in the end of socialist systems : erosion of the institutional framework, specially the devitalization of the notion of ownership, decline of the system's legitimacy through the critiques of intellectuals, loss of confidence of the ruling class in its own future. A similar irony results from Kornai's *Socialist system* : the movement of formation of the system, its development, expansion and eventually decline through inner dynamics and contradictions recalls Marx's grand dynamics envisioned about... capitalism.

In *By force of thought* – a very apt title for his autobiography, the reader has a taste of genuine reflexivity on many important topics. Beyond the fascinating account of the political context and its consequences, we also find important insights on intellectual creativity, and also on academic « constraints and driving forces », for a man who managed to cross the borders of the conflict of great systems of the 20th century.

I am glad of this opportunity to participate in the event for the book with studies in the honour of Janos Kornai. My congratulations go to to the colleagues who participated in this project and organized it. And I send my warmest thoughts to Janos, from another disciple and a long time friend.