THE POLITICS OF IMPOTENCE?
OPPOSITION AND DISSENT IN EAST CENTRAL EUROPE

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Introductory Note

The initial impetus for this paper was a suggestion by Iván Szelényi, that the time had come for a fresh look at recent developments in the societies of Eastern Europe. In the past generation so much has happened in this region that many of the old categories of description and analysis were sterile, perhaps redundant. Not only had new issues arisen about which little had been written in the West, but the very terms in which social debate in Eastern Europe is now undertaken have undergone radical transformation. Some fresh overall assessment of these changes is called for.

The paper which you now see is the result of my attempt to undertake one part of this task. Given the potential dimensions of such a project, I have confined myself to one theme, albeit central; the emergence of new forms of opposition and dissent in this region over the past decade. The centrality of this subject will be obvious to anyone even superficially acquainted with the history of Poland or Czechoslovakia, for example; it just is no longer possible to think of political struggle or social movements in the terms still current as recently as 1976. There is almost no subject of argument or concern in these countries, in Hungary and perhaps even in the GDR, which has not been altered beyond recognition by the new issues raised by the opposition or (and even more significantly) by the way in which they have been raised. To rethink the recent history of opposition in these countries is to rethink their recent history itself.

Because this is for me still very much a matter of work-in-progress, what follows is something between a set of notes and an elaboration of my interim conclusions. I have therefore confined myself to the "headlines," so to speak. In addressing the paper to an informed audience I have kept introductory material to a minimum, and have confined the usual academic apparatus to sources of particular interest or to those from which I am quoting directly. Thus the paper should be seen as an informal contribution, designed to stimulate discussion.

"It is not necessary," said the priest, "to accept everything as true, one must only accept it as necessary." "A melancholy conclusion," said K. "It turns lying into a universal principle."

Franz Kafka, The Trial

Let me begin by disposing as efficiently as I can of two boring matters of definition. Eastern Europe exists, just as eastern France exists. But if sub-Carpathian Ruthenia is unquestionably in the East, then Prague and Cracow are necessarily less so. The reason why it matters for people in Prague or Budapest today that this question receive close attention is something I shall discuss later. At this juncture I want only to stress that what I am talking about in this paper is precisely that part of the Soviet sphere of Europe which is most central, least eastern. Opposition exists in Romania, in Bulgaria, and in the Baltic lands, but it is significantly different from the things that have happened in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the GDR, for a variety of reasons, some circumstantial, others not. This paper is about developments in those parts of Europe which lie on the western periphery of the Soviet sphere of influence. So, for these purposes, East Central Europe.[1]

Second, the very term dissident arouses...dissent. To the extent to which intellectuals reflecting upon the contradictions of their own society are dissidents, then the phenomenon is endemic to any complex social system. The output of cosmopolitan intellectuals from Vilna, for example, is reminiscent of the serial intellectual migrations from the Mezzogiorno to northern Italy, and with many of the same discontents in their output. Individual non-conformity which in the West would pass virtually unnoticed is labelled dissident activity when observed in the East, with a consequent blunting of the analytical force of the term. Dissident art in particular acquires a romantic aura which, while accentuated in societies which emphasize conformity, is still something surely distinct from a conscious opposition to the system which sustains that conformity.

I have thus opted where possible for the term opposition. This creates at least one problem: it is precisely characteristic of the new politics of "anti-politics" that some of it, especially among the young, is indeed little more than the refusal to conform, the insistence upon being "different," elevated to a form of conscious ideological statement. But other matters conversely become more straightforward: my interest is in people and movements which function as opponents of the Party

and the state, and which occupy that role in novel ways. I also wish to end the paper with some reflections upon the limitations and problems of such novel approaches, and here it is indeed a question of the limits of opposition, not mere dissent.

One final coda to the problem of definition. In order to say anything at all it is necessary to proceed on realist assumptions. I believe there <u>is</u> a wide area of thinking and behavior now common (though internally divided) to all the countries I shall be discussing. After forty years of "real socialism" this is not very surprising. And my best argument is that many of the protagonists believe this to be the case. But the differences are nonetheless large, and I want to enumerate a few at the outset. The GDR has very different concerns from the rest of Eastern Europe, and this is reflected in its internal opposition, for whom "rights" nearly always begins with the "right to movement," and for whom economic discussions entail recognizing that the GDR is now virtually a de facto associate of the EEC. The "German problem," both as a subject for samizdat historiography and present day politics, exists in a very different form in Prussia than in, for example, Moravia. And, most remarkably, East German oppositionists (the best known in the West in recent years being Rudolf Bahro, and perhaps Robert Havemann) were loath to abandon not only socialist ideology, but a belief in the desirability and utopian qualities of a (reformed) one-party state. This alone, as Jiří Pelikán observed, makes them virtually inaudible in Czechoslovakia, Poland, or Hungary.

Or take Czechoslovakia, whose intellectuals are still obsessed with their own enduring flirtation with Marxism, the unique scale and endurance of the persecutions of the fifties, and indeed the very plausibility of a Czechoslovak state (no doubts of <u>this</u> kind trouble Poles or Hungarians!). Much of Czech thought could fairly if brutally be described as the "philosophy of the humiliated."[2] The Czech (not Slovak) obsession with self-analysis of a morbidly pessimistic kind has long roots and distinguishes the work of Czech analysts even at their most universalist and dispassionate. And this even before one takes into consideration the uniquely advanced nature of the economy in the Czech lands before 1948, which has shaped the economic history of socialist Czechoslovakia, its large and hitherto politicized industrial proletariat, and the latter's troubled relations with the intelligentsia.

Considerations such as these, to which might be added the peculiarly social-democratic and sociological orientation of intellectual critics in Hungary, or the famously special case of the Polish Church, do not make it impossible to undertake general analytical surveys. But they should be borne in mind as the latter get under way. Here, as elsewhere, I shall take advantage of the sophistication of the present audience to pass over a

fuller enumeration of the more obvious sorts of variables which need to be kept in play.

At some point in the course of the seventies, the project of absorbing civil society into the state was seen to have failed. The precise chronology of this process varied by country, and with a certain décalage in each case. From 1948 until 1956 there were quite a few Stalinists and even more Marxists in East Central Europe. 1956 destroyed the myth of the consubstantiality of History, Communist Party, and Proletariat, but it left almost intact the language in which to communicate one's concerns about these matters (both within the Soviet sphere and between Eastern and Western Marxists). Hence revisionism, characterized by a belief in the possibility of reforming the system by appealing to its own ideological premises, and by the continued acceptance of the need to achieve such reforms within and through the apparatus of the Party. To the extent that the actions, or inaction, of the Party-state thus continued to set the agenda for discussion, the years 1956-1968 look remarkably sterile in gloomy retrospect (much as they do for aging Western radicals, who if honest will concede that the fascination with the young Marx, Gramsci, and Lukács, not to speak of their modern heirs-aspirant, lay in their comfortable remoteness from questions of power, program, or deed).

In this respect, 1968 mattered more. For in quick sequence first the Polish, then the Czech Parties were revealed as hopelessly unfitted for the task of interlocutors between society and History. The astonishing burst of anti-Semitism in Poland, with students and purged Party members bereft of support from Church or workers alike, revealed the bankruptcy of the hopes of the revisionist era. In Czechoslovakia, the ease with which the reformist wing of the Party crumbled and the success of the "normalizers" in dividing Czechs from Slovaks and intellectuals from everyone else, made the hopes and goodwill of the spring look peculiarly sour. Here, and again in a delayed symbiosis with Western Europe, what died was a political language, which could no longer carry even the residual legitimacy it had maintained since 1956.

If we then ask why it was that there was a delay of nearly a decade before serious collective efforts were made to replace revisionism with something else, we have to bring into the discussion other considerations than the internal history of political thought in this region. A side-effect of the continuing engagement with the regime through 1968 on the part of the intellectuals was their total isolation from the working population. There were of course acknowledgements of this problem (notably the Kuroń/Modzelewski open letter of 1964), but little more than that. As a result the Polish intelligentsia, like its Hungarian counterpart, was substantially ignorant of conditions and opinions in the industrial centers, and even more

cut off from the views of the peasantry. In Czechoslovakia this was made worse by the uniquely high level of pro-Communist sentiment among the educated population until the mid-fifties, and also by the division between urban, non-religious and left-leaning Czechs, and rural, Catholic Slovaks. There had been very little open public support for the worker rebellions of 1953 in Berlin and Plzeň from left-leaning intellectuals, and the compliment was returned heartily in 1968 and 1969 (except in Bohemia, where upwards of one million skilled workers took part in the Councils movement and gave open support to the Prague reformers and even to the student demonstrators at the time of the death of Jan Palach).

For the revisionists and their heirs, then, it came as something of a shock to realize just how isolated they were, and how out of touch with their potential audience, and how little they could achieve. As Miklós Haraszti has written, the real shock for him was not learning that the old categories of Left and Right were defunct, gone for ever, but realizing that everyone already knew this![3] And now they no longer had a dialogue, even purely formal, with the power structure itself. Or perhaps one should rather say that now, for the first time since 1945, they were no longer a part of that power structure. This was perhaps least marked in Hungary, where the traumas of 1956 were waning just as its neighbors were undergoing their own, and where the peculiar attractions and problems of Kádárism were beginning to emerge -- hence the slight delay with which opposition in Hungary came to take up the new themes of the late seventies? The old Central European distinction between "intelligentsia" and "people" (applicable in aristocratic societies like Hungary and Poland rather than in plebeian ones like Czechoslovakia, but artificially instituted even there after 1948) had resurfaced in an acute form.

These problems were not invisible from 1970 to 1975, of course. But during those years one could still find many people in Poland and Czechoslovakia, including some later luminaries of the modern "anti-politics," debating the question of an aggiornamento of socialism, often though not exclusively in the economic arena. It was as though the family could still not quite bring itself to hand over the corpse, for all they knew it to be a corpse (in fairness, the metaphor requires that one imagine the corpse as serving simultaneously to shore up the dining table, or perhaps the very walls). It was also quite unclear what to put in the place of socialism, which here stood in as shorthand for a whole way of looking at the state, political practice, the course of history, and the very language of public debate. After August 1968 (or the 1970 strikes in Poland), the scope for public protest had also sharply diminished (these were the years of renewed show trials in Prague and Brno, of 500,000 expulsions or departures from the KSČ, of expulsions from the Polish universities, and renewed international tension).

The moment of "catch-up" came in 1975. In that year not only was the Helsinki Final Act signed (to ambiguous response in the East -- Romanian dissidents for example saw it as little short of a new Yalta), but a new Polish constitution was proposed, to incorporate the leading role of the Party and render explicit the bonds of permanent fraternity with the USSR. The protests this aroused generated a de facto public alliance between radical dissidents and the Catholic Church, a de facto reconciliation which then extended into the social realm with the workers' strikes and the trials at Radom and Ursus and subsequent intellectual declarations in support of the persecuted workers. The beginnings of the end of the Gierek bubble combined with the (rapidly withdrawn) constitutional proposals to produce a public movement of protest which then went in search of an organization and goals.

Mutatis mutandis, something similar happened in Czechoslovakia. There it was the persecution of a new generation of popular musicians (The Plastic People of the Universe, etc.) which finally brought out the intellectuals in their defense (forming VONS in 1978, with much the same purpose as that behind the 1976 creation of KOR). The drafters of Charter 77 could hardly have been directly moved by the crisis over the proposed Polish constitution (their own already had such clauses and worse, dating from 1960), but the coincidence of the Polish events with the Czech legal clampdowns was what provided the spark behind the public appeal to legality, immeasurably boosted by the formal incorporation into the Czech Legal Code of Helsinki Decree 120 in August 1976. Charter 77 in turn produced the first feeble efforts at collective protest in Romania (a letter of support from Paul Goma and seven others[4]), and in due course growing echoes from Hungary. The contemporary developments in the GDR (the expulsion of the singer Wolf Biermann in 1976, and the subsequent prosecution of Rudolf Bahro) are not directly related to these other events, but they undoubtedly provided an extra impetus to the Czechs in particular, who were confirmed in their view that the moment was propitious for a new beginning.

"I talk about rights because they alone will enable us to leave this magic-lantern show."

Kazimierz Brandys, A Question of Reality

Although the language of rights sits at the epicenter of the new oppositions in East Central Europe and thus can now seem somehow inherent in the changes I am considering, matters are not quite so straightforward. To invoke the notion of rights, whether human or moral, is implicitly to pass over decades of neo-Hegelianism and return to Kant in an undiluted form (as we

shall soon see, it can also mean leapfrogging Hegel and Kant and returning more or less directly to Aquinas). It requires a serious, and not merely casual, abandoning of the intellectual baggage of Marxism, and it has immediate implications for a reading of the relationship of the individual to the community, in a part of the world where that relationship has not been seriously questioned by the radical intelligentsia since the 1930s. It will be noted that similar consequences are entailed in the contemporary vogue for "rights talk" in Western political philosophy, although very little communication has taken place at the higher reaches of analytical argument (very, very few East Central Europeans are acquainted with even the better-known rights theorists of the recent Anglo-American school). Perhaps this amounts to little more than a statement of the finitude of moral options -- the death of Marxism in France, the only Western nation with a Communist party of major significance fully Stalinized in the post-war years, has produced a similar fascination with the language of rights in recent years.

Focussing on rights, in this case civil rights, has one initial strategic advantage. It provides the opposition with a way of engaging the regime, in a curious echo of the common language of Marxism of the revisionist era. All the Soviet bloc constitutions pay great attention to the duties of the citizen, and thus of necessity contain an implicit language of rights. Even if these are only rights to, rather than rights against, they engage the state in a relationship with the citizen contingent on some mutually performed acts enshrined in law. When the Helsinki accords provided a further package of specific rights to those already proclaimed, the opportunity became obvious. As Petr Pithart notes, the object becomes not to claim some rights as yet unpossessed, but to assert the claim to those already acknowledged. This gives opposition a positive, almost conservative air, while placing the regime on the defensive (or at least obliging it to reveal its own illegality).[5]

Beyond the strategic advantage lies a deeper consideration. Rights detotalize. They are things possessed by the individual, not the state -- they can be abused and they can be ignored, but they cannot be removed (we have the right to life whether or not other people decide to kill us). They are in their very existence witness to the space between individuals and the state, and are thus constitutive of civil, or bourgeois, society. This is what I take Haraszti to mean when he writes of the human rights movement constituting "l'avanguardia dell'imborghesimento e contemporaneamente del movimento dei lavoratori," and it is without doubt what Mihály Vajda is pointing to when he speaks of a preference for the supremacy of the bourgeois after the "unbearable historical experience of the tyranny of the citizen."[6] The same point was made by Adam Michnik in 1978.[7]

These are civil rights, or perhaps "human rights" (the

confusion as to the finer distinctions at issue here is not normally thought to be important in these writings). Characteristically, the Czechs have been more inclined to focus upon the moral benefits of thinking in terms of rights. Václav Havel, for one, was arguing as far back as April 1968 that it was necessary to use a vocabulary of "good" and "evil" rather than the more instrumental terms still in vogue then, and he has acquired many followers since that time.[8] The difficulty here is that at this level of abstraction one is not really engaging in any sort of conversation with the state; one is living one's rights rather than defending or proclaiming them. It is not at all coincidental that this "moral" end of the spectrum is to be found in the national intelligentsia most isolated from other social groups in its society. In Poland rights language had already surfaced in the workers' press before Solidarity, taking its cue from the International Labor Organization's conventions and other international documents.[9] Although these social rights are epistemologically distinct from the kind employed by intellectuals, they served as a bridge and kept Polish rights vocabulary in closer touch with popular sentiment, here as in other matters.

If rights provided a convenient common vocabulary on which all could agree (in part by ignoring the small print), they also exercised a purchase on the Central European imagination for a further reason. The state in Soviet-type societies is an instrumental organ, not a constitutional one. In Leninist terms this has to be the case, since it is one of the central distinguishing features of such a state. But there is something peculiarly offensive about this proposition in cultures which historically looked to the tradition of the Rechtsstaat. The preoccupation with legalism among the Czechs especially can be traced to such concerns, but it is at the very heart of the legal and political traditions of Hungary, Poland, and Germany too. Taking with pedantic seriousness the letter of the law is not just a tactic, it is a genuine expression of desire, the historical wish fathering the political thought. Notice how important it had seemed in Poland, for example, to institutionalize the gains of 1980/81. In Hungary János Kis and others have brought the point fully into the open in their expressed desire to see a return to the distinction between public law and private or civil law (a distinction unknown in the Anglo-American tradition but central to codified Roman law), with rights and identities attached to all persons, real and social, individual and economic.[10] Such a formalizing of the sphere of civil society (reducing the state to little more than the institutional guardian of the social terrain) is not only a way of breaking with the old ways of talking politics in this part of the world; it is also an attempt to link that break with concerns of earlier times, forging a constitutional continuity with the pre-socialist past. Here more than anywhere the peculiarly Central European historical imagination can be seen at work.

The fact that rights provides a vocabulary is in itself a matter of some importance, independent of the cognitive status of the rights themselves. In totalitarian societies, the official language fills the public space, and any recovery of that space entails discovering a language of one's own. Hence the recent efflorescence of religious practice (even among the historically agnostic Czechs). The language of religion, precisely because it simply does not engage the language of the state, is not polluted by it in the way that the socialist discourse has been. This point perhaps bears some elaboration. Much of the citizenry of central and eastern Europe never ceased to be religious -- Lutheran in the GDR, Catholic in Poland, Slovakia, and northern Yugoslavia, Orthodox and (unofficially) Uniate in Romania, etc. But the public language was exclusively that of real socialism. In recent years however this has changed. Intellectuals first began to talk <u>to</u> the Church, and in some cases then began to sound <u>like</u> the Church, to the point that in the GDR the Bund der Evangelischen Kirchen is in practice the major host to oppositional activities and pronouncements. Because the language of rights is close to (and of course derivative from) that of the western religious tradition, the distinction between the discourse of the intellectual opposition and that of the church has become very unclear. This gives the opposition a vastly expanded potential constituency, and it strengthens it by associating it with the only surviving pre-socialist institution, something which would once have been a source of embarrassment but is so no longer. This is less of an advantage in a country like Hungary where the bishops have been notoriously pusillanimous, but even there it is no handicap.

These developments should be kept distinct from the internal history of religion in these lands, where it is often associated with national and ethnic minorities, and where its strengths and weaknesses have been largely independent of the history of non-religious opposition (though not of course independent of the events which affected them both). My point here is simply that the particular value of the language of rights as a lever for generating space and pluralism in public conversation is considerably enhanced by its capacity to ride piggy-back upon a hitherto-submerged language of religious commitment and morality. The net interim result is to end the monopoly of language-as-power.

"These are perhaps impractical methods in today's world and very difficult to apply in daily life. Nevertheless, I know no better alternative."

Václav Havel, <u>Politika a svědomí</u>

Once you have adopted a new language, and in doing so implicitly both rejected the claims of the regime and challenged its monopoly, what next? If you are advocating "anti-political politics," what precisely are you doing?[11] To some extent, one can answer this question in general terms. The idea is to live "as if" -- to "play at being citizens...[to] make speeches as if we were grown-up and legally independent."[12] By simply living as though free, rather than demanding of the regime freedoms you know it will not/cannot grant, one creates the very social sphere whose existence one seeks.[13] The object, in Michnik's words, becomes not "how should the system of government be changed," but rather "how should we defend ourselves against this system"; one seeks not to advise the government on how it should govern, but to suggest to the nation how it might live -- to suggest by example above all.[14]

Even within these general propositions there are, of course, wide variations of understanding. The anti-political nature of this sort of opposition has gone furthest in Czechoslovakia (although in recent writings there has been evidence of division on this point).[15] It was Milan Kundera who wrote that "one of the lyric illusions of our time is that political discussion leads to the heart of the real"; and it is in Havel's essay on the Power of the Powerless that this version of the new approach found its most articulate expression.[16] Ludvík Vaculík has written of Czechoslovakia as of a land struck by a social neutron bomb, with undamaged empty people mechanically living out their existences. With the regime having an "outpost in every citizen" (Havel), it is the people, not political programs, which need to be replenished. For some Czechs, even the very suggestion of political activity smacks of compromise: "The very act of forming a political grouping forces one to start playing a power game, instead of giving truth priority."[17] The psychic wounds of 1968 run deep.

It would be facile to attribute this moralism and withdrawal to some peculiarly Czech penchant for Švejkian scepticism (not least because it applies equally to Slovak writers for whom Švejk is a foreign creation). In some ways, after all, the approach of Charter 77 is not only a realistic response to the particular circumstances of repression there, but a very political one, treating the state as a subject for moral and political analysis, rather than as some sort of disinterested manager, as it was seen by many of the Czech revisionists of the early sixties. Havel's open letters, or the hundreds of Charter 77 documents and statements, are deliberately addressed as though to a responsive government, even though their true target is the silent society in-between. But after ten years of unilateral communications, the frustration is audible. In 1982, Charter 77 admitted that the state was not listening to it, but thought this irrelevant. Five years later there is real fear of isolation, and the Czech opposition is split between those who wish to re-engage the

mundane questions of political organization and those who would make a virtue of repressive necessity and reduce the whole question to one of the achieving of national moral integrity by individual example.

The same set of themes arranges itself differently in Hungary. There is no lack of self-laceration in Budapest as well, of course, and many would agree with Agnes Heller that Realpolitik is the "cemetery of the Central European political imagination."[18] But even the most resolute anti-realist cannot wholly ignore the siren-like charms of Kádárism. To go from the austere pronouncements in Prague to the uncertain and multifold discussions in Budapest is to move from the Sermon on the Mount to the moneychangers in the Temple. To practice the politics of "as if" in Hungary means first determining the boundaries of the existing unfreedom, and this itself is highly indeterminate. Because there is some genuine space for public political activity, there inevitably exists some argument for behaving politically in the traditional sense, and thus divided opinion at a more strategic level than in the Czech lands.[19] Although the views of György Bencze and Kis, for example, that organizational autonomy is an end in itself, are recognizably related to the reasoning of the Chartists, they and others cannot help but see that autonomy as precisely a space in which to talk about organization. Precisely because rights activists are virtually a professional category in contemporary Hungary, merely existing cannot be its own end. But anything more requires programmatic considerations, and these are not only internally divisive (as we shall see) but involve an implicit re-engagement with the political world whose terms are set by the regime. And to be very well aware of this paradox is not to resolve it. Hence the frustration which one senses in the Hungarian opposition and which is absent in the Czech case.[20]

The Polish opposition has in these respects been more fortunate. Unlike the Czechs it has been both enabled and obliged to relate its abstract reflections to the immediate needs of a variety of social constituencies, and this has given Polish writing on the subject a sharper edge. And in contrast with the Hungarians, the Poles have spread the paradoxes of their situation out across a period of years, whereas for the Hungarians the dilemma of Kádárism has been a constant since the first stirring of the new opposition. From 1976 to 1979 KOR could perforce do little more than make its point by example, by declaration, and by argument. "Practicing society" as a new form of activity (Jacek Kuroń) was something it could do, but it was also all that it could do. Then there came Solidarity, which provided both a social ally and a social space -- indeed, by coming into being it made KOR redundant. The distinction between an open and a closed society, which Michnik wished to see replace the defunct categories of Left and Right, now formed part of the lived experience of millions of non-intellectual Poles. The

implicit splits among the Hungarians, over programmatic goals and the desirability of behaving politically, became explicit in the widening debates in Solidarity over its means and ends. Michnik's theory of opposition as the evolution of ceaseless struggles for specific reforms which would simultaneously extend civil freedoms came about in fact.

The imposition of martial law, the semi-effective silencing of the opposition, the imprisonment and arbitrary release of prominent individuals, all served to focus attention over time on the dilemma of Solidarity in its last months of open activity: a self-limiting revolution avoids some traps, but in the act of admitting its self-imposed constraints it contradicts the wider goals of its supporters and theorists. By 1986 the debate turned not so much on teaching society to be free (the astonishing range of underground publications and the implicit admission by the regime that it is forced to respond to them reveals an achievement in this domain unimaginable before 1980, or in most other Soviet-bloc countries), but once again on how much to engage the regime on its own terms, and what pressure to bring in the course of such engagement. Whether to compromise, and to what end, is once again a theme in the Polish debates, and no one has any very clear response to propose. But a decade of movement makes this temporary cul-de-sac somehow more real than in Hungary, where the political topography has not been mapped on the ground.

The inevitable inadequacy of the "new politics" should not blind us to its originality. It was no mean achievement to set aside the endless discussions about the "system" and concentrate instead on talking to and within a civil society which had virtually to be reconstituted. Just how original this was can be noted through the contrast with the East German opposition of the seventies, which was actually much better known in the West. Not only did the much-admired Bahro actually dismiss the renewed discussion of rights and democracy as "obsessions" of the intellectuals, but pluralism itself was not seen as a desirable goal. What was proposed was increased freedom of opinion <u>within</u> the ruling Party and a <u>return</u> to the undefiled goals of the Communist revolution. Only in the past three years has the East German opposition begun gingerly to adopt the themes of the Czech or Polish opposition, and even then on a case by case basis, rather than as part of a new way of engaging public debate. On close <u>internal</u> comparison, Michnik and Havel, Vaculík and Haraszti, Kis and Kuroń display important differences of moral and political emphasis. But set against their own past, or the present elsewhere, the importance of their common conversation is hard to overestimate.

At this point one should perhaps move to a discussion of the

issues which form the substance of the language of opposition. But there is a difficulty here, of which many activists and writers are themselves only too well aware. The themes which lie at the center of political discussion in East Central Europe today are frequently social or cultural. To the extent that they are political this is because the term has been redefined to include them. What they are not, with special exceptions, are economic.

This is remarkable. Economics lay at the epicenter of socialist politics in Europe, and especially in the Soviet sphere. This was partly because economics was what socialism was long thought to be about, and also because economic change became both the goal and the measure of socialist achievement during and after Stalin. And finally economics was what socialist political argument was about because the economic problems of the socialist states could not be ignored, and because critical discussion couched in economic proposals was the nearest thing to a licensed opposition in the crucial period 1956-66. Because of this intimate association of economic debate with the language of intra-socialist discussion, the subject fell victim to the radical shift of concerns in the mid-seventies. But the economic problems and paradoxes have not disappeared. And therefore, just as the question of what to do with the language of rights and the tactics of living "as if" might be called the "problem of politics," so the complex of troubling questions associated with the political economy of East Central Europe is the "problem of socialism."

There seem to me to be some quite distinct issues in play here. The first, and the one most readily overlooked in the West, is that a revolution really did take place in Central and Eastern Europe, though not perhaps the one usually described in official Soviet literature. The Second World War destroyed much of the social fabric of this part of Europe, and what there was of capitalism substantially disappeared, all the more so in that it had frequently been in the hands of ethnic and religious minorities which had either been killed or were deported in the post-war "resettlements." The state sector, social services, and collective economic organization expanded enormously, <u>before</u> the Communist take-over in many cases (the most extreme of which was of course Czechoslovakia, which had a heavily nationalized and left-social-democratic regime before 1948, widely supported across the political spectrum). With the special exception of agriculture, this is not something which could be readily reversed. And to the extent that socialism is associated with a variety of welfare provisions, social security systems and guarantees, a "return" to capitalism would not be regarded with favor by most people. This is something on which there seems to be agreement across the broadest of opinion spectrums, from Michnik to Czesław Miłosz, via Kundera and even Havel.[21] The point could be sustained at a more analytical level either by

reference to social expectations today or by a glance at the role that the state has always played in the political economy of this region. It is something that is intuitively obvious to most of the opposition and a source of some confusion.

The second point concerns the economy itself. The way in which the economy is organized under socialism is profoundly irrational, a point too well known to need elaboration here. Fixed pricing systems make it impossible to ascertain real costs or respond to needs and resource constraints. Waste and shortage are mutually self-sustaining, via managerial efforts to hide reserves of material and labor from the administration. Maintaining consumer satisfaction (the only interim social goal to which the state can reasonably aspire) requires the accumulation of trade deficits, in systems geared primarily to the production of industrial goods, but the trade deficits can only be reduced by the manufacture and sale of non-consumer goods, since the West has little use for socialist commodities (unless sold at a loss, which destroys the object of the exercise). And so on.

But to be irrational is not to be dysfunctional. What sustains socialism is the non-socialist economy. In its most extreme form, this means that, for example, 35,000 artisans, operating exclusively in the private sector, were meeting nearly 60 percent of Hungarian demand for services as early as 1975 (the figure today is presumably higher still). Add to this private peasant production, diverted resources in the public sector being utilized by workers for private enterprise, and it can be seen that real socialism, much like Italian capitalism, depends heavily on a parallel economy. Indeed, it can only maintain its public monopoly by channelling into the private sphere all activities and needs that it can neither deny nor meet. However, the relationship is symbiotic. The second economy depends upon the first economy for its survival; it channels resources away from it (often illegally), but above all the very inefficiency of the public sector guarantees it a market and artificially elevates its value and thereby its profits. There is a delicate balance here, weighted differently in different countries but universally present. Any reform which radically undermined, or threatened to undermine, the relationship would not only be dangerous -- it might not even be popular.

To this problem one should add a further one. Just because the opposition wishes to decouple social analysis from the socialist language in which it has been entangled for the past forty years, this does not mean that the relationship which socialism proposes between politics and economic life has been decoupled in reality. Quite the contrary. As Támás Bauer among others has demonstrated, economic reforms of even the most localized and micro-efficient kind have immediate political ramifications, in a system where the legitimacy of the state

rests precisely upon the universality of its function. The economic system of socialism is a political system (indeed its rationality is a political rationality, against which the economic absurdities it generates are secondary). No economic bishop, no political king. To give managerial autonomy on pricing decisions, to allow redundancies and market-oriented output criteria, is not only to threaten the careers and power of an important stratum of managers, bureaucrats, and employees, but calls radically into question the unlimited power of the Party itself. The connection between even mild economic reform and a questioning of the whole institutional structure was made clear in Czechoslovakia in 1968. It lay behind the powerful opposition to the New Economic Mechanism in Hungary in the early seventies, and it was implicitly crucial to the threat posed by Solidarity. It will not go away just because the opposition takes care not to speak openly of the need to limit the role of the Party. And that is why they have been wary of even engaging <u>à fond</u> the subject of major economic change.

And yet at the same time, the economic black hole into which some of the socialist economies are now tumbling is too obvious to pass undiscussed. As Michnik has explained (and he was echoed in a Charter 77 document this year), the collapse of the work ethic, the disastrous inefficiency of the socialist social contract ("you pretend to work, we pretend to pay you"), is not something about which any morally responsible opposition can remain silent. Prices of basic goods rose by up to 50 percent in Poland this year; the Hungarian deficit on current account in 1986 was 1.4 billion dollars; the national revenue in 1986 in both countries had actually fallen since the late seventies; the GDR lives at its present level from handouts supplied by Bonn; and so forth. Things may well be about to get worse, as the Gorbachëv regime improves its trade deficit with the West by sharpening still further the terms of its trade with its satellites.[22]

Linked to all of the above, and perhaps most significant in the long run for any social movements of opposition, is the issue of the working class in socialist societies. The sense of isolation from the industrial labor force felt by many intellectuals (most in Czechoslovakia, least in Poland, but omnipresent) is very much to the fore in the consciousness of the modern opposition. With the exception of a fairly brief period in the fifties in Czechoslovakia, the intelligentsia has not suffered unduly under socialism (which accounts for the sense some of them have that these are actually regimes based on the class power of the intellectuals, an argument whose reasoning strikes me as subtle but somewhat solipsistic!). The activists of the sixties in Poland, and the prominent opposition spokesmen of the eighties everywhere, are the children (sometimes literally) of the ruling class of the first generation of socialist power. Education and privilege pass reasonably

efficiently down the generations, especially in Hungary. This isolates the radical opposition and does not endear it to the mass of the population.

This isolation is then exacerbated by the effective absence of shared interests. In the short run, many workers, especially the less-skilled, have a stake in the continuation of the present economic arrangements, which seem to ensure social security and a low level of pressure and exploitation at the workplace (or, to be more precise, a fear, not ungrounded, that almost any reform in the direction of greater efficiency and productivity would make of them and their working day its first victims). Similarly, there are many skilled artisans and private entrepreneurs who could not but lose in any improvement on the part of the public service sector, even if that improvement entailed a general loosening of restrictions on their own activities as well. One has only to look at the recent spate of strikes in Yugoslavia to see the immediate social costs of decentralized decision taking and market-oriented micro-planning (not to mention the likely responses of the state to such overt evidence of social disaffection).

One could go further. Some have argued that there is now something akin to a "labor aristocracy" in Eastern Europe, affiliated by common interest to the lower levels of management and to the security apparatus, all of whom derive their members from the same social strata. These people have much to lose and little initially to gain from genuine economic reform. How can the opposition appeal to such people? And what happens if it fails to do so?[23]

Of course, there <u>is</u> a working class constituency for opposition and reform, in Poland above all. It has an immediate interest in the more rational distribution of consumer goods, like anyone else, but also in the reform of the trade unions, the latter to represent its interests to the state and the public at large. It has social as well as economic reasons for wishing to see improvements in working conditions, housing, education, health care, an end to inefficient and arbitrary management. The <u>decline</u> in social mobility which marked East Central Europe from the early seventies has made this working class constituency more cohesive and more potentially volatile. There is, as Szelényi notes, "a workers' opposition in Eastern Europe which awaits its ideologies."[24] But almost any conceivable ideology which could respond to these demands, while offering a set of rational proposals for economic change, would under present conditions <u>have</u> to ask of the workers a decline in real wages, increased real unemployment, and greater productivity. Whenever such sacrifices have been sought in the European past by radical movements and parties, they have been accompanied either by promises of a revolutionary future or else guarantees of complementary benefits to be provided by the social-democratic

state. Or both. The opposition in East Central Europe today cannot promise such things, nor does it wish to be drawn into doing so. Small wonder that the economic question is off the agenda, except pro forma.

The desire to avoid old styles of politics and the need to avoid certain controversial economic issues entail their own opportunity costs. Not the least of these is real self-doubt: how isolated is the opposition, especially in Czechoslovakia and Hungary? But they have the distinct benefit of focussing attention instead on the sorts of issues I have called "social" or "cultural." These have their own appeal -- they are not the sort of thing which monopolized discussion in earlier times, and thus emphasize the radical break with the past. By moving to "single-issue" politics the opposition is more flexible and able to respond to new problems and new generations, without the need to fit its response into any previously-established general theory or program. At the same time there is almost no theme open to adoption by the opposition which does not, sooner or later, bring the discussion back to rights and freedoms. This is simply because however anodine the topic (in some cases it may even be a concern shared by those in power), the very fact of organizing petitions, meetings, and protests outside the official sphere is an act of political independence of which the state must disapprove. And when it does that, it serves to remind the signers and protesters of the restrictions upon their freedoms, and converts them not infrequently from mild defenders of the environment or the Gypsies into civil-rights activists. To the extent that this process functions, it turns the Party-state into the source of its own opposition, while enabling the opposition itself to avoid direct challenges. Something similar has on occasion begun to happen in "single-issue" protest movements in the West (notably in West Germany, Austria, and the UK), but the continued residual legitimacy of traditional politics and the vastly greater sensitivity of the government (not to speak of the protection of the law) have normally kept such movements at the level of their initial concerns. We are thus perhaps inclined to underestimate the impact of single-issue politics within the socialist bloc.

For the purposes of illustration I shall discuss six subjects which recur frequently in the writings of the opposition in East Central Europe. All are of contemporary significance, but they fall along two distinct axes. There are subjects which are essentially new (the environment, the problem of peace and disarmament), and others which have been at the heart of Central European politics since the late nineteenth century (minorities, the problem of nationalism). But there is also a clear distinction between topics of public concern (the environment, peace and disarmament, certain minority questions) and those

which are still confined to conversations within the opposition itself (the re-emergence of nationalism, the writing of history, the identity of the region itself). At the limit these distinctions blur, of course. Furthermore, the analytical distinction between matters of public concern and those which obsess the opposition itself is one which many of the latter would wish to see obliterated. But the existence of these distinctions remains intuitively undeniable.

The extent of the environmental disaster in Central Europe is widely acknowledged (I use the term Central Europe here advisedly -- eco-systems recognize few socially constructed frontiers and the German-speaking lands are intimately affected, which helps account for the "greening" effect in the politics of the region East and West). Czechoslovakia is the worst hit. Northern Bohemia has the worst air pollution in Europe, largely because of the use of (cheap) brown coal in industrial and energy production there. Of 73.5 billion kwh of power generated in the region in 1981, 64 billion came from plants burning this high-sulphur fuel. As a result, by 1983 some 35 percent of all Czech forests were dead or dying, and one-third of all Czech water courses were too polluted even for industrial use. In Slovakia, according to the regime's <u>own</u> figures, 81 percent of well water in the eastern part of the republic was unusable for human consumption. This is in large part due to the heavy use of fertilizer on the collective farms of the area (which has also produced agricultural disasters similar to those experienced in the black soil areas of the Soviet Union, and for similar reasons). The 3,500 miles of rivers in Slovakia were "dangerously" polluted in the order of 45 percent, in 1982. And so on.[25]

The situation is almost as bad in the industrial southern Poland and in the GDR (not least because these areas are contiguous with northern Bohemia and downwind of its industrial towns). The industrial region around Cracow is not so badly affected by air pollution, because the coal-fired plants there use a harder, less sulphurous dark coal, but the population density is greater, which makes the social effects almost as serious. It is symptomatic that the Czechoslovak government, which for many years ignored and denied the problem and which has for two decades been unconstrained to respond to public protests of any kind, has nevertheless established in Prague a special hospital service dealing with the respiratory ailments of children. Ivan Klíma, in a short story called "A Christmas Conspiracy," describes stepping out into the streets of the Czech capital: "The dark, cold mist smelled of smoke, sulphur and irritability."[26] It is like the awful smoggy London of one's youth, only worse.

It is the state which pollutes, in a socialist society. But it is the society which suffers, with little distinction.

Accordingly pollution is a subject about which everyone cares, and the Czechs, Poles, and East Germans have been vocal on the subject. The subject is also intensely political: the reason that it is so hard to protect the environment is that the administration of any given mine, factory, or farm has no incentive to take preventive measures. Since charges are fixed and there is no price constraint on raw materials (availability is another matter), waste makes sense. And with production targets to reach there is no reason to increase costs and reduce output by installing filter systems, using clean fuels, restricting the spread of fertilizer into the sub-soil. Only effective and consistently applied official sanctions could achieve such an end, and these would of course be emanating from the same authority which was encouraging the economic calculations which create the crisis. Nor, given the endemic corruption in the relations between bureaucracy and managers, would any given manager have the slightest reason to suppose that he was doing anything other than cutting his own throat by the serious application of measures to control pollution. What about his quotas? And what about the behavior of his "competitors?"

The difficulties inherent in raising such matters have been well illustrated in the public outcry over the proposed diversion of the Danube between Gabčikovo in Slovakia and Nagymaros in Hungary. This is a joint plan originally drawn up in the fifties (the Hungarian discussants were led by Ernö Gerö), and which the Slovaks wish to press to completion. The Hungarian authorities no longer consider the hydro-electric benefits worth the cost, and they are well aware of the serious ecological implications of a thirty-kilometer-long diversion for the surrounding land. The first public protests surfaced in 1981, culminating in the creation of the Danube Circle, a group dedicated to educating the public to the risks of the proposal and to supporting the government in its hesitation about proceeding. In 1986 it was claimed that some ten thousand signatories had committed themselves in public against the project.

Yet the Danube Circle and other such groups found themselves on the receiving end of severe official disapproval, forcing them to disband. What makes such protest intolerable, even when it is on a subject about which the authorities themselves are doubtful, is precisely that it takes place <u>outside</u> the official sphere, creating a <u>public</u> difference of opinion. It is thus implicitly an act of political pluralism, which moves from being a protest about the dam to a protest about the restriction on the right to launch such protests. The latest proposal, which is that the Austrians should pay much of the Hungarian share of the project's costs, in return for receiving the electricity that Budapest no longer needs, provoked an open letter from Hungarian intellectuals to the Austrian public. It was signed by almost anyone who is anyone in the Hungarian opposition, including Miklós Haraszti, András Hegedus, János Kenedi, János Kis, György

Konrád, and László Rajk. What began as a technical discussion within the environmentally-active circles in Hungary ends as a minor cause célèbre in the shadow wars between government and opposition. It is also worth calling attention to the machiavellian intelligence of the decision to involve Austria; Vienna gets desperately needed cheap electricity without provoking its own environmental movement (as in its earlier aborted efforts to establish nuclear energy), while the Hungarian state can at least claim that it has saved face by saving money.

Protests over the destruction of the environment thus do not get very far (and if not in Hungary, then assuredly not elsewhere). But they establish a link with both a wider public and a younger one. The youthful quality of green politics is no less evident in this area than in the Federal Republic or the Netherlands, and it is no accident that the signatories listed above, or their contemporaries in Prague and Warsaw, are taking public stands on the subject, one about which they had nothing to say some few short years back. This is truly an issue which emerged around them and to which they have learned to respond.

When it comes to the subject of peace and the nuclear question, it is a little more complicated. The two issues are connected, of course -- the environmentalists all over Europe see nuclear energy and nuclear weapons as one problem, and the youthful constituency for these topics is similar. But although one can discuss air pollution as though it were a non-political, non-Party problem, any consideration of weapons and the peace movement is geopolitical from the first. That is why Solidarity largely avoided it, and it is also why the opposition has paid it much more attention.

Ever since the late 1940s the socialist states have been officially "peace-loving," and all maintain various organized umbrella institutions in which official pronouncements are made in favor of peace and disarmament. Thus any movement within the socialist countries which pronounces itself in favor of these matters and wishes to work for them, but which insists on operating outside of the official committees, is vulnerable to charges of anti-state activity. But this is a minor inhibition. More serious is the fact that for most members of the opposition, the Western peace movements which emerged in the seventies and which appealed to them to form a common front fell into the category of "useful idiots," men and women who seriously believe that there is no significant moral difference between the United States and the USSR, that peace and survival are more important than freedom and dignity, etc. Havel, for example, saw the struggle against war as the perfect vehicle for diverting, engaging, and neutralizing the Western intelligentsia.[27] In Prague, of course, the association of Western dreams of peace at any price and Munich is still strong. But everywhere in the socialist regimes there were two replies constantly reiterated

whenever the question arose: "peace" is not possible in countries where the state is permanently at war with society, so that one cannot separate the "peace" question from that of rights and liberties; peace and disarmament under present conditions leaves Western Europe free and independent, it leaves Eastern Europe under Soviet control. What is more, it undermines the defense of Western Europe, which is the best hope of survival and change for the East.

This set of responses can still be met with anywhere in East Central Europe, but it is undergoing considerable change (and was doing so even before Gorbachëv came to power). In the first place, the opposition has had to respond to a very real wish for "peace" (in the Western sense) on the part of a new generation, the generation for whom John Lennon is the troubadour of "Give Peace a Chance" (as one opposition figure in Prague pointed out to me, for his own generation Lennon still signified the Beatles and Liverpool-accented English learned from underground tapes). Secondly, the Western peace movement has begun (slowly) to listen to the voices from the East, and in April 1986 a Charter 77 statement acknowledged the growing convergence and agreement on the need to associate rights with any lasting peace (though it reminded the Milan Forum to which it was addressed that the Western activists still sought to equate the two camps and establish neutral territory in-between, something the Charter rejects). Finally, as with the environment, it has become difficult to maintain a separation between the demand for rights and civil liberties and certain protests directly associated with the peace issue.

Thus in Hungary the Peace Group for Dialogue was forced to dissolve itself after refusing in 1983 to merge with the (official) National Peace Council. In the same year the issue of conscientious objection to military service emerged into the public eye. Because (in contrast with the situation in Poland or the GDR) the official Church refused to give its approval, support for conscientious objectors was undertaken by individual priests, and by local committees set in motion by the example of SZETA (Foundation for the Support of the Poor, established in 1979 on the example of the Czech VONS). In Poland, the Freedom and Peace movement recently collected 2,000 signatures in Gdańsk to protest against the building of the first Polish nuclear power station at Żarnowiec, and has openly linked nuclear energy, nuclear weapons, and civil liberties in its publications and meetings. Many of its supporters are people who were not old enough to experience the self-restraint and ambivalence of the Solidarity years when it came to these sensitive problems, and their approach marks a decisive shift, one which the leading figures in the Polish opposition certainly recognize, but which has yet to be incorporated into their own outlook.

In the GDR, of course, it is all very different. The German

state certainly pursues a similar line on the peace question to that proclaimed in other socialist lands, but it has achieved a far deeper resonance in the nation. No doubt this is in part through the osmotic effect of the West German media, the barrier of language which helps to separate Western and Eastern discussions of peace being of course absent. But there is something else. The GDR exists for geopolitical reasons. It is not a historical state, nor is it a distinct cultural unit, and no amount of lionization of Frederick and Luther can alter that. It can with some shard of plausibility describe peace as its raison d'être. Yet at the same time it is the most militarized and militaristic of the socialist states. Since 1977 "Defense Studies" have been introduced into the schools, and the Youth Movement is in effect a para-military training organization. The tension generated by this perceived paradox has found its outlet in an opposition movement which derives a large part of its legitimacy and support from its concentration on the issue of peace and disarmament.

One possible circumstantial reason for the depth of feeling on the subject is this. Much of the dissident population of the region went west, until that option ceased in August 1961. Six months later, in February 1962, the state passed a conscription law, making military service of eighteen months compulsory for men aged 18-50. But two years later it introduced an escape clause: those who wished to avoid military service on grounds of conscience could join the Bausoldaten. Although membership of this unit could prove disadvantageous in later life, the state was nonetheless recognizing the existence and the legitimacy of dissent in the question of military activity. By 1980 there were thousands of men in the GDR who had passed through the Bausoldaten, and who represented a substantial potential network of support for peace activists. The other important factor was the Lutheran churches, tolerated by the regime until the eighties, encouraged since then as part of the campaign to appropriate Luther for the heritage of the history-less GDR.

When Lutheran pastors began to offer support and protection to the early peace activists, beginning in 1980 with the first Friedensdekaden held in the churches, they were able to do so to a considerable extent without incurring disapproval from the state. Even when some churchmen engaged their own churches in support of the ideas of the opposition, they received only quiet words of disapproval and discouragement (to which they mostly paid heed). The process expanded considerably with the stationing of new Soviet missiles in 1983/84, and contemporary with the first big successes of the Greens in the Federal Republic. It spread from the churches to the universities. And inevitably it raised not only demands for disarmament, but also the demand for the right to articulate these demands without restriction. And in this way the opposition in the GDR has finally found a way to communicate with the opposition in the

rest of the socialist bloc, freed of the mortgage of traditional Communist discourse associated with it as recently as 1978 by the writings of Bahro and others of his generation.

These developments are fascinating, but their significance is uncertain and their future unclear. The reasons that Solidarity had for shying away from this issue still obtain, albeit in the background. And I am not at all convinced that Michnik, Havel, or the Hungarians have found a way to be comfortable with the implications of placing peace at the center of their agenda, for all that they can no longer ignore it. And even if they could achieve this they would still not be pacifists, a fact which distinguishes them from both many of the East Germans and nearly all the Western activists. For the record, Charter 77 appealed to Gorbachëv, on the occasion of his Prague visit in April of this year, to withdraw Soviet troops from Czechoslovakia and remove all nuclear warheads. And if he were to do so? And similar steps were taken in Hungary and Poland and the GDR (unthinkable, but let that pass)? What then? The opposition would still be facing regimes which proclaimed the leading role of the Party, denied a pluralist social sphere and ignored the rights enshrined in their constitutions. And if in the absence of Soviet troops the regimes were to collapse? Would the USSR intervene? That is the question, and it is essentially independent of details of weaponry and warheads. Until then better to have a well-defended Western Europe, they reason; it entails accepting a heavily armed eastern bloc, but the converse does not follow. There is thus just a touch of bad faith in the support offered by the opposition to the young disarmers of East Central Europe. Or perhaps it would be fairer to see it as a tactical move, another arena in which the regime is forced to acknowledge its refusal to accommodate its own population, and the population gets a further lesson in the indivisibility of freedom. Or, maybe, it is simpler still. The issue of peace is on the agenda of a new generation, and the opposition has little choice but to respond.

You cannot help sensing a sigh of relief in the opposition literature when the discussion turns to older, more familiar themes, even when these are no less complex or sensitive than the matters just noted. The problem of nationalism illustrates this rather well. It is a traditional theme of debate and disagreement, in a part of the world beset by overlapping ethnic and political boundaries; but it has also taken on new form and importance as a result of the socialist experience.

In essence there are two separate issues here. The first is that of the identity of the nation-state in Central Europe. History has gone some way towards resolving this issue: Poland is almost a homogenous unit, and it sits within boundaries which, though far from natural, are probably unlikely to alter for many years. Czechoslovakia is two distinct nations, but incorporated

into a state which will probably survive, something that was far from clear for much of its short life. The Slovaks, many of whom rather favored the puppet Slovak state of the war years, are now a favored group within the federated republic. The GDR is a historical accident, but no more so than all the other Germanies which have proclaimed their necessity since 1848. Romania, like Poland, has settled frontiers which were achieved by ceding something to the Soviet Union and getting a chunk of someone else as implied compensation. (Hungary is perhaps the exception [leaving aside the uniquely problematic case of Yugoslavia]. There are too many Hungarian nationals living in Transylvania and Slovakia, and under disadvantageous conditions, for the Hungarians to regard the national question as solved. And since, in the Romanian territories at least, things are actually getting worse, the question is emerging rather than subsiding.)

The furious arguments around these questions which characterized the history of East Central Europe from 1848 to 1939 are thus largely in the past. But the <u>way</u> in which they have been resolved has created difficulties of its own. For if there has been one response to the Soviet hegemony common to all these countries, it is the resurgence of a certain nationalist discourse, verging on the xenophobic in certain cases, and which is very difficult for the opposition to engage. So long as the opposition was part of the regime, so to speak (spoke its language, shared its stated goals, derived from the same social groups, often disproportionately drawn from unpopular ethnic minorities, especially Jews), it could ignore the feelings of the "nation." In the final analysis, it could look to the USSR for support against the remnants of conservative nationalism at home. And it neither was able to communicate with that nation, nor did it seek to do so.

In the past two decades, all this has changed. Jewish socialists like Michnik began to pay serious attention, as historians and activists, to the views of Catholics and even Polish nationalists. Czech intellectuals ceased to dismiss the perspective of Slovak separatists, at least without closer investigation. The opposition began to talk to the nation. And the nation was not always saying very pleasant things in reply. Because certain subjects remain taboo -- notably the question of national independence vis-à-vis the USSR, or the status of national minorities in other lands where that status was established with Soviet approval -- nationalism must perforce take a cultural form when it is articulated in public. In Hungary this has resulted in a revival of the old debate between urbanists and populists. What is really at issue in that disagreement is the question of Hungary's national orientation (East/West?) and the choice between conservative social arrangements and a more urban, egalitarian, industrial social system. But what it comes out as today is a debate over where things went wrong (i.e. where Hungary lost its autonomy and its

traditions), and that comes out sounding very much like a nationalist charge of treason at the social groups (not least the ethnic minorities) which participated in the destruction of Hungary's past. Because the Communist era is frequently seen as one instituted and dominated by outsiders, the nation itself is posited as a victim of non-Hungarian forces (see the startling passage in the memoirs of Cardinal Mindszenty, where he reminds his readers that "we [his family] all came from ancient Hungarian families and all our relations bear genuine Hungarian family names" -- a theme repeated more than once in the course of the book[28]).

In Hungary the present government treads carefully, identifying itself with such nationalist outbursts (frequently associated with protests on behalf of the Transylvanians) while discouraging their public expression. The same applies in Poland, where the Party simultaneously covers itself in the national flag and appeals to the Catholic Church for cooperation as one "national institution" addressing another, is not utterly displeased by the activities of the Grunwald Patriotic Union, yet takes care to discourage reference to Katyń, the post-war frontier shifts or the vexed history of Poland, and its relations with its powerful neighbor to the East. In an odd way, the opposition behaves likewise. Within Solidarity there was always a potential for division along democratic or nationalist lines, and the leadership then and since made valiant efforts to avoid conflict on these issues. The serious risk of a re-emergence of much of the pre-war political spectrum was one that the Polish opposition had no choice but to run, though it leaves them very uncomfortable. In the same way, Hungarians like Kis recognize that the destruction of traditional values wrought by real socialism has created a vacuum into which an ugly, resentful nationalism can flow; yet they do not want to be pushed completely aside by the onrush of nationalist discourse, and would rather try to engage it.[29] They are peculiarly ill-equipped to achieve this, given their own marginality (much of the Hungarian intellectual opposition is Jewish) and vulnerability, even though the treatment of Hungarian minorities in other countries lends itself very readily to the language of rights and moral protest.

The danger for the opposition of a resurgent nationalism is obvious. The regime can readily use it to mobilize popular support against a dissident minority (as one section of the Polish Party did against Jews, with some success, in 1968). The frustrations and resentments of the majority, even if they cannot be mobilized successfully in support of the regime, can nevertheless be deflected by nationalist rhetoric from consideration of real problems, social, economic, or whatever. And, perhaps most serious of all, nationalism in East Central Europe is historically the opponent of democracy. Not inherently, of course, but by force of circumstance. The

resurrection of nationalist rhetoric is not without its advantages to the socialist state, even though it is implicitly a condemnation of the latter. For it channels attention away from the denial of rights, the restriction on liberty, and the inadequacy of the social and economic infrastructure; instead it places the emphasis on the dislike of outsiders, of change, and of the Soviet-wrought world in particular. Nothing need come of such an emphasis in popular parlance -- Hungary is not going to recover the 66 percent of its territory lost at Trianon; Lvov and Vilna are firmly in the Soviet Union; and Prague is the capital of the Czech lands and Slovakia alike. But in extremis the local government can appeal to the USSR for greater understanding of the pressures it faces at home by offering the example of the nationalist danger (this has been attempted more than once, and with some limited success).

Against such threats the present-day opposition is virtually powerless. But the resurgence of nationalism has prompted it to look harder at another and even more vexed topic of East European history, and one that most people had tended to treat as resolved: the minorities problem. When compared to the ethnic patchwork of 1938, for example (not to speak of 1914), the problem of ethnic, religious, and national minorities in Central and Eastern Europe is much diminished. There is no doubt that this was how it looked to the revisionists of the fifties and sixties, who displayed little interest in it. But even if we once again choose to set aside the special case of Yugoslavia we cannot help being made aware that this is still a rather heterogenous part of our continent. Some data: in a 1978 estimate, Hungary contained 200,000 Germans, 100,000 Slovaks, 80-100,000 South Slavs (mostly Croats), 20-25,000 Romanians, about 100,000 Jews, and an uncertain but large community of Gypsies. The 600,000 Hungarians in Slovakia represent about 11 percent of the population. In 1976 the 2.8 million Hungarians in Romania constituted about 15 percent of the population (there were also about 500,000 ethnic Germans). There are Lithuanian, Ukrainian, and Byelorussian minorities in present-day Poland. And then there are the Jews. Like the Germans, their presence in eastern and central Europe was dramatically reduced by the war and the post-war settlements, but not wholly eradicated. About 17 percent of the 357,000 Jews of pre-war Czechoslovakia survived the war. In Romania there were 400,000 Jews in 1946, although their number had fallen to 30,000 by 1982. And in Poland, Hungary, and Romania what matters is not the number of Jews who survived the holocaust, but the fact that the survivors played a prominent role in the early years of the modern Communist states (until the 1952 purge the Romanian Communist Party consisted almost exclusively at its higher levels of minorities, Jews in particular). Finally, the identity of these ethnic and national minorities is strengthened by the degree to which they are also religious minorities (thus whereas most Romanians in Transylvania are Eastern Orthodox, the Hungarians are Catholic or Calvinist,

the Germans Lutheran or Catholic).[30]

The opposition in East Central Europe has no particular "policy" or attitude on the question of these minorities, other than to demand the obvious: that their right to exist be recognized and protected, that they be free to maintain their linguistic and ethnic identity, to practice their religion, and be accorded genuine equality of treatment. This in itself is something new, of course, though no more so than the very emergence of a language in which such demands can be expressed. Its true relationship to the minority question in the region is more complex. As everyone knows (and as was widely whispered in the Solidarity years and in Hungary today), many of the most prominent activists in Hungary and Poland are of Jewish origin (to employ the phrase used in the Slánsky trial to distinguish eleven of the fourteen defendants). What difference this makes to the reception they find in the community is unclear. In Hungary many of the opposition writers have expressed the fear that all they do is talk to each other, and that this is not unconnected with their isolated social position (of course the Czech samizdat authors also express this unease, and few of them are members of any minority group). In Poland, the re-emergence of discussion surrounding the wartime experience has focussed attention on the Polish-Jewish problem, but it is remarkable how unwilling the opposition has been to take an active part in this soul-searching. And although everyone is interested in the move to re-appropriate with a critical eye the history of these lands (see below), only in Budapest has the opposition made serious efforts to study its <u>own</u> history from the ethnic perspective.[31]

Some of this is a legitimate desire to avoid excessive self-obsession (and in Poland there have been other things to occupy the mind, whereas in Czechoslovakia the alternatives have been cruelly limited). But it may not be altogether unfair to detect traces of the Luxemburgian heresy among the heirs of the Polish Left, less inclined than Czechs or Hungarians to take up the tradition of serious engagement with the national question à la Otto Bauer. Even the direct victims of the persecutions of 1968/70 in Poland are reluctant to admit that things would have been different had they not been Jewish. This is not just a biographical observation. It surely contributed to their myopia in the early eighties, when the question of the remaining minorities in Poland went all-but-undiscussed during Solidarity's congress, for example. And it may handicap them in facing up to the nationalist sentiment which their own successful undermining of the socialist state has helped to release.

I earlier linked the destruction of the Jewish community in the region to the post-war expulsion of the Germans. This is not an absurd conjunction. Jews and Germans constituted the single largest minority groups in the lands between Vienna and Moscow. In the immediate post-war years German populations that had lived

there for centuries were expelled from what used to be East Prussia, from Silesia and the western territory of modern Poland, from Bohemia and Moravia, and to a lesser extent from parts of the old Hungarian half of the Dual Monarchy as well (it is remarkable how little attention we pay to the astonishing success with which they were integrated into the lands of present-day Germany, East and West). At the time these expulsions were perhaps psychologically necessary, certainly politically expedient. From 1947 until very recently indeed they were far from anyone's mind. Yet in the past few years the expulsion of the ethnic Germans from Bohemia, for example, has been the subject of heated and scholarly discussion in the samizdat historiography of Czechoslovakia. With this telling example we scratch the surface of a truly significant aspect of the new opposition in East Central Europe: its deeply serious concern about History.

There is nothing very mysterious about the obsession with History in this part of the world. Until 1918 the past, in a concentrated cultural form, was the true space in which the nation existed. Reconciling that ideal national territory with the experience of the independent nation was a large part of the identity crisis experienced by the region between the wars. Since the late forties the past has been appropriated by the socialist regime, both by its own adoption of the trappings and language of national legitimacy, and more directly by strict control over what is written and read about the country's recent history. The literate public in East Central Europe today is thus not only heir to a tradition of fascination with its own history; it is also in a condition of permanent unarmed conflict with the authorities for access to that history, a conflict which heightens the interest and raises the stakes.

The opposition's own growing interest in investigating the past is thus culturally over-determined, so to speak. Michnik, like many of his Hungarian homologues, is a serious historian. His work on Polish history would be of interest even if it did not intimately relate to the evolution of his thinking about the role of the Catholic Church, the varieties of nationalist consciousness, etc. In Hungary the "contract of forgetting" (Kis) signed between Kádár and the nation is being slowly prised open at certain key junctures. But it is in the Czech opposition that the subject of history has been discussed most fully, and where its centrality emerges in sharpest relief.

In the "Biafra of the spirit" (Aragon) which followed upon the Soviet invasion, 145 university historians lost their jobs in Czechoslovakia. Of these, 40 signed the original declaration of Charter 77. It has been estimated that there are about 90 samizdat historians writing today. It is only a mild exaggeration to say that the intellectual opposition in modern Czechoslovakia is primarily about the past, and in particular

about ridding oneself of illusions. For the past matters in two ways. As Milan Šimečka notes, rethinking the past is an act of self-preservation, denying to the regime that monopoly over memory which it has attained over action. But there is something else. The Czechs (not the Slovaks) cannot forget that theirs is a special case. Stalinism was worse in Prague, lasted longer, and left more traces. The regime had more local support than in any other land (in the genuinely free 1946 elections the KSČ emerged as the strongest single party, more successful even than the PCF or the PCI). And a lot of that support came from the same urban intellectuals who now form the core of the opposition (the same people, in a few remaining cases). Like the French Marxists, the Czech intelligentsia has a lot to think about, and it is one of the remarkable aspects of the Charter 77 movement that it has generated this thinking process, and in public.

The history of the regime itself is the least significant of the subjects investigated. The moral and political problem of the show trials was important in 1968, when it was a question of cleansing the regime and the Party from within, ridding it of its secrets, its crimes, and its lies. But few now care about the Party and <u>its</u> illusions; the material on the trials and their consequences has been published.[32] The myths that now engage Czech historians working in semi-clandestinity (there are virtually no respectable historians employed full-time in the universities, in sharp contrast with, for example, Hungary) are their own. Was 1948 a Russian-backed coup, or did we not rather will the event ourselves? Was the Beneš Republic that it overthrew such a paragon of virtue anyway -- it laid the path towards state control of the economy, and it was not the Communists but the coalition government which so brutally expelled the Sudeten Germans, laying the groundwork for similar acts of Realpolitik by its Communist successor? Was the First Republic, the Republic of Masaryk, so blameless? It too was not as careful as it might have been in its treatment of minorities. It also went in for the public re-writing of history -- destroying Imperial monuments, changing street names, etc. (the Czechs seem unaware of the confusing frequency with which such things have been done in France, for example!).[33]

Some of this might plausibly be attributed to the Czech taste for <u>lítost</u>, a masochistic glee in basking in the reflected gloom of their own past. But it has a serious purpose, in the hands of writers like Pithart or Šimečka. Their argument is not that the Czechs should stop glorifying their non-Communist past, which is murkier than people care to admit. It is that treating the past in this way, as a source of polemical weaponry for or against the present, is to engage in an activity essentially similar to that of Communist historiography itself. Just because the regime has placed virtually all non-pejorative reference to Masaryk and his Republic on the index of forbidden reading,[34] that is no reason to see the historian's task as the defense of

the Founder. Similarly, the official historiography treats the Hussite movement in crass, materialist terms (a "proto-bourgeois revolution," roughly speaking), appropriating the high moment of Czech late-medieval history in the crudest way. But, as a recent Charter 77 document pointed out, this in no way relieves us of the responsibility of investigating the subject with a critical eye. There is, it notes, something to be said for Marxist historiography (as done in the West). It does not have to be crude. The Hussite movement, like the Battle of White Mountain, must be accorded serious critical historical attention. To reflect back at the regime the defects of its own historiography would be to repeat ad infinitum the "errors and illusions" of Czech national historical consciousness and historical writing.[35]

One of the best, most thoughtful statements of this sort was made by Jiří Hochmann in a review of Jiří Hájek's memoirs. The author, he wrote, has retained all his generation's illusions about the pre-war USSR. Was it such a doughty defender of Czech independence and collective security? If Hájek wishes to be able to claim that the events after 1945 are all the fault of the Russians and their local Stalinist support, then he needs to think more clearly about why he and others like him harbored such illusions about the goodwill of the USSR. The combination of amnesia and anachronism enables Hájek to inject into his memoirs an unremittingly high level of moral indignation, but it does not explain why men like him believed what they did and acted accordingly. It is significant that this gentle but precise criticism is being directed at one of the heroes of the Charter movement (and indeed one of the figureheads of the Prague Spring). If there are to be no illusions in our attempt to understand what brought us to our present pass, then there can be no wart-free portraits either.[36]

This urge to scrape away generations of accreted beliefs about their past suggests that Czech historians are engaged in something more than a search for the history to which the regime has claimed unique access. There is a moral point at issue here, closely linked to their sense that they, the intellectuals, were the regime, and that history is an act of self-redemption. There is a drive to recapture the uncertainty, the indeterminacy of Czech history. Does the country exist? Should it exist? Why? Only in Czechoslovakia is one tempted to suggest that the question arises, whether the country has deserved to exist! Given that the country has lived in a suspended condition since 1938, it is in many ways the youngest nation in Europe. Its true identity, for many of its intellectuals, lies in its culture, its sense of itself, rather than in any presumed necessity about the course of its actual history. In removing layers of illusions and explanations about their own behavior, and that of their governments, the Czech opposition is instinctively digging for some sort of idea of Czechoslovakia (even as they assert that the search for such a thing is one of the illusions that needs

shattering). It is not done with a view to proposing this idea to the nation as an alternative to the socialist one. It is a morally self-referential exercise, like asserting the need to live in integrity or claiming one's rights. And, like almost all the historiography of the opposition, it leads sooner or later to a discussion of another self-referential "idea," that of a certain "Europe."

"It isn't pleasant to surrender to the hegemony of a nation which is still wild and primitive."

Czesław Miłosz, The Captive Mind

It is one of the enduring achievements of socialism that it has succeeded, in the course of little more than a generation, in placing Russia at the center of the agenda in East Central Europe, where for so long the problem had been Germany. By reconstituting the region as "western Asia" (Joseph Brodsky), the Soviet Union has focussed attention on the issue of European identity in a novel and interesting form. For this to happen, it was first necessary that the USSR be displaced from the center of the historical project of the socialist intellectuals. Now that this has happened (simply because there is no longer a historical project, just as there are very few "socialist" intellectuals), there has been a flourishing discussion on the peculiarities of the great nation to the east. We are all familiar with Milan Kundera on this subject, writing of the "strangeness of a civilization that thinks differently, feels differently, has a different destiny, lives in a different historical time."[37] But he is not alone, nor was he the first. In 1968 a writer in Nová mysl noted of the Soviet Union: "It is a country which did not pass through the phase of a civil society, did not absorb the intellectual trends of antiquity, Roman Christianity, Renaissance and Enlightenment, a country taking over Marxism without the experience of its original sources and integrating Marxism first of all from the angle of its internal needs and state interests."[38] Václav Havel, who normally criticizes Kundera for placing excessive blame on Russian "awfulness" when the true problem lies nearer home, nonetheless agrees that the Byzantine tradition of conflating church and state, the spiritual and the secular authority, is alien to European traditions and a major part of the distortions of the post-war experience.[39]

At a sufficiently general level, these propositions are common to all East Central European reflections (they are also distinctively present in Romanian culture, with its aggressive claim to be an outpost not just of European but specifically of Latin European civilization). But what, then, is "Europe," and why is it so important to answer that question? Here clear differences of emphasis emerge. The Polish opposition has not

paid the matter very close attention.[40] Not only does an older generation, such as Czesław Miłosz, look as much to Lithuania as to the western Polish lands, but younger writers like Adam Zagajewski are also culturally eastern in their orientation, with their roots as much in Lvov as in Cracow. They might agree with the Czech Pithart that "Eastern Europe is a fragile fringe of the European continent," but they would be unlikely to concede that it is a fringe which "crumbles, breaks off, and disappears from Europe" (in his sense that this is characteristic of the region, rather than a violent imposition upon it).[41] What the Polish opposition offers in place of Russia is Poland.

Hungarians and Czechs start from a different point on the historical compass. For the Hungarian opposition, heavily sociological in its style, Europe, Central Europe, is the notion of a "middle way," a solution lying somewhere between "individualism" (the West) and collectivism, between organic social systems and contractual ones.[42] Hungarian writers are more inclined to set Central Europe in a concrete historical context, as a term describing the peculiar experience of a certain part of the continent -- different as a matter of fact from the West and the East. The best statement of this comes in Mihály Vajda's work, where he treats the history of fascism in Central Europe as crucial to its specificity.[43]

Central Europe is thus not a <u>project</u> for the Hungarian opposition so much as a critical tool of enquiry. Being less isolated from the West than the Czechs or the East Germans, the Hungarians are less obsessed with the division of the continent, and (with the exception of György Konrád, perhaps) do not see much use in resurrecting old themes of <u>Mitteleuropa</u>. As we have seen, they have also to work in a very powerful tradition of national pride and self-awareness. There is no need for endless claims to being a European -- sufficient unto the day is the Hungarian-ness thereof. It is precisely the reverse in Czechoslovakia, where many writers find it depressingly provincial to assert one's Czech-ness, and prefer to merge that identity into something larger. This helps account for a certain enthusiasm for the Dual Monarchy. Just as Europe for the Czechs is a cultural, not a sociological, category, so the Austro-Hungarian Empire is not exactly the one that was, but the one that is imagined. Like Kundera's Europe (and in contrast, say, to Vajda's), it is an ontological creation (which confuses sympathetic British writers, who seem to suppose that the Czechs actually hope and expect to see Kakania resurrected...). Thus Pithart, again: "Central Europe [is] a sober, skeptical yet persistent will to synthesize."

In a circuitous way, these constant references to Central Europe are something more than an expression of the desire to distinguish the region from its Soviet neighbor. They constitute another side of the attempt to create a political vocabulary with

which to communicate over time and space, in the place of the old universalist vocabulary of socialism now irretrievably polluted by experience. "Central Europe" is like "rights" -- by reiterated assertion of its existence you can hope to bring it about. And it implies the possibility of communication with that other Europe of the West. This is a complicated point. The opposition in East Central Europe is ambivalent about Western Europe. Polish intellectuals no longer look to Paris, and Czech writers like Hável scorn the trappings of Western materialism and moral indifference. They all assert that the task is to find and repair the sources of value and inspiration from within their own threatened cultures. Yet they place immense worth upon having access to Western thinking, and upon being in a dialogue with it. Hence the wish to assert a single community, a Europe of which they are and must be a part. But Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals has the wrong connotations and is anyway too vague to be of real use. Central Europe stands in as a metaphor for this other Europe which they seek to recreate. Hável, Konrád, et al. do not actually wish to engage in a nostalgic resurrection of the world of fin-de-siècle Vienna, and they would certainly be of little interest (to the Poles, or even to themselves, much less to us) if they did. Central Europe is both a myth and a code for the specific achievements of the European political imagination. It is worth noting that they have had much success with the French intelligentsia, readily attuned to such ideas, whereas the language of "Central Europe" has been a barrier rather than a bridge when it comes to communication with the opposition in the GDR, or the Greens in the Federal Republic.

"Historical experience shows that Communists were sometimes forced by circumstances to behave rationally and agree to compromises."

Adam Michnik, Letters from Prison

In order to ensure a minimum of clarity in this paper, I have proceeded via a necessary fiction -- that the opposition in East Central Europe is, if not united, then at least a recognizably homogenous entity. And where I have pointed to significant variations of emphasis or opinion, these have normally been between national groups, rather than within them. But it is perfectly clear to any observer that there are serious differences within the opposition in each country. Some of these amount to passing quarrels characteristic of any small and powerless community of activists and writers; but some of them are of surpassing importance, in theory, in practice, or both.

In the first place there is the question of whether to compromise with the regime. In Hungary this is particularly hard to answer because of the rather indeterminate character of the

regime's own responses. In the spring of 1982 János Kis was proposing compromise, but since then the emphasis in official harrassment has switched away from the workers towards the intellectuals (though this pattern is far from constant); as a result compromise (meaning what?) comes to look like concession or even capitulation. If the Hungarian opposition confines itself to consciousness-raising among the intelligentsia, then it need not compromise in what it says, but is restricted in what it can do. If it seeks to appeal to a wider public it is constrained to compromise, given its restricted constituency, but then stands accused by its more intransigent members of playing along with the regime. The discussions before and after the recent elections, with their "independent" candidates, illustrate this point.

The same debate in Czechoslovakia is given a sharper edge by virtue of the much greater practical restrictions on action. When Ludvík Vaculík published an "Essay on Bravery," in which he argued that one can only ask so much of people in the course of their daily struggle to live, he provoked a widespread debate. Most people agreed with him in principle that one can only ask of people "unheroic, realistic deeds." But his accompanying assertion, that things were in <u>some</u> ways better now than in the fifties, was much resented. There is a radical wing in Charter 77 which is frustrated at the "constructive dialogue" with the regime, a dialogue in which only one side speaks. For these people (mostly, but not always, the younger activists) Vaculík's interest in seeking the "liquidation of concrete evils" came close to a betrayal of their goals. For Milan Šimečka, this quarrel between those who still lean to "utopian abstractions" and those who supported Vaculík is the central fault line in current Czech dissident thinking.[44] It should also be regarded as distinct (or perhaps intersecting) from the argument between Havel and Kundera (which dates to 1969 and continues still). Kundera, who is much resented among some circles in Charter 77, treats the Czech condition as a problem of its national destiny, and is sceptical about citizens' initiatives, whereas Havel is both optimistic about the latter and resolutely nominalist in his distaste for talk about "history" or "fate."

This discussion is at its most acute in Poland, where the fault line can actually be seen to run <u>within</u> the work of a leading opposition thinker like Michnik. In his own behavior and personal dealings with the regime he has been consistently uncompromising, refusing offers of emigration, preferring prison to a negotiated silence, speaking or writing without restraint. But in his discussions of the tactics of opposition he takes a quite different position. Although he does not view with favor any consistent tactic of compromise and concession, he is equally as critical of those who opt consistently for antagonistic stances, or who are nostalgic for the certainties of opposition and secrecy. What happened in 1980/81 is, for him, something so

extraordinary as to be worth preserving, where possible, at almost any price short of self-defeating concessions. The trick for Michnik is somehow to find a way to maintain the pressure on the authorities while conveying a willingness to listen and talk. If this seems inconsistent, the criticism does not trouble him. In a justly renowned essay on "Maggots and Angels," he rejects the demand for consistency as part of the "either-or" mentality, the Manichean political furniture of a past era. Like Havel he is suspicious of the utopian mentality, of seekers after perfection. But he is vastly more sophisticated than Havel in his appreciation of the limits and possibilities in political life, less inclined to make of his own virtue others' necessity.[48]

There is only slightly more concordance on the matter of issues. The Hungarian opposition intellectuals, mostly in their thirties and forties, are variously concerned with the economic conundrum, with the housing crisis, with the treatment of the Gypsies, with the environment, with the problem of participation in the political system, with communicating effectively with human rights activists and disarmers in other countries, and so forth. Those who are not directly concerned with, for example, the problem of the economy, make little attempt to relate their own primary interests to the economic crisis. Similarly, there is very little effective conversation between the intellectuals and the "populists," whose own concern is largely with the national question, the national minorities abroad, or (and not always sympathetically) the ethnic minorities at home. Writers like Haraszti or Kis are perfectly well aware of these divisions -- Kis describes his own intellectual circle as "marginal" and without a clear or coherent program -- but see little immediate hope of overcoming this "disaggregation of the contemporary Hungarian intelligentsia."

The same point applies elsewhere, subject once again to the caveat that Kádárism makes it harder for an opposition to form and cohere. In Poland the recent moves of the Jaruzelski regime have left the opposition uncertain, and divided in its response. The most immediate danger is that the workers' movement and the radical intelligentsia will lose the unity they achieved in the late seventies, as the economic crisis and the government's "flexible" strategy of response produce a crystallization of demands and tactics around atomized issues. The most coherent and unified initiatives at present are coming from a post-Solidarity generation interested primarily in the issue of peace and the environmental question. They may sympathize with the world of the Gdańsk movement, and they certainly share implicitly its interest in civil and collective rights, as well as its good relations with the Church. But how this converts into anything approaching a joint policy or even common tactics is not clear.

If these are what might once have been termed "ideological" and political differences within the opposition, there is also some suggestion of a sociological one as well. "Low-status dissidents," whether they are impoverished Slovakian peasants of Magyar nationality, Gypsies in Hungary itself, unskilled workers in industrial Poland and the GDR resentful of the privileges the regime accords its own middle class, all have grounds for opposing the present regime. In various ways they represent a potential clientele for populist opponents (though not always in the country in which they find themselves). But they are not easily mobilized by the intellectual and urban opposition spokesmen on whom I have concentrated, nor have the latter always given them much thought. The division between a democratic and a nationalist opposition is one which worries the more thoughtful Polish and Hungarian writers, but they have not found a way to translate their fears into action. As a result there may be developing a two-tier opposition, almost as mutually antagonistic as it is antipathetic to the regime itself. To this in turn may be added the difficulty of sounding the feelings of the younger generation. In Czechoslovakia the Charter and VONS have responded very positively to the situation of the musical underground, but so far the support has been all in one direction (one Czech intellectual commented morosely a few months ago on the onanistic satisfaction of publishing samizdat for the same two thousand intellectuals, all of whom also write it). There is a distinct "youth culture" in East Central Europe, but except in the GDR it has not been effectively mobilized behind the wider goals of any opposition movement.

Perhaps none of this is very surprising. If anything at all is genuinely characteristic of Central Europe it is surely the historical role of the intelligentsia in the generation and implementation of radical political ideas. The status of the intellectual and of the opposition in this part of Europe has never been dependent on their numbers or the popular audience for their writings. This association between radical political ideology and mass support is an import from Western Europe in the late nineteenth century, given universal credibility by the self-description of Marxism. In the post-Marxist era there is no a priori ground for expecting the association to re-emerge (though for the same reason there is no reason to deny that it might -- witness Solidarity again).

The issue for intellectuals in East Central Europe was succinctly presented to them by János Kádár as long ago as December 1961 when he announced that "whoever is not against us is with us." This proposition, which is now valid for all socialist regimes but was then reasonably novel, puts the onus on the intellectual to speak out. Silence, if it goes on long enough, becomes complicity. Internal emigration -- Czesław Miłosz's "Ketman" for example -- is not enough. But for whom do you write? The proverbial desk-drawer? Even if you put together

a few hundred such desk-drawers you still risk a "self-inebriating monologue" (Pithart). Civic courage is no guarantee of literary quality, after all, and in the long run it is not sufficient for a work or an idea to be of interest merely that it or its author was disapproved by the authorities. Anyone wanting to know more about the risks attendant on being a writer without an audience is referred to the essays of Alexander Kliment and other Czech critics, who know whereof they speak.[46]

Hence the tendency to treat the work of a dissident intelligentsia as inherently significant, independent of its potential or actual audience. In Hungary, where these problems have received fuller and franker discussion than elsewhere, Konrád/Szelényi and, more recently, Haraszti, treat the intelligentsia as a functional substitute for a radical bourgeoisie. What they acquire under socialism is, quite simply, power. The nature of the regime, the sort of legitimacy it claims, and the persons on whom it must perforce rely for its survival, all give a premium to the thinking classes (in their rather special, sociologically-discrete Central European sense). Similarly, it becomes the task of the intellectuals to produce a counter-ideology. It therefore does not terribly much matter that they are talking largely to themselves, since neither the regime nor its opponents are support-dependent. I find this rather talmudic, and recognizably a trait derived from within the thought processes of the sophisticated Budapest school of Marxism, but it has the virtue of providing, both in its content and in its form, a link to the traditional role of the Hungarian intelligentsia; it is perhaps this which both appeals to its supporters and legitimizes them to the society at large.

The same intense debate about the tasks of the intelligentsia, when conducted just north of the Danube, looks utterly different. Like Konrád and Szelényi, or Miłosz come to that, the Czechs can see quite well that Diamat gave the intellectuals a role unique in their history. But in Prague this is now seen as a problem of hubris rather than power. The Czech intellectual community, starting with Jaroslav Seifert's famous 1956 self-criticism for his silent complicity ("All that is over now"), is above all obsessed with bearing witness, from below and from outside. There are perhaps a very few exceptions to this rule (Hájek?), but they stand out and a little aside. Here at least Havel is truly representative. In the conditions of the "parallel polity" he denies any "tasks" to literature (oppositional Zhdanovism he once called it!). Just as one must live in integrity, so one must write in integrity. The writer should reject the special status of a "protected creature," and write what he must, as he can.[47] As Pithart also observes, the loss of contact with both the public and the official literary realm, as well as the media, makes the writer somehow "autarchic," at least so far as the life of the mind is concerned. This releases him from all responsibility -- and thus

places upon him a transcendent moral responsibility instead. It is an "opportunity" for which writers may or may not prove worthy.

It will now be clear why exile and emigration is so much more sensitive an issue in Prague than in Budapest. This is not merely because the possibility of communication with Budapest is much better -- this was not always the case, after all. And anyway, exile is always a personal and cultural tragedy, the "worst of all misfortunes" (Miłosz). But if the whole point of intellectual production is to bear moral witness, then this is something you just cannot do in the same way in Paris or Toronto as in Prague or Bratislava. Hungarian opposition writers go back and forth to other lands, including the West, and share their theories and their problems with émigré Hungarians from a variety of generations. The latter might have mixed feelings about their ambivalent status, but they are certainly not ignored and are in an abstract sense an integral part of the Hungarian opposition. But the issue is much more clear-cut in Czechoslovakia (I confess to being unsure about the Polish case, and I think I am reflecting the uncertainty of my Polish friends on the subject). The Czech intelligentsia was so much a part of the world which it now rejects that it can only unburden itself by <u>living</u> that rejection, and the feeling seems to be passing down the generations. Perhaps the reaction would not have been so absolute had the regime not chosen to make of the intellectuals the enemy Number One of normalized socialism. But by depriving them of employment, status, and an audience it has granted them a moral and cultural autonomy which they have turned to good, if perhaps intensive account.

"Totalitarian society is the distorted mirror of the whole of modern civilization."

Václav Havel, <u>Politika a svedomí</u>

"Marxism is not a philosophy of history, it is the philosophy of history, and to renounce it is to dig the grave of Reason in history."

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, <u>Humanism and Terror</u>

While there were still socialists in socialist Europe, communication with the capitalist West was a possibility. If this is a paradox, it is only because of the illusions of Western Marxists. From the point of view of those in the Soviet bloc it made sense. During the seventies men like Michnik still found nothing absurd about identifying themselves with the traditions of democratic socialism (in 1977 Michnik stated that given the choice he would opt for Bruno Trentin over Agnelli). In his <u>The</u>

State and Socialism, Mihály Vajda saw a continuing value in socialism as a "permanent critique" of capitalism, on condition that it never replaced it. And many early Czech Charter signatories evinced a continuing faith in the goals of a Western socialist tradition, albeit abstracted from either Western or Eastern experience. The last gasp of this common ideological currency came with the brief mirage of "Eurocommunism." That Havemann, Bahro, or Biermann saw hope in the apparent renaissance of a reformed Communism in Italy or Spain was of course consistent with their continued confidence in the role of their own Party. But Jiří Hájek regarded the Eurocommunists as a boon to Charter 77, which could quote their opinions against the Czechoslovak rulers; and Zdeněk Mlynář in his "Open Letter to the Communists and Socialists of Europe" (1975) explicitly appealed to his and their common ideals in a plea for support against the repression of dissent in Czechoslovakia.[48]

But Eurocommunism soon passed (except in Italy -- though note Vajda's telling comments on the questionable faith of even the Party of Berlinguer[49]). And with it there disappeared the era of troubled but open communications between the radical intellectuals of the West and their Eastern homologues. From the outset the quotient of misunderstanding and mistrust had been high. On the one hand West European culture in the fifties and early sixties had been a source of anxiety for those in the East who still looked to it, by habit; between the advocates of the "end of ideology" and the Sartrian apologists for the existential commitment to philo-communism the space had been slim indeed. In a recent article Czesław Miłosz remarks that a "chapter in a hypothetical book on postwar Polish poetry should be dedicated to irony and even derision in the treatment of the Western European and particularly French intellectuals." The unhappy love affair may be over, but a sour taste remains.[50] With the rise of the New Left in the West the gap increased. Just as the spokesmen of the Prague Spring were appealing to the values of the Western socialism from which they drew their hopes, so Western socialists were bolting the door. In 1969 a group of intellectuals on the left wing of the French Parti Socialiste Unifié criticized their own party (led by Michel Rocard and Pierre Mendès-France) for supporting the Czech reformers. The latter, they declared, were "victimes consentantes des idéologies petites-bourgeoises (humanisme, liberté, justice, progrès, suffrage universel secret)."[51]

It is hardly surprising that throughout this period the disabused Eastern intellectual was tempted to indulge in some mild Schadenfreude. If the socialists of the West knew what we know, perhaps they would then understand. Or as Miłosz put it in The Captive Mind, writing of the irrational urges of the "Easterner": "He is apt to believe in feelings that foresee violent changes in the countries of the West, for he finds it unjust that they should escape the hardship he had to undergo."

Some of these feelings could also be attributed to the experience of war in this century, which led many to treat social catastrophe as the necessary prelude to any genuine change and improvement -- lending to the eschatological dimension in Marxism an apparently rational and historical basis in experience. But once the historicized dimension of such visions was lost to view, with the crumbling of socialist hopes after 1968, what was left was a morbid satisfaction at the way things were going. Central Europe was the "destiny of the West, in concentrated form."[52]

Characteristically, it is Václav Havel who has captured this feeling best. East Central Europe, he writes, is "deeply instructive information about the West's <u>own</u> crises." It is the "moral future" of the West. Nor is this some vicious twist of fate, a piece of historical misfortune, or mere geopolitical chance. It is Europe, writes Havel, democratic Western Europe in particular, which bears the responsibility for modern science, rationalism, scientism, the industrial revolution, and the idea of revolution itself as an abstract fanaticism. And now it must face the fruits of its "ambiguous exports."[53] Where Kundera is sceptical, Havel is positively luxuriating in the apocalyptical prospects opening for the West.

In this respect, it seems to me, the Czech moralists and the East German Marxists finally join hands, across the supine, bloated body of Western "consumerism." The opposition in the GDR during the seventies utterly rejected the cult of consumption and material well-being which they saw drifting eastwards from the Federal Republic. Robert Havemann condemned the Party for encouraging mass consumption, private ownership of consumer goods (cars, electrical goods), and Wolfgang Harich treated the "illusions of consumerism" as something against which it was the task of the ruling Party to re-educate the populace.[54] The Czechs obviously did not wish to see any such role for the Party, but were at least as vociferous (and still are) in their attacks on the cult of consumption, the mediocrity of materialism, the idolatry of all that <u>conforms</u> (Ivan Klíma). And they either trace this moral pollution to the West, or else to their own regime's desire to compete with the capitalist states on the crassest of their terms. Which amounts to the same thing.

Obviously, not everyone agrees. Milan Šimečka, the most appealingly intelligent of the Czech and Slovak writers, warns of letting this distaste for material goods and the benefits of modernity get out of hand, something he detects as much in the environmentalist movement as in Havel's moral strictures: "I am of the opinion that even the pollution that accompanies industrial prosperity is better than the chaos and brutality which plagues those societies in which people are unable to satisfy their basic needs."[55] Likewise, Peter Král has defended Kundera against the charge that he has become a member (and thus implicitly a defender) of Western culture. Not all Western

society and culture is superficial, consumerist, and without value, he observes; we should be wary of supposing that only a persecuted, parallel/dissident culture can generate "true" values.[56] Some of this discussion is mildly reminiscent of the Communist language of the late forties, with its attacks (in France and Italy, as well as in Eastern and Central Europe) on the "Americanization" of Europe by Coca Cola and Rita Hayworth. Perhaps Havel and others have not moved as far from the regime which persecutes them as they imagine -- or it may simply be that puritanism and a melancholy disposition to cultural nemesis are endemic in the Central European intelligentsia?

Some such inclinations of my own lead me to see the new language of politics in East Central Europe as the end of a European era. I claim no great originality for this insight -- Ferenc Fehér noted the anti-Enlightenment element present in the excesses of the retreat from Marxism.[57] Nor is the phenomenon confined to the socialist systems, as any traveller in le tout Paris these days can confirm. But I want to note an important distinction within this new departure, and one which may be a clue to future developments.

In the first instance, we have the Poles (and probably the Hungarians, though I shall confine my remarks to Poland). The rapprochement between KOR and the Catholic Church, the conscious effort by ex-Marxists like Michnik to jettison the baggage of anti-clericalism, these are more than moves in the political game. They are unambiguous attempts to set aside the political and cultural categories of Polish public life, categories which have their ideological roots in the nineteenth century and their philosophical basis in the philosophy of the Enlightenment. That is why they have been underpinned by sustained and serious historical analysis, and by careful moral critiques of earlier polemical positions. In a similar vein, Michnik in 1980 wrote that "a hybrid society is conceivable, one where totalitarian organization of the state will co-exist with democratic institutions of society."[58]

Why is this similar? Because it too entails unravelling a holistic view of social arrangements, of what requires what, which lies, or lay, at the heart of European radical thinking. It may be that Michnik wrote this, like much else, in the heat of the political moment, and that his thinking was primarily tactical and not even strategic, much less theoretical (a distinction he might not admit). But that is besides the point. However hot the political kitchen, no European radical between 1848 and 1968 would have proposed the conceptual possibility of such a hybrid, and even the Leninists would never have admitted it as anything beyond a passing tactic. For what is being proposed, after all, is that social arrangements and political ones are conceptually independent, whereas it is central to European political thought since the French Revolution that this

is simply not true, independently of whether it is desirable.

Thus if we take him seriously, Michnik is trying to think his way clear of the tradition of political argument which in Europe is associated with the moral and epistemological concepts of the Enlightenment. It is no satisfactory counter to note that he still wishes to invoke some of the Enlightenment traditions of moral discourse against other Enlightenment theories of the state. The point is that he is ignoring what was once thought crucial to a belief in either, to wit their interconnection.

What Michnik is decidedly not engaged in is a critique of the rationalist faith which underpins the intellectual traditions he is reworking. Neither he nor any of the Budapest School could coherently do this, given their concern to find solid ground in a rational critique of their own former positions, and those of the present regimes. What disturbs them about the present sorry state of political argument in their own community is not primarily that it reflects badly on the rationalist sources of its own thought, but that in running into the ground it risks dragging down with it the ideals and assumptions which gave it birth. These are what has to be rescued, if necessary by the most disruptive of intellectual house-cleaning.

For Havel, on the other hand, the problem lies not in the accumulated dust and debris, but in the faulty design of the house itself. I want to suggest that it is a serious mistake to conflate his work with that of Michnik, Konrád, or others like them. For Havel, Charter 77 presents the opportunity for a thorough-going "existential revolution."[59] Our problem, quite simply, is that we live in the "first atheist civilization in human history," and have lost our sense of the majesty of the natural world in our rush to "control." Emboldened by the "fiction of concrete human objectivity" and the illusion of understanding, we believe that we can do anything. If we create problems, we can solve them (he uses the example of polluting factory chimneys, which we then "cure" by the addition of a filter, etc.). Because we can collectively remake our world (or so we suppose) we have lost our sense of individual responsibility for our actions, and modesty in our capacities. The world, he argues, has an essential "natural order" with which we are wrong to tamper. We should cease to "interfere with God."[60]

Not only does Havel thus explicitly resurrect the claims of the natural world against the human presumption to control and fashion it. He also makes the direct connection between the constructions of rational understanding and "abstract schemes of alleged 'historical necessity'." In other words, the Marxist myth is not simply the error of our time, it is the inevitable consequence of a belief in the possibility of a cognitive grasp of the external world. Rationalism has not given rise to our

problems -- it is our problem. And it is thus no solution simply to get rid of totalitarian regimes; this, he asserts, would not only not solve the problem, it would make it worse.[61] If I understand him correctly, he is saying that totalitarian regimes at least bring the West and its accolytes face to face with the results of their hubristic undertakings. Without real socialism, we might relapse into our rationalist illusions once more.

I would not want to argue that Havel is typical, although this seems to me unimportant. He is certainly more consistently rigorous in his attack on the Enlightenment tradition in European thought than any other writer, and his personal moral heroism gives his writing a special resonance, in Czechoslovakia and abroad. Moreover, the revival in religious affiliation and the growing deployment of a language deriving from religious sources, a point alluded to earlier in this essay, give him a growing audience. And if his popularity in the West is still primarily due to his literary and theatrical output, he is nonetheless the best-known spokesman for Charter 77, the man Western peace activists and civil libertarians seek to visit when they reach Prague. I am not sure how much he himself recognizes the resemblance between the Christian theory of salvation through suffering and virtue (to which his own moral language now points) and the analagous morality of the Marxist theory of historical liberation; but the reception he finds among many former Marxists, in Czechoslovakia and the West alike, surely owes much to this common trait.[62]

There are thus two distinct senses in which the opposition in East Central Europe is abandoning the Enlightenment. Moreover, they are bringing East and West back into communication again, since in Western Europe, too, the years since 1968 have seen a progressive unravelling of the project of a total rebirth of society, a project dating at least to 1789. That is why Havel and Kundera get such a sympathetic hearing in Paris (though not in London, still straggling along in the wake of developments, as throughout the history of modern radical thought). And that, too, is why "anti-political" politics exercise a certain fascination over the Western radical imagination these days, it too in search of something with which to replace the Reason of History which guided it through the industrial revolution and since.

But we should be careful not to plunge too readily along the route being charted in the "other" Europe. In the first place, Havel in particular is not charting a route. It is altogether unclear what the Czech opposition will do when the present regime changes leadership, or is pressed by the Soviet Union to be more flexible in its own interest. What is clear is that all sorts of compromises will be required, and that Havel and other Charter 77 signatories will not be happy with them, even if they recognize their inevitability. In this respect, the Poles and the

Hungarians are better placed, although not by much. For it is one thing to decouple the various social and moral categories of the Enlightenment from one another, the better to rethink them and their separate possibilities and practicality. It is not so easy to detach our actual history from the experience bequeathed it by that same Enlightenment (not to mention the contributions of industrialization, urbanization, the formation of social classes, political and national ideologies, the importance of which has perhaps been overlooked in the rush to abandon the specifically Marxist way of interpreting them). By this I do not just mean Yalta etc. -- that would be to slip into pessimistic Central European respect for Realpolitik against which Agnes Heller warned us. What I am referring to here is our way of thinking about politics -- as a project-related enterprise, gathering discrete persons together in support of collective goals. This is not some cognitive error we have inherited from abstraction-obsessed philosophes; it is the way in which Europeans have thought about the polis for a very long time indeed, and all the East Central Europeans pay it implicit homage in everything they do. It survives in Western Europe in a variety of forms, none of which is historically necessary. But what is necessary is some such form.

The interim achievement of the opposition in the Soviet bloc is to have destroyed the moribund form of politics as hitherto practiced there. They have also succeeded, variously, in bringing into the public realm some genuinely new political content. Indeed, freed of form, they have proven rather better at rethinking this content than have Western radicals, still free to think and act in the old ways and thus tempted to do so. But this free-floating existence, this release from the responsibility to think hard about the form a political system should take, will not last. If it did, indeed, things would have become very bad indeed, and that is not what anyone is advocating (it is not clear how they could consistently do so, even if they thought it had some long-term benefit). And when it comes time to talk about the ways in which the political world of East Central Europe should be (re-) constructed, the actual choices are going to be rather restricted. And for this we cannot blame Voltaire, not if we wish to be taken seriously.

This is not news for thinkers like Kis, Michnik, or Šimečka, to name a few. And it is what Michnik appears to be groping for in his reflections about compromise. But the time has not yet come to talk about these things. This is in part of course because Gorbachëv notwithstanding, nothing significant has yet changed in the relationship of society and state in these countries (nor is it clear that the Gorbachëv clause is applicable here, but that is another subject). But it has also something to do with "decent intervals." The time that has elapsed since the progressive abandonment of socialism is still very brief, and it would be inappropriate to begin again to think

"politically" in the old sense, however different the style. But it is hard to imagine how the problem can be avoided indefinitely. The excitement of a radical rethinking of an ancient tradition of political engagement, or the indulgence in ruthlessly honest, self-lacerating (but also occasionally prideful) moral purgation, the experiment of engaging new issues in a forgotten language, all this is functional as well as being of real historical interest. But precisely because it is functional it also has a finitude. In the foreseeable future it is going to be necessary to mobilize and organize a new generation which not only does not remember revisionism, the Prague Spring, the Solidarity years, and so forth, but also does not remember why it was necessary to forget so much in order to begin afresh. Political forms, political programs, political compromises are going to be called for. If we are lucky, there are some dull times ahead.

ENDNOTES

1. In many ways it would make sense to include Yugoslavia, or at least Slovenia and Croatia, in this discussion. Considerations of space and ignorance preclude doing so.

2. See Jiří Gruša, "A Bride for Sale," in Antonín Liehm and Peter Kussi, eds., The Writing on the Wall: An Anthology of Contemporary Czech Literature (Princeton, NJ: Karz-Cohl Publishers, 1983), 37.

3. Miklós Haraszti, "Il dissenso come professione," Micro Mega 1 (1986): 245.

4. Virgil Tanase, ed., Dossier Paul Goma (Paris, 1977), 88-95.

5. Petr Pithart, "Papier pelure blanc 30 g/m^2," Cahiers de l'Est 15 (1979): 65.

6. Haraszti, "Il dissenso," 244; Mihály Vajda, The State and Socialism: Political Essays (London, 1981), 103.

7. Adam Michnik, "Le nouvel évolutionnisme," Penser la Pologne (Paris, 1983), 36.

8. Václav Havel, interviewed in Antonín Liehm, ed., The Politics of Culture (New York: Grove Press, 1971), 390-93.

9. Timothy Garton Ash, The Polish Revolution (London, 1983), 24.

10. See the extracts from the address by János Kis to the Monor seminar in Hungary, 14-16 June 1985, published in La nouvelle Alternative 2-3 (1986): especially 49.

11. See Václav Havel, "Politika a svědomí," Svědectví XVIII no. 72 (1984): 621-35.

12. Ludvík Vaculík, addressing the Fourth Congress of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union, 27-29 June 1967, quoted in D. Hamšík, Writers Against Rulers (London, 1971), 183.

13. On this, see the interesting (and prescient) observations of Nicola Chiaromonte in his essay on "Modern Tyranny" published in Chiaromonte, The Worm of Consciousness and Other Essays (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Jovanovich, 1976), 209.

14. Adam Michnik, Letters from Prison and Other Essays (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 28. See also, Michnik, Penser la Pologne, for the introductory comments by Aleksander Smolar.

15. See the materials reproduced in the journals Listy and Svědectví in particular.

16. See Milan Kundera, interviewed by Alain Finkielkraut, in Ladislav Matejka and Benjamin Stolz, eds., Cross Currents: A Yearbook of Central European Culture, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Department of Slavic Languages and Literature, 1982): 20; Václav Havel et al., The Power of the Powerless, John Keane, ed. (Armonk, NY: M E Sharpe, 1985).

17. Ludvík Vaculík, "Poznámky o statečnosti," in Václav Havel et al., O lidskou identitu (London, 1984), 203. Also Havel, "Doing Without Utopias," an interview in The Times Literary Supplement, 23 January 1987.

18. Agnes Heller, "Un democratico senza democrazia," Micro Mega 3 (1986): 130.

19. The peculiarities of the condition of the Hungarian opposition are discussed in Fernando Claudin, La Oposición en el 'Socialismo Real' (Madrid, 1981), especially 228-37.

20. See works by Haraszti and Vajda already noted. Also, Miklós Haraszti et al., Opposition = 0.1%: extraits du samizdat hongrois (Paris, 1979); Haraszti, L' Artiste d'Etat. De la censure en pays socialiste (Paris, 1983); a translation of material from the Hungarian opposition journal Beszélö, "Is Dialogue Possible," East European Reporter 2, ii (1986).

21. For example, Czesław Miłosz, "Sur notre Europe," La nouvelle Alternative 2-3 (1986): 18; or Milan Kundera in the interview in Cross Currents cited above in note 16 (page 18 in particular).

22. Sources for economic data are too numerous to list. For very recent figures I have used the reports in Le Monde for the first quarter of 1987.

23. Constantin Dumitrescu, La Cité totale (Paris, 1980), 215ff; also Marc Rakovski, Towards an East European Marxism (London, 1978), 54-55.

24. Iván Szelényi, in R. L. Tökes, ed., Opposition in Eastern Europe (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 188.

25. Among the many sources for data on the environmental crisis in Czechoslovakia and the rest of Eastern Europe, see Christine Zrosec, "Environmental Deterioration in Eastern Europe," Survey 28, iv (Winter 1984): 117-42; John M. Kramer, "The Environmental Crisis in Eastern Europe: The Price of Progress," Slavic Review (Summer 1983): especially 206-207; Vojtech Mastny, ed., Soviet/East European Survey 1983-84 (Durham, NC: Duke University

Press, 1985), 305-309.

26. Ivan Klíma, "A Christmas Conspiracy," in Liehm, Writing on the Wall (New York: Karz-Cohl Publishing, 1983), 90.

27. Havel, "Politika a svědomí," 631.

28. Joseph Cardinal Mindszenty, Memoirs (London, 1974), 1.

29. See page 38 of address by János Kis cited in my note 10.

30. For figures on ethnic and national minorities see, variously, Jaroslav Blaha et al., "Les principales minorités nationales en Europe de l'Est," Cahiers de l'Est (1985): 41-80; Michael Checinski, Poland: Communism, Nationalism, Anti-Semitism (New York: Karz-Cohl Publishing, 1982), 41; Kálman Janics, Czechoslovak Policy and the Hungarian Minority 1945-48 vol. 9 of War and Society in East Central Europe: The Effects of World War II (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); G. Klein and M. J. Reban, eds., The Politics of Ethnicity in Eastern Europe (Boulder and New York: East European Monographs, 1981); Georg Brunner and Boris Meissner, eds., Nationalitätenprobleme in der Sowjetunion und Osteuropa (Cologne, 1982), especially László Revesz, "Die nationalen Minderheiten in Ungarn": 165-89; Anne Fay Sanborn, ed., Transylvania and the Hungarian-Rumanian Problem: A Symposium (Astor, FL: Danubian Press, 1979), 21-22; Pedro Ramet, ed., Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1984); Peter F. Sugar, ed., Ethnic Diversity and Conflict in Eastern Europe (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio, 1980). On the Gypsies in Hungary, see János Kenedi, "Why is the Gypsy the Scapegoat and not the Jew," East European Reporter 2, i (1985): 11-15. The best estimate for the number of Gypsies in Hungary is 300,000 (about 3 percent of the population).

31. András Kovács, "La question juive dans la Hongrie contemporaine," Actes de la Recherche en sciences sociales 56 (March 1985): 45-58; and Jerenc Erös, András Kovács, and Katalin Lévai, "Comment j'en suis arrivé à apprendre que j'étais juif," in the same edition of Actes: 63-69.

32. See above all Jiří Pelikán, ed., The Czechoslovak Political Trials, 1950-1954 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1971); and Karel Kaplan, Dans les Archives du Comité Central (Paris, 1978). The fullest account ever published openly in Czechoslovakia was also by Kaplan: "Zamyšlení nad politickými procesy" in Nová mysl, 6-8 (June-August 1968). Radio Free Europe published summary translations in the same year.

33. For the earlier quotation from Šimečka on the rethinking of history as a work of "self-preservation," see H. Gordon Skilling, "The Muse of History - 1984," Cross Currents (1984): 30. The

observation about the destruction of the past in the First Republic is from Ivan Klíma, quoted in Cahiers de l'Est, 15 (1979): 87.

34. The problems facing Czech historians are well illustrated by the action of Miloslav Bruzek, the Minister of Culture, who in May 1972 required libraries to separate off, together with "Trotskyist and fascist" publications, all works that "defend the Czechoslovak Republic that existed before the Munich Agreement." See A Besieged Culture: Czechoslovakia Ten Years after Helsinki (Stockholm and Vienna, 1985).

35. "Právo na dějiny," Charter 77 document no. 11 (1984) in Listy XIV, v (October 1984).

36. Jiří Hochmann, "Poznámky k poznámkam Jiřího Hájka," Listy XV, i (February 1985): 22-23.

37. Milan Kundera, interview in Cross Currents (1982): 16.

38. Radoslav Selucký, quoted in Peter Hruby, Fools and Heroes; the Changing Role of Communist Intellectuals in Czechoslovakia (Oxford, 1980), 114.

39. Václav Havel, O lidskou identitu, 199. See also Jiří Hochmann, "Poznámky," who notes that icons, etc., are not part of the Czech historical heritage. (His references to the Russian "otherness" are heavily ironic -- see p. 23).

40. On the whole question of "Central Europe," the best starting place is now Timothy Garton Ash, "Does Central Europe Exist?" in The New York Review of Books, 9 October 1986. See also the discussion between Milan Šimečka and Mihály Vajda around the famous article by Kundera, "Milan Šimečka, 'Another Civilization? An Other Civilization?'" East European Reporter, 1, ii (1985); Vajda's reply, "Who Excluded Russia from Europe?" East European Reporter, 1, iv (1986).

41. Petr Pithart, "Let Us Be Gentle to Our History", in Kosmas, 3, ii/4, i (double issue): 22.

42. Agnes Heller, "Un Democratico senza Democrazia," 131-32.

43. Mihály Vajda, The State and Socialism: Political Essays (London, 1981), passim.

44. Ludvík Vaculík, O lidskou identitu, 202-203; Milan Simecka, "A World with Utopias or without Them?" Cross Currents (1984): 26, where he is discussing Vaculík's essay on bravery, "Poznámky o statečnosti".

45. See Michnik's "Maggots and Angels", originally published in

Zapis as a reply to Piotr Wierzbicki's "Treatise on Maggots," now reprinted in Letters from Prison, 169-99. The pejorative use of the term "angels," with reference to persons of a utopian, intolerant, and collective bent, has an interesting prominence in the literature of the region. Kafka uses it this way in one of his letters to Milena, and there is, of course, the famous passage in Kundera's Book of Laughter and Forgetting.

46. See Alexander Kliment in Hodina naděje: almanach české literatury, 1968-1978 (Toronto, 1980), 200. In his introduction, Vaculík notes that some of the writers included in the collection were not totally forbidden to publish their work openly.

47. See, e.g., Havel, writing in O lidskou identitu, 259-60.

48. Hájek is quoted by Robert Wesson in M. M. Drachkovitch, ed., East Central Europe: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1982), 73. See also Jiří Hájek, Dix ans après (Paris, 1978). For other examples see Jiří Pelikan, ed., Socialist Opposition in Eastern Europe: The Czechoslovak Example (London, 1976), 89-93, 156; V. V. Kusin, From Dubček to Charter 77 (Edinburgh, 1978), 286, for a discussion of Mlynář's position; and for Mlynář himself, Voices of Czechoslovak Socialists (London, 1977), 76. For the views of the East Germans, see, for example, Rudolf Bahro, The Alternative in Eastern Europe (London, 1978); Bahro, Socialism and Survival (London, 1982); and DDR: das Manifest der Opposition (Munich, 1978).

49. Vajda, The State and Socialism, 104. Vajda here is probably a victim of his own clear thinking and the generally high level of analytical logic and abstraction of the Budapest group. The Italian Communists do not invoke support for pluralism as a conscious tactic, they just preferred to avert their eyes from the contradiction generated by their simultaneous support for democratic politics and their promise of an eventual overthrow of the "bourgeois rule" that it represents. They can live with their inconsistencies because they have no choice, although December 1981 brought them much closer to a genuine break with their Leninist doctrinal baggage. See Enrico Berlinguer, After Poland (Nottingham, 1982).

50. Czesław Miłosz, "Looking for a Center: On the Poetry of Central Europe", Cross Currents (1982): 4-11 especially.

51. See Pierre Grémion, Paris-Prague (Paris, 1985), 79.

52. Milan Kundera, Cross Currents (1982): 29

53. Havel, "Politika a svědomí": 627.

54. On the anti-consumerism of the older generation of dissidents in the GDR, see sources cited in note 48, together

dissidents in the GDR, see sources cited in note 48, together with Michael Sodaro in Jane L. Curry, ed., Dissent in Eastern Europe (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1983), 90ff; also Werner Volkmer in Tökes, Opposition in Eastern Europe, 113-27 especially.

55. For Šimečka, see source given in note 44.

56. See Král's sharp condemnation of Milan Jungmann (and others in Charter 77) for acting as a "parallel power," intolerant of all deviation (in this case the writings of Kundera). This is all a part, he writes, of the temptation to see nothing but evil in everything and everyone outside the charmed circle of political and literary dissidence; in Nouvelle Alternative, V (1987).

57. Ferenc Fehér, "Eastern Europe in the Eighties," Telos, 45 (Fall 1980). In general the Hungarians have been quicker to note the pitfalls entailed in a certain way of abandoning Marxism - see G. Bencze and J. Kis on the political expedience, if nothing else, of holding on to parts of the tradition (Bencze and Kis, "After the Break," in František Silnitsky et al., Communism and Eastern Europe: A Collection of Essays (New York: Karz Publishers, 1979), 133-40 especially.

58. Michnik is quoted by Jan T. Gross in Drachkovitch, East Central Europe, 325.

59. Havel, O lidskou identitu, 260.

60. The various Havel quotes come from Havel, "Krize identity," written in 1982 and included in the collections O lidskou identitu and "Politika a svědomí" (1984) cited already.

61. Havel, "Politika a svědomí," 628.

62. On certain epistemological similarities between Marxism and Christianity, see Leszek Kołakowski, L'Esprit révolutionnaire (Paris 1972, 1985), 19ff (page reference is to the later edition). It would not be so much mistaken as unhelpful to attempt to pursue this line of reasoning beyond the suggestive.

Comments* by

Timothy Garton Ash
The Spectator

The first thing to reflect on is Tony Judt's claim that"to rethink the recent history of opposition in these countries is to rethink their recent history itself." A person in the audience hinted at a question about that. This question has to be not only asserted but also examined, because, it seems to me, some of the problems of your analysis derive precisely from the fact that the congruence between the history of opposition and history of countries is very different in the different cases. The role and function of opposition is very different, hence, the language and articulation of opposition is very different. To treat these various opposition groups as if they were in some sense equivalent groups engaged in the same type of activity seems to me rather questionable. Of course, this is an assumption which they themselves have promoted: there is a fiction of an equivalence between the oppositions in the four countries of East Central Europe which is being merrily fostered at the moment and which is no doubt very useful politically, but is analytically quite misleading. There is the first point.

Second, it does seem to me that you must make up your mind about what kind of analysis you are making -- whether you are writing intellectual history or political history. Of course, the problem is intrinsic in that these people are both political thinkers and political actors. János Kis is a philosopher who is working as a politician; Hájek is a politician working as a philosopher. But nonetheless it seems to me that in this paper you are perhaps focussing too much on the side of intellectual history. For example, in the passage already mentioned by Geoff Eley where you charge both Havel and Michnik with the heinous crime of abandoning the Enlightenment, I think that certainly in the case of Michnik it is based simply on a misunderstanding. When he said that there is a possibility of a hybrid coexistence of a totalitarian state with a quasi-democratic society, he was making a short-term political statement -- he was not making a philosophical statement. And he never for one moment has thought of social and political spheres as conceptually independent as you suggest. Indeed his whole theory of "new evolutionism" which, by the way, is both more and less the language of rights, is based precisely on premises about the influence which social activism and social self-organization can have on the behavior of the state.

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* This is a lightly edited transcript of comments made at the seminar on 24 June 1987.

If I may return to the question of the language of rights--the chief vocabulary of the opposition in the 1970s. It seems to me that you concentrate too narrowly on that evolution, if it is such, from critical Marxism to the language of rights. If one regards that with the eye of a philosopher, or of an intellectual historian, then the use of the language of rights by most opposition activists in East Central Europe is extraordinarily superficial. As you yourself say in the paper, most of those who use it have not even absorbed, let alone reflected upon, the whole Anglo-American discussion of rights. The first, to my knowledge, opposition activist who is doing this at the moment is János Kis who has just completed a book about human rights. It seems to me that the popularity of the language of rights is both mere superficial, in one sense, and more profound, in another, than you suggest. Sometimes we can be too clever in seeking causes that are too profound. It seems to me the popularity of the language of rights has at least one very superfical cause which is simply the fact that with Helsinki, with the Carter Administration, the language of rights came to the top of the agenda of Western policy.

A rather major lack in your paper, it seems to me, is the way in which the Church in Poland in the early 1970s adopted the language of universal human rights abandoning its prior vocabulary of the historic rights of church and believers, the way in which this was then developed particularly by the Pope into an absolutely central part of Catholic social and political teaching so that if you look at his homolies in Poland on the last two visits -- particularly the sermon to Jaruzelski in the Royal Castle, which I think is absolutely a wonderful, wonderful work -- human rights appear there almost on a level with original sin. They are an absolutely central part of the Pope's theological teaching. Moreover, the Pope has, it seems to me, rarely done what the democratic opposition for the most part has not done, that is to say rarely built human rights into a larger ideological architecture and in so doing, speaks of human rights in terms which precisely appeal not only to intellectuals but also to workers -- that is to say, he talks in the context of human dignity, of the dignity of work, of society as subject--and that seems to me a major evolution -- of course it has the further implication that this specifically East European development has now gone off, as it were into world history through the Catholic Church. It is a real question how far that embracing of the Enlightenment by the Catholic Church is intellectually coherent and defensible. But that the Pope at least believes it is so is indisputable.

Finally, coming back to this abandoning of the Enlightenment. To address it in those terms is to move the spotlight slightly off center stage where it should be, which is on precisely the political implications and effects of these new

forms of opposition. Thinking the evolution you described from revisionism to new evolutionism, politics to anti-politics, if you will, party-state as subject to society as subject, has, it seems to me, had significant and measurable effects in at least one East European country, in Poland. In that sense your comment that nothing significant has changed between society and state seems to me very questionable. But the limits up against which it has come are not intellectual; they are the inadequacies of an antiholistic world view, they are simply in the nature of the political system -- to wit, the discovery that there are few areas of life which are not controlled by the state. It is as simple as that. Therefore the focus of the frontline of opposition in thinking, at least in Poland and in Hungary, though not yet in Czechoslovakia, is actually moving back from society as subject, that is, as it were, accepted, to the state as subject. And I can see three very fragile seedlings of a third phase in the evolution of oppositional thought, speaking in schematic terms. One is the discussion of freedom and peace--which you slighly suggest is something that, what you call opposition has had to adapt to but really has not made its own. I think there is a significant trend in opposition which makes that the central theme, the geopolitical theme, and it concentrates on the state as a function of the international system; that seems to me to be its analytical core. It accepts one of the basic arguments of Ostpolitik that the nature of the state in Eastern Europe is to a significant degree a function of the condition of the international system. I think that this premise is questionable, but that there is such a tendency in oppositional thought it seems to me unquestionable. Second, one of the discussants mentions Res Publica and Marcin Krol, and there is a school of thought at least in Poland which now believes that the party has been so significantly weakened, ideologies of reform so significantly discredited, and civil society sufficiently strengthened that one can consider beginning to re-domesticate parts of the state. Again, that is probably an illusion but certainly it is a new element in thought. The third element which seems to me the most important and realistic is that which the same discussant talked about -- to wit, the discussion of ownership, of property rights, of economic participation in various models of private, social, or mixed ownerhip. And to return to my starting point, if one is asking how does the history of the opposition relate to the history of the countries themselves, how might it relate in the future, then I must say that this is the area where there is, so to speak, the least ground for pessimism.

Comments by

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To analyze dissent in East Central Europe is, at best, a daunting task. At worst, it is an impossible one. The main problem with both Tony Judt's paper and most of our Western notions of East European thinking and criticism of their systems, however, is that they deal with East Europeans as if they were not from Eastern Europe. By divorcing intellectual history, for clarity's sake, from its national, historical, and social bases they turn a blind eye to the fates of those in the East European systems who dare to criticize. This approach also negates the very crucial relationship between the policies of these states and their citizens' responses, a major concern of East European theorists.

Those who dissent from their systems are far more than coffee-house theoreticians. By necessity, they are political strategists as well as social critics. They were not hatched into dissent in an incubator: some, such as former Czechoslovak foreign minister Jiří Hájek, at first worked within the system and later broke with it; others, such as Adam Michnik and László Rajk, are the children of former communist officials and revolutionaries; and still others have always presented a threat to the communist governors by virtue of their backgrounds or their own predilections. All of them know all too well the risks they run.

Equally problematic for Western observers is our desire to equate all of Eastern Europe and to treat its dissidents as if they were cut from one cloth. In fact, East European dissidents live in very different social and political worlds. A Hungarian and a Pole are free to act on ideas whose very utterance would be a crime in Czechoslovakia. Independent peace activists have been coopted by the East German regime and jailed or harassed in Czechoslovakia and Poland. A workers' union virtually ruled Poland for fifteen months; even after the government declared martial law and delegalized the union, it carried on negotiations with the union's leaders. In Romania, the miners who struck in 1977 in the Jiu Valley were not heard from again.

Dissidents are not, nor have they ever been, of one mind. To dissent from one system is not to agree on what the viable options are. The twelve or so dissidents cited by Judt are no more representative than any other twelve men or women who have

dared to dissent. Perhaps, given the obstacles to East-West contacts outside official circles, they are even less representative because they happen to be translated and read abroad. A complete study of dissent, even if it were limited to intellectuals, would have to encompass the spectrum from old to young; from the religious to the Marxist; from nationalists and representatives of ethnic minorities to anti-Semites and internationalists; from those who see their class as leaders in change to those who look to broad alliances of workers, peasants, and intellectuals; and from those who reject the system to those who inhabit the grey borders between the establishment and its opponents. Within each groups, too, there are disagreements and discussions.

Nor is dissent in Eastern Europe stagnant. The individuals whose views Judt cites, and others like them, have intellectual histories of their own and with time have made complex shifts in their positions. And, although demands for a free press, freedom of association, and religious freedom have been part of the regime critics' lexicon since before 1956, their tone has changed dramatically. They have shifted from demands for absolute freedom to more limited and conciliatory ones, as a result of national debates and the dissidents' own experiences.

The Question of Charter 77

In the process of declaring as irrelevant the questions of whether the East Europeans sit politically and culturally in the East or in the West, and whether those who criticize their systems should choose between remaining outside the system and working for change from within, Judt fails to cover some of the most interesting and universally challenging intellectual life in Eastern Europe -- that of Charter 77. While all too little of it has received the kind of press it deserves in the West, the Charter's texts are available either in full translation or in detailed summaries in most Western languages as well as in Czech and Slovak.

The documents issued by Charter 77, as well as the texts originating from the community around it, comprise a rich body of literature. It has concentrated neither on Marxism nor on Czech history, as Judt claims. The plethora of documents, literature, and discussions that come out of the Charter community every year range from the state of health care and youth issues in Czechoslovakia to statements of support for Solidarity, opposition to martial law in Poland and to the exile of Andrei Sakharov, as well as condemnation of U.S. support for the contras. And, although there are Charter members who were once in the Party and who remain dedicated to the ideals of Marxism, it is a serious misrepresentation to claim that Marxism frames their thinking and occupies their time. Instead, the Chartists have deliberately and explicitly created a "community of spirit" whose only common thread is dedication to human and civil rights.

What is central to both the thought and life of Chartists and others who oppose the current Czechoslovak system, as they communicate with their own countrymen and with those outside of Czechoslovakia, is the notion of creating a new community. The most dangerous aspects of their society are not merely horrors of communist systems but of all modern industrial societies: the mental deadening brought on by materialism promoted through the mass media and mass culture and the amoralism of societies ruled by bureaucracies and bureaucratic values. They do not merely focus on what is wrong in the industrial world, West and East, but on what individuals can and should do to live morally in it. Put explicitly, their lives and their words are an exploration of the "power of the powerless" in mass societies. Hence the emphasis on creating communities -- not so alternate that they become exclusive -- that can harbor those who do not wish simply to follow the lines marked by the state, be they the young punk musicians of the Plastic People of the Universe or the stately philosophers and former statesmen, Hájek, Ladislav Hejdanek, and Václav Černý. Judt ignores both the deliberate diversity in the Chartists' thinking and its critical focus not on major political change of potentially immutable Western and Eastern societies but on their gradual erosion through the construction of islands of ethical life. In doing this, he fails not only to make note of the very real information that is available on the realities in Czechoslovakia and the practical options, but he also fails to deal with probably the most relevant intellectual discussion of any in Eastern Europe for Western intellectuals.

In addition, although Judt rightly points out that jazz musicians are an important element in Czechoslovak dissent, he misses the significance of their role. It was, indeed, the repression of the Plastic People that made undeniably clear to more traditional elements of the intellectual community that human rights had to be advocated. Hence, the Charter 77 movement began with the attempts of men the age of the punk musicians' fathers and grandfathers focussing on the Plastic People's trial as the final proof that citizens who wished to live ethically had to advocate the rights of others, no matter how different their views. Jazz music as such played a less significant role in Czechoslovakia than in other states after the initial trials of the Plastic People. It joined a larger genre of underground culture that including living room theater, Patocka University classes given by blacklisted professors on blacklisted subjects to blacklisted students, and a lively underground publishing world. The Jazz Section of the Czechoslovak Musicians' Union, however, has remained a leading force in dissent. Playing on both its international recognition by UNESCO and its backing by the Union, the Jazz Section has been an outlet for all forms of otherwise forbidden culture. To do this, it battled successfully with the authorities for years but its leaders were finally arrested and tried in 1986, in spite of international protests.

People in Dissent

As the paper moves from characterizing the overall nature of dissent to the specific new issues on which, Judt claims, dissidents are now focussing, the waters become far murkier. Once he begins to discuss opposition to nuclear arms and peace as issues, he has, apparently inadvertently, stepped out of the domain of intellectual history and into the domain of mass culture.

Most broadly, one cannot talk of the intelligentsia as a whole when discussing dissidents. The intelligentsia is simply not equivalent to the opposition. Only a tiny margin of intellectuals, and even fewer of the intelligentsia, engage in public and explicit dissent in any of the East European societies. A slightly larger group, but still a tiny part of the whole, make a distinction between their public and private selves. In Czechoslovakia, they may dare speak only to their closest friends. In Poland, Hungary, and the GDR, they speak more fearlessly. And, increasingly, groups such as the peace movement in the GDR or the ecological clubs in Hungary and Poland have been able to function publicly if not officially, and are occasionally even included in meetings with official organizations.

The complications posed by ignoring the real world in which dissidents live are even clearer in Judt's generalizations explaining the involvement of young people in peace movements. The Freedom and Peace group that has just emerged in Poland is, indeed, the first postwar peace movement of any note in Poland. It has not, however, been formed by a generation that has already forgotten Solidarity, as Judt suggests. Poland is not Czechoslovakia. The end came for the Prague Spring abruptly and violently a year after the Soviet invasion. Books disappeared, those who had been involved in the debates of 1968 became "unpersons," and the very mention of the Prague Spring was forbidden. In Poland, on the other hand, martial law did not bring with it an end to the words and ideas of Solidarity. For the past six years, uncensored and establishment media and forums have kept Solidarity in view and in mind. No generation can forget this time in Polish history. Freedom and Peace was not produced by forgetting Solidarity's history but by the emergence of a generation of Poles who came of age after rapprochement between West Germany and Poland had made World War II and the fear of once again being victims much less immediate.

Groups and individuals making similar demands in Czechoslovakia are, in fact, not youth groups. Generations play little role here, given the enormity of the repression of all age groups. Peace and freedom are linked together because of the Czechoslovaks' very different wartime experience, of occupation but not destruction, and also because of the Czech

oppositionists' closer ties with their cohorts in the West. These intellectuals were concerned early on with the question of nuclear disarmament and have been pulled by the Czechs to link the two issues.

The irrelevance of generational differences in Czechoslovakia is evident when one reads Charter documents. Its members, who have made a deliberate attempt to ensure that their annually rotating spokesmen are representative of the whole movement, have recently been choosing spokesmen from the younger generation. This has not, however, resulted in any real shift in the Charter's line. In fact, its critical evaluations of the movement occur most often among those who have been involved in dissent since 1968 or earlier.

By leaving out the realities of life in Czechoslovakia which affect the way Chartists live, one cannot fully appreciate the nature of this movement, its boundaries and membership. Charter 77 and KOR are both movements and not organizations. Their non-structure is not a desire to be non-political. Rather, it is a recognition of the great risks which open involvement in them entails and the desire to expand activities to defend human rights. Therefore, they require no official leadership or organization. Instead, they have groups of supporters and a broader base of silent assistance and awareness. At the same time, the goal of both movements has been to be more than intellectual critics. Both have realized that, to bring about change in their societies, they need an involved working class. To this end, both groups (and, to a lesser extent, the church-based dissent in East Germany) have reached out to workers with services and ideas. This linkage is crucial to an understanding of the intellectual history of Eastern Europe.

The Search for New Issues

The watershed for dissent in Eastern Europe has long been assumed to be the signing of the Helsinki accords by the European nations of East and West. East European groups came to the surface soon afterwards with names and public declarations of membership, asserting their "rights" to freedom of religion, travel, and discussion. To claim, as Judt does, that these were "new issues" is to ignore the very loud calls against censorship, for religious freedom, and for a voice in decision-making that came from workers and intellectuals alike in Poland and Hungary in 1956, Poland and Czechoslovakia in 1968, and Poland again in 1970. It is also to ignore the intellectual base that writings from the late fifties and sixties laid out for many in the current opposition.

With the exception, perhaps, of the issue of nuclear disarmament that Judt lists, none of these issues is new. What is new is the sense among intellectuals in particular that, to force their systems to change, they must press existing laws to

their limit: if organizations in general are licensed, then that provision should be stretched further by attempts to register truly independent ones.

Missing, of course, from all but marginal writings is the issue of feminism that has come to fascinate Western intellectuals. Its absence is troubling to some. But, in the context of the world in which the East Europeans live, the daily struggles for basic material goods, for free time, and for freedoms overshadow the issue of feminism. It appears only in East Germany where the standard of living is significantly higher than elsewhere in Eastern Europe.

As interesting for analysts as the new themes and issues discussed by dissidents are the issues no longer raised. Revolution, liberal democracy, national aggrandizement, and withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact are no longer alternatives. Intellectuals no longer expect to be freed by the West or to overturn their systems. Some, for example the Czech dissenters, explicitly see in the failings of their system counterparts in the West. Others, such as the Poles and Hungarians, realize simply that they must live with the legacy of Yalta and cannot overturn it. They all seek evolutionary changes coming from inside. Even Solidarity and especially its intellectual advisors tried to fashion a deliberately "self-limiting revolution."

Limits of Analysis

Any attempt to demonstrate the complexities of Eastern Europe and to compare and analyze without getting bogged down in exceptions leaves open to question the feasibility of any cross-national comparison. At the same time, this problem illustrates the very necessity of cross-national comparison if only to prove that the East European states, and even the thinking of their intellectuals, are more different than alike.

Our ignorance of Eastern Europe makes this task all the more necessary. It also makes it more difficult. Although many scholars read one or two East European languages, few know enough of the spectrum to make any real comparisons. In addition, regular contacts with dissidents are not feasible in most of Eastern Europe.

In spite of the fact that all of the East European systems share a political structure, their diversity -- both historical and political -- far exceeds their similarities. And, even for the most erudite among us, the details of Bulgaria's short fling with democracy, or Czechoslovakia's interwar democratic regime are not part of our standard lexicon of facts. But, they are critical and formative events in the thinking of East European intellectuals. Without being set in these contexts, their thinking lacks its most basic reference points.

Why then consider Eastern Europe as a whole? First of all, whether they look East or West culturally, East European dissidents see their future as closely linked with those of their counterparts in the Soviet bloc. For there to be real change, nations must first of all be moving simultaneously in the same direction, as they have not in past periods when change was sought by one nation or one group at a time. Second, whatever their differences, the West understands and responds to the intellectual discussions all over Eastern Europe as one. And third, in spite of their differences, they are all European countries under repressive governments calling, symbolically at least, for Marxist ends. Therefore, the questions they ask and the answers they give are comparable. They also raise, to a greater degree than most Third World thinkers, philosophical questions of the "power of the powerless," an issue with which men in the modern world -- both East and West -- must deal. Fourth, the intellectual history of East European dissent is a window on the socialist world, that is, the impact of socialism on their lives and thinking. For, as Rudolf Bahro has pointed out, "the fate of socialism as a theory and as a movement is not independent of real existing socialism."

Comments by

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First, I want to say what a pleasure it is to have to comment on a paper that (despite its length) is so clear, thoughtful, well-written, and consistently stimulating. I should say right at the outset that I am really in broad agreement with the overall framework of argument and with most of its specific content. What I have in the way of comments is more a series of qualifications than fundamental disagreements, together with some discrete suggestions for how the agenda of questions might be filled out and further developed. These follow in no particular order, more or less as they occurred to me during my reading of the text.

(1) There are three general assumptions that underlie Tony Judt's discussion in the paper: (a) that there is a relative coherence and unity to the East Central European region ("that part of the Soviet sphere of Europe which is most central, least eastern," "those parts of Europe which lie on the western periphery of the Soviet sphere of influence"), which allows us to consider its forms of oppositional activity as distinct, and which separates the region from other societies in the Soviet sphere; (b) that opposition in this region is (has been?) mainly a matter of intellectuals, whose political, cultural, and existential predicament hinges at some level on "the old Central European distinction between 'intelligentsia' and 'people'"; and (c) such opposition is passing through a major watershed (roughly since the mid-1970s), which has enormous implications for the available and viable modes of political understanding, not only in the East, but also for the West, and particularly for the Left, if that old category still retains any meaning (I personally think it does). Now, each of these assumptions or claims seems to me correct, although they also suggest certain additional thoughts, which I offer as an extension of Judt's framework, for the purposes of possible discussion.

(2) Limiting the discussion to Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, and the GDR makes sense, at the very least for the practical limitations of space and expertise. Judt also makes the positive case fairly persuasively that "there is a wide area of thinking and behavior now common (though internally divided)" to the countries he discusses, although at the same time he reminds us very perceptively of the real differences among their social environments, intellectual cultures, and recent histories. But it is worth playing around nonetheless with the conceptual basis

for identifying a common regional experience in this way. Poland and Hungary, for instance, make an obvious couple -- by their common status as "historic nations" (with all that this implies), by their similar social structures and gentry-based traditional intelligentsias, by their shared experience of Stalinism (both as the East European societies, together with Romania, with the least indigenous support for Communism in 1945-47, and as the two societies that produced popular uprisings against Stalinism in 1956). To them, on the basis of postwar experiences of Stalinism, anti-Stalinism, and post-Stalinist repression, we can add Czechoslovakia. But in so doing, we are tacitly admitting that the main basis of categorization is pragmatic, namely, the fact that these are the three societies that have actually passed through a bitterly chastening mass oppositional experience since Stalin, and whose intelligentsias have reached convergent positions of intellectual, political, and moral self-demarcation -- partly because of their common sociological formation, partly because of their common investment in the abortive reform projects, and partly because of their shared suffering of harassment and repression.

Now, in all these respects, it seems to me, the GDR does not quite fit. There is a good case for arguing that the East German intelligentsia has a different formation, historically and structurally see Michael Sodaro in Jane Leftwich Curry, Dissent in Eastern Europe, New York: Praeger, 1983, pp. 85-89); it has experienced no popular-democratic anti-Stalinist uprising (with the ambiguous exception of June 1953); its literary and academic fractions have coexisted in a relatively stable modus vivendi with the regime; and its various oppositional currents have remained on the whole much more squarely within the institutional and intellectual parameters of the Communist political tradition. I fact, the GDR is integrated least satisfactorily into the terms of Judt's discussion, and for large parts of this discussion it tends to disappear from view. Conversely, there might be stronger positive grounds (as Judt acknowledges) for including, say, Yugoslavia instead. I should stress that this is not so much a criticism of the paper as a suggestion that one of the useful directions for the discussion might be some further exploration of the appropriate bases of comparability. For instance, in Judt's paper there is strikingly little discussion of any specifically Slovakian contribution or component in the Czechoslovak opposition, and this absence is surely worth some direct attention.

Likewise, if we take the East European region as a whole, the reasons for the absence of significant opposition are at least as interesting as those for its appearance, though obviously this raises a different set of questions from the ones Judt is discussing. There has been some discussion of Romania in this respect, but in some ways the particularly interesting case is Bulgaria, after Albania the East European society we know the

least about. Now, aside from the Czech lands, Bulgaria produced the only example in Eastern Europe before 1914 of a legally functioning, mass-based, parliamentary, Social Democratic labor movement, winning something more than 20 percent of the vote in the elections of 1913; it also produced an unusually successful and sophisticated peasant political movement between the turn of the century and the early 1920s; and in general the Bulgarian twentieth-century Left tradition was grounded in an unusually plebeian -- as opposed to intelligentsia-based -- political formation. What are the longer-range implications of this for the formation of the post-liberation Bulgarian intelligentsia and for other aspects of the Bulgarian political culture?

(3) As I say, these are not criticisms of Judt's paper per se, so much as suggestions for how the terms of his discussion might be usefully extended. Much the same goes for my response to the second of his underlying assumptions, namely, the focus on intellectuals as the social basis of current dissenting activity. At the same time, there is a certain partiality of perspective to his discussion in this respect: the more accurate title for his paper, I think, would be "the discourse of opposition and dissent in East Central Europe," because this is very much an exercise in intellectual history -- in delineating the emphases and orientations of consciously formulated reflections on the predicaments of Polish/Czech/Hungarian society. Again: I am not criticizing this as such, so much as suggesting how these legitimate emphases might need to be extended. For it is easy to forget, when reading this paper, that six or seven years ago Poland produced the single most impressive example of sustained, genuinely mass-based, specifically working-class political insurgency and creativity in Europe as a whole since the period 1917-20. This is relevant for two reasons.

First, because a recurrence of significant working-class militancy or unrest would immediately change the name of the game -- not because the reactivation of popular opposition would somehow miraculously conjure all the dilemmas and uncertainties out of existence, but because it would compel intellectuals to face precisely the problem of "political forms, political programs, political compromises" Tony raises in the next-to-last sentence of his paper. This would be especially dramatic in its consequences in Czechoslovakia, where democrats have found themselves forced so powerfully into the moral redoubt of a redemptively conceived private sphere. But second, and more to the point for present purposes, it would be inconceivable that a gigantic popular-democratic mobilization such as that achieved through Solidarity could disappear with no traces in the formal and informal culture of the working class, particularly when it generated such a large working-class leadership cadre, from Wałęsa and other recognized figures of the movement's national organs to the militants and activists who provided the lower levels of leadership.

The really important question concerns the nature of the oppositional outlook of this partially displaced working-class cadre; and in this respect it becomes crucial, I would think, to consider the nature of the influence of the Church, particularly as the Church is undertaking such a conscious and variegated responsibility for keeping alive an organized political culture of opposition -- for organizing civil society in Judt's sense. In other words, I am a little unhappy with the implied dichotomy between a consciously reflective intellectual opposition and an ideologically inert popular mass that seems to be present in some of Judt's remarks. There may be a "workers' opposition...which awaits it ideologies" (Szelényi) in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, but in Poland the "ideologies" are already present and correct. There is a real danger, it seems to me, of underestimating the existing strength ad coherence of the popular ideological outlook. Wałęsa, Bujak, and their colleagues were hardly blank pages before August 1980, and the same will be true of whoever their equivalents turn out to be in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, whenever the next major explosion of popular oppositional activity eventually breaks out.

(4) Turning now to the third of Tony's organizing assumptions, I again find myself in broad agreement: we are in the midst of a vital watershed, through which both the dominant modes of political understanding and the given bases of political action are being changed. In the most obvious sense, the practical viability of the official Communist tradition has been radically undermined. As a functioning idea capable of mobilizing popular aspirations and of offering a genuine field of activity for democratic reformers, of course, it has always been in doubt, certainly since the late 1940s, although it has to be said that in specific cases (such as Czechoslovakia between the mid-1940s and 1968) it still displayed a striking degree of resilience in this respect. But more recently -- since 1968-69 in Czechoslovakia, since 1981 in Poland -- the Communist tradition has decisively exhausted its residual credibility: not just in terms of the processes of legitimation, but also in terms of the communist parties' practical irrelevance to the processes of potential reconstruction as most oppositionists see them. In the past, it had always been possible to argue for the necessity of working through the existing political institutions to achieve reform, even in the most limited of pragmatic senses. But now that argument retains a very small purchase on the political strategy of opposition. This process has certainly gone furthest in Poland, and I think the 1980-81 events demonstrate this particularly powerfully:

(a) First, even in Poland at this late stage there were still signs that the typical pattern of Communist reform movements could assert itself -- namely, the pattern of interaction between reformist aspirations in society and flexible

or reformist currents inside the Party willing to take up these demands: I am thinking here of the weakly articulated efforts of the Kania-Barcikowski leadership, of the beginnings of horizontal organization at the lower levels of the party, and of the considerable penetration of Solidarity among the party's rank-and-file. Now -- this is to say nothing about the "real" intentions or motivations of the Kania-Barcikowski group or the real adaptability in the long run of the existing party structures; it is simply to say that there were still some signs of a more familiar process of political resolution at work, that is, the practical dynamics of an articulated reform movement tending toward some coalition of party and society.

(b) However, ultimately the most important thing about the actual outcome of the crisis was the complete displacement of the party ALTOGETHER. It was not just that the Kania-Barcikowski conception never came to anything, but also the fact that the conservative party groupings were not involved either. When the repression came, it came through the agency of the army and not through the agency of a purged and re-Stalinized party. The collapse of the party as an active agent and its complete displacement by the army seems to me to have been without precedent in a Communist state.

(c) Now, even more significantly, to a great extent the empty space left by the party's collapse as a socializing agency is being filled by the Church, which seems to be allowed a remarkable degree of latitude for autonomous cultural and social activity under the terms of the Jaruzelski normalization. Thus -- not only is the communist party as an embodied tradition in abject disarray, but a positive opportunity has also been conceded to an alternative organizing force, which can provide the opposition with some framework for survival. This makes the Polish situation quite unusual. It presents the vital new problems of "civil society" that Judt discusses so well in a very distinctive light. We may certainly find highly innovative efforts in Hungary and Czechoslovakia directed at "shifting...the forms of social activity away from the institutions of the Communist system and toward a more open public domain" (Jan B. de Weydenthal, in Jane Leftwich Curry, ed., Dissent in Eastern Europe, New York: Praeger, 1983, p. 150). But by comparison with Poland, they have gone nothing like as far. And the key difference is in this simultaneous collapse of the communist party and the availability of a tolerated alternative agency in the form of the Church, the new "Modern Prince," so to speak. Neither have the communist parties in Hungary and Czechoslovakia totally eliminated themselves as serious institutional factors in any future process of reform -- as Judt says, as soon as some new loosening occurs, all the old questions will once again arise concerning "constructive engagement," "dialogue," and "compromise." Nor is it possible to identify a societal institution in Hungary and Czechoslovakia that can provide a

support system of some rough equivalence to the Polish Church. The "great refusal" of the dissenting Czech intelligentsia cannot of itself corrode the practical institutional presence of the apparatus.

(5) The more grandiloquent parts of Judt's argument regarding the end of a European era and the death of the Enlightenment tradition in the very specific sense he gives it are harder to deal with. The mildly apocalyptic and Spenglerian undertones leave me relatively unmoved. However, the major point concerning the "unravelling" of a "holistic view of social arrangements," and the uncoupling of political thinking and political values from a strong conception of social progress, seems to me a very good one. One of the areas in which this is particularly true is the retreat from a classical faith in the power of technological progress and the mastery of science over nature, which has been both a central article of the Communist credo and one of its most evident points of failure; and Judt might perhaps have made more of this in his treatment of environmentalism towards the start of his paper. There is obviously an enormous amount to be said on this point, but I will confine myself to two quick remarks:

(a) First, there seems to me to be a striking degree of congruence between this particular form of socio-political skepticism among East European intellectuals and similar processes of rethinking among radical intellectuals in the West -- most visibly in West Germany perhaps (because there it has acquired an organized embodiment in the Greens), and least apparent (dare one say) in France, but present in one way or another in Italy, Britain, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Scandinavia. This is the phenomenon negatively characterized in the mid-1970s as the "crisis of Marxism," but whose latter-day positive manifestations are now conventionally discussed beneath the rubric of "new social movements," and which fundamentally reflects the same kind of theoretical and political disaggregating noted by Judt in the East. Ultimately, I would argue, this reflects a general "anti-reductionist turn," which has freed the radical imagination to engage creatively with a wide range of discrete political concerns (more or less the same kind of concerns surveyed by Judt in the middle part of his paper, together with some others, one of which I will mention in a minute), unconstrained by older, determinist notions of class and sociological or Marxist materialism.

(b) The most radical versions of this new skepticism, in the West no less than the East, have dethroned socialism as the automatic vehicle of a radical politics in favor of a more catholic and pluralist conception of democracy. But this does not mean -- in the East any more than in the West -- that socialism is somehow "dead" (which is again one of the more apocalyptic intimations of Judt's discussion). What it does mean is that in the East socialism will henceforth have to take its

chances in the intellectual and political arena, laboring heavily beneath the accumulated handicap of "actually existing socialism," perhaps as a minority interest, and certainly without privilege or preferment.

(6) There is in Judt's list of specific oppositional themes, which otherwise looks so reminiscent of the new social movements and their agenda, one very interesting absence, which I assume reflects its actual relative absence from the East European discourse rather than any blind spot of Judt's own, and that is feminism. I was strongly struck with the fact that in the paper an exclusively male voice is used throughout.

(7) One dimension of the prospects for the opposition in Eastern Europe which is so obvious at this point as to hardly need stating, is Gorbachëv and the likely trajectory and reverberations of the Soviet reform initiatives. The only specific comment I would make in this respect is that one striking effect so far has been to open in the Soviet Union precisely the sort of discussion Judt diagnoses in the discourse of the East European opposition -- most notably, perhaps, in the area of the environment.

Comments by

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Tony Judt's morphology of the East European opposition is welcome, as it is based on enormous erudition and, above all, on a fresh insight into the intricate patterns of the subject. In Judt's presentation, a new panorama of intellectual and political struggles emerges, in lieu of the much too nineteenth-century fresco with battle scenes between "freedom" and "unfreedom" as the political landscape normally appears in earlier presentations. I will only dwell on three not entirely random issues selected from this rich paper.

(1) The first is the change in vocabulary. While I wholly agree with Judt on his inventory of the considerable changes in actors, and hence in the vocabularies used from one period to the next, I do not share his linear historicity. I hope I do justice to his presentation if I sum it up in the following manner. Marxism, due to its institutionalized and coercion-based position, but also to its intellectual appeal, was the exclusive language of politics and culture in Eastern Europe until the middle, or the second half, of the fifties. The post-Stalinist turbulences created a new actor, the dissenting or oppositional communist; and a new language, critical or oppositional Marxism. As far as its political implications were concerned, this language was dramatically different from the official dialect of the ruling apparatus. And yet, to the majority of the populace, the oppositional jargon was almost indistinguishable from the official one. This ambiguity was in part the cause of the pragmatic fiasco of reformist communism (as one could observe on the streets of a revolutionary Hungary in 1956). In part, it served as a clear premonition of its future incapacity to transcend the antinomies of the system even theoretically.

In the mid-seventies a new actor emerged with a new vocabulary, "the rights language." On the one hand, the new actor's new vocabulary attested to his self-therapy from Marxism. On the other hand, this thorough cure made rapprochement possible with wide layers of the populace which had always remained unaffected by Marxism, official or oppositional. It was clearly the intention of this new actor equipped with his new vocabulary to bid adieu for good to such obsolete ctegories as "right" and "left," "capitalism" and "socialism." The new actor, however, has his own problems now. The "rights militant" has not yet proved capable of thematizing certain key issues such as environmentalism, peace movements, and others. This is where we

now stand.

While, to repeat, I find Judt's emphasis on the language shift, and on the shift in actors central, I cannot accept his linear view of events in which certain categories of earlier theoretical frameworks disappear for good while others rise above the debris of a destroyed theoretical past. My own periodization would read as follows. The first, very weak and ultimately futile, opposition to the Soviet system which prevailed in Eastern Europe from 1945-48 was constituted by fairly obsolete liberal, liberal-conservative, and social-demoratic theories, none of which had ever understood the character of the Soviet regime with which it had to deal. Nor did most of them enjoy much theoretical, moral, or political authority after the war. (István Bibó and certain trends within Polish social theory seem to be the only exceptions here.)

When oppositional Marxism took over in the mid-fifties, it appeared as a language of modernization by comparison to the first generation. Oppositional Marxism was on the same wavelength as East European radical movements: it seemed to offer an insight into the riddle of the whole, not just of parts, of our civilization. We all know, even if our accounts of the event differ, that this movement has historically proved to be incapable of delivering what it promises, that it has disintegrated, and that in its wake the "rights activist" and his vocabulary of rights have emerged. While I no longer adhere to the old vocabulary of critical Marxism (although I do not reject it altogether), while I genuinely admire the aspirations and, occasionally, the achievements of the "rights activist," I cannot regard this change in vocabulary simply as evolution, as a gain without losses. Nor do I believe that those ominous categories of "right" and "left," "capitalism" and "socialism" have become meaningless for all eternity just because the "rights activist" has dumped them.

The "rights activist" has emerged as the anti-holistic actor. In this sense, he was an early forerunner of political postmodernism qua minimalism and deconstruction. But a price was attached to this innovation. Neither could the socio-economic base of the integrating role played by the oppressive state (the target of his campaign) be analyzed in these terms beyond the perfectly true statement that it is oppressive, which could be repeated ad nauseam, nor could the peculiar network of social stratification and functional division of labor be analyzed in "rights" terms. By contrast, it seems that the endless disputes about the "system" may have retained their significance. Once the course of events proceeds from rights campaigns to systemic projects and blueprints, as is now happening in Poland and Hungary, it is the very context of oppositional debate that makes more holistic approaches mandatory. Ironically, no one is more fully aware of this than Judt when he embarks on a historical

excursion concerning what "capitalism" had meant in Eastern Europe prior to the communist system, and whether it can be restored in an unaltered form.

But with the new exigencies of the debate we move into the fourth, the postmodernist, phase of East European oppositon, in which actors and vocabularies shed their oppositional uniformity, and they diversify. To some of them, an anti-statist, and at the same time anti-capitalist, egalitarianism will be the central issue (and Judt points out this eventuality, relying on Iván Szelényi's prognosis). To others, the rights issue will remain the crucial, and perhaps the only, item on the agenda. To yet another group, the advocacy of capitalism pure and simple, at least in all matters economic, constitutes the chief remedy and therefore the major substantive issue. One can already see such groups emerging in the new phase of the Hungarian debates on reform. Finally, I am quite convinced that certain apparently dead elements of reformist communism will be resurrected to the degree that Gorbachëvshchina outgrows the phase of mere conjectures and becomes a reality. One can already observe phenomena of this kind among Czechoslovak dissidents.

(2) My second remark concerns such categories as "Eastern Europe," "Central Europe," or the one coined by Brodsky to describe the periphery of the empire, "Western Asia." As geographic terms in general, these too are value-loaded and, to a degree, political. "Eastern Europe" in particular has never been, nor is it now, an entity. The term is the conceptual yield of the postwar situation in which many politically, culturally, and religiously different states and regimes have been melted into one, the "East European." But none of the countries described by this term had a common past with any other. Moreover, many of them had been hermetically separated from some of the others throughout their normal histories. The two characteristics they shared when they became "Eastern Europe" were, first, that they found themselves in the path of the Red Army en route to Western Europe and, second, that they were Sovietized in a holistic manner.

This is why oppositional historicism working to dissect the term "Eastern Europe" is more than a mere romantic pastime. It is a theoretical operation in the strictest Foucauldean sense: the dissection of a concept in order to find in it the underlying element of power and domination. The very fact that certain nations, or at least the oppositional and critical intelligentsia of certain nations, define themselves as Central and not as East European is tantamount to the spiritual deconstruction of the imperial system. No romantic exaggeration of the political weight of oppositional historicism is implied in this statement. Soviet army units will not evaporate under the impact of cultural flirtation with the idea of Central Europe. Yet those familiar with the history of the Habsburg Empire are fully aware of the

significance of these subversive activities.

This is why I do not find the selection of terms politically innocent. And this is, further, why I am opposed to Kundera's and Brodsky's equation of the Soviet system with Russia as non-European, as "Asian." This is, finally, why I am opposed to raising the very legitimate East European resistance to Soviet imperialism to the rank of a bastion of European culture. The Soviet soldiers who throw age-old relics of European culture out of windows in occupied cities, to resort to Kundera's well-known metaphor, are certainly enemies of European culture. But so were their fathers who served as armed guards in Stalin's concentration camps where an extremely European, and at the same time native Russian, intelligentsia was annihilated. In other words, Stalin's system is, both inside and outside the USSR, a mortal enemy of "European" culture.

It is not just the Jewish cosmopolitan feeling in me, although this kind of aversion also argues against the revival of poisonous old ideologies with an oppositional twist. There is a philosophical and political argument as well behind this aversion. The philosophical argument is the following. Precisely insofar as the East European opposition pretends to be the bulwark of "Europe" against "barbarian Russia," it is no longer on the European wavelength. These days, Europe is becoming a museum, a cultural memory of the past, due to the postmodernist, anti-ethnocentric drive to deconstruct all universalistic and holistic concepts. Therefore the same opposition which so vehemently fights holism in other areas, embraces a holistic-universalistic ideology in another. The political argument is the following. I have shown several times together with Agnes Heller how the merger of Russian and Soviet nationalism has become the principle of legitimation in the Soviet regime after Khrushchev. Insofar as the East Europeans choose to define their opposition in terms of being "European" as opposed to accepting a Russian, that is non-European, imperialism they are not only indulging in a more than questionable historicist exercise. They also lend indirect support to their principal enemy. People in the USSR who could otherwise be sensitive to East European grievances will gather around the imperial banner if they feel themselves attacked in their "ethnic substance."

(3) Finally, a brief polemic against the title. The story under consideration is for me far from being a politics of impotence. It seems to be the lasting historical achievement of many, above all Polish and Hungarian, oppositional actors to have considerably de-totalized their societies, even if they have not been able to change the totalitarian character of the state. This is not an unintentional by-product of their activities. In order to understand their implications, we have to fit the oppositional sturggles into a wider political perspective in these countries. What I have in mind in this respect I have

called elsewhere "Eastern Europe's long revolution against the Yalta system." Very brief and undocumented statements should suffice here. Immediately after Stalin's death, the social struggles against Soviet imperialism carried the hope that the social and national situation could be radically altered. These hopes reached their peak in the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, in the pluralistic and vaguely socialist regime with which revolutionary Hungary seemed to emerge from the debris of a destroyed communist system, and in its determination to leave the Warsaw Pact and become neutral. To deconstruct Yalta in such a radical form later proved impossible. In the more than twenty years that followed, Yalta was strictly and jealously guarded by Brezhnev's USSR. From Zdeněk Mlynář's narrative, we all are familiar with the thorough astonishment of the abducted Dubček leadership at not being accused of ideological and internal political heresies by a furious Brezhnev, but rather of another crime of which they were innocent: the secret intention to defect from the Yalta system. On the other hand, the anti-Yalta movement had such champions in that period, in the persons and regimes of Ceausescu and Hoxha, that not many of the reformist communists or the "rights activists" would have been prepared to join them in a common cause.

I propose to understand that which Judt terms "politics of impotence," and what is for me a powerful trend in all of East European politics, in terms of a long-term anti-Yalta revolution. The linkage is not my invention. Adam Michnik suggested in an interesting article in the late seventies, and his strategy seems not to have changed since, to use the following blueprint. Yalta, Michnik stated, had indeed decided which country would belong to which sphere of influence. In this sense, Poland has no option. But, he argued further, Yalta did not prescribe the oppressive character of the regimes which emerged in the region, as a result of Stalin's doing. Since, however, many of Stalin's policies are being deconstructed, why should the oppressive character of the regimes created by Stalin remain exempt from deconstruction? And if they are not, if the internal character of these regimes is radically altered without any attempt at "defection," the Yalta system will be drastically modified, but not dismantled.

The much too obvious illusions and ideological elements in this interpretation are of secondary importance. More importantly, I believe to find a coordinated attempt at a new historical Ausgleich between the periphery and the center of the Soviet empire in these strategies. And if the opposition could achieve, or only promote, an Ausgleich of this kind in one country, even more so in several countries, the result would amount to incomparably more than a mere politics of impotence.

Comments by

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The paper presented by Tony Judt is excellent and useful both as a comprehensive survey and as an introduction to the discussion of the East Central European opposition. Still, I think that in mapping the boundaries of the realm of this opposition, Judt restricts it mainly to the visible and readable groupings of the democratic dissidents. My readings and experiences suggest, however, that the actual size of this hard-to-define realm is greater and reaches deeper.

(1) For example, in Hungary suppressed journals (Tiszatáj), silenced writers (Csurka, Csoóri), and the most recent meeting of the Writers' Union show that one must not exclude the populist (népi) grouping from the opposition or belittle its role within the opposition. First, many of its members are radical opponents of the system, and, second, they have much greater popular support than the mainly Budapest-centered democratic opposition. They have enjoyed a growing influence among students and non-academic professionals, and in country towns; the liberal-national emigration considers them the "authentic" Hungarian opposition.

(2) One cannot overlook the revitalization of religious groupings. Voices can be heard from the Jewish samizdat Shalom and the Catholic journal Vigilia; religious groups attached to churches can also be seen and heard.

I can understand Judt's restriction of the term "opposition" because these groupings are less perceptible to the observer from abroad than are the writings and movements of the democratic urban opposition. Among the latter there are well-known writers (Konrád, Eörsi) and scholars (J. Kis, Bencze), whose writings and samizdat publications are available in many foreign languages, and whose contacts and friends are in similar dissident groups in Eastern Europe, as well as among Western radicals. I could understand this reduction of the opposition if the author's survey were curtailed only by a shortage of information.

I suspect, however, that Judt's definition is limited for another reason, the same reason that is used by the democratic opposition to define its sphere of potential alliances. I guess that the main cause of this lies in the critical reasoning which the left radicals inherited from the Enlightenment, positivism, and genuine Marxism. It is the historical horror of any non-rational idea or irrational emotions that for centuries has been

holding the believers of Pure Reason back from having ambiguous relations with nationalism. To be sure, logical considerations alone cannot explain this aversion: there are also tough historical experiences. "Nationalism in East Central Europe," writes Judt, "is historically the opponent of democracy. The resurrection of the nationalist rhetoric is not without its advantages to the socialist state.... For it channels attention away from the denial of rights, the restriction of liberty... instead it places the emphasis on the dislike of outsiders." I think that these statements are overgeneralized without the backing of an accurate analysis of the actual situation. It may be true that Hungarian nationalism was an opponent of democratic and socialist thought before World War I, in 1918-19, and in the interwar period -- but not independently from time, space, and social strata! There were groups in Hungary before and during World War I, in 1918, in the interwar years, and in 1956 which represented and temporarily reconciled national and democratic ideas.

I would disagree also with Judt's statement that the ruling system was happy with the resurrection of nationalism, and nationalism really would be instrumental in strengthening the existing socialism. Perhaps the ruling circles' attempt to manipulate people with cautiously directed nationalism in Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia; nationalism, however, has always been and remains detrimental and destructive to the basic issue: Hungarian- (Polish-, Czech-) Soviet relations. I cannot help questioning the correctness of a perhaps hasty sentence in the paper. There is no need for national rhetoric, "Hungary is not going to recover the 66 percent of its territory lost at Trianon; Lvov, and Vilna are firmly in the Soviet Union." It sounds as though the Hungarian national opposition, as well as the people, were so chauvinistic and unrealistic that they have actually raised the prospect of reclaiming Slovakia, Transylvania, and Croatia in the last 30 years or so. I do not know the author's sources. I do not know how many fantasists are living in Hungary, Poland, West Germany, and the United States. What I do know is that the Hungarian opposition demands only democratic human rights for its minorities living in oppression in Romania, Slovakia, and elsewhere.

(3) The democratic opposition is not active in a social vacuum. The "registered" opposition is surrounded and supported by numerous sympathizers ranging from discontented workers to top academicians. A large part of the population, particularly intellectuals, is deeply concerned with the economic decomposition of the country, the sinking public morale, the government's neglect of the fate of Hungarian minorities, and the problems of alcoholism and suicide. This is a favorable environment for the opposition, precluding its isolation, which is the main goal of the ruling establishment. In order to explain better the East Central European situation, I suggest the

following analogy. The formal and informal opposition in Hungary -- and very probably in Poland -- may be placed on an almost uninterrupted continuum which reaches all the way up to the discontented elements within the party. Each point on this continuum interacts steadily with its neighbors, ultimately transmitting two-way information from the core of the opposition to the reformers in the party.

In conclusion, I think that (1) rational democratism does not necessarily contradict national sentiments and can be reconciled (or at least reconciliation ought to be aimed for); and (2) paying attention to the existing political continuum of opposition is not a sign of opportunism but rather a demand of realism.

Comments by

Norman M. Naimark
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"In the Wings of East Central Europe"

Eastern Europe -- and by that I mean Europe east of the "mystical" border of the river Elbe (Iván Berend) stretching to the Urals and beyond -- has been living through a period of profound crisis. The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 marked its beginning. The simultaneous victory and defeat of Solidarity in the 1980s indicate that the crisis is permanent and self-perpetuating. In his fascinating, complex analysis of the opposition in Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and, to a lesser extent, the GDR, Tony Judt surveys the cultural/political responses of the intelligentsia in these countries to the depressing realities of communism in power. If the writer István Eörsi can speak of "catastrophic economic decline and cultural desolation in Hungary, the liveliest country in the region, we do not need to review the demoralization and economic frailties of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and -- one could argue -- even the GDR, where an estimated 400,000 citizens have applied to leave and the gap between the East German and West German economies grows larger. (Emigration also seems to be increasingly on the minds of young Poles.) We should at least mention Romania, not simply because the regime has deprived its citizens of personal security and sustenance. Communism has attempted to obliterate Romania's interwar heritage of cultural interchange with Central Europe. In doing so, it has undermined the spiritual and moral health of the Romanian nation.

The reason I begin with the crisis of Eastern Europe rather than with the discussion about "Central Europe" among intellectuals in the East and West is to emphasize cause and effect. The biographies of Kundera, Michnik, and Konrád, among others, reflect in part the acts of the East European tragedy as the regimes evolved through Stalinism, revisionism, and opposition. The failures of the social movements in 1953, 1956, and 1968 shaped the intelligentsia's thinking, as has martial law. What is left for intellectuals is their dignity and culture, their autonomy of mind and passion for freedom. Theirs may be a "politics of impotence," as Judt notes by his title. They are only minimally capable of influencing the ruling governments or potential social movements. But "anti-politics" provides intellectual and psychological nourishment often lacking -- from their point of view and ours -- in Western intellectual life. In short, the idea of "Central Europe" is a response among

intellectuals to permanent crisis (not unrelated to Trotsky's "permanent revolution") in Eastern Europe. For them, it carves out a territory for discussion and reflection about culture, for historical inquiry and social meaning. The crisis has more to do with the system and its ideological underpinnings than with its location and cultural context. Similarly, the demilitarized, neutralized "Mitteleuropa" of the West German left and its "second Ostpolitik" has little or nothing to do with the "Central Europe" of Polish or Czech intellectuals.

To expand on this argument, let us consider the wings of East Central Europe -- the German Democratic Republic and Russia (geographically and culturally the Russian Republic of the USSR). There is no need to elaborate on the enormous difference between these two countries and their cultures. Yet in some ways they resemble each other more than they are similar to Poland, Hungary, or Czechoslovakia. The GDR and Russia are heavily militarized and prone to national chauvinism and show little appreciation for democracy and pluralism. They are more thoroughly anti-capitalist and historically more uncompromising toward "revisionist" ideas. Still, Judt's paper highlighted for me the similarities between the oppositions in all of these countries. To be sure, he says almost nothing about the Russians, reflecting perhaps the general Central European view that Communism somehow fits the Muscovites. But one finds a similar pattern of opposition in Russia as in Central Europe: an older generation, many now in emigration, who founded the human rights movement -- and a younger one, which rallies around a romantic neo-Slavophile movement (or "Rusofils" as they are called in Moscow). On the other hand, Judt underestimates (in my view) the commonalities between East German oppositionists and those of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland. I think that much of the problem with his treatment of the GDR has to do with far too much attention to the ideas of Rudolf Bahro, which were developed in almost total isolation and made little or no impact on East German oppositionists. (One could argue that Judt pays too much attention to single intellectuals in all the countries.) On the other hand, Harich and his group in 1956-57 and Havemann and his university circles in the 1960s and 1970s met with considerable sympathy. Though calling for party reform, as Judt notes, both groups also clearly advocated pluralism, a mixed economy and basic freedoms and had excellent contacts in Prague and Warsaw.

It would be worth sketching some of the concrete Russian and East German analogies to the new East Central European opposition politics that Judt describes. Before doing so, however, it is worth reminding ourselves how different and unique the historical development and contemporary challenges of each of these countries are. To talk about the commonalities that the systems promote is not intended to minimize the cultural uniqueness of East European societies. Nor do I think we should think of the

term "opposition" in overly schematic terms. Forms and methods of opposition differ dramatically from country to country, even within the same countries simultaneously and over time.

(1) For over 150 years, the Russian intelligentsia has led the opposition to autocracy in its Romanov and Soviet forms. Can Solzhenitsyn be so different from Havel in his search for "value and inspiration" within his "own threatened culture"? The problem of the intelligentsia is trickier in the East German case, since so many have been expelled or have chosen the road of emigration to a country (the FRG) they can claim as home. Still, writers like Stefan Heym (or, in a different way, Christa Wolf) stand in opposition to the state, while searching the German past for answers to questions of moral truth and national identity.

(2) One hardly needs to dwell on the social isolation of the Russian or East German intelligentsia from the working class, and -- what is especially painful for the Russians -- from the peasantry. (Is neo-populism really so irrelevant to the interests of, for example, the Hungarian opposition or even the Poles? The failures of industrialization and the catastrophe of the post-industrial societies in Eastern Europe have, I think, contributed to the attractions of populism and peasantism in various forms.)

(3) Judt is correct to point to the willingness of the East German intelligentsia to compromise with the regime, in some sense like the Hungarians. The Russian case recently has been complicated by the first signs of willingness on the part of the Soviet government since the 1920s to compromise with the intelligentsia. (One can argue about Khrushchev.) Still, there is a tradition and structure of absolute opposition to the government and equally absolute dedication to an alternative society -- "obshchestvennost'" to use the nineteenth-century term, or "counter-public" (A. Heller) and "Gegenöffentlichkeit" (D. Bathrick) to use more contemporary ones.

(4) Almost by definition, the Russian intelligentsia opposition is anti-bourgeois, against the consumer society, and non-conformist. The East German opposition similarly attacks the "buying off" of the population by the government, traditional German Anpassungsfähigkeit and the values of Kleinbürgertum.

(5) As Judt indicates, the independent peace movement in the GDR has assumed a central role in the country's "new opposition," though clearly the movement is scattered, unable to form central organizations, and only haphazardly able to express unified opinion. We should not forget that East German dissidents opposed the formation of the NVA in 1955-56 and have urged its dissolution ever since. In this case, as in many others, the sources of new opposition politics can be traced back to the first post-Stalin years. It is also significant that the

independent East German peace movement is not primarily concerned with missiles but with the militarization of East German society. There is evidence that the winds of this opposition have blown from West to East, to the now banned Hungarian Peace Group for Dialogue and even to the Soviet Union, where the Group to Establish Trust between the US and USSR has struggled against police threats, forced emigration, and imprisonment to pass around its petitions and to hold meetings of its discussion groups. Winds of the peace movement also blow from East to West. Recently, the East German movement has introduced much stronger language (not unlike the Czechs) about the centrality of civil and human rights to the peace issue.

(6) Ecological issues have become increasingly important to both Russian and East German oppositionists. To read Valentin Rasputin on the destruction of the Angara River ecology because of new dams or Sergei Zalygin on the recently postponed project to divert Siberian rivers cannot be so dissimilar from the arguments of the Danube Circle or the ecological concerns of Charter 77, though in the first two cases, the Soviet writers are still part of the official world. That socialism is destroying the physical environment and with it the national heritage is also part of the myriad protests -- especially against Waldsterben -- of ecological groups in the GDR. While it would be inaccurate to equate ecological concerns with political opposition of the traditional sort, it is nevertheless the case that in the USSR and the GDR, ecological issues have served the function of surrogate political discussion.

(7) In both the Russian and East German cases, the search for historical meaning has become a critical part of the self-definition of the intelligentsia. Stefan Heym's historical novels Colin and especially Schwarzenberg counterpose a pluralistic, social democratic, Central European Mitteleuropa to the sharply divided Europe he so clearly resents. A Model Childhood is Christa Wolf's attempt to find meaning for herself and her countrymen in the Nazi past. The East German government now approves patriotic investigations of Bismarck, Luther, and Frederick II. In a bizarre reversal of roles, the opposition intelligentsia now explores the lessons of good and evil in the dark corners of twentieth-century German history. Russian oppositionists, too, are in search of their real historical past. Samizdat historical journals are flourishing. Not unlike the German case, there is a new willingness by the government to revive the previously ignored heroes of the past -- from tsars to military conquerors and wandering monks. It is up to the opposition intelligentsia to present accurate historical renditions of the revolution, the Stalinist thirties, and the post-war "reconstruction." Much as in Poland and Hungary, the opportunities to publish their works in the official press vary from day to day.

(8) There are many other examples of commonalities in the opposition. One we should certainly mention is the growing influence of religion. Judt's discussion of religion and politics in Adam Michnik's thinking contains insights, as well, into the Orthodox revival in the Russian opposition movement. (Russian dissident churchmen accurately label this revival "ethnographic" Orthodoxy.) The old divisions between Westernizers and Slavophiles in the Russian intelligentsia have become increasingly irrelevant to opposition politics. Judt also describes the critical importance of the Evangelical church to the vast German opposition. At the same time, it is important to add that there is a generational struggle in the church. The lay pastors -- many of whom served in the Baueinheiten -- are often much more radical than the church hierarchy and more willing to oppose the state. East German Catholics have also been more active recently on behalf of human rights, a reflection -- no doubt -- of the Vatican's influence.

There are also issues raised by the East German and Russian oppositions that are not (or perhaps not yet) of critical importance to the Central Europeans. In the GDR, for example, there is an argument raging in literary journals (Sinn und Form, Weimarer Beiträge) and opposition circles about the dangers of technological progress. Problems of genetic engineering and nuclear power have become important issues for the opposition. Christa Wolf's latest novel, Störfall, examines the Chernobyl disaster as an example of the self-destructive rationality of the state. Chernobyl has had an important effect on Russian oppositionists as well, adding anti-nuclear arguments to the burgeoning environmentalist movement.

The historical interests of the Russian opposition have been expressed in a movement for historical preservation, which has become the main source of public confrontation between Russian youth and police authorities. Preservationism also spreads to concerns about the Russian village in the powerful writings of the derevenshchiki (villagers). These writers, though not part of a traditional "opposition," have nevertheless expanded the realm of political dialogue between state and society. No less attention in the East German case is paid to the maintenance of the old-fashioned "Dorf," as often praised by nostalgic West Germans as by East German oppositionists. One further issue that is critical to the East Germans (but apparently irrelevant to the Russians and only slightly less so to the Central Europeans) derives from the demands of feminism. In the East German case, there is an influential movement -- led by the writers Christa Wolf, Renate Apitz, and Irmtraud Morgner, among others -- which tries to understand culture as a reflection of sexual roles and struggle. In novels that use ancient mythology to explore male-female conflict, feminists seek a "third order," neither male nor female, which is capable of preserving peace and the environment.

The point of discussing the oppositions in the GDR and Russia is not to divert our attention from East Central Europe, Judt's legitimate focus, but rather to place developments there in a broader context. On a number of levels, the Communist system is in crisis. Ecological concerns, the peace movement, feminism, neo-populism, preservationism, the revival of religion, and other social and intellectual movements these nations have in common reflect the failures of "advanced socialism" in meeting the needs of "post-industrial" society. (One can debate how successful they have been in providing the basics of an industrial society.) On another level, opposition intellectuals -- whether in Vologda or Poznań, Györ or Karl-Marx Stadt -- see their responses to the challenges of the moment through the lenses of their personal and their nation's historical experiences. To that extent, the writings of intellectuals in East Central Europe cannot help but reflect a "Central European idea." But the similarity of oppositional responses in the Communist world also reflects a common set of problems expressed in part by a recent joint declaration on the thirtieth anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution (Budapest, Berlin-GDR, Prague, Warsaw, 23 October 1986): the lack of political democracy, the absence of pluralism and self-management, a militarized and artificially divided Europe, and the continued exploitation of minority nationalities.

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