CITIZEN INTELLECTUALS AND PHILOSOPHER-KINGS: 
THE DILEMMAS OF DISSIDENCE IN EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE 
1968-1989

Barbara J. Falk

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies in 
partial fulfilment of the requirements 
for the degree of 
Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Programme in Political Science 
York University 
Toronto, Ontario

May, 1999
The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

0-612-39264-3
Dedication

This thesis and the ideas discussed herein are dedicated in loving memory of my maternal grandmother, Ada Troyer Vetter and to the representative of my future (and her namesake) my daughter Alannah Ada Bloch. Grandma passed her life-long dedication to learning and education onto her children and grandchildren. Her commitment to her family was solid and unswerving, her sense of justice was both swift and keen, and her belief in basic respect, civility, and human dignity was reflected daily in her lived experience and interactions with others. If I can transport Havel to her sometimes hard and impoverished existence on the Canadian prairie, I can state with confidence that she lived in truth. I can only hope that the values she held dear and that were also championed by the dissidents in East-Central Europe will be reflected in the civil society in which Alannah grows up.
Citizen Intellectuals and Philosopher-Kings: The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe 1968 - 1989

by Barbara Joy Falk

a dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of York University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

© Permission has been granted to the LIBRARY OF YORK UNIVERSITY to lend or sell copies of this dissertation, to the NATIONAL LIBRARY OF CANADA to microfilm this dissertation and to lend or sell copies of the film, and to UNIVERSITY MICROFILMS to publish an abstract of this dissertation. The author reserves other publication rights, and neither the dissertation nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's written permission.
Abstract

This dissertation examines the theory and activism of indigenous intellectuals and dissident writers in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia from the late 1960s through to the downfall of authoritarian communism in 1989. It is suggested that not only is there a common historical trajectory in the postwar period in the three countries studied, but that there is a common logic and approach to the political theory and practice of the dissidents. Moreover, separately, together, and with great complementarity, the dissidents of the region developed an oeuvre which had a profound impact on the scope and depth of regime transformation and at the same time makes an important contribution to democratic political thought. Metatheoretically, it is argued that the East-Central European nexus of theory and practice provides us with a strong case of the impact of political ideas on the processes of political change.

This study focuses on the writings of the major intellectual activists in the region who were most prominent in both non-party-state opposition movements and who theorized and reflected about their experiences. Included are Leszek Kołakowski, Jacek Kuroń, and Adam Michnik in Poland; Václav Havel, Václav Benda, and Jan Patočka in Czechoslovakia; and János Kis, Miklós Haraszti, and György Konrád in Hungary. These dissidents were well-known and influential among their peers, across borders to each other, and many of their ideas were translated, published and disseminated widely in the West.

The work of the dissidents themselves is examined with close scrutiny to two of their most consistently held theories and strategies: the reconstruction of “civil society” and the theory of “new evolutionism” or “radical reformism”. As well, their emphasis on personal responsibility, morality in politics, and non-violence is analyzed. The collective oeuvre of the dissidents is subjected to two lines of critique, one based on contemporary feminist theory regarding the gendered nature of distinctions between the public and the private, and the other informed by critical political economy. Finally, it is argued that the dissidents’ contribution to democratic theory has continuing relevance for their own societies as well as for the West, and that their activism provides a compelling example of intellectual engagement in the public sphere.
Acknowledgements

Completing this degree and this dissertation has been the major intellectual project thus far of my adult life. I ultimately left a promising career, had not a stitch of guiltless free time for years, imposed a relentless regimen upon myself of sleepless nights, and no doubt have not been the easiest person to live with. For making this possible—emotionally and financially—I have my husband Jules to thank. From the moment of my acceptance into graduate school where I was greeted with champagne and roses to the many hours standing at photocopiers on my behalf, he was unfailingly supportive and most importantly believed in me and my dream. He also read my chapter drafts, forced me to refine my arguments, challenged me when he knew better (how frustrating!), and shares my love of Central and Eastern Europe, from which both our families came over a century ago. He delayed his own life priorities in order to finance three research trips to the region, organized many well-timed excursions and vacations with our daughter to permit me the luxury of extended writing time, and tended to me personally when I not infrequently collapsed with exhaustion.

I must also thank my parents Mearl and Faith Falk who have instilled in me a love of learning throughout my life and have been generous in their support of my pursuit of higher education. I know that for my father attending university was a goal he was unable due to life circumstances to pursue, and his pride in my achievement is one of the deepest and most poignant connections between us. My mother has never questioned my academic choices, listened patiently over the years to my rantings on politics, and enveloped me with love and support whenever needed. Mom came into our home and took over the life of the household and caring for Alannah while I studied for and wrote comprehensive examinations, became mired in the depths of history for weeks on end, and travelled abroad, both for research and for conferences. In her commitment to my own cause, she also engaged in a struggle to overcome the Cold War bias in her own education, reading many books and articles along with me.

A special thank-you goes to my supervisor and friend Ross Rudolph. Ross helped me launch my first career, helped me get back into graduate school, believed I was doing political theory when I myself doubted it, and has been a cogent critic and editor. His commitment to politics and teaching as a vocation is an inspiration, and his erudition is inseparable from the dedication, dynamism, and humanism that he brings to academic life.

Thank you to Gordon Skilling, who can only be described as the Canadian heir to the legacy of Tomás Garrigue Masaryk. Gordon has been a mentor, committee member, and friend. Our creation and sustenance of the flying seminar has been a meaningful part of my graduate studies. Those of us that have had the honour and pleasure of “studying” with Gordon—if that is an appropriate term for someone who has ostensibly long since retired—live in awe of his achievements and his life, his earnest scholarship supported by political conviction. Gordon continually goes beyond the call of duty—permitting me
access to unpublished research in the University of Toronto archives, sharing his reminiscences, reading conference papers, and even travelling to my various presentations to lend assistance and support. I also thank the many members of the flying seminar with whom I have shared my devotion to the region along with many laughs and arguments along the way, especially Marketa Evans, Martin Horak, Nadya Nedelsky, and Jacqueline True. A special thank you to Naninka (Anna) Vaniček for her help securing research materials in the Czech Republic, setting up research interviews, and for her invaluable advice and translation, as well as to Marci Shore for her timely response to my late-night emergency emails on subjects large and details small, and for sharing her own research with me. Thanks to Glenys Babcock for her good advice, shared interest in (one could say obsession with) civil society, and her impressive example of academic entrepreneurship!

I have also to thank the remaining members of my diverse and “interesting” supervisory committee. Leo Panitch is a model of the type of scholar I would like to be, always with one foot in the academy and one firmly planted amidst the real struggles of average people. His commitment to social justice, his ability to communicate powerfully at all levels, and the depth of this commitment as reflected in his scholarship is beyond impressive. Ioan Davies has been generous in sharing his research interviews from Writers in Prison, is one of the best storytellers I know, and was an early believer in my project. Bernie Frolic has provided me with some of the most practical and sound advice about writing a thesis (just write!), on how to conduct interviews, and has generously and repeatedly offered his classroom as a testing ground for my research and ideas.

Many other professors at York and elsewhere have been encouraging, interested, and helpful: Stephen Hellman, Judy Hellman, Stephen Newman, Christian Lenhardt, Reg Whitaker, Sergei Plekhanov, Henrik Flakierski, Edith Klein, Stefania Miller, Warren Magnusson, Jean Laux, David Ost, Andrew Arato, David Plotke, Jeffrey Goldfarb, Elzbieta Matynia, Ann Snitow, and John Keane. Many of the above took time to read papers or chapters, provide advice and suggestions, wrote letters on my behalf, or agreed to be interviewed. Keith Krause, Jennifer Milliken, Stephen Gelb, and Shireen Hassim deserve special mention as professors and colleagues who became close friends. Together as families and academics we share a passion for democracy and parenting, and I wonder if somehow we will eventually merge the two in the interests of saving time.

My entire graduate school experience has been mirrored by a similar trajectory of my friend Nancy Lewis. Our lives will remain forever intertwined as we engage on similar processes encoded with the multiple meanings of friendship. Of all the wonderful friendships I have developed at York over the years with my colleagues, two are stellar examples of collegiality and commitment: Mark Baron and Chris Roberts. I thank them both for their help carrying books, pushing the stroller through snow drifts on campus, the many breakfasts and lunches we shared, the valuable advice and criticism they both provided. If there is still room for a Marxist political economy in this globalizing capitalist world, I know Mark and Chris will carry the torch forward to the next
generation. Thanks to the members of the DWW (Dissertation Writing Workshop)—Andrew Biro, Ruth Groff, Gerald Kerneman, Pam Leach, and Joanne Wright. Several others are deserving of mention because they have challenged my views, shared laughs, and have so amiably struggled along with me, in particular Greg Chin, Carolyn Bassett, Chanchal Bhattacharya, Marlea Clarke, Andrew Goodman, Andrea Harrington, Catherine Kellogg, Marnie Lucas-Zerbe, John Peters, David Pottie, Denise Roman, Leah Vosko, and Andrej Zaslove. Thanks to Randy Germain for proving before me that you can be a parent and a doctoral student (and even graduate) and to Mike Williams for all his advice, encouragement, and insistence that I write on Havel.

Thanks also to many friends who although not connected to graduate studies, have sensed the importance of this project to me personally and have continually been there when it mattered most.

My dearest friend Christine Burton shared my early infectious enthusiasm for Havel over many cups of tea and conversation. Emil and Kathy, who most thoughtfully gave me two roses after I completed my two comprehensive exams, made consistent and truly interested enquiries about my progress, and I also thank them for the many times they took Alannah on adventures around town when I could not. Emil shares my compassion for the solitary wonders of writing, its mysteries and depths in a way no one else can. Thanks to Susan Spratley, Kim Jantzi, and Linda Gee for having a sixth sense about knowing when to invite Alannah over to play, for helping out with life's little emergencies, and for providing a welcome respite from the rigours of research. Thanks to the courageous women of pay equity—Jane Adams, Wendy Cuthbertson, Linda Kahn, Leslie Macleod, and Nan Weiner. Your lives of continuous learning combined with dedication to careers are instructive; your friendships individually and collectively are a testament to the power of what women can do working (and playing!) together. Finally, thanks to Debbie Plested for our early morning walks, for listening with patience to my ideas and my paranoia, and for empathizing for my exhaustion—something one can only expect from a fellow insomniac.

Thanks to the many members of my own and Jules' extended families whose support, interest, and delicate and polite inquiries regarding my progress were appreciated, especially Thelma Ohlhauser, Debbie Ohlhauser, Marlene Dubois, Gerald Dubois, Lillian Bloch, Penny Bloch, Peter Rohlick, Jeff Bloch, David Rishikof, Bonnie Glanz, Rob Rishikof, Abbey Neidik, and Irene Angelico.

Thanks to my friend and doctor Barbara Vari, who listened with patience, dispensed good advice and medication where necessary, shared with me the stories of her own family's flight from Hungary in 1956, and most importantly helped me help myself get a good night's sleep—if only occasionally.

Thanks to Ariel Landau for his "emergency" and "on-call" computer assistance, Internet advice, and especially for his help in getting my computer and my printer to communicate with each other effectively. As a confessed techno-peasant, I am
appreciative of both Ariel’s ability and good humour in my moments of dread and panic.

Thanks also to John Dwyer, Suzanne Sheffield, Pat Rogers and the staff at the Centre for Support of Teaching. In the same way the dissidents combined theory with activism, I have tried to weave together research and teaching in a compatible and mutually reinforcing manner. Their devotion to university pedagogy is too rare and I value the insights and ideas they have provided.

Successfully negotiating one’s way through university bureaucracy is never easy, but my bumpy trail was made easier with the friendly and caring assistance of two fine and dedicated graduate assistants, Anne Stretch and Marlene Quesenberry, as well as the former doyenne of the ninth floor, Lorraine Hardie.

Many of my former co-workers with whom I have maintained contact (and who knew all along I really belonged in graduate school anyway) have been supportive of my academic endeavours: thanks to Jennifer Brown, Anna Hoad, Linda Mahaney, and Angela Sullivan. A special thanks to Daisy Perry for her informal (and unpaid) German tutoring and to George Cordahi for his unflagging interest, and for never failing to unearth articles and internet sites I would have never found myself.

Thanks to Paul Burger for not sending me on a executive human resources program, when I really wanted to go to graduate school, for being the most progressive employer I know in supporting this wacky idea, and for becoming a dear friend in the process of our working together.

In East-Central Europe, I have had the opportunity to develop friendships with the “next generation” of scholars and committed activists. I admire their perseverance and their dedication to time and place. On a more practical level, I also have to thank the following individuals for putting me up, setting up interviews, providing translation, correcting my inept interpretations of history and generally providing nuance to my views: Jacek Kucharczyk, Jana Juráňová, Gábor Magyar, and Michal Vasečka. Thanks to the Fleps family in Budapest and the Bužek family in Prague--they have welcomed me into their homes and their hearts, sharing with me both personal and difficult memories of actually-existing life both prior to and after 1989.

The final thank-you must be reserved for the many intellectuals, activists, dissidents, and opposition members who agreed to be interviewed. I have long admired their deft combination of theory and practice, and their superhuman commitment to the very simple ideas of truth and justice. They have generously shared their memories, their ideas, and their impatience with the past and the future. They were and are extraordinary individuals living and acting on one of the most important stages of the twentieth century, and their dedication and action demonstrates that in the age of the post-modern, human agency is alive and well and that ideas matter to human choices and human destiny.
Citizen Intellectuals and Philosopher-Kings: The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe 1968-1989

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**Section 1**

Chapter 1: Introduction

I. The Professional Rebuke
II. Scope of Research
   - Dimensions of Time and Space
   - Focus on Intellectuals: The Reversal of the Betrayal
III. Political Theory as a Process
IV. Methodology
V. A Note on Nomenclature
   - Authoritarian Communism
   - Totalitarianism
   - Party-State
   - Intellectuals and Intelligentsia
   - A Note on Style: Names and Organizations
VI. The Call to History

Chapter 2: Poland: The Harbinger of Crisis and Collapse

I. Intellectual Opposition in Poland: 1956-1965
II. The Catholic Church in Poland
III. The Students' Protest: March, 1968
IV. The Workers' Protest: Gdansk, 1970
V. The Events of June, 1976: Radom, Ursus, and Beyond
VI. *Komitet Obrony Robotników* (KOR): The Workers' Defence Committee
VII. The Alternative Civil Society?
VIII. *Towarzystwo Kursów Naukowych* (TKN): The Flying University
IX. The Pope's Visit, 1979
X. Solidarity (*Solidarność*)
XI. Role of Intellectuals within Solidarity
XII. Martial Law and its Aftermath
Chapter 3: Czechoslovakia: From Interrupted to Velvet Revolution

I. Czechoslovak Stalinism and the Role of Intellectuals
II. The Economic Crisis of the 1960s
III. Proposals for Economic Reform
IV. The Revitalization of Scholarship and Intellectual Life
V. The Writers’ Union and the Cultural Renaissance of the 1960s
VI. The Student/Youth Movements and Strahov
VII. The Prague Spring
VIII. The Action Program and Soviet Response
IX. Independent Currents: The Untimely Rebirth of Civil Society
X. Čierna nad Tisou
XI. Crisis: Soviet Mobilization and the Moscow Protocols
XII. Normalization
XIII. The Underground Music Scene and the Trial of the PPU
XIV. The Helsinki Accords and Charter 77 (Charta 77)
XV. Vybor na Obranu Nespravedlive Stihanych (VONS)
XVI. The “Underground University”
XVII. Samizdat Publishing
XVIII. Repression and Resistance in the Czech Lands and Slovakia in the 1980s
XIX. The Underground Church in Slovakia
XX. The Tide Turns: Just a Few Sentences
XXI. The DDR Exodus and the Fall of the Wall
XXII. November 17 and the Birth of Civic Forum and Public Against Violence
XXIII. Havel na Hrad
XXIV. The New Year’s Address and the Consolidation of Democracy

Chapter 4: Post 1956 Hungary: Repression, Reform, and Round Table Revolution

I. The Hungarian Revolution of 1956: Lessons and Legacies
II. Kádárite Communism
III. The Politics of Economic Reform: The NEM
IV. Socialist Redistribution and the Second Economy
V. Intellectuals: On the Road to Class Power?
VI. The Budapest School
VII. “Populist” vs. “Democratic” Dissent
VIII. Beszéldó and Hungarian Samizdat
IX. Toward an Alliance: The Bibó Festschrift and Monor
X. Lakitelek
XI. Intra-Party and Election Reform
XII. The Rebirth of Civil Society
XIII. The Opposition Round Table (ORT) and the “Pacted Transition”
XIV. The “Four Yeses” Referendum
XV. June 16, 1989: The Reburial of Imre Nagy

Section 2

Chapter 5: Intellectuals in Poland: The Tradition Continues

I. Leszek Kolakowski: A Source of Hope Amidst Hopelessness
II. Adam Michnik’s Alliance Strategy: The Church and the Left
III. “A New Evolutionism”
IV. Non-Violence as Theory and Practice
V. Kuron: A Bridge Between Generations
VI. Theorizing Civil Society: The Polish Case

Chapter 6: Opposition Intellectuals in Czechoslovakia

I. Václav Havel’s Theatre of the Absurd
II. The Evolution of “Living in Truth”: Its Meaning and Consequences
III. From Playwright to Dissident in Husák’s Czechoslovakia
IV. Theorizing Resistance: “The Power of the Powerless”
V. “Politics and Conscience” and the Destructive Capacities of Technology
VI. Largo Desolato, Temptation, and the Vaněk Plays
VII. Letters to Olga: “Being” and the “Absolute”
VIII. Dissidence and the Western Peace Movement: Fragile and Reticent Allies
IX. The Decisive Influence of Jan Patočka
X. Václav Benda’s “Parallel Polis”
XI. The Collective Oeuvre of the Chartists
XII. Theorizing Civil Society: The Czechoslovak Example

Chapter 7: The Democratic Opposition in Hungary

I. The Philosophical Influence of Lukács and Bibó
II. Kis and Bence: Toward an East European Marxism?
III. The Social Contract of Beszéd and “Radical Reformism”
IV. Kis’ Democratic Alternative
V. Miklós Haraszti: The Nature of Repression for Workers and Artists
VI. Theorizing Civil Society: Konrád’s Antipolitics

Section 3

Chapter 8: A Feminist Reappraisal

I. Defining the Problem: Civil Society and the Shifting Boundaries of Public and Private
II. Civil Society and the Western Liberal Tradition: A Case History in the Exclusion of Women
   - Gellner’s “Modular Man” and Shils’ Civic Virtue
   - Pateman’s Unmasking of Fraternity
   - Rescuing Fraternity: Habermas and His Critics
   - Social Solidarity as a Sequel to Fraternity
III. East Meets West: The Complications of Transnational Feminist Discourse

Chapter 9: Political Economy as Critique: Dissident Theory Meets the Market

I. The Great Transformation: The Sequel
II. Return to Europe: The Best of Times and the Worst of Times
III. Civil Society and Market Economy: An Affiliation of Process and Outcome
IV. Capacity: Limitations in Theory and Practice

Chapter 10: A Contribution to Political Theory?

I. Toward a Reconstituted Public Sphere: Central European and Western Intersections in Theorizing Civil Society
II. Dissident Thought as Reconstructed Liberalism
III. Political Theory Engages With Dissident Theory
IV. Marginalization or Public Engagement: The Role of Central European Intellectuals in the Post-Communist Era

1. I am partially indebted to Tony Judt’s article “The Dilemmas of Dissidence: The Politics of Opposition in East-Central Europe” for the phrasing of my title. Daniel Chirot, in a dismissive
comment about Judt, stated that he and “other scholars from Central Europe...[who ran] journals such as Telos and Cross-currents” were among the small minority of those who were aware of the scope of dissident movements in the region and perhaps for whom 1989 came as less of a surprise because of this knowledge. However, as Chirot also stated, “...very few scholars or intellectuals paid attention to such publications, and even most specialists, especially those in the policy-related fields, hardly took them seriously” (1991: 305).
Section 1

Chapter 1: Introduction

I. The Professional Rebuke

In November of 1995 Jeffrey Isaac published an article for *Political Theory* which condemned political theorists *en masse* in the United States for failing to take seriously the revolutions of 1989 in Central Europe, through which “the face of world politics for five decades was transformed” (1995: 636). In Isaac’s view, 1989 represented a political milestone equal in scope and importance to both the French and American Revolutions, yet unlike these two previous watersheds which had sparked much debate among political thinkers, and indeed to some extent been provoked by them,¹ the reaction of the professional mainstream has been minimal. He is critical of his profession for the pervasive silence and lack of attention paid to both the events themselves, and the activists/theorists and ideas behind them. The statistics compiled by Isaac are tellingly damning: in the years between 1989 and 1993 in his review of the “major outlets of political theory” (that is, the academic journals *Political Theory*, *Polity*, *American Political Science Review*, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, and *Ethics*) he found that only 2

¹For example, the work of Thomas Paine was critical to the thinking behind the American Revolution, and arguably the US constitution is derived from the language and principles of John Locke (Tarcov, 1984). Both Edmund Burke and Alexis de Toqueville had much to say in the wake of the American and the French revolutions.
out of 384 articles dealt with 1989, one of which was a review essay (1995: 637). This represents a “shocking indictment” of political theory, and moreover sharply contrasts with the canon that is largely studied; thinkers from Plato and Machiavelli to Hegel, Toqueville and Marx were profoundly engaged with the events and political realities of their day.

Isaac suggests four possible reasons for “the strange silence of political theory” but in each case finds the explanation unsatisfactory and unconvincing. First, he posits that it is the recency of the events themselves, but then adds that current political theory “itself is so intellectually faddish [that it can] hardly plead patience and caution when it comes to interpreting current events” (1995: 638). Moreover, as Isaac argues, it is hard to maintain such a position in consideration of the great “canonic” theorists, such as Locke, Paine, Kant, Hegel, or Marx, who made it their business to comment on and theorize about the great events, movements, and conditions of their day—from the French

---

2Isaac does not “deny that attention has been paid to these events” and cites the work of comparativists in the field of political science, and especially the newly-created Journal of Democracy. Moreover, what he calls “public intellectual journals” such as Dissent, The Nation, Praxis International, and Social Research have published numerous essays relating to 1989. (Isaac might also have added Constellations, Social Text, Telos, October, Representations, Millennium, Social Anthropology, New Left Review, Socialist Register, International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society, and many of the core publications of feminist theory, such as The Feminist Review, The Journal of Women’s History, Women’s Studies International Forum, and Gender and Society according to one of his respondents, Kirstie McClure. I would also add Hypaetia to the list.) However, his argument is that the “principal journals of the field, the main origins of scholarship and intellectual exchange, have been silent” (my emphasis; 1995 :637).
Revolution and religious tolerance to the inhumane social conditions of primitive capitalist development. In fact, one could argue that engagement is what made them great political theorists in the first place, and qualified them for subsequent beatification and inclusion in the canon.³ After all, political theory developed into professionalized academic discipline long after the real lives and activities of those thinkers currently canonized. The process of appropriating and institutionalizing their legacies for scholarly consumption has served to retrospectively transform them. An unfortunate result has been the bifurcation of political theory into questions of “first” and “second” order, that is, theory about politics and metatheory about how we reflect about politics. I assume that for any of the theorists discussed above this was inevitably a false distinction. In my consideration of the dissidents of East-Central Europe as political theorists, I am also conducting an exercise in the reintegration of political science and normative political theory. I argue that political theory and theorists properly contextualized and understood are intimately involved in both the enterprise of understanding/explanation as well as prescription/critique.

Isaac secondly postulates that the explanation lies in cultural and linguistic unfamiliarity with Central Europe, given the strong Western European bias of political theory. On the surface this is more plausible, but Isaac points out that “language barriers

³Although I would argue that engagement is a necessary condition for the production of great political theory, it is obviously not a sufficient condition, as most of the “thinking practitioners” of political life are partisans, hacks, or policy wonks.
have never really constrained political theorists from offering interpretations of texts or the events to which they are related" (1995: 639). Isaac's example is that of Machiavelli:

Question most self-respecting political theorists...and they will offer you some interpretation of Machiavelli. Can you imagine many political theorists saying that they could not comment on or write about Machiavelli because they could not read Italian or grasp sixteenth-century Florentine idioms in the original? The writings of the principal Soviet bloc democratic oppositionists--Havel, Michnik, Lipski, Konrad, Szelenyi, Sakharov, and others--have been amply translated into English. They have long been available to the English-speaking world, and there is no linguistic excuse for having avoided them.4

I would add to Isaac's remarks here that this is especially the case for the contemporary political theorist who rushes to publish on Habermas, Derrida or Foucault with research and insight based on translations of their works, rather than interpretations based on the German or French originals (languages far more accessible to the Anglo-American academic context than either Slavic or Finno-Ugric languages)! In any case, the argument that “cultural distinctiveness” or linguistic barriers make the East-Central Europeans remote from our understanding is invalidated by the fact that any cursory reading of the their works yields an interpretation of their collective oeuvre that places it squarely in the broader European context. As Isaac points out (and my interviews corroborate) "...the fact is that the Central Europeans have believed themselves to be, and have been, part of a

4This is one of the classic arguments I have faced in advancing this thesis topic as a dissertation in political theory, the other being that the work of the thinkers themselves is not sufficiently weighty enough intellectually to constitute part of the grand heroic enterprise known as political theory. On this latter point, see my commentary on Isaac below.

The third point raised by Isaac is that the Central European “literature of revolt” although both “historically [and] politically significant” is regarded by those who ignore it as neither “especially innovative or genuinely theoretical” (1995: 639). This criticism is based on a profoundly conservative assumption of what constitutes political theory, and is all the more ironic in light of post-modernism and its influential critique of the epistemological constructions of such creatures as “authentic theory”, not to mention the actual existence of the canon itself. Further, as Isaac points out, this argument suggests that the work of the Central Europeans is mere political commentary, and that the issues dealt with are somehow “casual, uninteresting, [and] unphilosophical” (emphasis in original; 1995: 640). Even a cursory glance at the topics covered, however, suggests otherwise. Isaac points out that their work contains arguments about “the ethical and strategic prospects of different forms of resistance, the nature of democratic citizenship, and the importance of civil society” (1995: 640). To this brief list I would also add that the Central Europeans addressed questions of morality in political action (Havel’s “living in truth”); the importance of self-limitation and non-violence in the radical transformation of politics (Michnik’s formulations may change the way we conceive of revolution both historically and strategically); notions of nationalism which are more historically and politically constituted that take issue both with the Wilsonian principle of self-determination and to some degree with both ethnic and civic varieties; and an articulation
of the relationships between state-ideology and instrumental rationality, and the consequences not just for the atomization of social life (à la Adorno, Heidegger, and Arendt) but for the natural environment as well. The addition of these topics helps defeat Isaac’s fourth possible explanation--that the democratic oppositionists have received too much credit, but are “simply unoriginal, revisiting the themes and concerns of nineteenth-century democratic liberalism with which we are all familiar”; it is not that they are “insufficiently deep, but rather...simply anachronistic and old hat” (1995: 640). Even if true, this charge would a) require a strong engagement with the theorists themselves, and b) is based on the assumption that rearticulation or being derivative constitutes a reason for intellectual dismissal.

One of the major purposes of this dissertation is to take up Isaac’s challenge, and to analyze seriously the *oeuvre* of the Central European dissidents *qua* political theory. Central and Eastern Europe have been the political laboratory of the twentieth century *par excellence*, the testing ground of both fascism and the many varieties of authoritarian communism. If, as I maintain below, there is an intrinsic connection between political events and the ideas inspiring or underwritten by them, it stands to reason that this must be a birthplace and breeding ground for indigenous political theory. In fact, much of the Marxian-inspired political theory from the first half of the century (Luxemburg, Lukács, and even Gramsci) as well as the succeeding “critical” and “post-Marxist” variants in recent decades (Adorno, Horkheimer, Arendt, Habermas) can be said to be distinctively Central European in both derivation and content. By this I suggest there are a number of
strong commonalities despite the obvious differences—the stress on political and economic equality; the need for humankind to be freed from alienation and instrumental reason and be able to participate meaningfully in politics and society writ large; an analysis of the mental, structural, and historical constraints mitigating such engagement; and finally what one might call the blessing and the curse of post-Enlightenment European thought—the central tenet that human beings as political agents and masters of their own subjectivity can act both individually and in concert to change their circumstances. Not incidentally, these commonalities also extend to the theorists and the activists of dissident movements and democratic opposition of Central Europe prior to 1989.

The challenge posed by Isaac is not a small one, for I am not merely extending the boundaries of a discipline that has often self-consciously described itself as progressive, radical or indeed revolutionary in scope or implications. Rather, I am conducting a bold experiment in the laboratory of East-Central Europe, in order to further our understanding of the relationship of political ideas to political change, and to examine how in the late twentieth century ordinary and extraordinary human beings make this happen.

II. Scope of Research

Dimensions of Time and Space

In this thesis I am examining the context, thought, and actions of intellectual activists in three East-Central European countries: Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia.
These three countries were chosen with considerable deliberation for a number of reasons. First, they share a similar historical trajectory in this century. They are all partially or wholly successor states to the Austro-Hungarian empire. Their interwar experiences were both formative in setting the context of political debate and the regimes of this period served later as important historical referents. It is not by accident, for example, that the 1918-1938 Czechoslovak state is referred to as the “First Republic”, and the post-1989 state as the “Second Republic”. Hungary’s loss of two-thirds of its territory thanks to the Treaty of Trianon$^5$ sharply shaped the contours of its interwar agenda: without full knowledge of the Treaty’s implications it is hard if not impossible to understand its alliance with Nazi Germany, the very revolutionary demands of 1956, or the persistence of fringe nationalist movements and the important “minorities question” in contemporary post-communist Hungary. The reemergence of Poland after over a century of partition assumed mythic proportions as the successful result of romantic and messianic nationalism; the legend was furthered by the difficult circumstances of state formation and consolidation given the war with the USSR which did not end until 1921.

Second, all three countries had indigenous fascist experiences and/or were subject to German fascism. Third, not only were they subject, along with the rest of the nations east

$^5$The Versailles peace treaty signed in the Palais Trianon on June 4, 1920. In the wake of World War I, the victorious powers divided up much of Hungary’s former territory among neighbouring states which for the most part came into existence for the first time, i.e. Romania, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia. See Hoensch, 1996, especially pp. 98-106.
of the Yalta divide, to the imposition of Soviet-style authoritarian communism, but all had internationally significant and important movements against Soviet hegemony. Moreover such watershed events such as the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the Polish October of the same year, the Prague Spring, and the dramatic rise of Solidarity in 1980-1981 reflected an internal regional dynamic of influence and subsequent revision. For example, the “unacceptable” demands that were an outgrowth of Hungarian revolution of 1956, such as withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact, international neutrality, and the declaration of multiparty competition were countered by the Prague Spring, the apotheosis of reform communism. When the careful Czechoslovak strategy of economic reform, relaxation of censorship, and new openness was met by Soviet “fraternal assistance” in the form of tanks and an occupying force from neighbouring countries, internal reforms to the party-state or top-down approaches to changing the system were more or less abandoned by the progressive intellectual elites. Not only did the later normalization pave the way for the alliance and the approach represented by Charter 77, but the twin deaths of the Prague Spring and reform communism profoundly influenced the democratic opposition in Hungary and the worker-intellectual alliance nurtured by KOR, which later came into full bloom with Solidarity.

Most important, the dissident movements and activities increasingly from the 1970s onward were mutually influential. Despite the restrictions on travel and on the free circulation of ideas, particularly those critical of the regime, there were considerable and important connections made, in the form of illicit border meetings on the Polish-
Czechoslovak border, personal visits, public letters of support and condemnation, the
funnelling of samizdat via internal and external contacts, and so on. This fact, which was
repeatedly pointed out to me in personal interviews both in 1995 and 1997, is borne out
through the use of similar concepts and strategies that were diverse in origin yet strong in
mutual recognition. Indeed this will lead me to argue below that intellectual activists in
the region can be said to have constructed together a coherent oeuvre of political theory,
and developed and shared a sociology of knowledge which made this possible.

For a number of explicit reasons I have also decided to limit my study to these
three countries and have excluded a number of other possible candidates. I have
deliberately not dealt with the DDR (Deutsche Demokratische Republik or East
Germany). Partially because of the bifurcation of Germany and the obvious commonality
of a linguistic and historical past of shared nationhood, dissent in the DDR was largely
oriented toward the BRD (Bundesrepublik Deutschland, or West Germany). This was
ironically reinforced by Bonn itself, with its policies of “buying” freedom for dissidents,
recognition through Deutschlandpolitik specifically and Ostpolitik more generally, and
the deliberately fairy-tale nature of official discussions about reunification.\(^6\) Thus noted
East German dissidents, scholars, and writers, such as Rudolf Bahro, Robert Havemann,
Christa Wolf, and Wolf Biermann oriented themselves to a significant degree to the other

\(^6\)For a detailed and controversial discussion of West Germany’s role and
especially its foreign policy with respect to both the DDR and other East European states
excluding the Soviet Union, see Timothy Garton Ash (1994), *In Europe’s Name:
Germany and the Divided Continent*, especially his chapter “Germany and Germany”.

half of Germany and when arrested, many were routinely and perfunctorily offered the choice of emigration. As Garton Ash states:

"When the lesser repertory of intimidation and harassment failed, the dissident activist was faced, sometimes explicitly and cynically, with a stark choice. Here, in this room, said the police or state prosecutor, we are preparing the case against you, 'you'll get three years'. (No need to worry about independent judges, the sentence could be predicted in advance.) But there, in the next room, we have a completed application to emigrate, 'just sign and you'll be in the West next week'. It was, as one young Christian put it, like the choice between Heaven and Hell. In the circumstances it is not surprising that, often under acute psychological pressure, most of these courageous men and women chose emigration. And so the opposition bled and bled (1994: 193-194).

Garton Ash's last statement is telling, for although it would be extreme to suggest that the policies of West Germany were solely responsible for truncating the development of a culture of opposition in the East, they certainly had an impact. There were some strong similarities between the opposition as it did exist in the East and the other countries of Central Europe, but I believe these are overshadowed by the stark omnipresence of the German debate, and the division in the lives of all Germans between citizenship and nationhood. For example, as in Poland and in Slovakia, the Church played a significant role in the unofficial opposition of the DDR, sometimes attempting to navigate a dangerous route between "Christianity" and "Marxism" and at others (especially later) condemning the system on a scale from evil to incompetent on the basis of Christian morality. However, the predominant Church in the DDR was the Evangelische Kirche or Evangelical (that is, Lutheran and Protestant) Church, not the Catholic Church as elsewhere in the region. Although I do not want to downplay the importance of
underlying philosophical differences between the two Christian churches, overall church organization and culture were critical. The Evangelical Church was diverse and decentralized, which made it not only a home for peace and social activists, but also, as was evident after 1989, for considerable Stasi penetration.

Moreover, the East German dissidents themselves never really went beyond revisionist Marxism in their approach. That they made an interesting contribution in this respect there is no doubt; however, unlike Michnik or Havel, Bahro, Wolf, and Biermann continued to valorize socialism unproblematically rather than theoretically question either its premises or consequences.7

Finally, to the extent the DDR was a true “imagined community”, it shared a set of legacies in many respects different from the rest of Central Europe—not just the obvious postwar and Cold War arbitrariness of its borders, but its Prussian past, and its part in the larger Germany as the great power of the region. Ironically and by contrast, the DDR could claim like interwar Czechoslovakia and Hungary from 1918 onwards to have a strong socialist past, but certainly by the 1970s the red line was a thin one, and one deployed not only by the opposition but by the party-state in its repeated attempts to

---

7This same point is made, albeit stridently with an ideological axe to grind, by Melvin J. Lasky (1991) in his pamphlet sent to subscribers in lieu of the final issue of Encouter, “Voices in a Revolution: Intellectuals (& Others) in the Collapse of the East German Communist Regime”. One could also examine the differences in approach and demands of Civic Forum in Czechoslovakia and Neues Forum (New Forum) in 1989.
conjure nationhood. Moreover, even some of the more effective rallying cries of East German dissent, such as anti-nuclear arguments and concerns for peace, had more in common with West German pacifists and Greens rather than with the region as a whole.

Another possible candidate for inclusion is the former Yugoslavia. Like Czechoslovakia, it was a multi-ethnic byproduct of the Versailles treaties, and had a strong tradition of partisan resistance to foreign occupation, and much earlier to its “Ottoman oppressors”. However, it has on balance a thoroughly mixed history, and this is inherent in the very process of its state formation. The new Yugoslav state of 1918 welded together pieces of the old Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires along with formerly independent and rebellious Serbia. As its legendary turbulent and history attests, the Balkan success and failure was a result of both complicated external factors (involving all major European powers) and internal differences. From the very beginning, Yugoslavia was extremely heterogeneous culturally, religiously, and to some extent linguistically. Furthermore, this remained the case throughout its history, whereas after the Holocaust and mass migrations following World War II, other countries in

---

8By contrast, whereas in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia the party-state had to repeatedly suppress or coopt valid histories and attempts at national roads to socialism or communism, the East German government was faced with the dilemma of having to glorify Red Prussia in order to justify its existence as a separate state.

Europe became more homogenous--this was especially the case in Poland. Yugoslavia had a strong history of resistance to the orthodoxy of Moscow, as is evidenced by Tito's continued protests to the USSR after the war with respect to intervention in its internal affairs, and eventual Soviet denunciation and removal from the Comintern in 1948. Unlike the remainder of East-Central Europe yet like both Russia and China, Yugoslavia's initial experience of communism was revolutionary and patriotic. Its liberation from fascism came not from the Soviet army but largely from its own partisan troops; and Tito was not "assisted" by the Soviet Union in his ascension to power. The "Titoist derivation" meant in practise that Yugoslavs up until the late 1980s had better access to foreign information, freedom to travel, and an ambiguous international position with respect to the superpowers. Ironically, as was the case in Hungary, such an intermediate position somewhat compromised rather than liberated its potential opposition. This was at first blush a paradoxical situation. Yugoslavia produced super-dissident Milovan Djilas, a radical student leader, wartime partisan hero and former Vice-President of Yugoslavia. After he was expelled from the party in 1954 and subsequently imprisoned, he wrote both The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System and

10CzechoSlovakia, within its two solitudes, remained fairly homogenous, especially if one accepts Moravia as one of the "Czech lands" alongside Bohemia, and bears in mind the almost complete liquidation of the German and German-Jewish presence.

11This remains true in spite of the current revisionist fashion which tends to argue that Yugoslavia was just as oppressive as its authoritarian communist brethren.
Conversations with Stalin. In a sense, these two books were the oppositionist's equivalent to the Twentieth Party Congress—communism was shown to be deeply flawed by one of its leading practitioners. His work and his life was to have enormous influence across Central and Eastern Europe, and his prediction—that the Hungarian revolution of 1956 was the beginning of the end of communism in Europe—turned out to be uncannily correct. Although critique within the acceptable range of socialist discourse was tolerated and working contacts with the West were more frequent, Yugoslav academics who proved too critical to the regime were successfully removed from their university positions. For example, Mihailo Markovic, Sveta Stojanovic, Zagordka Golubovic, Rudi Supek and Gajo Petrovic were all removed from their teaching posts in 1975. In 1981, Western academics Richard J. Bernstein, Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor, and Albrecht Wellmer reestablished the journal Praxis International as a measure of support and as a lifeline to an emerging critical dissident discourse that grew out of earlier traditions of Marxist humanism (Benhabib, 1995: 675-676). Alongside Marxist revisionism and the democratic socialist tradition (largely the legacy of Djilas and his followers, such as Mihajlo Mihajlov), grew an increasingly nationalist discourse. To the extent that an

---


13 In fact this is one of the major arguments of Rudolph Tökés (1996) in his recent work Hungary’s Negotiated Revolution, in which he draws a clear line between the Revolution of 1956 and the “pacted transition” of 1989.
independent "civil society" existed at all, it was dominated by nationalists ranging from secessionist or autonomist activities of Albanians in Kosovo to the Ustase movement and other liberationist and revolutionary movements in Croatia. Similarly, exiled political parties focused on nationalist rather than democratic aspirations. Dissident thought was not organized around the same set of issues as in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia—the need for an authentic and independent political space, the incremental establishment of political rights consonant with democracy and human dignity, and the growth of political alternatives that over time would provide for non-violent and meaningful change to the party-state. Furthermore, the response of the party-state to ethno-nationalist demands was largely to placate them. For example, citizens of the former Yugoslavia enjoyed unprecedented language rights in comparison with their European neighbours. We know in hindsight, however, that official and unofficial state policy amounted to an impossible strategy of attempted containment.

For historical reasons, 1968 is an appropriate and obvious date to begin my analysis, as it signalled the end of hopes for a "reformed", or "enlightened" communism in the Eastern Bloc with the crushing of the Prague Spring, an event which reverberated far beyond the borders of Czechoslovakia. The late 1960s in Poland was a time of considerable unrest and protest, especially among students and in universities—a period

which resulted in considerable backlash. Most notable was the imprisonment of Jacek
Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski for their controversial *Open Letter to the Party*, the
expulsion of former Marxist philosopher Leszek Kolakowski from the party after his
critical lectures on the events of 1956, the banning of nationalist author Adam
Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve* from being performed at the National Theatre in Warsaw,
and the anti-Semitic backlash inspired by the Interior Ministry. Meanwhile in Hungary,
Communist leader János Kádár introduced the “New Economic Mechanism” in 1968-
1969, which was intended to partially liberalize the economy, and signalled a loosening
of ideological control and a reduction in the level and type of state surveillance and
repression with his famous policy “he who is not against us is with us”.

These events indicate a series of beginnings; my analysis will commence with this
period and continue through the 1970s and the 1980s--for example, from the Workers' Riots in 1971 and 1976 in Poland to the formation of both KOR and Solidarity; the
“normalization” in Czechoslovakia and the dissident response in the activities of both

---

15 For a detailed discussion of the various student groups, “scout groups”, and
clubs of writers and intellectuals active prior and during this period and who played a
prominent role in students revolts (and later the formation of KOR, the Worker's Self-

16 The “New Economic Mechanism” introduced some private small-scale enterprise, allowed large-scale state enterprises more leverage in setting planning goals and production norms, and permitted the retaining of private plots in agricultural cooperatives for members. At the same time, technical competence as a criterion of advancement played a greater role in the selection of the nomenklatura.
Charter 77 and VONS, and later Civic Forum and Public Against Violence; the original (and at first lonely) activism of dissidents such as Miklós Haraszti and author György Konrád, as well as the work of the "Budapest School" of intellectuals, through to the eventual formation of groups such as the Alliance of Free Democrats and the Federation of Young Democrats.

**Focus on Intellectuals: The Reversal of the Betrayal**

When Julien Benda published *La Trahison des Clercs* in 1928, he gave substance and meaning to what he perceived as a disturbing trend in modern life: the tendency of intellectuals to play the game of political passions. He compared the *engagé* intellectuals of his day to the earlier masters of critical thought and innovation who, like Kant and Rousseau, when concerned with high principles--such as justice or equality--took a critical and dispassionate stance, abstracting themselves from immediate results and purposefully distancing themselves from the masses. By contrast, the new breed of intellectual he describes

...is determined to have the soul of a citizen and to make vigorous use of it; he is proud of that soul; his literature is filled with contempt for the man who shuts himself up with art or science and takes no interest in the passions of the State....

The time has long past by since Plato demanded that this philosopher should be bound in chains in order to compel him to take an interest in the State. To have as his function the pursuit of eternal things and yet to believe that he becomes greater by concerning himself with the State--that is the view of the modern 'clerk' (Benda, 1928: 32-33).

In Benda's view, the political commitment of the "clercs" amounts to a dangerous and
inevitably slippery slope toward blind patriotism, xenophobia, and fanaticism, where liberty of thought is swallowed up by partisan closed-mindedness, and the particularism of a cause is substituted for the universal good of humanity.

It is easy to understand how Benda’s prescient predictions of ill-gotten political gains championed by intellectuals sure of their positions and surer still of their chosen paths, would ring true for anti-communists living through the consolidation of Soviet-style authoritarian communism in the postwar satellite regimes of Eastern Europe. When Czeslaw Milosz first published *The Captive Mind* in Cold War America, he helped spawn an intellectual counter-current to which this book remains of biblical importance. Seeringly critical of his Polish compatriots who willingly embraced or who unsuspectingly succumbed to the power of the ‘New Faith’, Milosz champions instead an independent intellectual who both refuses all complicity with tyranny and all pressures to conform.

The post-1968 dissidents of East-Central Europe took both Benda and Milosz to heart. In a sense, they were trying to “reverse” the earlier betrayal, by making a commitment to political and social change that was deeply rooted in independence of thought and action, respect for the rights of the individual, the need to restore human subjectivity, and re-introduce morality into politics. In focusing on intellectuals of the region and from this period, I am deliberately narrating what is only the latest chapter in the century-old dilemma that has plagued the European “republic of letters” at least since *L’Affaire Dreyfus*. The supreme irony is that, although these dissidents were conscious of
their debt to Benda, in many respects they fulfilled their destinies as the same kind of intellectual Benda sought to decry, albeit in the service of a different set of commitments than their predecessors. There is a fickle continuity to the role of intellectuals in this part of Europe, a discussion which I will take up again in my final conclusions.

This study will focus primarily but not exclusively on the most prominent or well-known (both internally and externally) dissidents writing and actively involved in non-party-state organizations. There are a number of reasons for this approach. First, their writings, both officially published as well as samizdat, are widely available in English, French, or German translation. Second, those more actively and prominently involved exercised considerable intellectual influence over their peers. Portraying the web-like connection of intellectual influences, which was facilitated not only by a similarity of goals but a sustained series of efforts to exchange viewpoints and strategies, has been a major task of my research. This exchange was achieved via smuggling samizdat (either directly or through third parties such as foreign, that is, Western, embassies and academics, expatriate organizations and networks, and publishing houses), personal visits (always involving considerable risk), remaining abreast of developments in neighbouring countries, protesting human rights abuses as they occurred, and so on. The

17 Although I would argue that most activities and organizations were broadly and inevitably political in nature, I use this term as not all dissident activities or organizations were considered by their memberships as political. In fact their very existence and belief in “self-limitation” dictated that this be the case. Thus KOR called itself a committee for workers' self-defence, and Charter 77 was described as a human rights organization.
numerous Czech-Polish border meetings, visits to Poland by Hungarian dissidents, and the pervasive regional influence of the writings of especially Václav Havel, János Kísz, and Adam Michnik are powerful illustrations of these processes in action. Finally, as intellectuals they were more likely to want to make connections across borders and build upon the knowledge of experience of their peers elsewhere; in fact, there was a true sense of "internationalism", in an idealist Marxist sense. Marginalized academics, writers, and oppositionally-minded members of the intelligentsia were also concerned (and perhaps obsessed) with constructing an alternative to the Yalta division of Europe. Breaking the East-West axis by positing the real and imagined existence of a "Central Europe" was a form of revisionist history, a political goal, and a strategy of increasing the layers of interconnectedness. As a result of the above, a commonality of themes and approaches can be ascertained from a detailed analysis of their work.\(^{18}\) The most prominent and influential dissidents who were active in opposition movements and who wrote about their experiences and theorized about politics more broadly include Jacek Kuron, Adam Michnik, and Leszek Kołakowski\(^{19}\) of Poland; Václav Havel, Václav Benda, Jan

---

\(^{18}\)Any short list is inadequately representative of either the intellectual currents of thought or the movements themselves. Obviously, more activists and the interrelationships between them will be discussed in the core discussions of each country.

\(^{19}\)I have included Kołakowski because despite his high-profile expulsion from Poland and his subsequent re-thinking of many of his original ideals, a number of his essays, such as "Hope and Hopelessness", published in the West in 1971 but subsequently available in Poland, was instrumental in helping chart the future course and strategies of a number of the movements.
Patočka, and the Chartists of Czechoslovakia; and János Kis, György Bence, Miklós Haraszti, and György Konrád of Hungary.

I have deliberately not included worker activists or nationalist anti-communists, not because they were not important, but because it was largely intellectuals who self-reflexively wrote and theorized about their political practice. This distinction is especially important in the Polish context, where there existed a large working class opposition, from which many organizers and activists also wrote critically and analytically about their experiences. In all three countries, as will be examined in the next chapter, those members of the intelligentsia involved in oppositional politics grew out of or came from the left, and can be with some accuracy typecast as the "generation of '68".

Finally, one factor that unites the intellectual opposition in all three countries as it...
marks them as distinctively Central European, is their nuanced understanding of operating within a larger and even grand-historical tradition of political engagement. They self-consciously operated within the traditional roles of moral and political leadership and societal engagement often assigned to Central European intellectuals. It can certainly be argued, as do György Konrád and Ivan Szelényi in *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*, that in Central Europe “the intelligentsia, organized into a government-bureaucratic ruling class, has taken the lead in modernization, replacing a weak bourgeoisie incapable of breaking with feudalism” (1979: 10). The intellectual took the place of the entrepreneur as the engine and spokesperson of dynamic change and development. According to this view, the Central European intellectual faced a dilemma: either become an agent of the state or become completely independent and critical of its authoritarianism and the prevailing *étatiste* form of development—in other words, be a bureaucrat or a revolutionary (1979: 85-86). Those who made up the cast of early dissenters were also the protectors of the ideals of Western Europe, whether as socialists following Lassalle or Luxemburg or after World War I as adherents of the Wilsonian principles of national self-determination and parliamentary democracy (Rupnik, 1988: 13-16). Those who chose the road of collaboration with the state assumed leadership roles often first (and again later) as romantic nationalists and as committed socialists intent on rebuilding their war-torn societies in the postwar period. Characteristic of all of the above has been the commitment to a “social teleology oriented toward growth” (Konrád and Szelényi, 1979: 86), the pursuit of ends without regard to the means employed, which
reached its apogee in both the industrial achievements and social degradation of authoritarian communism. This privileged role of the intellectual continued in the post-totalitarian 1970s and 1980s, and thus it is not surprising that such intellectuals became the champions of a distinctive vision of Central Europe. In fact literally all of the dissidents in Czechoslovakia and Hungary could be described as intellectuals, and although dissent became in Poland an ultimately more widespread phenomenon, many of the leaders and a large core of the activists were also intellectuals. Post-1989 the debate on the proper role of the intellectual inside or outside high politics continues unabated. Today, the prevalent fear is that, as a result of the market commodification of their labour, intellectuals will be marginalized or in the words of Milosz “institutionalized”--tucked safely away in the protected sphere of the academy where they have freedom to speak but also where the market denies the effectiveness of their voices.

III. Political Theory as a Political Process

In order to situate this thesis into broader metatheoretical discussions in the academy with respect to the study of political theory, it is necessary to make explicit my assumptions regarding the nature of political theorizing as an activity and state in advance the hypotheses afforded by this a priori declaration. On the whole, my views on what constitutes political theory, and how it is related to politics--or stated another way, the old issue of the vita contemplativa and the vita activa debated by Plato and Aristotle--have been formed in reaction to the school of “Cambridge contextualists”, most notably
Quentin Skinner and James Tully. However, as will be seen below, I have been deeply influenced by contemporary feminist theory in its efforts to broaden the political, and in effect to de-canonize the sacred and elevate the profane. And although I agree with Skinner that ideological context and intentionality of the author are especially paramount in examining the work of self-professed intellectuals, one can no more detach the author from her or his surroundings than detach intention from meaning. In this respect, I see the work of Neal Wood and C.B. Macpherson more as powerful corrective to a narrow view of contextualism rather than its materially-based deconstruction.

Rather than focus narrowly on what constitutes the right set of procedures in understanding a particular text, however, I want to first examine the prior question of what is considered political theory in the first place. I agree with Skinner when he argues that political life sets the main problems for the political theorist, causing a certain range of questions to become the leading subjects of debate and I equally concur with James Tully’s statement that “Political theory, then, is as Aristotle and Marx would say, a part of politics, and the questions it treats are the effects of political action” (1988: 11). Thus as theorists we do end up focusing a great deal on the “big questions”, such as justice, liberty, and equality. And most can agree that these questions have relevance, and that at certain historical conjunctures these questions grew out of political life. Before going under the surgeon’s knife of the political theorist and as a result abstracted beyond

---

reasonable comprehension, the genesis of theory was and is a need to examine and analyse the burning questions of the day critically and comprehensively. For this reason alone I believe it is sufficient to categorize the oeuvre of Central European dissident thought qua political theory. Writers such as Michnik, Havel, and Kis were pragmatically engaged in politics at the same time as they deliberately not only theorized about it but self-consciously operated within the larger tradition of European political thought.

Following both Foucault and feminist theory, political theory has been expanded notionally but not practically or systematically by the idea that power relations underlie all politics and our attempts to construct and categorize knowledge about politics (and vice-versa), and that the subject matter of politics is just as easily the household as the public sphere, or the family versus the formal institutions of ruling. The pursuit of the political good has conventionally focused on the polis, the explicitly political community from which the responsibilities and rights of citizenship arise. Thus Paul Ricoeur states:

```
The point of view of philosophy is, on the contrary, that the individual becomes human only within this totality which is the ‘ universality of citizens’. The threshold of humanity is the threshold of citizenship, and the citizen is a citizen only through the state. Hence the movement of political philosophy starts with happiness, which all men pursue, moves to the proper end of the state, then to its nature as a self-sufficient totality, and from there to the citizen (1984: 252).
```

Contrary to Ricoeur, I maintain that political relationships involving mutual responsibilities and structures of obligation and consent can just as easily emerge from the private sphere (especially where it forms a substitute for the public sphere, as arguably occurred in Central and Eastern Europe) or from civil society itself. It is not just blithely
to suggest that politics is everywhere we look; it also involved recognizing that programs of thought and action which are not institutionally centred may also constitute political theory. It is political *life* which is at issue, rather than the *polis* or some modern variation thereof.

However, the linguistic and post-modern turn in all forms of philosophy has also meant that our Foucauldian gaze is increasingly directed toward the text, rather than the context, even as we have simultaneously robbed texts of authority and authors of meaning. Thus my metatheoretical and simplistic critique of both Skinner and Derrida is that simply too much time is spent on interpretation rather than on the power or force of the ideas themselves, and how they were or can be operationalized in a particular ideological and social context.

This leads me to my first assumption, which I call the "ideas matter" thesis. Briefly, what I wish to maintain and explore is the necessary connection between political theory and political change, and to me there is no better twentieth-century laboratory than Central and Eastern Europe. The relevant connection is not simply a logical one, such as that proposed by Alasdair McIntyre, for whom actions have meaning and theories are implicitly and logically necessary to understand those meanings. It is more causal in nature, but by saying this I am not standing up in favour of merging predictive social science with political theory. I am, however, suggesting that we can no longer separate institutional history or history-as-events and the history of ideas; in order to understand complex political phenomena we must not simply combine the two but understand the
dynamic relationship between them. To hold this view one need not deny the staggering importance of structural determinants rooted in culture, history, or political economy or to suggest that ideas are either independently Geist-like and Hegelian, or merely superstructural. If there is anything that the predictive failures of social science has taught us, it is of the complexity of relationships and factors concerning all forms of change, political or otherwise.

Rather than descend to the notion that chaos theory is an appropriate model for political understanding with random and free-floating ideas as yet another micron in the weather patterns of change, we should stop to consider what taking ideas seriously means. It means understanding where the ideas came from and what they grew out of, of course, but it also requires a thorough-going examination of what happened after those ideas were in circulation. Traditional Straussian historiographers of political thought privilege the interpreter; Cambridge contextualists privilege the interpreted. Two metahistorical flaws occur in both approaches. First, as John Keane suggests, there is the inescapable need to assert the “one true methodology” in both approaches, which is covertly positivist and also ignores the inescapable subjectivity of the interpretation process itself. (Furthermore, these authoritative tendencies tend to result in a curious reproduction of the same political canon regardless of whose gaze is involved.) Second, the focus is usually temporally unidirectional: on the before rather than the after. Thus Strauss focused on such arcane issues as how the level of political persecution would lead the author to disguise meaning only to have the sacred truths unveiled later by the clever philosopher.
Similarly, Skinner or J.G.A. Pocock can discuss the ideological context of the “mirror of princes” literature at the time Machiavelli wrote the *Prince* and how he literally turned the genre on its head. However, I believe strongly that in order to understand the force of ideas in politics, we have to redirect our interpretative gaze to what happened after rather than during the time of writing. It is hard to even conceive of the twentieth-century unfolding the way that it did, for example, with the explosion of the Russian Revolution at the beginning of our era, if not for the writings and dynamism of Karl Marx.

In making a causal claim for ideas, I cannot in this study focus solely on antecedents, in the same way Hannah Arendt does in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* or Jürgen Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. To give the argument some force and meaning, I must also look at consequences. For this reason, two of the chapters of Section III focus not just on dissident ideas but on the particular impact of these ideas on post-1989 East-Central Europe. Thus I look specifically at the contours of civil society and its effects on women, as well as the shape and pace of economic change and the relationship of both to earlier dissident ideas.

To accept that ideas are powerful motivators of political actors and offer humankind visions of something new or better, is to also implicitly suggest my second assumption—that human actors in politics are significant agents of change. In this vein, this thesis can be read on one level as a theoretical and practical argument against both the scientistic rationalism of orthodox Marxist philosophy (although not necessarily political practice inspired by Marx) and forms of post-modernism that for all intents and
purposes deny the possibility for human agency. Reclaiming subjectivity and political activism go hand in hand, for without ideas political action has no meaning. Part of what happened with the downfall of authoritarian communism in Central and Eastern Europe was the destruction of a particular ideological vision, no matter how bankrupt and removed from the original source that vision had become. Now we are supposedly in a “global marketplace” where ideas, like goods, move freely. But the magic of markets is in their ever-changing relativities of value; nothing is intrinsically better or worse. Ideas, like consumer goods, are the subject of fad, and are continuously re-tooled and sold through sophisticated marketing strategies. They are deprived of meaning, which may be just as well in the Nietzschean-inspired universe populated by post-modern academics. In a sense, part of the millennial malaise faced by political agents (although curiously not by political theorists) is the search for vision, meaning, and coherence in a world stripped of radical departures and alternatives. Daniel Bell spoke of the end of ideology too prematurely, and Francis Fukuyama applauded the end of history; in my view what we need is more of both. Well-grounded knowledge of the past and some form of political orientation toward the future is necessary if political action is to be anything more than catering to the whims of market economics, whose very purpose is to deny the legitimacy or primacy of politics in the first place. The alternative is that spontaneous protest against injustice remains just that, as hopelessly irrelevant, not disseminated by official or unofficial media, and devoid of any broader purpose. What this is called is less important than that it be called something, if ideas are to serve as rallying cries, and if politics is to
maintain its independence into the next century. Ideas only have force in politics if human agents carry those ideas forward.

IV. Methodology

In terms of a research methodology, I rely on the traditional sources of political theory: texts about political ideas. In this case, the texts themselves were not written intentionally as a contribution to the theoretical canon, but as I have argued earlier, as a result of political engagement (not unlike most of the now-canonized tomes of political theory). Neither are many of these texts traditional non-fictional histories or programmatic narratives: many of the ideas that constitute the oeuvre are contained in unofficial media or in a non-traditional format. Thus by the catch-all term “dissident political theory” I refer not only to such impressive works as Havel’s landmark essay “The Power of the Powerless” but also to the novels, plays, poetry, feuilletons, unofficial or “flying university” seminars, samizdat newspaper articles, and even various forms of performance art and cultural expression that made the opposition so distinctive, creative and frankly, difficult to penetrate and stop effectively. Thus I am broadening political theory not just in terms of who is accepted, but also what.

In this respect, I concur with Douglas Williams when he argues that as theorists we should not only “engage with our times” but consider conducting “political theory by other means”. As Williams describes, the traditional labour of professional political theory encompasses “...the reconstruction of the thought of our predecessors; clarification
of the languages and concepts we alternately take for granted and debate as citizens and scholars; and the evaluation of the performance and justification of public policies, political institutions and their leaders in light of some pre-established theoretical point of departure” (1991: 91). Although Williams is careful not to discredit the contribution of this exercise, he suggests that the arcane methodology of political theorists and the density of their typically rarefied objects of study have combined to produce and sustain a variety of gaps and interstices between the academic world and the real world. By expanding our universe of theoretical discourse beyond “formal treatises and other didactic, systematic sorts of inquiries” to other more experimental and expressive reflections of political thought and life, we give more serious consideration to other narratives and formats which permeate our cultures and daily lives. Williams’ view of political theory is expansive, and its objects of study should include films, paintings, novels, sculptures and monuments, poetry, popular music, rock videos, television, and “... a host of other cultural practices [which] are powerful channels of discourse daily traversing those individual and collective narratives we habitually describe as our lives” (1991: 93). In my view, no genre is intrinsically theoretical or atheoretical, but each case must be examined seriously and in context. Put another way, political theory can be much more than what academic political theorists do.

Thus, in order to grasp and sustain an argument about the full range of ideas under discussion in dissident circles, I have spent as much time reading novels, watching films and documenting oral histories as reading essays and published works. I have been
privileged to supplement this unconventional research with personal interviews of many former activists and opposition intellectuals in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. Throughout this study, I will refer to and quote from these interviews; the full list of interviewees and dates interviewed is contained in the bibliography. These interviews have also been helpful in documenting the relationships, both personal and intellectual, among the dissidents of the three countries under discussion and their mutual admiration for or points of departure from each other. Samizdat collections in translation, either in archives or in translated anthologies, have been exceedingly helpful. A valuable source has been the Open Society Archives (formerly the Radio Free Europe Archives), now housed at the new Central European University in Budapest. These archives, which like my research as a whole contain material culled from a variety of sources, are rich in dissident substance and detail, as it was one of the stated intentions of RFE to both broadcast the "real" news and to implicitly and explicitly foster opposition to the regime. As nefarious as this purpose might seem to some, it has meant a rich supply of information for researchers, especially for the period being studied here. Finally, I have drawn from a great many "eye-witness" accounts, written by the dissidents themselves, by contemporary historians, and by Western journalists. This has been a fruitful method of capturing the tone and feel of events as they unfolded, especially with respect to the moments of mass mobilization most scrutinized by the media, such as the Pope's visits to Poland, the phenomenal growth and consolidation of Solidarity in 1980-81, and the series of discreet yet profoundly connected events in the region we now refer to simply as
Another methodological point requires mentioning here, as it is intrinsic to the internal organization of my research, and that is my intentional focus on historical context and detail, not simply to prove that I can get my facts straight on the misunderstood and misinterpreted "other half" of Europe. Rather, my concern is that knowledge and understanding of the recent and earlier past is absolutely necessary to comprehend the ideas and especially the political strategies behind them. Moreover, context is not simply historical background or intellectual window-dressing, but is profoundly political. Dissidents responded to the broader circumstances of authoritarian communism generally by organizing, participating in, and interpreting an alternative context of their own design: this was creative, dynamic, and political process, involving strategies and tactics, debates and choices. Thus I have devoted an entire section, which follows this chapter and precedes my theoretical analysis of dissident writings, to providing the necessary context and background to the reader.

V. A Note on Nomenclature

Throughout the twentieth century the distortion of language in relation to politics has been a recurrent theme. Fifty years ago in his famous essay, “Politics and the English Language”, George Orwell suggested that “linguistic decay” was intrinsically connected

25 By which Orwell means the use of dying metaphors, verbal false limbs, pretentious diction and meaningless words--in combination these practices assist in
to the manipulation of meaning. With a rhetorical yet prescient flourish, he concludes that “Political language...is designed to make all lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind” (Orwell, 1946, 754). In his influential study *The Politics of Communication*, Claus Mueller developed a typology of such purposeful and politically motivated abuse of language. Mueller would have probably categorized Orwell’s concerns as a form of “distorted communication”, that is, restricted communication that inhibits discussion of public issues.

The former Eastern Bloc regimes, however, were guilty of at least two other more specialized forms of abuse. First, the party-state engaged in actively directing language reform through control of all the organs of the mass media. Theoretically this was justified through an interpretation of Marx and Lenin where language was seen as a weapon of struggle and social transformation, a powerful tool of regulation that reflected the ability to shape and redirect material destiny. By controlling semantic space by stipulating correct definitions, the party-state was not only replacing the “capitalist” lexicon with a “socialist” one, it was also circumscribing any possibility of interpretation. Although today we can be easily derisive of their overly ideological content, political definitions and explanations were infused with a scientific and military precision so as to convey the certainty and inevitability of the laws of history.

---

A second form of distortion arose from the limited capacity of individuals or groups to engage in authentic and open political communication, not directly because of apparent or probable intervention, but because of the nature of the linguistic environment. The problem with drawing any causal links between linguistic socialization and thought control (with the consequent inability to oppose the system) is that it tends to theoretically support the regimes' attempts to rewrite language as part of an overall effort to create Homo sovieticus. And hindsight has certainly demonstrated that via strong linkages to past political and cultural traditions resistance--through humour, family codes, clever writing to avoid the censors et cetera--resistance was not only possible but frequent. Efforts at linguistic control were met with highly motivated and imaginative forms of resistance. Authentic, uncensored and privately-generated expression was thus a strong component in the dissidents' desire to recover subjectivity and reclaim public space. Thus two lexicons began to appear in the region: the official and the unofficial, the prescribed and the proscribed. In reconstructing history it is thus difficult to shift from one set of meanings to the other, and thus new terms of scholarship have also evolved and exist alongside the colloquialisms of both the regime and its opposition. Thus in any discussion of contemporary history or politics of "previously-existing socialism" or the "former Eastern Europe" one immediately encounters the problem of defining the terms of discourse used. Because so many of the key concepts I refer to in this study have ideologically loaded meanings--not just as a result of their intrinsic association with communism but also with the Cold War debates of the West--I feel
compelled at the outset to define and defend my usage of some terms.

**Authoritarian Communism**

First, there is the problem of how to describe the regimes of Central and Eastern Europe in the 1945-1989 period. In the literature, the labels most often encountered are "communism", "authoritarian communism", "socialism", "state socialism", and "really-existing socialism". To my mind, both "socialism" and "communism" tout court are problematic as they are more properly ideological constructs or ideals rather than geographical locations. To use either term in the Central or East European context is either to come dangerously close to absorbing the McCarthyist rhetoric of the 1950s, where all socialist or communist beliefs were reduced to and conflated with the sphere of Soviet domination (and by this logic all communists or socialists were inevitably Soviet agents), or to adopting the linguistic codes the regimes used to describe themselves. Invariably, the countries following the Soviet model portrayed their historical progress as moving towards socialism, reaching the stage of advanced socialism, or finally nearing the desired ideal of full-fledged communism. Thus Marx's theory of history was simplistically reduced to a stage-based recipe, where the ingredients of the one stage

---

27This phrase has been attributed to Leonid Brezhnev, the former leader of the USSR who was apparently exasperated with efforts to idealize socialism—it was both more important and more realistic to pay attention to “really-existing socialism”, that is, the socialism of the former Soviet empire. Of course, this catch phrase has been easily converted post-1989 and post-1991 into “previously-existing socialism” to refer to the same in the past tense.
(socialism) contained the necessary but not sufficient conditions for moving to the next stage (communism). At the same time, in the West both terms came in the post-war period to have historically-specific and politically-constituted meanings. In Europe, communism was often associated with the phenomenon of "Eurocommunism", and socialism, along with its linguistic relatives social democracy and democratic socialism, were linked to a political project independent of the USSR to resuscitate the socialist ideal either as compatible with a nationally-driven market economy or not (depending on the formulation). "State socialism" came into vogue in the 1970s and 1980s as a way of describing in a more neutral fashion not only the Warsaw Pact countries, but also Yugoslavia, Albania, China, Vietnam, North Korea and any other countries ruled monopolistically and ideologically by a communist party, and where the economies were centrally planned and controlled by the party-state. Moreover, the term "state socialism" came to be used more and more in its economic dimensions, with authors such as Alec Nove, Michael Burowoy, and Domenico Mario Nuti applying it primarily or solely to the economic structure and organization of the Soviet model. In my view, the term was a victim of its own success. Its supposed neutrality fails to distinguish normatively between these systems and other forms of socialism (either real or ideal) which in order to meet their stated requirements must rely significantly on the state. At the same time, the term masks the inability of these systems to meet their own stated socialist objectives. Even those who hesitatingly use the "socialist" descriptor (with or without the "state") must acknowledge these difficulties, as does János Kornai in his 1992 study The Socialist
System: The Political Economy of Communism:

All over the world there are political currents that use the term “socialism” in the normative senses, attaching specific ethical principles to it. Although they interpret the value system of socialism in a number of different ways, most have a constituent in common: they see the combatting of poverty and helping the needy, weak, and disadvantaged as one of the main objectives of socialism. By this definition, a socialist state has a duty to redistribute material welfare more fairly. Now measured by this yardstick, the classical socialist system [read: the Soviet model] just partly fulfills its mission. Some of its institutions help fulfill it, while others hinder; its policy in this respect is inconsistent and self-contradictory. For those who consider this criterion to be the hallmark of a socialist social system, the Scandinavian countries have made far more progress toward socialism than the socialist countries (1992: 327).

This leads to my adopting the term “authoritarian communism” as perhaps the best of a bad lot. First, this term normatively describes the system at hand as “authoritarian” linking it in some respects with other authoritarian regimes and as theoretically and practically distinct from democratic regimes. Second, the term communism manages somewhat imperfectly to unite internal descriptions (by both its dissenters and its official representatives and defenders) with the external description of common parlance.

Totalitarianism

Next comes the difficulty with the word “totalitarianism”. In Anglo-American social science, this term is usually associated with a) the definition of Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski or b) the writings of Hannah Arendt.\(^{28}\) The Friedrich/Brzezinski

\(^{28}\)See both Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski (1956), Totalitarian Government and Autocracy, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP), and Hannah Arendt (1979,
definition is inextricably linked with American Cold War politics, and the desire to paint authoritarian communism as completely monolithic and intrinsically evil. In this study, the term “totalitarianism” must be understood initially in its Arendtian sense, as Arendt’s work had immense influence on the dissidents active in Central Europe. Their own definitions (especially those of Havel and Michnik) use Arendt as their own point of departure. For this reason, it is useful to briefly review the Arendtian notion of totalitarianism.

In her classic work *The Origins of Totalitarianism* Arendt portrays totalitarianism as a specifically modern and historically-situated European outcome. To be sure, the prime historical examples she uses are Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union under Stalin, however, what is important is not that these extremes of right and left are somehow united under a broad label. Rather, what is crucial is that they share a number of processes and features which were facilitated by anti-Semitism/racism (the “othering” of a segment of society or the branding of one group as an enemy on the basis of ascriptive characteristics, such as religion or class) on the one hand and the deeper motives and outcomes of nineteenth century imperialism translated into twentieth century reality on the other. Although Arendt’s historiography and thus her interpretations of events are at

times incorrect (often due to her own preference for certain sources over others, and the general unavailability of much material at the time of her writing), her insights into the nature of totalitarianism are unequalled. Taken today, Origins of Totalitarianism is best read less as an accurate history on the development of totalitarianism than as a heuristic device in reflecting on the nature of totalitarianism (and by historical implication, post-totalitarianism).  

For Arendt, totalitarianism is the massive defeat of politics, and thus also of freedom. Because of Arendt’s paradox that there can be no human rights outside of the political realm, the nation-state can, through the twin usage of ideology and terror, 

\[\text{\textsuperscript{29}}\]

Arendt’s intellectual influence in the region cannot be overemphasized, and this has contributed partly to the renaissance in Arendt scholarship worldwide. For an excellent and recent review essay of Arendt and her work, see Amos Elon (1997), “The Case of Hannah Arendt”, New York Review of Books, 6 November 1997: 25-29. See also Seyla Benhabib (1996), The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt (New York: Sage), Bonnie Honig, ed. (1995), Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania UP), Margaret Canovan (1992) Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge UP), and her intellectual biography by Elisabeth Young-Bruehl (1982), Hannah Arendt: For the Love of the World (New Haven: Yale UP). Her correspondence with Mary McCarthy, Karl Jaspers, Hermann Broch, Heinrich Blücher (her husband), and Martin Heidegger has either recently been published, or is in the process of translation.  

\[\text{\textsuperscript{30}}\]Arendt’s views are deliberately contradictory: she holds that it is only within the nation-state that human rights can exist at all (where “state” and the rule of law takes precedence over the nation). However, she also claims that when the “nation” triumphs over the “state”, national interest takes priority over law and legal guarantees, and non-nationals become stateless minorities. This paves the way for the logic of eliminationist anti-Semitism of Hitler and the labelling of entire groups as “class enemies” under authoritarian communism. In chapter 9 of Origins (“Decline of the Nation State and the End of the Rights of Man”) Arendt links the consequences of World War I--the appearance of minorities created by peace treaties, stateless peoples, growing refugee
effectively expel some groups to the margins of society or outside the political order altogether. Where reason is conflated with power, truth is reduced to an official story, and history becomes the official record of that truth. Society is atomized into an undifferentiated mass, and is constantly subject to change which ultimately takes its form as demobilization. Individual autonomy is meaningless, and individual action is paralysed. Because the capacity for self-determination is removed from the average human being, responsibility is also absent. Evil deeds are not simply the product of heroic, unusual or psychopathic actions as they may be in a non-totalitarian order, but become ordinary and banal. Thus in Arendt’s interpretation Adolph Eichmann is not extraordinary but average, and both the perpetrators of the Holocaust and those who conduct the Stalinist show trials and willingly extract both confessions and executions are happily able to sleep at night, separated logically from their own consciences.

Many social scientists have argued that once terror is removed from either the Friedrich/Brzezinski definition or the Arendtian portrayal, totalitarianism no longer properly exists. According to this logic, terror is the only instrument truly effective in the totalization of society. Without the active and continual implementation of a campaign of terror, society, through its inherent complexity and as a function of its size, is able to movements—to the systematic deprivation of human rights. Despite her assumptions about the inherent lawlessness of the international arena and the inability of international organizations such as the League of Nations to be useful in the protection of rights for the vulnerable and the dispossessed, her claims have an eerie resonance at the end of the century, when the United Nations and its organs have no better a track record in protecting refugees from harm or permanent displacement.
differentiate itself enough through the formation of a multiplicity of competing interests. Different from Western conceptions of pluralism, any formation of active and passive resistance renders the terminology of totalitarianism meaningless. Thus in the spirit of intellectual détente, academics moved toward the adoption of more neutral descriptions, often categorizing the regimes of Central and Eastern Europe as one form or another of authoritarianism.

There is, however, a compelling counter-argument, one worth mentioning here because it has been both explanatory of and influential to the dissidents of Central Europe. Jeffrey Goldfarb argues that even without terror, these systems are nonetheless totalitarian. He bases this on his own impressions, particularly of Poland in the 1980s, where many of his dissident friends had convinced him “there was something special about the oppression they were experiencing” (Goldfarb, 1992: 41). He continues:

Unlike traditional forms of oppression, there was something uniquely modern about the communist dictatorship. According to Hannah Arendt, terror and ideology are the two essential components of totalitarianism.

---

Truth and coercion become indistinguishable. There is an official truth and syntax, tied to a complete understanding of history, past, present, and future. The understanding comes from the powers that be, and when the powers change, so does the complete understanding. Even without terror, this ideological existence constituted the world of existing socialism (1992: 41).

For Goldfarb, neither the removal of terror ("de-Stalinization" or "normalization") nor the limited existence of opposition (the system no longer having either the desire or ability to totally repress) suffice to remove the totalitarian label, but rather indicate different phases of it. Moreover, in Goldfarb's view Arendtian political philosophy not only provides a distinctive analysis for coming to terms with the former regimes of Central and Eastern Europe; her notion of public freedom and the political importance of a public sphere (especially as expressed in On Revolution and Between Past and Future) point to a kind of "principled rethinking" necessary to the creation and consolidation of civil society in the post-1989 context. In this regard, he suggests Arendt's "insights suggest an alternative not only to despair but also to an easy triumphalism" (1992: 254). Thus Arendt not only diagnoses the malaise, she also points in the direction of a possible cure.

The most sophisticated formulation of the totalitarian conundrum coming from

---

32"Triumphalism" for Goldfarb comes in rightist and leftist varieties, each of which are equally simplistic. On the one hand, Francis Fukuyama's prediction of the end of the Cold War as the "end of history" is also an explicit portrayal of capitalism as not simply hegemonic but morally victorious. On the other, Paul Sweezy can easily brush aside the collapse of the Soviet bloc as not indicative of faults intrinsic to the socialist ideal. Rather, in the long run their ruination may be helpful to the long-term emergence and consolidation of socialism, as these regimes were at best false constructs paying ideological lip-service to the real McCoy.
dissident circles is the well-known analysis of Václav Havel in his most important essay, *The Power of the Powerless*. In the first place, he distinguishes between the regimes of the Soviet bloc and "classical dictatorships" (which can be likened to an Aristotelian notion of tyranny). Whereas classical dictatorships have tended to be locally owned-and-operated phenomena, he states that "our system is not limited in a local, geographical sense; rather, it holds sway over a huge power bloc controlled by one of the two superpowers" (1991: 128). Despite some regional variation, there is a "single unifying framework" where each country is "penetrated by a network of manipulatory instruments controlled by the superpower centre and totally subordinated to its interests" giving the overall system considerable stability, if only enforced internally by the threat of armed intervention and externally by the global arms race (1991: 128). In addition to this element of "empire" is the importance of historicity and ideology. Havel recognizes that although the system has long since been alienated from the workers it supposedly rules to benefit, there is an undeniable link to the proletarian and socialist movements of Europe from the nineteenth century onward. History is of course linked to its ideology, because corresponding to the social base of these regimes is a "‘correct’ understanding of social conflicts in the period from which those original movements emerged" (1991: 129). Ideology not only extends backward in time; it is also a "logically-structured, generally comprehensible...[and] extremely flexible" system of explanation and prediction that is akin to a secularized religion (1991: 129). There are consequences to such a belief system, as Havel points out:
In an era when metaphysical and existential certainties are in a state of crisis, when people are being uprooted and alienated and are losing their sense of what this world means, this ideology inevitably has a certain hypnotic charm. To wandering humankind it offers an immediately available home: all one has to do is accept it, and suddenly everything becomes clear once more, life takes on new meaning, and all mysteries, unanswered questions, anxiety, and loneliness vanish. Of course, one pays dearly for this low-rent home: the price is abdication of one’s own reason, conscience, and responsibility, for an essential aspect of this ideology is the consignment of reason and conscience to a higher authority. The principle involved here is that the centre of power is identical with the centre of truth (1991: 130).

One sees immediately here the Arendtian description of totalitarianism where ideology becomes truth, and both are conflated with power. Two further points separate classical dictatorships from the system described by Havel. The former are necessarily improvisational as “there is considerable room for accident and for the arbitrary and unregulated application of power”--this in turn provides physical and psychological scope for opposition and political manoeuvre (1991: 130). Connected to this is also an “atmosphere of revolutionary excitement, heroism, dedication and boisterous violence on all sides” of a classical dictatorship, whereas the Soviet Bloc has to a large extent “ceased to be a kind of an enclave” but in its long if fractured coexistence has become “simply another form of the consumer and industrial society, with all its concomitant social, intellectual, and psychological consequences” (1991: 131). Thus ideology is ultimately traded off in favour of a social compact, in which Havel’s stock character the greengrocer is not required to “believe” the slogan on the sign he places in his shop window (‘Workers of the World Unite!’) Rather, he must go through the motions, and in
return the regime must deliver the basic goods and services, and must at least marginally protect him from life's vicissitudes.

In his essay, Havel searches for and comes up with a term that is appropriate to the system he describes, which he refers to as "post-totalitarian". However, he is aware of the linguistic problems this represents:

I am fully aware that this is perhaps not the most precise term, but I am unable to think of a better one. I do not wish to imply by the prefix "post-" that the system is no longer totalitarian; on the contrary, I mean that it is totalitarian in a way fundamentally different from classical dictatorships, different from totalitarianism as we usually understand it (1991: 131).

Havel understands the validity of the term "totalitarian"; however, he wants to describe the later "normalized" phase in the system; in this way he is indebted to Arendt but wants to historically distinguish this period.

In this study I will in most cases be adopting the Havelian distinction, and will thus reserve the term "totalitarian" for depicting the nature of the earlier Stalinist phase of the Soviet regimes. However, the term post-totalitarian is more accurately descriptive of the period in which the dissidents of Central Europe were most active--the 1970s and the 1980s. In this respect, the term applies with some universality to Kádárite Hungary, Poland under Gomułka, Gierek or even Jaruzelski from the mid-1980s onward, or "normalized" Czechoslovakia. Hungary and Poland were obviously more "liberal" in many respects than Czechoslovakia, but the point remains true that although political activists were repeatedly harassed, imprisoned and at times beaten in the latter, they were nonetheless allowed to survive their own persecution. Even during the neo-Stalinism of
the Brezhnev period in the USSR and the Husák regime of Czechoslovakia, political executions were a thing of the past. The distinction may seem to be a hair-splitting one, but given the profusion of terms and the confusion surrounding their use, a necessary one. I agree with Goldfarb and Havel that these regimes are distinctive from other modern dictatorships and tyrannies, especially the bureaucratic authoritarianism of Latin America, with which they have often more recently been compared. However, I am unwilling to concede to Goldfarb that the term “totalitarian” is sufficient to cover the variations in meaning and history. Moreover, it remains too difficult to separate the term on its own from its Cold War definitions, hence I side with the subtlety of Havel’s addition of “post-”. Nonetheless, the terms “totalitarian” and “post-totalitarian” will be primarily used as adjectives describing the nature of the power structures and their stranglehold over society. In broadly describing the regimes subscribing to the Soviet model, more generally as well as in particular to Central Europe, I will use the term “authoritarian communism”.

**Party-State**

In describing the governing apparatus or state structures of authoritarian communism, most recent historical literature adopts the term “party-state”, and I will be doing the same here. Again, this comes from a need to distinguish the state of authoritarian communism from the state of either democratic or other forms of authoritarian regimes. One of the unique features of authoritarian communism is its
fusion of the party as initially a vanguardist and later as a mass mobilizational force with the state itself, such that political positions in the state can only be understood as part of broader relationships of power that include positions in the party as well. Thus in many cases, both in the Soviet Union and its satellites in the Eastern Bloc, the highest political position of "president" was often occupied by the same person who was the "First Secretary" or leader of the Communist Party. Like fascism but unlike bureaucratic authoritarianism, the party was at one and the same time in control of and over the state (and in many ways coterminous with it, as my usage suggests), the only upward mobilizational force in political life, the most important educational and political instrument in the dissemination of correct history and ideology, and by virtue of all of the above, much more than any of the other "Leninist transmission-belts" that existed, such as trade unions, or youth and women's organizations. In fact, many of these were simply wings of the party itself. All of this was neatly summarized and understood concretely by all as "the leading role of the party".

So central was the leading role of the party to the functioning of authoritarian communism that once it was threatened, as in Poland by the very existence of Solidarity, the party-state itself was in jeopardy. This self-fulfilling prophecy of the hard-liners--that "giving in" on the leading role of the party or allowing for any form of political pluralism that could be dubbed oppositional or even mildly independent of partisan control was the thin edge of the wedge that could bring the system down--was the justification for many of the more lamentable strategies of the Warsaw Pact, as well as some of the more clever
tactics of the evolving opposition. One important reason that both the Hungarian uprising of 1956 and to a certain extent the Prague Spring were crushed was because of their allowance of independent thought and organizations (more explicitly in the former, more as a result of things “getting out of hand” in the latter). In contradistinction, Gomułka’s accession to power in 1956 in Poland was not marked by such independent currents (for criticism and such “opposition” was largely within the party at this time). One of the brilliant insights of Adam Michnik was to realize the importance of an independent civil society in representing a *de facto* challenge to the leading role of the party. However, had it not been for the severity of economic crisis in Poland by the late 1980s (and the long-term impotence of the martial law strategy), there might not have been the same impetus to negotiate with Solidarity on issues such as elections. The opposition had to be co-opted to save the nation, and the ultimate sacrifice of the leading role of the party was a major factor in the demise of the regime. In my usage, referring to the governing apparatuses as the party-state is shorthand for conveying the importance of the leading role of the party and its fusion with the state.

**Intellectuals and Intelligentsia**

If the European notion of intellectuals is distinct from that held in North America, it is usually attributed to *engagé* attitudes and values of the former in comparison with the professional academization of the latter. This may be overly simplistic, and as much a matter of self-perception as societal perception, but it has been a recurring theme in
European assessments. The term *les intellectuels* came into common parlance in France with the Dreyfus case, and came to controversially refer to those Dreyfusards such as Émile Zola and Anatole France who made a point of entering (or impertinently interfering in) the public realm on the side of truth and justice. Just as quickly as the term came into vogue, it also generated pejorative connotations, as the publication of Maurice Barrès’ *La Protéstation des intellectuels* and ultimately Benda’s *La Trahison des clercs* attest.

In East-Central Europe, the term intellectual connotes, if anything, an even higher level of political commitment and engagement. Both in defence of socialist ideals and in vehement opposition to the actual practise of authoritarian communism, the voices of intellectuals are heard with greatest frequency, and at the highest decibel level. Alongside this notion of the intellectual as a particular individual, however, exists its species, the intelligentsia. The two have to be understood in relation to each other and clarified, given they are often mistakenly interchanged.

---

33 After publishing his scathing condemnation of the Dreyfus verdict *J’accuse*, Zola, along with France, the Halévys, Lucien Herr, and (then unknown) Léon Blum published a statement calling for a revision of the conviction aptly entitled *Manifeste des intellectuels*.

34 Two views opposed politically but not necessarily in terms of the role accorded to intellectuals, can be found in Karl Mannheim’s *Ideology and Utopia* and V.I. Lenin’s *What Is To Be Done?* In both cases the intellectual is something of a political messiah, a saviour above politics and thus able to possess strategic and empowering knowledge about human possibilities and generate new forms of belief and action. Not surprisingly, Mannheim’s formulation is considerably indebted to György Lukács, a communist intellectual *par excellence*. 
Intellectuals can be considered a subset of the intelligentsia, the larger and more vague category. Intellectuals are certainly seen to be more creative and innovative, in George Schöpflin's words, the job of intellectuals is to "create values" while the intelligentsia are responsible for "administering them". This is sometimes defined vocationally; the intelligentsia includes the educated professionals--such as teachers, lawyers, managers, and engineers--who form the nucleus of technical expertise in any society, who are responsible for reproducing its cultural and scientific content. Intellectuals are more likely to be artists, writers, or scientists, whether employed in the service of the party-state or in opposition to it. Higher education and professional employment are all that is required to be a member of the intelligentsia, but something more culturally imaginative, original, and distinctive is required to be considered an intellectual. Moreover, you can be an "independent" intellectual writing samizdat for the drawer in your living room, but being a member of the intelligentsia is a collective and organizational term.

Unfortunately, this is too neat a separation to correspond with actually-existing society in East-Central Europe. In fact, one of the dynamic class features of authoritarian communism was its ability to co-opt and subsume intellectuals into the intelligentsia, under the aegis and in the employment (literally) of the party-state. Though carried out in the name of the proletariat, the revolution and the resulting party-state were not to be confused with the *actual* dictatorship of the working class (even though through mass education and ideological promotion many of humble proletarian origins were eventually
successfully absorbed and formed a sizeable contingent of the intelligentsia). Thus Miklós Haraszti explains:

So “science” organized the workers’ “own” state like a factory. The economy, the administration of labor, political life, and cultural activity were unified into one hierarchical organization. The state apparatus, now the owner of aggregate capital, became synonymous with the intelligentsia, the guardian of all social, economic, and cultural knowledge. (In the East the term “intelligentsia” traditionally applies not only to the “creative” cultural professionals but also to those whose work requires a higher education.) Intellectual activity and the structure of the state were like muscles and bones in an indivisible, organic, unity (1987: 18).

These already muddy waters are complicated further by the notion of the intelligentsia as collectively embodying an ideal of national or popular service. An outgrowth of the nineteenth-century Russian model, this view holds that members of the intelligentsia are inwardly and via their special status in society as educated professionals obliged to serve the nation or the people, to teach and defend national history, ideals, symbols and if necessary defend them from oppression. In fact, in late-nineteenth century Russian parlance, the term intelligentsia referred to writer-critics caught in fortunate limbo between state and society, whose very “rootlessness was treated as a unique vantage point from which to survey and articulate the ‘social interest’ as a whole” (Jennings and Kemp-Welch, 1997: 7-8). In Poland, it was the collective job of the intelligentsia to keep the Polish nation alive, infusing messianic romantic nationalism with public service. The Polish opposition re-invented this “tradition” with KOR and the
TKN in the late 1970s.  

In the wake of such category confusion, I am inclined to refer to intellectuals as a subset of the intelligentsia, more likely historically to have been independent and to some degree vanguardist, regardless of ideological direction. I use the term intelligentsia in the collective sense, and include in it all educated and professional classes and vocations. Thus I leave to the intellectual historian the impossible task of sifting through the evidence and deciding the degree to which the intellectuals have been the role models and innovators and the intelligentsia as national soul-searchers or deeply compromised state employees. There is no “one” answer to this definitional conundrum, as these roles have shifted across time and space in the region.

A Note on Style: Names and Organizations

Finally, throughout this study all proper names of individuals are spelled as they would be spelled in their language/country of origin, regardless of how they may otherwise appear in Western media or in Western editions of their works. Thus György Konrád is always written as György Konrád and not as George Konrad, as he is referred to in Western editions of his novels. Similarly, Czeslaw Miłosz is spelled with Polish

---

*I am indebted here to my interview with Jerzy Jedlicki, 21 July 1995, Kraków, Poland. Jedlicki’s view of the intelligentsia-as-national-protector also has Marxist variants, such as the early articulation of Stanislaw Brzozowski (1910) in *A Legend of Young Poland: Essays on the Structure of the Cultural Soul*, wherein he anticipates the Gramscian notion of “organic intellectuals” subordinating themselves to the service of the working class.*
diacritics and not in accordance with the adopted American spelling of his name—Czeslaw Milosz.

For organizations well-known to Western audiences, such as Charter 77 and Solidarity, I have used the English names rather than their Czech and Polish counterparts respectively. For lesser-known groups, I have usually written the organization's name in the original language, followed by an acronym and the approximate or most generally-recognized English translation. In most cases, I use original language acronyms rather than English substitutes, thus the Federal Republic of Germany is the BRD (for Bundesrepublik Deutschland) rather than FRG, and the Hungarian Democratic Forum is MDF (for Magyar Demokrata Forum) rather than HDF. In the two cases cited above, one sees both abbreviations in the literature, so I have tried to be as consistent as possible.

The one exception I generally make to this rule occurs when well-known English acronyms are available and widely-recognized, for example PUWP for the Polish United Workers Party rather than the Polish acronym PZPR (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza), or CPSU for the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

Consistent with most style guides, all foreign words and phrases appear in italics, and are translated unless they are commonly understood or often used in English academic writing.

VI. The Call to History

A good friend recently told me something I have always suspected was true: the
most the average person knows about history of political opposition in East-Central Europe in the forty years of authoritarian communism that span roughly from the late 1940s to 1989 can be summarized into the names of country, a city, and an organization—Hungary, 1956; Prague, 1968; and Solidarity, 1980. The implicit assumption is that no opposition existed between these flare-ups, that the leaders involved (including Dubček) were hopelessly naive, and if one has any understanding of the division of Europe symbolically represented by Yalta, that the West dared not intervene to help these poor doomed souls given the delicate balance of international alliances and the awesome power of the Soviet Union. Indeed, the fact that the aforementioned events attracted massive international attention to a large degree served Western foreign policy interests nicely. The problem that this familiar caricature presents is twofold: 1) it is grossly inaccurate; and 2) it highlights the need of anyone writing outside the region, academic or otherwise, not to presume a level of general historical knowledge, or even of a cultivated interest.

Regarding the first point, most are surprised to learn that although the focal points of Prague 1968 or the triumphant success of Solidarity in the 1980-81 period were both critical and equal in scope and complexity, they nonetheless represent much more than a severe blip on the Richter Scale of political opposition. Rather, they represent peaks in a mountain of activity that was being built for a long period. Part of the explanation is historically obvious: events do not just happen, for both reasons of deep structure and individual agency. For example, the voluminous accounts of revolutions that we have
from such scholars as Barrington Moore and Theda Skocpol have taught us that broadly comparative analysis combined with the richness and specificity of detail can yield such conclusions as "how could it not but happen?" or simply remind us that there is a lot more to history than immediately meets the eye, warning us against simple determinism or easy explanations that enable us to easily slot practice into already existing theories. This is definitely the case when looking at East-Central Europe. The history of the political opposition in each of the countries studied here--Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary--is so full of complexity, detail, and fundamentally *irreducible* to a series of television images of Warsaw Pact tanks in the streets of Prague or Hungarian freedom fighters struggling to keep control of Budapest. Every serious scholar of the region knows this is the case, and it is for this reason that virtually every text that touches on political opposition in any of these countries begins with a recitation of recent history, and here I feel compelled to do the same.

With respect to the second point--the lack of assumed knowledge--this is not the case when writing about Western Europe, especially in the last half of the twentieth century. And here the two--or more--Europes are brought into sharp contrast. When one refers to "May, 1968" in Paris, a series of historical images are brought to mind--students rioting in the streets, massive strikes as they are joined from workers from nearby factories, the overall sense of a social movement *in action*. Unfortunately, when one refers to "March, 1968" in Warsaw, no images are brought to mind. One draws a blank. North America and the Western half of the European continent have a *shared history* for
a multitude of reasons, not the least of which include the postwar division of Europe; the political, economic, and military predominance of the United States throughout the Cold War; the shared hegemony of capitalism and even its tamer aspects as represented in the various postwar settlements and agglomeration of welfare state policies; the ideological intertwining of capitalism and democracy as the ideological twin sisters of freedom and progress; and a network of economic and military alliances and agreements.

However, aside from the lack of accuracy of stock images or the gap in shared history, there are a number of other critical reasons why history remains critical to this study. First, the region was and remains a laboratory for all the political experiments and economic disasters of the twentieth century. If Eric Hobsbawm is right in characterizing this short century as the "Age of Extremes" then this region is the "Region of Extremes". The collapse of empires at the end of World War I led to the bold Wilsonian experiment of attempting to draw state boundaries around nations or, when that proved impossible (as it was destined to be given the linguistic, religious diversity and mixed historical experience of the region), to attempt to make some innovative combinations—the result being the now-defunct nations of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. The model to be followed—Western democracy and economic liberalism—broke down dramatically in the 1920s and 1930s. The Great Depression ravaged this underdeveloped half of Europe. Hungary, Poland and Slovakia all had their indigenous flirtations with fascism. Even the success story of the region—Czechoslovakia (which in the interwar years was the 10th strongest economy in the world)—collapsed from a combination of internal factors and
external threats. The Munich agreement in 1938 signalled the cowardly acceptance by the Western powers of the failure of the model they had so boldly and confidently championed at Versailles. In 1945 the region chose, or as Hobsbawm states “was made to choose”, the Soviet model, which he accurately describes “a model for modernizing backward agrarian economies by planned industrial revolution” (Hobsbawm, 1993: 62). Unfortunately, given the intolerance of Moscow for the home-grown Left, it also meant the Stalinist liquidation of indigenous communism (and its most fervent supporters) and anyone else accused of nationalist or deviationist tendencies. This de facto removal of political opposition, even in its most friendly quarters, succeeded only insofar as it cemented together in the minds of its victims the Stalinists with the earlier Tsarist oppressors, as enemies of nationalist aspirations. This was especially the case in Poland. The planned economics of authoritarian communism succeeded and failed most spectacularly in the region, no matter how one looks at it. Moving the largely backward and agrarian economies of Poland and Hungary into Fordist factory production was a major “achievement”; in the minds of the consumer-citizens whose standard of living, education, and employment increased considerably while at the same time their ability to consume could not compete with their Western European neighbours, it was also a colossal “failure”. Dubček’s “socialism with a human face” was crushed by Warsaw Pact tanks, but more important to the internal opposition, it crushed the possibility for a revisionist model, a more democratically-based and decentralized socialism, one that owed more to Western European Marxism than the Soviet model. At the same time, the
“New Economic Mechanism” in Hungary—dubbed “goulash communism” by the West—in the 1970s proved that there may have been life in the old model after all, with some tinkering. Since 1989 the experimentation in political economy continues. Although some of the former oppositionists still maintain the relevance of some sort of “Third Road” between capitalism and authoritarian communism, today the new extreme is neoliberal economics, repackaged as “shock therapy” and the necessary prerequisite of a “return to Europe”. The results of this latest imitation are to say the least unsatisfactory, as few countries in the region have succeeded in bringing production up to pre-1989 levels. With new democratic freedoms have come old and new-old problems--anti-Semitism, xenophobic nationalism, and the general splintering of the body politic. The entire history of the twentieth century and its experiments weighs heavily upon the region, and one simply cannot avoid a discussion of history. You bump into it with every new discussion, with every new tried, or more likely re-tried, possibility.

Thus it is not surprising that in East-Central Europe one encounters a high degree of historical self-consciousness. This has especially been the case with the activists of the political opposition. They have fought against the ideologically-based abuse of their own histories while at the same time they have legitimized their own actions as an effort to reclaim some truth of the past as well as to change the present. Memory and truth are valorized as part the struggle of the anti-totalitarian project. This was expressed most vividly by Milan Kundera in his famous line that “...the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting” (Kundera, 1987: 3).
On the one hand, this path gave way to grand historically-oriented gestures that on
the surface did little to change the present. One example of this phenomenon: the self-
immolation of Jan Palach in Prague in January 1969, where a young man dramatically
lights himself on fire with kerosene in St. Wenceslas Square in the centre of the city to
protest the passivity of the Czechs after the crushing of the Prague Spring. It is followed
by the brutal mediocrity and repression of the Czech “normalization”. On the other hand,
the memorialization (and to some degree mythologization) that these events symbolize is
the power of this truth-recovery. Twenty years later, the so-called Velvet Revolution
began with students marching to mark the 50th anniversary of Jan Opletal, a Czech
student murdered by the Nazis. A similar experience happened in Budapest: the reburial
of Imre Nagy in Heroes’ Square, 31 years after his death and one year after a
demonstration to mark the anniversary of his execution was suppressed by police
violence. At the funeral, mourners join hands and intone the words of the Sándor Petőfi,
the poet of the revolution of 1848: “No more shall we be slaves!” Every historian worth
her or his salt knows that history is neither that simple nor that conveniently dramatic.
Yet that is precisely the point: it is only with a knowledge of the valleys of history that we
can come to understand its peaks.

My argument in this thesis primarily concern political theory, but like many
historicists and contextualists in my field, I will be arguing that this theory cannot be
separated from the well springs of practice from which it flowed. Most of the activist
intellectuals to whose writings I will repeatedly refer would agree, and have done so in a
number of personal interviews. Not only has their political theory grown out of their personal experiences, it has been informed by a deep knowledge of and respect for history. In order to understand the meaning of their ideas, explanations, and strategies I have had to learn a great deal of the history of the region. For this reason, I maintain that no accurate and vital analysis of their work even *qua* political theory is possible unless it is historically grounded. This does not mean I have attempted to write the abridged version of postwar history for each of the countries under examination. I have, however, attempted to include enough of a prelude so that the discussion of theory in the following chapters makes sense to the reader, with or without a prior knowledge of the region. At the same time, I have tried to insert into these brief historical sketches a discussion of intellectual debates and how they did (or did not) contribute to the climate of oppositional politics. This is important to my metatheoretical argument on two levels. First, as a comparativist, I want to demonstrate the theoretical and pragmatic linkages between oppositional ideas and movements in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. Second, as a theorist, if I want to argue that "ideas matter" to political change, I must be able to show that it does, either through references to actual events or by refuting a negative hypothesis by positing historic alterntativity. Part of the "proof" lies in my effectively arguing that, at times, certain texts appeared as watershed events in themselves, such as the publication of Kuroń and Modzewlewski's *Open Letter*, Kołakowski's powerful essay "On Hope and Hopelessness", as well as Havel's signature piece "The Power of the Powerless". In these cases, the timing and general import of the work will be discussed in this section, whereas
analysis will take place in subsequent chapters.
Section 1

Chapter 2: Poland: The Harbinger of Crisis and Collapse

I. Intellectual Opposition in Poland: 1956-1965

By the mid-1960s in Poland, the hopes that had accompanied the so-called “Polish October” of 1956 had largely dissipated. The results of the 1956 Poznań riots and the leadership crisis which propelled Władysław Gomułka to the position of First Secretary

---

1 Domestic and proximate causes of the riots in Poznań were food and housing shortages, a decline in the standard of living since the late 1940s as well as high prices. In June, 1956 because of increased production quotas (and therefore decreased real wages, given a piece-rate payment system), the workers at ZISPO (The Stalin Railway Car Factory), Poznań’s largest factory, launched a series of strikes and workers’ protests. Military force was required to bring the situation under control (although some units of the militia and civil police did side with the demonstrators). The riots were short-lived and the workers themselves did not get an opportunity to present their demands publicly. However, a delegation did travel to Warsaw to demand repayment of taxes, a 20% wage increase, and better working conditions. As in the case of Hungary in 1956, the international atmosphere also played a role. The Korean War armistice had been signed and the Geneva 1954 conference on Indochina at least temporarily settled that conflict. Within the USSR, the declaration of the possibility of peaceful coexistence, the rapprochement with Yugoslavia, Khrushchev’s “New Course”, and the far-reaching impact of the “secret speech” at the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU were critical milestones on the path to intra-party rebellion and societal conflict in both countries. See Andrzej Korbonski, “October 1956: Crisis of Legitimacy or Palace Revolution,” in Jane Leftwich Curry and Luba Fajfer, eds. (1996), *Poland’s Permanent Revolution: People vs. Elites, 1956-1980*. Korbonski accurately notes that unlike for Hungary and Czechoslovakia, there is no comprehensive landmark study of the Polish events of 1956 akin to Paul Zinner and Ferenc Vali’s accounts of the Hungarian revolt of 1956 (and I would add the more recently published collection by Litván) or to H. Gordon Skilling’s monumental study of the Prague Spring.

2 Gomułka was an indigenous communist who like Imre Nagy had been discredited in the immediate postwar period by Poland’s Soviet sponsors, largely because of his demands for a separate and nationalist path for Polish socialism, and his opposition to single-party domination and rapid collectivization. His release from prison in 1954 was
were hardly promising. On the one hand, the drive for continued agricultural collectivization was abandoned, a fact that would consistently differentiate Poland from its neighbours in the decades to come. As well, workers’ councils formed in response to the uprising continued to exist (although clearly circumscribed by party control). On the other, the government had failed to heed the advice of Oskar Lange and others to restructure the economy away from the privileging of heavy industry over the production of consumer goods. Moreover, the cultural and intellectual liberalization in effect from 1955 to 1957 period had been steadily eroded. In his attempt to maintain his “moderate” fortuitous in some respects, as he was untouched by criticisms of the Stalinist leadership, especially the revelations of Józef Świały upon his defection to the West (his political confessions were widely broadcast on Radio Free Europe).

Although Gomułka was strongly opposed to enforced collectivization, the regime was never fully reconciled to the abandonment of socialist agricultural production. The party-state did not grant peasants legal title to their lands until the mid-1970s under Gierek, and modernization of agriculture was always linked in ideology and in public policy to its ultimate socialization. And although the peasants did gain control over land, supplies, equipment, and methods of distribution remained in the hands of the party-state, a fact which encouraged bottlenecks and disequilibrium in the agricultural sector throughout the authoritarian communist period.

In 1958 legislation was passed that effectively removed any power held by the workers’ councils. See Michael H. Bernhard (1993), *The Origins of Democratization in Poland* (New York: Columbia UP), pp. 38-39.

Lange, one of Poland’s leading economists in the 1950s, was aligned with the progressive reform-minded wing of the party and publicly criticized the failures of the economic system to raise the standard of living. He promoted increasing food supplies and consumer goods, providing workers with more control, and encouraging small firms and independent peasants. To what extent his more structural reforms would have yielded a more responsive and effective socialist economy is open to debate, one that has partly been taken up by one of his students and chief biographer, Tadeusz Kowalik.
position between party hard-liners and the democratic Marxism or "new socialism"
advocated by intellectuals, publications such as Po Prostu (Plain Speaking) were shut down, philosophy professor Leszek Kołakowski was singled out for "excess revisionism" and prominent communist writer Adam Wazyk publicly censured for his Poem for Adults, published in the literary weekly Nowa Kultura (New Culture). The following lines, along with Wazyk's demands for greater openness, truth, human dignity, reason, and freedom, indicate why this piece was branded as offensive and seditious:

There are people overworked, there are people from Nowa Huta⁶ who have never been to a theatre, there are Polish apples which Polish children cannot reach, there are boys forced to lie, there are girls forced to lie, there are old wives turned away from their homes by their husbands, there are the weary dying of tired hearts, there are people slandered, spat upon there are people stripped in the streets by common bandits, for whom the authorities still seek a legal definition, there are people who wait for documents, there are people who wait for justice, there are people who wait very long.⁷

⁶Nowa Huta is one of the new cities built as a result of postwar industrialization. Its location and purpose also had an ideological function as a model for a socialist future. To drive this point home, it was constructed immediately next door to the historic seat of royalty and intellectual development--Kraków. The pollution from the steelworks of Nowa Huta and a neighbouring aluminum smelter (finally closed down in the 1980s) have resulted in considerable environmental damage to Kraków's historic buildings.

Despite the increasing chill of the late 1950s and the early 1960s, however, there were a series of intellectual linkages between the flowering in 1956 and the activism of the mid-to-late 1960s. Chief among these was the Klub Kryzowego Koła (KKK), or the Club of the Crooked Circle, which operated between 1955 or 1956 and 1962. The club was essentially a forum for discussion and independent thought in Warsaw, and was dominated by academics from the city. The KKK was critical from a sociological standpoint, for as Jan Józef Lipski remarks, “[it] played an important role in the formation of attitudes and ideologies, and the exchange of ideas among the large and influential milieu of Warsaw intellectuals” (Lipski, 1985: 10). The club also provided a generational bridge between the older group of activists and sympathizers and a younger circle touched by its influence and later prominent in the student movement and Komitet Obrony Robotników (KOR; the Workers’ Defence Committee)—including Adam Michnik. Active members included Ludwik Cohn, Edward Lipiński, Jan Józef Lipski, Aniela Steinsbergowa, Wojciech Ziemiński, Paweł Jaisienica, Stanisław Ossowski, and Maria Ossowska (Lipski, 1985: 11)—most of whom were later involved in KOR. The political tone of the club was leftist in outlook and liberal in outreach and openness. Needless to

8Similar clubs of the young intelligentsia operated throughout Poland, and the Warsaw KKK served as a model. These were among the few fora where controversial ideas might be openly discussed. The Warsaw KKK was closed down after an incident in a crowded Warsaw café when a scuffle broke out between Wadlemar Kasprzak (a suspected agent provocateur) and one of the club’s members. This, however, was simply the pretext, as club officials were later told by Warsaw City Council that, among other things, they were responsible for right-wing nationalist deviationism, questioning the authority of the party and negatively influencing youth (Raina, 1978: 70-71).
say it was, as Lipski reports, "consciously and consistently antitotalitarian" (Lipski, 1985: 11). An active KKK member, Anna Rewska, was also the first to be tried for political crimes since the Polish October, in 1958-59, for reputedly having sold the Polish monthly *Kultura.*

The various traditions of the Polish scouting movement were also an important intellectual as well as organizational bridge. Scouting was a large and popular movement among young boys from the late 19th century onward; it has a long association with Polish nationalism. Many of its traditions and organizational forms were so successful as to be coopted by the party in the postwar period. Nonetheless, scouting was both historically-grounded as Polish, independent, and internationally-connected to a larger movement and set of ideas. Group activities and outdoor expeditions fostered a sense of camaraderie, voluntarism, and mutual trust. Two controversial but important strains were the *Walterowcy* or "Walterites" and "Black Troop No. 1" from Warsaw. Jacek Kuron founded the Walterites, naming the troop after Karol Świerczewski, the "General Walter" of the Spanish Civil War (Lipski, 1985:14). In contradistinction the Baden-Powellism

---

9*Kultura* was an important Polish emigre journal published in Paris. Peter Raina, in his detailed study *Political Opposition in Poland, 1954-1977,* points out how shocking this was at the time, since *Kultura* was then easily accessible in public libraries, and could be borrowed and read without fear of reprisal. See Raina, 1978: 64-65.

10My analysis here is much indebted to a conversation with intellectual historian and former TKN activist Jerzy Jedlicki, 21 July 1995.

11Świerczewski, or "General Walter" was a Polish communist famous for having fought in the international brigades in Spain. Like elsewhere in the region, having fought
of Western boy scout organizations, the Walterites promoted a high degree of social and political involvement, and were radically and uncompromisingly committed to an ideologically pure form of Marxism. Ironically and perhaps predictably, this “fanaticist” group was on a collision course with the authorities and was soon dissolved.

Membership in the “Walterites” served as a black stain on later dissident “careers”, although it is nonetheless telling that so many had roots in this organization. As well as ideological conformity, Kuroń also paradoxically promoted a form of anti-conformism, emphasis on truth, and the importance of a “genuine life”—one that could be most hospitably provided by membership and commitment to the scout corps. The second group, “Black Troop No. 1” was a Baden-Powellist troop. It had roots going back to before the First World War, when scouting was covertly associated with opposition to partition and Russian domination. It was also associated with the Gray Ranks, a scouting group connected to the Polish resistance and the Home Army during the German occupation during the Second World War. This group was less known for what it did for boys who were members than for its “alumni” organization: a circle of “old boys” that became known as the “Band of Vagabonds”. This group met several times a year, were involved in discussions of current events, social concerns, and national life in general.

Their implicit social activism was revealed in the later actions of many of its members. Lipski documents this genealogy:

_____________________

in Spain was both an impressive credential and simultaneously tended to brand one as an independent on non-Muscovite communist.
As many as four members of KOR, and later of KSS KOR, had their roots in the Band of Vagabonds: Antoni Macierewicz, Piotr Naimski, Wojciech Onyszkiewicz, and Andrzej Celiński. Two editors of Głos (The Voice), Urszula Doroszewska and Ludwik Dorn, also came from the band, as did Marian Barański, who played an important role in TKN, Dariusz Kupiecki, and others. The Band of Vagabonds also put together the original team that organized help for the workers from Ursus in 1976. One might also add that KOR member Mirosław Chojecki, who was for a while the head of the Radom team and later the founder of the Independent Publishing House (NOWa), had also been a scouting activist, although not a member of the band (Lipski, 1985: 18).

The organizational ties and networks established through scouting were to prove helpful during the early genesis of KOR and later oppositional activities. Even scouts themselves were later mobilized: for example, Piotr Naimski arranged for boy scouts to take care of the children of accused workers in the Ursus trials in 1976 (Lipski, 1985: 47-48). Boys and girls involved in Bands of Vagabonds assisted also in making contacts with workers’ families in Ursus, helping to win their confidence and thus collect information about the nature and extent of the repression in 1976 (Lipski, 1985: 48).

The common pre-war history of many intellectuals involved in opposition from the 1950s to the 1970s should also not be overlooked. A large number of intellectuals were involved in the Polska Partia Socjalistyczna (PPS), or the Polish Socialist Party\(^\text{12}\): Ludwik Cohn, Edward Lipiński, Antoni Pajdak, Józef Rybicki, Aniela Steinsbergowa, Adam Szczypiorski, and Waclaw Zawadski were all active in the PPS prior to 1948 and

\(^{12}\)The PPS was forcibly unified with the Communist Party in 1948--thus the Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza (PZPR: also known by its English acronym PUWP) or the Polish United Workers Party was born. Many PPS members were expelled at this time.
were later important signatories and members of early KOR documents.\(^{13}\) There was also a history of resistance to both fascism and Soviet domination, reflected in service in the Home Army (Rybicki) or participation in the Warsaw Uprising (Reverend Jan Zieja, Stefan Kaczorowski), the earlier defence of Warsaw in 1920 (Cohn) or wartime resistance (Lipiński, Pajdak).

There were also a series of events in the 1960s and protest groups which sprung up in response that collectively served as an important “training ground” since there was obvious overlap in the personalities involved. In 1965 Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski (leaders of the Walterites and the Club of the Seekers of Contradictions\(^{14}\) respectively) were arrested and then imprisoned for the circulation of an essay entitled *Open Letter to the Members of the Basic Party Organizations of PZPR and to Members of the University Cell of the Union of Socialist youth at Warsaw University.*\(^{15}\) The essay, written in fiery Leninist rhetoric, demanded that party uphold the true principles of Marxism-Leninism, and outlined its various deviations therefrom. Its overall message

---

\(^{13}\)The common ancestry of prewar socialism can be inferred from earlier accounts of the political opposition and of KOR but is not dealt with explicitly (for example, Lipski, 1985, and Raina, 1978). Bernhard (1993) mentions PPS membership as having been overlooked by Lipski, but does not discuss the ramifications of this history of activism on the left.

\(^{14}\)This organization, originally founded by Adam Michnik and Jan Gross as high school students, was a sort of short-lived student-successor to the KKK.

\(^{15}\)The *Open Letter* was first published in the original in the West in Paris in 1966. It was later translated into English, French, German, and Italian, often published and disseminated by independent socialist groups.
was that although the Polish state was Marxist in appearance it was at the same time fundamentally opposed to genuine Marxism. In particular, the Polish version of state ownership was merely another form of ownership, which enabled the fusion of economic and political power (control of production, labour process, and distribution with state control) not in the interests of all but in the interests of the decision-makers, members of the monolithic party. Moreover, the "leading role of the party" and the existence of party organs dominating all aspects of social life resulted in a monopolistic, centralized, and anti-democratic type of regime. Needless to say, this power was protected and reinforced by the entire state apparatus, especially the police, political police, and the courts. The supposedly democratic functioning of the party was in practice completely fictional, as decision-making was top-down, and structurally organized to exclude the influence or ideas of rank-and-file party members, or society at large. Where the Open Letter is most compelling, however, is in its documentation of the actual conditions of the working class--measured in terms of consumption levels (food, clothing), living space, average wages vis-a-vis national income, and so on. Like Miklós Haraszti's Worker in a Workers' State published later in Hungary, it is a sharp leftist critique of the workers' situation in Soviet-style regimes. Looking at either work today and eliminating the obvious references to authoritarian communism, it is strikingly similar to critiques of primitive or Taylorite capitalism.

The manuscript itself, which was drafted in the summer of 1964 and reviewed by a number of scholars in History, Economics and Philosophy, inevitably aroused the
attention of the Interior Ministry. Both students were immediately expelled from the party and its student organization at Warsaw University. Despite the fact that in 1956 the party had adopted a resolution that party members could hold divergent views, when a copy of the Open Letter was subsequently submitted to the party organization at the university, the result was not discussion or even disagreement, but rather the arrest of Kuron and Modzelewski (Raina, 1978: 87).

II. The Catholic Church in Poland

The dialogue and relationship between the Catholic Church and the Polish opposition has always been difficult for the outsider to comprehend, but neither the Polish past nor present can be understood without grasping the complexity of the Church’s presence and moral force in Poland, its notions of both the individual and the social order, its mixture of conservative ethics with progressive and nationalist politics, and the ongoing battle between Church and State—which both preceded and succeeded forty years of authoritarian communism. Poland is not only a Catholic country in the same way as France is a Catholic country—it is fiercely Catholic (claiming over 90% of the population as adherents), and has historically had strong church attendance, with the Church deeply embedded in Polish society, culture, and history.

Poland’s first Catholic ruler Mieszko was baptized in CE 966, and the notion of Poland as a territory is entwined with the expansion and consolidation of Catholicism in the region. This relationship between Church and nation was cemented during the Third
Partition\textsuperscript{16} when the struggle for the preservation of the Polish nation, its language and culture was carried out under the auspices of the Church, which systematically opposed both Bismarck’s \textit{Kulturkampf} and the forced Russification of the Tsars. It is also from this period that develops a peculiar type of religious messianism, to the point where Polish Romantic poet Juliusz Słowacki described his country as “the Jesus Christ of nations”.\textsuperscript{17} The Church developed a set of survival skills which have been both its greatest strengths and its weaknesses: rigid conservatism, ethnic exclusivism,\textsuperscript{18} and an ability to both resist Poland’s temporal rulers and ignore them completely, claiming its source of power and legitimacy was much higher and stronger and could never be overruled by mere secularism. During Nazi occupation, the clergy and the national resistance movement worked together; thousands of Catholic priests and bishops died or were imprisoned. The new postwar Polish boundaries combined with the genocidal policies of Hitler meant that the identification of the Polish nation with Catholicism was increasingly the geographic and cultural reality of the situation. The Church’s resistance

\textsuperscript{16}The period between 1795 and 1918 when Poland was divided up by three empires: German, Austrian, and Russian.

\textsuperscript{17}This peculiar form of religious messianism is so entwined with Polish culture it is not even limited to Catholicism. A number of parallels have also been drawn to the messianic Chassidism of a substantial portion of Polish Jewry during the same period. The only close parallel is the case of religion in Ireland.

\textsuperscript{18}This chief negative consequence of this exclusivism has been the historical perpetuation of intense anti-Semitism, which unfortunately still remains among clergy (for example, the oft-quoted remarks of Bishop Jaźkowski and even current Primate Józef Glemp).
to Nazism and the support of the Vatican to the Polish government-in-exile in London strengthened its legitimacy; in this respect, at least, the Polish Church was considerably different than its French and Italian counterparts. This legitimacy was strengthened in the postwar period, when it not only refused to accept any of the doctrinal limitations of orthodox Marxist-Leninism, but suffered a crackdown and suppression of Church privileges as a result. These initial battles gave way to a form of mutual recognition in 1950 when the episcopate reached an understanding with the party-state whereby it would acknowledge the authority of the state on all secular matters but would retain its religious autonomy and a number of its privileges, including religious instruction in schools, the maintenance of the Catholic University in Lublin, and the continued independent functioning of religious orders. With this history, one can see how nationalism and Catholicism are effectively fused. Moreover, opposition to external authority or authoritarianism of any kind--Nazism or communism--is also associated with the Church. That the Church could freely teach and historicize its role as the saviour of the nation from both the pulpit and in the schools from 1950 onward was a distinct advantage, especially as the remainder of the curriculum in both schools and universities was strictly controlled, and Polish historiography revisionist in favour of the new regime.

The Church has always been particularly skilful in employing a form of metaphysical symbolism in its self-expression as a counterweight to the relations of

---

19 Following a Vatican decree in 1949, the Church establishment proceeded to excommunicate members and supporters of communism.
power. Take, for example, the symbolism of Częstochowa, the monastery housing the famous portrait of the "Black Madonna" at Jasna Góra. If Poland is the Christ among nations, doomed to suffer but rise again, the Black Madonna is the marianite icon whose passion, piety, and sublime power makes it possible. It was here in the 17th century that the invading armies of Sweden were stopped. August 15 is one of the holiest days in Poland—it is the Feast of the Assumption, and this day is consecrated to the Black Madonna. It is also the same day in 1920 that Piłsudski's Legionnaires held off the Bolshevik armies of General Budenny on the outskirts of Warsaw—an event that became known as "The Miracle on the Vistula". Sixty years later, it is also the day that workers all over Poland put down their tools in support of the strikers at the Lenin shipyard in Gdańsk. Signs appeared that read "The Madonna is on strike" (Garton Ash, 1983: 62).

Poland’s recent history is rife with the fusion of religious celebration with moments of highly-charged political significance. For example, Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński was released from prison by Gomułka only days after he became party leader; thus the Polish October became self-identified with freedom for the Primate and greater freedom for Poles. It was the beginning of normalization of church-state relations in the country.

Intellectuals associated with the Catholic Church had managed to walk the tightrope between religious expression and political opposition since Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński regained his freedom. Two manifestations of the social activist tradition

---

20 Cardinal Wyszyński was imprisoned after the 1952 elections as part of the Stalinist crackdown on the Church.
within the Church were the Catholic group Znak (Sign)21 and the Klub Inteligencji Katolickiej (KIK), or Warsaw Club of Catholic Intelligentsia. The Znak movement began in 1956 in the spirit of the Polish October, and combined “geopolitical realism” (that is, an acceptance of Soviet hegemony) with “a rejection of the Poles’ supposed predisposition to revolt” (as in the case of the 1944 Warsaw Uprising) (Michnik, 1985: 139). Znak clearly expressed the desire of the mainstream Catholic episcopate to form an uneasy alliance with the authorities; Michnik states:

...the Catholic politicians believed in having concessions and rights “granted” from above rather than in organizing pressure from below. They sought harmony, not conflict; they cared for order, seeking agreement with the party, and sought to avoid imputations of oppositional attitudes (Michnik, 1985: 140).

Znak was largely composed of writers, academics, and journalists. It was inspired by French Catholic philosopher-activists such as Emmanuel Mounier and Jacques Maritain. Znak was a multi-faceted organization, with a publishing house, a monthly journal of the same name and a respected Kraków weekly, Tygodnik Powszechny (Universal Weekly).22 Znak also had a parliamentary caucus in the Sejm, who

21The leading exponent and ideological creator of Znak was Stanisław Stomma, who envisioned a dual strategy of working within the system (he and others were members of the Sejm from 1957 onward) and providing by their separation from the party a moderate and Catholic-based alternative to it. Michnik describes Znak as “neopositivist” in outlook, “[taking] for granted Poland’s loyalty to the USSR while at the same time rejecting Marxist doctrine and socialist ideology” (Michnik, 1985: 135-136).

22The group around these publications was also instrumental in founding the KIK, the most important of which was located in Warsaw. The editorial board of Tygodnik
demonstrated their political allegiance to the emerging opposition by protesting to the prime minister against the harsh treatment of students during the March, 1968 events.23

The KIK in Warsaw strengthened the informal alliance between Poland’s unofficial opposition and the Catholic Church. Particularly important was the editorial leadership of Tadeusz Mazowiecki in publishing the intellectual monthly Wisz (Link). Mazowiecki’s views were critical in laying the groundwork in the early 1970s for the now-famous Church-opposition alliance. Dissidents (including those of Jewish descent) were encouraged to write under pseudonym. Mazowiecki strongly believed that the role of the Church was to stand in defence of the oppressed, against “totalitarian power”.24 Catholic intellectuals like Tadeusz Mazowiecki and Anna Morawska combined Polish nationalism, activism, realism, and religious independence with leftist revisionism. To a certain degree, this blending of religiosity and Marxism brought them into conflict with

Powszechny included Karol Wojtyla, the future Pope John Paul II.

23Later, in 1976, Znak split as a result of Sejm leader Stanislaw Stomma’s absence during the constitutional amendment process. The pro-regime faction, known as Neo-Znak, was deliberately deployed by the party-state in its propaganda efforts. More importantly for the ensuing Church-Left alliance, the progressive elements of Znak united with the remaining KIK and developed an increasingly anti-regime, pro-opposition stance. Thereafter politicized lay people and prominent clergy lent their voices and their premises in support of the opposition. Cardinal Wyszynski later spoke out against reprisals against workers dismissed as a result of the protests in June, 1976 (see below). In Kraków, Cardinal Karol Wojtyla (later Pope John-Paul II) allowed churches to be used for lectures of the TKN.

the established Church, but as Adam Michnik observed “[their] ideas also made possible an ideological dialogue with the lay intelligentsia” (Michnik, 1985: 140).

Catholic publications were also important, as they had (relatively) the right of free expression. Because of their philosophical nature and moral tone, opinions expressed had enormous resonance. In both his *Letters from Prison* and *The Church and the Left*, Adam Michnik discusses the overwhelming importance of the independent Catholic intelligentsia as laying important groundwork for future alliances. First, one must understand that Polish intellectual life and culture has absorbed much contemporary Christian thought and morality, despite the secular nature of the writing of many scholars (Michnik, 1985: 140). Second, Catholic organizations, publishing houses and journals served as independent models, creating a base for an independent culture separate from officially-sanctioned organizations (the many Leninist “transmission belts” of Soviet party-state systems). Thus the Church became a proto-oppositional organization simply by virtue of its independent existence. Without intentionally adopting an activist stance, it absorbed societal discontent and was a site for “truthful” discussion and criticism. This in turn fostered what Michnik described as “ersatz political pluralism” (dependent as it was on the limited tolerance capacities of the party-state). Finally, Jewish, left, and secular intellectuals were able to revise their own stereotypes of Catholicism given the examples of analysis and activism from within the Church.

Because the KIK and *Znak* were officially recognized, overt cross-membership between these organizations and later oppositional groups was originally rare, but
informally support was strong. Henryk Wujec was a member of both KIK and later KOR, but concerns regarding possible reprisals against these groups made his membership the exception rather than the rule. The publishers and scholars associated with Znak (for example, Władysław Bartoszewski, Bohdan Cywiński, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, and Adam Stanowski) were sympathetic politically, but none were among the original members of KOR. However, it should be said that this group, especially Mazowiecki, emerged as an important and morally powerful ally between the Church and Solidarity right from the early negotiations in Gdańsk. Ironically, it was Anka Kowalska, a former activist within the pro-regime Catholic movement PAX who was a member of KOR.

III. The Students' Protest: March, 1968

In 1966, the Union of Socialist Youth at Warsaw University (ZMS) and in particular students from the history faculty invited Professor Leszek Kołakowski to provide a lecture honouring the 10th anniversary of the Polish October. Kołakowski was frank in his assessment of any positive legacies—the opportunities represented by Gomułka's accession to power were lost. He not only denounced the lack of progress since 1956 in terms of economic planning and political administration, but evaluated and attacked the legal system (since one had “reason to believe certain rightful laws existed in Poland after 1956”), the lack of democratic choice concerning leaders, the

25In fact, the exact date chosen was 21 October 1966, ten years to the day since the important Eighth Plenum of the party in 1956.
unresponsiveness of the government to the nation, bureaucratic inefficiency, a system rife
with special privileges, and the nonexistence of academic freedom, the right to assembly
or free speech (Raina, 1978: 96-97). As might have been predicted, Kołakowski was
expelled from the party and later the university (the speech having been recorded by party
informers); however, dealing with someone of Kołakowski's stature and reputation was
not as easy as dealing with Kuroń and Modzelewski. The university party members took
a pro-Kołakowski stand, and twenty-two prominent Polish writers expressed their
disapproval to this expulsion in a letter to the Central Committee. Actions were also
taken against many of the participants, including Adam Michnik. Others in the Warsaw
academic community reciprocated by handing in their party cards, resulting in further
suspensions and reprimands (Lipski, 1985: 16). Many were expelled along with
Kołakowski, including economist Włodzimeriz Brus and sociologist Zygmunt Bauman.
The faculties of economics, philosophy, sociology and psychology were dissolved, and
therefore over a thousand students lost their right to continue their studies (Raina, 1978:
146). The affair also attracted international publicity, including from other Eastern Bloc
countries. Czech philosopher Karel Kosík wrote a letter published in Literarni Listy,
stating:

A few days ago, my Polish colleagues, the philosophers Bronisław Baczko
and Leszek Kołakowski were dismissed, along with some other scholars,
from the University of Warsaw because of their opinions. Intellectual
Europe knows Baczko and Kołakowski as Marxist humanists and values
their work. It would be in keeping with the principles of human solidarity
if the Philosophical Faculty of Charles University were to invite these
persecuted Polish thinkers to come to Prague, permitting them freely to
continue their work and to propagate progressive socialist opinions (Raina, 1978: 146).

Significantly, Kołakowski's speech was the beginning of the end of his commitment to partisanship. His personal intellectual journey— from revisionist Marxist intellectual to opposition activist and finally to a complete rejection of Marxism as an intellectual project— was soon indicative of a larger trend, one that has been continually alluded to in personal biographies and in interviews I have conducted throughout Central Europe.26

On top of this upheaval, national censors decided to ban the remainder of scheduled performances of the production of Adam Mickiewicz's Dziady (Forefather's Eve)27 at the National Theatre in late 1967. Student commandos quickly used the incident to galvanize protest against the state; demonstrations held at both the theatre and at Warsaw University were dramatically and brutally broken up by police and reserve forces. Both Adam Michnik and Henryk Szląjer were expelled from the university, and petitions were circulated on the censoring of such a literary masterpiece. The issue was

26 Adam Michnik talks about the “failure of revisionism” in his essay The New Evolutionism. Miklós Haraszti discussed his own intellectual journey from being a self-described Maoist to a liberal democrat in a personal interview on 18 August 1995. For both the older generation and for the students, the events of August, 1968 in Czechoslovakia proved to be decisive in terms of their collective rejection of revisionism, especially within the party, as a means of attaining a more open political system and/or a more responsive economy.

27 Adam Mickiewicz is foremost among Poland’s nationalist poets. The play Forefather’s Eve is thematically about the struggle of the Polish nation to overcome Tsarist oppression during the period of Russian partition. It was staged in 1967 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution, and prior to its run in Warsaw, had received favourable reviews in Moscow.
debated by the Union of Polish Writers. Strikes and protests in other major academic centres (Kraków, Lublin, and Gdańsk) soon followed.

The state responded with a campaign of anti-Semitic slander, misinformation, and violence that had not been seen in Poland since the end of the war. Leaders of the student movement and the academic community were targeted as Jewish troublemakers and hooligans. This was all the more remarkable given the minute size of Poland’s active Jewish community, and the fact that most of the activists (a minority) who were actually Jewish (for example, Michnik, Blumsztajn, Szlajfer) were from such thoroughly secular and Polish families as to make the charges ridiculous. The government’s anti-Semitic efforts were effectively linked by those as high up in the party as Gomulka himself\(^{28}\) to popular Polish support for Israel during the Arab-Israeli War of 1967. Peter Raina describes this support:

...the general mood among the Poles was strongly in favour of Israel, because everyone felt that the outcome of the Middle East conflict had been a great defeat for the Soviet Union. *The New York Times* correspondent Henry Kamm, was right when he reported from Warsaw on 13 June 1967 that the sentiments of the population were “running strongly in favour of Israel,” and that the Israeli Embassy in Warsaw had received telegrams and letters “overflowing with emotion and sentiments”. Cardinal Wysżyński prayed for Israel in a public mass in Warsaw, and the Catholic deputy, Konstanty Łubieński, in a speech to the *Sejm*, disapproved of the Polish Government’s policy on Israel (Raina, 1978: 109).

\(^{28}\)In a number of speeches and remarks Gomułka encouraged Jews to leave for Israel, denounced them for having more than one fatherland, accused them of being a “Fifth Column”.
Despite this background of support for Israel, Polish authorities were able at one and the same time to use the Middle East crisis as a convenient link to Poland’s problems, paint the students and their families as Jewish/Zionist perpetrators in a larger plot, and thus play on the simmering ethnic prejudices of those inside and outside the party. That many of the Jews singled out as conspirators were sons or daughters of high-ranking party members is significant, and relates to the disproportionate representation of Jews in the party itself. The content of the campaign included leaflets, speeches by party leaders, and beatings. An example from one Ministry of Interior leaflet, written in verse, gives one a flavour of the “debate”:

Onward brothers! sabre in hand,
Seize the Jew by his payee [pais]
--And if you well understand--

---


30 For example, Wiktor Górecki was the son of the director-general of the Ministry of Finance; Henryk Szlajfer was the son of a censor in the Main Press Control Office; Ewa Zarzycka was the daughter of the ex-Mayor of Warsaw; and Katarzyna Werfel was the daughter of the former editor-in-chief of the party newspaper Nowe Drogi.

31 Sociologically, many of those Jews who survived the Holocaust did so by living in the Soviet Union. These Jews were often not only communists, in the hopeful belief that communism would result in an end to the decades of anti-Semitism associated with both fascism and capitalism, but were also particularly loyal to the Soviet Union and its interests.

Thus, to a certain degree the campaign was successful, especially given the ability of the authorities to play on some of the traditional antipathies of average Polish workers and citizens—Jews and activists were effectively merged, silenced and “othered”. Ironically, however, in the long run, this served to galvanize the consciousness of both Jews and activists. Former opposition activist Konstanty Gebert tells of how being “beat up as a kid in the playground” for his supposed “Jewishness” following the March, 1968 events fostered his curiosity in his identity as a Jew, and cemented his feelings of anger toward and opposition to the regime.12

1968 in Poland was not only about the March movement and its aftermath. Protests and leafleting also followed the invasion of Warsaw Pact troops into Czechoslovakia in August. Compared to the size and scope of earlier events, these responses were marginal given the overall sense of defeat and organizational disarray. In retrospect, however, the juxtaposition of the two was critical in terms of analysis and the creation of new strategies. In his seminal essay “A New Evolutionism” in 1976, Adam Michnik writes:

Also in 1968, the year revisionism died, the demonstrating students chanted “All Poland is waiting for its Dubček.” For a while, the leader of Czech and Slovak communists became the symbol of hope. To this very day, the myth of Dubček and the Prague Spring has played an important role in Poland, and the meaning of this myth is far from simple. It serves to justify both radiant optimism and the darkest pessimism; it provides a

---

12Interview with Konstanty Gebert, 27 July 1995.
defence for attitudes of conformism as well as for gestures of heroism....

For me, the lesson of Czechoslovakia is that change is possible and that it has its limits. Czechoslovakia is an example of the fragility of totalitarian stability, and also of the desperation and ruthlessness of an empire under threat. The lesson of Czechoslovakia is that evolution has its limits and that it is possible (Michnik, 1985: 139).

Michnik was not the only Pole who came to this conclusion at the end of the 1960s. Prominent intellectuals who were once the jewels in the crown of revisionist Marxism, such as Leszek Kołakowski, Edward Lipiński, and Włodzimierz Brus, moved from their faith that the party could be internally reformed to a stance of what I shall describe (following Kołakowski) as “principled reformism”. The main feature of this approach, at least in its early stages, was a recognition that the party-state is unrefordable from within given the very nature of its internal contradictions, but that gradual reform was nonetheless possible given structural inconsistencies.

What should be evident from the above discussion is that the seeds of political opposition in Poland in the 1970s and 1980s were sown on the Left—collectively this was by no means a simplistic anti-communist stance. There were elements of Catholic fundamentalism and Polish nationalism (often intertwined) to be sure, but the fact remains that the general critique grew out of disappointment of revisionists, as well as pre-war traditions of Polish socialism. Revisionism itself was based on a more radical and obviously democratic reading of Marx and Lenin. This is an important and often conveniently forgotten point in the intellectual history of the Polish opposition, not always due to conscious obfuscation or subsequent ideological conversion on the part of
the players. Many American journalists, academics and certainly the crafters of Reaganite foreign policy were all keen to present the Polish opposition (especially Solidarity) in a light that suited both their own interests and the ability of the American public to digest the story in its supposedly proper anti-Communist context. Indeed these roots have caused both confusion and finger-pointing in Polish politics in the post-Communist period. A prime example was Jacek Kuron having to face repeated questions over his "Walterite" scouting past during the 1995 Polish presidential campaign—this from the same man who as leader of the Freedom Union party supported the neoliberal economic program of Leszek Balcerowicz.

What should also be clear is that these linkages between 1956 and the 1970s were largely intellectual efforts—discussion clubs, journals, university protests and the like. Between 1956 and 1970 there was no effective or widespread worker-based opposition to the authoritarian communist regime in Poland; opposition was the privilege of an intellectual and mostly Warsaw-centred elite. I do not mean to imply that the Polish working classes were in full agreement with the Polish state: there are enough indications of tacit and even overt support for the students to quell this claim.

33 Peter Raina details a number of these in his account: 1) a number of workers addressed the students indicating that they were being "forced" to demonstrate and mobilize against them and in Nowa Huta they actually staged a public demonstration of sympathy for the students; 2) during the sit-in strikes in Warsaw, the public continually delivered packages of food and mineral water to the students lest they be starved out; and 3) during the large student demonstration on March 8th, the strength of the procession grew from about 5,000 to approximately 20,000, and the ever-increasing crowd shouted slogans such as "Workers with Us" and "Warsaw with Us." See Raina, 1978: 125-143.
were no independent mass-based organizations equivalent to the intellectual clubs, nor was there any sense of independent or critical leadership on a national scale. There are a number of reasons for the quiescence of workers during the Gomułka era, not the least of which was the relative expansion and growth of the Polish economy, the continuation of private middle-income farming in what is still a largely agrarian state, and the prevalence of a strong Catholic-based conservatism. These factors in their more negative manifestations, such as religious messianism, xenophobic nationalism and anti-Semitism, also help to explain why the state-directed anti-Semitic campaign following the March 1968 events was passively and in many quarters actively supported by the urban working classes and the peasantry. However unfortunate this may be, it was also the case that the intellectuals so harassed and beaten in the late 1960s were largely silent in December, 1970 in Gdańsk.

To some degree, the lack of empathy between students and workers in 1968 and 1970 was also reflective of the generation gap between the sixties generation and those who grew up during the war. Put in an international context, the March 1968 events in Warsaw were of the same genus as the student movements in Paris, Berkeley, and Chicago. Adam Michnik, Seweryn Blumsztajn and Jan Lityński self-consciously identified with the radical student movement worldwide and it is also clear that this

---

Adam Michnik once stated in a 1988 interview with French student radical Daniel Cohn-Bendit of May 1968 fame that he remained “loyal to the whole anti-authoritarian project [of 1968] and that in effect Solidarity was a continuation of this same struggle. This self-identification with the 1960s also helps to explain the
extended to their anti-authoritarian style, their tastes in fashion, art, belief in sexual freedom, and their identification as “New” (rather than “Old”) Left. The lack of understanding is best explained through reference to Andrzej Wajda’s film *Man of Iron*. The protagonist Maciej Tomczyk is the son of Birkut, a Stakanovite bricklayer and workers’ hero who later fell into obscurity as a result of Stalinist purges. Tomczyk rages at his father for not joining him in his radical denunciation of Stalinism (in essence, his father’s experience) during the 1968 student demonstrations. In a flashback we hear the narrator (and sympathetic student colleague of Tomczyk) describe the source of tension:

> They didn’t get on too well... in 1968 we were angry with the workers for failing to come round. Maciejk had begged his father to bring the yard out, but couldn’t budge him. His father said it was a provocation (Wajda, 1981).

We then hear Birkut’s explanation for not joining the students:

> They want a palace revolution. And like sheep you let them use you.... This thing is a police set-up. It’s not the workers’ business.... They’ll move when the right time comes.... Lies can’t last long. Just stay out of power politics.... When the right time comes, we’ll march together (Wajda, 1981).

He, in turn, hesitates to join his father at the shipyard in 1970, yet in the background we...

---

“disappointment” of many Polish activists and intellectuals toward what they see as the passivity, lack of commitment, and consumerism among “post-communist youth” (Interview with Jan Lityński, 9 August 1995).

For a complete discussion, see David Ost, 1990: 2-6.

Birkut was the subject of Wajda’s earlier masterpiece *Man of Marble*, released in 1976. Wajda’s fictional reality is more docudrama than movie--Birkut is killed in the 1970 uprising in Gdańsk.
hear the workers appealing to the students to join the workers:

Students! This concerns all of us. Your comrades are still in prison for their part in the events of 1968. Join us and you can free them! We can now join common cause. If we join forces 1968 will not be repeated! Our destiny lies in our own hands. No more oppression, violence, and lies! No more injustice! Let us gather today...to fight for our human rights! Students! Will you come with us? (Wajda, 1981).

Tomczyk is then overcome with grief at his father’s death during the massacre. Of course, he effectively channels these strong emotions into political activism in the 1970s, culminating in the formation of Solidarity ten years later. It is partially the story of generational misunderstanding, but also of the “passing the torch” to those who finally grasp its full meaning and their destiny to overcome the mistakes of the past.

IV. The Workers’ Protest: Gdańsk, 1970

Virtually every history and analytical account of the Solidarity correctly places the genesis of the 1980 events in the December protests in Gdańsk in 1970. The story and its aftermath are now legendary. In a classic move of phenomenally bad timing, the people’s state decided to implement a series of sweeping price increases (including beef, pork, flour, jam, and coffee) on December 13, immediately prior to Christmas in a predominantly Catholic country.37 The first protests occurred early the next day, outside

37Ironically, the price changes also included decreases in large consumer durables, such as refrigerators and washing machines, but since many Poles could not afford these more expensive items, such decreases were largely irrelevant. For background to the
the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk, with the crowd marching moving towards the downtown area. After clashes in the early afternoon between the militia and the protestors, the crowd attacked local party headquarters. First Secretary Gomułka responded with force and into the next day there were battles between workers and the militia, now backed up by the security police. After workers left the shipyard to join the battle, shots were fired from the gates and the fight escalated, with Molotov cocktails, and further attacks on the obvious symbols of authority: the party building, the municipal council building, and even the railway station. The crowd surged to 10,000. The human costs, however, were more devastating and immediately tangible; six dead, 300 injured, 120 arrested. The next show of force involved army tanks and the crowd, now subdued by earlier events but still angry, demanded negotiations to redress their grievances.

Within the party in Warsaw, the strain of events was beginning to take its toll. Further strikes occurred in Gdynia, and 13 were gunned down in Szczecin. After some initial hesitation, Gomułka asked for military assistance from Moscow. He had assumed

---


---

Further strikes took place along the Baltic Coast, and in cities inland—for example, in Kraków, Wrocław, Katowice, Łódź, Poznán and Wałbrzych. The authorities were concerned that if the Baltic situation continued to get out of control, popular discontent would metamorphosize quickly into nation-wide counter-revolution. It should also be said that given the narrow and authoritarian mind set of the Poland’s leaders, they could not posit any alternatives between a crackdown and what they perceived as anti-socialism.
the worst—a national counter-revolutionary uprising—but his plea for help was refused by Brezhnev. Given the arcane and unwritten code of communist leadership succession, and a lengthy Politburo session, Gomułka was essentially finished. After suffering a minor stroke he agreed to resign, and immediately thereafter, Edward Gierek was announced as the new leader on Polish television. Less than a month later, however, the strikes resumed, and comprehensive lists of demands were being drawn by hastily-organized strike committees in Gdańsk and Szczecin. In a bold move calculated to win worker support, Gierek travelled personally to the Baltic Coast and acknowledged that the working class had been “provoked beyond endurance”. Gierek, a former coal miner who had moved through the ranks to become party boss in Katowice (a centre of mining in Silesia, in Southern Poland), made reference to his own roots as a worker, and appealed for their help. At both the Warski Shipyard in Szczecin and at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk, Gierek’s personally-delivered plea for popular support was successful, even though he made few concrete promises or concessions. The workers responded with their now-famous conciliatory response: “We shall help!” Ironically, however, it was not

39 Brezhnev advised Gomułka to seek a political solution to the crisis rather than a military one. However, Brezhnev’s letter to the Polish Politburo was more than good advice. It amounted to a censure of the first secretary which, given the unwritten rules of communist political succession, provided Moscow approval for Gomułka’s removal and replacement.

40 Although he was greeted with moderate support, neither the workers nor the intelligentsia greeted Gierek’s promotion with the same jubilation and hope that accompanied Gomułka’s rise to power in 1956. Willingness to help was matched by wariness and mistrust.
until after strikes in the predominantly female textile mills in Łódź, that meat prices were rolled back to their pre-December 13 levels.\textsuperscript{41} This act was significant in terms of both concrete action and symbolism, for it established the possibility of a popular veto over the policies of the Party-state. At the same time, Gierek's concessions provided a floor from which worker expectations had to be both recognized and ultimately met. The communist regime had to deal face-to-face with both its workers and its consumers, and had to find some way of averting a similar crisis in the near future.

Gierek essentially solved the crisis by postponing it. The government instituted a price freeze for two years, which was then extended for another two years. Wages on the lowest end of the pay scale were increased, along with family allowances and retirement benefits. The cost of the regime's surrender to popular demands was not only high,\textsuperscript{42} but also reaffirmed the workers' belief that it was done by arbitrary administrative fiat, with no connection to actual economic conditions. This perception reinforced the "us" versus

\textsuperscript{41}Persky (1981: 44), Lipski (1985: 31), and Fajfer (1996: 94-95) make references to the Łódź workers. There were among the lowest-paid workers in the entire country, and among the most exploited in terms of overall working conditions. Unlike their male counterparts on the Baltic Coast, they did not opt to form strike committees and arrange lists of demands—their own lives could not afford this amount of time away from work and family (they were also fearful of reprisals that might result from such identifiable organization). As a result, however, their strikes were amorphous and almost impossible to control. The regime could deal with a strike committee or negotiate demands; it could not, however, stop the striking women of Łódź!

\textsuperscript{42}In fact, Fajfer (1996: 95) makes the salient point that it would have been more politically expedient and economically wise to simply raise the wages of the underpaid textile workers.
"them" ethos that would come to characterize all later conflicts between society and the party-state.

Ultimately, this led to the Gierek government adopting a risky economic strategy of rapid and far-reaching modernization. Whereas the crisis of 1956 was preceded by political liberalization, the crisis of 1970 was succeed by an ill-thought out and poorly implemented attempt at economic liberalization. Both Gierek's early achievements as a leader as well as later failures are rooted in the economic policies of his government. Initially, the strategy was to expand and modernize the Polish economy through the credit-financing of Western technology. This was facilitated both by détente and Ostpolitik in West Germany. From the perspective of Western creditors, financing East European governments meant a convenient merging of economic and political objectives. The same economic conditions that lead to the debt crisis in the Third World were also at play: banks flush with petrodollars were easy with their money and increased inflation rates combined with low interest rates made it seem you were crazy not to borrow.

The idea was then to finance and eventually pay off the newly-accumulated debt with hard currency obtained through increased exports,—exports made possible through the modernization process itself as well as the behind-the-scenes improvement of Poland's planning and management systems, and overall efforts to increase efficiency, productivity, and quality. New high quality products would hit the market at the same time as Poland planned to step up the traditional exports responsible for generating hard currency—food products, coal, and steel. On the domestic front, food supplies would be
increased by both modernizing agriculture and easing supply and distribution restrictions. The modernization of agriculture would also free up the labour supply, which would then be redirected to retooled and new industries.

In the end, the plan was a colossal failure. A short-term boom in coal in the early 1970s initially fuelled export earnings, but then collapsed. Wages rose by over 60% between 1970 and 1975, but consumer spending was directed at food, not surprising given the fact that consumer durables were still either in short supply or beyond the reach of the average family. In a few short years, Poland moved from being a net exporter of food to being a net importer. Poland's agricultural system did not help matters in this regard—although production was largely private, both supply and distribution was state-controlled, and points of intersection were inefficient and chaotic (by the 1980s the situation was so absurd that Polish farmers began to feed their livestock bread rather than fodder, as it was less expensive given its artificially-lower price). In the industrial sector, where modernization did occur and finished goods were produced for export, the markets did not materialize given their inferior quality. Put simply, no one in Western Europe wanted to buy a Polish television. Polish industry could not compete globally—it could not simply retool itself fast enough or be flexible enough for the tough and discerning expectations of any Western consumer market.

In the second half of the 1970s, the regime owned up to some of the economic failures, but placed the blame on the OPEC oil embargo, the quadrupling of energy prices, the stagflation of Western economies which put a downward pressure on the
demand for imports. To be sure, these external factors did much to make a bad situation worse. The Soviet Union provided relatively cheap petroleum to the region, but even COMECON rates rose quickly in the early 1970s. Exports initially intended for Western markets were diverted to the USSR for oil credits. Unfortunately, although this kept up the energy supply, it did not provide much-needed hard currency to support the mounting debt. Massive corruption and mismanagement of funds were rampant. Lipski succinctly describes the worsening situation:

The problem of disproportionate prices remained and grew deeper during the later years of pseudo-prosperity achieved in the first half of Gierek’s reign. The economic revival had been achieved at the price of a steadily increasing foreign debt. Anyone with ears to listen, or who had a passing acquaintance with economists or engineers, knew that corruption was reaching frightening proportions; that nonsensical licenses were being bought; that low-quality goods, bordering on trash, were being imported at ridiculous prices; that billions were being wasted; that changes in investment were introduced chaotically into various sectors of the economy without regard for the actual needs of the economy, but rather according to the distribution of power among communist palatines struggling for authority and influence; and that enormous investments, largest among them the Katowice Steel Mill, were economic monstrosities, were badly located, and required miracles of accounting. It was becoming increasingly evident to everyone except those who did not want to know that the censorship and the lack of democracy were serving above all to protect stupidity and theft (Lipski, 1985: 32).

By 1976, the Gierek government ended up exactly where Gomulka had left off—trying to correct the deeply structural problems of the Polish economy with the bandaid of removing price supports on key foodstuffs. Disciplining the consumer—the still relatively poorly-paid Polish worker—was seen as a way to begin simultaneously reforming the system and dealing with the debt. It did not help matters that Gierek himself was grossly
inadequate to the task of meaningful economic reform. According to one commentator, "his economic illiteracy was matched only by its contempt for expert economic advice" (Terry, in Curry and Fajfer, 1996: 114). Members of the Polish apparat seemed to employ no sense of economic rationality in terms of investment and development decisions, but simply went on an opportunistic and narrowly self-serving buying binge. Structural reforms were watered down to the point that the only new development was the introduction of limited enterprise autonomy for some large economic organizations.\footnote{Giving large organizations control of investment and financial decisions made sense on one level, and was in keeping with the approach employed by Hungary with its New Economic Mechanism (see chapter 4 below). However, the lack of planning and control combined with enterprise irresponsibility simply fuelled the buying binge and the ensuing inflationary wage/price spiral.}

From the point-of-view of the political and intellectual opposition, there were also a number of lessons to be learned from December, 1970. The first lesson was the clout that the power of the workers--in sheer numbers as well as their economic necessity to the bare functioning of the Polish economy--represented. Although the workers lacked any cohesive organizational structure and certainly had no national leadership\footnote{A number of local leaders did emerge in the Tri-City area who were later to become both instigators and leaders of Solidarity, such as Lech Wałęsa and Anna Walentynowicz. Their legitimacy and authority was considerably enhanced by the fact of their début during the 1970-1971 wave of strikes and protests.} or strategy, they were a force to be reckoned with. The spontaneity and severity of the protests, and the considerable personal courage and tenaciousness of the participants had brought the
regime to its knees, and had effectively ended the political career of the hero of 1956, Władysław Gomułka. However, the strength of the workers was not simply in their numbers. They also represented a type of ideological challenge: the workers standing up to the obvious contradictions between theory and practice in a workers' state.

The second lesson was somewhat more ideologically rooted in the tenets of Marxism-Leninism. No purely Leninist or vanguardist approach would be successful in terms of building real socialism or achieving any level of structural political or economic change. Putting it simply, the intellectuals could not do it alone, and in any event, were too marginal in their productive contribution to society to afford them any bargaining power in economic terms. Theirs was the sphere of a political and moral opposition, one that was nonetheless powerful in terms of spelling out the regime’s contradictions and exposing its weaknesses, as it was forced to censor, arrest, and imprison its own analysts and academics.

The third lesson was complementary to both the first and second--the workers required some form of leadership, an independent organizational base, a set of objectives and a long-term strategy, if their protests were not to be anything but reactionary nor their gains short-lived.

The fourth lesson is well known to analysts of and participants in various social movements, that is, the importance of coalition-building. There were no personal or organizational linkages between the workers’ protests of 1970 and the long lineage of largely intellectual oppositional efforts between 1956 and 1970 that have been
highlighted above. Moreover, there was not a sense of workers and intellectuals having a common cause--the goals of the intellectuals were not seen as the same or even complementary. Peter Raina provides an explanation for this presumed divergence:

The intellectuals pressed for more freedom of expression, the workers insisted on just distribution of national wealth, higher wages, adequate supply of consumer goods. It looked as if the interests were divergent, hence the continued manifestation of indifference toward each other's cause. In fact, realisation of the desires of one particular group could not be brought about without achievement of those of the other. It was not without sense, then, that in March 1968 the students demonstrated under the slogan, "No Bread without Freedom". While the workers doubtless showed sympathy for this maxim, an open display of sentiments was, nevertheless, lacking. The disapproval of intellectual dissent exhibited in the general cry, "Students Back to Studies, Writers Back to Writing," by the workers' brigades, at the instigation of the party hierarchy, was both alarming and unpleasant. It was unpleasant because the Party oligarchy had, to a large degree, succeeded in creating an ideological chasm between the two dissenting sections of Polish society. It was unpleasant because the intellectuals came to be regarded as a class by itself: egoistic in character, allegedly contemptuous of the working class, idealistic in nature. By propagating this false impression, the oligarchy hoped forever to put an end to any future partnership. In March 1968, the Party almost succeeded in its sinister attempt. The dissidents were driven into isolation; as a result, they assumed a neutral attitude when the workers revolted in 1970. But the intellectuals did not go so far as to shout: workers back to the docks (Raina, 1978: 229-230).

Given the pace of events and the lack of these linkages and organic sympathies, there was simply no way of effectively and quickly mobilizing the Warsaw-based intellectual elite.45

The result was the "regrettable passivity" of the intellectuals and students referred to

---

45This is also why the 1970 protests and especially the strikes in 1971 were less-known to the outside world than the 1976 Radom/Ursus riots and the rise of Solidarity. Intellectuals such as Kołakowski and Kuroń had links to the international academic community, external media, and so on.
earlier by Kołakowski. What is significant about the Polish opposition is that it
collectively and reflexively learned these lessons, so that by 1976 the response was more
unified, and linkages were made with mutual understanding and compassion between the
intellectuals and the workers. The response to the June events proved that both sides
began to realize that what united them was much more important than what divided them:
opposition to the arbitrary and unchecked power of the Party-state, and lack of an
authentic voice that would be heard in dealing with it.

If there was some hope that Gierek would be more tolerant of criticism and less
given to political repression, it proved to be no more than naive longing soon after his
accession to power. Peter Raina outlines several events that highlight the continued
confrontation of intellectuals with the party in the early 1970s (Raina, 1978: 205-228).

First, the sentences handed down in the Ruch trials in late 1971 were unduly harsh—from
between 1 and 6 years for each of the defendants. Ruch (Movement) was a small
organization of leftist professionals centred in Łódź who managed to produce six issues
of a bulletin critical of the system before being arrested. They were accused of
outrageous actions and plans, including the supposed attempt to blow up the Lenin
Museum in Poronin. Second, the handling of the cases of Jacek Smykal\footnote{A student at the Medical Academy in Szczecin who was expelled for making political comments in a seminar.} and Stanisław
Kruszyński both demonstrated the continued vigilance of the authorities in exercising political censorship.

The major event of the early 1970s which galvanized opposition to the regime on the part of academics and workers already awakened by the events of 1968 and 1970 was the decision of the Polish government to amend the Constitution of 1952. At the Sixth Party Congress in late 1971 the leadership decided that this process would strengthen the relationship between current social relations and democratic socialism, and that above all such sacred principles as the leading role of the party and the class character of the Polish state as a proletarian dictatorship be enshrined. The underlying agenda was the need for the party to increase its constitutional legitimacy, as the wording of the 1952 document placed sovereignty more directly and vaguely in the hands of the working people. The writing of the constitution and the debate surrounding it continued for several years. Official protests against the proposals began with Edward Lipiński forwarding the now-famous “Memorandum of the 59” and a subsequent letter signed by 300 students and academics to the Sejm. The debate occurred in 1976--at the same time as the Helsinki process internationally--prompting dissidents to suggest that basic freedoms such as conscience, religion, expression et cetera ought to be included in the constitution.

---

47 A student at the Catholic University in Lublin who was imprisoned for insulting Polish authority in private correspondence, as well as possessing prewar “anti-Soviet literature” and copies of Kultura.

48 The Memorandum was signed by 59 essayists, poets, novelists, lawyers, priests, and academicians who authorized Lipiński to act on their behalf (Raina, 1978: 212).
Needless to say, these suggestions were ignored, by both the party and the official press. In a round of amendments proposed by the party in 1976, the PUWP was to be entrenched as the “leading political force in society in the building of socialism”; the rights of citizens were declared to be “inseparably linked” to the “conscientious fulfilling of duties to the fatherland” and the section on the friendship with the Soviet Union and cooperation with other socialist states strengthened. These amendments drew significant protests, and even Cardinal Wyszyński declared that a “citizen never loses his rights, even if he does not fulfill his duties toward the state” (Raina, 1978: 215). Making rights contingent on duties was seen as another way of totalizing the life of the citizenry and erasing the basic meaning of the Helsinki agreements. Poles were affronted by the Soviet friendship clause, and as to the “leading role of the party”, it would effectively drive a constitutional wedge between partisan political activity and anything remotely independent of or separate from it. More protests and letters followed, the wording softened somewhat, and with effective blackmail of the Sejm membership, the new Constitution was passed in February, 1976.

---

49The constitutional vote was carried out just prior to the Sejm elections, thus the party could effectively threaten to strike the name from the ballot of anyone who voted against the new Constitution and offer the carrot of promotion to those who did. This especially raised problems for the Znak group; when leader Stanisław Stomma abstained, his name disappeared from the upcoming ballot.
V. The Events of June, 1976: Radom, Ursus and Beyond

Stan Persky has called the price hikes of 1976 a serious act of “political amnesia” on the part of the Polish authorities, for in effect, Edward Gierek was attempting the same course of action as his predecessor five years earlier (Persky, 1981: 44-45). This round of proposed food price increases was staggering—lending some weight to Marx’s credo in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* that history repeats itself only as farce. The proposed price reforms were phenomenal in terms of their impact on the consumption level and cost to the average family: sausage, a mainstay of the Polish diet, was to be increased by 90%; other meat cuts and dairy products by 50-70%; sugar by 100% (Persky, 1981: 45; Bernhard, 1993: 49). Wages were also adjusted and structured to assist lower-paid workers and pensioners, but at most this amounted to a 23% raise. The speed in which the package was introduced to the Sejm and Polish society and the sham of supposed consultation with society was also striking. Polish Prime Minister Jaroszewicz presented the package of reforms to parliament on June 24, 1976, and “pledged to hold consultations with representatives of factories and social groups on June 25, before seeking the Sejm’s ratification on the 26th” (Bernhard, 1993: 49). The results of the proposals could have, in hindsight, been predicted.

The strikes lasted only for one day—June 25th, the day after the proposals were

---

50 Not only did the party leaders not consult with workers (despite Gierek’s personal promises to hold “broad social consultations” on food prices only six months earlier), but Sejm deputies were informed of the increases only hours before they were expected to grant legislative approval. See Terry, in Curry and Fajfer, 1996: 110.
announced. The reason for the short duration is obvious—the prime minister went on national television to indicate the withdrawal of the reform package. The most dramatic events occurred at Radom, a city southeast of Warsaw, and at the Ursus Tractor Factory in the Warsaw suburbs, for it was at these locations that violence occurred. However, Michael Bernhard provides a corrective to the interpretation of events as the “Radom-Ursus” strikes, as he stresses that 1) the strikes took place in more than 130 factories, estimated later by KOR to include approximately 75% of Poland’s largest factories, and 2) that the vast majority of the strikes were peaceful and nonviolent in character (Bernhard, 1993: 47). At Ursus, nearly the entire factory supported the impromptu strike, and the workers briefly occupied the major east-west and southwest-northeast rail lines leaving Warsaw, which dramatically increased the level of disruption. In Radom, the strikes were more extensive—workers from a large number of factories participated, gained control of most of the city, ransacked local party headquarters, and towards the end of the day were involved in street battles with security forces. Workers in the Tri-City area (Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot), were known for their militant actions in 1970-1971, and army and police patrols were ominously patrolling the streets the previous day. There

\[51\]Workers also stopped the Paris-Warsaw express, and distributed to onlookers eggs, bread, and sugar obtained from one of the stopped trains (Bernhard, 1993: 51).

\[52\]For example, workers from the Walter Metal Factory, the Radoskór Leather Factory, the Blaszanka Tin Can Factory, the Telephone Factory, the Tobacco Factories, and the Rolling Stock Repair shop all participated, and were joined by students and women working at home (Bernhard, 1993: 53).
were a number of sit-in strikes and argumentative clashes with authorities, but fortunately no repeat of the massacre five years earlier.\textsuperscript{53} Other strikes occurred in Płock (at the large Mazowiecki Refinery and Petrochemical Works), as well as in Grudziądz, Łódź, Szczecin, Gryfino, Nowy Targ, Poznań, Katowice, Wrocław, and a number of smaller centres (Lipski, 1985: 33-42; Bernhard, 1993: 50-64).

In contrast to the largely peaceful demonstrations was the extent and scale of the police repression that followed. About a dozen workers lost their lives as a result of the protests themselves, but many more faced reprisals. Thousands were arrested, interrogated, and even tortured.\textsuperscript{54} Up to 20,000 workers were dismissed as the result of their alleged participation.\textsuperscript{55} Over a thousand individuals faced misdemeanour or criminal charges. A media campaign was launched which included public rallies (mostly attended by bureaucrats and PUWP members) and concocted speeches and telegrams of praise and support. Despite these efforts, both the symbolic and real uses of violence were so brutal as to alienate not only the victims but did much to create a cadre of sympathizers (Bernhard, 1993: 75)--this in a nation that wore the scars of its repeated

\textsuperscript{53}A general strike was planned for the following day, but was called off given the withdrawal of the price hikes.

\textsuperscript{54}As Lipski documents, the chief method was the so-called “Path of Health” whereby the detainee was forced to walk through a line of armed policemen, each of whom would beat the victim with clubs, fists or their boots (Lipski, 1985: 34-36).

\textsuperscript{55}Bernhard notes that Lipski’s estimates match those made independently by the European Trade Union Confederation (Bernhard, 1993: 64).
victimization proudly and with defiance.

VI. Komitet Obrony Robotników (KOR): The Workers’ Defence Committee

KOR was not only the grandest “outreach effort” attempted in postwar Polish history, but it also signalled the beginning of a genuine coalition of workers and intellectuals in opposition to an authoritarian communist regime. The idea of institutionalizing the support for the workers/victims of the June events in a concrete form has been attributed jointly to Jacek Kuron and Antoni Macierewicz (Lipski, 1985: 43). The original idea was to provide legal and/or financial assistance to workers dismissed or arrested as a result of the riots. It boldly and publicly declared its existence, purpose, and membership in September, 1976.

The governing ethos of KOR was based on a number of principles now considered sacred tenets in the mythologised history of the Polish opposition. First, in the words of Lipski, “there was the idea of an action that would appeal above all to ethical values, to general moral standards rather than political attitudes” (Lipski, 1985: 44). Second, there was agreement that the actions of the committee be overt, and that its membership be made public, to the point of publishing members’ names, addresses, and telephone numbers. There was sound reasoning rather than simply rash bravery to this policy. On the one hand, this definitely paved the way for possible reprisals against its members.56

---

56This is the major reason why the majority of the published members of KOR tended to be prominent and in some cases internationally-known intellectuals—it was
On the other hand, and more importantly, KOR’s documents were considered trustworthy and not the products of possible agents provocateur. This in turn helped to overcome the “barrier of fear” that existed in Polish society and the elimination of which was one of the committee’s basic goals (Lipski, 1985: 45). Finally, KOR members decided that it should be not only overt but also legal. This was a tricky proposition given the uses and abuses of Polish law, but reference was made to international agreements signed by Poland, such as the Helsinki Accords (as we shall see, the use of the Final Act of the Helsinki Conference, and in particular the so-called “Third Basket” of human rights guarantees, were used effectively by oppositional activists throughout Central Europe.) Because KOR cleverly never applied to be officially registered, it could not be easily de-registered. It could also claim the legitimacy of its existence based on a valid prewar law which allowed for the existence of relief committees (meant, of course, to aid flood or fire victims). KOR organized itself loosely and without an obvious structure to be criticized or repealed; it had members, but no bylaws, officers, or membership fees (Lipski, 1985: 45).

Principles aside, the major work of KOR was the provision of all sources of more difficult for the party-state to retaliate against those whose biographies inspired recognition and respect. Prominence was not a guarantee, and police attacks were not limited to workers only. Ludwik Dom was severely beaten and abused for being Jewish. Detentions and apartment searches were common, and many prominent members of KOR were arrested in 1977—including Michnik, Kuroń, Macierewicz, Naimski, Blumsztajn, Chojecki, Lipski, and Lityński. In a dramatic event that signalled this new round of repression in May, 1977 (and renewed resistance on the part of KOR) KOR student activist Stanisław Pyjas was murdered in Kraków.
assistance to workers and their families, especially during the difficult period of legal
trials. This included legal advice and assistance (and payment for the retention of
independent attorneys); medical aid; assistance in finding new jobs (important for those
whose principal punishment was the loss of income in a country that because it did not
recognize unemployment could not assist those in any way who found themselves
unemployed); child care; financial help; and moral support. KOR called this “social
work” for it included not only the concrete forms of assistance mentioned above but
attempted to place this in a broader sociological perspective—to allow broader
conclusions to be drawn about the actual condition of people’s lives in Poland, and what
might be done to improve them. Defining the work as “social” rather than “political” in
nature was also an important strategic defensive move; it was less obviously challenging
to the authorities or the political monopoly of the party. It is clear from this description
that KOR, like other organizations in Central Europe and most notably Charter 77 which
was formed the following year in Czechoslovakia, acted “as if” (to use Havel’s
terminology) the society in which it operated was a “normal” one—that is, open in its
recognition of pluralism and tolerant of the diversity of thought and action. This meant
not only acting openly, but attempting to erase any vestiges of secrecy or paranoia from
within its ranks. Lipski documents this rationale:

Also important for the atmosphere in the committee was its attitude
toward the possibility that KOR might be infiltrated by the Security
Service. Accordingly, it was more difficult to gain access to some kinds of
work than others. The rule of overtness could not be extended to the
addresses of print shops and storage places, or to the files of those
receiving help. Thus a certain degree of selection was necessary for those granted access to this kind of work. But basically KOR had a different recruitment policy. Anyone could present himself as ready to work. If one came with references from some trustworthy people, so much the better, but references were not required. KOR's doctrine was to trust everyone within the bounds of common sense. Apart from those instances of house searches and arrests in which the hand of an agent could be clearly discerned, any consideration of possible links between a KOR associate and the Security Service was inadmissible. These problems and approaches were formulated with particular clarity by Jacek Kuroń, who gained full approval for his position. There was agreement that in a movement such as KOR, an atmosphere in which everyone suspected everyone else would ultimately be more dangerous than the possibility of overlooking a few agents (Lipski, 1985: 64).

Sociologically, the membership of KOR spanned two important generations. Bernhard describes these as "those who had come to political maturity in the interwar period and those who did so under the communist regime" (Bernhard, 1993: 85). The older generation consisted of those involved in interwar resistance, had socialist roots in the PPS, and were leftist partisans unwilling to subscribe to the dogmatism or stagnation of the PUWP. They had stature, respect, and provided the historical link to earlier eras of Polish political opposition. The younger generation was the generation of the sixties, and like their Western counterparts, they were educated, independently critical, and attracted by movement politics. In Poland they had grown up as scouting activists and leaders of the student movement. This younger generation also yielded the theoreticians of Poland's new opposition, such as Borusewicz and Michnik. Jacek Kuroń was the bridge between these two generations; he was much younger than the old socialist warhorses, and he served as a mentor to the younger activists (initially as a Scoutmaster in the 1950s).
KOR also had a role in the documentation and dissemination of information, and thus its publications, principally *Kommunikat* (Communiqué) and the *Biuletyn Informacyjny* (Information Bulletin)\textsuperscript{57} were important sources of accurate reporting and thus remain key historical sources. *Kommunikat* was the official organ of KOR and its immediate purpose was to deal with the aftermath of the June events and the publication of the committee’s efforts; on the other hand, *Biuletyn* was an independent journal, but because it was edited by KOR members it has been rightly associated with its aims and activities. For example, the second issue of the *Biuletyn* published the following statement of support by the Polish episcopate, which greatly boosted the spirits of younger activists and the moral authority of KOR itself:

> The Plenary Conference of the Episcopate asks that the highest state authorities cease all repressive acts against workers who participated in protests against the excessive increases in food prices that were announced by the government in June. The rights of the workers who took part in these protests should be restored, along with their social and professional status; the wrongs done to them should be rectified appropriately; and those who have already sentenced should be amnestied (*Biuletyn Informacyjny* No. 2).

At the beginning, a series of open letters and declarations launched KOR, and through its

\textsuperscript{57} *Biuletyn Informacyjny* was named after the periodical of the Home Army in Poland during the war. Its editor was Seweryn Blumsztajn; he was assisted by Joanna Szczęsna and Jan Lityński (who later went on to become editor of *Robotnik*, a bimonthly underground journal targeted at workers).
activities KOR attempted to publicize the campaign of repression against the workers.\(^{58}\)

The target audience of such publicity was the Polish public, the authorities, international media, Polish expatriates, and sympathetic but influential external actors. With respect to this latter category, Jacek Kuroń drafted a letter to Italian Communist Party leader Enrico Berlinguer in the hopes that as the leading exponent of the Eurocommunist vision he might hold some sway in obtaining an amnesty. Another appeal was written by prominent novelist and KOR member Jerzy Andrzejewski entitled “To the Persecuted Participants of the Workers’ Protest”. Given the notoriety and popularity of the author, it was well-designed to attract support from among the participants in the June events:

> There are people in Poland who are immune to deception and hypocrisy and have preserved their ability to discern truth from falsehood and who see in you, the persecuted workers, not only spokesmen for an immediate and specific cause, but, above all, fighters for true socialist democracy and for social liberty, without which all freedom perishes and deceitful cliches reign over public life, the nation is in danger, the life of individuals is stifled (Raina, 1978: 289).

The rich tradition of *bibuła* or underground press in Poland, largely has its roots in KOR and the publications it spawned.

Not only did KOR create the groundwork for later efforts at mobilization and underground publishing, it was also successful in generating the necessary funds to keep

---

\(^{58}\)The first declaration, “The Declaration of the 14 in Solidarity with the Workers” was sent to the Sejm, and significantly did not only address the repression, but called for a broader dialogue and solution to Poland’s social problems. It was followed by two more declarations, made by the Warsaw intelligentsia and Warsaw students and graduates respectively. Most of the signatories were KOR members and virtually all had a previous history of political opposition.
its sophisticated range of activities in operation—it was an entirely self-financed, non-profit organization. At the beginning, money was generated within dissident circles in Warsaw to assist the workers and their families. Later, fundraising was conducted nationwide, and even parish priests funnelled contributions through to KOR members. KOR was also able to raise considerable funds through the effective mobilization of the Polish emigré community. Leszek Kołakowski, now in exile and living in the United Kingdom, led one of the external fundraising committees, and the emigré journal *Kultura* in Paris also played a strong role. These efforts were so successful that in the spring of 1977, a Fund for Self-Defence was set up to manage and account for monies distributed. (Bernhard, 1993: 80).

KOR not only defended workers successfully, but in the end, it also successfully defended itself. The renewed campaign of repression in May, 1977 that led to the arrest of many of KOR’s key activists was ultimately a failure. Facing an innovative combination of hunger strikes (in particular the collective fast held in St. Martin’s Church in Warsaw); appeals to prominent international figures such as Willy Brandt and Kurt Waldheim (which helped to heighten international pressure); the mobilization of official institutions to intervene on behalf of specific detainees (for example, the Union of Polish Writers for Lipski), open letters, petitions, and protests and demonstrations abroad, the authorities eventually crumbled, and the party-state granted an amnesty for the arrested KOR activists and the workers still serving their sentences in prison (Bernhard, 1993: 117-121).
In late 1977 KOR transformed itself into the *Komitet Samoobrony Społecznej* (Social Self-Defence Committee; known by the acronym KSS-KOR), broadening its work from its concentration on relief efforts to the struggle against political or other forms of repression, state violence, and engaging in the fight for the institutionalization of human and civil rights (Bernhard, 1993: 123). In a programmatic attempt to outline a positive program, KSS-KOR published a four-part “Declaration of the Democratic Movement” which, aside from reiterating the expansion of basic freedoms (that is, conviction, speech, assembly and association), called upon Polish citizens to take up a number of possible initiatives with the aim of fostering democratization. These included: educational reforms; independent workers’ representatives (free trade unions); cooperatives for peasants and artisans; economic reforms; support of the underground press; and social support and self-help in the face of further repression (Bernhard, 1993: 124). Thus KSS-KOR moved from responding to a specific set of needs (the situation of the workers after June, 1976) to a more broadly-defined and explicitly political and challenging agenda. The social milieu of KSS-KOR continued to grow as well as the scope and breadth of its activities, right up until the point its members decided to formally dissolve itself prior to the Solidarity Congress in 1981.

KOR’s success lay not only in the concrete material aid provided to real people in need, but in its pioneering of “different tools and techniques that permitted the committee to practice oppositional politics effectively” (Bernhard, 1993: 129). This point cannot be overemphasized, because the collective experience of KOR was not only later
utilized in the formation of Solidarity, but also as an important role model in other
Central European movements. Through the development and support of an actual
underground press (not just the circulation of carbon-copied typescripts), KOR was able
to disseminate its own publications widely, and foster the development of many new
journals and newspapers. The combination of a visible and prominent open membership
with a larger but less visible base of activists and supporters made it difficult for the
party-state to a) imprison or stop the prominent players without both antagonizing society
and inviting international alarm and b) effectively locate the minor players who provided
a grass-roots base and shouldered the burden of much of the relief and support work
without arresting large portions of society and risking more massive mobilization. The
development of complicated social networks required the development of significant
organizational and oratorical skills. The variety of innovative measures were employed
(for example, hunger strikes, open letters, public protests, appeals to the international
media, Eurocommunist Parties, Western governments) increased the array of non-violent
possibilities for collective action. Friendships, mutual trust, and a collective sense of
purpose and historical mission was built in the process. And finally, through its dogged
determination to survive and continue, KOR carved out a public space for itself that was
independent from the party-state; its existence was a living denial of the Constitution of

Both VONS, the Committee for the Unjustly Persecuted, in Czechoslovakia, as
well as SZETA, the Fund for Support of the Poor, in Hungary, were explicitly modelled
on KOR. See chapters 3 and 4 respectively.
1976. The social relations of Poland would simply never be the same again, for it was at this point the claims of authoritarian communism began to be defeated, if not the overwhelming fact of its geopolitical reality.

**VII. The Alternative Civil Society?**

The success of KOR seemed infectious at the time, and it effectively nurtured the growth of dozens of independent initiatives, journals, newspapers, and discussion groups. The most influential and important of these will be discussed below, as well as the expansion of the public sphere that took place through the growth of these organs of the unofficial opposition. It is in reference to this period that analysts and commentators begin to describe the Polish events as the *reconstitution of civil society*.

Of the number of groups that began almost as offshoots of KOR, the most controversial was *Ruch Obrony Praw Człowieka i Obywatela* (ROPCiO)--the Movement for the Defence of Human and Civil Rights. Before the transformation of KSS into KSS-KOR, there were general discussions about the creation of a human rights initiative; however, its formation was preempted by the hasty foundation of ROPCiO. Aside from the hard feelings generated by the obvious rivalry, ROPCiO’s existence prevented a more “united” front from evolving naturally out of KOR. This was probably inevitable, and in any event ROPCiO’s internecine strife led to its own demise. In retrospect, one can see that the various oppositional splinter groups (including *Ruch Młodej Polski* (RMP, or Young Poland Movement) that resulted from these controversies tended to
nourish a broader spectrum of political beliefs, ideological experimentation (and the inevitable trying on of clothes from Poland's partisan past, as different organizations and individuals searched for a "best fit").

Not surprisingly, the protests following the death of Pyjas resulted in the creation of a new student movement, known as the Studencki Komitet Solidarności (SKS), or the Student Solidarity Committee. A number of "Peasant Self-Defence Committees" were organized on regional and local levels in response to local grievances and dissatisfaction over new peasant retirement legislation (Bernhard, 1993: 146). Both these movements waxed and waned in the late 1970s, but were critical training grounds for future activists and leaders of Solidarity.

Reflective of the ideological ferment in the late 1970s was the rapid growth of the underground press and underground publishing houses. The union of two independent publishing houses in Warsaw and Lublin led to the creation of Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza or NOW-a, the Independent Publishing House.\(^\text{60}\) At its heyday, NOW-a employed printers, typesetters, bookbinders, and distributors, as well as an activist-oriented editorial board. Hundreds of people were involved in its operation--their goal was nothing less than to break the party-state's monopoly on printed information. At the same time, literally dozens of new periodicals appeared, such as Robotnik (The Worker), an important underground bimonthly for workers; Spotkania (Encounters), which catered

---

\(^{60}\)The acronym NOW-a also spells out the Polish adjective "new".
to independent lay Catholic youth; Zapis (The Register), an arts and literature review; Puls (Pulse), another underground literary review; Opinia (Opinion), Gospodarz (Farmer), Bratniak (also the name of a prewar student fraternity), and Droga (The Way)--the various official organs of ROPCiO; Postęp (Progress), a forum for working people to discuss such issues as independent trade unions and workers' self-management; Krytyka (Critique), a scholarly political quarterly; Alternatywy (Alternatives), a conservative intellectual journal; and Res Publica, a more classically-liberal journal. This list is not meant to be exhaustive, but merely to provide an indication of the volume and variety of publications available; this adds considerable meaning to Lipski's estimate that by 1979 over 100,000 volumes of periodicals, brochures, and books were being produced each month (Lipski, 1985: 161-164). After 1978, each issue of Robotnik alone reached between 30,000 and 100,000 people (Bernhard, 1993: 161).

The conclusion I suggested at the beginning of this section—that KOR be considered the “parent” of this spectacular growth in organizations and publications is one not only supported by the literature (Lipski, 1985; Bernhard, 1993) and anecdotal information, but is also obvious from the considerable overlap in membership. A few examples will suffice to demonstrate this point. Jan Lityński, an active member in KOR, was also a co-editor of Robotnik. When Robotnik published its “Charter of Human Rights”, it was signed by over 100 activists, the majority of which were KOR and ROPCiO members. KOR member Miroslaw Chojecki (previously involved in underground publishing in Warsaw) was instrumental in the start-up and operation of
NOW-a, which in turn borrowed money from KOR for capital expansion, and employed mostly KOR activists and sympathizers. Adam Michnik sat on the editorial board of NOW-a. KOR members were involved in the formation of ROPCiO and SKS. Not surprisingly, during the 1977 repression, spokespersons for both ROPCiO and SKS publicly supported KOR detainees. In fact, trying to keep track of which activist belonged to which dozen organizations and was affiliated with how many publications and initiatives is dizzying in proportions.

VIII. Towarzystwo Kursów Naukowych (TKN): The Flying University

I have singled out the TKN, or the Society of Scientific Courses, for particular mention as it was founded solely by intellectuals and obviously had a specific set of academic goals. It also served as a role model for a similar ventures in Czechoslovakia and Hungary. It was founded in 1978 by 62 Polish scholars (many of whom were KOR activists) in Warsaw, and quickly became dubbed “The Flying University”. The idea of creating an independent form of advanced education was not new in Poland: a similar organization existed in the late 19th century during Russian partition. Because of ideological restrictions placed on the official system of education by the Tsarist regime and the requirement to speak Russian and not Polish in institutions of higher learning, Polish Marxists, nationalists, and revolutionaries created a method whereby well-known
scholars would teach uncensored courses in private homes.\textsuperscript{61} Locations could be scheduled or rescheduled quickly to avoid the authorities—a sort of guerilla tactics to enrich the mind. The first Flying University was active until the outbreak of World War I. The original Flying University and its 1970s sequel were not simply self-interested in character, in which groups of like-minded intellectuals and younger students could learn in an open and critical atmosphere, more conducive to mutual engagement and debate. Both rather hearken back to the 19th century tradition of what Jerzy Jedlicki has called “national intellectual service”, a conception of the role of the intellectual as obliged to keep alive, teach and defend national ideals, symbols, culture, and history.\textsuperscript{62}

The goals of the new Flying University were manifold: first, to find a way to work around the handcuffs of censorship and political restrictions placed upon existing universities and thus to provide alternative perspectives, especially in the humanities and social sciences; second, to provide academic assistance and supervision to those wanting

\textsuperscript{61}Jedlicki has made this point that even this was not an original concept—the idea was borrowed from the private courses set up for girls of wealthy families in East European cities such as Warsaw, as official schools were not open to women prior to Poland re-gaining its independence (Interview with Jerzy Jedlicki, 21 July 1995).

\textsuperscript{62}Lecture by Jerzy Jedlicki, College for New Europe, Kraków, Poland, 21 July 1995. One might add that the flip-side of this intellectual tradition is the strong desire to promote a correct form of politics, and is a major reason why so many intellectuals were drawn to promote (and later stridently defend) authoritarian communism, as per my introduction. On the collective responsibility of intellectuals for national heritage in the Polish context, see Jerzy Jedlicki, “Heritage and Collective Responsibility” in Ian Maclean, Alan Montefiore, and Peter Winch, eds. (1990), \textit{The Political Responsibility of Intellectuals} (Cambridge: Cambridge UP).
to pursue studies or theses not officially acceptable; and finally, to reach out to those for whom university attendance was not possible. Thus there were no specific criteria for acceptance into the courses offered or lectures given--everyone was welcome, courses were free of charge, and no previous academic qualifications were necessary. The ability of the scholars to get the operation up and running quickly was impressive: between October 1977 and May 1978, over 120 individual lectures were held in Warsaw, Kraków, Wrocław, and Łódź (Bernhard, 1993: 147). Longer courses were normally held in Warsaw. Courses were partially advertised--through leaflets and through word-of-mouth. The attitude of the lecturers was that if you knew about them, you could attend. In time, this also lead to the participation of police agents and student informers, and the occasional break-up of sessions through either physical force or the shouting-down of lectures by agitators.63 No independent certification process was established and thus one could not earn diplomas or degrees, however, the courses proved popular and were regularly attended by at least several hundred participants.

The continued success of TKN also had another important side-benefit, that of strengthening the alliance between the workers and the intellectuals. The fact that esteemed academics in a number of fields were willing to take the necessary risks and

63Bullies from the *Socjalistyczne Zrzeszenie Studentków Polskich* (SZSP), or Socialist Union of Polish Students would cause continual disruptions, especially during the larger lectures conducted in 1979--thus causing organizers to shift to a strategy of smaller seminars (Bernhard, 1993: 147). Peter Raina describes one incident in Kraków where over 100 people had assembled in a private home to hear Adam Michnik and police used tear-gas and force to disperse the gathering (Raina, 1978: 546).
give freely of their time (which involved considerable preparation separate from their official work) brought a certain trustworthiness to the intelligentsia in the eyes of the Polish workers—they were seen as “giving back” something to society as a whole (Jedlicki, 21 July 1995). The proof of this claim can be found in the fact that Solidarity ultimately drew most of its intellectual advisers to the Interfactory Strike Committee in Gdańsk from either the TKN membership or from their stable of lecturers (Bernhard, 1993: 148). The obvious overlap in membership between KOR/KSS-KOR and the TKN was another reason for its credibility.

**IX. The Pope’s Visit, 1979**

In October, 1978 a cardinal little-known outside his native Poland shed his identity as Karól Wojtyła and became Pope John Paul II. The following year he made a trip home that arguably had a catalytic impact on the downfall of authoritarian communism. At minimum, the Pope’s 1979 visit is usually described as a “dress rehearsal” for the seemingly spontaneous creation of an independent national workers’ movement--Solidarity. That this was the case demands examination and exploration.

Long before becoming the pope, Wojtyła had made it his business to go to bat with the regime, but in so doing allied himself with the interests of Poland’s working class. As Terry states:

Throughout his years as priest, bishop, and archbishop, the Pope’s natural constituency had been the urban blue-collar workforce, a constituency that the party claimed as its own. It was Cardinal Wojtyła who, after years of
confrontation with the regime, extracted permission for the construction of
the first church in the sprawling, bleak residential districts surrounding the
Nowa Huta steelworks outside Cracow....(Terry, in Curry and Fajfer,

Because Wojtyła was now Pope, the Church’s official attitude toward the regime shifted
in favour of a more aggressive and social activist stance. Because John Paul II was both a
determined and charismatic individual, as pontiff he carved out a role for himself that
allowed for intervention in temporal affairs, for which he received much international
attention outside the Catholic Church.

As the Pope made his tour across the country in June, 1979, it became clear to
observers and participants alike that this visit was something between a pilgrimage and a
victory train. It was certainly the largest peacefully-assembled gathering in the nation’s
history. John Paul II addressed literally hundreds of thousands of Polish citizens during a
number of carefully planned events, carefully staged for maximum impact in the symbolic
fusion of church and nation. He spoke in Warsaw’s Victory Square, in Gniezno, the
birthplace of Polish Catholicism, before the shrine at Częstochowa, inside Auschwitz,
and finally, climatically, and dramatically he addressed a vast outdoor congregation on
the Błonia outside Kraków.

For the duration of the visit, the daily lived realities of the party-state retreated
into the background. Renewed faith mixed with national pride. Not all but a great many
also realized that the rebirth of civil society was complete; the Pope’s visit demonstrated
that a vibrant, unified, and self-conscious public sphere existed as an alternative to the
party-state. As Garton Ash states:

That intense unity of thought and feeling which previously had been confined to small circles of friends—the intimate solidarity of private life in Eastern Europe—was now multiplied by millions. For nine days the state virtually ceased to exist, except as a censor doctoring the television coverage. Everyone saw that Poland is not a communist country—just a communist state (Garton Ash, 1983b: 32).

The visit was not only a spiritual shot in the arm for the nascent Polish opposition, but it also marked a logistical triumph. From the papal tour came the realization that self-organization, in Kuroń’s sense of the term, was possible. As a Catholic intellectual put it in 1979:

It wasn’t so much his election as Pope as his visit here that June—in 1979—that really inspired the country. Here we were, facing a tremendously complicated series of logistical tasks—setting the itinerary for his trip, making arrangements for several huge rallies, providing for crowd control, and so forth—and the government was pointedly declining to help us. Generally speaking, the authorities were trying to ignore the Pope’s visit as much as possible—television coverage, for instance, was limited. The police pulled back, made themselves scarce, partly out of tact, I suppose. And so, completely independent of anything that John Paul had to say, we discovered an extraordinary and quite unexpected competence within ourselves: we could do all kinds of things by ourselves, we didn’t need the authorities. We developed communications networks, planning procedures—all kinds of skills that would become tremendously useful a year later (quoted in Weschler, 1982: 23).

Solidarity (Solidarność)

The history of Solidarity—as a trade union, social movement, and powerful force for political and social change in Poland—has become legendary. What began as an 18
day strike in August, 1980 as part of a movement for free trade unions in the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk grew to become a mass movement of over 10 million members, thus constituting the largest sustained challenge to authoritarian communism since its beginnings in the Russian Revolution in 1917. My purpose in this section is not to recount the history or development of Solidarity, a task which has been undertaken by numerous authors, but to chronicle the contribution made to the political theory and practices of the movement by key intellectuals. Nonetheless, recounting some key events is important given continuing references in both the literature and this study, as well as briefly examining the incredible victory represented by its legal existence.

In the early days of the strike, the workers demanded a wage increase (first asking for 1000-zloty pay raise; this was later escalated to 2000 zlotys); the reinstatement of Free Trade Union activists Lech Wałęsa and Anna Walentynowicz; the construction and erection of monument to the fallen workers of the 1970 protest; increased family allowances; publication of their demands in the media, security from possible reprisals; and last but certainly not least the creation of independent trade unions. A tentative

---

64i.e. the KWZZ--Founding Committee of the Baltic Free Trade Unions, a group founded in 1978 in Gdańsk and included a number of workers who played key roles in the shipyard strikes, for example, former shipyard electrician (and later Solidarity leader and ultimately Polish president) Lech Wałęsa, Andrzej Gwiazda, Alina Pietkowska, and Bogdan Borusewicz.

65See for example, the excellent studies of Neil Ascherson (1981); Stan Persky (1981); Krzysztof Pomian (1981); Lawrence Weschler (1983); Timothy Garton Ash (1983b); Alain Touraine et al., (1983); Jadwiga Staniszkis (1984); Jerzy Holzer (1984); Peter Raina (1985); David Ost (1990); and Michael Kennedy (1991).
agreement was reached on August 16; the shipyard authorities agreed to a 1500-zloty increase, the reinstatement of both Walentynowicz and Wałesa; and the memorial. The authorities nearly succeeded in buying off the Gdańsk workers and nipping their political demands in the bud when delegates from other striking enterprises began to arrive, accusing them of betrayal. Amidst the confusion, shipyard nurse and activist Alina Pieńkowska courageously spoke to the workers, urging them not to leave but to continue their strike in solidarity with the shipyards and factories in the Tri-City area as well (Persky, 1981: 58-82; Garton Ash, 1983b: 42-46; and Ost, 1990: 80-82.) As a result, Wałesa declared the continuation of the strike, issuing his famous line “I'll be the last one to leave the shipyard!”

On August 16 the Międzyzakładowy Komitet Strajkowy (MKS), or Interfactory Strike Committee, was born. In formulating a new collective set of demands the recognition of independent self-governing trade unions was at the top of the list. Members of both KOR and ROPCiO were involved almost immediately (for example,

---

The full set of 21 demands can be divided into two sets: general political demands and demands more specific to the striking workers in the Tri-City area. In the first set were the following demands: the creation of free trade unions; guarantee for the right to strike and the security of strikers and advisers; freedom of speech and the press, including no repression of independent publications; reinstatement of those dismissed after 1970 and 1976 and renewed status for students dismissed after 1968; the release of all political prisoners; the prohibition of any reprisals; publication in the mass media of both the formation of the MKS and the strikers' demands; full disclosure of information with respect to the socio-economic situation of the country; and the involvement of all social groups and strata in discussions for reform. For further information and analysis see Persky, 1981: 80-91; Garton Ash, 1983: 45-49; Staniszkis, 1984: 43-45; and Laba, 1986: 47-67 and Ost, 1990: 80-90.
Bogdan Borusewicz), as strike leaders such as Gwiazda and Pieńkowska kept Jacek Kuroń abreast of events via telephone (until, of course, the phone lines were cut, and both Kuroń and Michnik were arrested). At this point, the main role of Warsaw intellectuals was to keep foreign media and press agencies informed about the “real facts” of the strike as events unfolded, challenging the media monopoly held by the official news agency.67

However, on August 20, sixty-two prominent Warsaw intellectuals (some of whom were also members of the Party) came out publicly in support of a free trade union, and on August 22 medieval historian Bronisław Geremek and Catholic intellectual and editor Tadeusz Mazowiecki delivered a letter of support to the Gdańsk workers. On August 24 a “committee of experts” was formed to assist the MKS in its upcoming round of bargaining with the authorities. It consisted of Geremek and Mazowiecki, as well as Bogdan Cywiński (Catholic journalist from Znak), Tadeusz Kowalik and Waldemar Kuczyński (both economists and active in TKN), Jadwiga Staniszkis (sociologist, later author of books about Solidarity and the fall of authoritarian communism), and Andrzej Wielowiejski (of the KKK). These advisors did not take part in actual face-to-face bargaining, but worked together with the negotiators (elected directly to the MKS from workers of the various striking enterprises) in reviewing proposals, developing

---

67For example, on August 16, following the official line of the Polish press, Associated Press reported that the strike was over.
wording,\textsuperscript{68} preparing files, and meeting behind-the-scenes with their government counterparts. Intellectuals were also important in the production of the strike newspaper, Solidarność\textsuperscript{69}—fourteen issues were distributed in only eleven days; the first issue was 40,000 copies (Touraine et al., 1983: 39).

The historic Gdańsk Accord was finally signed after several rounds of tense bargaining on August 30, when all 21 demands were incorporated into the agreement. Significantly, the MKS held firm to their convictions that they not be railroaded into accepting only wage increases and economic concessions; they held out for \textit{all} their political demands, including not only the recognition of free trade unions (and the concomitant ability to legally organize workers) but also the unconditional release of all political prisoners.\textsuperscript{70} Despite the fact that the wording of the Accord had to include a

\textsuperscript{68}This was a critical and sensitive task, and in some cases was deftly handled. For example, Mazowiecki and Kowalik were successful in changing the formulaic wording regarding the leading role of the party to “leading role of the Party in the state”, whereas in the 1976 Constitution, the party leads over all of society. Similarly, the government agreed that the union would be allowed defend workers’ interests with respect to their social needs; the intellectuals knew that much could be included under the umbrella-like rubric of the word social, whereas any reference to political involvement or activity would have been immediately rejected. See David Ost, 1990: 84 and Garton Ash, 1983b: 62-63.

\textsuperscript{69}Major roles were played by Konrad Bieliński, who went to the Lenin Shipyard and together with Krzysztof Wyszkowski (the initiator of the Free Trade Unions committee in Gdańsk) produced the first newsletter. See David Ost, 1990: 12-13.

\textsuperscript{70}Andrzej Wajda’s film \textit{Workers ‘80} shows poignant footage of Lech Wałęsa responding to a question from the crowd about political prisoners after the signing of the agreement and shouting in response, “No, no, we don’t sell out our friends!”
reference to the “leading role of the party” for tactical reasons, the very recognition of the right of independent, self-governing trade unions to exist itself constituted a challenge to the monopoly of the party-state.\footnote{During the negotiations, the authorities were very hesitant and unwilling to cede to the demand for independent trade unions—rather, they repeatedly offered an overhaul of the existing structure, immediate elections for new leadership, and finally their limitation to the Baltic coast. See David Ost, 1990: 79-97.} It was also an outright rejection of the existing union structure,\footnote{Official trade unions in Soviet-style systems can be understood not only in the traditional sense of “Leninist transmission belts” but also as a form of interest group or association (Ost, 1990: 98). Unions were responsible for maintaining discipline, providing clarity regarding the boundaries of trades or professions, and coordinating and distributing the provision of social benefits (including paid holiday time, child care, and even vacations). Bargaining was not part of their mandate as it would have presumed the possibility of a particular enterprise not acting in the interests of the workers; likewise prior to the Gdańsk Accord there were no provisions in Polish law for a legal strike.} which had long since been discarded by workers as a potential means of obtaining improvements in wages or working conditions. The fact that the party-state “gave in” at this particular location was also significant. As David Ost points out, the factory or workplace and the trade union, like the party cell and its apparatuses, were the essential building blocks of authoritarian communism (Ost, 1990: 98). Moreover, to emasculate the existing trade unions was to deny the party its ability to socialize workers into official structures (Ost, 1990: 98). To provide greater freedom for intellectual dissent was one thing, but to allow some degree of independence for workers was both a symbolic victory for the opposition and an ideological disaster for the regime, given its inability to defend what it had done and to effectively limit what had started (hence the
path to martial law). This is also why many of the intellectuals—both those like Kowalik and Strzelicki who were in Gdańsk, and those like Michnik and Kuroń who were not—were either opposed or sceptical about the demand for independent trade unions, as it was simply too massive a contradiction for the system to sustain for any period of time (Ost, 1990: 77, 98). In the end, of course, they were right on the sustainability issue, but wrong on the issue of strategy. The formation of Solidarity was a brilliant strategic move in hindsight because it laid bare the contradictions for all to see, once and for all. It was one thing to confront the regime on its ability to live up to its promises and provide for the well-being of its workers (especially given the consumerist model of Gierek), but another entirely to break down its ideological hegemony, not only among its subjects but its believers as well.73

The strategy of the workers in organizing occupation or sit-in strikes rather than leaving the factory in mass demonstrations was critical to maintaining their position of non-violence and in not providing the authorities a) an easy target and b) the excuse of prowokacja (provocation). As in 1970 and 1976, the authorities were in the problematic position of having to deal with workers challenging a state that supposedly privileged their existence. However, the general spontaneity and disarray surrounding the demonstrations in both Gdańsk in 1970 and Radom in 1976 (and even the massacre that

73The best evidence of the non-belief in the ideology of the party-state is that at its height in 1981, of Solidarity’s 10 million members, fully one-third were also members of PUWP.
followed in the former and systemic repression after the latter) were used by the authorities and paradoxically by the workers themselves to dissuade others from protesting in a similar manner. If one wanted to either a) grow to a ripe old age or b) be able to successfully provide for one’s family, it simply did not pay to demonstrate, in this type of cost-benefit reasoning. However, this rationale was undercut by, among other things, the worsening of the economic crisis, the greater success of the political opposition in the period immediately prior to 1980 (which included the attenuation of risk given the existence of a support network such as KOR), and the greater feeling of societal solidarity (which one can associate with the worker-intellectual-Church alliance; the growing self-organization of society; and the powerful sense of community fostered by the Pope’s visit one year earlier).

Although there is considerable debate of the chicken and egg variety\textsuperscript{74} regarding

\textsuperscript{74}There has been considerable debate in the Solidarity literature with respect to the sociological genesis of the political demands--as initiated and championed by the workers or as the brainchild of the intellectual opposition. One view (especially represented by Staniszkis, 1984) contends that workers vacillate between narrow economism (Lenin’s “trade union consciousness”) and unrealistic utopianism, therefore intellectuals are needed to both politicize and moderate their demands. The other view (especially represented by Laba, 1986) suggests that the workers were capable of formulating sophisticated political demands by themselves, as is evidenced by a comparison of the 1971 demands solicited by the party-state following the massacre in Gdańsk-Gdynia with the 21 demands of August, 1980. Without attempting to simplify the complexity of the debate or its underlying assumptions, however, it is fair to concede in hindsight that both the workers and the intellectuals had a considerable impact on both the Gdańsk Accord and the rapid growth of Solidarity that followed. Moreover, what is perhaps unique to the Polish situation is the degree to which both workers and intellectuals acted in a historically self-conscious manner, with reference to past traditions and events.
who came first and which group was more important initially in terms of formulating demands—the workers or the intellectuals—it is evident from the above analysis that in the ten year period prior to the 1980 strike a strong partnership was being forged. The key event was obviously the formation of KOR, which succeeded in breaking the cycle of separate worker and intellectual protests since 1956, each social group unable to effectively attract the support of the other. With Solidarity, as Eva Hoffman points out ironically, Poles were actually able to realize the Marxist sumnum bonum—a true union of intellectuals and workers mobilized toward the same ends (1993: 45).

The next section will begin by discussing the various roles played by intellectuals during the Solidarity period: during the Gdańsk negotiations, throughout Solidarity’s most active and legal phase (up until the declaration of martial law by the government of General Jaruzelski on December 13, 1981), and while the movement operated underground (until 1988). These roles and the continued activism of the intellectuals essentially set them up not only to be key advisors and players in the Round Table Talks (RTT) of 1989, but also as both elected and appointed officials in the first non-communist government (many of whom have continued to the present day). Moreover, many have parlayed their experiences into important academic and societal positions (the most obvious being Adam Michnik as editor of Gazeta Wyborcza—arguably the most important and critical daily newspaper in Central Europe today). My point here is not to reinforce the obvious and cynical claim that intellectuals were engaging in farsighted career development with their activism, but to suggest that the continued relationship of political
theory and the overall strategies and tactics of the democratic opposition to the on-the-ground practices has remained an important and time-honoured connection. Moreover, much of their political theorization grew out of direct political experience; in a bizarre sense, this was substantially helped by repeated periods of detention and imprisonment where reflection and writing were one of the few outlets possible. Hence, probably the most important collection of political theory in the entire region is Adam Michnik’s *Letters From Prison and Other Essays*. To say that there was considerable intellectual ferment and counter-education going on in Poland’s prisons after 1981 is not to put too fine a point on it!

**XI. Role of Intellectuals within Solidarity**

In the period of Solidarity’s legal existence, from August of 1980 to the imposition of martial law in December 1991, the intellectual side of the newly-reconfigured oppositional alliance played a number of critical roles. In the early stage of Solidarity’s consolidation, both as a trade union and a broader social movement, the existing *infrastructure* of the opposition—its networks, publishing facilities, administrative and fundraising capabilities—were vital in getting Solidarity operational in

---

75I am focusing on *intellectuals*, that segment of the intelligentsia who are deliberately theoretical, self-reflexive, and indeed teleological in their deliberations. On the role of the professional classes more broadly in Solidarity, see especially Kennedy (1991). Kennedy points out that engineers and physicians in particular allied themselves *and their own professional interests* with Solidarity in the 1980-1981 period.
a hurry. For example, Seweryn Blumsztajn, a veteran of 1968 and KOR, was fundamental in the developing nationwide union press agency *Agencja Solidarność*, and became chief editor of its bulletin. In some cases, the offices of the KIK were used to house regional offices of Solidarity for an interim period. Although in many respects practice leapt way ahead of theory in the 1980-81 period, intellectuals were also critical in crystallizing some of the debates leading up to the Solidarity Congress, and in some cases pointing out (sometimes not very helpfully) the contradictions posed by Solidarity's existence and the options available to it.

One of the early debates following the heady days of the Polish August was whether or not the union should be centralized or decentralized in its organizational structure. The semantics of the debate as well as the participants themselves suggest that the pros and cons of both positions were formulated within the parameters of the previous oppositional discourse. Decentralists constructed their positions with reference to greater participatory democracy and grass-roots connectedness--Solidarity, like other efforts in the late 1970s--had to be about the revitalization of the public sphere. This view was consistent with the anti-political and anti-authoritarian stance of the opposition. Centralists argued that the power and unity of *society* against the state could only be achieved with "unified strike action and conciliation with unified assent" (Ost, 1990: 107). In the end, an ambiguous federal structure emerged--so that Solidarity could make

---

76 For complete details of this debate, see David Ost, 1990: 102-109.
good on its promise for a general strike if it had to, but on the other hand did not rule over the workers as did the (previous) official union structure.

Alongside the formal creation and legalization of Solidarity (and later Rural Solidarity and Student Solidarity), there was a general resurgence of independent intellectual life. Professional groups and activities spontaneously re-organized, and many academics, journalists, and self-styled experts of all kinds wore the banner of reform, putting forward new demands, and in some cases seeking some sort of connection to or validation from Solidarity. For example, under the leadership of philosophy professor Stanisław Szaniawski, a Coordinating Committee of Polish Intellectuals was set up with the self-appointed task of negotiating with the government and Solidarity of various legal issues of particular concern to the academic community, such as censorship and university governance (Curry, in Curry and Fajfer, 1996: 173).

The size and scope of Solidarity meant that there inevitably arose a series of contradictions vis-a-vis its initial foundation as a trade union and its reality as a social movement. Proposed solutions differed among key Solidarity activists and advisors. For Karol Modzelewski, Solidarity had no choice but to take a more political and institutional role, given the inefficacy of the government and the worsening economic crisis. Jacek Kuroń’s proposal was one that would consume a substantial level of intellectual energy: self management through workers’ councils in enterprises mirrored by local self-governments in communities. These bodies in turn would be provided representation in a second house of parliament. Bronisław Geremek favoured a tripartite arrangement
nationally between the government, Solidarity and the Church; this was also the position of Lech Wałęsa.

These differing views as well as increasingly clear fault lines between the interests of the workers and the intellectuals, became more strongly evident during the first national congress of Solidarity in September, 1981. The debates and divisions of the congress itself reflected a number of processes simultaneously: the presence of generational splits; the crystallization of different points of views that elections naturally bring forth; the decentralized and radically democratic ethos of the organization, and its related resistance to leadership and hierarchy, whether self-appointed or elected; and finally utopian hope mixed with phenomenal ignorance regarding the dismal reality of Poland's economic situation. Because Solidarity was not an institution like any other in Poland, its open and antipolitical nature made it appear fragmented and indecisive. Very few concrete proposals were ratified by the second session of the Congress, and this led the National Co-ordinating Commission to deal with economic reform at the top while restive and impatient members spiralled off into their own alternative worker-based ideas and associations. Polish society was not used to the painfully slow and inconclusive aspects of democratic organizing, and thus many became less hopeful that Solidarity was strong or capable enough to tackle the nation's problems. Moreover, in the face of food rationing, strikes, industrial paralysis, and agricultural failure, Poles learned firsthand that economic performance was down considerably in 1981.
XII. Martial Law and its Aftermath

We now know that the party-state had considered the imposition of martial law in the spring of 1981, soon after General Wojciech Jaruzelski was installed as prime minister. Although great pains were made to keep the plans secret, the defection of Colonel Kukliński to the West, meant that the American CIA was also apprised of Polish strategy. Soviet pressure for a solution took many forms: in the form of constant telephone calls to Kania from an aging and partially senile Brezhnev, more directly and firmly in the form of an involuntary “summit” in Brest with KGB head Yuri Andropov and Defence Minister Marshal Dmitri Ustinov, military maneuvers along the border and over Polish airspace, and frequent visits from Warsaw Pact chief Marshal Viktor Kulikov to personally push the case with Jaruzelski. Clearly, the Soviets did not trust the PUWP to deal effectively with the problem; in July the KGB even estimated that 20 percent of the Polish Central Committee was openly pro-Solidarity and that over half the members

---

77 In some respects, the appointment itself was ominous, as it was the first time in the Warsaw Pact that a military man was to hold the office of prime minister. Moreover, he also retained the post of defence minister.

78 Colonel Kukliński was the former chief of the Strategic Planning Department of the Polish General Staff. Polish leaders knew that his defection guaranteed American knowledge of the plan. See Rosenberg, 1996: 188-198 and Curry, in Curry and Fajfer, 1996: 188-189.

79 Jaruzelski’s less-than-liberal counterparts in the DDR and in Czechoslovakia were also pressing for a solution so as to limit the Polish contagion. Erich Honecker even provided Kania with unused plans for a proposed declaration of martial law in 1953 following the Berlin riots.
secretly sympathized with the cause (Rosenberg, 1996: 188).

At the same time, the Soviets were effectively hamstrung. They knew that any form of Soviet or Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) invasion as had occurred in Czechoslovakia twelve years earlier would be met with the fiercest resistance possible on the part of Polish society, just as they had begun to realize the human and military costs of their entanglement in Afghanistan. The Polish leadership also had reason to worry. Jaruzelski maintains to this day that martial law was the only solution in the end that would appease the Soviets, provide the necessary discipline to get the country stabilized, and eliminate the possibility of an outright invasion. Given détente and European stability, both the Polish and Soviet leaderships knew martial law would be perceived by the Americans as the lesser evil. However, at the time, he had reason to be concerned about the loyalty of the Polish army and police units whose strength and cooperation were necessary to make the operation a success. At the same time, Poland was dangerously close to defaulting on its Western debt and had applied to the International Monetary fund for assistance. Other Eastern Bloc countries had already cut financial aid to Poland because of the success of Solidarity. It is noteworthy that the actual date of the imposition of martial law--December 13, 1981, was just two days before massive debt service payments were due to Western creditors.

As a military operation, martial law was an outright success. At midnight of December 12, army tanks and personnel carriers moved out into the streets. Posters tacked up on light posts on street corners announced that a Military Council of National
Salvation was now ruling Poland. Overnight virtually the entire Solidarity leadership was rounded up and detained, borders were closed, telephone lines cut, radio and television stations occupied, schools and theatres shut down, all public meetings and gatherings banned, mail censored, and a curfew imposed. By military standards, there were also relatively few casualties; about 115 deaths attributable to martial law were later investigated by a Solidarity-led congressional committee. Solidarity fought back with a few noteworthy yet decidedly rearguard actions: occupation strikes in Gdańsk and Katowice were violently and effectively crushed.

Politically, martial law succeeded in stabilizing the country in the short term but in hindsight simply postponed the inevitable. The party-state could and did exert its power, but could reestablish no form of legitimate authority. No form of post-1968 normalization as had occurred in Czechoslovakia was remotely possible. By attacking Solidarity and blaming it for the country’s economic ills, the party-state leadership had only alienated one symptom of a much larger disease. Civil disobedience and a national tradition of passive non-compliance were harder to deal with. Over a million Poles turned in their party cards. The party lost any support it might have still had on the part of reform-minded intellectuals. The West imposed economic sanctions, very little help came from WTO countries, and the Polish economy limped on.

80 More than ten thousand Solidarity activists were detained and interned without trial. Most of the top leaders were caught in Gdańsk where they had been involved in a national meeting of the organization.
Despite the fact that Soviet pressure on the authorities was assumed by all levels of Polish society, the Solidarity leadership did little to prepare themselves for what was to come. They took no precautionary measures to avoid detention of key personnel or to set up emergency communications linkages. Moreover, they never directly challenged the barrage of Soviet propaganda that was being constantly fed to the army and police. Despite the ominous atmosphere of threat, they were essentially caught off-guard.

XIII. Solidarity Underground

Solidarity did re-emerge as an underground organization after the declaration of martial law, but its existence on this level was sadly paradoxical. The Polish opposition from KOR onward had prided itself on its public face, its openness, its cultivation of civil society that existed along side the party-state and not beneath or hidden from it. Largely under the leadership of Zbigniew Bujak in Warsaw and Bogdan Lis in Gdańsk (who had both escaped arrest), Solidarity was converted into a loose coalition of unevenly organized disparate groups. For reasons of political expediency and the obvious pressures of martial law, they more or less pursued their own oppositional activities by whatever means possible (Ost, 1990: 152). They did manage to form the Tymczasowa Komisja Krajowa (TKK), or Provisional Coordinating Commission of Solidarity, in April, 1982.

Although 1982 was a year to simply survive rather than reinstitute vigorous theoretical debates about where to go from here, an interesting debate did emerge from
the underground. An exchange of open letters took place between Jacek Kuroń (then imprisoned) and Wiktor Kulerksi and Zbigniew Bujak. Kuroń believed that Solidarity should prepare to overthrow the government and should tightly centralize the opposition to this end. Bujak was more in tune with the public mood of mistrust, defeat, and exhaustion. He countered that only an “imprecise and diverse” movement could avoid being crushed by the police state, and that Solidarity had to adopt a “long march” approach (quoted in Ost, 1990: 152). Bujak’s approach won out, if only because it was the only practicable means of keeping Solidarity alive.

The TKK put most of its resources into the underground presses and in general information dissemination. In 1982 it managed to install underground radio and television transmitters and penetrate state-controlled airwaves, if only briefly. However, Solidarity’s calls for nation-wide strikes in 1982 went largely unheeded, just as the organization was being formally stripped of its legal status (Ost, 1990: 153).

Nonetheless, Lech Wałęsa, the country’s most famous political prisoner, was released in late 1982, just after the death of Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev. Martial law itself was suspended one month later.\footnote{There was a need on Poland’s part to be seen to be fulfilling the conditions demanded by the West so that economic sanctions would be lifted. However, this did not stop the regime from formally arresting Jacek Kuroń, Adam Michnik, Jan Lityński, Jan Józef Lipski, and Henryk Wujec for trying overthrow the state by force.} Meanwhile, the party-state could not effectively rollback time to the days before August, 1980. Even with the clampdown, cultural policy was relatively open compared to other countries in the Soviet orbit. *Tygodnik Powszechny*
resumed publication in 1982 and was quite critical of the regime.  

The Church maintained its independence and while sympathetic to Solidarity’s aims, officially attempted to mediate in a corporatist manner between opposition and party-state. In fact, the regime and the episcopate were necessarily conciliatory toward each other, the party-state in terms of recognizing the Church as an institution with which it could bargain (and it sorely needed some partner representative of Polish society), and the Church by taking advantage of the situation by pressing for its own needs. The state attempted to co-opt popular national and religious ideology as a result of its own internal legitimation crisis. While the Church enjoyed a construction boom and new primate Józef Glemp appealed to workers not to strike, the situation at the parish level was more uneven. Many priests provided refuge and support to Solidarity underground, and some even preached anti-government sermons.

---

82 Over time, the party-state effectively gave up monopoly control over media. In 1987 the underground journal Res Publica (a prominent small-I liberal theoretical quarterly) was allowed to resume publication. Moreover, Res Publica’s editor, Marcin Król, was among a group of intellectuals chosen to meet with Mikhail Gorbachev in Warsaw in 1988.


84 One, Father Jerzy Popiełuszko, paid for his commitment with his life. In October 1984, he was kidnapped and murdered by three policemen. They were clearly acting against official policy and in fact were arrested and prosecuted for their crime. The affair galvanized support for the Church, exposed the excesses of the regime, and laid bare intra-governmental rivalry. See Ost, 1990: 158-159. The story of Popiełuszko’s life and martyrdom has been told in Agnieszka Holland’s 1989 film To Kill A Priest.
In 1983, two years after martial law had been declared and Solidarity pushed underground, the Pope’s return visit was staged so dramatically and his sermons so well-crafted as to be worthy of a performance of Shakespeare. Of course, the climax of the Pope’s visit was again his pilgrimage to Częstochowa and the Black Madonna, defender of the Polish nation in times of crisis. Despite the fact that the papal tour was highly controlled and visually presented as a *state visit*, the Pope was symbolically victorious (Curry, in Curry and Fafjer, 1996: 205). Timothy Garton Ash has captured the spirit of the occasion and the magic contact he established with the crowd during these dark days of the Polish opposition:

And then, as suddenly, the crowd is silent, reverent, half a million people listening with such attention that you could hear a rosary drop. It is a great and simple homily, not a political speech. He preaches a love that is ‘greater than all the experiences and disappointments that life can prepare for us.’ He shows them that he knows and shares their disappointments, without needing to mention martial law directly. He tells them what they can do: to begin with the reformation of themselves, which must precede any social or political reform; to listen to their consciences; to ‘call good and evil by name.’ Then and only then does he mention, for the first time, the word *solidarity*, letting it drop very quietly in the silent crowd, not Solidarity the outlawed movement, but ‘fundamental solidarity between human beings’ (Garton Ash, 1983a: 43).

In the end, the word that best characterized the decade was “stalemate”. Neither side could effectively check-mate the other, and only the Church managed to strengthen its position. With no cards left in the legitimacy game, the regime finally declared an unconditional amnesty in July, 1986 and for the first time since martial law all the former Solidarity leaders and opposition intellectuals could meet and discuss future strategy.
However, there was no real consensus as to what that strategy should be. Was Solidarity better off trying to re-organize itself as a more “business-oriented” trade union, or should political reform be first and foremost on the agenda? At this time, a right-wing, anti-trade union critique of Solidarity was being hatched, one that decried the old intellectual-worker alliance and collectivist ethos of the movement (and of the opposition since the founding of KOR) as anti-individualist and anti-liberal. For the first time, Solidarity found itself being described as too socialist in nature. Konstanty Gebert, writing under the pseudonym David Warszawski, actively defended the leftist ideals around which the opposition was founded. Warszawski’s defence seemed to unravel when it came to the economy, as marketization was increasingly linked to democratic citizenship. By 1987 extensive privatization of the economy was Solidarity policy (Ost, 1990: 168).

By now being an opposition intellectual meant that you were effectively cut off from Polish society. The debates were becoming more arcane and technocratic; gone were the rallying cries of the past. Given the political repression of the 1980s, the costs of being involved were very high in terms of the personal sacrifice, with the likelihood of internment, arrest, dismissal, fines, and confiscation of property. As Castle states:

> Opposition activity became the exclusive sphere of that minority who, for

---


86This was a large semantic and theoretical difference from Michnik’s early conception of tying active citizenship to a democratic public sphere.
whatever reason, found the nebulous payoffs of intellectual stimulation and/or moral satisfaction worth the significant personal costs. A larger circle might read the occasional underground newspaper or book, or join a brief march after a patriotic mass, but this had little practical effect (Castle, in Curry and Fajfer, 1996: 219).

The intellectual leadership was also divorced from the shop floor reality of Solidarity as a re-emerging trade union in the late 1980s. In 1988, when the biggest price increases since 1982 were implemented, a wave of strikes followed, beginning with the municipal transportation workers in Bydgoszcz, and including shipyard workers in Gdansk and Silesian miners. The strikes took place under the banner of Solidarity, but it was not the same organization as existed in 1980-1981.

XIV. Re-Legalization, the Round Table Talks (RTT), and Free Elections

By the late 1980s, some optimistic scholars outside Poland began to discuss the possibility of political liberalization in Poland, the example of Spain in Franco’s last years was often mentioned.87 Ironically, the period of martial law ushered in the most frank and open discussions of economic reform, and the debate took on a tone of harsh realism, and it was clear that economic restructuring would entail loss as well as gain. Among official economists, the words “marketization” and “democratization” began to be used in tandem as a potential solution for the endemic crisis that Poland continued to

87See David Ost (1990), especially the final chapter “The Viability of an Accord,” pp. 187-204. Ost quotes Kolakowski as ridiculing the possibility of a Spanish road for Poland as mere “fantasy”!
represent. The fault line and implicit contradictions between these two underlay much of what was to come ahead.

Following the introduction of glasnost and perestroika in the USSR and faced with another round of crippling strikes in 1988 from a much younger and in many respects more militant Solidarity, the party-state was ready to bargain. The PUWP had long since moved from its earlier ideological commitment to Marxism-Leninism. Given the depth of the economic crisis and the increasingly technocratic orientation of its leaders, nothing was being ruled out—neither a free market for capital coupled with extensive privatization nor the participation of anti-communists and opposition members in the government itself. It was within this context that on January 18, 1989, General Jaruzelski informed a plenary session of the PUWP that the leadership was now ready to re-legalize Solidarity. Less than three weeks after this announcement, leaders of the party and Solidarity sat down with each to work out the country’s problems and design a blueprint for a more stable future.88 The immediate goal of both sides was liberalization as opposed to democratization and economic reform. Nevertheless, by first recognizing and then negotiating with the opposition, the party-state effectively relinquished their

88The party-state contingent included allied, official parties, such as the Stronnictwo Demokratyczne (SD), or Democratic Party; the Zjednoczone Stronnictwo Ludowe (ZSL), or United Peasants Party; and the Ogólnopolskie Porozumienie Związków Zawodowych (OPZZ), the “official” trade union umbrella organization since 1983. Long-time Solidarity activists and intellectuals such as Lech Wałęsa, Adam Michnik, Jacek Kuroń, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, and Bronisław Geremek were at the table, as well as representatives of the Catholic Church.
monopolistic hold on power, and agreed to a process they could not entirely control.

After weeks of wrangling and negotiation, of private meetings and informal summits, an agreement was signed on April 5. It stipulated that 35 percent of seats of the Sejm were up for competitive election to any independent candidates who got three thousand voter signatures on a petition. The Senate would be restored with limited parliamentary powers, and all its 100 seats were open to election. The date for these partially-contested elections was set for June 4, 1989, and completely free elections were promised four years hence. At this point, events moved both quickly and unpredictably for all the parties involved.

In terms of the campaign, Solidarity reconfigured itself as an electoral machine, the Solidarity Citizens' Committee. It organized the nomination of one candidate per seat and mobilized all its resources behind its chosen representatives. The candidates from the party-government coalition (as it now called itself) avoided all ideological and partisan references. In addition, some independents (either putative independents indirectly allied with the regime or non-Solidarity independents) entered the race for the contestable seats. This was of great concern to the Solidarity candidates, who were worried about the fragmentation of the non-communist vote.

In the end, the results of the June 4 elections were resoundingly clear. As Garton whereby its majority would be ensured, see Castle, in Curry and Fajfer, 1996: 234-235.

---

89 For the electoral logistics of the agreement and the party-state's reasoning
Ash stated at the time, “Three things happened at once: the communists lost an election; Solidarity won; the communists acknowledged Solidarity won” (1990c: 29). Far from being syllogistic, Garton Ash was trying to point out the symbolic importance and interdependence of these three related events. Tadeusz Mazowiecki became the first non-communist prime minister in what was soon to be the former Eastern Bloc. In terms of international events, the Solidarity victory occurred in parallel to another alternative response to communist crisis: the Tiananmen Square massacre in Beijing. This sobering comparison was lost on none of the participants.
Chapter 3: Czechoslovakia: From Interrupted to Velvet Revolution

I. Czechoslovak Stalinism and the Role of Intellectuals

The Komunistická Strana Československa, or Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPCz), assumed power by engineering a coup in 1948, ousting their former coalition partners from power. However, the Czech communists had the strongest indigenous support in the region, a point that can not be overemphasized. The CPCz had been legally operating in the country since its founding in 1921. Reasons for support are also rooted in the Munich Agreement in 1938—when the Sudeten lands were ceded to Hitler’s Germany and Czechoslovakia was effectively abandoned by the Western powers. Germany, not the Soviet Union, was the major enemy. When President Beneš returned to Prague via Moscow with his government-in-exile, the message was a strong

1In the May 1946 elections, the Communists won 38% of the popular vote and a higher number of seats (114 out of 300) than any of the other major contending parties. From 1946 to 1948 the communists participated in a National Front government with Edward Beneš as President. For a more detailed historical description of the period and Czechoslovakia’s “national path to socialism”, see H. Gordon Skilling, Czechoslovakia’s Interrupted Revolution (1976: 22-29).

2Language is an important indicator of how this event is perceived through Czech eyes. Among Western historians and commentators, reference is commonly made to the “appeasement” of Hitler at Munich by Western allies lead by Neville Chamberlain. Czechs, however, speak of the “betrayal” at Munich or zrada v Mnichove, referring to the West’s abandonment of collective security guarantees, thus effectively “sacrificing” Czechoslovak sovereignty to National Socialist Germany. Moreover, the Czech use of “betray” is both broader and more intense than in English usage, implying treacherous behaviour.
one: cooperation and friendship with the USSR. Whereas in Poland national independence was perceived at odds with either Russian or Soviet domination, in Czechoslovakia the USSR was seen as the liberator and guarantor of national independence. Even before the coup or takeover, communists held many decisive positions in the government, notably in the army and security services.

Moreover, the communists successfully attracted the intellectual elite of the country. As Milan Kundera states:

In 1939, German troops marched into Bohemia, and the Czech state ceased to exist. In 1945, Russian troops marched in Bohemia, and the country was once again declared an independent republic. The people showed great enthusiasm for Russia—which had driven the Germans from the country—and because they considered the Czech Communist Party its faithful representative, they shifted their sympathies to it. And it so happened that in February 1948 the Communists took power not in bloodshed and violence, but to the cheers of about half the population. And please note: the half that cheered was the more dynamic, the more intelligent, the better half (Kundera, 1980: 8).

What influenced many to support and join the party even after the coup was that, in Milan Šimečka’s words, “…almost everyone in that admirable generation of inter-war artists and creators had been in the party…all the writers we admired, all the poets we loved—cultured people with national standing—were either party members or at least fellow travellers” (1984: 45). The communist generation had enormous moral and social authority, and was not simply entrusted with support but with faith that a new and better community was and would continue to be built. This naive and utopian idealism was matched with a sense of optimism and social solidarity.
However popular communist ideals and its working class leader, Klement Gottwald, were in the period from 1948 through to his death in 1953, the Czechoslovak party successfully demonstrated its increasing slavishness to the Moscow line. As in Poland and elsewhere, national communist or socialist traditions were thus eliminated. Indeed, Czechoslovak Stalinism reached its apogee with the purges and political trials of the 1950s, especially in the case against Rudolf Slánský and his co-defendants. Those in the party leadership who received the harshest treatment (execution) were overwhelmingly Jewish—a pattern that was unfortunately repeated throughout the region. Both communists and non-communists alike were arrested and imprisoned; the earlier legitimacy of Gottwald and his party was sacrificed in favour of widespread fear and brutal coercion.

The Khrushchev era in Moscow did not lead to either a leadership crisis or open revolt in Czechoslovakia, despite the fact that de-Stalinization in the USSR coincided with new leadership in Prague (unlike Poland and Hungary).

---

3Rudolf Slánský was the party’s general secretary and a close associate of Gottwald from 1929 onward until his arrest in 1951. He was tried, convicted, and executed in 1952, along with eleven others. Three were sentenced to life imprisonment, and later released. Slánský was not rehabilitated until 1968. For an excellent personal memoir of one of Slánský co-defendants, see Artur London (1968), *On Trial* (London: Macmillan). His book was later made into a film by director Costa-Gavras, entitled *The Confession*. A similar recollection is that of Evžen Löbl (1976), *My Mind on Trial* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich). The correspondence of Vlado Clementis and Lida Clementisová (1968) has also been published as *Listy z vasenia* (Prague: Tatran).

4Originally a duumvirate between Antonín Zápotocký as president and Antonín Novotný as First Secretary, Novotný assumed both positions in 1957 with Zápotocký’s
Course” was hardly new at all. Although “cult of personality” was condemned, Gottwald was not personally censured; agricultural and industrial shortcomings were admitted, but no major policy revision took place; the structure of government remained much the same (Skilling, 1976: 31). Some signs of protest and dissent were evident—the Pilsen riots, meetings and demonstrations in early 1955 in Prague and Bratislava, and prominent poet Jaroslav Seifert was heavily censured for calling on writers to be “conscience of the people”. Nonetheless, there was relative passivity in comparison to Poland and Hungary, which can be at least partially accounted for by satisfactory economic progress and the overall lack of a tradition of revolutionary protest or hostility to the USSR. One more factor is critical—at this time there were no large-scale movements of protest or reassessment by intellectuals, first because they were hindered by severe restrictions on expression, but second, they were still, taken as a whole, fairly supportive of the regime.5

The active support of prominent intellectuals for not only the events of 1948 but also the purges and show trials that followed has been documented both by key players in their personal reflections and diaries6 and in a number of subsequent analyses.

5Muriel Blaive of the Fondation Nationale de Sciences Politiques (FNSP) in Paris has recently completed her doctoral thesis 1956: Anatomie d’une absence on the question of why there was no meaningful dissent in Czechoslovakia in 1956, as had occurred in Poland and Hungary.

6See for example, Pavel Kohout, Diary of a Counter-Revolutionary (1969); Zdeněk Mlynář, Nightfrost in Prague: The End of Humane Socialism (1980); and Radoslav Selucký, Czechoslovakia: The Plan That Failed (1970). All three were prominent
Representative of the latter is Peter Hruby's *Fools and Heroes: The Changing Role of Communist Intellectuals in Czechoslovakia* (1980). In a series of case studies that include Karel Bartošek, Eduard Goldstücker, Milan Hübl, Karel Kaplan, Pavel Kohout, Karek Kosík, Eugen Löbl, Artur London, Pavel Machonin, Zdeněk Mlynář, Ota Šik, and Ivan Sviták, Hruby paints a picture of the misguided communist supporter slowly awakening to the reality of the regime, moving from anti-democratic hypocrisy to self-correction, democratic support, and anti-communism. The problem with this simplistic political trajectory (in addition to demonstrating the obvious biases of the author as a 1948 anti-communist emigre) is that it assumes, and in fact the argument is dependent upon, ideological movement along a left-right axis. However, this interpretation purposefully obfuscates much of the real story. People like writer and poet Pavel Kohout and economist Ota Šik did not miraculously transform themselves into anti-communists in either the making of the Prague Spring or as result of the Moscow Protocols. Rather, they were exploring a logic intrinsic to democratic socialism, which they had adopted in the 1940s and continued to support. If one can assume that more radically democratic and participatory forms of politics are on the left even within a socialist dialogue (contrasting, for example, the politics of Rosa Luxemburg with that of V.I. Lenin), then communist intellectuals did not move to the right but rather further to the left. This point

---

...
is more than simply theoretical nitpicking, as it is central to my thesis that throughout the region much of the opposition to authoritarian communism grew from and remained committed to the Left. In fact, part of the reason the party in Czechoslovakia was able to mount an effective revisionist challenge to the Stalinist model was because the intellectual opposition remained largely inside the party itself, at least prior to 1968.

Nonetheless, it remains true that many intellectuals in the 1950s supported the Stalinist model wholeheartedly believing it to be the answer to rapid industrialization and restructuring of the war-torn economy, the maintenance of Czechoslovakia as a national entity, and to the eradication of anti-Semitism and the remaining intellectual and cultural vestiges of the old Hapsburg empire.

II. The Economic Crisis of the 1960s

By the early 1960s, however, signs of a mounting crisis were evident. Because the old Stalinist guard in the party had remained secure throughout the 1950s, any reform, admission of past errors or responsibility, or rehabilitation of political criminals, was negligible. By 1964, however, Novotný had carefully rid himself of his more hardline comrades while maintaining his position. This manoeuvring had the effect of opening up the party considerably. The question of Slovak discontent in a federation ruled from

---

7The findings of the Kolder Commission resulted in the penal rehabilitation of all fourteen Slánský defendants; full rehabilitation and exoneration did not occur until May, 1968.
Prague resurfaced, and the previous attempts to sweep the problem under the carpet under the label "bourgeois nationalism" was no longer effective nor believed. Under the auspices of Czech and Slovak nationalism, a more relaxed attitude was adopted toward the critical intelligentsia—which was later to prove crucial in the 1967-68 period. Of more immediate importance, however, was the economic crisis of the early 1960s.

In the 1961-63 period, the steady economic growth had not only come to a complete halt, but had actually began to reverse itself (Skilling, 1976: 57-58). Between 1962 and 1963 the national income fell and consumer goods were in short supply. Exogenous factors such as the loss of trade with China (as a result of the Sino-Soviet split) and a series of poor harvests also played a role (Williams, 1997: 21). Officially, the party blamed the crisis on earlier decentralization initiatives, which it promptly abandoned in favour of recentralization. The real story was more complicated, and connected to the structure of the Czechoslovak economy.

The war did not bring infrastructural devastation to Czechoslovakia as it did to Poland, Hungary, and Germany. After the communist takeover, this meant both the appropriation and reorientation of industry by the party-state rather than its rebuilding. Although Czechoslovakia was the tenth most highly industrialized country in the interwar

---

*For an examination of the history of both Czech and Slovak nationalism and state formation, see Carol Skalnik Leff (1998), *The Czech and Slovak Republics: Nation vs. State* (Boulder, Co.:Westview). Also on this subject, Nadya Nedelsky is currently completing her doctoral thesis at the University of Toronto, entitled *National Identity and Political Culture: Czech and Slovak Legacies of Nationhood and Patterns of Post-Communist Governance.*
period, from 1949-1953 it underwent a second phase of industrialization following the Soviet approach taken in the 1930s (Selucký, 1970: 28). Czechoslovakia was to play the role of the supplier of capital goods to COMECON, which required a major increase in engineering capacities to churn out the necessary machines, weapons, and plant equipment. In the short run the Soviet approach was highly successful; building on Czechoslovakia’s historical economic advantages, Czechoslovakia in the early 1950s was the showpiece of socialist expansion in Europe. Logically, it also meant that the Stalinist model of heavy industrialization and extensive or “easy” economic expansion was exhausted much earlier in terms of economic growth. Industrial expansion was based on outmoded and often pre-war structures; there was no or little necessary long-term planning or economic development or investment aimed at new technologies—nuclear physics, chemistry, electronics and cybernetics. (Selucký, 1971: 28). Such investments would have been necessary to further automatize production processes, generate the mass production of both industrial and consumer goods, and provide a platform for continued economic growth. Further investments in heavy industry and resource extraction (notably mining) yielded much lower returns on productive capacity and efficiency.⁹ Moreover,

⁹Economist Ota Šik came to prominence not only because of his proposals for economic reform (ultimately leading to the expatriate development of his theories of a “Third Way” between capitalism and existing socialism) but also on his assessment of how the Czechoslovak economy had deteriorated. He demonstrated that privileging heavy industry leads to a concentration of investment; this level of “consumption” in turn leads to lower plant efficiency, slowed growth of labour productivity, and an increasing proportion of the GNP is absorbed by accumulation rather than consumption. Over time on a macroeconomic level this means that each further increment in
agriculture, distribution and services did not keep pace with initial industrial growth; the high priority given to heavy industry meant that these sectors were perennially disadvantaged in terms of supply of labour and materials, as well as expansion and development. Overall, "extensive" economic growth would have to be replaced with "intensive" expansion. However, unlike in Poland where Gomułka had never taken economic reform and the proposals of Oskar Lange and others seriously, a series of drastic changes was proposed within party structures, in particular by the head of the Institute of Economics, Ota Šík.

III. Proposals for Economic Reform

The party leadership did not easily accept the idea of economic reform. However, mounting economic crisis combined with Novotný's dissociation from the Stalinist "old guard" of Gottwald days created the necessary set of conditions for the acceptance of change. A critical point was the appointment of Šík to a team of experts charged with productivity demands more and more investment than ever before, that is, productivity is achieved at enormous social and economic cost in an increasingly inefficient manner. See Šelucký, 1971: 33-34 and Ota Šík, 1976, 1985.

10As Galia Golan points out, much of the debate regarding the necessity for reform was initiated by rehabilitated Slovak economist Evžen Löbl in the pages of Slovak paper Kultúrny život (Cultural Life). Löbl argued that planning was not intrinsic to the logic of socialism, but became the 'law' of socialism thanks to Stalin. Löbl's view were considered extremely radical, but his charges of dogmatism and demand for creative, independent economists laid the groundwork for others, most notably Šík. Löbl became head of the Slovak National Bank in 1968; afterward he lived in exile in the United States.
examining economic management and planning in 1963 (Skilling, 1976: 58). Šik was also appointed a full member of the Central Committee in 1962; with his new set of responsibilities he combined both political authority and technical expertise. Through a series of incremental decisions taken from 1964 to 1966 the party-state committed itself to a fairly comprehensive program of economic reform, involving a shift to an intensive-growth, regulated market system. Enterprises would increasingly control their own production through democratically-elected boards, independently formulating their own responses to local and foreign competition, maximizing and where necessary reinvesting their profits. Šik wanted to dismantle centralized directives in favour of greater independence for enterprises; managers of such enterprises would set production levels, assess costs, be responsible for technical development and through greater dependence on the market be more responsive to their “customers” (Golan, 1971: 56). Wages and prices would be adjusted by a partially-free market (influenced, but not totally determined by, supply and demand) and regulated by the party-state, but would be allowed to vary according to economic rather than political criteria (skills, productivity, and so on).

Planning as a general economic principle and practice was to be revamped—a process

---

The ideological shift whereby the market was rehabilitated as a distributive mechanism occurred incrementally with the cautious acceptance of a number of related assumptions: 1) that society was composed of a multiplicity of interests (not simply composed of classes antagonistically at odds with one another); 2) that enterprises and workers require incentives to induce performance; 3) that regardless of the mode of production, consumer demand must be met; and 4) that the commodification of goods and labour would likely continue under centrally-planned socialism. See Williams, 1997: 21.
whereby investment decisions were to be based on rational estimates of profitability. National economic plans would still exist to provide long-term objectives and facilitate growth in a particular direction. Economic success would be measured against plan targets on the basis of measurable (objective) quantitative and qualitative indices.

Important to and implicit in these reforms was a critique of the Soviet model as no longer appropriate to the Czechoslovak economy. To make the point more strongly, I should add that these proposals were not simply the dreams of economists. Even in the highest ranks of the party, there was a realization that in the Czechoslovak case, the Soviet model had exhausted its potential: even a "conservative" like Jiří Hendrych suggested that there was no longer a socialist model to follow (Golan, 1971: 56). The Czechoslovak reformers indeed saw themselves as creating the new socialist model, and carefully distinguished themselves from other "variations" such as the NEP or the de-collectivization of agriculture in Poland after 1956, which were not an extension of socialism but a deviation from it (Golan, 1971: 56).

Accepting the proposals as outlined, however, was a far cry from actual implementation. Aside from the existing constellation of political and economic interests inimical to change, it became increasingly obvious that the reforms required radical institutional and structural changes to work, and that introducing reforms in a piecemeal fashion was not likely to succeed (Skilling, 1976: 60). Half-measures taken were compounded by a fear of inflation and price instability. Economists, technical apparatchiki, and middle managers (hoping to gain more freedom of action) supported
the reforms; resistance came from both the higher echelons of the party (for example Oldřich Černík, planning head, and Drahomír Kolder, chief of the Economic Commission, favoured moderation) and at lower levels from party and trade union bureaucrats who naturally feared a reduction in their own levels of personal control (Skilling, 1976: 61). Skilling also recounts: “Paradoxically, some sections of the working class were apprehensive, perceiving dangers of dismissals or transfers, greater wage inequalities and the necessity of harder work” (1976: 61). In hindsight, this reaction on the part of the workers does not seem paradoxical at all, given what we now know from the fateful experiments of Gorbachev in the latter days of the Soviet Union, not to mention the recent electoral support for post-communist parties in the former Eastern Bloc, where wages and social entitlements have been eroded, currencies weakened, and inflation skyrocketed in the immediate aftermath of neoliberal economic transformation. Public opinion, to the extent that it could be inferred, was characterized initially as apathetic.

Meanwhile, as economists such as Šik criticized the “conservatives” for foot-dragging in face of the need for the acceleration of economic reform, others such as Zdeněk Mlynář became convinced of the need for accompanying political reforms. As in Poland, the political impetus for reform communism came from the tenets of Marxism, and of a thoroughgoing examination of the discrepancies between theory and practice. Mlynář summarizes this nicely:

After 1956 [in reference to the Hungarian events], intellectual
Communists, who had originally been oriented toward Stalinism, achieved a new state in their thinking, which paved the way for what is called reform communism. Through their study of Marxist literature, they discovered that in Marx, as well as in Lenin, there are many ideas which basically contradict the way Marxism is presented by the official party interpreters. Impressed in particular with Marx's humanism and his unequivocal stand in the cause of freedom and the emancipation of man—the class struggle being only a necessary instrument to attain these higher ends—critically-thinking Communists came to set Marx (and, in some cases, Lenin as well) against official ideology, which they felt had abandoned Marx's scientific methodology and his commitment to truth. This was the basic point of departure at this stage in the development of reform communism (Mlynář, 1980: 45).

As strange as this might seem in the context of the 1990s after many decades of critical, New Left, and now even post-Marxism, at the time and given the fact that such a position took hold among party activists as well as theoreticians within the Soviet bloc, this viewpoint was both revelatory and revolutionary.

**IV. The Revitalization of Scholarship and Intellectual Life**

Beginning in the late 1950s with the assault on dogmatism encouraged by the Twentieth Congress and Khrushchev's "secret speech", Czech philosophers and scholars were inspired to reinvestigate and reinvigorate traditional Marxism-Leninism. This took a variety of forms and took scholars down many paths, eventually to the resuscitation of formerly "politically incorrect" academic disciplines.

Philosophers were among the first to embark on this process. This was alarming to the authorities, as they were in both a sacrosanct and sensitive position vis-à-vis the regime as the correct interpreters of Marxist dogma (Skilling, 1976: 94-95; Williams,
They were the priests of the state religion. Czech philosophers Ivan Sviták and Karel Kosík were condemned and harassed, largely because of their taking seriously the work of prominent revisionist Marxists abroad. Like their counterparts in Western academies, these philosophers were influenced by the likes of György Lukács and Henri Lefebvre. They were not satisfied merely to condemn Stalinism, but rather sought to authenticate Marxism with reference to Marx’s earlier and more “humanistic” or “Hegelian” writings. This process of philosophical revisionism was also critical in Poland and Hungary, not only as a theoretical development in and of itself, but also because the dissidents reacted against it the 1970s and the 1980s, as will be explored in Section 2 of this study. Mediated by the writings of Masaryk, Czech phenomenology and European currents of existentialism, new ideas of socialism focused on man’s

---

12 Also influential yet not at this point well-known in the West was Polish revisionist philosopher Leszek Kołakowski.

13 Especially Marx’s *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*.

14 Especially the writings of Edmund Husserl and his Czech student Jan Patočka. Patočka was the intellectual heir of Masaryk, Jaspers, Heidegger, and Husserl, as well as of a legendary philosopher and historian of ideas. Attacked during the 1950s, he was allowed to return to university life in 1964, first as a librarian and later from 1965-1970 as a university lecturer. His role as the philosophical grandfather of contemporary Czech dissent simply cannot be overestimated. His students, friends, and colleagues (including Jiří Němec, Radim Palouš, Miroslava Holubová, Václav Havel) formed the nucleus of Charter 77, of which he himself was a signatory and spokesperson. His work is only now being translated into English (see especially Erazim Kohák (1989) *Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Writings* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press]). His complete works are being currently translated into German by the *Institut für Wissenschaften vom Menschen* in Vienna, which has a special Patočka archive.
creative and critical evolution, his self-actualization through freedom. In Slovakia philosophers Miroslav Kusý and Július Strinka moved even farther, determining that room was needed for freedom of thought and the expression of dissent.

Especially important in this context was the posthumous “rehabilitation” of Franz Kafka. Led by Eduard Goldstucker, another victim of Stalinist repression, Kafka was reinstated to his rightful place in the literary culture of the nation through a conference held at Liblice in 1963. Kafka’s views on the absurdity and alienation of the human condition, buffeted by the faceless and hostile forces of bureaucracy and technology, were seen as relevant to contemporary Czech society under “socialism”. Philosophers linked this conception with the Marxian view of alienation and the Švejkian tradition in Czech literature, where the little guy is seemingly always impotent in the face of authority...but not really. The indestructibility of humanity and human dignity, the critical spirit

---

15See for example, Karel Kosík (1976), *Dialectics of the Concrete*, trans. Karel Kovanda with James Schmidt (Dortrecht: Reidel).


17See the Czech literary classic by Jaroslav Hašek, *The Good Soldier Švejk*. Švejk is a larger-than-life icon in Czech fiction, a not-too-intelligent soldier in the Hapsburg army during the Great War. He conducts his own war against officialdom and bureaucracy with a strongly satirical combination of ironic wit and passive resistance masked by apparent patriotism and devotion to duty. Švejk is the master of the art of double talk and a close observer of human nature, who cheerfully puts up with his lot in life while undermining it at the same time. Max Brod, the close friend and supporter of Kafka, recognized Švejk as a supreme humorist, and drew parallels between Hašek and both Cervantes and Rabelais. Comic yet dark and ironic humour runs through twentieth
essential to both philosophy and science, and the positive role of human agency in the making and creating of history (contrary to dry and scientifically necessary orthodox Marxist teleology) were all important themes that continually resurfaced in this time, and form a intellectual backbone for what was to follow.\textsuperscript{18}

At the same time as this philosophical examination was taking place, sometimes supported by the party but most times inhibited by it, there were several parallel efforts to revitalize the humanities and social sciences. Attempts were made to revive sociology as a discipline, which had been previously branded as “bourgeois social science”. Similarly, there was an intense explosion of revisionist history, and an effort to create a new discipline of political science. The latter discipline would study the expansion of democracy, interest groups and mass associations, public opinion and political institutions, including those of the West (Skilling, 1976: 98-115). The academic revival of economics was closely related to proposals for economic reform, which have already been discussed.

V. The Writers' Union and the Cultural Renaissance of the 1960s

The Svaz československých spisovatelů (SCSS) or Union of Czechoslovak Writers, like its other cultural counterparts within Czechoslovakia and elsewhere, was in century Czech literary culture.

\textsuperscript{18}For greater detail and more information, see V.V. Kusin (1971), \textit{The Intellectual Origins of the Prague Spring} (Cambridge: Cambridge UP).
structure and organizational intent similar to the other centralized, Soviet-style mechanisms for both social and ideological control. On the intellectual front however, the SCSS, which had always been to some extent a haven for freer expression, or at least not formulaic participation, began to transform itself from both a literary and political perspective. It is perhaps ironic that in the most Stalinist of regimes examined here, the union had to some degree by the 1960s escaped the most serious restrictions of socialist realism, and had begun to carve out for itself greater freedom, helping to generate a tremendous expansion of cultural life, the likes of which had not been seen since the late 19th century. Its publications, both Kultúrny život in Slovakia and especially Literárni noviny (Literary News) in the Czech lands, became forums for increasingly frank exchange, political criticism and ultimately vehicles for reform. As a result, they rapidly expanded their readerships, both in scope and number. Of course, the role of the Writers' Union was not unproblematic, and especially in the early sixties as it expanded its political repertoire and tested the boundaries of what was permissible, there were many clashes with the regime, criticisms of the literary and cultural press, many changes of editorial board members, and so on. Censorship continued in an erratic and arbitrary

---

19 Gordon Skilling describes the literary press at this time as "organs for the intelligentsia as a whole", suggesting that their "outspoken content and somewhat greater freedom from restrictive controls" served to attract a much larger audience than previously—from his investigation in 1967 he reported estimated circulations of 100,000 for Literárni noviny and 30,000 for Kultúrny život (See Skilling, 1976: 64).

20 For example, in 1963 a campaign was launched against "dissident" writers following the outspoken ideas expressed by many during both the congresses of Slovak and
manner, but did not stop the freer expression of views, nor did it prevent its spread to both radio and television. It was an atmosphere of halting progress--of a new law in 1966 that proclaimed both the freedom of the press and the obligation of editors “to observe and vindicate the interests of the socialist state and society” (quoted in Skilling, 1976: 68). Finally, things came to a head at the 4th Congress of the SCSS in June 1967--an event now seen by historians as a turning point in generating the events that came to be known as the Prague Spring.

The topics of the discussion during the 4th congress are indicative of its explosive nature. This was not simply a forum for rehabilitating the cultural victims of Stalinism, or challenging openly the tenets of socialist realism as restrictive, narrow and responsible for generating much in the way of bad literature (although this was done as well). Political issues were also hot topics--as in Warsaw during the March 1968 events, the role of Eastern Bloc nations in support of Arab countries during the 1967 war with Israel was addressed by Pavel Kohout, Arnoš Lustig, and others. The centrepiece of the congress was the contribution by Ludvík Vaculík (subsequently published in English and entitled *The Relations Between Citizen and Power*). His speech is a thoroughgoing critique of the corrupting nature of power, its internal and inescapable logic of homogeneity and

domination regardless of its incarnation (socialist or not), and how its operation serves inevitably to alienate citizens, sponsoring participation based on public suspicion and self-censorship. This is especially so when one of the major tenets of procedural democracy is not met—when governments cannot peacefully be replaced. As Vaculík states:

Power is a specific human situation. It concerns both the rulers and the ruled and threatens the health of both. Experience of power through the millennia induced mankind to lay down certain operational rules. This is the system of formal democracy with its feedback controls, switches and regulators. But the interests of certain people interfere with the clearly designed mechanism of government: those who have brute force based on ownership of capital, on bearing arms, on advantageous relationships, on production monopoly, etc. Thus the rules do not prevent the evil and easy distortion of this framework—it can, at second-hand, even lead to the vulgar statement that the rules of formal democracy cause the evil. Those rules by themselves are, however, neither capitalist nor socialist; they do not lay down what should be done.

This is a human invention which on the whole makes it more difficult to govern. It sides with the ruled, but when the government falls it also protects its members from being shot. The preservation of such a formal democratic system does not bring a very firm government—it only brings the conviction that the next government might be better. The government falls, but the citizen is renewed. On the other hand, when the government remains permanently in power the citizen falls (1967: 6-7).

Two important points must be made about the SČSS specifically and the broader cultural renaissance of the late 1960s generally. First, the writers’ actions—not just in terms of speeches made at the congress, but through their press reviews, their public personae and as reflected in their collective development of a more personal and self-
reflexive literature—served as both a catalyst and lightening rod for developments in the arts and cultural scene. This was evident from the growth in independent theatrical production (including many of the plays of Václav Havel in his unique Czech adaptation of the genre of the “theatre of the absurd”), new musical currents (the Czech “big beat” and the incorporation of and experimentation with jazz traditions), and perhaps most-well known, the Czech “new wave” in cinema. Second, to the extent that there were political under- and overtones to these developments, the vast majority were supportive of socialist reform, and with few exceptions (Havel being the most notable) were not anti-communist in nature. In fact, one of the primary reasons why an officially-sanctioned

21Representative of this literature is Milan Kundera’s The Joke, Ludvik Vaculík’s The Axe and Pavel Kohout’s The Hangwoman. After the invasion of Czechoslovakia the repertoire expanded: Kundera published The Book of Laughter and Forgetting in exile in Paris (and subsequently The Unbearable Lightness of Being); Vaculík wrote The Guinea Pigs.

22The best example is Havel’s The Memorandum, written in 1965 and first performed at Prague’s Theatre of the Balustrade under the direction of Jan Grossman. Also from this period are The Garden Party and The Increased Difficulty of Concentration. The Theatre of the Balustrade was in its golden age, with impressive productions of Jarry’s Ubu Roi, Beckett’s Waiting for Godot, and Kafka’s The Trial. For personal reminiscences, see Eda Kriseová (1993), Vaclav Havel: The Authorized Biography (New York: Saint Martin’s): 40-57.

23The most well-known of the young generation of screenplay writer-directors that populated the Czech new wave were Jan Němec, Ivan Passer, Jiří Menzel, Ester Krumbachová, Věra Chytilová, Evald Schorm, Miloš Forman, and Pavel Juráček. Antonín Liehm (1973) has reflected upon this period in Closely Watched Films: The Czechoslovak Experience (White Plains, N.Y.: International Arts and Sciences Press). For a personal account, see Josef Škvorecký (1971), All the Bright Young Men and Women: of a Personal History of the Czech Cinema (Toronto: University of Toronto Press)
organization such as the Writers’ Union could play such a role is that to a large extent Czech intellectuals had funnelled their energies toward working with and then reforming the regime. Pavel Kohout and Milan Kundera, to use two famous examples, were both committed socialists and party activists. They moved away from the confining strictures of socialist realism and although they acknowledged the political shortcomings of the Gottwald era, they were nonetheless not regretful, for they still largely believed in the “beautiful idea” of socialism, even if the present incarnation had been seriously marred by a Stalinist past.

The politics of the writers, mirroring discursive developments in their own works, were definitely more self-critical and reflexive. As Marci Shore has so succinctly pointed out, they even explicitly reversed their own sense of self-definition from being “engineers of human souls” to existentially-rooted bystanders who could not promote politics through culture but through the negation of the very connection between the two. Shore also argues that the transformation of language was not only the most essential aspect of their political transformation, but that this linguistic process was transcendent.

In contradistinction to both Hruby and Shore I am arguing that prior to the invasion and the signing of the Moscow Protocols, the evolution of the Writers’ Union as an organization and of the vast majority of its members was still within a socialist discourse. It was political to the core. Reform consciousness in the 1960s did not solely have its origins in an essentially apolitical existentialist discourse as Shore contends, but rather was an exercise in testing the limits and where possible pushing the boundaries. Politics
was at the centre of the activities of the Writers' Union; in fact, the transformation of
language Shore points to can be seen as inextricably linked to this process.

VI. The Student/Youth Movements and Strahov

As in Poland and Hungary, what is perhaps most surprising about the students'
movements in the 1960s in Czechoslovakia is their striking similarity to their Western
counterparts. The younger generation felt weighed down by the conservatism of the older
generation--here represented by Stalinist attitudes, a rigidly ideological curriculum, and
their overt disapproval of new forms of cultural expression, whether it be reflected in
music, fashion, literary or cinematic style, and even sexual promiscuity. Ironically, most
of the students were committed yet independently-minded socialists, but certainly had no
difficulty in pointing out the discrepancies between the theory of Marxism-Leninism and
the actual practise of existing socialism. This generation did not participate actively and
with enthusiasm in the organs of the party as had the prior generation of students and
committed communists had after the war. They were unaffected by the immediacy of the
wartime experience and the resistance to fascism. Rather, they were disillusioned and
bored with rote political participation. Many were opposed to compulsory courses in

\[24\] It is important to remember that being permitted to attend institutions of higher
learning was considerably dependent on class background and the correct ideological
outlook of one's family. Class enemies (that is, from of a prewar bourgeois class) or their
children were generally not allowed to attend university. Thus this generation was more
ideologically predisposed via the selection process to be committed to socialism, making
their subsequent disillusion with the restrictions of the regime all the more striking.
Marxism-Leninism and required political training. They were searching for a public voice (students or youth were not well represented politically, even via official Leninist transmission belts), greater economic opportunity, better quality education, and freedom to travel.

Public meetings and demonstrations became more frequent in the mid-1960s, and often resulted in student arrests. In 1965 the traditional student festival Majáles was permitted for the first time in nine years. Students put on a massive parade, many features and slogans of which were antithetical to the regime. Moreover, the "crowning event" as it were, was the election of American poet Allen Ginsberg as King of Majáles. Ginsberg, who was just beginning a triumphal reign of poetic influence of truly counter-revolutionary proportions, was unceremoniously expelled from the country.

The response of the Party indicates exactly how out-of-touch it was with the students. Students were upbraided by a 1961 Central Committee resolution for their "wrong opinions", "anti-socialist deeds", and "indifference, apoliticalness, and

25May Day demonstrations from 1962 onward were a focus of student discontent. In October 1964 demonstrations in Václavské náměstí (Wenceslas Square) were broken up by police. See Skilling, 1976: 72.

26Ginsberg developed an almost cult-like following in the whole region among members of the sixties generation who identified strongly with his deliberately provocative and iconoclastic style, both evident in his poetry and his way of life. He was very influential on Hungarian poet István Eörsi, who translated much of his work into Hungarian, and remained a symbol of the independent yet committed poet/intellectual (Interview with István Eörsi, 22 August 1995; see also István Eörsi (1987), "On the Way to Debrecen With Ginsberg and Company", Cross Currents 6: 89-99).
irresponsibility” (Skilling, 1976: 74). Rather than deal with the students' objections, the Party made a half-hearted attempt to co-opt the students, directly supervising the activities of the Československý svaz mládeže (ČSM), or Czechoslovak Student Union. New initiatives included “reeducation through work” campaigns, the promotion of voluntary work brigades, special construction projects et cetera. In fostering right thinking, the Czechoslovak regime attempted a sort of voluntary cultural revolution, sending the students to the workers so that their young and vulnerable minds would be moulded in the correct direction. These initial strategies backfired.

By June of 1967 the party realized modification was necessary but even at the 5th ČSM Congress opposition radicals were not allowed to speak. The net result was that “the union was to remain unified and party-dominated and was to support the party’s policy rather than to defend youth interests. Its radical critics had failed in their efforts to federalize the Union and to make it a genuine spokesman of youth” (Skilling: 1976: 79). As often came to be the case during this time period, events outside the party began to overtake the situation.

A crisis erupted in 1967 as a result of events at the Strahov student dormitories in Prague. The dormitories were badly constructed and breakdowns in power (both heating and lighting) a were common from 1965 onward. In October following ten breakdowns in a row, the students poured into the streets to protest their frustration and anger. Chanting “We want light!” they were met on the way to the city centre by the public security police. The police response was severe, resulting in injuries to 13 students and 3
police officers. Mass protests and meetings followed, and finally a student commission was set up, to be headed by Professor Jiří Hálek.\textsuperscript{27} The commission findings only partly satisfied the students,\textsuperscript{28} as they were now in a heightened state of mobilization and political awareness.

\section*{VII. The Prague Spring}

The Prague Spring of 1968 happened more than ten years after the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and the Polish October of the same year. The situation in Czechoslovakia was certainly less dramatic in 1956; however, serious scholarship is still grappling with the question as to why it “took an additional ten years” for reform communism to come fully to fruition. Clearly nationalism was not as powerful in Czechoslovakia as in Poland, nor was there a history and perception of Russia as an imperial invader. As discussed above, the economic situation was initially better in the postwar period. The interwar tradition of democracy, the legacy of Masarykian humanism, and the greater popular support for socialism were influential factors that

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{27}The same Jiří Hálek who later became Minister of Foreign Affairs under Dubček and one of the founding spokespersons of Charter 77.
\item \textsuperscript{28}For example, the police intervention was described as legal, but the measures they took were deemed to be unduly harsh. No disciplinary actions were taken against either the police or the students. The report urged the students to maintain “academic order” and cited efforts to improve their living conditions and the learning environment. See Skilling, 1976: 81-82.
\end{itemize}
helped shape the contours of the Czechoslovak attempt to reform authoritarian communism from within. After the defeat of the Prague Spring, Radoslav Selucký, a reform communist in Czechoslovakia, wrote a comparison distinguishing the Czechoslovak experience from that of Poland and Hungary:

In 1956 Poles and Hungarians had a very clear idea of what they did not want. What they lacked, however, was a positive socialist programme acceptable to the general public and expressive of what the public both wanted and what they could realistically hope to get. True, the Polish communists also talked of a new model of socialism and longed for their own Polish model to acquire a more humane appearance. But the level of Marxist thinking at that time was not high enough to allow any realistic solution to be drafted....

...It is then significant that these progressive Czechoslovak communists should then have concerned themselves more with analysing the past than with categorically demanding a change in leadership. For they realized that the 'deformations' attributed to the Stalin personality cult lay, not in personalities, but in the system (emphasis in original; Selucký, 1970: 8).

Certainly much was happening in Czechoslovak society by the winter of 1967-1968. The collective results of the writers' revolt, Strahov, and the determined efforts of journalists, the technical and scientific intelligentsia, and party members of liberal orientation not only to speed up de-Stalinization but also to put pressure on further reforms took a significant toll on the party leadership. In November of 1967 Novotný had an extended stay in Moscow; and in Prague a strong reform pro-reform bloc was beginning to take shape.29 By January 5 the positions of First Secretary and President

29Within the Central Committee, Josef Smrkovský, Václav Slavík, František Kriegel, Oldřich Černík all supported reform along with Alexander Dubček. To some degree Jiří
were split, with Alexander Dubček taking the former and Novotný remaining the latter. Under public and internal party pressure, Novotný resigned from the presidency.\textsuperscript{30} His replacement, General Ludvík Svoboda, was a highly respected soldier who had served as commander of Czechoslovak forces in the USSR during WW II. By end of April six of the ten members of the former Presidium were replaced.\textsuperscript{31} The winds of the Prague Spring hardly began with the stormy winter weather inside the party, but these personnel

Hendrych and Vladimír Koucký held the balance, with Martin Vaculík representing an important defection to the reform caucus. See Dubček, 1993: 118-127; Mlynář, 1980: 70-115; and Skilling, 1976: 161-179.

\textsuperscript{30}This was partially the result of the so-called Šejna Affair. General Jan Šejna, head of the Czechoslovak Party Main Committee in the Ministry of Defence, was pro-Novotný and a personal friend of Novotný’s son. The military prosecutor had compiled considerable evidence that he was profiting from black market sales of army supplies of grass and clover. Given recently re-installed freedom of the press, the story made headlines and the scandal certainly affected public perception of the president.

\textsuperscript{31}Novotný, Hendrych, Chudík, Laštovička, and Dolanský were replaced; the newly-elected Presidium consisted of: František Barbírek, Vasil Bil’ak, Oldřich Černík, Drahomír Kolder, František Kriegel, Jan Piller, Emil Rigo, Josef Smrkovský, Josef Špaček, and Alexander Dubček. Other important appointments of this period include: Miloš Jakeš as chairman of the Party’s Central Auditing Commission; Oldřich Černík as prime minister; Josef Smrkovský as head of the National Assembly; Gustáv Husák as deputy prime minister; Ota Šík as deputy prime minister; Miroslav Galuška as new minister of education; Vladimir Kadlec as new minister of culture; and Professor Jiří Hájek (later Charter signatory and spokesperson) as the new minister of foreign affairs. Most of Dubček’s close associates remained committed to the reforms and thus suffered for it after August; the exception was Černík who remained prime minister until 1970. Husák, along with Jakeš, Kolder, Alois Indra and Vasil Bil’ak played important roles as “traitors” subsequent to the August invasion. Gustáv Husák later became First Secretary and President, and was chiefly responsible for Soviet-sponsored normalization (see below). Jakeš later became the ill-fated last First Secretary of the Party, and thus presided over its burial during the Velvet Revolution.
changes greatly facilitated the policy shift taking place.

Considerable overhaul of the leadership and the changing dynamic of the membership was possible in early 1968 partially due to demographics. As Mlynář has pointed out, the pre-1948 leaders of the party (along with their formative experiences) were now of retirement age (1980: 80-81). This lessened the possibility of internal conflict considerably, as generational turnover was inevitable. Bureaucrats were better educated, with more to gain than to lose both in class terms and individually by the reform process. With respect to society, relative social equality and time had erased the necessity of a dictatorial political approach to secure or defend the interests of any given segment or class stratum.

Given the typical snail pace of change within authoritarian communist systems, Dubček and his growing reform team moved very quickly, consolidating their hold on power with new appointments and initiating the construction of a broad reform program, to be called the Action Programme. Dubček had been pushing behind the scenes and with his party allies for some kind of program since October of 1967. Its final version was approved in April, and publicity and debate over its contents was expected given freedom of the press.

32See also Williams, 1997: 4-6.
VIII. The Action Programme and Soviet Response

The Action Programme was actually prepared and its 60 pages of text written by a team of five working groups under a commission headed by Kolder. Key participants were Zdeněk Mlynář (who wrote the section on developing socialist democracy), Ota Šik (the architect of economic reform), and Pavel Auersperg (who directed the groups organizationally and wrote on foreign policy). During his speech delivered to the Central Committee in April, 1968 where the programme was adopted, Dubček made it clear that economic success was linked to democracy. He stated:

...we are increasingly convinced that the development of democracy is the only way of strengthening a conscious discipline. We also have full confidence in our working people to be able to understand that a newly started tendency of development can be effectively supported by deeds, by purposeful work in factories, in the fields and workshops as well as in scientific thinking and the arts (quoted in Ello, ed, 1968: 9).

Dubček spoke eloquently of economic reform and of a new system of management which would raise the standard of living, a renewal of constitutional rights, and the need for an equal federation between Czechs and Slovaks. Of this last point Dubček was particularly proud, especially given his background as a Slovak participant in the National Uprising of 1944 and his continued concern over the second-class status of Slovakia within the country. At the same time, his speech was couched in the language of collective and

33Auersperg was more of a conservative ideologue than a "reformer" in the same sense as Šik and Mlynář; however, Mlynář states he was involved administratively and in the foreign policy process (remembering, of course, that even the Prague reformers were quite conservative and mindful of the Soviet hegemon in terms of their own external affairs).
continuing struggle in perfecting the ideals of Marxism-Leninism. In speaking of a socialist democracy, Dubček situated his vision within the revolutionary tradition:

We consider socialist democracy to be a system in which the working man has his own standing and value, his security, his right, and his future. It is based upon human participation, coherence, and cooperation. We wish to meet people’s longing for a society in which they can feel to be human amongst humans. This active, human integrating part of socialism, a society without antagonism, that is what we want to realize systematically and gradually, serving the people. It is a very gratifying task to serve humanity, one which has been waged by Marxist revolutionaries for more than a hundred years. We are carrying out their work and want to link up imaginatively with everything that is progressive and positive in the history of our nations (quoted in Ello, ed., 1968: 10).

Moreover, mindful of the external audience of the Soviet Union, Dubček was careful to link Czechoslovak success with “proletarian internationalism” (code for Soviet hegemony in the bloc) and the need for “intensifying cooperation” with the Soviet Union and her socialist neighbours in Eastern Europe. He reminded his audience that the “activities of world imperialism” force the “strengthening and maintenance of our armed forces” (quoted in Ello, ed., 1968: 49). In both his speech and in the wording of the programme, Dubček and the authors were careful not to raise any red flags (or perhaps lower them!) As Dubček later admitted, the content of the entire package was heretical, but they tried hard not to make it look that way (1993: 148). Even in his later address to Bloc leaders in Dresden and subsequent meetings with Brezhnev, he was careful to use the language of revision, rather than reform.

The Action Programme spelled out many facets of the reform process in detail, and outlined how it would be implemented. The main points of the document can be
summarized as follows: 1) national unity and true federal status for Slovakia; 2) a commitment to the leading role of the party as a “guarantee of socialist progress”; 3) the balancing of rights and responsibilities together with the implementation of the freedoms of assembly and association, religion, speech, movement, personal rights and property of citizens; 4) the rule of law, and a free and independent judiciary; 5) electoral reform based on free elections, the division of powers to provide checks on the role of the party vis-a-vis the state, as well as greater freedom for non-communist parties; 6) economic reform based on the protection and relative independence of private enterprises, the revival of the “positive functions of the market”; increased trade, and a new currency policy; and finally 7) a new constitution—to be completed by the end of 1969. The proposals were sweeping in scope and depth, but were carefully articulated as to draw a balance between the old model and unfettered democracy.

In Dubček’s memoirs, he describes the content of the programme as follows:

The programme declared an end to dictatorial, sectarian, and bureaucratic ways. It said that such practices had created artificial tensions in society, antagonizing different social groups, nations, and nationalities. Our new policy had to be built on democratic cooperation and confidence among social groups. Narrow professional or other interests could no longer take priority. Freedom of assembly and association, guaranteed in the constitution but not respected in the past, had to be put into practice. In this sphere, there were to be no extralegal limitations.

The programme proclaimed a return to freedom of the press and proposed the adoption of a press law that would clearly exclude

---

34That is, the use of the market as a regulatory mechanism to ensure a better match between supply and demand. To this degree, command planning would have had to have been significantly modified.
prerepublican censorship. Opinions expressed in mass communications were to be free and not be confused with official government pronouncements.

Freedom of movement was to be guaranteed, including not only citizens' right to travel abroad but their rights to stay abroad at length, or even permanently, without being labelled emigrants. Special legal norms were to be established for the redress of all past injustices, judicial as well as political.

Looking toward a new relationship between the Czechs and the Slovaks, there was to be a federalization of the Republic, full renewal of Slovak national institutions, and compensatory safeguards for the minority Slovaks in staffing federal bodies (Dubček, 1993: 149).

Dubček remained proud of the programme to the end of his days. He was adamant in both his memoirs and interviews that he never intended a dismantling of socialism as was later charged.\(^{35}\) In his view, the Action Programme was a collective achievement: an attempt at socialist renewal that was never allowed to run its intended course. He also saw it as a beginning: the first initiative in an open policy process that would revitalize both socialism and democratic life in Czechoslovakia. Perhaps the best evidence of his determination to hold onto this view is that in the early 1990s before his fatal car accident, Dubček was elected leader of the Social Democratic Party in Slovakia.

Regardless of the honorable intentions of the programme, it was nonetheless an internal CPCz document, a statement of party position. It had not been discussed with other parties or organizations (Skilling, 1976: 218) nor was it assumed that the programme would be accepted or rejected on the basis of a genuinely public debate. It

\(^{35}\)See both his memoirs, *Hope Dies Last* (1993: 147-152) and his interview with Hungarian journalist Andras Sugar, *Dubček Speaks* (1990: 36-42; 84-85; and 98-99).
did serve as a mirror for an increasingly expectant public, and for many it was either too radical or too conservative (Skilling, 1976: 218-224). The Action Programme was without a doubt a compromise document, but its published existence and the debate swirling around it was important. In a sense it can be likened to a constitution, filled with high-minded principles and much flourish, but lacking in substance and detail. But like a constitution it could serve as a higher reference point and a standard for debate, whether one was for or against its particular provisions. Unhappily, the Action Programme remained vague on how its proposals would be implemented, and even at subsequent party plenums not much meat was added to the original bones.

It is important to note also what the programme did not include: the return to political pluralism, for example, or elections in which parties of equal legal standing competed freely. Participants in the teams drafting the programme were aware of the difficulties and the contradictions posed by a number of their proposals, such as the question of reconciling transitional freedoms with a single ruling party, and the international repercussions of internal reform for the Soviet bloc. Zdeněk Mlynář later recalled this was not necessarily difficult personally, stating: “I was a reform Communist, not a non-Communist democrat. ...This meant that I quite naturally had neither the political interest, the ideological reasons, nor the personal desire to see the CPC [Communist Party of Czechoslovakia] stripped of its political power, nor did I work toward that end” (1980: 82). Mlynář goes on to explain that having another political party compete on equal footing with the communists would have lead to a self-defensive
backlash among the denizens of communist functionaries who had a stake in the single-party nature of the system. As well, he suggested that meeting society’s *objective* needs was more important than the number of parties; it was more important to rehabilitate organs in the party that guaranteed that differentiated interests would be represented in collective decision-making. Political change manipulated from above was seen as a necessary precondition to holding any form of competitive elections; the system would have to be changed by fiat from within. As contradictory as this may sound today, Dubček believed that the only way to re-vitalize socialism was through the release of a powerful *internal* engine for change. An example of this process in action was the revitalization of the *Národní fronta* (NF), or National Front.

Originally conceived after 1945 as an umbrella organization for parties in governing the country, the NF had become an increasingly stagnant and meaningless body in the two decades following the communist coup in 1948. However, under the leadership of Kriegel, the National Front was reconceived as an organization of primary political importance, a platform where political parties and social organizations would work together creatively to develop state policy. It would not be divided into a ruling party with opposing factions, nor be the site of internecine partisan struggle. The CPCz

---

36Ideologically, the goal was neither to abandon the Leninist tenet of democratic centralism, nor lessen the leading role of the party. Infusing democratic “content” into this model required the highly disciplined and regulated participation of its members where paradoxically the expression of free opinion was encouraged while factionalism was disallowed. See Williams, 1997: 15-19.
would maintain its leading role within and *through* the Front; it would no longer merely exist as a Leninist transmission belt. Dubček and particularly Mlynár thought this was possible because class antagonism no longer existed in Czechoslovakia; it was possible to speak of a *rapprochement* of social groups (Williams, 1997: 17).

Finally, the Action Programme did not make the "mistake" of constructing an independent foreign policy. The Czechoslovak reformers believed they had "learned" the lesson of Hungary in 1956, when Imre Nagy called for Hungarian neutrality and withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact in the dying days of the revolution. Not only would such a move be considered anathema to the Soviets, it was clearly not a priority for the reformers either. Domestic problems were the focus of the day--how the economy could be reset on a surer and more productive footing, and how the political system might be overhauled to achieve greater stability, freedom, and legitimacy. Although it is difficult to know the extent to which *ex-post facto* explanations come into play, clearly the Czechoslovaks knew they were up against big odds in trying to sell their program to both the Soviets and the other bloc leaders. And here they underestimated the difficulty of the task at hand, and perhaps the impossibility of their entire project. The Action Programme had been prepared without the advice or consent of their Soviet patrons, and they expressed their concern and mistrust from the outset.

The stories about the relationship between Brezhnev and Dubček are legendary. Brezhnev apparently repeated many times early on (ironically perhaps to reassure himself as well as Soviet hardliners) that, "Our Sasha has come to power in Czechoslovakia."
Everything will be all right.” He also is frequently reported to have said “Eto vashe delo-it’s your business” when in Czechoslovakia in December, 1967, thus paving the way for Novotný’s successors.\textsuperscript{37} However, certainly by the time Dubček was summoned to a meeting of Bloc leaders in Dresden on the pretext of discussing economic reform, the mood of the First Secretary of the CPSU (if ever charitable) had altered drastically.\textsuperscript{38}

On March 23 Dubček and advisors went to Dresden, where economic cooperation in the bloc would ostensibly be discussed. When he arrived, however, Dubček discovered that the only item on the agenda were the reform proposals circulating in Czechoslovakia.\textsuperscript{39} Gomułka and Ulbricht were harshest in their criticism,\textsuperscript{40} with

\textsuperscript{37}In his memoirs, Dubček said that if Brezhnev did make such a comment at their fateful December 9, 1967 meeting, it was not to him directly.

\textsuperscript{38}Brezhnev personally badgered Dubček repeatedly by letter and telephone about his unhappiness with respect to how the Czechoslovak government was dealing with “rightist forces” and “anti-socialist manifestations”. As the summer wore on, Brezhnev demanded that Dubček take “direct charge of the struggle” and later chastised him for not living up to and fully implementing the agreements reached at Čierna nad Tisou and Bratislava. For recently released translations of their correspondence and telephone conversations, see Jaromír Navrátil, ed. (1998), \textit{The Prague Spring 1968} (Budapest: Central European UP).

\textsuperscript{39}The “Group of Five” leaders were present, i.e. Walter Ulbricht as host from the DDR, Władysław Gomułka from Poland, János Kádár of Hungary, Todor Zhivkov from Bulgaria and of course Brezhnev and company from the USSR. These five nations later made up the Warsaw Pact force that invaded Czechoslovakia in August. Neither leaders Josip Broz Tito from Yugoslavia or Nicolae Ceaușescu from Romania attended the conference.

\textsuperscript{40}One can understand Gomułka’s unease, especially in consideration of student unrest in Warsaw and elsewhere, where one of their slogans was “Poland is Waiting for Her Dubček” (see Raina, 1978: 146 and 162-165). Ulbricht was one of the most conservative and long lived leaders of the Bloc; his slavishness to the Soviet line was legendary; the
Brezhnev playing the role of the worried father, concerned about the activities of the prodigal son. Following the April plenum and the adoption of the Action Programme, response of the Soviet press was distinctly unfriendly. *Pravda* described the program as a “convenient legal platform” for attacking the Communist Party, socialism, and the USSR (cited in Skilling, 1976: 223). At the CPSU plenum, the programme was denounced as imperialistic, as an effort to undermine socialism from within. At the Dresden conference and at subsequent meetings in May in Moscow and of the Group of Five in Warsaw in July, the situation in Prague was painted as counter-revolutionary. Bloc leaders were particularly concerned about undermining the leading role of the party. Increasingly liberated press reports were cited in order to provide examples of the internal chaos they feared could bring down the entire socialist edifice.

**IX. Independent Currents: The Untimely Rebirth of Civil Society**

To the extent that the Soviets and other Bloc members had legitimate cause for concern, it focused on the growth of independent currents completely out of the control or

ultimate vulnerability of his nation to the pull of the West and especially toward a united Germany has perversely proven his paranoia correct.

41The Czechoslovaks did not attend the meeting in Warsaw on July 14, as Dubček felt bound by a Presidium decision demanding that all socialist countries attend, i.e. including Romania and Yugoslavia. The meeting was originally called for July 15, but after Dubček rejected the exhortations of Hungarian First Secretary Janos Kádár to attend the meeting, it was held one day earlier. The result was a joint letter dispatched to the Czechoslovak Central Committee condemning the reforms and expressing alarm at how the situation was getting increasingly out of hand.
reach of the party-state. As spring edged toward summer, the flow of activity sped up, a multiplicity of organizations and associations sprang up, and often raced past the measured pace set by the party (Skilling, 1976: 232-237).

The breadth of these organizations and their societal penetration in such a few months is dizzying in sober retrospection. Mention has already been made of the revolutionary changes inside the SCSS; now a non-communist club of independent writers was formed within the union. Intellectuals within the Academy of Sciences were revitalizing institutions of higher learning, and the Philosophical Faculty of Charles University demanded written guarantees of academic freedom. Historical revisionism was the order of the day, with new examinations of important and hitherto ideologically banned discussions of such national events as the role of the Czech legions during the first world war, the Slovak question and the Slovak Uprising, the role of Masaryk and Beneš, and even the disputed death of Jan Masaryk in 1948.42 Organizations banned in the Stalinist 1950s, such as the Boy Scouts and Sokol clubs, were revived. Unions of scientific workers and collective farmers were organized. Various youth groups and an independent union of university students sprang up. Ethnic minorities found expression in new organizations for Hungarian and German Czechoslovak citizens respectively.

---

42In 1948 in the midst of the communist takeover, Czechoslovak Foreign Minister (and son of former president Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk) Jan Masaryk “fell” to his death from the Prague Castle. This act of defenestration continues to be debated as either murder or suicide, although Jan’s sister Alice maintained until her final days that he committed suicide as a statement of his own dissatisfaction with the government and sense of personal failure.
Moravian organizations began to suggest that a tripartite federation be established with a new, special place for Moravia alongside Bohemia and Slovakia. On the religious front, the Roman Catholic and Uniate Catholic churches demanded more freedom for their adherents.

Emerging political forces represented the greatest challenge. Attempts to resurrect the independent existence of the Social Democratic Party were problematic and subject to much negotiation under the auspices of the CPCz (with reformer Smrkovský taking the lead) and with the National Front. Smaller parties in both Slovakia and the Czech lands were reviving their membership and claiming a greater say in the activities of the National Front. In many respects, their independent existence could be controlled through the National Front. More "dangerous", however, were independent political currents represented by two organizations, the Klub angažovaných nestraníků (KAN), or Club of Non-party Engagés and K-231, an organization of former political prisoners. K-231 was complemented by a similar Slovak organization, the Organization for the Defence of Human Rights. KAN was deliberately formed as an umbrella organization to voice the political interests and engagement of non-party members, and provide an

43This was an issue of some delicacy as the party, a strong force in politics during the First Republic and after the war, was forcibly "unified" with the CPCz in 1948. CPCz officials were concerned that such a move would be retrograde, and presented a threat to socialist unity. Meanwhile, emerging social democrats argued that the unification was illegitimate, and had not been democratically ratified. As such, the party still existed legally. See Skilling, 1976: 232-235.

44Membership of K-231 was estimated to be as high as 130,000.
opportunity for political involvement. This in itself was a dangerous concept—not only was this an organization outside the CPCz; it was formulated as a kind of anti-party, disavowing any desire to establish a formal structure. In reality, the creation of KAN was both a nascent and broad-based social movement, and an important political example for a later movement of much greater importance and impact: Civic Forum. Perhaps not unsurprisingly, Václav Havel was a member.

Perhaps the most striking and memorable indication of the new openness in society was the publication of author Ludvík Vaculík’s manifesto Two Thousand Words to Workers, Farmers, Scientists, Artists, and Everyone. In the document, Vaculík decries the declining confidence of the people in the party and the state in the postwar period, and holds those in power chiefly responsible. Although he acknowledged the revival process, he stated that it had not really come up with anything new, and called for a dramatically improved Central Committee, along with an extension of the democratization process both politically and economically. Vaculík’s manifesto had a dramatic impact. It was published in four Prague newspapers, and signed by over sixty people, some of whom were ordinary farmers and workers (Skilling, 1976: 275). Vaculík obviously wanted to stir the pot with his rhetorical statement, both to alert the public of threats to democratization and mobilize it. In this respect, at least, he was successful. Unfortunately, the manifesto also resulted in several weeks worth of stinging recriminations from party officials (especially the conservatives) and a polarization of party reformers from non-party progressives. Finally, the most telling indicator of its
force is the fact that it was later cited repeatedly by the Soviets as evidence of the
dangerous dilution of the party’s leading role.

X. Čierna nad Tisou

In the final days of July, the Soviet Politburo summoned the Czechoslovak
Politburo to an unusual and unbalanced set of bilateral negotiations at Čierna nad Tisou, a
sleepy railroad town close to the Soviet border. The Soviet delegation included almost
the entire Politburo and was backed up psychologically and militarily (as were earlier
meetings in Dresden and Warsaw) by intentional and large-scale Warsaw Pact logistical
manoeuvres and exercises. Dubček’s bargaining power, not strong to begin with, was
weakened by his agreement to dismiss Czechoslovak General Václav Prchlík as head of
the Department of Defence and Security for the Central Committee (Valenta, 1991: 74).
This concession to his own and Soviet hardliners was a tactical error, and certainly
prefigured the “divide and conquer” approach of the Soviets in separating reformers from
each other by continually sowing dissention after intervention actually took place. The
Čierna negotiations underscored the romantic naiveté and inexperience of the Dubček
team; most (but not all) of those present were committed reform intellectuals and experts
convinced of the rightness of their programme and their efforts to renew socialism. Even
Zdeněk Mlynář later diplomatically admitted in his memoirs Nightfrost in Prague the
following understatement: “...none of the leading Czechoslovak reformists had any
experience in the field of foreign policy let alone practical experience with usual mutual
relations among socialist countries...." (Mlynář, 1980). Amidst the self-confident collective strength of the Soviet leaders, the Czechoslovaks were like lambs being fed to Machiavellian wolves.

As he had done previously, Brezhnev accused the Czechoslovak leadership of losing political control, endangering regional stability, and warned of the counterrevolutionary tendencies inherent in the reform process. Dubček responded with a skilful and moderate defence of the Action Programme, pledged his allegiance to both the WTO and COMECON, and suggested that the renewal of socialism inherent in it was an important example to Western communist parties. Dubček also tried to convince the Soviets that the popular upsurge in support, represented most recently by a nationwide signature campaign, indicated that he had firm political control and that the people were completely behind him.

45Vaculík’s Two Thousand Words manifesto was cited as proof, along with quotations from the newly liberalized press. Manufactured evidence, such as a letter approving the presence of Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia supposedly signed by Prague auto workers, was also produced. See Valenta, 1991: 77-78.

46Needless to say, this line of reasoning completely backfired, for identifying oneself with the will of the majority rather than to the bureaucratic elites of the party was tantamount to violating the leading role of the party. Brezhnev was reported to have said, without irony, “How can you claim that you are in control of the situation if the people sign a resolution without your prior knowledge?” (reported by Radoslav Selucký in “The Dubček Era Revisited,” Problems of Communism 24 (January-February 1975): 41. Nonetheless, Dubček could quote numbers with some certainty in terms of the popular support he enjoyed, as an Institute of Public Opinion had been established during this period. See Jaroslav A. Piekalkiewicz (1972), Public Opinion Polling in Czechoslovakia, 1968-1969: Results and Analysis of Surveys Conducted During the Dubček Era (New York: Praeger). In his memoirs, Dubček claims that with respect to the
The intimidation evident at Čierna was evident not only to Dubček but much of the population. Two days later in Bratislava, a Czechoslovak delegation met with the Group of Five. It appeared briefly that the Bratislava declaration resulted in a brokered compromise where the condemnation of the Warsaw Letter was not accepted and political means seemed to triumph over the threat of a military solution. Each communist party was left to “creatively solve the problems of further socialist development”. However, on August 13 Brezhnev ominously called Dubček to complain about the implementation of the Bratislava agreement. On August 17, just three days before WTO tanks rolled over the borders, Kádár summoned Dubček to a private meeting in Bratislava. Dubček claimed he received no direct warnings about the imminent invasion, but it is also just as likely that such a sincerely naïve optimist looking to reduce tension with his allies was not exactly searching for clues (Dubček, 1993: 169-171). It was never clear to him from either Čierna or Bratislava how far he was supposed to retreat in his reform program in order to satisfy the Soviets; indirect communication, allusion and ambiguity were the

Action Programme, 76% were in favour; 7% against. He also stated that at this time public opinion was a “decisive political factor” on which he definitely relied (see Dubček, 1993: 163). See also Skilling’s chapter “Non-Communists and Public Opinion” in Czechoslovakia’s Interrupted Revolution (1976: 526-562).

The Bratislava declaration was a contradictory document, citing the right of a socialist state to pursue its own form of socialism while at the same time granting other socialist states the right to intervene if counter-revolution was threatened. Dubček attempted to dispel the confusion and provide his own interpretation of the wording by implying in his public address following the declaration that liberalization would continue and was supported. See Williams, 1997: 103.
trademarks of the system. Too often in this latter-day wonderland, words meant precisely what the authors intended them to mean and nothing else. Due to this lack of commonality of meaning, burdened down with the obloquy of ideology, no one could really clearly understand anyone else. The complete historical trajectory of Soviet decision-making in the final days is still being written, but historians generally concur that the decision to impose a military solution was not made until days before the invasion.\footnote{For an updated discussion of the Soviet decision to intervene and of a critique of earlier explanations, see Williams, 1997: 29-38. Although the crucial shift in Soviet thinking probably occurred mid-August, they were nonetheless preparing for a potential military solution well in advance of the final decision.}

**XI. Crisis: Soviet Mobilization and the Moscow Protocols**

On August 20, 1968 as the Presidium was in session, about 250,000 soldiers (approximately 30 divisions) from the WTO nations comprising the Group of Five, crossed the Czechoslovak borders in the north, south, and east.\footnote{The vast majority of troops--about 170,000--were Soviet. Polish, East German, Hungarian, and Bulgarian troops were present in token form to convey the message of bloc solidarity, not because they were necessary militarily.} Other than for the conservative anti-reformers who were supposed to simultaneously engineer a political coup,\footnote{For example, Indra, Kolder, and Bil’ak. They were supposed to constitute the core of a replacement government, which would have helped the Soviets in their efforts to dress up the invasion as of a request for fraternal assistance. However, they were not able} the invasion was a complete surprise. From a military point of view, the
operation was efficient and successful. Within 36 hours the Warsaw Pact armies had complete control of Czechoslovak territory, and they encountered no serious resistance.

From a political standpoint, even with the Soviet viewpoint in mind, it was in many respects short-term disaster, a medium-term success, and in the long run the costs associated with such engagement caused the critical reexamination of the relationship of the USSR to the Bloc. This last process was so underestimated by Western sovietologists that it helps to explain their dumbfoundedness and surprise at the unwillingness of the declining USSR to entertain such a course in 1989. In the short term, the invasion was problematic because the expected alternative government failed to materialize, and there was much initial confusion inside the country. Thus it was not easy for the Soviets to construct a case of counter-revolution against Dubček and his supporters, as they had been able to do with the swift accession of the Kádár regime in Hungary in 1956. After all, the Czechoslovak Presidium declared that the invasion “contradicts not only all principles of relations between socialist countries but also the basic norms of international law” (quoted in Dubček, 1993: 181). From its earliest moments, the invasion clearly had extremely low support from the general public, and the international media was filled with images of peaceful Czechoslovak protestors attempting to reason to garner the necessary Central Committee support to do so, and the final declaration of the Presidium meeting from the evening of August 20-21 described the invasion for what it was, and claimed that the entry of troops had been made “without the knowledge of the President of the Republic, the chairman of the National Assembly, the chairman of the government, or the First Secretary of the CPCz Central Committee....” (Skilling, 1976: 716; see also Valenta, 1991: 148-150 and Williams, 1997: 112-143).
with ordinary Soviet soldiers who were certainly politically unprepared for what they were encountering. Internationally, the invasion was met with the predictable level of condemnation, but perhaps the most devastating and far-reaching critique came from within the communist camp, as had the reform process itself. The ruling communist parties in Albania, Romania, China, and Yugoslavia opposed the invasion. Most importantly, a majority within the powerful French and Italian communist parties were opposed to the invasion, and the Italians in particular strongly defended the right of any communist party to define its own path to socialism. Symbolic but nonetheless important resistance came from within the invading states. Especially in Poland and Hungary, fledgling oppositionists perceived the invasion as the death knell for reform communism. Their protests against the invasion were to signal the beginning of a very different political alternative that would grow up in the next twenty years of authoritarian communism.

The Czechoslovak government offered no military resistance--which in any case would have been costly and futile--but did offer some level of political resistance. The leaders themselves were essentially arrested and taken into “protective custody”--Dubček later described this as “kidnapping”. The net result was that all high-ranking leaders were carted off to Moscow and coerced into signing an agreement that legitimized recent events, the Moscow Protocol. Whether perceived as diktat or sellout, both sides had important issues at stake. Although the “negotiations” were uneven to say the least, many of the Czechoslovak participants sincerely believed that they needed to cooperate in order
to salvage the Prague Spring. The Soviet leaders were concerned to have written concessions, especially in light of the failed coup and the extraordinary party congress then taking place in Prague. In the end, only František Kriegel refused to sign. All those involved, however, were permitted to return to Prague (once a gag order had been placed on revealing the contents of the protocol) and at least initially, to their former posts.

XII. Normalization

"Normalization" in the Czechoslovak context refers to the process after the Soviet-sponsored invasion whereby authoritarian communism was reestablished along its originally rigid and Stalinist line. Power was consolidated in the hands of an old communist guard dogmatically loyal in all respects to the dictates of Moscow, and the party was effectively purged of all traces of attempted reform. This was not an immediate

51 Motives and explanations for signing as well as their personal reminiscences of the Moscow negotiations are offered by both Dubček (1993) and Mlynář (1980).

52 The military intervention itself was timed to prevent the meeting of the "Extraordinary" Fourteenth Party Congress, originally scheduled to begin September 9. What happened (without the knowledge of the captives in Moscow) is that via a broadcast appeal, over two thirds of the already-elected delegates convened in secret in the industrial district of Vysočany. Their dramatic meeting has been documented by one of the key participants, Jiří Pelikán (1971), The Secret Vysočany Congress (London: Penguin). The Congress conceived of itself as legal forum, operating within normal party procedures, and a true reflection of the views of Czechoslovak communists. The records of the Congress give testimony to the fact that the Prague Spring was indeed an exercise in socialist renewal and condemned the invasion as destructive of this process.
result of the signing of the Moscow protocols; in fact, it occurred gradually over the next few years. In fact, normalization seemed at the beginning like the slow return to normal life in Czechoslovakia after the upheavals of tanks in the streets, secret meetings, work stoppages, and so on. On another level, the completion of the normalization process represented the "medium-term success" of the invasion alluded to above.

Certainly the signatories of the protocols, including the "Big Four", did not immediately lose their positions. Dubček returned as a weakened leader, but he was still in office. It was a time of considerable contradiction; Moscow could not win the hearts and minds of the country even though it occupied and controlled militarily the public and political face of society. However, the Prague regime could not effectively win support for its compromise with Moscow either (Skilling, 1976: 813). It certainly was not immediately clear to outsiders or insiders that the reform process was completely dead. Key leaders such as Ota Šik and Jiří Hájek were removed from their posts, as was Jiří Pelikán, an activist in the 14th Congress. By November Zdeněk Mlynář resigned. At the same time a treaty was ratified by the National Assembly legitimizing the "temporary" presence of the occupation forces, Dubček was getting pressured from below by reformers within the party who wanted to see as much of the Action Programme as possible preserved (Skilling, 1976: 814-816).

Resistance to the invasion was initially determined and sustained, and above all
peaceful. In late November, 1968, university students held a successful 3-day strike in support of the Action Programme, and forwarded their own program of "Ten Points". Large mass demonstrations were held on the important anniversaries of October 28 and November 7. Trade unions supported the students and the demonstrations. Behind closed doors, party intrigue continued against the backdrop of Moscow's dissatisfaction at Prague's many failures. In retrospect, Dubček's attempt to square a political circle by appeasing the Soviet Union and maintaining the semblance of carrying out reforms, seemed doomed to failure. But this was not immediately evident, although two distinct events brought the hopelessness of the situation into sharper focus.

In January, 1969 a young student named Jan Palach attempted suicide by self-immolation in Wenceslas Square in the heart of Prague. He demanded the abolition of censorship and (ironically) the banning of the distribution of Zprávy (News). This solitary act of self-imposed violence was highly symbolic and not only stimulated the spirit of national resistance but provided the country with a martyr whose importance was

---

54 Students demanded freedom of assembly and association; freedom of research and literary and cultural expression; and personal and legal security. See Skilling, 1976: 816-817.

55 October 28 is the anniversary of the founding of the Czechoslovakia in 1918; November 7 was the anniversary of the Russian Revolution in 1917.

56 Zprávy was the major propaganda tool of the occupation forces. It was a Czech-language newspaper distributed by the troops which polemically outlined the WTO position, and ran from August 30, 1968 to May 10, 1969.
amplified exponentially over the next two decades. Palach was immediately compared to the Protestant martyr Jan Hus, who had been burned at the stake in 1415 for his heretical beliefs by the Catholic Church at the Council of Constance. The second event, the victory of the Czechoslovak ice hockey team over the Russians in the World Cup in Stockholm, “led to massive popular demonstrations in many cities and to violent actions, in several places, against Soviet installations, including Aeroflot offices in the centre of Prague” (Skilling, 1976: 819). This latter political crisis served as a partial pretext for the ultimate removal of Dubček from power. The Soviet Politburo went into an emergency session and decided that this incident could be used to effect a major shift in political personnel in Czechoslovakia (Williams, 1997: 199-200).

A declaration condemning the “mass hooligan attacks” by “rightist extremists and counter-revolutionaries” was delivered via letter to Prague via Soviet deputy foreign minister Vladimir Semyenov. Defence Minister Marshal Grechko arrived at Milovice, the main Soviet base, and rumours swirled about of a possible coup d'état by high-ranking Czechoslovak army officers (Williams, 1997: 200). Dubček was finally forced to yield power. At a Central Committee plenum in April he resigned as First Secretary and proposed Slovak Gustav Husák as his successor. Dubček was initially still in the

---

57One can argue that the Velvet Revolution in fact began with activities surrounding the twentieth anniversary commemoration of Palach’s death in January, 1989. The square in front of the philosophical faculty of Charles University was later re-named by the demonstrating students of 1989 “Palach Square”. His name and the “honour” of his sacrifice were invoked often by the dissidents and activists in the opposition. See McRae, 1997: 21-25.
Presidium, however he was demoted to the position of president of the Federal Assembly. Smrkovský was excluded entirely. Because the press was tightly controlled, Dubček himself was perceived as the initiator of the change, and the energy required for popular resistance had already been spent, no great opposition materialized.

It was the beginning of the end for Dubček, and his demise can be seen as a metaphor for the failure of reform communism as a whole. In January of 1970 his removal from Prague was assured through his appointment as Ambassador to Turkey. Not long afterward his expulsion from the Party prompted his recall to Prague. Eventually he was completely silenced and demoralized, and until 1989 worked as a mechanic in a forest products factory outside Bratislava. Unlike the victims of the Stalinist purges and the Slánský show trials of the 1950s, he was neither tried nor imprisoned. However, he was under close surveillance and his movement and contact with others seriously restricted. He was also not politically "rehabilitable"—as late as 1988 editors virulently attacked him as "that political wreck from 1968" (McRae, 1977: 43). Reform communism was too dangerous to be seriously engaged with, even as glasnost and perestroika were the order of the day in Moscow.

Slovak dissident Milan Šimečka wrote a book about the normalization period entitled The Restoration of Order in which he dissects the regime rubric of re-establishing order over disorder. The "master link" in the chain on which effective normalization depended was the restoration of the "leading role of the party", which, above all other errors committed in Soviet eyes, was the gravest mistake on the part of the Czechoslovak
reformers. The methods were precise, exacting a heavy toll on the communist party reformers identified with the ideals of the Prague Spring. The party conducted a major “screening” of all party members, the purpose of which “was not the creation of some new, ideologically right-minded membership (to do so would be to reduce the party to a tiny sect and to destroy the illusion of mass membership), but simply to turn the membership into what it used to be: an apolitical conglomerate of the most varied concealed denominations, united only by obedience and a readiness to fulfil its role as a trustworthy receiver of instructions and directives” (Šimečka, 1984: 37). The purpose was not the instillation of right-thinking or correct ideology, but rather more cynically the replacement of activism with passivity. Screening was followed by expulsion, a tragic and soul-destroying occurrence for many who had been brought up in the party, and had dedicated their lives and energies to it and its regeneration. In turn, many were blacklisted, subject to “occupational persecution”, and various forms of “civilized violence”. These measures included police harassment, interrogation, surveillance, and house searches. All of this was accomplished within a framework of rules that provided the facade of procedural justice. Finally, the restored order created its own reality, ideologically re-representing the Prague Spring as a counter-revolution, and perpetuating the myth that stationing Soviet troops was “temporary” (1984: 121).

58Šimečka describes this deprivation of meaningful work, a form of economic persecution where targeted individuals were not allowed to make use of the skills or training, but still within the strict boundaries of “humanitarian principles”: “none of the victims were forced to starve” (1984: 66).
The party purges that define the Husák period of normalization began in earnest in the 1970, and lasted for about four years. The results were staggering: approximately 327,000 members of the party were expelled; another 150,000 left voluntarily. The overall membership of the party was effectively cut by one third. The purge was less intense in Slovakia. About two thirds of Writer's Union members lost their jobs, 900 university teachers were fired, and 21 academic institutions were closed. A telling result of the depth and breadth of the purges is that in 1971, for the first time since 1821, no literary journals (originally the sponsors of the Czech national revival in the 19th century and long the bastions of critical national Czech culture) were published. Intellectual life was frozen. In the twenty years following 1968, over half a million people emigrated (in a country of just 15 million). According to law, their leaving was a criminal act, and they were forbidden to return. At this time Louis Aragon reputedly referred to Czechoslovakia as the "Biafra of the soul".

On a social-psychological level, the regime offered its citizenry an unwritten and unspoken contract. Like the Kádárist "compromise" or the labour peace "bought" by Gierek, in exchange for political silence, labour quiescence, and of a limited form of social cohesion, citizens were promised the bribe of modest improvement, a decent standard of living, and stable employment. This Faustian bargain was difficult, however, to maintain indefinitely. Moreover, it required that each citizen accept the state lie and

magnify its significance through silence and adaptation. Havel was later to call this process “living a lie” and his ability to construct new political alternatives ultimately depended on his ability to shatter the circular logic of normalization. Finally, on a material level, the extension of staunch economic orthodoxy for another twenty years meant that normalization generated other equally unpleasant legacies: an obsolete and completely inflexible industrial base, increasing corruption and bureaucratic rent-seeking, no meaningful reinvestment in research, development and scientific/technical knowledge, and the serious environmental impact of decades worth of industrial toxins.60

XIII. The Underground Music Scene and the Trial of PPU

Normalization was a pervasive and ongoing process throughout Czechoslovak society, and the arenas of music and culture were certainly not immune. The underground music scene was of particular political importance for at least two reasons: first, it represented the initial stirrings of alternative culture in the post-1968 period; and second, the arrest and trial of the underground rock group the Plastic People of the Universe (PPU, or “The Plastics”) was the catalyst for the formation of Charter 77.

The regime was able to commit “cuturecide”61 in the musical arena largely via its chief tool of normalization repression, the requalification exams. Anna (Naninka)


61 I am indebted to Anna (Naninka) Vaniček for this phrasing.
Vaníček has documented this process in her 1997 master’s thesis *Passion Play: Underground Music in Czechoslovakia, 1968-1989*. She recounts how official music-making was controlled by a series of music agencies in every large city or region under the aegis of the party-state. The ability to perform and receive payment was coordinated through the agencies; in order to qualify as a professional or an amateur musician one had to pass an exam and undergo an audition process (1997: 38-48). In the early 1970s, all musicians were required to pass requalification exams, an extremely political process where their politics, song lyrics, and even mode of dress were as critical as their musical ability. In 1973 the Musician’s Union laid off 3,000 of its members; rock music in particular was decimated to the point where only a handful of officially-sanctioned bands were permitted.\footnote{\cite{Ryback1990}} Guidelines were set up, cultural inspectors attended concerts to ensure compliance, and intimidation and censorship were pervasive (1997: 54-55). Vaníček cites Radim Hladík, an official musician working during this period (and who was a member of the examination commission in Prague), who commented rather cynically: “There were 3 things one could do in this situation. Either try to continue playing without pissing off the regime, emigrate, or resign professional status” (1997: 54).

It is within this context that a musical “underground” emerged in the mid-1970s. The musical underground, however, was not simply an agglomerated of highly

\footnote{Rock music was viewed as particularly insidious as it represented the imperialistic influence of the West on culture, not to mention the problems of disaffected youth generally. See Timothy W. Ryback (1990), *Rock Around the Bloc: A History of Rock Music in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*.}
idiosyncratic individuals who sought to defy authority in the name of rock music. Rather, over time and under the direction and influence of counter-cultural intellectuals, the underground began to conceive of itself as a constitutive element in an alternative culture and eventually nascent civil society. This is clear in the writings of both Václav Havel and Václav Benda, as well as in the thought and action of the underground’s premier theorist, Ivan Jirous.

Ivan Jirous used the term “second culture” to describe the non-conformist and unofficial music-making in which he was involved. However, it is not accidental that playwright-dissident Václav Havel and Jirous were friends, and the two were mutually influential. Havel took culture as a departure point for his theorizing about politics; Jirous applied politics to his artistic endeavours, effectively stage-managing political meaning out of counter-cultural activity. Most notably Jirous was both the artistic director and manager of the band, Plastic People of the Universe (PPU). Musically, the PPU were not necessarily the “best” the Prague underground had to offer, but under Jirous’ direction they became the centre of attention, not only to the small and largely Prague-based community of fledgling dissidents, rock aficionados and 60s generation

---

leftovers marginalized socially and politically by normalization, but unfortunately also to the *Státní bezpečnost* (StB), or State Security. The PPU combined a psychedelic sound very reminiscent of the Velvet Underground with ritual theatre; Jirous consciously linked the “authenticity” and “honesty” of the PPU with its politics, and the fact that its music was not officially sanctioned.64 Thus the party-state was not involved in corrupting or manipulating the band; the music itself was free from compromise and commodification. Although Jirous’ views may or may not have reflected the feelings of the bands’ members, he was definitely a profoundly moving force, encouraging many artists besides the PPU, and wrote extensively in samizdat books and underground journals (Vaniček, 1997: 79-82; Wilson, 1996).

In 1976, following a music festival/concert Jirous held to celebrate his own wedding, about 20 musicians were arrested and over a hundred people who attended were interrogated (Skilling, 1981: 8). Following a media campaign of denunciation and criticism, three organizers of a 1975 PPU concert and lecture by Jirous were arrested, tried, and convicted in a farcical trial in Pilsen. Later, several band members were tried and convicted in Prague. The authorities linked the musicians and their music to gross indecency, drug use, alcoholism, and described the PPU as a public disturbance, morally offensive, and opposed to the established order. Song lyrics were cited as

---

64Not surprisingly, Jirous styled his relationship to the PPU after Andy Warhol’s relationship with the Velvet Underground. He was simultaneously an artist, critic, and theoretician.
incontrovertible proof; underground rock music was depicted as heinous and conspiratorial. The result was the cultural equivalent of the political show trials of the 1950s.

The Prague intellectual community responded quite quickly. Havel approached others of like mind and considerable stature, and together they appealed first privately to the President, then to the media and finally to German writer Heinrich Böll (Riese, 1979; Skilling 1981). Böll responded positively, impressed that the prominent intellectuals had taken a strong and public stand against the actions of the regime; he presciently recognized a “new orientation” among the dissenters, and his communication opened up an avenue for discourse with other European intellectuals and writers that would continue right up to the 1989.

The trial of Jírous and three of the PPU band members went ahead in a perfunctory manner typical of such affairs. The members were able to defend themselves against the charges and they and their lawyers were given the opportunity to speak. The verdict, however, was determined at the highest political levels, and the presiding judge stated that the accused had conclusively been proven guilty, and “had organised and participated in performances from 1971 to 1976 which had ‘manifested their disrespect of

65Signatories included poet and former Writers’ Union president Jaroslav Seifert, literary historian Václav Černý, philosophers Jan Patočka and Karel Kosík, and writers Havel, Ivan Klíma and Pavel Kohout. All had played a part in the cultural and intellectual renaissance represented by the Prague Spring and were expelled from official life during normalization. Not only were they leading figures well-known in Czech society, but each was both known and published abroad.
society and their contempt of fundamental moral laws’’ (Skilling, 1981: 12). Havel attended the trial in place of one of the family members, and later wrote an essay (“The Trial”) which was widely circulated in Czechoslovakia, and later translated into English in *The Merry Ghetto* which was included in the Plastics’ first album, Egon Bondy’s *Happy Hearts Club Banned*. With his usual sense of the absurdity of any given situation, Havel perceived a key shift happening beneath the predictable trial drama. He described how although everyone expected the trial to turn out as intended with the conviction of the defendants, the process took on the nature of a relentless dramatic game, one in which all the participants were forced to play their roles but in so doing ironically represented the complete opposite. He states:

The players in this spectacle found themselves in a paradoxical situation. The more candidly they played their role, the more clearly they revealed its unpremeditated significance, and thus they gradually became co-creators of a drama utterly different from the one they thought they were playing in, or wanted to play in (1991: 103).

---

66The term “merry ghetto” was coined by Jiříous to describe the Czech cultural underground; it gives some sense of a) the closed or marginal nature of the alternative cultural community; and b) the fact that its “members” were involved often for less than serious reasons. Pervasive humour, partying, and general entertainment were not only survival strategies, but also a key form of everyday resistance to the regime.

67From 1977 onward, Paul Wilson played an instrumental role in recording, marketing, and distributing the music of the PPU abroad. He was a vocalist for the band, but as a Canadian national was expelled rather than tried. Given the fact that Wilson became the most prominent translator of Havel and many others, and a tireless organizer for Chartists abroad, this was probably a major error on the part of the authorities! Wilson was not allowed back into the country until late November of 1989, when the Velvet Revolution was in mid-swing. (Wilson, 1995; see also McRae, 1997).
Thus the public prosecutor, supposedly the guardian of societal interests and representing the forces of law and morality, *in fact* was the “symbol of an inflated, narrow-minded power, persecuting everything that does not fit into its sterile notions of life, everything unusual, risky, self-taught, and unbribable, everything that is too artless and too complex, too accessible and too mysterious, everything in fact that is different from itself” (1991: 103). Likewise, Ivan Jirous and his friends did not condemn those who condemned them. Despite the efforts of the officials to represent the accused as “repulsive, long-haired hooligans”, the PPU ultimately and unintentionally personified the need for self-determination and personal freedom. Finally, the judge was not the “objective arbiter” but tragically symbolized the incapacity of the judiciary to maintain its own independence vis-à-vis the party-state.

For Havel, this facade of justice and objectivity nonetheless began to appear as the smokescreen clouding up what was really going on in the trial:

[It was] an impassioned debate about the meaning of human existence, an urgent questioning of what one should expect from life, whether one should silently accept the world as it is presented to one, or whether one has the strength to exercise free choice in the matter; whether one should be “reasonable” and take one’s place in the world, or whether one has the right to resist in the name of one’s own human convictions (1991: 105).

Perhaps it took a particularly sensitive playwright to effectively juxtapose the absurd unreality of staged event with the absurd reality of everyday life in Husák’s “normalized” Czechoslovakia. In this essay, however, Havel describes a sea-change in attitudes that has been confirmed and reconfirmed to me by interviews with Charter 77 activists and
other Western interlocutors (Skilling, 1981; Skilling, 1994; Urbanek, 1995; Klíma, 1995; Wilson, 1996; Hejdánek, 1997; Šiklová, 1997). The trial presented the “challenge by example”, an idea Havel later developed as the now-famous idiom “living in truth” in his landmark essay, “The Power of the Powerless”. Caution in one’s actions against the regime and wariness in dealing with others now seemed petty to Havel (1991: 106). The trial became a critical “shared experience” in the founding of a “special, improvised community”--a greater amount of trust, communication, and solidarity grew from those who bore witness, not just inside the courtroom, but more obviously among those who had congregated outside who were not permitted to enter. And with not a small amount of moral courage, Havel summed up the possible options at this point:

In this situation, all reserve and inner reticence seemed to lose its point; in this atmosphere, all the inevitable “buts” seemed ridiculous, insignificant, and evasive. Everyone seemed to feel that at a time when all the chips are down, there are only two things one can do: gamble everything, or throw in the cards (1991: 108).

Trite as it may sound, the founding impulse for Charter 77 was this collective sense of “gambling everything”.

XIV. The Helsinki Accords and Charter 77

As Skilling has aptly pointed out, “Charter 77" referred not only to the document issued by a new coalition of dissidents in January, 1977, but it also “designated a movement for human rights”(1981: 19). This is useful description, as the promotion and protection of the human rights of Czechoslovak citizens was the official raison d’être of
the organization. By focusing on legally ratified rights, the Chartists were brilliantly engaging in the same strategy of self-limitation as the Poles in the founding of KOR, and as the Hungarian intellectuals would later employ in their engagement with the Kádár regime.

In 1975 Czechoslovakia along with other authoritarian communist countries in the region endorsed the Final Act of the Helsinki Accord. Article VII, subtitled "Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion, or belief" states:

The participating states will respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.

They will promote and encourage the effective exercise of civil, political, economic, social, cultural and other rights and freedoms all of which derive from the inherent dignity of the human person and are essential for his free and full development.

Within this framework the participating states will recognize and respect the freedom of the individual to profess and practise, alone or in community with others, religion or belief acting in accordance with the dictates of his own conscience (reprinted in Daniels, 1994: 256). 68

Czechoslovakia also ratified two international United Nations covenants on human rights which had ironically been originally signed in 1968 after the Soviet invasion. The idea for creating a human rights group to monitor the implementation of the accords followed the emergence of similar groups in Poland and the Soviet Union. Those involved in the PPU trial clearly wanted to move beyond the specifics of that case, while building on the

68 All the countries of the Eastern Bloc signed at Helsinki, save for Albania.
momentum of their increased communication and growing solidarity. It was also an
attempt to bring together a number of disparate yet important initiatives of the early 1970s
with a new sense of vitality and cohesion.69 After eight years of normalization and the
realization that reform communism was dead in all its variations, the organizers were also
able to create a remarkable consensus, which was represented in the wording of its
founding document, as well as by the representative nature of the list of signatures, 239 in
all. It is also important to note that the same consensus and conclusions, especially
regarding the death of reform communism, occurred in tandem with the formation of
KOR in Poland.70

The founding document of Charter 77, the declaration of 1 January 1977,
comprehensively details the litany of violations of both Helsinki and the UN covenants.71
Freedom of expression is described as illusory, given that “tens of thousands of our
citizens” are prevented from work in their professions because their views differ from

69For example, the independent existence of samizdat presses (Vaculík’s Edice Petlice
or Padlock Press), the recent founding of Havel’s Edice Expedice or Expedition Press, the
independently-mounted performances of Havel’s plays (for example, Audience and The
Beggar’s Opera), the underground music scene, Ladislav Hejdánek’s philosophy seminar,
and so on.

70Although there is no organizational comparison in Hungary at this time, Kis and
Bence were writing Toward An East European Marxism and were in the process of
questioning whether or not Marxist critical political economy relevant to the Hungarian
situation was possible at all (hence the samizdat title of a similar work, co-written with
György Márkus, entitled Ist Eine Politische Ökonomie Überhaupt Möglich?)

71This founding document and many of the early documents of the Charter that were
translated and disseminated widely abroad can be found in Skilling, 1981: 209-327.
those officially sanctioned. Likewise, “countless young people” are prevented from attending university because of their own views or those of their parents. Public expression is curtailed by “centralised control of all the communications media and publishing and cultural institutions”. Freedom of religion is systematically undermined, political and civil liberties have been curtailed or eliminated, and there is no recourse to authorities other than the party-state. Freedom of association is effectively forbidden given that no groups in society, such as trade unions, can pursue the interests of their members independently and without recourse to political sanction. In short, legal norms are condemned for their lawlessness, arbitrariness, and disrespect of civil rights.

In the declaration, Charter 77 announces its inception publicly as “a free informal, open community of people of different convictions, different faiths and different professions united by the will to strive, individually and collectively, for the respect of civic and human rights in our own country and throughout the world....” (Skilling, 1981: 211). From the beginning, Charter 77 was a “virtual” organization—no rules, permanent bodies, formal membership, fundraising capacity, or legal existence. Anyone who embraced its ideas or participated in its work was essentially a member; although the core group remained the signatories, spokespeople, and those who wrote and disseminated its documents. Thus its ideals were broad, its membership open, but it was nonetheless largely an intellectual phenomenon. Considerable diversity was represented by people of very different viewpoints and backgrounds.

Skilling (1981) dissected the membership of Charter 77 to include a number of
imprecise groupings. First, there were the “ex-communists”, a few elite party-state functionaries who had wholeheartedly supported reform in 1968 and were stripped of power and privilege in the ensuing period of normalization. Most prominent were Zdeněk Mlynář (former Central Committee and CC Vysočany member) and Jiří Hájek (former foreign minister and one of the three first Charter spokespersons). Although some of the “E-club” still held firm their views about the possibilities of the 1968 Action Programme, others had moved well beyond reform communism, envisaging true political pluralism as the only legitimate starting point for change. A third tendency wanted to remain close to critical Marxism and international (i.e. Euro) communism, and included Jaroslav Šabata and František Kriegel. Related ideologically were the socialists, of both the democratic and revolutionary variety, including historian Rudolf Battěk, student leader Jiří Müller, and Šabata’s son-in-law Petr Uhl. Religious groupings roughly representative of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren and the Catholic church were also evident, and over time freedom of religious expression gained greater attention from Charter signatories, and in turn helped to attract more signatures. Of course, many Chartist did not identify with one tendency or grouping, but generically supported the aims of the movement, and supported different declarations and positions independently. Thus Ladislav Hejdánek has been described as a “Protestant” philosopher (a label which he now rejects) yet supported socialist aims and declarations. Havel was never a communist, was only peripherally involved in the Prague Spring, made his living as a playwright, but at times described himself as a socialist.
The problem with labelling Chartists as representing tendency X or Y is that they were really trying to forge a new kind of consensus politics, not built around a traditional left-right axis. Rather, the goal was to emphasize points of agreement rather than disagreement. Over and over again, Charter 77 defined itself not as an organization but more of a movement, an umbrella under which tolerance for different views would be cultivated and various initiatives proposed. Thus the organizational design of the Charter was made to cohere with its anti-ideological bias and its democratic and pluralistic

The emphasis on agreement and on forging a new political road helps to explain why in the post-1989 period there has been a heated and polemical debate about the meaning and importance of Charter 77 among and between its former supporters and detractors. After the Velvet Revolution, consensus was no longer a perceived necessity, and simmering disagreements over the role of the organization/movement suddenly erupted in an orgy of self-examination and self-criticism. For example, Czech historians Vilém Prečan and Milan Otáhal have conducted a vituperative series of published exchanges on whether Charter 77 was sufficiently political or confrontational. See Milan Otáhal (1992), “Revolution der Intellektuellen? Die tschechischen Intellektuellen und der Totalitarismus,” Jahrbuch 1991/92 (Berlin: Institute for Advanced Study): 258-272), and (1994), Opozice, Moc, Společnost 1969-1989: Příspěvek k dějinám normalizace (Praha: Maxdorf, Ústav pro soudobé dějiny [Institute of Contemporary History]), and Vilém Prečan (1995), Novoroční filipika 1995: Disent a Charta 77 v pojetí Milana Otáhala (Praha: Quodlibet, Ústav pro soudobé dějiny). Journalist and former Charter signatory Jan Urban has chastized Czechs for ignoring the contribution of the Chartists yet has also criticized his fellow-dissidents for not having expanded earlier from a narrow human-rights strategy into a more overtly political opposition. Others have made light of its political intent or impact entirely. Ludvík Vaculík has been widely quoted as describing Charter 77 as “an uprising of characters, not political convictions”. Many of these ex post facto explanations and critiques are obviously coloured by the perceptions of the participants themselves, and in my view miss the key point that the Charter was trying to do a different form of politics differently. See Jan Urban (1997), “Robin Hood and His Merry Band 20 Years Later,” Transitions 3.3: 9-11. On the reflections of Chartists on the twentieth anniversary of its founding, see (1997) Charta 77: očima současníků (Doplněk: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny).
Attempts were made to be representative, especially in the selection of spokespersons. However, Charter documents, including the founding declaration, were discussed beforehand, collectively written, and later circulated, commented, and re-commented on. It is thus possible to speak of the collective position of the Charter, and of its aims and priorities as a whole.

The regime certainly picked up on the fact quickly that the Charter was a danger to the stability of the regime, despite its self-limited aims. In late January of 1977, a "voluntary" petition was circulated by the authorities condemning Charter 77--it became known as the "Anti-Charter". All state employees were required to sign the document, and those who did not faced severe repercussions. Despite harassment, interrogation,

---

73Skilling quotes Ladislav Hejdánek who spoke of the Charter as "a platform for people of different beliefs, different professions, different origins and different aims"; he was convinced that had it been differently structured, for example along the lines of a political party, it could not have lasted ten years (Skilling, 1989: 54-55).

74The first three spokespersons, respected philosopher Jan Patočka, independent playwright Václav Havel, and former communist Jiří Hájek, can be said to be roughly representative of the intellectual community, alternative culture, and reform communism, three important strands of the Charter. Throughout the existence of the Charter, the position of spokesperson rotated each year (sometimes mid-year in the case of arrest or illness), and three people were always assigned to the role, lessening the danger for any one individual and making the organization more accountable and reflective of its collective will. Attempts were later made to include women and Slovaks as spokespersons.

and the limited means available to them, the Chartists were able to continue effectively, even slowly building up the number of signatories from the original 240 to eventually some 2,000.

Charter 77 was predominantly an organization of writers and intellectuals, and thus its forte and principal activity was its endless publication of documents—declarations, open letters, and communiqués. Skilling calculated that during its first decade of existence, Charter 77 “issued a total of some 340 documents” (1989: 47). Underlying this impressive feat are the painstaking details that were involved in preparation of each document: the slow process of collective authorship of many of the pieces as well as time taken for consultation with others, and the even slower process of actual publication and distribution. Constant interruptions to this process were inevitable due to police surveillance and the confiscation of complete or partially-written drafts. The authenticity of Charter materials was ensured through the signature of all three spokespersons on each document. Over time the themes addressed by Charter authors also expanded considerably, from an initial emphasis on human rights and the violation of international agreements in such areas of education or the treatment of prisoners to a range of topics matched only by the variety of interests of the Chartists themselves. There was definitely a move away from strictly legal issues to social, economic, cultural, scientific, and even international issues (Skilling, 1989: 47-48). Some documents were prepared in advance as statements to particular fora, for example, the Madrid CSCE conference, the Budapest Cultural Forum sponsored by the CSCE, or as more all-
encompassing statements (such as those marking the various anniversaries of the Charter).

On an international level, Charter 77 maintained strong linkages with the Helsinki Process. Under the auspices of the Charter, outreach efforts were made to West European peace activists, spawning a considerable internal and cross-border debate on détente, the stationing of missiles in Europe, and the connections between peace and human rights. Appeals were made to various international and especially UN organizations (such as the ILO on the continued discrimination in employment characteristic of normalization but especially felt by Charter members). Most significantly were its associations and linkages with other dissident and social movements in the region. Representatives of KOR and Charter 77 first met on their common frontier in 1978 (Skilling, 1989: 58). Charter 77 expressed strong support for Solidarity in 1980, and condemned the imposition of martial law in 1981. This was formalized through the creation of the Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity group and later the Circle of Friends of Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity. Cooperation between dissidents had become so effective that by the 30th anniversary of the Hungarian uprising in 1956 a proclamation was signed by over 122 individuals from four countries (Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the DDR). They not only condemned the Soviet intervention, but linked the unfulfilled objectives of the Hungarian revolt historically to the Prague Spring, Solidarity, and the 1953 riots in Pilsen and East Berlin (1989: 59). In order to demonstrate their cohesion, “the signatories pledged mutual support in the struggle for political democracy, pluralism based on self-
government, the reunification of Europe and its democratic integration, and the rights of minorities” (1989: 59).

XV. *Výbor na Obranu Nespravedlivě Stihaných* (VONS)

The role of VONS (The Committee for the Defence of the Unjustly Persecuted) as an alternative organization along side the Charter but with many of the same members is lesser-known. It was founded on April 27, 1978. In many respects, it was conceived on the model of the Polish KOR—a self-help organization which would aid victims of state prosecution, attend trials, document evidence, provide legal advice, and assistance to their families. It was formally announced in 1978. Rather than replicate the broad sweep of the Charter, the purpose of VONS was to focus on individual cases of persecution.

In 1979 a large-scale police action was commenced against VONS signatories. In October six of its founding members were sentenced to long prison terms, making it difficult to continue the work of the organization. Nonetheless, there was no interruption in the regular communiqués (*sdělení*) detailing the monthly specifics of injustice—arrests, searches, trials, beatings, and so on (Skilling, 1989: 27).

In the same way that VONS was modelled on KOR, VONS was an important precursor to later legal defence organizations. For example, in October, 1988, the *Iniciativa Sociální Obrany* (ISO) or Initiative for Social Defence, was formed. Whereas VONS was created to support political prisoners, ISO focused on more subtle forms of persecution, ranging from problems with work, school, travel, and housing to social
discrimination and psychiatric abuse (Helsinki Watch, 1989: 10).

XVI. The “Underground University”

The array and breadth of unofficial seminars and learning venues is probably one of least researched aspects of the Czechoslovak opposition. Current investigation by British researcher Barbara Day suggests that open and well-organized university-type seminars were being conducted in Prague as early as 1975--more than a year before the creation of Charter 77. In fact, these seminars hearken back to an earlier set of seminars conducted by expelled professor Jan Patočka in the 1950s. Originally, these seminars from the mid 1970s were independent of each other, and rivals in terms of competing for “membership”.

One of the earliest seminar leaders, Julius Tomin, sought to establish Western contact and support for his seminar in 1978 by sending a letter to four prestigious universities: Heidelberg, the Freie Universität in Berlin, Oxford, and Harvard. The only copy of his letter to reach receptive ears was that sent to Oxford; it surfaced in a sub-faculty meeting of Balliol College in January, 1979. In particular, Tomin requested that Western lecturers come to Prague to provide basic instruction in the classics of Western

---

Barbara Day is currently researching and writing a book on the Czech “underground university” and in particular the role of the Jan Hus Educational Foundation in the United Kingdom. I am grateful for her generosity in sharing her insights with the Toronto Flying Seminar, 15 March 1998, as well as for further information gained during a private interview, 17 March 1998.
philosophy to his pupils. Bill Newton-Smith was friendly to the idea, and it was determined that the first three lecturers to travel to Prague would be Kathy Wilkes, Richard Hare, and Charles Taylor. The first initiatives were so successful that eventually an entire infrastructure was built up in the flow of “goods” (books, equipment, and later office supplies and computers) and “services” (visiting lecturers) from London to Prague. The British academics organized their efforts into a charitable foundation, calling themselves the “Jan Hus Educational Foundation”.  

The Czech seminar leaders never attempted to organize themselves more fully, along the lines of the TKN in Poland. It was simply too dangerous in Prague, where even with the sporadic, informal, disconnected, and decentralized nature of the seminars, the leaders and the students were subject to police harassment. Tomin himself passively resisted arrest and was badly treated; students from the Technical University attending another ongoing seminar were also beaten up. In the early 1980s attendance at and organization of the seminars was a very risky business, but considering that a major part of their clientele were the children of dissidents who had been denied university entrance anyway, they continued unabated. A stipend program was introduced for funding

77A Polish counterpart was also set up, with different scholarly membership, called the Jagiellonian Trust.

78This reached a peak in 1979-1980, when Zdená Tominová (spouse of Julius Tomin) was beaten up by police, and two Oxford lecturers were unceremoniously expelled, including Anthony Kenny, Master of Balliol College. This last event became a minor diplomatic incident, and was widely publicized in the British press.
independent research. A number of students completed the entire Cambridge Diploma in Theology, sitting exams in Prague and smuggling out their papers which would be sent to Cambridge professors for correction. Home cinemas were set up; four VCRs were sent over along with a portable television, and over time vast quantities of videos were smuggled into the country.

Prague was not the only site of such seminars. The Jan Hus Educational Foundation also financed a very carefully organized set of seminars in Brno from 1984-1989. Not only were they able to avoid police detection, but over time they were able to offer entire 10-12 week courses in a variety of subjects. In Brno there was also an effort to attract a wider base of students, and many organizers and attendees were either in the "grey zone" or had never been previously involved in any activity deemed illicit by the regime. In 1987 in Bratislava a small but important group gathered for eight lectures of high quality under the stewardship of Miroslav Kusý. As was also the case with other initiatives, Slovak lawyer and activist Ján Čarnogurský was a go-between linking up Catholic dissidents with others.

Jan Hus Foundations were set up in Canada and the United States, and other organizations in the Netherlands and France supported the network of independent seminars. Julius Tomin emigrated, taking a job at Oxford, and veteran dissident and philosopher Ladislav Hejdánek took over his seminar. Hejdánek's pupils were extremely

---

79Key organizers were Jiří Müller and theatre director Petr Osľzy. 
fortunate, for through the 1980s the likes of Jacques Derrida, Paul Ricoeur, Jürgen Habermas, Richard Rorty, and Ira Katznelson were to make appearances at his Monday night events. In fact, it is probably not an exaggeration to say that, dangers of participation aside, students in the seminar had better access to the leading minds of European and North American thought than their Western counterparts in graduate schools!

Day emphasized in our discussion the “moral or ethical” base of the seminars, which was most explicit in the Brno organization. There was definitely an undercurrent of public responsibility and engagement, which was very much in keeping with the general philosophy of the Czechoslovak underground. To some degree, the seminar graduates--many of whom today hold significant positions in public life--are giving back to their societies today.

Barbara Day, who in the midst of her research has tracked down over thirty independent seminars, does not believe it is an overstatement to refer to this agglomeration of activity as an “underground university”. Certainly dissidents at the time would not have conceived of their activities as such, concerned as they were to avoid

---

80 Interview with Ladislav Hejdánek, 21 October, 1997.

81 Day cited the examples of Jan Ruml, head of the newly-organized Freedom Union party in the Czech Republic, Marketa Nemčova, who for a time served as Ambassador to Poland, Jiří Schneider, current Czech Ambassador to Israel, and the remarkable Aleš Havlíček who made the transition from manual labourer (when a seminar attendee) to university teacher.
undue attention from the authorities. However, given the number of seminars involved, the fact that entire courses were offered, a “library” of book donations was built up over the years, and that students even “graduated” (as was the case with the Cambridge diploma) it seems in my view to be an appropriate description.

XVII. Samizdat Publishing and Distribution

After the creation of Charter 77, Zdena Tominová described the veritable explosion of a “typewriter culture” (quoted in Skilling, 1989: 26). In the first instance, there was the variety of informational bulletins about Charter 77, and their authorized documents, communiqués, open letters. There was a parallel industry of alternative presses focusing on literature, history, philosophy, music. Academic books, novels, essays, feuilletons, and collections of poetry were all published.

Unlike the sophistication of the Poles, who used regular printing presses and could ensure a mass level of circulation, the typewriter was the technology of choice. This had less to do with the lack of organization or ability of the Czechs, and more to do with the fact that this method was permissible under law—in keeping with the principles of the openness and legality that guided the Charter and other organizations (Skilling, 1989: 27). A limited number of copies would be made with each typing through the

---

82Informational material authorized in Charter 77’s name was issued by the current collective of spokespersons at the time. Closely associated with the Charter was the bulletin Informace O Chartě 77 or Infoch (Information on Charter 77), issued monthly under the editorship of Petr Uhl and Anna Šabatová.
combined use of onion skin and carbon paper. Later, the importance of fax machines and the transportation of computer disks would be used to transmit information, especially to supporters abroad who might funnel paperless documents to Radio Free Europe or Voice of America for maximum exposure.

Independent publishing houses existed, and especially in Slovakia published Catholic books and theological periodicals. Magazines and journals represented all aspects of the underground culture, from music to economics, theatre to history (see Skilling, 1989: 28-30). The most famous independent literary press was Edice Petlice founded by Ludvík Vaculík, launched in 1972. Václav Havel started Edice Expedice which issued over 300 titles.

One of the most important “independent” presses did not exist in Czechoslovakia at all, but in Toronto in the home of exiled Czech authors Josef Skvorecký and Zdena Salivarová. Salivarová began her publishing house 68 Publishers on her own initiative, eventually publishing over two hundred titles in Czech. She maintained a brisk mail order business, with a mailing list of over 40,000 names. The goal of 68 Publishers, however, was not only to reach the emigré community of Czechs and Slovaks worldwide. Salivarová also sought to publish contemporary Czech and Slovak literature and materials that could not be printed in Czechoslovakia, and in turn have these books smuggled back into the country so that they might be more widely available.

Journals published abroad were indispensable channels of information, and were distributed widely among dissident intellectuals after being smuggled into
Czechoslovakia. The most well-known were Pavel Tigríd’s Svědectví, published in Paris, and Jiří Pelikán’s Listy, published in Rome. In London exile Jan Kávan set up Palach Press. 

Over the almost 20 year history of Czechoslovak samizdat, most of it was collected and carefully preserved by historian Vilém Prečan in his Czechoslovak Documentation Centre for Independent Literature, located at the Schwarzenberg Castle in Scheinfeld, Germany. This informal and external network was mutually cooperative, and improvised elaborate and complicated systems whereby material would be transported across the Czechoslovak borders both into and out of the country.

---

83 These external publishers along with František Janouch in Sweden, Prince Karel Schwarzenberg of Austria, reform communist Zdeněk Mlynář living in Vienna, and Jiří Grusa and Vilém Prečan active in Germany constituted an informal network nourishing free thought and discussion, maintaining the continuity of Czechoslovak traditions, and providing a window through and from which the dissidents could communicate. For more detail see H. Gordon Skilling (1997), “Archive of Freedom,” Acta contemporanea: K pěti desetiletím Vilém Prečana: 400-419.

84 This was made possible by the support and generosity of Prince Karel Schwarzenberg, who used his position and hereditary fortune to build the centre and support various human rights activities. In fact, the documentation centre and an apartment for Prečan and his family was constructed within the Castle at Scheinfeld. Interview with Vilém Prečan, 20 October 1997.

85 Both Kavan and later Prečan smuggled materials into the country, first by car and later via diplomatic pouch (thanks to contacts at the West German, Swedish, Canadian and other embassies who often took on these tasks without their superiors’ knowledge and at some risk of being recalled). Within Czechoslovakia, Jiřina Šiklová was the main and most active contact, often meeting conspiratorially in parks, elevators, or on public transportation to meet fellow activists, diplomats, or even ordinary tourists who would transport materials. Elaborate code names were worked out and calls to foreign countries were made from public telephones. Šiklová never signed Charter 77 as it was too risky given her clandestine work, but over time she was “found out” and her telephones were bugged and she was followed. From a menial job as a cleaning lady in a state
XVIII. Repression and Resistance in the Czech Lands and Slovakia in the 1980s

In 1980 the unremarkable Czechoslovak government did something remarkable: it admitted that for the first time, the country had a negative GNP growth, and announced that only 2% of the country’s technological output could possibly match the quality of the developed world. Other cracks in the armour were beginning to show, cracks which were important in undermining the tacit social contract. By 1990, Czechoslovakia had one of the lowest per capita expenditures on education in Europe, the mortality rate had been growing for some years, and Czechoslovak citizens had a shorter life span than most Europeans.

Within Slovakia dissent proceeded at lower decibel levels and with less attention than in Prague, but paradoxically was more broad-based. Normalization in Slovakia had never been as severe as in the Czech lands, and the nature of Slovak demography and geography made it easier for some opposition currents to plant a seed with the general populace. Being removed from Prague was in some respects advantageous. There was also less of a distinction to be made between the Prague Spring reformers in Slovakia—who were not as radical as their Bohemian counterparts—and the anti-reformers, who

---

broadcasting building, however, she had the ability to work after hours and thus use their telephone lines to play tapes directly to Radio Free Europe in Munich. Working in a hospital also provided her with many contacts; she described it as “strategic” because she had access to the entire spectrum of society. Interview with Jiřina Šiklová, 29 October 1997.
were similarly not as hardline as the pro-Soviet hawks in Prague. Moreover, some of the token reforms associated with renewed federalism were implemented. Even in the depths of normalization, things could be published in Bratislava that could not be published in Prague. The concerns of Slovaks, associated with nationalist grievances, freedom of religion, and minority issues, were more pragmatic. Right up until 1989, there was less of a sense of the Slovak opposition attempting to occupy the "moral high ground" deliberately claimed by writers and philosophers in the Czech lands.

Slovakia’s sizeable minority of ethnic Hungarians, a testament to its history as Uhre-Hungary, part of the Hungarian side of the dual monarchy prior to the First World War, was a critical demographic fact. Finally, the Church was a unifying force and a source of public support and mobilization.

In the late 1970s, Hungarian minorities were becoming increasingly outspoken in defence of their human rights and national interests. In 1978, the Hungarians formed a

---

86 Interview with Samuel Abrahám, 16 October, 1997.

87 The name of the country was officially changed to the Czecho-Slovak Socialist Republic (ČSSR).

88 As Abrahám describes, even those Slovak dissidents who did take a moral position, such as Miroslav Kusý, Dominik Tatarka, and Milan Šimečka, could hardly engage in any level of moral screening with their knowledge of Slovak society. In later constructing Verejnost Proti Násilu (VPN, or Public Against Violence, the Slovak equivalent to Civic Forum), building a broad coalition to oppose the Husák regime was more critical. However, the lesser distance between rulers and opposition members meant that the dividing line between the two was opaque and often meaningless. Former prime minister Vladimír Mečiar is a good example: he has both a communist past and a record of service in VPN.
Committee for the Legal Defence of the Hungarian minority and by 1983 their harassed leader Miklós Dúray signed Charter 77. The Committee was not created to be anti-communist or united ideologically, but they did agree on the need to pressure the regime to support Hungarian education in schools. In retrospect, however, activist László Szigeti contends that it can be categorized as an independent civic initiative, albeit one that operated partly in the "grey zone". In a smart strategic move at coalition-building, Charter 77 protested discrimination against the Hungarians, and presented a proposal on national minorities to the Vienna CSCE conference. The Hungarians in Slovakia were also an important connection between dissidents in Czechoslovakia (especially Slovakia) and Hungary. Through the Hungarians, Slovaks became acquainted with the works of János Kis and György Konrád, and the efforts of the democratic opposition in Hungary to align itself with the cause of Hungarian minorities outside the country. Given the relative liberalism of the Kádár regime, it was easier, in fact, for the Hungarians to travel to and meet with their opposition counterparts in Budapest than to make conspiratorial contacts with Slovak oppositionists! The Hungarians did keep in touch with Charter activities not

89Dúray also publicly thanked VONS for the support he received during his 1982-1983 imprisonment, a testimonial to the ongoing practical work of the organization.

90László Szigeti claims that at this time about 40-50% of Hungarian-speaking children were attending schools where the only language of instruction was Slovak. They proposed two alternatives: either have Hungarian-only schools, or teach Hungarian in Slovak schools.

91Interview with László Szigeti, 16 October, 1997.
only through signatory Dúray, but also through Bratislava lawyer Ján Čarnogurský and former philosophy professor Miroslav Kusý. As Čarnogurský was also a Catholic activist, he was a contact point with these two groups. These three groups—Catholics, Hungarians, and Charter signatories—formed the nucleus of opposition in Slovakia and their increasing cooperation paved the way for the formulation and structure of Public Against Violence.

By the late 1980s and into 1989, the solidity of the Husák regime seemed to be crumbling—albeit imperceptibly to most Western observers. Nonetheless, the regime continued its hard-line to the bitter end—to the extent that it could and did remain unchallenged. In March, 1987, Gorbachev visited Prague, raising hope for some that perhaps his visit might trigger an accelerated level of reform along the same lines of perestroika and glasnost. Senior Soviet officials made it known to the authorities that perhaps a revision of 1968 was overdue; these suggestions were rapidly rebuffed and the regime criticized the “fashionable” attitudes of the leadership in Moscow. The same year Miloš Jakeš replaced Husák as first secretary, with the latter maintaining the ceremonial role as president. It became clear, however, that the changeover was merely cosmetic. The Academy of Science’s Institute for Economic Forecasting recommended radical reform in order to solve social and economic problems and Prime Minister Štougal

---

92 Both Václav Klaus and Vladimir Dlouhý were employed by the Academy at this time, and wrote a number of scholarly and technical articles of the state of economy. Both are good examples of what Šiklová refers to as “grey zone” intellectuals.
supported the report. The regime responded by ousting Štrougal, replacing him with Ladislav Adamec.

These official rumblings were also mirrored by extraordinary events which we tend to read today as “clues” of growing discontent with the regime, and the stirrings of public willingness to do something about it. On December 8, 1985, for example, on the fifth anniversary of the death of John Lennon, an assembly gathered on Na Kampě to commemorate the day. The original group of about 200 eventually swelled to over 1000. They marched across the Charles Bridge demanding freedom and peace, and later up to the castle, where a petition was signed by over 300. Like peace activists in END, they demanded an end to the stationing of nuclear warheads in either Western or Eastern Europe. They left peacefully at around 9:00 pm (Skilling, 1989: 65). This was not a Charter-sponsored event, although they did comment on it later and called for greater youth opportunities and reduced military service.

The martyrdom of John Lennon and the arbitrary violence of his death juxtaposed to his dedication to peace remained symbolically important to the flowering opposition, especially among young people. On Na Kampě Island there was an impromptu memorial to Lennon ritualistically spray-painted on a concrete retaining wall. Even though the authorities persisted time and again to secure its permanent removal, it reappeared. Later in 1988 an independent association called the Mirový Klub John Lennon (MKJL), or John

\(^{93}\)European Nuclear Disarmament, the largest umbrella anti-nuclear/peace organization on the continent in the 1980s.
Lennon Peace Club, was formed. Its aims were to work for world peace generally, human rights in Czechoslovakia specifically, and to encourage independent cultural activity.

Significantly, on the twentieth anniversary of the Soviet invasion, an anti-government demonstration was held in Wenceslas Square, organized not by the Chartists but by two groups of young activists: the Nezávislé Mírové Sdružení (NMS), or Independent Peace Initiative, and the Czech Children. The demonstration was surprisingly not disrupted by the police. This core group of young people had crossed a line—-they were now in direct confrontation with the regime. Moreover, they brought with their commitment new issues (such as conscientious objection to military service) and enthusiasm. At this early stage of public mobilization, however, university students by and large were not involved—at this point they were cautious given their vulnerability to expulsion.94

The regime also continued its campaign of harassment against its citizens, and made efforts to denounce publicly all independent initiatives (through party organs such as Rudé Právo [literally, Red Right or Red Truth]).95 From 1981 to 1986 the government


95The examples here are simply illustrative; for more complete documentation see Skilling, 1989; J.F. Brown, 1989: 150-179; Charta 77 and International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, 1985; Helsinki Watch, 1989; and virtually all of the Amnesty International Annual Reports for the 1980s.
launched a campaign of harassment against the *Jazzová Sekce* or Jazz Section, finally culminating in the arrest of seven members, including its head, Karel Srp.\(^{96}\) The underground and alternative music scenes continued to proliferate; some performances were banned, others operated semi-legally.

In August 1988 what began as a small demonstration on the twentieth anniversary of the 1968 invasion grew to a crowd of about 10,000 in Wenceslas Square, the largest independent demonstration since 1969 (Helsinki Watch, 1989: 43). It was sponsored by the NMS. Perhaps taken by surprise or hesitant to take action given the symbolic importance of the date, the police did not immediately intervene. However, a month later at a similar demonstration called together by NMS, the StB responded in force, emerging from the subway entrances around the square, clubbing and arresting participants (McRae, 1997: 5-6). Nevertheless, thousands of Czechs took part in a demonstration commemorating the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Republic on October 28 (Helsinki Watch, 1989: 44).

Political trials continued right up until and through the fall of 1989. Václav Havel’s third prison term began in January, 1989 after being arrested for laying a wreath

\(^{96}\)The Jazz Section had for nine years sponsored a jazz festival; in 1981 it was cancelled. Originally officially a part of the Musicians’ Union, it had approximately 4000 members and 100,000 followers. The regime tried to get the Union to end its activities, but when efforts failed the regime dissolved it officially in 1984. However, they still managed to carry on some of their activities, publishing, lending tapes, and having regular open houses. See Skilling, 1989: 80-83).
on Jan Palach's grave in January on the 20th anniversary of his death. Charter spokesperson Tomáš Hradilek was indicted for "damaging state interests abroad" and tried in April. The trial of Slovak lawyer and Charterist Jan Čarnogurský occurred simultaneously with the onset of the Velvet Revolution in November.

By late 1988 and early 1989, the strides toward reform represented by the Polish elections and the Hungarian negotiations were becoming increasingly problematic for the Czech regime. Now they had more to contend with than their criticism of trends in Moscow. Deteriorating relations with Hungary throughout 1989 are a case in point. On April 4, much to the chagrin of Czech authorities, the Hungarian television show *Panorama* aired a long and detailed interview of Alexander Dubček conducted by its host Andras Sugár. Not only was the show able to be picked up in Southern Slovakia, but Radio Free Europe re-broadcast it over the entire country. In the battle of words between the reformers in Budapest and the dinosaurs in Prague, the Czechoslovak government denounced the rehabilitation of 1956 and the reburial of Imre Nagy in June. Acting offensively, in September of 1989 the Hungarian parliament made it their business to condemn the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia. Hungary opening their borders to the

---

97 Havel was released in May after serving five months of his sentence—one month earlier than expected—probably due to international and even Soviet pressure.

98 I had the opportunity to speak with Sugár personally in Budapest in August, 1995. In the hilariously ironic and devilishly critical tradition of Hungarian television, *Panorama* could only be described as a Central European version of *60 Minutes* (I am indebted to Rob McRae for this parallel). Like Mike Wallace, Sugár is a right-of-centre populist-nationalist who continues to remain a controversial figure in Hungarian society.
West in May turned out to be the critical proximate cause in the fall of the Berlin Wall (which occurred November 9). Moreover, this decision had concrete consequences for the regime in Prague, as thousands of East German refugees streamed toward the Austro-Hungarian border. By October, 11,000 found a home in the West German embassy in Prague before being allowed to emigrate.

By the summer of 1989, cooperation among dissidents and now former dissidents in neighbouring countries had become much more open and widespread. It had been a long haul since the “illicit forest picnics” on the Czech-Polish border, but in July Adam Michnik and Zbygniew Bujak came to Prague as official representatives of the Polish Sejm. The StB were powerless to stop their visit with Czechoslovak dissidents. On August 11 the new Polish government condemned the 1968 invasion, and apologized for their participation in the process. Andrei Sakharov could now be telephoned openly in Moscow.

The dissidents in Prague were careful throughout 1989, and even when vigorously debating whether or not to advise participation in a demonstration to commemorate the Soviet invasion on August 20, they were extremely hesitant and reluctant. With considerable stamina and a strong moral voice, they were simply unwilling to suggest others get involved in a situation that could turn violent, in which people would likely get hurt. This is not insignificant, given their commitment to non-violence and passive resistance. When the regime did crack down on its citizens during the demonstrations on
November 17, the dissidents had no blood on their hands; it was not their march.99

XIX. The Underground Church in Slovakia

Unlike in Poland, the Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia had never managed to fully keep its independence. Many bishops and priests accommodated and supported the regime, even to the point of joining *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth), a pro-regime “peace movement” which was never recognized by the Vatican as a legitimate organization. Citizens were not as religiously observant, especially in Bohemia and Moravia. Cardinal Tomášek was at first no Cardinal Wyszyński or Archbishop Wotyła. He had historically avoided confrontation with the regime in the normalization period. However, a different story was evident in Slovakia.100

Slovakia was the most Catholic and religiously observant part of the Federation. And it was here that the Church suffered the most persecution. In the late 1940s and 1950s, religious orders were forcibly disbanded and hundreds of priests and monks were

---

99This fact is important in refuting the popular and oft-quoted conspiracy theory that somehow November 17 was staged together by dissidents and hardliners in order to oust the government from power. The theory was particularly strong when lists of StB collaborators were published and contained the names of many former dissidents. For a complete discussion of lustration and retrospective justice in the Czechoslovakia (and later the Czech Republic and Slovakia) see Rosenberg (1996), especially pp. 3-121.

100Skilling (1989: 84) cited official statistics showing that most church baptisms, weddings, and funerals occurred in Slovakia. In a sociological study conducted in 1970, almost 71% of the population of Slovakia indicated they were believers (quoted in Kirschbaum, 1995: 246).
Rebuilding the Church and religious orders took decades to accomplish, often clandestinely. A secret church was born. Efforts at spiritual reawakening were a dominant aspect of the Prague Spring as it manifested itself in Slovakia, and Bishop Korec was instrumental in writing a Catholic condemnation of the invasion. Although formally Church leaders were not supportive of dissent and can be categorized as pro-regime, an underground church took root in Slovakia. Many priests were secretly consecrated. The 1970s can be described as a period of quiet and methodical reconstruction, helped by the more relaxed version of normalization existing in Slovakia. The 1980s, on the other hand, was a time of greater social mobilization; in a sense the secret church “went public” with pilgrimages, demonstrations, and petitions for religious freedom. As in Poland, the election of Cardinal Wojtyła was pivotal, and the Slovak

---

101 This has been carefully documented by Catholic activist (and now prominent member of the Christian Democratic Party in Slovakia) František Mikloško (1991), *Nebudete Ich Mocť Rosvratit* (Bratislava: ARCHA). This has been partially translated in English as *You Can’t Destroy Them* (1991-1992). Trans. Danielle Rozgon. (New York [unpublished manuscript]).

102 This created a thorny issue for the Vatican in the post-1989 period, given that many officially consecrated priests were collaborators (such as those members of *Pacem in Terris*) whereas the unofficially consecrated priests in the secret church argued that they were the true carriers of the message and more worthy of Vatican recognition. On the role of the Secret Church in Slovakia, see David Doellinger, “The Emergence of Civil Society in Slovakia: The Role of the Secret Church,” presentation to the Mid-Atlantic Slavic Conference of the AAASS, 21 March 1998 (unpublished manuscript; used with permission of author).
Catholics purposefully played up his “Slovak connection”.103

Over time, Tomášek’s willingness to take greater risks also increased. With the tutelage and support of newly-appointed Pope John Paul II in Rome, the Cardinal adopted a more independent stance (Skilling, 1989: 85). In 1982, he condemned *Pacem in Terris* as a political organization, in keeping with the papal ordinance banning political activity among priests. He became an outspoken critic of the regime’s attacks on the Church, and revised earlier attitudes towards the Charter.104 In 1985 the Cardinal invited the Pope to the 1100th anniversary of the death of Slav missionary Saint Methodius in Velehrad, Moravia.105 The Pope accepted the invitation (which was circulated in samizdat) but was denied permission to attend by the Husák regime. The jubilee year of Saint Methodius was a pivotal event, especially for Slovak Catholics. It was celebrated in every Slovak diocese, and a large delegation of young Slovak believers held a peaceful outdoor meeting the day before the celebration, in defiance of local clergy (Mikloško, 1991).

103 Interview with František Mikloško, 17 October 1997. The Pope had a Slovak grandmother, and for a time rumours were swirling that the he was actually born in a small Slovak village near the Polish border. The drama, which centred around the reputed refusal of the local parish priest in Poland to produce the Pope’s birth registration, created much speculation. The rumour, which in any event was useful to the Slovak Catholics, was later proven incorrect.

104 Tomášek had been unsympathetic to Charter activity and in turn Catholic Chartists (such as former priest Václav Malý, and religious lay people Václav Benda and Radim Palouš) were critical of his attitude.

105 Tomášek’s collision course with the regime would continue right through to 1989. In June, 1989, for example, he received both Havel and Dubček during his 90th birthday celebration.
1985 was also the year that saw the elevation of Slovak emigré Bishop Jozef Tomko to Cardinal. In 1988, more than 600,000 people, both Catholics and lay supporters, signed a petition demanding greater religious freedom (two thirds of the signatories were Slovaks).

Demonstrations took place in March in both Bratislava and Prague repeating the call. The March candlelight religious rally organized by Mikloško attracted over 2,000 participants, but was brutally repressed (Kirschbaum, 1995: 248). In July 1988, the Catholic activists had succeeded to such a degree that over 280,000 made the religious pilgrimage to Levoča. In September, 1988, 60,000 travelled to Sastin in Western Slovakia on pilgrimage. Moreover, participation in pilgrimages and demonstrations was increasingly dominated by the younger generation, indicating religious renewal and future continuity.

Although the role of the Catholic Church was certainly not the same as in Poland and church resistance not as widespread through the whole country, its role in Slovakia was particularly significant. By December 11, 1989 one final victory had been secured by Catholic activists. The collaborationist and communist-controlled *Pacem in Terris* was disbanded.

**XX. The Tide Turns: “Just a Few Sentences”**

On June 29, 1989, both official and unofficial artists signed a petition entitled *Několik vět (Just a Few Sentences)*. With an ironic reference to the Vaculík’s earlier *Two Thousand Words...* manifesto, it called for democratization and in particular greater
religious freedom. The petition also demanded that political prisoners be released, freedom of assembly be granted, industrial projects be subject to an environmental assessment, and that the Prague Spring and subsequent normalization be openly discussed (McRae, 1997: 50).

The wording of the petition was carefully constructed so as to secure broader support than earlier dissident efforts. Designed to penetrate into the grey zone, it was entirely successful—over 4,000 people signed it during its first week. By the time Helsinki Watch in New York reported on the petition, 15,000 people had signed. This was particularly important because many of the signatories were not Chartists or the usual group of dissident suspects, but included employed academics, workers, students, and even police officers. The petition indicated a dissatisfaction and untapped potential for social mobilization that had been previously impossible.

It was also a daring move at the time, happening just after the Tiananmen Massacre earlier in June, along with the regime’s statement of sympathy for the Chinese hardliners. In the five months leading up to the dramatic events of November, it would be signed by over 40,000 people. Prior to November these signatories were also harassed, so much so that on October 25 a group of the signatories, together with official journalists and the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra announced that it would henceforth boycott Czechoslovak television for their attacks and biased coverage.

*Just a Few Sentences* was also important because of what occurred immediately in its wake. A plethora of groups and independent associations sprouted up, some overtly
political, others more conventionally pursuing single interests, such as peace or ecology. In particular, the Hnutí za Občanskou Svobodu (HOS) or Movement for Civil Liberties was formed, with the express intention of creating the necessary infrastructure for “normal” political life. It was both overtly political and pragmatic; its manifesto was particularly concrete in its demands for political and economic pluralism, a new constitution, the restructuring of the legal system, and the installation of basic freedoms. Notably many of its contact persons were also Charter signatories, a direct reflection of the desire of many that the Charter should take a more actively political role.

XXI. The DDR Exodus and the Fall of the Wall

When the Hungarians ripped open the iron curtain with their decision to permit freedom to travel for their citizens (and other Bloc nationals), many knew it was a bold move with serious and far-reaching ramifications, but few predicted it would go as far as it did. Geographically situated between the DDR and Hungary, Czechoslovakia at first braced themselves for the flood of refugees, and then attempted to close their own borders with Hungary. The net result was that thousands sought asylum in the West German

106 For example, Obroda, or Resistance, a club including former Prague Spring officials wanting to reinvigorate humanist socialism; the Spolecenstvi Pratel, or Society for the Friendship with the USA; the Czechoslovak Ecology Society; and ecological groups outside Prague such as Brno Forum and Bratislava Nahlas or Bratislava Aloud.

107 For example, Rudolf Battěk, Václav Benda, Ján Čarnogurský, Tomáš Hradílek, Ladislav Lis, and Jaroslav Šabata.
embassy in Prague, not only creating a dramatic scene of international tension played out by the media, but an obvious demonstration for Czechoslovak onlookers. Thousands remained stranded while negotiations took place between Bonn and Berlin, and finally it was decided that they would be allowed to leave on specially designated East German trains bound for the West. The agreement was short-lived, like a bandaid on the gaping hole of the sinking Titanic. The entire DDR government collapsed with the opening of the border in Berlin--the fall of the wall--on November 9. At this point, the international media, assembled in the thousands in Berlin to witness the dog days of East German communism, simply headed south to Prague, hoping for a new set of players to begin a similar drama on another stage.

XXII. November 17 and the Birth of Civic Forum and Public Against Violence

Neither the media nor the Czech population had to wait long for the action to continue. The demonstration of November 17 that would mark the beginning of the Velvet Revolution began innocently enough with a legitimate request by some Charles University students to hold a procession commemorating International Students Day.\footnote{November 17 had particular resonance, as the British had named International Students Day after Jan Opletal, a Czech student who had demonstrated in 1939 against the Nazi occupation. Opletal was shot to death and many student leaders were summarily executed by the German fascists. The request was considered legitimate by the authorities as Opletal’s act was one of anti-fascist resistance (even if it did occur during the time of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact).} Unfortunately, the local municipal committee rejected their request, so the students
decided to set up their own independent students council and go ahead with the march (McRae, 1997). It was significant that it was the students of Charles University who were the organizers--after all, they had been able to attend university because of their own political reliability or that of their family. This particular cohort should not have been a threat to the regime, but were in fact its hand-picked successors. From the many press accounts and the reminiscences of both observers and participants, we know that the demonstration was peaceful and controlled. To be sure, student banners included slogans such as “Democracy for All”, the ironic “The Soviet Union Our Example, at Last” and “Democracy, Freedom, and Free Elections”. Another banner in the forefront of the march read “We Don’t Want Violence”; this is clearly evident in the photographs of the students facing a wall of police in anti-riot gear on Narodní Avenue on their way to Wenceslas Square. Students were then boxed in on both sides, unable to escape. They peacefully anchored themselves on the pavement with their candles flickering, and many were photographed handing flowers to the police (McRae, 1997; Whipple, 1991; Rosenblum, Turnley, and Turnley, 1990; Garton Ash, 1990b; Gwertzman and Kaufman, 1990).

The police were given a signal, moved toward the crowd and began clubbing and beating the students. Many were seriously injured, and a rumour spread like wildfire throughout the city that one student had been killed. It was later proven incorrect, but it no longer mattered. The beloved and privileged children of Prague, of the prestigious Charles University, had been viciously beaten. It was the beginning of the end.

In a sense it was historically fortunate that the massacre occurred on a Friday, as it
gave various currents within the opposition, as well as the brutalized students, a chance to recover and mobilize for the following week. On Saturday, November 18, representatives from the independent students council declared publicly in the Square that a student strike was being called for Monday, November 20, with a two-hour general strike for all workers to commence exactly one week later. On Sunday afternoon and evening, crowds of protesters and onlookers assembled in Wenceslas Square, a harbinger of events to come.

Meanwhile, an impromptu meeting of opposition groups was also taking place, led by Václav Havel (McRae, 1997: 111). A decision was made to organize all groups under a broad umbrella, to be called Občanské Forum, or Civic Forum. Members of the 1968 reform group were there, along with the two co-opted parties still officially part of the National Front (the Socialistická Strana or Socialist Party, and the Lidová Strana or People’s Party). The Chartists were there, members of the NMS, the Jazz Section, as well as other members of the professional intelligentsia not previously linked up with the opposition. They huddled together to prepare a declaration, which was published the following day in the November 20 edition of the Socialist Party newspaper Svobodné Slovo (Free Word). On November 20 in Bratislava, Verejnost Proti Násilu (VPN) or Public Against Violence was formed.

In the fall of 1989 both parties had begun to show signs of independence. For example, on October 14 the “Stream of Birth” was founded in the People’s Party and accused the communists of betraying Christian values.
On November 20 Havel held a press conference announcing the creation of Civic Forum. Students organized strike committees at high schools and universities across the country, not only in Prague. That afternoon Wenceslas Square swelled to hold the crowd of over 200,000. Demonstrations had spread to Bratislava, Brno, Ostrava, and Olomouc (Whipple, 1991: 15). Canadian diplomat Rob McCrae was quoted in the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Toronto Star and the Globe and Mail stating, “It’s all over”. He had remained in close touch with dissidents and their strategies in recent months, and was one of the few Western diplomats to predict months in advance that 1989 would be the year of communist decline in Central and Eastern Europe.

In Czechoslovakia at that time, the only door that needed to be pushed open to make this possible was that of large-scale public mobilization. When during those few short weeks in November students, workers, professionals, and state workers of all stripes representing all regions, generations, and walks of life took to the streets in defiance of the regime, its days were numbered. The international constellation necessary for such change was in place. Gorbachev through Gennadi Gerasimov and his own statements earlier in the year had sent the message to Western politicians and the Bloc satellites that the USSR was no longer willing to prop up its former puppets. The former social contract had long since been eroded; the party-state was unable through mismanagement and economic crisis to keep its end of the bargain. Elections had occurred in Poland, Hungary was peacefully transforming itself, and the Berlin Wall was now an architectural monument to the Cold War; soon it would not exist at all.
It is important to note that although the Monday demonstration was large and there was definitely an electric current of change in the air, it was largely spontaneous and unorganized. However, the intellectuals and dissidents through their years of underground “training” became effective revolutionaries because, as McRae states, “they got their logistics right” (1997: 124). By the very next day, Civic Forum was able to secure a stadium-quality public address system, a speakers’ platform, and already had in place an organization to channel the power of the crowd into effective demands. You cannot negotiate with a mob, even a peaceful and euphoric one. The dissidents were accused by a journalist (and later by their fellow citizens) of hijacking the revolution (McRae, 1997: 124). Linkages to workers were there, and it was no accident that on November 23, 10,000 workers from the large ČKD engineering works joined the ranks of demonstrators.¹¹⁰ On this day Czechoslovak television started to report on the events as they unfolded. These events remind me of a very perceptive comment by Hungarian dissident Miklós Haraszti. He stated that in order for those in opposition to outwit their adversaries, they had to become paradoxically the best Leninists of all. Ironically, he likened the years of underground and semi-legal opposition throughout the region to party cells; at the right moment professional trained cadres were able to assume their rightful leadership positions at the head of the revolution. On another level, they were also

¹¹⁰It is important to remember that this occurred four days prior to the planned general strike--which in this particular revolutionary time line was quite long. That it happened earlier is at least partially due to the fact that Civic Forum member Petr Miller worked at ČKD.
operating in a long and historically continuous tradition as Central European intellectuals. They were to assume ethical responsibility and moral leadership in bringing their societies with them into a brave new world. The "beautiful idea" of socialism was now replaced by parliamentary democracy, but the commitment and activism were hallmarks of an earlier time than many would not care to be reminded of, either then or later.

XXIII. Havel na Hrad

In the weeks remaining in November, events proceeded at a dizzying pace, causing British contemporary historian and journalist Timothy Garton Ash to quip to Havel on the 23rd that, "In Poland it took ten years, in Hungary ten months, in East Germany ten weeks: perhaps in Czechoslovakia it will take ten days!" (Garton Ash, 1990b: 78). Civic Forum moved into the Laterna Magika, the home of Prague's magical black-light theatre, where they formulated demands, convened with the media, went back and forth to the Square, ate, slept.... On November 24, Dubček and Havel appeared on the balcony together in front of the crowd, but it was no longer May Day, 1968 and the crowd wanted something much different than socialism with a human face. On November 26 Cardinal Tomášek conducted a festive mass for Catholics to celebrate the canonization of Agnes of Bohemia, which took place on November 12, just five days prior to the revolution. The entire service was broadcast live on television. Later the same day more than half a million Czechoslovak citizens converged onto Letná Plain, and Prime Minister Adenec promised that all demands would be met "within our
competence” (sic!) (Whipple, 1990: 17). The general strike on November 27 went off without a hitch—with military precision and mass participation. Everyday crowds surged into the Square; jangling their keys, making the “V” for victory sign, and repeatedly chanting “Havel na Hrad”—“Havel to the Castle”. On November 29 Havel and entourage travelled to Bratislava, to cement the coalition between Civic Forum and PAV, and to give a message to both the people and the authorities that Czechs and Slovaks were acting in concert.

With greater confidence Civic Forum was able to take the lead in negotiation, and substantive changes to their list of demands reflects this. On December 10, International Human Rights Day, President Gustáv Husák swore in the new government and then did what people had been waiting a long time for: he resigned. The transitional government included a communist premier, Marián Čalfa and a few apparatchiks, but was composed mostly of the intellectual activists. Within a few short hours, Jiří Dienstbier

---

111See especially Garton Ash, 1990b: 78-130 for greater details on this process. Garton Ash was a critical “eye witness” in the Laterna Magika yet had considerable depth of understanding given his long involvement with dissident communities in the region. He documents how Forum members initially “fudged” on a lot of issues, for example, membership in the WTO and what kind of market economy (or socialist competition) they were asking for. On other issues they were clearer and simply pushed farther as the days went on, in terms of forcing out political leaders, the end of the “leading role” of the party, overhauling government structures, demanding free elections, and liberal political freedoms. The issues on which they were initially less clear obviously came back to haunt the new leaders later, but arguably this was strategically necessary to keep momentum going and coalition members happy. Internally within Forum, there was also disagreement on how it might be structured in the future, which eventually metamorphosed into the debate about political parties versus broader social movements. Since 1989, the former has clearly won out.
literally went from being a coal stoker to the nation’s foreign minister. It took slightly longer—fourteen days—for Ján Čarnogurský to move from being a prisoner of conscience to being vice-premier.

XXIV. The New Year’s Address and the Consolidation of Democracy

In his New Year’s address of 1990, President Václav Havel began with the statement: “Tvá vláda, lide, se k tobě navrátila!”, which translated means “People, your government has returned to you!” The words were powerful not simply in the obvious sense of a return to democracy. Havel borrowed this memorable line from the first president of the republic, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, who used the same line in his inaugural address. Masaryk himself adapted this quotation from 17th century Czech scholar Comenius.

In his speech, Havel expounded on some familiar themes. He spoke of the obsolescence of the economy, environmental degradation, and deficits in education. His major point, however, was to speak of the “contaminated moral environment” brought on by 40 years of authoritarian communism. In the same way that ten years earlier in writing “Power of the Powerless” he spoke about the lie running through the hearts and minds of all citizens, on this day he spoke about responsibility for the past:

We had all become used to the totalitarian system and accepted it as an unchangeable fact and thus helped to perpetuate it. In other words, we are all—though naturally to differing extents—responsible for the operation of totalitarian machinery; none of us is just its victim: we are all also its co-creators (Havel, 1991: 391-392).
The “sad legacy” of communism could not be understood, according to Havel, only as something alien imposed on the Czechoslovak people by “some distant relative”. The message of 1989 was one of personal responsibility and acceptance, if political change and maturity were to develop effectively. Havel insists:

...we have to accept this legacy as a sin we committed against ourselves. If we accept it as such, we will understand that it is up to us all, and up to us only, to do something about it. We cannot blame the previous rulers for everything, not because it would be untrue but also because it could blunt the duty that each of us faces today, namely, the obligation to act independently, freely, reasonably, and quickly. Let us not be mistaken: the best government in the world, the best parliament and the best president, cannot achieve much on their own. And it would also be wrong to expect a general remedy from them. Freedom and democracy include participation and therefore responsibility from us all (Havel, 1991: 392).

Above all, Havel’s speech was a hopeful one. He talked about the ability to make their own history, not in a teleological sense, but in the sense of people not being simply a product of their external world, and their active ability to change themselves and the human condition. Finally, he concluded with a discussion of Masarykian morality, and its restoration to politics:

Masaryk based his politics on morality. Let us try in a new time and in a new way to restore this concept to politics. Let us teach ourselves and others that politics should be an expression of the desire to contribute to the happiness of the community rather than of a need to cheat or rape the community. Let us teach ourselves and others that politics can be not only the art of the possible, especially if this means the art of speculation, calculation, intrigue, secret deals, and pragmatic manoeuvring, but that it can even be the art of the impossible, namely, the art of improving ourselves and the world (Havel, 1991: 395).

These themes, and more specifically the theory and philosophy that lay behind and
inspired these events is described and analyzed in the next section.
Chapter 4: Post 1956 Hungary: Repression, Reform, and Roundtable Revolution

I. The Hungarian Revolution of 1956: Lessons and Legacies

The ultimate failure of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 was perhaps mitigated by the many "lessons" it provided, not only for the reconsolidation of reform communism under János Kádár in Hungary, but also for the generation of communist reformers in Poland and especially in Czechoslovakia who constructed their programs with an eye to avoiding the "errors" of 1956. Whereas Gomulka’s accession to power in Warsaw seemed to indicate how far one could go in nationalist deviation from the Soviet model, Imre Nagy’s support for and attempted guidance of an essentially armed uprising and popular revolt certainly demonstrated what was completely unacceptable and would not be tolerated by the Soviet Union. My purpose here is not to recount in detail the events leading up to the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 or analyze its promises or shortcomings.¹

¹The 1956 events have been exhaustively told and retold at several important junctures and from different angles. The most recent “revisionist” account of the Hungarian Revolution, which has had the benefit of access to newly unclassified materials, was the work of a team of historians from the Budapest-based Institute for the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. It has been published in English in 1996 under the title The Hungarian Revolution of 1956: Reform, Revolt and Repression 1953-1956, edited by György Litván (New York: Longman). Earlier accounts include Ferenc A. Vali (1961), Rift and Revolution in Hungary (Cambridge, Cambridge UP); Miklós Molnár (1971), Budapest 1956 (London: Allen and Unwin); Bill Lomax (1976), Hungary 1956 (London: Allison and Busby); Paul E. Zinner (1982), Revolution in Hungary (New York, Columbia UP); and Ferenc Féher and Ágnes Heller (1983), Hungary 1956 Revisited (New York: McKay).
Rather, I wish to briefly highlight some of the lessons and legacies, especially as they pertain to the later development of a “dissident” community of people and ideas in Hungary. From a historical perspective 40 years after the actual events themselves, a number of key features of the revolution still stand out.

First, although the uprising was not the first in the Eastern Bloc since the Yalta division of Europe was consolidated, it certainly garnered the most attention both in the Soviet Union and in the West and was certainly the biggest challenge thus far to Soviet hegemony in the region—measured militarily, by numbers involved, or by scope of the revolution’s aims and demands.

Second, because of the size of the uprising and the fact that it was widely supported by workers—not just in Budapest but across the country—it drove a deep ideological wedge into the workers’ state. The strongest evidence of the proletarian

---

2It was preceded by riots in both East Berlin and Pilsen (Czechoslovakia) in 1953. The Poznán riots occurred earlier in 1956 (June) and the “Polish October” took place immediately prior to the uprising and was to some extent a catalyst. In fact the famous demands of the Budapest students—the “Sixteen Points” formulated at the Technical University—were publicized on October 22, exactly three days after Gomułka was elected first secretary in Warsaw. The revolution proper began the following day (October 23).

3This was true in spite of the fact that the Suez Crisis was happening simultaneously. Although it is probably true that the muted response of the British and French to the Soviet intervention was to some degree due to their desire for success in the Middle East (Litván, 1996: 94), it is unlikely that any form of Austrian solution would have resulted. Regardless of American posturing, its liberation propaganda aimed at the region and the rhetoric of John Foster Dulles, diverting the issue to the United Nations guaranteed that decisive or unilateral American action was not an option, especially given the limited means of the US to exert any effective pressure on the USSR in its own sphere of influence.
challenge to proletarian socialism can be found in the rearguard struggles following
Soviet intervention: the workers’ councils were “the strongest and most effective centres
of resistance” (Litván, 1996: 108). After armed resistance was effectively suppressed,
new communist leader János Kádár still had to come to terms with widespread strikes, the
militant demands of workers that dealt with broadly political as well as economic issues,
and the fact that worker self-organization was becoming an increasingly widespread
phenomenon in the chaos that followed. Indeed a nationwide strike was observed
December 11 and 12, over a month after the Soviet Union had brutally repressed the
uprising (and despite the arrest of workers’ leaders, most notably of the Nagybuda
pesti Központi Munkástanacs (KMT), or the Central Workers’ Council of Greater Budapest).³

Third, the fact that the uprising was an internal matter was significant; Péter
Kende has termed it an “anti-totalitarian revolution” that “challenged the totalitarian
system from inside with the aim to recover the elementary rights and freedoms abrogated
by the dictatorship” (in Litván, 1996: 165). I would add to Kende’s remarks that although
it might have been anti-totalitarian generally, it was specifically anti-Soviet and by no

---

²The most comprehensive account of the workers’ councils by far is Bill Lomax, ed. (1990), Hungarian Workers’ Councils in 1956 (Highland Lakes, New Jersey: Columbia University Press), which includes detailed information on the workers’ proposals and programs, personal and journalistic accounts, and transcripts from the trial of the workers’ leaders.

³The new Kádár regime did not have full control over labour unrest until they issued an order on January 5, 1957 prescribing the death penalty for either refusal to work or “provocation to strike” (Litván, 1996: 113).
means anti-socialist. Despite Soviet determination to portray 1956 as counter-revolution and Western (and Hungarian emigré) perceptions that the uprising more or less consisted of non- and anti-communist average Hungarian citizens, the fact remains (and Kende later admits) that former communists, intellectuals, anti-communist socialists, and many functionaries of the former regime as well as Imre Nagy and his immediate circle were also a prominent part of the events. Having said this, the hasty coalition propelled forward by the events themselves moved well beyond earlier demands and expectations, including demands for Hungarian neutrality (and withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact) and

---

6Imre Nagy himself personifies the level of equivocation surrounding personal decisions and actions during the uprising. Nagy transformed himself and was transformed by the events of 1956 from a lifelong communist partisan and politician into a popular hero. He lived in exile in the Soviet Union during the war, and studied agriculture. In 1944-45 he served as minister of agriculture in the provisional National Government, but fell into disfavour for his go-slow approach to collectivization. Partially due to his close connections with Malenkov and Soviet anxiety over the autocracy of Hungarian Stalinist leader Mátéias Rákosi (and the popular revulsion toward his rule), Nagy was promoted to the position of premier in 1953. Nagy’s appointment was short-lived, for after 18 months of political and ideological tug-of-war with Rákosi, Khrushchev’s victory provided Rákosi the excuse he needed to oust Nagy from the leadership, charging him and his “New Course” with right-wing opportunism. Throughout 1955 an “unofficial” opposition developed around Nagy, which included Hungarian communists (as opposed to the Muscovite variety) persecuted by Rákosi, former anti-fascist resistance leaders, writers, and rebellious journalists associated with Szabad Nép (Free People—the official party newspaper that had dared to criticize the regime). Student unrest and protest in Szeged and Budapest ushered in the mass demonstration of October 23 and the resulting armed conflict; Nagy was personally involved in neither. Initially Nagy took part in Politburo discussions of containing the conflict through radical changes in the program and leadership of the party; not until October 28 did he lend his unconditional support to the uprising. At this point Nagy obviously decided on leading a revolution rather than a restoration; by October 31 he announced Hungary’s intention to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact and on November 1 made his now-famous appeal to the United Nations.
a multi-party system. Because the Hungarian demands could always be justified by Western pro-Soviet intellectuals and by the Soviets themselves as a bridge too far, Hungary 1956 did not represent the same crisis of faith as Prague 1968.7

Finally, Hungary also heralded events to come, in the sense that Prague paid attention to avoid the mistakes of 1956, and Poland’s worker-intellectual alliance and development of worker self-organization owed much to the previous Hungarian efforts. The lessons of 1956 were critical for the development of dissident thought, especially in terms of providing a crash course in the geopolitical realities of Central and Eastern Europe. From the point of view of intellectual history, the Hungarian “revolt of the mind” was so influential in the region that, as Tamás Aczél suggested, “...when the Prague Spring arrived in 1968, the world simply assumed that it was initiated, led, supported, developed, and spurred on by intellectuals, mainly Communist ones, whose disillusionment became the spiritual axis of that event” (1976: 107). The lack of effective

7 Kende discusses November 1956 as the “Waterloo of leftist thought” but then admits the Prague Spring “evoked the impression that not all is lost in the Soviet orbit, communism may be redeemable, can receive a ‘human face’...” (in Litván, 1996: 174). In fact for some of the very reasons Kende expresses—the élan of Czechoslovak reform communism among Western intellectuals, the notion that it was founded on and through socialist market economics combined with greater political liberalism, and the resulting disappointment that the WTO invasion truncated a positive and promising alternative (in Skilling’s words an “interrupted revolution”)—I would argue strongly that the failure of the Prague Spring was a much greater defeat on an ideological level. This perception has been reinforced through my interviews, and especially by my discussions with János Kis and Miklós Haraszti. To the extent that 1956 did represent a “Waterloo” or more accurately, a watershed, it was more so among Western intellectuals. See for example, Tony Judt (1992), Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals 1944-1956 (Los Angeles: University of California Press).
international response and anything other than moralizing rhetoric offered by the West\textsuperscript{8} also set a pattern and foreshadowed similar reactions after the WTO invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the imposition of martial law in Poland in 1981. This pattern, initially disappointing but later predictable, generated an internal response and influenced subsequent strategies of dissent: if “liberation” from authoritarian communism was ever going to occur, it was not going to happen with overt Western assistance. The violence and death resulting from the Hungarian uprising\textsuperscript{9} also influenced later strategizing; non-violence became the hallmark of all subsequent dissent. In the end, the

\textsuperscript{8}There has been considerable debate, for example, on the role of Radio Free Europe in encouraging Hungarians to believe Western assistance would be forthcoming; a commentary on November 4 declared “a practical manifestation of Western sympathy is expected at any hour” (quoted in Timothy Garton Ash (1996), “Hungary’s Revolution: Forty Years On,” \textit{New York Review of Books}, 14 November 1996: 18-22). Of particular contention is whether or not these “false hopes” were generated by Hungarian journalists operating in accordance with US policy guidance at the time and, if so, whether many more lost their lives as freedom fighters as a result.

\textsuperscript{9}In the early days of the conflict, between 10,000 and 15,000 armed Hungarian “freedom fighters” took part (mostly young people, men and women, mostly from poorer parts of Budapest, especially from worker/apprentice barracks—the most marginalized, oppressed, and poverty-stricken segment of the population in the mid 1950s). It is still difficult to estimate the number of deaths and casualties fighting on either the Hungarian or Soviet side. A minimum of 2,700 Hungarian losses were reported by Litván; recently declassified Soviet documents are also cited which suggest 669 Soviet soldiers died, although this figure may have been minimized (1996: 102-103). More clear from Litván is the full extent of reprisals after the installation of the Kádár government. From 1956 to 1959, Litván estimates 35,000 were subject to prosecutorial investigation; between 1957 and 1960 13,000 ended up in internment camps. Approximately 350 people in total were executed (1996: 143-144). The border remained open from the end of October until late November; in less than one month over 180,000 refugees arrived in Austria (more than 200,000 left in total). The emigration after the uprising represented the largest mass exodus and professional “brain drain” ever experienced by the country.
Hungarian revolution was important for the instauration of democracy in Hungary itself. It became a moral issue for the democratic opposition, a unifying strategy, a project of recovering historical memory, and even a catalyst for political change.

The fact that the Hungarian uprising ultimately represented a distinct departure from and rejection of the Soviet model also had consequences for the immediate communist restoration. János Kádár had been invited to join the reconstituted cabinet organized by Nagy on November 3. Emblematic of his own equivocation—wanting to eliminate Rákossist elements in the party yet still maintain Moscow’s favour—he had issued a press release announcing the reorganization of the communist party on November 1, and travelled later that day to Moscow with Ferenc Münich for a meeting of the CPSU’s presidium. He returned to Budapest on the highly symbolic day of November 7, and was quickly installed as the new leader of the party. The Kádár government dealt harshly with the remnants of the “counter-revolutionary” struggle, reorganized police power, and began a process of mass reprisal, arrest, and judicial prosecution that lasted through to a partial amnesty in 1959. At the same time, the government had to be concerned with its perceived illegitimacy, especially in light of massive popular support for the uprising. Attempting to wrap itself in the cloth of Hungarian history, the regime adopted the Kossuth-arms of 1848 as the official state emblem and announced a wage increase. Even during his early period of consolidation,

10The reconstituted communist government formed under the leadership of Kádár between November 2 and November 4 in Szolnok, with Soviet approval.
Kádár was laying the groundwork for his own anti-Stalinist but pro-Moscow contract, epitomized forever by his oft-quoted slogan “He who is not against us is with us”. With these words and with blood-stained hands over the judicial murder of Imre Nagy and his codefendants, he inaugurated a twenty-year period of “consensus-seeking behaviour” (Tőkés, 1996: 11).

There is an old saying that Hungary has historically initiated and lost revolutions (1848, 1956) but gained much from the period of defeat, perhaps not immediately but over time. Thus after 1848 and the brutal murder of the revolutionaries on October 6, 1849, the dual monarchy resulted in 1867, ushering in a period of economic development, cultural advancement, urbanization, and political liberalism. After 1956 and following the period of repression, reprisal, and the execution of Nagy came Kádárite “soft” or “goulash” communism.

---

11Kádár was purposefully inverting Rákosi’s earlier catch phrase of Stalinist consolidation and paranoia: “He who is not with us is against us”. The message was one of live and let live, as long as political quiescence and public acquiescence were the rule.

12From November 4 to 22, Imre Nagy and close associates obtained refuge in the Yugoslav embassy in Budapest, and refused to either resign or recognize the Kádár government. Although they had been guaranteed safe conduct out of the embassy, they were in fact abducted by the KGB and taken to Romania, where they were both tried and executed.

13Miklós Molnár (1971) is best-known for having described 1956 as “the victory of a defeat”. As Ash (1996) pointed out, 1956 was also a turning point in the West’s recognition of Hungary and its sympathetic reception. This “positive association” replaced the “negative or non-existent one” Westerners generally had of Hungary, as an oppressor of minority cultures before 1914 (for example, Slovaks, Croats, Romanians) or as the dithering and ineffective ally of Hitler during the Second World War.
II. Kádárite Communism

Kádárite communism remained as quixotic as its leader. Rudolf Tőkés has periodized his long rule and changing public personae as “the reluctant hostage” (1956-63); the “risk-taking reformer” (1963-1971); the “good king” (1972-1980) and the “enfeebled autarch” (1981-1988). All of these descriptions are true, but are dependent on events external to Kádár’s rule as much as they are connected to any shifts in his personality. In the early years after 1956, he had to straddle Soviet control (and the fearful possibility of a Rákosi return) and the urgent requirement to legitimize his rulership and be perceived as his own political master. Obviously, the recognition of the former tended to defeat the latter, underscoring his own dependence on Khrushchev and his embodiment of the spirit of the XXth Congress. At the same time, Kádár had to avoid internally the types of policies that gave rise to the 1956 revolution in the first place. Given the demise of Khrushchev and the persistent memory and resonance of 1956, this could never be a long-term strategy.

Over time less emphasis was placed on overt administrative coercion as a means of obtaining legitimacy (or simply of preventing dissent). More sophisticated and effective methods were employed to generate tacit support: economic incentives, the selective cooptation of writers, journalists, and intellectuals, the routinization of

---

14In fact the regime was so successful in this regard that it goes a long way to explain the smaller size of the intellectual dissident community in Hungary.
political and economic life according to criteria of technical efficiency rather than ideological correctness, and the institutional separation of party and state. The regime could even afford, in János Kis' words, to "allow people to discover the cracks and side doors in the wall of official regulation, since it did not have to fear that those who circumvented them would attempt to secure their position with demands of rights" (1989: 14). The Hungarian party became a mass catch-all organization not unlike Western parties of the same period save for its operation in a non-competitive arena. Partly because of the adoption of such measures, life in Hungary slowly adapted to these changes. Society in Hungary became more liberal and de-politicized. Thus Kádár legitimized his rule not through a new political approach but in a sense the absence of one—by removing politics and the obtrusive nature of the party from people's daily lives, the perception of liberal and open society could be cultivated. The price to be paid, as Hungarian support for the WTO invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 attests, was slavish adherence to the Moscow line in foreign affairs.

Kádár was well-suited personally and psychologically to this operational strategy of flexible adaptation. Characterized by Tőkés as a "born follower" he was also an astute survivor, able to carve a place for himself in Rákosi's regime (after being persecuted by it), Nagy's short-lived cabinet, and subsequently as the leader of a still-shaky party reeling from the force and impact of the uprising and the violence attendant on its repression. Whether innately ruthless or not, he was motivated by a certain situational ethics, which allowed him, for example, to urge Rajk to confess falsely, knowingly send Nagy to his
end by handing him over to the Soviets, and later on appear to support Dubček in Czechoslovakia while agreeing to Hungarian participation in the invasion. It is perhaps interesting to note that unlike many of his generation who had both suffered and been promoted for their beliefs, Kádár was neither an intellectual nor particularly ideological. Pragmatism was the hallmark of his actions, which probably underscored his willingness to consider and then experiment with sweeping economic reforms. These reforms, which came to be known as the “New Economic Mechanism” or NEM, guaranteed his place as a “reformer” in the annals of authoritarian communism, and generated widespread admiration and even tacit support from outside the Bloc.

III. The Politics of Economic Reform: The NEM

Like other experiments in economic reform in the region, the NEM was motivated by the need to overcome the structural limitations of Soviet-style industrialization. As in Czechoslovakia, internal resources (measured in terms of capital, material, or labour) had been exhausted by the postwar period of extensive industrialization. Declining growth and productivity by the early 1960s were symptomatic of the diminishing returns that could be obtained if the only policy response available was to throw more resources at the problem.\footnote{In fact, because cheap raw materials and economic resources were no longer available by the late 1960s, the USSR and its satellite states had exhausted the possibilities of easy extensive industrialization.} As Nuti (1979), Burawoy (1985), Kornai (1992) and many others have shown,
any attempt to reform a state socialist economy generates many logical inconsistencies, paradoxes, and above all, political risks. In the first place, to modify resource-allocation strategies is to undermine the command nature of the economy. Second, to decentralize and down load economic decision-making to the firm or enterprise level amounts to drastically increasing local autonomy. Although such a move may result in greater efficiency, rationality and thus increased productivity, it will also subvert the centralized command structure and introduce a level of chaos into the picture (remembering that such decentralization would occur across entire industries and thus generate contradictory decisions given differing local priorities). Finally, to introduce wage incentives means allowing a level of societal differentiation ideologically incompatible with the system itself. In a sense, the NEM undertook all of these risks and, intentionally or not, "unleashed a wide array of hitherto latent political and social forces, [setting in] motion a process of complex systemic change that the regime could neither foresee nor control" (Tőkés, 1996: 82).

Proposals for Hungarian economic reform began circulating in the early 1960s, but gained momentum after Rezső Nyers was appointed to the Politburo and as Central Committee secretary for economic policy as a result of the 8th party congress in 1962. The first case for comprehensive reform was submitted in 1965, and importantly the emphasis was not only on achieving economic growth but also the democratization of
Ironically, the NEM was based on many of the principles of agricultural reform that were at the centre of Imre Nagy’s New Course. When finally promulgated in 1968, the implementation of the NEM consisted of the following planks: 1) reform in the industrial sector such that enterprises were to become autonomous and profit-maximizing; 2) devolution of planning to the local level; and 3) wage and price reform. The NEM was a bold and far-reaching effort to reform the state-socialist economy of Hungary systematically from within, but from the start it contained a number of contradictions, which were the object of much discussion and debate both internally and externally for the next two decades.¹⁷

¹⁶I am indebted to Tőkés for highlighting the significance of this “bold coupling”; interestingly he found no compelling explanation for why the latter was included in a program of largely economic reform, but it clearly had to do with the regime linking political legitimacy to economic performance. See Tőkés, 1996, chapter 2, “Economic Reforms: From Plan to Market”.

From the outset, the contradictory nature of the program is evident in Kádár’s speech to the 9th Congress of the Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt (MSZMP, or Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party) in 1966 outlining the proposed program. Just a few paragraphs apart, he speaks of how “central planning will continue to have a first class role”, however, “…the state will not generally prescribe compulsory plan indexes for the enterprises”. Similarly, although he warned that “changes in consumer prices must not entail a lowering of the population’s living standard”, it was recognized that prices would have to change (that is, rise). Furthermore, Kádár stated “wages should reflect the workers’ actual performance more exactly” but then explained this in the very next sentence as “...a more direct application of the socialist principle of distribution according to work”, all in the context of a discussion to raise wages overall (Kádár, quoted in Daniels, ed., 1994: 228-230).

Price reform was supposed to result in better use of assets and resources, and also force managers to bring prices closer to market levels. However, because of state control over most prices (70% of goods and services were directly regulated) and the general absence of hard budget constraints, enterprise effectiveness (or “profitability”) was a chimera, given the opportunities to use the complexity of auditing and accounting procedures to the firm’s advantage. Smarter production and better marketing did not

summary is Támas Bauer’s “Reforming or Perfecting the Economic Mechanism” in Ferenc Féher and Andrew Arato, eds. (1991), Crisis and Reform in Eastern Europe (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction).
result. The illogical relationship between the cost and the price of goods was heightened by the continual state privileging of heavy industry and defence (especially given these could be translated into favourable dollar and rouble exports). Efforts to allow for greater differentiation in wages proved problematic in implementation. Unfortunately, differentiated compensation occurred most effectively in middle and higher management levels, which were largely unproductive and perhaps less deserving of such differentiation. On the shop floor level such policies were often translated into rudimentary and exploitative incentive systems above artificially low base rates. The system of using “piece rates” on the shop floor was effectively analyzed and criticized by Miklós Haraszti in *A Worker in a Workers’ State*: Michael Burawoy later used Haraszti’s book as a point of comparison with similarly inhumane wage practices of capitalist factory production in *The Politics of Production: Factory Regimes under Capitalism and State Socialism*. Somehow Kádárist incomes policies when translated into reality provided for the worst in capitalist-type wage differentiation, with none of the intended benefits.

There were considerable difficulties in implementing the NEM, not surprising given the policy contradictions it contained. The party “reds”--largely uneducated working class cadres who owed their upward mobility to their ideological commitment--resented the emphasis on education and technical expertise with good reason given
increased job insecurity. The cumbersome and rigidly hierarchical nature of the decision-making endemic to all forms of authoritarian communism (not to mention heavily entrenched institutional interests) contributed to the delay between promulgation and implementation, and caused a fair amount of policy drift along the way. From 1968 through to 1972 Moscow and other Eastern Bloc countries (most notably normalized Czechoslovakia, the DDR, and Bulgaria; Poland had its own problems in 1968 and attempted new solutions under Gierek in the 1970s) put varying degrees of pressure on Hungary to alter or halt the reform process. A process of counter-reform and recentralization was half-heartedly implemented from 1972 onward, with a general lack of success one might have predicted with such a policy turnaround. In the end, the “escape hatch” strategy of Kádár and others in the early 1980s was almost exactly the same as that utilized by Gierek in the 1970s: finance increased expectations and overlook deepening structural constraints by borrowing from abroad. In the West Hungary found a more than willing partner economically; moreover financial credit was politically supported by governments wanting to “reward” Hungary for its bold experimentation through generous trade conditions (Johnson, 1996: 256).

Regardless of the contradictions inherent in the NEM, it remained the most

---

18 Not in the sense of losing one’s job, but being considered ineligible for promotion or new positions given the emphasis on education and expertise.

19 By the end of the 1970s, Hungary already had a 6-7 billion dollar debt and it was increasingly clear that this burden could not be alleviated through successful competition on the world market.
comprehensive and sustained effort to reform a state socialist economy, only to be
surpassed by the grand vision (and failure) of Gorbachev's *perestroika* in the late 1980s.
The role of the plan diminished and that of the "market" (such as it was) increased,
especially in allocating resources for production. The relationship between plan and
market, although not necessarily complementary, meant that a hybrid system was allowed
to develop, with features of plan and price bargaining within the context of competing
institutional interests (Battaile Hall, 1986). On a bureaucratic level, the reform measures
were accompanied by the gradual emancipation of public administration from direct party
control. The rule of experts and debate among them were evidence of what Tőkés calls
"institutional proto-pluralism" (1996: 115). Thus the successes and shortcomings of the
NEM also generated a debate on where it might lead in the future, which opened up one
of the few regime-sanctioned, serious, and scholarly debates on how the Hungarian
economy might be further defined. These alternate approaches included proposals for a
mixed economy (*gemischte Wirtschaft*), "managerial" or "entrepreneurial" socialism", or
some form of syndicalist or worker self-managed economy (Battaile Hall, 1986).

IV. Socialist Redistribution and the Second Economy

An important outgrowth of the NEM was the permitted existence of the "second
economy", which consisted of everything from private agricultural plots to small family-
run businesses and joint ventures with foreign companies. Elemér Hankiss described the
second economy as "the sum total of economic activities outside the state sector", a
definition with enough elasticity to include both illegal, semi-legal, and legal transactions (quoted in Skilling, 1989: 165). Moreover, the second economy overall was an integral component of the national economy, contributing up to one third of NMP.21

In 1979 the Politburo passed a resolution fully legalizing the second economy, which initiated a renewal of the economic reform process and also served to give a green light for grass-roots privatization (Berend, 1996: 268). In 1981 the private leasing of state-owned shops and restaurants began, and “civil-law companies” and small cooperatives were allowed. During the first half of the decade, the number of private crafts people and shopkeepers increased by up to 40 percent.

By the late 1980s the second economy was so extensive in Hungary that virtually the entire citizenry engaged with it in the routines of daily life. Many people had at least one job in the second economy, parallelling similar work in the official economy or in a completely separate arena but conducted after “official” working hours. Small independent entrepreneurs played an increasingly important role, but to some degree their

20 Legal activities included the sale of agricultural products by private farmers, cottage goods manufacturing, and licensed transactions by various service workers--crafts persons contractors, repair persons, and professionals, especially in medical and dental fields. Illegal or semi-legal activities were the unlicensed versions of the same activities listed above, and out-and-out illegal activities included the giving and receipt of gratuities, bribery, corruption, black-market and currency speculation or the conduct of entirely underground operations (see Skilling, 1989: 165).

21 Berend (1990, 1996) estimated that by the mid 1980s private businesses accounted for up to 80 percent of construction work, 60 percent of the service sector, about one-third of the total agricultural production, and 15% of industrial output.
influence has been exaggerated by Western economists looking hopefully to Hungary for economic convergence that then might spawn political change.

The second economy was also supported on an ideological level, as it encouraged independence, private initiative, personal liberty, existential freedom, and entrepreneurial risk-taking—all this on top of the usual motive of economic gain. From the perspective of the regime, this latter function was probably most important, for when the regime had to face up to the structural nature of its economic crises in the late 1980s, only the second economy was able to smooth the edges by providing consistently high quality and plentiful consumer goods and foodstuffs.22 The second economy served another important socially integrating and legitimizing function for the state, for it tolerated private initiative and paradoxically the resulting social differentiation increased the public perceptions of getting ahead (at least for some).

In the long term, however, the second economy had considerable corrosive effects. To the extent that participation in the second economy was more profitable, workers engaged in both the official and second economies began to switch their allegiances in terms of a personal investment of time, commitment, and creative energy. At the same time, the growth of the second economy and its attendant benefits was clearly being undermined by the limits of self-exploitation (Kis, 1989: 17). This process tended

22A good example is the provision of privately developed housing units in Budapest which, on the one hand, alleviated the dramatic shortage of urban dwellings but, on the other, generated inflationary pressures on costs such that ordinary citizens were paying an increasingly large share of their net incomes on housing.
simultaneously to highlight and paper over the structural deficiencies in the state-controlled realm. The second economy also increased individual autonomy at a time when the post-1956 generation had come of age, a generation for which consolidation, concession, and consumerism were not considered "an unexpected gift, but a natural point of departure" (Kis, 1989: 17). Kis logically argued that it was from these ranks that the embryonic opposition emerged, not content with grumbling about the shortcomings of economic policies, but demanding a "new start in politics" as well (1989: 17). Most of the active theorists of the democratic opposition were not occupied in the sidelines running little businesses in the second economy, but its very existence made their job easier.

Not unlike neoliberal critics of the Western welfare state, preeminent Hungarian economist János Kornai has subsequently criticized Kádárist economics for creating a welfarist ethos of the part of unmotivated workers, unproductive bureaucrats and parasitic intellectuals. None of these groups would pay for the ultimate costs of gyulas communism. However, Kádár was pragmatic enough either to leave alone or encourage the farmers and workers in the second economy; their progress and economic betterment was key to the success of the regime. However, the increase in societal inequality was matched by the inability of the party-state to deal with the implications of success in the second economy by implementing the major structural changes necessary to reform the official economy. Taken together, these factors were in large part responsible for the unravelling of the Kádárite compromise.
V. Intellectuals: On the Road to Class Power?

If in Czechoslovakia the particular strength of the intellectual opposition lay in its writers and philosophers, if in Poland many of the leading intellectual activists were historians, then in Hungary the strong suit of the democratic opposition could be found in the trenchant analyses of economists and sociologists. I have included an analysis of writer György Konrád and Ivan Szelenyi’s The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power here rather than in the following section: it is an illuminating account of society in Hungary under authoritarian communism as it is yet another critical socialist “new class” theory.

Konrád and Szelenyi wrote the book first as a samizdat essay in 1973-1974, “as an attempt to sum up the results of the studies we had carried on in Hungary since 1965” (1979: xiii). Together they developed the dual thesis that first, under state socialist Soviet-style systems, the workers are in fact the most underprivileged class and second, that the new ruling class is a consolidated class of intellectuals who rule in their own interests but under the banner of “the dictatorship of the proletariat”. Moreover, this consolidated class resulted from a class alliance between “free intellectuals” (scholars, artists, teachers) and the technical intelligentsia (engineers, physicians) in combination with the party bureaucracy.

Konrád and Szelenyi root their analysis historically in the historical experience and development of the intelligentsia in Central and Eastern Europe, where the bourgeoisie was numerically small in comparison with the gentry or nobility.
Furthermore, traders and merchants were often of German or Jewish extraction (or both), and thus their "otherness" compounded other difficulties, ensuring that they did not generally "acquire the power and privileges that accompanied the rise of that class in the West" (Rupnik, 1988: 11). Intellectuals, or more pragmatically stated, the intelligentsia, replaced the entrepreneur in Central Europe as the engine and spokesperson of dynamic change and development. The authors state: "...the intelligentsia, organized into a government-bureaucratic ruling class, has taken the lead in modernization, replacing a weak bourgeoisie incapable of breaking with feudalism" (1979: 10). The rise of Bolshevism provided the power and even the ideological orientation to defeat local and landed aristocracies once and for all:

Bolshevism, then, offered the intellectuals a program for freeing themselves of the duty of representing particular interests once power had been secured, and it used particular interests simply as a means of acquiring power. With the expropriation of the expropriators—that is, with the transfer of the right to dispose over the surplus product from landlords and capitalists to intellectuals in power, or to worker cadres whose political positions and functions made intellectuals of them—and with the destruction of the immediate producers' organs of management and control, the Bolsheviks traced the outlines of a new rational-redistributive system and, within it, indicated the position of the teleological redistributors, called to represent the interests of all society expertly and professionally (1979: 142).

According to this view, the Central European intellectual faced a historical dilemma: either become an agent of the state or become completely independent and critical of its authoritarianism and the prevailing étatiste form of development—in other words, be a bureaucrat or a revolutionary (1979: 85-86). Part of the danger inherent in
the rule by intellectuals is due to their claim to possess “transcendent” or “teleological” forms of knowledge. Thus their epistemology coheres easily with economic structures remodelled as “a system of rational redistribution” and political structures that are totalistic in nature, and ideologically determined. Such masters of the universe believed not only that politics could be refashioned to achieve desirable social goals, but that this required not simply ownership but control over the economic forces of production as well.

With such an analysis, Konrád and Szélényi were able to clarify for themselves the opacity of Hungarian society in terms of latent class conflict, and also account for their own positions within it. More so than any other authoritarian communist regime, Kádár’s government was extremely successful in coopting intellectuals after a critical episode of dissent (not so in Gomułka’s Poland where the intellectuals were disenchanted early on, nor in Husák’s Czechoslovakia). By providing for their “class interest” in the bureaucratic hierarchy, intellectuals were effectively demobilized as a force for social change. Miklós Haraszti echoed Konrád and Szélényi when describing the process as follows:

In Budapest they have come to understand that neither the technocrats, nor the scholars, nor even the artists are necessarily the vanguards of the struggle for liberty. They may become such vanguards but only if their aspiration remains unfulfilled. In general, the regime came to realize that these functionally leading social strata, which in a nationalized industrial society have occupied the place of the bourgeoisie, also have real interests. Moreover, it has remained unperturbed by the recognition that these interests can in fact be satisfied in a monolithic state.
This is how the “Hungarian miracle” came into being. Hungarian society is in the process of demonstrating that it can be transformed from a post-Stalinist crisis-society into a lasting civilization; and with careful concessions, the planning, organizing, directing, and cultural intelligentsia can become supporters of the monolithic state. It is not enough for these strata to serve the state. Security demands that they should also constitute the state. Without relinquishing its monolithic identity, the Hungarian state has reoriented itself to become the real protection of the interests of these new strata that are the products of the process of total nationalization.  

Most of the best representatives of Hungarian culture, for example, worked within the system rather than outside it. Kádár’s cultural czar György Aczél ruled over a vast apparat for over twenty-five years (surrendering control only in 1985) and literally “orchestrated, quite brilliantly, the score, the players, and the instruments of the cultural scene” (Tőkés, 1996: 16). After 1956, when extreme opponents to the regime had either been liquidated, silenced, or emigrated, Aczél oversaw the cultural establishment, encouraging and tolerating an elite of writers, playwrights, poets, and filmmakers. In exchange for being well-housed and well-fed, the cultural elite propagated the official line but at the same time were given considerable artistic space and license to criticize—within vaguely determinable boundaries, of course. Thus the famed “liberalism” of Kádárite communism had a cultural and intellectual dimension as well.

Even in the late 1980s when dissident voices were gathering sound, fury, and cohesion, the line between the within-system intellectual and the dissident remained

---

indistinct. There was no Polish division between “us” and “them”; no persecuted community of worthy and recognized writers and activists as in Czechoslovakia. Given the modest improvements (or even the openness of debate) generated by the NEM, the smooth functioning of the cultural aristocracy, and the relative freedom of intellectual debate in the academic sphere, one could well believe that the intellectuals had assumed class power.

The few Hungarians who could later lay claim to the clear-cut label “dissident” had both a subtle appreciation of Hungarian “liberalism” and at the same time were extremely critical of it. In fact, they preferred to speak not of Hungarian “liberalism” but of the chaos or anarchy pervading the system. At issue was not only the fact that strategically it was more difficult to get effectively co-opted intellectuals “on side”, but that given the fuzziness and mutability of the boundaries, it was never easy to get a clear-cut picture of who stood where. Former opposition activist Miklós Haraszti drew a telling distinction between what he called “the outcast opposition” (of which he considered himself a member) and the so-called “loyal opposition”, those who were ensconced in the “velvet prison” of state patronage.24 Another indication of the Hungarian situation is a cynical joke common at the time: “If Solzhenitsyn had lived in Hungary, he would have been appointed president of the Writers’ Union, and The Gulag Archipelago would never have been written”.

VI. The Budapest School

György Lukács stands as almost a mythical figure with respect to both the history of twentieth-century Hungary and modern Marxist philosophy. In his long and active life as a philosopher, literary critic, and politician, Lukács managed to play key roles in all three "moments" of Hungarian communism. First, after becoming a committed communist in 1918 he was appointed to the short-lived Béla Kun government of 1919 as "People's Commissar" for Education and Culture. Second, as a leader, activist, and theoretician of the Hungarian Communist Party in the interwar period and again after the war, his independent stance, popular-front political strategies and his compellingly humanistic Marxist philosophy earned him enormous intellectual influence combined with disdain and official harassment from the Comintern and the gatekeepers of Soviet Marxism. Third, he was appointed Minister of Culture in Imre Nagy's government in 1956, and was deported with Nagy to Romania, lucky to be able to return later to a more "quiet" life in Budapest. In the final decades of his life he returned to earlier themes, specifically aesthetic theory and social ontology. However, at the same time he nurtured and supported a group of dedicated and highly skilled students of philosophy, and in this role became the unofficial founder and leader of the so-called "Budapest School".

Shortly before he died, in a letter to the Times Literary Supplement in 1971, Lukács himself drew the attention of the wider intellectual community to the

---

“accomplishments of a small group of Hungarian marxist philosophers, his own disciples which he called the ‘Budapest School’” (Szelényi, 1977: 61). In the early 1960s with the relaxation of the repressive measures necessitated by the uprising, these disciples of Lukács were not only able to develop their ideas with limited political interference,26 but in fact became full members of the academic community, were published, and to some degree acquired a following among younger students. Included were Ágnes Heller, Ferenc Fehér, György Márkus, Maria Márkus, Ivan Szelényi, Mihály Vajda and perhaps most controversially András Hegedüs.27

26This was partially because of Lukács’ own influence; he saved Ferenc Fehér from being expelled from university, as he did later with writer and dissident György Konrád (Kadarkay, 1991: 416). Ágnes Heller was expelled from the party in 1959, but was still able to publish. György Márkus was assistant professor of philosophy at Lórand Eötvös University (ELTE) from 1957 to 1959 and later joined the Hungarian Academy of Science’s Institute of Philosophy. András Hegedüs founded the Hungarian Academy of Science’s Sociological Research Group, of which Maria Márkus, also a noted sociologist and co-author of Hegedüs, was party secretary. Lukács’ position in post-1956 Hungary continued to be an ambiguous one: as a towering figure of Marxist philosophy he could not be easily discounted, although he was identified by Moscow as a chief “revisionist” along with Kolakowski in Poland and Lefebvre in France. Despite considerable pressure, he refused to emigrate and over time was more or less tolerated by the authorities. His description of the absurd situation was, “I got stuck in their throat, and they were unable to either swallow or spit me out” (quoted in Kadarkay, 1991: 441). It was not coincidental that the regime crackdown on the intellectuals associated with the School occurred after Lukács’ death in 1971.

27Hegedüs was a leading communist politician, served as prime minister in 1955-1956, and was considered a Stalinist hard-liner. However after emigrating to (and then returning from) Moscow in the late 1950s, he organized and was leader of the sociological research group in the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He first attracted criticism through his editorship of the sociological journal Valosag. His own personal process of rethinking the process that led up to 1956 reached a high point with his vocal opposition to the WTO invasion of Czechoslovakia and expulsion from the party in 1973.
Lukács was both a problematic and fitting mentor for a generation raised on the philosophical tenets of Marxism as well as having lived through its real-life crises. Lukács always considered himself a party member, funnelled his criticism through party channels, took the Stalinist dictates of self-criticism and self-repudiation seriously, and never (unlike Kołakowski) wavered in his belief that Marxism was not irrevocably damaged by Leninist practice. Throughout his life in the various roles he played, Lukács continued his search for a viable and radical socialist alternative, yet still within the Soviet Bloc. Nonetheless, he continued to be a philosophical iconoclast within the boundaries of Marxist philosophy. One of his major achievements was to root Marxist historiography in its Hegelian origins, and in many respects he remained a philosophical idealist. His treatment of class consciousness and aesthetics demonstrate his determination that Marxist theory be considered in its subjective and cultural dimensions, and with this approach he strongly influenced the Frankfurt School and the development of a “sociology of knowledge”.

First as students, and then later as close associates and friends, Ágnes Heller and Ferenc Fehér were among the most faithful Lukács disciples. In the same way that

He later formulated his position for “radical reformism” and “a great historic compromise” together with a proposal for the creation of a new “historical bloc” (in the Gramscian sense) which would transcend existing monolithic social regimes. In a sense, Hegedüs’ vision can be considered yet another Hungarian expression of the “third way”.

28A telling reminder of this fact occurred in 1956: as a member of Imre Nagy’s government in 1956, he was one of two cabinet members who did not support Hungary’s withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact.
Lukács pushed the envelope of orthodox Marxism, Heller and Fehér moved from Lukácian Marxist humanism to more broadly philosophical approaches to the problems of alienation and human essence. They were not content to merely comment on the obvious discrepancies between really-existing socialism and the socialist idea, but to move beyond this confrontation to a new critical theory. Meanwhile András Hegedüs, Ivan Szelényi, and Maria Márcus engaged in the development of empirical sociology, highlighting through case study and example increasing social inequalities, consumerist attitudes and deteriorating workplace conditions, while providing a detailed picture of the second economy, and the realities of enterprise management. György Márcus was also an important philosopher and member of the School; in particular he was influential to the younger 1960s generation as a teacher and mentor, fulfilling the same role as Lukács did for his own generation. Much of this philosophical and empirical exploration was encouraged by Lukács or at least took place under the protective umbrella afforded by his personal preeminence in the international community of intellectual Marxists. In one way or another, all scholars in the School sought to utilize Marxism as a methodology, in critically analyzing the antinomies of the system, from the perspectives of political

\[\text{\footnotesize 29Subsequently, they took on the banner as “post-Marxists”}.\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 30In my interview with Ágnes Heller on 22 August 1995, she noted that from 1957 onward Lukács could and did receive books from the West; being in his circle meant access to contemporary scholarly literature from outside the Soviet bloc. This fact combined with Lukács’ stringent emphasis on being grounded in the philosophical classics--Plato, Aristotle, Kant, and Hegel in particular--meant that his students were well versed not only in Marxist theory but in classical and contemporary debates.}\]
economy, sociology, and philosophy. However, in so doing they consciously began to reassess many of the classical tenets of Marxism, a process that led Márkus, Bence, and Kis to write *Is a Critical Political Economy Really Possible at all?* Thus Lukács’ disciples moved from a renewal of Marxism by using Marxist methodology to advance a Marxist explanation of state socialist phenomena, to what Szelényi (borrowing from Adorno) called “a negation of the negation”.

Originally, as Szelényi points out, the Budapest School functioned like “His Majesty’s Opposition”: “the humanist critique they presented did not frighten the political establishment” (Szelényi, 1977: 63). It could be tolerated because at this early stage (mid to late 1960s) “it did not offer a structural critique of State socialism” (1977:63).\(^3\) They first began to cross the line with their attacks on the economic reforms envisioned by the NEM, especially with their concerns about widening social inequalities and their fears about the prospect of a technocratic takeover (a dress rehearsal for the thesis more fully developed later by Szelényi and Konrád). They also made the salient and rather prescient point that pursuing economic reform without accompanying political reform was an exercise in half-measures that was inevitably doomed to failure. However, when Lukács along with his students openly and publicly protested against Hungary’s participation in the WTO invasion of Czechoslovakia, a more obvious and less forgiving barrier had been

\(^3\)This came later, most notably with Fehér, Heller, and Márkus’ publication of *Dictatorship OverNeeds: An Analysis of Soviet Societies* in 1983, after all three had left Hungary.
Regime retaliation followed and five years later, with Kádár’s blessing, they were dismissed from their academic positions as well (Tőkés, 1996: 181). Their ideological transgressions had accumulated to a point where they could no longer be even repressively tolerated. They had indeed become the “problem children” of the regime. In January, 1977, the prominent members of the School were among the thirty-four intellectuals who made a public expression of solidarity with the signatories of Charter 77.

By the late 1970s, the Berufsverbot had begun to take its toll both individually and collectively on the members of the School. After five years of near-constant police harassment combined with the regime-sanctioned prohibition against academic teaching and publishing, the most prominent members of the Budapest School emigrated. György and Maria Márkus relocated to West Berlin; Ágnes Heller and Ferenc Fehér left for Melbourne, Australia. At the time and with considerable Hungarian irony, Minister of Culture Imre Pozsgay paid an eloquent tribute to the foursome, stating that the

32 In the summer of 1968 while attending a conference of philosophers at Korcula in Yugoslavia, György Márkus, Maria Márkus, Ágnes Heller, and Ferenc Fehér all signed a declaration condemning the intervention of WTO troops in Czechoslovakia. György and Maria Márkus were both expelled from the party as a result.


34 Both Heller and Fehér subsequently joined the Graduate Faculty of the New School for Social Research, where Heller remains currently as Hannah Arendt Professor of Philosophy.
departure of such highly respected intellectuals was an undisputed cultural loss for the country, but also admitted that the prohibition of their work was necessary given its opposition to the political and economic foundations of socialism.\textsuperscript{35} By letting them leave legally and without recrimination, the regime could be seen to be living within the spirit of Helsinki and at the same time ridding themselves of dissenting scholars who had long been a thorn in their side. However, the Budapest School members living abroad formed a small but intellectually influential emigré community of support and external opposition to the regime. In this respect, they were able to focus scholarly attention in the West on the underside of Kádárite communism and the specificities of the Hungarian political situation,\textsuperscript{36} which continued to require a more subtle appreciation than the obvious persecution of Czechoslovakia and the periodic popular mobilization of Poland.

VII. "Populist" vs. "Democratic" Dissent

To complicate matters in any discussion of opposition in Hungary prior to 1989, there are a number of cross-cutting cleavages permeating Hungarian intellectual history that are unrelated to the divide between those opposing authoritarian communism and

\textsuperscript{35}Quoted in RFE Report (Hungarian Section/KK), “Prominent Dissident Intellectuals Emigrate from Hungary,” Munich, 10 February 1978.

\textsuperscript{36}A good example is the work on and many contributions of Heller and the Budapest School emigrés to the journal \textit{Praxis International}, involvement with NSSR’s \textit{Social Research}, and cooperation with the (NSSR) East and Central Europe Program’s Democracy Seminars (the Budapest seminars were chaired by former Márkus student György Bence, assisted organizationally by Fehér in New York).
those who worked within the system and to varying degrees may have undermined or supported it (or both). The classic and most important example is the division between the “populist” (népi) and the “urbanist” or cosmopolitan writers and intellectuals.

The populists saw themselves as the representatives of völklisch Hungarian traditions, epitomized by their valorization of rural and village life.³⁷ The urbanists, on the other hand, positioned their axis on life in Budapest, were disproportionately Jewish and politically more leftist than nationalist.³⁸ There are many ways to heighten the differences between the populists and the urbanists: the former were more concerned with the fate of Hungarian Kultur and in particular the persecution of Hungarian minorities outside its border, whereas the latter looked to the West and European civilization, with Budapest representing an island and refuge.³⁹ Populists tended to be more easily coopted

³⁷ Tőkés is emphatic in making the historical comment that the earlier generations of Hungarian populists were “not the Russian Narodnik-type urban visionaries bound on a mission to enlighten, or learn from, the poor” (1996: 176). Rather, they tended to be educated provincial intellectuals and writers whose aim was to promote the cultural modernization and development of rural Hungary. In many respects they were radically critical of official policy during the Horthy regime, but it is also true that to the extent that populist roots were agrarian and anticapitalist, they were also nationalist and inward-seeking, thus making them susceptible to both fascist and anti-Semitic sympathies (see Lukacs, 1988: 132-134).

³⁸ On the historical development of these two groups and the antagonism between them, see John Lukacs (1988), Budapest 1900: A Historical Portrait of a City and its Culture, (New York, Grove Press), especially chapter 4, “Politics and Powers” and chapter 6, “Seeds of Troubles”.

³⁹ For a deliberate caricature of the differences, see Timothy Garton Ash, “A Hungarian Lesson” in Ash (1991a), The Uses of Adversity, p. 135.
(or more easy for the regime to tolerate) given that the selective use of nationalism was highly functional for the regime. The self-styled “democratic opposition” (demokratikus ellenzék) were drawn largely from the urbanists and given their vigorous sociological and economic critiques of the system (such as that of Konrád and Szelényi) as well as their emphasis on human rights and opposition to censorship, they were far more likely to be out of favour with the regime, which even in Hungary had serious and negative consequences.

In the four years following the 1956 uprising, the populist writers “made their peace with the regime” (Tőkés, 1996: 176). Many of the prominent writers sympathetic to the events of 1956 (László Németh, Gyula Illyés and others) were effectively silenced into submission. However, they were not clear-cut victims. Indeed they saw the protectionist and nationalist elements of Kádárite communism as immeasurably preferable to a total loss of cultural statehood, which was represented by both Western consumerist capitalism and the Soviet Stalinism already endured under Rákosi. The “modus vivendi” of the relationship between the populists and the party can be found in László Németh’s 1962 “Letter to a Cultural Politician” (aimed at György Aczél), wherein he outlined his vision of the future—a society made up of socialist intellectuals, to be sure, but from peasant, worker, and lower-middle-class backgrounds with greater access to education, social mobility and whose voice would be found in patriotism as well as ideology. (Tőkés, 1996: 178-179). Needless to say, this unwritten agreement was reinforced by many sweeteners flowing from the regime to the writers: literary prizes,
generous financial support, freedom to travel abroad. The regime was so successful in its approach that not only did the populist writers not support Charter 77 (as many of the members of the fledgling democratic opposition did); many openly condemned the Czechoslovak signatories (Haraszti, 1979). This stance remained more or less unchallenged until the “leadership” of the populist intellectuals passed from Gyula Illyés’ death in 1983 to the next generation, unofficially led by Sándor Csoóri.

The largely urbanist democratic opposition began to take shape in the 1970s, and really crystallized in the 1980s. In many respects, the story of the opposition is the story of two friends and former students of Márkus: János Kis and György Bence. Tőkés claims, quite accurately in my view, that both these individuals were more responsible than anyone else “for the transformation of the Budapest School from an esoteric philosophical debating society to what became by far the most influential political opposition movement of the late Kádár era” (1996: 181). In particular, Kis’ strategic mind and attitude of philosophical compromise was evident early on in his career, with his suggestion that one must go beyond Marx to a regulated market economy if the freedom of both consumers and producers (as in Marx’s original vision) was to be truly achieved. Both Kis and Bence were victims of the 1973 academic purge of the Budapest School and its corollaries. Between 1973 and 1977 they wrote a series of critical essays together under the pseudonym Marc Rakovski, which were later published in Hungarian samizdat and in English as a book under the title *Towards an East European Marxism*. Unfortunately, their intellectual collaboration ended with the acrimonious collapse of
their friendship, and in most accounts Kis remained the intellectual leader and strategist of the opposition.

Another key figure in the Hungarian democratic opposition whose roots were not with the Budapest School is poet and activist Miklós Haraszti. Haraszti began his "career" as a dissident early, and was on a more obvious collision course with the regime than his counterparts. An avowed and self-described Maoist or "ultra-leftist" and sympathizer with spontaneous and popular democratic struggle, Haraszti came into the spotlight as a student when he published a poem defending Cuban revolutionary Che Guevara.40 Expelled from university for his oppositional views, he went to work for a year in the Red Star Tractor Factory, and wrote a book about the experience. When he published his book *A Worker in a Workers' State* it caused a national scandal, as Haraszti had the audacity to claim that Hungarian workers were exploited under state socialism, in the same degree and by the same methods as previously employed by primitive commodity production under capitalism. His work was declared "subversive agitation against the state" and he was arrested in 1973. A farcical trial ensued, with the widows of Count Michael Károlyi and László Rajk41 taking part as character witnesses for the
defendant. Heller, Fehér, Vajda, and Hegedűs were also in the courtroom. The case captured international attention, and as a result, Haraszti remained one of the most well-recognized and oft-quoted figures in the Hungarian opposition.

Writer György Konrád straddled many demographic and occupational categories and his novels gave a literary voice to the empirical sociology initiated by Hegedűs and the Sociological Research Group. The personal intensity and confessional quality of novels such as *The Case Worker* and *The City Builder* provided fictional yet realistic testimony to the Sisyphean struggles of functionaries employed by the party-state.

Konrád was young enough to have remembered and been involved in the 1956 revolution, but played such a minor role that he was neither tried nor imprisoned. After a period of forced unemployment in the early 1960s he found work first as a public guardianship officer and later as an urban sociologist. What Hegedűs studied from the top down, Konrád experienced from the bottom up, an experience which provided fodder for both

Party from 1913 onward (as a potential and popular alternative to the conservative corporatist elite ruling the country), his moment in the political spotlight was sandwiched between the oppressive and short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919 and the counter-revolutionary crackdown of the Horthy regime. László Rajk was a prominent "indigenous" communist, appointed to lead the Ministry of the Interior in 1946 and was also briefly deputy secretary general. He was the chief rival of Mátýás Rákosi and in 1949 was arrested and stripped of his positions. Three months later he and several alleged accomplices were tried in what became the first of the famous postwar show trials in the region. He was coerced into falsely confessing that he was a Titoist and Western spy, in regular contact with two Americans ostensibly in the employ of John Foster Dulles--Noel and Hermann Field. Rajk was sentenced to death and executed. His son (of the same name) became a prominent and outspoken member of the democratic opposition in the 1970s and 1980s.
his writing and his politics. As a writer, Konrád was neither an older nor younger generation populist; his literary style was not local or national but cosmopolitan and modern: ironically, it can be described as realistic socialist realism.\footnote{Konrád's novel \textit{The City Builder} was rejected by a Hungarian publisher because it was considered "too bleak"! (Konrád, 1995: X)} Through his friendship and collaboration with Szélényi he became connected with the ideas of the Budapest School. He raised his voice in support of Miklós Haraszti during his 1974 trial, initiating a close friendship between the two men.

As in Czechoslovakia, a catalyst for organized dissent was Hungary's participation in the Helsinki process. However, Hungarians did not respond to Helsinki by creating a human rights group; rather, they responded to the Czechoslovak crackdown on the Chartists. On January 9, 1977 thirty-four intellectuals sent the following message to Pavel Kohout in Prague:

\begin{quote}
We declare our solidarity with the signers of Charter 77 and we condemn the repressive measures used against them. We are convinced that the defence of human and civil rights is a common concern of all Eastern Europe.\footnote{quoted in RFE Report, “Thirty Hungarian Intellectuals Express Solidarity with Charter 77,” Munich, 20 January 1977.}
\end{quote}

Notably, among those who signed were philosophers, writers, literary critics, and economists and many were of the younger generation, those reared under the promises of
communism. The variety represented by those signing the appeal also pointed to the nascent possibility of an oppositional alliance that went beyond leftist intellectuals. Again, in 1979, Hungarian intellectuals signed a protest supporting their Czechoslovak counterparts, however, this time 184 individuals signed a petition stating, “We protest the trial and sentences of the members of the Charter 77 movement and demand release of the prisoners.” The occasion was the trial and sentencing of the six Chartists arrested for the activities in VONS, including Havel, Dienstbier, and Benda.

Similarly, the Polish social mobilization represented at first by KOR and then the spectacular success of the formation of the independent trade union Solidarity was a powerful incentive for the Hungarians. The regime also took notice and was obviously concerned about a possible demonstration effect: when György Bence and four others attempted to catch a flight to Warsaw on August 27, 1980, they had their passports confiscated at the Budapest-Ferihagy airport. In contravention of the “normal” rules of permissible travel between friendly socialist states, Bence and friends were informed their trip was contrary to the interests of both the Hungarian and Polish governments (Engelmann, 1981: 139). The Poles also reciprocated with advice, assistance, and

---

44 Signatories included, for example, Budapest School members such as Mihály Vajda and Ágnes Heller, Miklós Haraszti, established writers such as Miklós Mészöly and Sándro Csoóri, and veterans of 1956 such as poet István Eörsi and historian Ferenc Donáth.

messages of solidarity, especially after the relegalization of Polish Solidarity in 1988 and the increased pace of events in both countries in 1988-1989.\(^4\)

In Budapest as in Poland and Czechoslovakia, a small yet not insignificant underground university was set up in 1978.\(^4\) The so-called “Free University” met on Monday evenings, and lecture courses were held on such subjects as the history of the CPSU, on Hungarian literary policy since 1945, Hungarian social history from 1848 to 1945, the revolutions of 1918-1919, the situation of the Hungarian minority in Romania, and on economic crises both East and West. Typical of Hungarian self-deprecating sarcasm, the oppositionists dubbed their version of the Polish/Czech flying university as the “flying kindergarten” (Lomax, 1982: 3).

A social self-help organization modelled on KOR and entitled Szengényeket Tamogató Alap (SZETA) or the League to Support the Poor, was set up in 1979. By 1981 they were sufficiently well-organized and successful in their fundraising efforts to sponsor a summer holiday in the Lake Balaton area for children from poor Polish

\(^4\)For example, on behalf of Solidarity, Janusz Onyszkiewicz sent greetings to free trade unions in Hungary in March, 1989. The organization Polish-Hungarian Solidarity (modelled on the Polish-Czechoslovak counterpart) was formed 18 February 1989, and sent formal greetings on the anniversary of the 1848 uprising, a day of mass action in the country. Polish unofficial and emigré publications published Hungarian samizdat and news of the democratic opposition: typical is the coverage of the Polish Solidarity news magazine Kontakt, which provided a revisionist and independent account of the 1956 events, as well as a report on the activities of the opposition and an interview with János Kis (“Ze Świata Węgry”, Marzec 84, 3(23): 44-68).

\(^4\)Between 100 and 200 individuals, mostly from the younger generation, met once a month in different private apartments for both lectures and discussions.
families. Strategically, it was a brilliant manoeuvre, as this charitable act of assistance to
a fraternal Bloc member was at the same time an action in support of Solidarity, and in
fact was carried out in collaboration with the Mazowsze regional organization.

As in Czechoslovakia, but unlike in Poland, the evolution of the largely
intellectual and cultural opposition into a movement of political dissidence did not attract
any widespread support of workers. There were no systematic efforts on the part of
Hungarian intellectuals to “reach out” to independent worker organizations, but at the
same time no such organizations existed. Hungarian apathy is harder to explain in
retrospect than the attitude of the Czechs given the relative “liberalism” of Hungarian
society. However, two important points are in order. First, most Hungarian intellectuals
and average citizens knew instinctively that any attempt to resuscitate the worker-
intelligentsia alliance of 1956 would be met with harsh reprisals.48 Second, there was the
widely-held cynical view that whatever Polish compromise might result from the strikes,
it was unlikely to be any better than what had already been achieved in Hungary. Moving
beyond the narrow base of intellectuals—even if well represented demographically,
regionally, and by profession—would be required if the democratic opposition were to

48 Tőkés tellingly quotes Kádár’s comment at a December, 1980 Politburo
meeting: “...should the opposition try to link up with the workers, then all bets are off, for
no one can act against the Hungarian People’s Republic and remain unpunished” (Tőkés,
1996: 175). There were isolated reports of disturbances, for example, among workers of
the Csepel iron and steel works at the same time as the Gdańsk strikes. Fearing a Polish-
type reaction, the party-state wisely withdrew a planned price hike. Similarly, fearing a
martial-law type reaction, the intellectuals avoided any worker-intellectual alliance.
have a meaningful impact. New strategies and ideas were also needed. The best method for allowing for the generation and discussion of new ideas as well as their increased circulation had already been attempted in both Poland and Czechoslovakia: samizdat publishing.

VIII. *Beszélő* and Hungarian Samizdat

Samizdat literature had existed in the 1970s in Hungary, but along the lines of the model of the Soviet dissidents. Typewritten texts circulated within narrow and overlapping circles of friends and acquaintances. Two important samizdat volumes were published in 1977-1978: *Marx in the Fourth Decade* and *Profile*. The first volume was a collection of twenty-one responses to a questionnaire sent out by philosopher András Kovács about the relevance of Marx and Marxism to Hungary in the “fourth decade” of communism in the country. Most expressed their growing disillusionment with the utility of Marxism both in terms of philosophy and political practice.49 The second consisted of 34 essays which had been previously rejected by official journals because, according to the euphemistic language of Hungarian self-censors, they “did not fit our profile” (Skilling, 1989: 32). This volume was fittingly edited by János Kenedi, a writer

---

49Not surprisingly, one of the most influential entries was that written by György Bence and János Kis entitled *On Being A Marxist*. The authors used the opportunity to explain their philosophical break with the older members of the Budapest School and instead advocated “radical reformism”, which owed much to the ideas of Adam Michnik and Jacek Kuroń.
who had himself been fired from his position as an editor and prohibited from future intellectual employment.50

The turning point in samizdat publishing came in 1980 when Gábor Demszyky and László Rajk went to Poland on a course of self-instruction to learn about Polish methods of “mass-market” independent publishing (Short, 1985: 31). Aside from the technical innovation (including the introduction of *ramka*, a Polish screen-printing technique), Demszyky and Rajk were equally ingenious in creating new methods of distribution. Their crowning achievement in this regard was the establishment of a samizdat “boutique” set up at Rajk’s apartment every Tuesday evening where oppositional shoppers could come and peruse their latest offerings.

Operating so openly and brazenly under the watchful eye of the Hungarian authorities was also a risky undertaking. In one sense, however, it was easier for Rajk than others to take such a risk, because as the son of the executed yet rehabilitated former Interior minister, he had quasi-political immunity. This was not enough to protect either Rajk or Demszyky from police harassment; the first crackdown occurred when the police attempted to evict Rajk from his apartment in central Budapest in 1981. In 1983 both of them were stopped by a supposedly routine traffic check and when Demszyky attempted to

recover a personal letter from Konrád he was badly beaten. Prior to the 1848 anniversary on March 15, 1988, Demszky and twenty others were detained by police and the inventory of the boutique was confiscated.

János Kis and Miklós Haraszti were chief co-editors of the most influential Hungarian samizdat periodical, entitled Beszélő (The Speaker). All articles in Beszélő and other samizdat periodicals were published “without official authorization”, meaning that the legal process of institutional affiliation, content review, and approval/censorship by officials had been completely avoided. Published from 1981 onward, it had a quarterly circulation of about 2,000 copies. However, the readership of Beszélő has been estimated anywhere between three to five times that number (Uncaptive Minds, May 1988: 2). Its purpose was to address social, political, and economic issues and provide uncensored news coverage. Its articles were also translated and appeared in Western journals, such as Uncaptive Minds, East European Reporter, Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, Profil, Gegenstimmen, L’Alternative, and Diagonale (Short: 1985: 31). As in

---

51 Demszky’s trial, like that of Haraszti ten years earlier, generated international attention. He received a suspended sentence for the “assault”. In May 1984, 179 individuals signed a “report of public interest” addressed to the Supreme Court expressing concern over the verdict. Significantly, about one quarter of the signatories were students and workers not actively associated with the opposition (“Appeal of Hungarian Samizdat Literature Publisher Rejected,” RFE Report, Munich, 24 May 1984 (RAD/Reisch)).

52 Beszélő has the additional meaning in Hungarian of “prison visiting hours”.
Poland and Czechoslovakia, openness was key to their critical stance: the editors’ names, addresses, and telephone numbers were displayed in the journal (Tőkés, 1996: 187).

In the opening editorial of the first issue of Beszélő, editors Miklós Haraszti, János Kis, Ferenc Kőszeg, Bálint Nagy, and György Petri announced that their task was to combat the myth that “nothing of note ever happens in Hungary”. Naturally, they planned to report on the activities of the opposition and to provide their reading public with a more accurate depiction of events. However, they also wanted to report on the more mundane aspects of resistance:

Beszélő will speak about events that are outside the ordinary run of things: when people, either on their own or together with others, step out beyond the accepted rules of intercourse between the authorities and the subjects, when they refuse to obey humiliating commands, insist on their rights, and exercise pressure on those above them... We would like to get more information on the motives that inspire people to abandon routine ways of behaviour. We would like to know what measures the authorities take to force people back into the machine-like order of daily routines. How is the conflict between the two sides resolved? How do the bystanders react to the out of the ordinary course of events? We would like to see that these experiences don’t get lost, and that the people who have been, or could be, the protagonists of such events should come to know more about each other.53

What made Beszélő the most important organ of the democratic opposition was not its independent news coverage nor even its intended effect in providing a mass audience a communication and connection point to the activists. Rather, its critical role lay in the fact that it sought to mobilize both intellectuals and the wider public around a

particular program of radical reform. János Kis reasoned that Hungarians would not be converted to the cause through philosophic posturing, but through an elaboration of basic values illustrated by positions taken on the news events of the day and on the possibilities for future reform. This process reached a pinnacle with the 1987 special issue of Beszélő outlining a new program, or “Social Contract”. The authors of the program document the breakdown in Hungary's historic golden middle road between Rákosi Stalinism and the 1956 aims and programmes, as personified in the rule of János Kádár. However, they go one step beyond “grumbling about the consequences of a bad policy” in formulating a coherent alternative, which can best be summarized as radical and systematic economic change coupled with political reforms consonant with marketization and liberal democracy. On the economic side, proposals included:

- Equal rights for various forms of ownership in the economy. Legal assurances for establishing private businesses and for private investment. Uniform tax rules, credit conditions, business and foreign trade opportunities for every type of business organization and every enterprise.

- Restriction of demand through monetary control, rather than through the arbitrary, administrative withdrawal of income.

- Curtailment of official tinkering with wage and profit mechanisms.

- Development of a capital market, and a substantial reduction in the proportion of centrally controlled investments.

---

54 Personal interview with János Kis, 22 November 1995.

55 For the English translation of the introduction to this issue, see Uncaptive Minds 1.1 (April-May 1988): 5-8.
Dismantling of the proliferating monopolies, the breaking up of other enterprises too large to be economically justified and the establishment of many small and medium-sized enterprises.

A flexible price policy in the interest of balance-of-trade equilibrium instead of policies to increase particular exports and restrict imports.

Abandoning of the COMECON program of self-sufficiency, and opening up to the world economy. Within COMECON, the expansion of business relations between enterprises, and turning away from the economically disadvantageous cooperation brought about through political agreements.

On the political side, the Beszélo authors noted that the last time Hungary had a comprehensive political program was in 1956. Consonant with those demands, they proposed:

- Political pluralism and representative democracy in government.
- Self-management in the workplace and localities.
- National self-determination and neutrality in foreign policy.

Recognizing that especially the first and third point were unlikely given Hungary’s geopolitical position, a “compromise solution” was proposed, one that would “fall short of what people aspire to” but at the same time “would produce appreciable changes in the relationship between the power structure and society”. Thus the following program was suggested for adoption:

- Constitutional checks on party rule, a sovereign National Assembly, and an accountable government.
- Freedom of the press guaranteed by law.
Legal protection for employees, representation of interests, and freedom of association.

Social security and an equitable social welfare policy.

Civil rights.

The Social Contract had both its supporters and detractors. As a means of uniting the opposition under a particular (and perhaps feasible) program, it was laudable, and certainly consistent with the editorial perspective of the journal. It was criticized for being too compromising in its recognition of the continuing leading role of the MSZMP for not laying out a path whereby such a compromise might be achieved. Furthermore, the populists as represented by the Democratic Forum were critical of the program as a Leninist effort to foreclose debate on future opportunities and as a means whereby the intellectual opposition would be able to map its particular agenda onto the rest of Hungarian society.

The most important independent samizdat publishing house was AB, headed by Gábor Demszky. It was modelled on the independent Polish publishing house NOW-a. Polish texts were very influential, and the works of Adam Michnik, Jacek Kuroń, Karol Modzelewski and others were translated into Hungarian and distributed. By 1988, over sixty books were also in print, each with a circulation of about 2-3,000. Titles included László Németh’s Hungarians in Romania, István Bibó’s The Jewish Question in Hungary, Teresa Toranska’s Oni, György Faludy’s Happy Days in Hell (about the Hungarian revolution), George Orwell’s 1984, Arthur Koestler’s Darkness at Noon, and
Milan Kundera’s *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. The works of other East-Central European authors, such as Gombrowicz, Miłosz, and Hrabal, were translated and published, as well as the unpublished writings of Hungarian populists. Other publishing houses included Katalizator, which focused on reviving the collective memory and experiences of 1956. Other important journals besides Beszelő included Hírmondó (edited by Demszky) and Demokrata. Demokrata was more militant than Beszelő in its demands vis-à-vis the regime, and generally opposed the idea that the system could be reformed from within. In keeping with this line, Demokrata called for a free market economy, popular representative democracy and Soviet troop withdrawal from Hungarian soil.

Sometimes journals would initially attempt official publication, but the insidious processes of self- and overt censorship would drive them into the independent, i.e. illegal, camp. One case in point was the journal Égtájak Közott (*Between the Points of the Compass*), published by the VOX HUMANA Circle.\(^{56}\) Between 1984 and 1986, six issues appeared officially; after the pressures of censorship became “unbearable” in the view of its editorial board, they made the decision to “go independent”. The experience radicalized the students, and by the late 1980s, they considered themselves to be “an autonomous group within the Hungarian political opposition” (Bartők, 1987: 62). Their

---

\(^{56}\)A discussion group under the aegis of Kommunista Ifjúsági Szövetség, or KISZ (the Communist Youth Alliance) organization of ELTE, which focused on Central European Identity. For an insider view, see Gyula Bartők (1987), “Between the Points of the Compass,” *East European Reporter* 3.1: 62-63.
editorial position evolved to the point of promoting "...a democratic, non-aligned, neutral and independent Europe...close to the independent peace movements and with END (European Nuclear Disarmament, the premiere West European anti-nuclear movement)" (Bartók, 1987: 62).

Other periodicals kept on publishing officially, and simply kept pushing the envelope with authorities. One such journal was Mozgó Világ (The World in Motion), which started publication in 1975, and was self-styled as an avant-garde literary and cultural periodical. It was extremely popular among students and youth, partially because it gave affirmative expression to alternative lifestyles and discussed taboo topics of the nation’s history and culture in a purposefully controversial manner. By 1981 publication had already been suspended for three months, and in the mid-1980s editors were routinely removed. By the late 1980s officially-sponsored journals simply began to publish what they wanted. A dramatic example was Századvég (End of the Century), published by the István Bibó College of Law, whose editors flatly stated that they would cease publication if any attempts were made at censorship.

As in Poland and Czechoslovakia, emigré Hungarians and their organizations outside the country also played a role in republishing samizdat literature for an external Hungarian audience, as well as keeping them informed of activities in other East-Central European countries. For example, the Hungarian language newspaper Irodalmi Újság, published in Paris, often republished articles from Beszélő and Hirmondó.

The Hungarians were certainly late entrants to the Centrál European samizdat
scene, but throughout the 1980s more than made up for their slow start. Samizdat
publishing in Hungary also had the effect of expanding the limits of what was officially
acceptable. Once again, the line between official and unofficial, censored and
uncensored, could not always be discerned with great clarity, as the above examples
attest.

IX. Toward an Alliance: The Bibó Festschrift and Monor

It was inevitable that if the members of the democratic opposition were going to
translate their work into something wider and more meaningful, they were going to have
to come to terms with the populists, the regime, and the wider public. One of the first
tentative steps in this direction was the preparation of a commemorative volume
celebrating the life and thought of Hungarian historian and political scientist István Bibó.
His death in 1979 was a defining moment for the opposition, and the idea of a Festschrift
in his honour was a critical symbolic and strategic move.

Bibó himself was a Patočka-like figure for the Hungarian opposition, not for his
activism but for his profound social and political analysis of the nation’s past, and as a
classic representative of liberal thinking in the region. Bibó, like Lukács, was involved
and implicated in every stage of Hungarian history in the twentieth century. His first
career as a law professor at the University of Szeged was interrupted by the war; he
became active in the resistance and in 1945 joined the National Peasant Party. At the
time the Peasant Party was relatively radical, and is often described (as Bibó is himself)
as seeking a "third road" between capitalism and communism (Jeszyszky, in Bibó, 1991: 6). Bibó was certainly not initially unfriendly to the Soviet liberation, as he considered it a historic possibility to create politics anew in his country.\footnote{Many of Bibó's most original and compelling essays were written in response to the events of the early postwar period, and have only recently been translated into English in a volume edited by Károly Nagy (1991), entitled \textit{Democracy, Revolution, and Self-Determination}.} However, both he and his party were victims of Rákosi's famous "salami tactics" which decimated the opposition slice by slice and resulted in the consolidation of Stalinist control over the country. As a later critic of Stalin and as a defender of Hungarian national interests, he was demoted from academician to assistant librarian. In 1956 he briefly assumed the position of Minister of State in Nagy's government. His legendary status was assured when he was the only member of the government who did not leave the Parliament building in Budapest upon the invasion of Soviet troops on November 4. Miraculously, he was mistaken for a clerk and was left undisturbed; under the oppressors' noses he managed to prepare and get out a declaration rejecting the label of counter-revolution and called for passive resistance and international support (Litván, 1996: 105). He later prepared a "Draft Proposal" on how the crisis might be resolved, yet despite its widespread circulation and eventual presentation to the Soviet government (via the Indian ambassador in Moscow) his attempt to broker a peaceful compromise failed (Litván,
Unlike many others he remained true to his liberal and democratic ideals, and was not coopted into the system after 1956. After serving a jail sentence (for which he was amnestied in 1963) Bibó was again permitted to work as a librarian, a post he held until his retirement.

As Tőkés states, “Bibó’s funeral serendipitously united everybody who was anybody in the intellectual community and prompted many—whether out of friendship, respect, or guilt—to agree to cooperate on a major samizdat project, the *Bibó Memorial Book*” (1996: 185). The result, edited by dissident sociologist János Kenedi, featured seventy-six authors from a variety of backgrounds. Included, for example, were populist writers Gyula Illyés and Sandor Csoóri, agricultural economist and Imre Nagy co-defendant Ferenc Donáth, and non-dissident historian Jenő Szűcs.

The text was submitted to the Gondolat publishing company (an official publishing house) with the veiled threat that if rejected, it would be published abroad (the manuscript had already been sent to the West). This prompted the party to take an unusual move and commission a detailed evaluation of its contents and authors. At first the party appeared to waver towards authorizing its publication, on the condition that five of the authors considered “enemies of the regime” be dropped from the project. After the editorial committee chaired by Donath rejected the regime’s counter-offer, the contents of

---

58 Bibó’s compromise consisted of substituting for the demand for Warsaw Pact withdrawal a bilateral treaty, an amnesty for Stalin-era transgressions, and a staged removal of Soviet troops. Above all, he wanted both to protect the achievements of the revolution and to respond to Soviet anxieties over their sphere of influence.
the examination commissioned by the Politburo were fortuitously leaked and smuggled out of Hungary. With unusual candour and precision, the report expressed concern over the use of Bibó as a "model of public conduct" and as a tool whereby the opposition could begin to form a "consensus among various strata of the intelligentsia" (quoted in Tőkés, 1996: 186). This is in fact exactly what they were trying to do: Bibó’s native populism, progressive economic stance, and civil courage could be lauded and at the same time serve as an intellectual bridge to the populists, members of the official intelligentsia, and the generation of 1956.

It is worth noting that during the early 1980s, the democratic opposition was particularly sensitive to the charge that it did not care about the situation of Hungarian minorities outside the country, especially in Romanian Transylvania (long the primary concern of the populists, especially the younger writers). As a deliberate coalition-building strategy, members of the democratic opposition, especially those involved with Beszélő began to take up this cause, as is evidenced by their many articles on the persecution of the Hungarian minorities and outreach to those representing them (for example, Miklós Dúray in Slovakia). Moreover, to gain popular legitimacy and to undermine the legitimacy of the regime, they began to play the 1956 card. In Havelian style, this was raised as an issue not just of politics or in defence of historical memory, but as a point of morality. However liberal the Kádáríte compromise might be made to seem, in fact it rested on the graves of Nagy and others. Moral indignation also generated concrete support for regime adherence to human rights, which in turn highlighted the
violation of Hungarian rights outside the country.

The democratic opposition's next foray into coalition-building came through their participation in a three-day unofficial campsite in Monor, a small village outside Budapest on June 14-16, 1985. Ferenc Donáth, the moving force behind the Bibó Memorial Book, was also the convenor of the conference, and he highlighted the deterioration of living standards and the crisis-ridden economy as both a catalyst for action and a galvanizing force for potentially political change. Participants included members of the democratic opposition, populists, reform-minded socialists, artists, and writers. The agenda consisted of four formal presentations intended to represent the diversity of the conference: the speakers were népi writers István Csurka and Sándor Csoóri, economist Tamás Bauer, and philosopher János Kis. The discussion was wide-ranging, and touched on national minorities, the economy, and its attendant social problems. Although the conference was loosely designed to initiate a popular front strategy, no common programme or set of aims emerged from it. There occurred the usual political nitpicking in terms of favoured issues and causes, but the dialogue itself was fairly fruitful. Unfortunately, the opposition was unable to keep up the momentum after Monor, partially because of populist agitation over Beszéd's Social Contract, and partially because the populists continued to follow their own separate path, culminating at Lakitelek and the formation of the Democratic Forum.
X. Lakitelek

At Lakitelek it was the regime’s turn to take the initiative, or rather seize the initiative, after it had been dropped in their laps by the populist writers. Stung by their perceived exclusion from the policy preparation of the Social Contract, a number of populist writers set out to arrange their own Monor-style conference on national issues. Zoltán Biró in particular approached Imre Pozsgay (who was his close friend) about engaging in a dialogue with reform-minded senior members of the party-state. Pozsgay, in what was probably a move in his own personal political interests as much as those of the party, assented, and was also a principal speaker at the conference. Others included writers István Csurka, Mihály Bihari, and Csaba Gombár. The problem was simple, as Mihály Bihari put it: “Socialism is in crisis...a historically institutionalized dictatorial political regime pretends to be democratic...we have arrived at a crossroads” (quoted in Berend, 1996: 271). The conference was a gamble in terms of both sides attempting to gain support for bipolar political reform--a socialist versus populist two-party scheme. Both György Konrád and economist László Lengyel--two individuals who straddled the divide between the democratic opposition and the populists--vigorously objected, reminding the participants that only multi-party competition was truly consonant with democratic principles.

On another level, the Lakitelek conference represented the resuscitation of the Kádárite compromise. As Tőkés observed:

The Lakitelek conference was a landmark event: the public
renegotiation of the terms of the Kádár-Aczél-Populist compromise of 1958-1962. The old regime had defaulted on its commitments to Németh, Illyés, and their ideological heirs. This, in turn, presented the reform communists, particularly Poszgay, with the opportunity to revise the terms of the relationship to their political benefit. The recruitment of Populists for participation in a “democratic socialist” partnership with the political incumbents was an example of communist “rearguard” *realpolitik* at its best (1996: 199).

Even though it might have been strategic politically for Poszgay, the party was clearly operating on borrowed time—time borrowed from the Hungarian people. Lakitelek might have been seen in retrospect as damaging for the populists given the wrong spin, but in the end they were saved by the leadership and performance of József Antall during the Opposition Round Table and later National Round Table negotiations.

Nonetheless, an important outcome of Lakitelek was the creation of the *Magyar Demokrata Forum* (MDF, or Hungarian Democratic Forum). At first envisioned as an intellectual and political movement inspired by the populist message, it was formally set up with official acquiescence in September, 1988. Its policy programme described the organization as democratic, centrist, committed to Hungarian traditions, and in support of a competitive market economy—and here no reference is made to a “third way” approach. At its official inception, it declined to be characterized as a political party, but did announce its hope to field candidates in parliamentary and local elections. However, a year later it would transform itself into a political party and in Hungary’s

---

59 The programme of the MDF was translated and reprinted in (1990) *East European Reporter* 4.2: 73-75 after their decisive March 1990 electoral victory.
first democratic multi-party elections in 1990 it would claim a decisive victory.

Both Monor and Lakitelek are historically important as they represent the germination of Hungarian political interests as they began to divide along partisan lines. The populists' partisan creation was the MDF, the democratic opposition later transformed themselves into the *Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége* (SzDSz), or the Alliance for Free Democrats.

**XI. Intra-Party and Election Reform**

Although this is a study on intellectual and decidedly non-party opposition, I would be remiss especially in the Hungarian case if mention were not made of the significant efforts of the intra-party reform process in Hungary in the late 1980s. Not that reform socialists in the party-state were ever completely systematic or even organized amongst themselves, but unlike in Czechoslovakia and in Poland, serious efforts were made to ensure some generational renewal within party ranks and some form of policy overhaul.

The reform wing of the party, although hardly unified in practice, consisted of those individuals reared in the apparat, usually young or inexperienced enough *not* to have been implicated by 1956 but old enough to have risen through party ranks during the good times of the Kádárist compromise. They were educated, had well-honed political and bureaucratic skills, were influenced by Eurocommunism and had lived through the two steps forward, one step back nature of many previous reform efforts. Aside from
veteran economic reform architect Rezső Nyers, the leading lights were Imre Poszgay, Károly Grósz, and János Berecz.

All of their efforts and personal ambitions, both individually and collectively, were stymied by the long-awaited retirement of János Kádár, who had never succeeded in agreeing on or grooming a likely political successor. In the end, his forced retirement was more like a “leveraged buy out” with the outgoing CEO negotiating his own severance package (Tőkés, 1996: 280-281). He essentially demanded that in the process of rethinking the past and in revising the party’s role, he not be held accountable for the Rajk confession in 1949, his role in 1956, or his responsibility for the unsuccessful counter-reform process of the 1970s.

Although Károly Grósz won the big prize as the country’s new prime minister and secretary general of the party in May, 1988, it was Imre Poszgay who would emerge as the party’s best hope for survival and regeneration. A skilled and candid orator and a person willing to seize the imitative, Poszgay transformed himself by late 1988 (with the help of the media which he largely controlled) into the most popular socialist politician in Hungary. In January 1989 he consolidated his position as a potential leader and confirmed risk taker when he went on television and took on two of the regime’s biggest shibboleths. He dared to characterize 1956 as a popular uprising--and not a counterrevolution--and at the same time suggested that in the future the party would have to learn to co-exist not just with another party (an MDF-type popular front) but two or
more parties. \(^{60}\) Reevaluation of 1956 was critical, as the legitimacy of the regime had historically been constructed on its portrayal of events as a counter-revolution and thus its own seizure of power. \(^{61}\) Thus it was Poszgay and not Grósz or Berecz who was to play the most decisive role on behalf of the party leading up to and including the Opposition Round Table and National Round Table talks in 1989.

Intra-party political reform was necessarily a top-down phenomenon, but the 1985 election reforms--four years before the partially-free elections in Poland in June, 1989--demonstrated how easily the process could be ambushed or at least sidetracked from below. Although the regime had modestly experimented with political reform at the same time as the NEM was implemented, 1985 represented the first time Hungarian voters were given a choice of two candidates on the ballot. In what amounted to a harsh condemnation of regime policies and “accomplishments” from local party rank-and-file, a real debate took place on issues of resource allocation in accordance with local priorities. The script was written from above but not followed. On the one hand, all active

\(^{60}\) At this point Grósz could have initiated proceedings to have Poszgay expelled from the Central Committee or even resorted to a “scorched earth” policy by declaring martial law. He was dissuaded by the Americans (and likely the Soviets as well) on the second point, and in any event he could not have necessarily counted on internal support for such a move. On the first point, it would have been counter-intuitive at this time to attempt to eliminate the party’s most popular leader given the uncertain nature of reform. See Tőkés, 1996: 253-304.

\(^{61}\) This led to the appointment of a four member expert committee whose task was not only to evaluate the history of Hungarian state socialism, but whose instructions referred explicitly to the “people’s uprising” which emerged against the government and the regime (Berend, 1996: 274).
politicians in leading positions were elected, but on the other, many lower-ranking but noteworthy functionaries failed to be elected. In the latter case, they were often replaced by locally credible nominees who were not part of the central party machine.

Moreover, a few non-party reform-minded intellectuals attempted to get themselves designated as candidates (such as Rajk and Tamás), taking advantage of the fact that nominations “from the floor” were permitted during the nomination process. Their efforts were doomed to failure, because after the first few attempts, the party was careful to ensure that the nomination meetings were stacked with their own supporters. However, Rajk’s and Tamás’s unsuccessful attempts had a demonstration effect, and other independent candidates sought nomination, not only known dissidents but also economists and environmentalists. Moreover, all the proposed candidates used the platforms provided by the nomination meetings to voice their opinions before a captive audience, thus ensuring a debate on issues usually confined to samizdat. Thus they succeeded in generating public discussion and forcing real choices to be made (Demszky, 62

---

62 The new legislation made it possible for anyone to nominate a candidate who, once nominated, was allowed to speak freely with legal protection.

63 A pleasant surprise for many dissidents was that during the meetings members of the audience raised issues only previously discussed in samizdat, evidence that the illegal publications were reaching a much broader audience that overt supporters of the opposition. See Andrew Short (1985), “Liberal Hungary?” East European Reporter 1.2: 34-36.
1985: 24).64

The "failure" to nominate independent candidates with oppositional views had two other important effects. First, the process unmasked the supposed liberality of the Kádárite regime and its mythology of free elections, displaying the actual nature of the "fix" for what it really was. Second, and more positively, the process provided a preliminary sense of democratic antagonism in the electoral trenches; many of those who were defeated in 1985 ran again in 1990. János Kis, writing an election analysis in Beszélő, said it best in stating, "The electoral reform was a failure in terms of being a reform, but the process provided an opportunity for the expression of aspirations from below for which there was no precedent for decades" (Kis, 1985).65

XII. The Rebirth of Civil Society

From the mid-to-late 1980s, the opposition grew in both size and scope, and a number of reasons account for this heightened activism. The results of the long and tangled process of economic reform were evident in the restratification of Hungarian

---

64Demszky's 1985 article, "Parliamentarism in Eastern Europe: the Chances of the Independent Candidate", which appeared in English in East European Reporter, is also noteworthy because of its obvious indebtedness to Adam Michnik's analysis in his seminal essay "A New Evolutionism". Virtually every Hungarian activist I interviewed brought my attention to the importance of Michnik's formulation to the Hungarian context.

society. Hungary was the first country in the Bloc to introduce a personal income tax and a VAT-type tax in order to deal with the mounting foreign debt. The new phenomenon of unemployment, rising inflation (along with increased consumer and housing costs) and the uneven growth in the second economy meant that Hungarians often had to work several jobs to make ends meet. These indicators signalled the end of the Kádárist compromise. The significant growth in both samizdat and officially-sponsored publications that refused to self-censor and were ever more critical of the regime coincided with the willingness of intellectuals to add their voices in protest.

Demographically, younger Hungarians born and raised after 1956 (and in the shadow of Gorbachev’s Soviet Union) and thus less fearful of a draconian Soviet intervention, agitated for reform, especially in the environmental and peace movements. As indicated above, intra-party reform spawned new hope for some, and for others provided motivation to leave behind the blanket of partisan security and make demands for wider and deeper economic reform with an accompanying process of political reforms.

Furthermore, the electoral reform and parliamentary elections of 1985, brought to the public’s attention the ideas and concerns not only of the known dissidents who attempted to stand—like Rajk and Tamás, but also many economists and environmentalists whose electoral aspirations took the regime by surprise. Throughout the 1980s, the inability of the Polish and Czechoslovak authorities to put an end to the courageous activities of Solidarity and Charter 77 provided the Hungarians with a powerful example of the necessity of continued action under adverse circumstances. Finally, the growth in new
and independent associations representing various interests and promoting a wide variety of causes signalled a rebirth of civil society and at the same time pointed to the success, albeit limited, of Kis' strategy of radical reformism. Although it is impossible to paint a complete picture of the depth and diversity of new social and political movements in Hungary at this time, some deserve particular attention.

One of the most important independent initiatives centred around the opposition to the Gabčikovo-Nagymaros Project. The project, first a trial balloon floated in the 1950s as a plan to generate hydroelectric power by building a massive dam on the Danube (also the Czechoslovak-Hungarian border), reemerged as a negotiated possibility in the early 1970s. In 1977 the two countries signed an agreement to start work on the barrage system. Austria was brought in as a third partner, guaranteeing a loan for project construction. Opposition to the project was voiced early on the Hungarian side, largely because of environmental concerns. Activist and biologist János Vargha began to publicize information about the feared environmental impact of the proposal. In 1983, he founded the Danube Circle (Duna Kör), whose purpose was to provide information and generate public debate on the project. Other environmental groups had existed previously in Hungary, such as the Ornithological Society and the ELTE Nature location of the project, the Danube-bend, is considered to be one of the most beautiful parts of the river landscape. Environmentalists feared such massive intervention would have long term negative consequences for the soil, water, and vegetation of the area.

66 The location of the project, the Danube-bend, is considered to be one of the most beautiful parts of the river landscape. Environmentalists feared such massive intervention would have long term negative consequences for the soil, water, and vegetation of the area.

67 See interview with Vargha (1990), East European Reporter 4.2: 78-79.
Protection Club, but these groups limited themselves to issues that would not put them on such a direct collision course with regime authorities, or place them in the international spotlight. Opposition to the dam-building project also had the effect of broadening awareness of other ecological concerns and in 1986 Ferenc Langmar (a Nagymaros activist) set up the first independent environmental journal (VIZJEL) in the region. The environmentalists had broad public appeal; in September 1988 over 30,000 citizens demonstrated against the project and in 1989 the Danube Circle gathered more than 100,000 signatures demanding a plebiscite on its continuation. The Danube Circle and other opponents to the project were ultimately so successful that in May, 1989 the government announced that construction would be suspended.68

As in the DDR, the peace movement was an important political force, especially in mobilizing young people. It grew rapidly in the early 1980s, and sought to maintain a distinct position, separate and independent from both the democratic opposition and the party-state sponsored peace organizations. As in Czechoslovakia, the response of the Hungarian activists to the END appeal for continental nuclear disarmament was tepid. Like their other East-Central European counterparts, they did not want to see a decoupling of human rights, democratization, and (real) national independence from the

68The story does not end here. The Slovakian government, eager for the economic benefits that the project promised to yield, eventually took their case to the International Court of Justice at the Hague. The court’s judgment, released in October, 1997, cannot be easily summarized, but certainly was considered a “victory” for the Slovak side. Negotiations still continue between the two governments, and Hungary’s position in the affair was an issue in the May, 1998 elections (which FIDESZ won).
intense and well-meaning desire of Western activists to achieve a pan-European settlement on arms reduction or even elimination. Secondary school students formed ANC--Anti-Nuclear Campaign Hungary--and peace activist Ferenc Köszegi founded the Peace Group for Dialogue in 1982. In the same year E.P. Thompson visited Budapest to establish friendly relations with the representatives of different Hungarian groups supporting peace initiatives. The Dialogue group’s activities included a number of semi-official public meetings and in 1983 they unsuccessfuly attempted to set up a peace camp modelled on Greenham Common.

Similar to the peace activists who sought the protection and encouragement of the Lutheran Church in the DDR, anti-militarism and pacifism were reflected (albeit minority voices) in the Catholic Church in Hungary. Efforts by those such as Catholic priests László Kovács and András Gromon, both of whom delivered pacifist sermons and supported conscientious objection to the required 18 months military service, were met

---

69 Thompson was not allowed to give a planned university lecture, but did deliver it informally to an audience gathered in the flat of György Konrád, and took part in a roundtable discussion with Hungarian participants, including Andráš Hagedüüs and Miklós Haraszti. See Bill Lomax (1982), “The Hungarian Peace Movement” in Labour Focus on Eastern Europe 5.5-6: 35-36.

70 Four women from Greenham Common arrived in Hungary to lend their organizational support, but once they arrived at the Romai camp location, were taken in for questioning and later escorted to the Austrian border and expelled. See Bill Lomax (1984), “The Dialogue Breaks Down” in Labour Focus on Eastern Europe 7.1: 23-25.
with official church reprisals.\footnote{Both were suspended by Hungarian Primate László Lékai. He was an outspoken opponent of priests who dared defend the right to object to military service, citing Saint Paul and church doctrine on the use of force in the defence of the nation.} As in Slovakia, the official church supported the regime, but the Catholic faithful found inspiration within their beliefs to oppose it. In the early 1980s, over a hundred “local communities” of Catholics followed the teachings of György Bulányi, a priest preaching in Franciscan style in favour of the early Christian values of poverty, humility, and non-violence (Lomax, 1982: 30). In 1982 Bulányi’s supporters formed a Committee for Human Dignity, and voiced their support for peace movements East and West.

Opposition in Hungary was initially more of a cultural than a political phenomenon, and on the cultural front the range and depth of independent initiatives grew. Originally, such independent artists initiatives as Inconnu resulted in underground art exhibitions and events. As early as 1973, the Young Writers Attila József Circle was created under the auspices of the Writers’ Union--unfortunately their demands for radical cultural democratization resulted in official suspension in 1981.

One of the most unusual and interesting unofficial events in the world of East-Central European opposition took place in 1985. The European Cultural Forum was held in Budapest that year, the latest in a series of meetings that were part of the Helsinki process. The official forum was attended by delegations from all 35 countries that had signed the Helsinki Accords. However, parallelling the Forum and coinciding with it, the
Helsinki Federation for Human Rights along with members of the opposition organized an unofficial symposium, entitled “The Writer and His Integrity”. The goal of the symposium along with its timing was to actively demonstrate that culture was not simply the province of governments, but more importantly involved the writers and artists themselves. Art belonged to civil society, and was not just a function of official regulation. Ten writers were invited to attend the symposium, which was well-attended by both international journalists and the democratic opposition.72 Notably, twenty leading members of the Hungarian democratic opposition (most of whom had attended the unofficial gathering) sent a signed statement entitled “Cultural Freedom for Hungary” to the official Forum. Charter 77 also sent a proxy address to the Forum, thus ensuring that their voices would be heard and their absences noted.

Throughout the 1980s youth culture generally and student activism specifically could be characterized as displaying growing discontent simultaneously with an exertion of greater independence. While Student Solidarity was radicalizing student politics in Poland in the 1980-1981 period, there was an (abortive) effort at democratizing KISZ, the Communist Youth Alliance. In the Karl Marx University of Economics, an overtly

political discussion club called Polvax was formed, and it attracted hundreds of students to debates on questions of international and domestic politics, human rights, economic reform, and Eurocommunism.

On March 30, 1988 the *Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége* (FIDESZ, or the Federation of Young Democrats), was founded by several dozen students, drawn largely from the activist student body at the István Bibó College of Law. Lead by Viktor Orbán, Gábor Fodor, Tamás Deutsch and others, it grew within one year to more than 3,000 members. The major issues motivating FIDESZ members were political reform, the Nagymaros Dam project, and other concerns specifically relevant to young people, such as conscientious objection to military service.

Encouraged by the success of other groups and discouraged by the ailing economy, the Democratic League of Free Trade Unions was set up in 1989 as an umbrella organization for newly-independent unions. Leaflet campaigns were initiated to encourage members of the official National Council of Trade Unions to leave the organization. A sign of the turning tide was the unofficial May Day celebration in 1989, attended by over 100,000 workers, intellectuals, and students. This was in sharp contrast

---

73The Bibó College itself was legendary as a hotbed of student unrest and dissident ideas. In the mid- to late-1980s, the student leaders of the College (the same individuals who founded FIDESZ) invited many of the members of the democratic opposition to come and speak to/with them, including Miklós Haraszti, János Kis, and Gábor Domszy. Furthermore, their ideas and proposals were made public through the college newspapers' articles about and interviews with them. Interview with Gábor Fodor, 19 October 1997.
to the official celebration presided over by party leader Károly Grósz, attended by less than 10,000.

Some previously existing groups were able to transform their previously illegal activities into legal organizations. For example, SZETA registered itself as a legal foundation in 1989. Previously extinct “nostalgic” political parties, such as the Independent Smallholders Party and the Social Democrats, were resurrected.74

Although traditionally the groups under the umbrella of party-state sponsorship were of the transmission belt variety, the late 1980s saw the development of a “grey zone” of organizations that were originally of the party-state but not necessarily for it.75 In a sense this was somewhat analogous to events in Czechoslovakia, except that the grey zone there was made up largely of individuals acting within their own limited capacities and in so doing enlarging their space for action. One such organization in the Hungarian context was the Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Society. It was established in 1986 under the auspices of the Patriotic People’s Front76 as a discussion group promoting the radical and

74Both parties had participated in the post-1945 coalition government, and had briefly revived themselves in 1956.

75András Bozóki refers to “independent initiatives” inside the party during its period of “internal disintegration” and the more politicized “social movements” outside the party. The Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Society was an example of the former; the MDF, FIDESZ, SzDSz, TDDSZ, and Duna Kör are examples of the latter. See András Bozóki (1993), “Hungary’s Road to Systemic Change: The Opposition Roundtable”, East European Politics and Societies 7.2: 276-308.

76The Hazafias Népfőrtrő (HNF, or Patriotic People’s Front) was the largest mass membership organization in Hungary, equipped with a national newspaper and a network
nationalist agenda of Bajcsy-Zsilinszky. Similar to the populists, one of its main goals was to focus public attention on the plight of Hungarian minorities, especially in Romania. Public activities included co-sponsorship of the June 1988 demonstration against the persecutionist policies of Romanian leader Nicolae Ceaușescu. The Society had strong links to both reformer Poszgay and Central Committee Secretary (and conservative) György Fejti, and was certainly more of an “official” nature than, for example, the MDF. At the same time, it was sufficiently “independent” in its thinking to be included as part of the Opposition Round Table in 1989.

Although the growth of civic initiatives largely occurred in Budapest, other university centres (such as Szeged) became drawn into the ever-larger and overlapping circles of oppositional activities. The production and distribution of samizdat moved outward from the centre also, with student activists often taking part in the actual printing processes and transportation of materials in and out of the city.

The role of the HNF was to be a “transmission belt to convey and gain acceptance of the party’s policies by the country’s non-communist majority” (Tőkés, 1996: 236-237). In the 1980s Imre Poszgay transformed the organization from this role into a personal power base not bound to the factional and segmented interests of the other transmission belt organizations (built as they were around particular social constituencies, for example, women, workers, and young people).

Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky was a prominent politician active in the interwar period, a populist and nationalist known for favouring closer working relationships with the Social Democrats and the Communists. He was arrested and executed by the Gestapo for his role in the founding of the Magyar Nemzeti Felkelés Felszabadító Bizottsága, the Committee of Liberation of the Hungarian National Uprising, in 1944.

Interview with Gábor Fodor, 19 October 1997.
XIII. The Opposition Round Table (ORT) and the "Pacted Transition"

The example of the successful initiation and conclusion of the Polish National Round Table was instrumental in providing both an example and a feasible policy alternative for the Hungarian context. It is hard to imagine, especially given our retrospective knowledge of events, that the Hungarian opposition had enough leverage on their own to pressure the regime into such proceedings without the Polish example. At the same time the Hungarian authorities, like their counterparts in Poland, wanted to share the increasingly burdensome responsibility of managing the twin problems of a disintegrating economy and barely latent social instability with partners enjoying greater legitimacy than themselves. After all, the now-collapsed Kádárist compromise was built on careful cooptation, and external resources and ideas from outsiders with greater legitimacy and socio-cultural capital were needed now more than ever.

The Opposition Round Table (ORT) began its deliberations on March 22, 1989, on the heels of massive demonstrations on the March 15 anniversary of the 1848 revolution. The Independent Lawyers' Forum took the initiative in proposing the establishment of an Opposition Round Table--after the false starts represented by Monor and Lakitelek, it was important to establish some degree of oppositional unity in the face of the regime's own agenda for reform. Initially, the leadership of the party, now under

---

Over 100,000 Hungarians took to the streets, cheering for the leaders of the democratic opposition. This visual display of support beyond the intellectuals and student activists that had formed its core since the mid-1980s was critical in providing both legitimacy and bargaining power.
the command of Miklós Németh, was angry at such a move. With typical divide-and-conquer tactics, their obvious preference was to manage talks with opposition groups separately. Nonetheless, the first stage of the process was successful, and as result the ORT began to meet with the MSZMP on April 22, 1989.\footnote{A “third side” was added in May at the insistence of the MSZMP, and consisted of its traditional agencies and auxiliaries: the Hazafias Népfőnt (HNF), or Patriotic People’s Front; the Szakszervezetek Országos Tanácsa (SZOT), or National Council of Trade Unions; the National Council of Hungarian Women, the Ferenc Münnich society, the Baloldali Alternatíva (BAL), or Left Alternative Association; the youth organization of the Communist party (formerly KISZ, now transformed into Demokratikus Ifjúsági Szövetség (DEMISZ), or the Democratic Youth Organization); and the Association of Hungarian Resistance Fighters and Antifascists. The inclusion of the “third side” was a regime victory but only a partial one, as the ORT insisted that, like themselves, the third side speak with a unified voice (narrowing the number of options and manoeuvrability of the players). Thus the National Round Table was not in fact round, but triangular. See Bozóki, 1993: 289.}

Included in the ORT were the MDF, SzDSz, FIDESZ, the Independent Smallholders’ Party, the Hungarian People’s Party, the Christian Democratic People’s Party, the Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Society, and the Democratic Trade Union of Scientific Workers, later replaced by the larger umbrella organization, the League of Independent Trade Unions. Although it is not my purpose here to detail the progress of the talks, some salient points about the nature and content of the process are in order.\footnote{On the details of the talks themselves, see Bruszt, 1990; Bozóki, 1993; and Tőkés, 1996. Over 150 hours of the talks were videotaped by Fekete Doboz, an independent video journal. The footage was edited into a five-hour film, entitled Ellenzéki Kerekasztal (Opposition Round Table). The original 150 hour record is available for public screening in the Széchényi Library in Budapest.}

First, all players involved were devoted to a peaceful and democratic transition.
Clearly none of the actors involved wanted to see a repeat performance of 1956, and here I refer not to an imminent Soviet invasion but the possibility of uncontrolled popular mobilization. The nervousness about the effects of such mobilization is perhaps more understandable when one considers that at this point the Berlin Wall was intact, Solidarity had not experienced its decisive electoral victory, and Czech citizens had not yet gathered en masse in Wenceslas Square. This is not to suggest that the groups involved were not willing to trade on public support in the process, but to the extent they believed mobilization equalled potential disintegration, they definitely preferred to stay in the controlled realm of negotiations.

Second, all opposition organizations in varying degrees focused on the recognized historic task of engineering a transition to democracy--this was not going to be a retrofit of the Kádárist compromise. Thus the agenda of the talks included a new election law, rewriting the constitution, the modification of the criminal code in keeping with new legal guarantees, and so on. Political liberalization was front and centre, and was considered a prior condition to the discussion of other national issues, such as economic reform. As László Bruszt stated at the time:

No one held legitimate power in a country sliding downward in the direction of economic chaos. No one represented “society” and no one was authorized to enunciate the “public will”. Under these circumstances the sole possible solution became obvious. The apparent crisis could be resolved only by establishing legitimate power, one that possessed appropriate authority. The sole possible path by which this could be accomplished was the holding of free elections (emphasis in original; 1990: 376).
Third, despite the politics-over-economics sequencing that eventually occurred, the party-state tried to force shared responsibility early on by emphasizing an economic reform agenda. This process ultimately failed. Even the party had to realize that none of the issues discussed could be easily decoupled from the underlying economic structures, that such issues were mere symptoms of a deeper malaise. This is not to say, however, that the Hungarian economic crisis sat quietly in the background during 1989. The party's desire for economic reform underscored larger pressures looming in the background--from 1987 to 1989 the country's hard currency debt doubled in dollar value--the threat of Hungarian insolvency was a real and present danger. Moreover, Western creditors made it clear that the price for continued financing of the debt was radical transformation of the economy. But no side of the triangle had the legitimacy, ability, or resources to go it alone on change of such a major scale.

Fourth, although there were clearly power differentials among the three sides, with the opposition groups still operating in a quasi-legal netherworld between unofficial harassment and official recognition, all the parties to the negotiation had strong interests in staying at the table. In fact, the Hungarian example reads like a textbook case in the success of mutual gains bargaining. The party was beleaguered by demands for change from within, as voiced through increasingly active Reform Circles.\(^8^{2}\) The regime also

---

\(^{82}\) The Reform Circles served not only as an engine for reform within the party, but also undermined the party's legitimacy and centralized apparatus, as many of the reform-circle representatives had great affinity with the opposition, urging talks with and perhaps wanting to join the ORT (Bruszt, 1990: 378; Bozóki, 1993: 287).
faced considerable international constraints, such as Soviet meddling in the Hungarian leadership crisis, the increasingly hardline positions of Honecker and Ceaușescu, and the impending July visit of US President George Bush. This was matched by internal uncertainties, such as the potential impact and outcome of the planned reburial of Imre Nagy—was this to be a moment of uncontrolled revenge or national reconciliation?

The member groups of the Opposition Round Table had for the first time an open-ended agenda for talks with the party, and could effectively veto reform proposals advanced by it—this was more real oppositional power than had ever existed previously (Tőkés, 1996: 336-337). They suddenly had a national forum in and through which to advance their own political platforms, and a stage from which to establish and make public their leadership skills and bargaining ability. Although the ORT members had no long-standing or institutional base of power, they did have the public mobilization card, as only they were able to get Hungarian citizens onto the streets in large numbers (as the March events amply demonstrated)—this was a veiled threat should a hypothetical departure from the talks be deemed necessary.

The “third side” was acknowledged by all the players to be of less importance both in terms of process and outcome—to extend the metaphor, this was no equilateral triangle.83 Members of the state agencies obviously had a stake in asserting their

---

83 In the June 10 agreement concluding preparatory talks, the third side stated it would support agreement between the party and the ORT, and in so doing both acknowledged and limited its bargaining position (Bozóki, 1993: 289).
independence given the possibility of the once-mighty party becoming an immobilized and rapidly sinking Titanic. To this extent, the “third side” was content not to support the party, which automatically destined them to a lesser role in the negotiating process. On another level, however, the “third side” ostensibly represented the non-elites not present at the table, unlike both the party and the ORT. Their issues included the bread-and-butter concerns of their constituents, such as wages, self-management, the maintenance and extension of the social safety net given the uncertainties of reform and its uneven impact on average Hungarians. By and large, however, these concerns were only symbolically and not substantively discussed; both the ORT and the party sidelined the agenda of the third side in favour of the pressing need for a political solution. But such marginalization was not enough of a negative incentive so as to discourage further participation.

In the burst of comparativist literature on transitions to democracy following 1989, much has been made of both the Polish and Hungarian cases as examples of a “negotiated” or “pacted” variety.84 János Kis has suggested that, in fact, such a

84Much of the “transitology” literature of the early 1990s drew on and was inspired by the earlier work of comparativists O'Donnell and Schmitter (1989) in their comprehensive work on comparing the transitions from authoritarian rule in Latin America and Southern Europe, as well as that of Diamond, Linz, and Lipset (1990). There ensued a grand débat, fought out largely in the pages of Slavic Review, between the “transitologists” arguing for the value and utility of broad comparisons and the “area studies” specialists making their case for the uniqueness of the Central and East European transitions. See Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl (1994), “The Conceptual Travels of Transitologists and Consolidologists: How Far to the East Should They Attempt to Go?” Slavic Review 53.1: 173-185; Valerie Bunce (1995), “Should
description calls into question the future plausibility of the old dualism of reform versus revolution. Neither is completely adequate to describe what happened in Hungary, where there was a breakdown in legitimacy but not legality. No clear revolutionary break occurred between the *ancien régime* and the new order. This occurred, in Kis’ view, because the avenues of both internal reform and reaction were foreclosed. Moreover, none of the parties had any long-term *interest* in pushing for a political implosion or explosion, not to mention the normative rejection of the violence that such a collapse would likely entail. Thus a new fourth option emerged, that of literally negotiating the transition from one system to another, for making a deal with a counter-elite or a counter-power was evidently much more favourable to the ruling party than the inherent unpredictability and instability of a revolutionary moment. The primary condition for the success of this scenario in Kis’ view is the degree of popular mobilization. If there is


85 My summary of Kis’ position here is taken from his Democracy Lecture, 17 November 1995, East and Central Europe Program, New School for Social Research.

none, and the citizenry is completely apathetic or demobilized by fear, the party-state would have had no interest in making a deal with a counter-elite. Rather, it could have managed its own transition on the economic level foregoing any change on the political side--an East-Central European version of the Asian model. On the other hand, if mobilization is too high, no deal can result because negotiation is impossible in a highly-charged environment prone to swings in popular support and the unstable backing of the negotiating partners. Such a situation too easily dissolves into regime breakdown.

Tőkés makes the salient point that in Hungary, “patterns of interaction between the political incumbents and the dissidents were substantially different from those elsewhere in communist Eastern Europe and in the USSR” (1996: 205). However true this might be (and it does rest on the generally accepted view that in Hungary the line between dissident and intra-party reformer was indeed highly permeable), Tőkés in incorrect in singling out the Hungarian opposition for special commendation for their “self-limitation and accommodation-seeking behaviour” (1996: 205). Certainly self-limitation was a Polish invention if there ever was one (Kis and Haraszti themselves admit to the strong theoretical influence of Michnik here), right from the founding of KOR through to the relegalization of Solidarity and the Round Table Talks in 1989. The opposition, although profoundly separated from the apparatus of the party-state by near-continuous persecution and a wall of narrow-minded intransigence and near-sightedness on the part of the regime, also stayed well within the bounds of legality (and purposefully so). In all three cases studied here the end of authoritarian communism entailed a set of
peaceful negotiations, and no one could have predicted at the outset of the process that the oppositional movements in all three cases would end up holding the winning set of cards. Accommodation and compromise were not only geopolitical necessities even well into 1989, but as will be demonstrated in the next section, they were also an essential and integral planks in their political theorization. Arguably, the fine art of compromise is also one of the most essential civic values on which democracies are constructed.

XIV. The “Four Yeses” Referendum

As any good negotiator knows, the devil lies in the detail of contractual language. Put another way, seemingly esoteric points of agreement and disagreement can have huge practical implications. In negotiating the details of a new Hungarian political system, the various participants had to think not only of the big picture, but of the implications of taking certain decisions, and the procedural sequencing of such. A case in point was the fracas over the election of the new head of state.

The party supported a presidential type of system, whereby the president would be directly elected. Aside from institutional reasons of control and centralization, the major political reason for such support was the fact that the party had the country’s most popular and well-known politician: Imre Poszgay. The ORT, on the contrary, wanted a parliamentary democracy, given their obvious concerns about the concentration of power in one individual. In such a system, they reasoned that the goal of structurally limiting the president’s role would be achieved through a parliamentary rather than a direct
election. They argued further that presidential elections would have to occur after parliamentary elections, theoretically to ensure the legitimacy of the new head of state, but practically to avoid electing someone with a communist past (i.e. Poszgay).

In fact, this issue broke apart the ORT coalition, for first the Christian Democratic People’s Party and later the MDF broke ranks and supported the party’s position of presidential elections prior to parliamentary elections. In the end, the agreement signed on September 18, which concluded the phase of the National Round Table negotiations, was not signed by either FIDESZ or SzDSz. In retrospect, this was not exactly a setback, as the agreement signed by the remaining parties did “create legal and political conditions for a peaceful transition” and included six draft pieces of legislation which amended the constitution, provided the organizational and financial rules for multi-party democratic competition, and modified the criminal code and criminal procedure. On the other hand, the refusal of SzDSz and FIDESZ to sign on the basis of their political principles set an important example: the opposition was not going to be forced into a pact with communists that would limit the possibility of fully free elections. In this respect, the intellectual opposition wanted to avoid what had just happened in Poland, where Solidarity had agreed to partially-free elections and whereby Jaruzelski would hold the presidency.

Importantly, the stalemate was resolved in the public realm. On November 28,

87 The text of the agreement is translated as Appendix 7.1 in Tőkés, 1996: 357-360.
Hungarian citizens voted in a referendum on four issues: the disbanding of the Workers' Guard, the withdrawal of communist party cells from the workplace, an official accounting of the assets of the party, and the postponement of the presidential elections until after national parliamentary elections to be held in March, 1990. The party and the MDF boycotted the referendum, in an offensive enough manner as to generate a voter backlash in favour of the opposition. The SzDSz, FIDESZ, Smallholders, and Social Democrats banded together in a campaign asking Hungarians to vote "Igen" (Yes) on all four questions, but in the end it was the last question that was to prove most crucial in terms of establishing democratic precedent. The first three issues were in a sense "resolved" beforehand, as the lame-duck parliament had already voted in favour of their implementation; nonetheless the legislative position was upheld by a 95% margin. As to the last question, 58% voted in favour of delaying the presidential election. The timing of the referendum had proved to be fortuitous: less than a month after the fall of the Berlin Wall and in the middle of the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia. Expressions of the public will contra the party-state were rapidly becoming commonplace. Moreover, the results of the plebiscite were respected and indeed presidential elections were held following the parliamentary elections in March, 1990.

XV. June 16, 1989: The Reburial of Imre Nagy

Unlike the popular upsurge represented by Solidarity in 1980-1981 and the thousands of Czechs in Wenceslas Square in 1989, Hungary did not experience a
euphoric moment of popular mobilization in support of a set of political demands. The closest thing to it in terms of emotive symbolism, myth-making, and mass participation, however, was the reburial of Imre Nagy on June 16, 1989. Exactly one year earlier, demonstrations commemorating Nagy’s execution had been suppressed with violence uncharacteristic of the Hungarian regime. Now the stage was set for a solemn and ceremonial reburial of the national hero of 1956, and the set was designed by none other than architect and designer László Rajk (Garton Ash, 1991c: 49). In Heroes’ Square five coffins were laid for Nagy and his associates; a sixth was also added to represent the “unknown insurgent”.

Over 200,000 attended the “funeral”, to which Grósz had assented on behalf of the regime when confronted by representatives of the Hungarian community during his visit to the United States the previous year (Tőkés, 1996: 290). It was also well-attended by the Western press, and significant luminaries included Adam Michnik, now in an official capacity as a representative of Poland. A list of the known victims was read to all over loudspeakers, wreaths were laid by public officials, speeches read by such notables as Sándor Rácz (who led the KMT in 1956). The only speech that drew public applause was that of Viktor Orbán, leader of FIDESZ. More than any other speaker, Orbán was willing to use the occasion to highlight the extreme irony of the revolution’s oppressors now bowing before its victims:

Friends! We young people fail to understand many things that are obvious to the older generations. We are puzzled by those who were so eager to slander the Revolution and Imre Nagy have suddenly become the greatest
supporters of the former prime minister’s policies. Nor do we understand why the party leaders who saw to it that we were taught from books that falsified the Revolution are now rushing to touch the coffins as if they were good-luck charms. We need not be grateful for their permission to bury our martyrs after thirty-one years; nor do we have to thank them for allowing our political organizations to function. Hungary’s leaders are not to be praised because they have refrained from using weapons against those striving for democracy and free elections, because they have not adopted, as well they could, the methods of Li Ping, Pol Pot, Jaruzelski, and Rákos (from full English text, reprinted in *Uncaptive Minds* (August-September 1989): 26).

Nor did Orbán hesitate to seize the opportunity provided by the mass audience to advance the aims of the democratic opposition, which at that time had just entered the National Round Table negotiations. Orbán reminded his fellow citizens to keep their eye on the prize:

Citizens! Thirty-three years after the Hungarian Revolution was crushed and thirty-one years after the execution of the last legitimate prime minister, we may now have a chance to achieve peacefully the goals that the revolutionaries briefly attained through bloody combat. If we trust our souls and our strength, we can put an end to the communist dictatorship, if we are determined enough, we can force the party to submit to free elections; and if we do not lose sight of the ideals of 1956, then we will be able to elect a government that will immediately begin negotiations on the swift withdrawal of the Russian troops. We can fulfill the will of the revolution if—and only if—we are brave enough (1989: 26).
Section 2

Chapter 5: Intellectuals in Poland: The Tradition Continues

I. Leszek Kołakowski: A Source of Hope Amidst Hopelessness

Polish philosopher and intellectual activist Leszek Kołakowski left Poland in 1968 after his expulsion from Warsaw University, and therefore hardly warrants being categorized as a “dissident” in terms of the time frame of this study. However, as a revisionist Marxist who goes beyond revisionism, as a mentor to the generation of Michnik, and as the author of arguably the most important theoretical text of the Polish opposition of the 1970s, he must be included. The influence of his life, his work, and the changing nature of his own philosophical positions was enormous. From outside Poland’s borders, as an emigré writing for Kultura, as a Central European philosopher engaging with the Western New Left, and as a professor at Oxford or in Chicago bringing the history and ideas of the Polish opposition to new audiences, he personified the importance of East-West dialogue.

Although he would later become one of the regime’s harshest critics, both inside

1Kołakowski has been prolific and far-reaching in his philosophy. However, in this section I will be specifically concentrating only the period in which he questioned his revisionist approach in the context of the emerging Polish opposition. For this reason, I will not be covering landmark essays such as “Responsibility and History”, his later comprehensive examination of Marxism, or his most recent turn to Christianity.

2I am particularly indebted in what follows to David Ost’s analysis of Kołakowski’s role and thought, as well as to my conversations with and the unpublished writings of Jacek Kucharczyk.
and outside Poland, Kołakowski had enthusiastically joined the ranks of younger
generation party intellectuals who supported the party, even as it consolidated its Stalinist
hold on the country in the late 1940s. He quickly advanced upward in the ranks of
academic philosophers, first at Łódź and later in Warsaw, aided by the fact that many
senior academics lost their positions because of their bourgeois origins or thought.
During the 1956 Polish October and the subsequent thaw, Kołakowski gained notoriety as
chief intellectual “revisionist”. He was increasingly critical of the Marxism
institutionalized by the party-state in Poland, drawing his inspiration from the newly-
published writings of the “young” Marx, as well as Gramsci and Lukács, and promoted
the ideal of a more humane and democratic socialism. At that time, revisionist thought
developed dialectically--synchronous with the progressive faction within the party, and
via its reestablished connections with society and independent non-party intellectuals.

Indicative of this period of change is Kołakowski’s influential essay “The Priest
and the Jester”, in which Kołakowski posits two possibilities for philosophy in general
and for the vocation of the philosopher in particular. He states:

The antagonism between a philosophy that perpetuates the absolute
and a philosophy that questions accepted absolutes seems incurable, as
incurable as that which exists between conservatism and radicalism in all
aspects of human life. This is the antagonism between the priest and the
jester, and in almost every epoch the philosophy of the priest and the

---

3As both Marxist revisionist and unofficial intellectual “spokesperson” of this
trend, Kołakowski is most well known in the West for his essay “Responsibility and History”, which is reprinted in Kołakowski (1968), Toward a Marxist Humanism: Essays on the Left Today (New York: Grove Press).
philosophy of the jester are the two most general forms of intellectual culture. The priest is the guardian of the absolute; he sustains the cult of the final and the obvious as acknowledged by and contained in tradition. The jester is he who moves in good society without belonging to it, and treats it with impertinence; he who doubts all that appears self-evident (Kołakowski, 1968: 33).

Kołakowski’s priest is not simply a religious figure; he represents all efforts in philosophy—both within the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*—to find absolute explanations for human phenomena, or promote a single ordering principle. Thus Plato and Marx can be categorized as priests, for the priesthood is not simply a religious undertaking. As Kołakowski says, “Atheists have their saints, and blasphemers build temples” (1968: 36). Jesters, however, are neither detached nor disinterested intellectuals à la Mannheim or Benda; they must hold court with the rulers and remain engaged with society in order to criticize power or express dubiousness and contempt. The jester rebels, pokes fun, yet knows the limits of rebellion while revealing contradictions in the most unshakable of faiths. The jester “derides common sense and reads sense into the absurd” (1968: 34).

In this essay, Kołakowski is doing something more than cleverly analyzing the metaphorical opposition between priest and jester. His fascination with religion as a historical and cultural phenomenon and his concern with religious dissent of all forms indicates a break with Marxist orthodoxy’s view of religion as merely “false consciousness”. Moreover, he discusses with considerable insight and knowledge the role of religious questions in philosophy—as complicated formulations that address the
possible reconciliation of the essence of humankind with its existence (even if postulated in eschatological terms as nature versus grace) or as an attempt to provide a monistic and unifying explanation for consciousness and history. Philosophy cannot escape its theological heritage, and without fully understanding it the philosopher cannot come to terms with the Cartesian revolution, the Enlightenment opposition of faith and reason, or its logical and radical successors—Marxism, phenomenology, and psychoanalysis. Even at this early stage in his philosophical career, Kołakowski brings to his subject matter an in-depth knowledge of the philosophical currents within Christianity and an unusual affinity for its internal dilemmas for a Marxist intellectual of his generation.⁴

Kołakowski’s jester might be read as a defence of Kołakowski as a still-committed yet critical party intellectual. However, more broadly the notion of the jester serves as a partial credo for a nascent opposition. Irony shatters ideology, and can be a potent force in destabilizing existing power relations, but does not provide its own replacement. The events of Kołakowski’s life again provide the seeds for his own theoretical reflection. Not until he begins a life in exile does he completely discard revisionism—monumentally and rigorously through his three-volume history of...

---

⁴I make this point in partial refutation of the tendency to view Kołakowski’s “conversion” to Christianity as a sudden and clear break of his “Marxist” past. Michnik also discusses the subtle depth of Kołakowski’s religious knowledge and arguments in such early essays as “Jesus Christ: Prophet and Reformer”. Michnik sees Kołakowski’s early engagement with religious thought and Catholic doctrine as a classic missed opportunity, where dialogue might have ensued much earlier between the episcopate and the revisionists. See Michnik, 1993: 33-35.
Marxism, and address the problem of how Poles might remain in opposition to the party-state. The intrigue of the court is ultimately replaced as the home for the jester by society at large. The jester leaves his typical and defining occupational criteria, carving out new social and political space within civil society.

In 1971, Kołakowski published an article entitled "Theses on Hope and Hopelessness", both in Polish in Kultura and in English in Survey. Written before the wide scale publication and distribution of samizdat, it was nonetheless extremely influential inside Poland—one might even suggest that the existence of such an independent and critical essay necessitated samizdat. His purpose in writing the article was to demonstrate by theory and by example that revisionism was dead, but that this did not simultaneously mean that changing the system was impossible. Eliminating reform-from-above as an option opened the window for options not centred on the party-state or its traditional organs of power.

Kołakowski begins by summarizing the arguments supporting the thesis that authoritarian communism is, in his words, "unreformable". Taken together, these arguments claim that as the "main function of the system is to uphold the monopolistic and uncontrolled power of the ruling apparatus"—best expressed by the epithet, "the leading role of the party"—nothing can be permitted to undermine this basic principle (1971: 37). No monopoly can be partial.

In particular, there are structural features endemic to the Soviet model that make any "revisionist" or elite-centred reform process impossible. Kolakowski outlines these "peculiarities" as his seven "theses of hopelessness":

- Partial democratization is contradictory in terms of the norms of the system, as it amounts in the end to "partial expropriation of the ruling class"—impermissible and illogical given the leading role of the party. Dissent is either outlawed or pushed to the margins; discontent takes the form of amorphous social pressure, unorganized, and unrealized.

- Technical expertise, especially in the areas of economic, social, and cultural policy, must always take a back seat to partisan servility. Technical criteria—such as efficiency or competence—cannot operate independently as they might erode authority over time.

- Freedom of information and free exchange of information—necessary for the efficient operation of the economy, and the twin systems of education and culture—cannot be an operative principle as it might convey discontent, generate doubt, or be politically dangerous. As long as "unfavourable information can prove self-denunciatory" the system must operate on misinformation, as information itself is ideological and never neutral (hence Lysenko’s genetics).

- The strict subordination and willingness to conform evident in the hierarchy of the Soviet model promote the following characteristics necessary for
career growth: servility, cowardice, the lack of initiative, readiness to obey superiors, readiness to inform on people, indifference to social opinion and public interest (1971: 40). Effectively, these values which are rewarded and promoted run counter to an alternative set of “democratic” values, such as the “capacity to take initiative, concern about the public good, and attachment to truth, efficiency, and social interest” (1971: 40).

The Soviet model, like other forms of despotism, produces permanent aggression, either via external wars or an internal state of siege. As in Orwell’s Oceania, the system must “invent its own enemies, creating real ones in the process” (1971: 41).

The principle of monopolistic control requires that “all forms of social life not decreed by the ruling apparatus” be destroyed: thus any form of independent civil society or attempt to promote it must be instantly dismantled. Social life is controlled via its nationalization and is operationalized through the various transmission-belt organizations which are effectively agents of the party-state.

Citizens’ rights can neither be widened nor protected, as the smallest crack represented by the smallest reform would set off an avalanche which could threaten the entire order. Concessions in the face of demands--for democracy or rights--never result in satisfaction, but rather in increased pressure from below (the Prague Spring being the
ultimate example). Thus, “the philanthropy of the rulers, even should it exist, could not relieve the political and economic slavery of the population” (1971: 41).

In Thomist fashion, Kołakowski sets up the arguments against reform before he advances its possibilities. The theses of hopelessness amount to an “ideology of defeatism”, for four reasons. First, one cannot possibly predict in advance the “degree of flexibility” of the system, and events have proven that it is not completely rigid. Second, to the degree the system is rigid, it rests on the people’s belief that it is so. Third, any arguments claiming total unreformability have in common an “all or nothing” logic not confirmed by actual historical development. Finally, authoritarian communism is rife with a tangled web of internal contradictions which cannot be synthetically resolved.

Kołakowski describes some of these contradictions and how they can present themselves as political opportunities:

The very nature of this system demands complete concentration of power at the centre of command. That is why it is true that Stalin’s power (and that of his local miniatures) was the most perfect embodiment of the principles of despotic socialism. However the impossibility of re-establishing it stems from the impossibility of reconciling two values, both important for the ruling apparatus; unity and security. The conflicts for power within the system cannot be institutionalized without threatening the ruin of the whole system, for institutionalization would mean the legalization of fractional activity within the party, which would only differ in an insignificant way from the establishment of a multi-party system. Yet groups, cliques and cabals which organize themselves in accordance with various criteria of choice and with different bonds of interest are an inevitable product of social life (1971: 43-44).

For Kołakowski, the conflict between the systemic need for control and the inescapable
reality of societal pluralism presents the possibility for an external form of political organization. Even within the party, however, the conflict continues to be manifest even where external action does not occur, as there is a conflict between the Stalinist-type of one-man rule (which is the most effective, if brutal) and forms of collective or oligarchic leadership (which might be in the better interests of society, as well as the participants themselves). On the ideological level, a further contradiction exists between the “need for a radical change in ideology and the impossibility of getting rid of Stalinist-Leninist ideology” (1971: 45). This is another reason why internal party reform is impossible: legitimation requires an ideological rigidity, otherwise its purpose is undercut by itself. Kolakowski uses the example of Soviet internationalism to demonstrate this logic:

Internationalist phraseology is indispensable to the Soviet authorities, since it offers the only legitimation of their rule abroad; it is indispensable to the local rulers who are dependent on the Soviets, as the justification of their dependence and of their own power. It might seem that the Soviet rulers can completely disregard the non-ruling communist parties, whom they hardly wish to incite to a real struggle for power, and that their splits and deviations are of no political significance. In reality, this is not the case, for an open and complete abandonment of the communist movement in countries which are not under Soviet control could only occur if they were to abandon the principles which justify this control where it exists. The rulers are thus the victims of their own ideology with all its nonsensical baggage. It is a paradox that this ideology, in which practically everybody has ceased to believe--those who propagate it, those who profit from it, and those who must listen to it--is still a matter of the most vital importance for the continuing existence of this political system (1971: 46-47).

Finally, attempts by the party-state to reverse the trend through appeals to greater productivity and efficiency through the implementation of better technologies are
themselves doomed, because there would inevitably be a clash between the requirements of efficiency and the primacy of political values—in this case, the rule of Stalinist ideology. Nonetheless, the leaders themselves get caught up in the trap of pursuing technical solutions to systemic problems:

But technological progress (not limited only to military technique) and even the increase in consumption (in spite of certain political advantages which poverty and an inadequate supply of elementary needs give to the rulers) are in the interests of the ruling class for various reasons; the higher the general level of development, the more difficult it is to achieve outstanding results in one area of production, such as military production, treated as an isolated branch; the expectations of the population depend to a considerable degree on their comparison of their situation with that of highly developed countries, a phenomenon impossible to avoid because a complete blockage of information is, for many reasons, already impossible to achieve. Thus in a situation of stagnation or even one in which the level of consumption is increasing slowly, the level of subjective dissatisfaction and discontent can grow. One can indeed never foresee when it will reach the point of explosion in conjunction with other circumstances; in general it is impossible to avoid a situation of international competition even when this imposes an unfavourable situation, and the conditions of this competition are ever more difficult. Thus the rulers, when they stress their desire for technological progress, and the improvement of the material situation of the population are, in general, stating their true intentions. These intentions are, however, in conflict with a second group of intentions, related to the perpetuation of their own monopoly of uncontrolled power in all fields of life (Kolakowski, 1971: 47).

Because the rulers get trapped in the need for technology as the ultimate solution to the problem of economic progress and the satisfaction of consumer demand (rather than dealing with the issue structurally which they cannot), there will be an endless cycle of not being able to catch up to their own expectations, or the expectations of the citizenry. However, even this disjuncture provides an opportunity for action, providing a theoretical
basis for the success of the mass protests in 1970 in Gdańsk and in 1976 in Radom/Ursus.

The response must therefore be the impulse to reform on a selective, strategic, and principled basis. Kołakowski characterizes this as

...a reformist orientation [that can be defined] in the sense of a belief in the possibility of effective gradual and partial pressures, exercised in a long-term perspective, a perspective of social and national liberation (Kołakowski, 1971: 49).

Only reformism can be the answer because passivity on any level results in increasing inflexibility. Not to commit yourself to massive resistance against the system is to pull the noose more tightly around your neck. Conversely, repression increases if society maintains passivity and accepts its role as necessary weak and powerless vis-a-vis the party-state. As Kołakowski states dramatically: “The growth of police methods of rule is the result not of increased resistance, but, on the contrary, of its absence (Kołakowski, 1971: 52).” In the Polish context, when the intelligentsia moves from a position of revisionism to hopelessness based on the supposed unref ormability of the system, drastic consequences result, as occurred in 1970:

The principle of unref ormability can thus serve as an absolution granted in advance for every act of cowardice, passivity and cooperation with evil. The fact that a large part of the Polish intelligentsia has been persuaded to believe in the complete inflexibility of the shameful system under which they live is almost certainly responsible for the regrettable passivity which they displayed during the dramatic action of the Polish workers in 1970 (1971: 51).

This essay is indeed a compelling call-to-arms, and the combination of tough reasoning and the timing of its appearance on the Polish scene indicate why it was so
critical to the political-theoretical development of younger activists, such as Adam Michnik. By shifting the focus of reform away from revisionism and toward resistance, and from the party-state to civil society, he signalled a paradigm shift in oppositional thinking. He does not theorize how societal democratization and resistance might occur, but he does reject dramatic overthrow or revolution as both nonsensical and highly improbable.

Ironically, shortly after the kernels of this new approach began germinating in the Polish opposition, Kołakowski came increasingly under attack by the Western New Left for his despair and hopelessness. Most vitriolic were the published exchanges between Kołakowski and veteran socialist and historian E.P. Thompson in the pages of Socialist Register in 1973 and 1974 respectively. Speaking not only for himself but more generally on behalf of the British New Left, Thompson chided Kołakowski for abandoning the revisionist Marxist approach for which he had originally enjoyed limited international fame and earned admiration following the Polish October. Thompson compares with anger and indignation what he considers to be the highpoint of Kołakowski’s revisionism, his long essay “Responsibility and History”, with a number of interviews and articles that appeared in Encounter and Daedalus in the early 1970s following his emigration from Poland. As Marxist “kin” to Kołakowski, Thompson displays with devastating logic and detail his admonishment and sense of betrayal. Kołakowski returns the favour with his own indignation--firstly at being misinterpreted and secondly with his own shock and horror at Thompson’s “reading” of the first fifty years of Soviet communism.
The debate is too long and dense with the philosophy of history to effectively summarize here; however, a few relevant impressions are in order. The negative inspiration for Thompson's letter—especially the *Encounter* interview of October, 1971—amount on one reading to a series of clever musings and caricatures of many of the New Left ideals that Thompson and many others held dear. What angers Thompson in particular is the tone of cynicism and despair he detects in Kołakowski's writings, correlative with his abandonment of the "Marxist tradition" as Thompson himself defines it. In this respect, many of Thompson's finer points of critique are distinctly and fairly made. However, judging Kołakowski on the basis of a few articles in *Encounter* and *Daedalus* is a little like judging Marx based only on the polemics in *The Communist Manifesto* without having read *Capital* or any of his other earlier or later works. Kołakowski made no secret of the fact that he had moved well beyond the days of

---

6The fact that Kołakowski's interview appeared in *Encounter* was particularly irritating to Thompson. *Encounter* was published by the Congress for Cultural Freedom, an organization founded in 1950 by Western intellectuals opposed to communism in general and its Western sympathizers in particular. In 1967, through a series of articles in the *New York Times, Saturday Evening Post, Ramparts,* and *The Nation* it became publicly known that the organization had been financially supported by the Central Intelligence Agency to a significant degree. Long-time editor of *Encounter* Stephen Spender resigned amidst the crisis, and the British New Left felt justified in its initial opinions of the magazine and the Congress as a collection of dupes and cold warriors (a reputation not entirely warranted, as many of its members and supporters were from the non-Communist Left). It was in this atmosphere that Thompson criticized the placement of Kołakowski's article—Thompson himself was a strident *internal* critic of socialism in both theory and practice, but in written form and public space friendly to the socialist project. See Leszek Kołakowski (1971), "Intellectuals, Hope & Heresy: An Interview with Kołakowski," *Encounter* 37.4: 42-47, and Edward Shils (1991), "Remembering the Congress of Cultural Freedom," *Encounter* 75.2: 53-65.
revisionism and “Responsibility and History”; Thompson however, prefers comparing backward to even mentioning Kołakowski’s landmark (though brief) effort in “Hope and Hopelessness”.

The double irony only surfaces in reading Thompson’s “Open Letter” to Kołakowski alongside “Hope and Hopelessness”. In a long excursus on the relationship between social being and social consciousness in the context of “socialist evolution” (in Eastern Europe), Thompson suggests:

So long as any ruling group, perhaps fortuitously established in power at the moment of revolution, can reproduce itself and control or manufacture social consciousness there will be no inherent logic of process within the system which, as social being, will work powerfully enough to bring its overthrow. There will of course be plenty of conflicts of interest within “social being” to which the rulers (in order to control consciousness) must adjust; and the actual social experience of the majority of citizens will give rise incessantly to a critical social consciousness which it will always prove difficult for the rulers, even with the aid of terror and censorship, to control. The manipulation of social consciousness will be difficult; but I see no theoretical reason why it could not, over a considerable historical period, be done (emphasis in original; 1973: 75).

Kołakowski denies that it can be done indefinitely by the party-state, and exploiting the contradictions of the Soviet model is a key theme of “Hope and Hopelessness”. Whereas for Thompson social consciousness can be manipulated over time and a “long protraction of tyranny” could result, Kołakowski puts his faith in “the possibility of effective gradual and partial pressures, exercised in a long-term perspective...of social and national liberation” (1971: 49). Nonetheless, Thompson wears his utopian idealism proudly, for “to lose faith in man’s reason and his capacity to act as a moral agent is to disarm in the
face of ‘circumstances’” (1973: 79). Of course, this is precisely what Kołakowski recommends to his Polish comrades in “Hope and Hopelessness”.

Thompson loses sight of the fact that Kołakowski’s despair is more or less reserved for what he perceives as the ideological reductionism and two-sidedness of many (but not all) quarters of the New (and Old) Left in the West in explaining the ills of capitalism, a distinctly different phenomenon than the possibility of democratizing change in the East. At the same time, Kołakowski is most certainly reductive in his dismissal of the “New Left”, as if one could easily collapse such divergent theoretical and practical approaches as revolutionary trade union syndicalism, parliamentary socialism, Trotskyism, feminism, and environmentalism into a self-contained definition. The debate is much larger than the personal antagonism between Thompson and Kołakowski, and above all signals a fundamental lack of understanding between the opposition in the East and the West. Too often in the 1970s and 1980s Eastern European emigrés were seen as blinded by bourgeois “freedoms” and the ostentatious spectacle of consumer capitalism, or were ungenerously and automatically branded as right-wing anti-Communist reactionaries. At the same time, Western leftists could not come to terms with what they perceived as the increasing antipathy to “socialist” solutions, causes, and (especially) jargon on the part of dissident activists and emigrés. Many potentially useful dialogues were lost in this “apples and oranges” discussion.

Kołakowski’s writings on Polish affairs as an emigré continued to inspire the younger generation of Polish intellectuals—the same generation he decried in the West for
their naiveté, pathos, and even “mental degradation”. In marked contrast to his deliberately comical condemnation of the radical youth movements of the late 1960s in the West and their “revolutionary farce”, Kolakowski’s stance was respected in East-Central Europe, and he respected the fledgling opposition in turn. This is doubly ironic since the younger generation in East-Central Europe tended to identify strongly with their Western counterparts, at least in terms of lifestyle and cultural tastes. Kołakowski’s position is at least partially reflective of the communications gap between East and West, but it is also a selective lens through which he processed generational change and was willing to privilege and be more forgiving of those struggling against authoritarian communism. In Kołakowski’s view, aside from the mass movement against the Vietnam War, the sixties generation in the West discredited itself by agitating for less-than-radical ideas (university reform, the power of rock music, an alternative life-style) or highly euphemistic potentialities (make love, not war), all in highly charged revolutionary and rhetorical language. In the East, the situation was the reverse. As the demands for change grew in strength and volume throughout the 1970s and 1980s, they became less state-centred and more radical--in direct proportion to their shedding the traditional socialist lexicon.7

7Jeffrey C. Goldfarb (1982) explains the communications and understanding gap between the oppositions in the “East” and “West” in terms of how dominant values (for example, freedom and quality) are differently produced--defined and administered in the case of authoritarian communism, or created within a shared public realm, albeit flawed by manipulation and coercion, under liberal democracies. Much fallout has occurred from the basic misbelief that oppositions across the political divide between East and
II. Adam Michnik’s Alliance Strategy: The Church and the Left

There are a number of recurrent themes running through Church teaching in Poland that define its philosophy and are worth noting given that their echoes are also found in the Polish opposition. Not unlike the “liberation theology” of Catholic and political movements in Latin America, this Polish “ethics of emancipation” provide an important moral and religious subtext to political opposition. First, ethics have primacy over politics; a moral order must exist before the founding of a social order. Second, any type of social order must have as its starting point the recognition of individual human dignity—people are equal moral subjects and can equally receive salvation. Embodied in human dignity is one’s natural freedom, reason, and right to bear witness to truth—none of which can be deprived by any ideology or political system, or reduced merely to a catalogue of human rights and obligations. Third, religious faith is grounded in hope—as the source of spirituality. Hope finds its human referent in the concept of trust—the placing of one’s hopes with another, which is a founding principle of social order. Other founding principles are social love (which precedes justice in the hierarchy of virtues) and

West must logically share similar world views. Moreover, Goldfarb maintains that because the conditions for public life are so different in the East than the West, an oppositional ethos and strategy evolves which both transcends and defies traditional Western categories of left versus right, liberal versus conservative, and revolutionary versus reformist. See Goldfarb (1982), *On Cultural Freedom: An Exploration of Public Life in Poland and America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), pp. 7-13.

8This phrase and the following analysis owe much to Jan Zielonka’s essay “The ethics of emancipation” (in Zielonka, 1989: 35-69).
solidarity. Love of God and one another together with solidarity are able to overcome the societal hatreds and hardened passions that can accompany the struggle for pure justice without love. Love is fundamentally other-regarding rather than self-regarding, and therefore in its true form can absorb social conflict rather than be a source of tension.

Thus the Church’s specific teachings and sermons, especially as reflected in the writings of some of the activist Catholic intellectuals (for example, Tadeusz Mazowiecki) or clergy (most notably Jerzy Popiełuszko and Józef Tischner), must be understood against this ethics of emancipation. An illustration is the Church’s views on labour relations. John Paul II, no doubt with Polish events in mind, published a special papal encyclical on labour relations (which also relied heavily on his earlier work on the philosophy of labour--*Osoba i czyn*). Tischner also wrote about this subject in *Etyka Solidarnosci*. For both Tischner and John Paul II, the dignity of work is related to the dignity of humankind. This dignity is not fundamentally reducible or alienable—the worker maintains her or his subjectivity and agency despite having been considerably exploited by both capital and the production process. Labour remains throughout history as an ally of human expression, not an enemy of it. This does not mean, however, that as an expression of dignity labour must be accepted as a divine yoke; workers have rights to a just wage, working conditions, and social care. Unions are understood as “an indispensable element of social life” and the “mouthpiece of a struggle for social justice, for the just rights of working people....” (Zielonka, 1989: 50). Moreover, unions are an expression of solidarity, the *communion* of working people one with another toward a
common set of ends. Tischner goes even beyond this religious sanction of unions, to the point where the strike takes on a mystical quality—the collective struggle changes the attitude of the worker to the workplace, and endows work with a form of ownership (not unrelated to the labour theory of value).

At the same time as writers such as Mazowiecki and clergy such as Tischner and Popiełuszko were preaching the moral and religious bases for political opposition, those on the secular Left were also coming to terms with the Church. The watershed in this process was the publication of Adam Michnik’s *Kościół, Lewica, Dialog (The Church and the Left)*.\(^9\) Michnik wrote the book in 1975-1976, and it was originally intended to be part of a special issue of the emigré quarterly *Aneks*, published in London. Michnik’s aim, along with fellow contributors Jan Józef Lipski, Antoni Macierewicz, and Father Jacek Salij, “was to reexamine the complex relationship between the Catholic Church and the secular intelligentsia...to shed light on the new way each side was looking at the other” (1993: xi). In retrospect, Michnik has denied that the book “was an attempt to forge a political alliance with the Church”; rather, he claims, his intention was to “propose a new way of thinking about the Church and its place in the world. I wanted to familiarize a wider audience with the ideas of modern Catholic intellectuals” (Michnik, 1993: xiii). This in turn prompted Michnik to explore intellectually and metaphysically

---

\(^9\)Translated literally, the title is *Church, Left, Dialogue* but it has been rendered by Ost as *The Church and the Left* following the French translation *L’Église et la gauche*, first published in 1979. The English translation did not appear until 1993.
the question "What exactly is religion?" (1993: xii). Along with other members of the nascent political opposition in Poland and elsewhere, he was dissatisfied with official Marxist-Leninist explanations of religion as "ideology" or "false consciousness". Like Havel, he came to understand religion as "an absolute, a mystery, as sacrum" (1993: xii).

Regardless of the author’s intentions, however, it was nonetheless the case in the late 1970s that his own reassessment of the Church as a potentially progressive source of democratic values was instrumental in redefining the relationship between Catholic intellectuals and the secular Left. This new relationship, if not alliance, was ultimately reflected by the Church’s attitude toward Solidarity, especially during martial law. Church sermons by Jánkowskí and Popieluszko defended those, like Michnik, who were tried and imprisoned by the party-state and church cellars became important meeting places. If the Church was not a powerful ally, then it most certainly was a both a shield and a sanctuary for Solidarity in particular and the democratic opposition more generally.

Christian and particularly Catholic interpretations of holy scriptures took on a new tone as the dialogue between the Church and the opposition progressed. Religious questions took on profound existential and political meanings. As Michnik states:

We asked about the meaning of life and suffering, and how to relate to enemies. We were grappling with the relative and absolute nature of values, the meaning of tolerance, the law of love. And all of these questions informed concrete decisions that each of us had to make. For choosing to fight the dictatorship was not a decision to be taken lightly. It

---

was a major decision and exacted a high price. Surely we could not at the
time seriously believe that so many of us would be able to trade in our
prison cells for the swank offices of state dignitaries. Our questions and
reflections thus had a very specific undertone. These were questions about
how to live under a dictatorship. About how to avoid the temptations of
"normality." In the name of what, we asked ourselves, were we ready to
make our own lives and the lives of our loved ones so miserable? (1993:
xi-xiii)

From his experience, Michnik concludes that conflict between the Catholic Church and
the secular Left is neither necessary nor inevitable. His existential struggle for religious
meaning combines with a practical need to promote a particular dialogue results in an
appreciation of the role of Catholicism or religion in the public sphere. Unlike anti-
clerical liberals of the past, he is unwilling to force a false separation between Church and
state, or deny the possibility of a role for the Church in politics. However, he feels that
the Church’s role is primarily a moral one, as a teacher and carrier of ideals and values.
The Church is welcome to publicly censure individual leaders or regimes for abuses of
power, and to put forward its vision of humanity as one of the potential sets of ideas
circulating in the public realm. However, in both The Church and the Left and his current
opinions, Michnik remains fervently opposed to the translation of moral imperatives into
juridical reality and the "Julianic" aspirations of the Polish Church today.11

11Michnik borrows the term “Julianic Church” from Polish historian Bohdan
Cywiński, who used it to refer simultaneously to both the history of the Catholic Church
under Julian the Apostate in Rome as well as to the current aspirations of the Polish
Church. The Emperor Julian decreed the separation of church and state not by choice but
by force. The “Julianic” Church seeks to reestablish its position of power vis-à-vis the
state; its alliance with a discontented and alienated society is but a temporary and tactical
move in a larger game to assure its own power and longevity. See “Introduction” by
Michnik’s book is a number of things at the same time: it is an original statement of his political theory (which will be discussed below in the context of his other writings, notably *Letters from Prison*); an historically-grounded revisionist account of both the secular Left and the Church from before the war to the present (and their many errors, mutual misunderstandings and lost opportunities); a defence of the Church’s position under totalitarianism and an examination of its role as a defender of human rights and as the source of the values underlying many of the commitments of the Left; a highly personal reappraisal of his own (mistaken) assumptions about the Church; and above all a plea for *dialogue* between the Church and the Left. Michnik demonstrated sophisticated mediation skills in his political practice; in this book he applies this same ability intellectually to carefully sketch a common ground that can serve as a meeting place for these previously-warring factions of the Polish opposition. It is important to note that in so doing, he was arguing against many of his ideological friends in favour of one of their traditional foes.

In introducing his subject matter, Michnik begins with a useful linguistic exercise, particularly helpful to the uninitiated reader of the texts of the East-Central European opposition--he defines what he means by the term “Left” or “Secular Left”. From the Spanish Civil War until the end of the Second World War, the term “Left” could be easily summarized: “Its essential features were antifascism, support for a planned economy and

for agricultural reform, and the demand for a separation of church and state” (1993: 31).

Over the next few decades in the countries in the Soviet orbit, the term became increasingly problematic. First, there was the issue of support from the indigenous Polish (i.e. prewar) Left, most notably the PPS, for the new government installed by Moscow. An important rupture occurred between intellectuals who supported this “new reality” and those who took a more independent and critical stance. Michnik outlines this historically in the Polish context, but this was not simply a Polish dilemma—it was faced by leftist intellectuals and parties throughout the region, and from this division the seeds were planted for the first generation of criticism of and opposition to authoritarian communism. Second, another “Left” faced a crisis of self-definition in 1956, as intra-party anti-Stalinists formulated their position against the “conservative” and indeed “reactionary” forces inside the party, as well as against the traditional right, represented in Poland by the Catholic Church. This group of revisionists began to make contact with the postwar “independent” Left critics coming out of the PPS and were united in their conflict with the PUWP, but neither group thought it appropriate or useful to become engaged with the party-state’s attacks on the Roman Catholic episcopate. After all, the Church was also painted as the enemy, and in the battle between two enemies, it was thought both amusing and strategically clever to simply stand aside.12 After the student

12Michnik uses Leszek Kołakowski as the example par excellence of a revisionist who categorically refused to take any position toward the Church except that of extreme hostility. He illustrates his point with Kołakowski’s reaction to Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński’s favourable citation of his essay “Jesus Christ: Prophet and Reformer.” In an
protests of 1968 and the tragedy of the December, 1970 massacre, the embattled
opposition began to take a new view of itself and what being a “left” critic of the regime
was all about.

In the mid-1970s, Michnik observed that the opposition included those who
especially wanted capitalist restoration, and “those who support the idea of democratic
socialism” (1993: 33). It is noteworthy that not only does Michnik categorize this second
tendency as leftist, but firmly plants himself in this camp. He states:

This Left champions the ideas of freedom and tolerance, of individual
sovereignty and the emancipation of labor, of a just distribution of income
and the right of everyone to an equal start in life. It fights against national-
chauvinism, obscurantism, xenophobia, lawlessness, and social injustice. The
program of this Left is the program of antitotalitarian socialism (1993: 31).13

Thus Michnik’s “Left” is more broadly liberal in its commitment to political freedoms
and anti-nationalism, but remains wedded to economic egalitarianism. It is neither

13Terminology here is important. Ost translates the Polish term nacjonalizm as
nationalism-chauvinism to convey the ethnocentric narrowness of the original term.
Obscurantism in the Polish context often refers to narrow-minded, traditionally
conservative, inaccessible, and obsolete religious reasoning and dogma (in this definition
it is commonly used as an epithet hurled against the Church by the prewar Left). It is also
used in the sense of being backward, that is opposed to “Enlightenment”, “Knowledge”,
and “Progress”.
teleological nor universalist in its claims about history or the future. It is antitotalitarian, meaning not only that it stands against the authoritarian communist party-state, but also that it attempts to design itself as an opposition that is democratic and decidedly non-statist in character.

This Left is not fundamentally opposed to religion *per se*, but to the historically specific actions and teachings of a conservative Church bent on delivering the message that socialism was intrinsically contrary to God’s natural law and ultimately representative of spiritual nihilism (1993: 34). This message was made concrete though the Church’s actions—its hostility to social reform, and intolerance for both non-Catholics and non-believers. The Church’s inherent respect for hierarchy as was evident in its own organization and its close relationship with the “earthly oligarchy.” Marx advocated the abolition of religion because it was “the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions...the opium of the people”.

However, Michnik chose to favourably reinterpret and contextualize Marx rather than to reject him entirely. He states that “...Marx’s unshakable atheism stems not so much from antipathy toward the very idea of transcendence as from his opposition to the conservative social doctrines of the Church of his time” (1993: 34). The implicit suggestion is that given a different set of doctrines, the Church might play a different role, and that the Left need not be so unequivocally dismissive of it. Total conflict and diametrical opposition between the Left and the Church in the Polish context evolved to a point where intellectual strata on both sides came to have a set of similar goals, learned to
speak a similar language, and could thus engage in a dialogue one with the other.

Michnik returns to his semantic exercise later in the book when he defines “secularization.” For Michnik, secularization is “complete separation of church from state, complete separation of state from church, and complete civil rights for all” (1993: 139). He contrasts his view with that of Cardinal Wyszynski, who defines secularization as “the purging of believers and of religious and Catholic elements” (1993: 139). Coming to terms with what is meant by secularization is important if those on the Left and in the Church are to come to terms with each other, and this effort is made problematic by the pollution of language by the party-state:

If secularization is taken to mean censorship and the crippling of a nation’s culture by the elimination of its religious traditions; if it is understood as the use of state force to eradicate Catholic customs and interpose other ones; then it is hard to disagree with Cardinal Wyszynski. That kind of “secularization” is merely a mask for totalitarian terror. But the primate’s remarks may also be understood as an attack upon the principle of the separation of church and state. There is a terrible confusion of concepts in our language today. Thanks to the work of our official propaganda, more and more words confuse matters rather than explain them (1993: 140).

Michnik is indebted to French clerics such as Jean-Marie Domenach and Jacques Leclerq, who justify the neutrality of the state as prerequisite for political tolerance. Because the temporal sovereignty of the state is not seriously challenged by the Church, there is no temptation for an abuse of state power. Likewise, the Church when faced with a neutral state has no temptation to directly form or set up an alternative to the state apparatus. To accept this view, according to Michnik, is also to accept the basis of human freedom. He cites J.S. Mill favourably, who sought to ground the principle of liberty first and foremost
in freedom of conscience and religious conviction. Absolute freedom of opinion, judgement, and the ability to express and publish one's views flow logically from this premise. This kind of secularization is also necessary if Poland is going to be defended from Sovietization in a culturally pluralistic manner, rather than from a position of Catholic fundamentalism.

Michnik continues the excursus with a discussion of what is meant by "dialogue" in the third section of the book, subtitled "Toward a New Dialogue". He rejects the self-serving and inauthentic dialogue of PAX with the authorities, summing it up as "an encounter between totalitarians, drawing inspiration from a peculiarly understood Catholicism and a specific, very Soviet understanding of Marxism" (1993: 176). Rather, Michnik allies himself with the concept of dialogue advocated by Tadeusz Mazowiecki and Więź, whom he quotes:

A dialogue is made up of three components: people, a common platform, and values. A conversation may be nothing more than a transfer of information; a discussion may be merely a debate between differing positions; practical cooperation may entail no more than pragmatic activity pure and simple. A dialogue, on the other hand, depends on the communication and transfer of values. A dialogue thus occurs whenever there is a readiness to understand the validity of someone else's position and to enter into a different way of thinking; that is, whenever there is an openness to the values embodied in other points of view.... A dialogue is not a compromise; the tension of contradiction still exists. It is, instead, an attempt to discover a new dimension of the matter at hand, to find a new plane of discourse in which it is possible to meet.... Dialogue is a method by which an ideologically diverse society can learn to live together. Based on continual interaction, it is a way to overcome mutual human isolation (Mazowiecki, quoted in Michnik, 1993: 183).

This view of "dialogue" is significant, as it not only permeated the Polish opposition
internally, but set the stage for an overall negotiated, self-limiting, and non-violent approach to political change. Negotiation and dialogue were the hallmarks of the Gdańsk agreement, the short official life of Solidarity, and the Round Table Talks in 1989.

Much of Michnik's book is a re-telling of Polish history so that both the secular intelligentsia of this "new" Left and the Catholic intellectuals can see the reasons why they should be talking to one another. Michnik the historian is careful in his attention to detail and evidence, in order to demonstrate that the views that the Church and the Left have of each other have been falsely and ideologically constructed. His revisionist account thus becomes a powerful corrective to these two separate and incomplete histories, and is evidence that The Church and the Left was as much a part of the process of dialogue as it was documentation of it. For example, in chapter 2, "The Church Under Totalitarianism", Michnik recasts the Church's resistance to party-state domination in the late 1940s as a defence of independent forces in society and of human liberty in thought and practice, rather than as anti-communism *iout court*.

Similarly, in chapter 5, "The Church in 1968", Michnik wants to correct the commonly-held view that the Church viewed the March events as yet one more "settling of accounts" within the Party (1993: 97). In the latter case, he cites Church documents and sermons that support the students, and make veiled references to the regime's anti-Semitic counter-attack, in Cardinal Wyszyński's words, "the monstrous ghost of a revived racism...." (1993: 99). However, he also harshly criticizes the Church for not having made a "clear and unequivocal denunciation of official anti-Semitism" (1993:..."
Michnik admits that the Church probably to some degree did view the clash between leftist intellectuals as yet another intra-party struggle, tinged with anti-Semitism as had often been the case in the past (1993: 102).

In both examples, Michnik wants to paint a more accurate and complete picture of history and demonstrate how partial accounts have led to past misunderstandings. At the same time, however, he is not afraid of hitting hard when he feels it is necessary to do so—either to further the cause of historical “truth”, or simply to force a combination of awareness and contrition on both sides.

Finally, Michnik wants both sides to understand how the party-state has carefully promoted the existing divisions between the Church and the independent critics of the regime in its own divide-and-rule approach, a strategy that effectively weakens any potential unity and strength of oppositional forces. Moreover, Michnik does not arrive at this new position of dialogue as a passive bystander or as a “neutral” academic carefully balancing the historical record in the interest of “objective” truth. Michnik was

14In chapter 4, “The Conflict Over the Pastoral Letter,” Michnik discusses how the left-wing intelligentsia willingly accepted the regime’s propaganda campaign against the Church in the 1965 debate over the Pastoral Letter released by the Polish episcopate to Germans granting and asking for forgiveness over mutual wrongdoings committed during the war (for example, Nazi atrocities against Poles and the expulsion of Germans from lands east of the postwar Oder-Neisse border). The party-state’s clever deployment of xenophobic and nationalistic slogans in its battle with the Church made it easier for the authorities to instrumentally and ideologically suggest an alliance between nationalism and anti-Semitism, or conversely between antitotalitarianism and antipatriotism (1993: 94). Thus the battle with the Church paved the way for the battle with the regime’s leftist critics and the student opposition in 1968.
invariably involved in the events he describes--as a journalist eagerly interviewing Professor Konstanty Grzybowski on his hostile reaction to the 1965 Pastoral Letter, or as a student leader and activist arrested in March, 1968 and viciously slandered by the regime as an unpatriotic Jewish radical.

In the second half of *The Church and the Left*, aptly subtitled “The Politics of the Church”, Michnik seeks to illustrate the similarities between Catholic teaching in Poland and the approach that is simultaneously developed among Left intellectuals. For example, he quotes Cardinal Wyszyński at length to demonstrate the episcopate’s support for freedom of assembly and association, as essential to both individual development and the voluntary associations so necessary for participation in public life (1993: 116). For Michnik, this amounts to Church sanction for the resuscitation of civil society advocated by East-Central European dissidents—all the more relevant given that the sermons he quotes from were delivered in 1974—two years before the formation of KOR! To assuage the concerns of leftist dissidents preoccupied with real socialism rather than the really-existing variety, Michnik quotes Wyszyński’s support for meaningful employment and his distress over the “capitalist spirit” stemming from a “deification of material production” (1993: 116). On the subject of truth and human dignity, Michnik compares the Cardinal’s exhortations to “write the truth, defend the truth” (emphasis in original; 1993: 120) to both Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (“Do not live in lies!”) and Leszek Kołakowski (“Live in dignity!”). If this book had been written a few years later, no doubt Michnik would have also been making a comparison to Havel’s dictum “Live in truth”.
Notably, he cites Antoni Słonimski’s comparison\(^{15}\) between the ideas expressed in the papal encyclical *Populorum progressio* and the secular principles of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man*.\(^{16}\) As for the secular Left, Michnik documents the “dramatic shift in attitudes” via the essays and life of Leszek Kołakowski, and his examination of Christian/Catholic doctrine and its meaning for European culture and politics.

For Michnik, the language and teachings of Christ are a metanarrative woven through the history and culture of Christian Europe. Christian tradition cannot be merely rejected as untrue or invalid. Michnik states:

> For by rejecting Christ’s teachings of love for one’s neighbour, one rejects the canonical foundation of European culture. By rejecting these teachings, we lose the foundation of our belief in the autonomous value of truth and human solidarity. Belief in the divinity of Christ is a matter of Grace, and in this sense is given only to a few. But belief in the hallowed nature of Christ’s commandments is the duty of all, because it is the light that protects human freedom and dignity against violence and debasement, against nihilism and the hell of solitude (1993: 123).

Essentially, Michnik provides the secular Left with political reasons why they ought to support the most basic teachings of Christ and the Church, providing tactical *terra firma* for “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another” (John 13:34) and

---

\(^{15}\)Słonimski was a poet, playwright and essayist who was associated with the prewar Left. He was president of the Polish Writers’ Association in the late 1950s and a respected moral authority for Polish dissidents generally and for Michnik personally. Michnik worked as a secretary for Słonimski in the early 1970s and refers to his mentorship extensively in his writing.

\(^{16}\)Michnik initiates a series of repeated comparisons between the values and objectives of the dissidents of East-Central Europe and the goals of the French, and more particularly, the American revolutions.
"Love your enemies, bless them that curse you" (Matthew 5:44). The best example of Michnik's approach is a famous and often retold story from his own life, here told by Tina Rosenberg:

In 1981, in the town of Otwock, Michnik was present when a crowd of Solidarity activists engulfed a policeman suspected of having beaten up two drunks. Members of the crowd threatened to lynch the policeman and burn down the police station. Michnik jumped in the middle. "Listen to me!" he shouted. "I am Adam Michnik and I am an anti-socialist element [the Party's usual term for its enemies]." He quieted the crowd. "And," he wrote to Kiszczak later in a letter from prison, "I would do the same for you." (Rosenberg, 1996: 246)

If Michnik was willing as a thoroughly secularized and assimilated Polish Jew to buy into and indeed practice this expansive and non-dogmatic version of Christ's teaching, he may not have been speaking for many of his Leftist compatriots. After all, it is one thing to talk about an encounter with God or the universality of Christ's message, but entirely another to come to terms with the Church as an institution, especially when Michnik opposes the idea of religion as a private affair. In fact, he asks the secular Left to support and recognize the "unique, suprapolitical, and otherworldly apostolic mission of the Church" (1993: 200). The Church not only plays an important public role in terms of social criticism (based on the moral code of fundamental rights offered in the Bible),

17 General Czesław Kiszczak was Minister of Internal Affairs at the time martial law was declared and thus was primarily responsible for the round-up and arrest of Solidarity activists and intellectual dissidents such as Michnik. He was also prominently involved in the Round Table Talks in April, 1989. However, whereas the relationship between Michnik and Jaruzelski has surprisingly developed into a post-communist friendship based on mutual respect, the personal animosity between Michnik and Kiszczak is legendary. See Rosenberg, 1996: 233.
but in so doing reasserts an ethic of personal responsibility. Official Marxist
historiography wants to "pass off moral decisions as mere consequences of historical
laws"; Michnik recognizes moral responsibility underlying the humanist task of making a
better world and acknowledges the possibility of a religious basis for such morality. The
secular Left, already in a difficult position for having to defend socialist ideals under
authoritarian communism (where it has little control over the terms of political discourse)
must now embrace the Christian tradition.\textsuperscript{18}

The dialogue that Michnik called for and Mazowiecki defined is premised upon a
notion of faith as a place were idealistic belief in a different future merges with fervour
and activism in helping to bring it about. In other words, a notion of human agency very
much of this world is teamed up with a very otherworldly sense of faith and hope,
buttressed by unexpected idealism and optimism. At first glance it appears profoundly
contradictory, for how can one simultaneously sustain such faith and at the same time
generate any sense of self-empowerment, when the prevailing relations of power are so
obviously stacked against one? After all, right up until 1989, the goals of the opposition
in many respects belonged more to the realm of faith rather than any form of concrete
possibility, as no constellation of social, political and international forces could be

\textsuperscript{18}In fact, the secular Left did embrace the Church, especially after the election of a
Polish pope. They supported the use of religious symbols by the workers in 1980, and
sought refuge in the Church during martial law. Arguably the Left moved much closer to
the Church than vice-versa, a tendency which disturbed both Michnik and his secular
reasonably imagined that might bring about significant political change. Michnik as a non-believer cannot come close to a personal understanding of God or spiritual transcendence, but the dialogue was possible for him because of his romantic yet irreligious acceptance of faith. Faith, as he cites Father Roman Rogowski, “not as a safeguard but as a challenge” can inspire people, promote heroism, and move mountains (1993: 195).

Michnik called such a path one of “question and call”—a combination of critique and faith. Moreover, such faith demands the recognition of moral rights, as well as the acceptance of responsibility and action as vocation, without which there can be no absolution politically or metaphysically. Acknowledging the fruitful possibilities of dialogue and the meeting of minds between Christians and the secular Left, he concludes *The Church and the Left* by quoting Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert at length:

> Go where those others went to the dark boundary  
> for the golden fleece of nothingness your last prize  
>  
> go upright among those who are on their knees  
> among those with their backs turned and those toppled in the dust  
>  
> you were saved not in order to live  
> you have little time you must give testimony  
>  
> be courageous when the mind deceives you be courageous  
> in the final account only this is important  
>  
> and let your helpless Anger be like the sea  
> whenever you hear the voice of the insulted and beaten  
>  
> let your sister Scorn not leave you  
> for the informers executioners cowards—they will win
they will go to your funeral and with relief will throw a lump of earth
the woodborer will write your smoothed-over biography

and do not forgive truly it is not in your power
to forgive in the name of those betrayed at dawn

beware however of unnecessary pride
keep looking at your clown’s face in the mirror
repeat: I was called--weren’t there better ones than I

beware of dryness of heart love the morning spring
the bird with an unknown name the winter oak

light on a wall the splendour of the sky
they don’t need your warm breath
they are there to say: no one will console you

be vigilant--when the light on the mountains gives the sign--arise and go
as long as blood turns in the breast your dark star

repeat old incantations of humanity fables and legends
because this is how you will attain the good you will not attain
repeat great words repeat them stubbornly
like those crossing the desert who perished in the sand

and they will reward you with what they have at hand
with the whip of laughter with murder on a garbage heap

go because only in this will you be admitted to the company of cold
skulls
to the company of your ancestors: Gilgamesh Hector Roland
the defenders of the kingdom without limit and the city of ashes

Be faithful Go
(reprinted in Michnik, 1993: 214-215)

Regardless of Michnik’s exhortations to the Left to participate in a dialogue with
the Church, it should not be surprising to learn that the enemy-cum-friend did not always
welcome the gesture with an open embrace. Tischner’s seering critique in Marxism and
Christianity (1987) condemns Michnik for his appropriation of the Church’s moral high ground, for misunderstanding and compromising its role in Polish society both historically and in the present, and rebukes his call for dialogue. The Church, in Tischner’s view, is the site of opposition to communism, and he confidently backs this up with the evidence of church and pilgrimage site attendance, and the overall religious devotion of ordinary Poles. However touching the recognition of some leftists of the good works of the Church, their outsider criticism does not mean the Church has any requirement to reciprocate with its own reevaluation of its past. The secular Left is fundamentally irrelevant to the roots of Polish society, and need not conduct commissions of self-flagellation or inquiry.

Ironically, Michnik’s advice was almost too-enthusiastically championed by both secular Leftists and Catholic intellectuals—the dialogue was ongoing and fruitful, but a victim of its own success. This point can be illustrated by Michnik’s defence of the Church not getting too involved in politics after the declaration of martial law, given his commitment to the separation of Church and State. Insofar as Michnik wanted increased dialogue with the Church and to morally ground the politics of the opposition with Polish culture (which ipso facto means dealing with the Catholic Church), he also wanted the Church to be separate but not removed from politics—for it to have neither the position of outlaw nor have special perquisites.¹⁹

¹⁹This is why Michnik has been highly critical of the Church in the post-Communist period, with its demands for mandatory religious instruction, severe
The real fact of the alliance between the Church (at least unofficially) and the secular Left can nonetheless be demonstrated by reference to the number of secular initiatives supported by individual priests, Catholic intellectuals, and local parishes. For example, priests Jan Zieja and Zbigniew Kamiński were both members of KOR. Many others were involved in protest fasts, provided space for meetings, collected money for relief activities (Bernhard, 1993:138). After the arrest of KOR activists in 1977, both Primate Wyszyński and then-Archbishop Karol Wojtyła addressed the issue in sermons criticizing the repression of those defending human rights and privately intervened with authorities on behalf of KOR (Lipski, 1985:157-158). Tadeusz Mazowiecki, as editor of Więź, played an important role collecting financial support from overseas in 1976 and acted as the spokesperson for the St. Martin’s fasters in 1977. Bohdan Cywiński, editor of Znak and Aleksander Hauke-Ligowski joined the fast. In 1980-1981, despite the initial calls for the workers to return to work by Primate Wyszyński, Priests Henryk Jańkowski and Jerzy Popiełuszko supported Solidarity from the pulpit, and during martial law their parishes offered sanctuary. St. Brygida’s Church in Gdańsk was for a long time the unofficial headquarters of Lech Wałęsa. Officially the episcopate straddled two worlds—the opposition and the authorities—but the on-the-ground reality reflected the success of the dialogue.

restrictions on abortion, and even constitutional recognition. For a comprehensive overview and critique of the Church’s role in Poland since 1989, see Mirella Eberts (1998), “The Roman Catholic Church and Democracy in Poland,” Europe-Asia Studies 50.5: 817-842.
III. “A New Evolutionism”

In the late 1970s, after the formation of KOR but before the explosion of Solidarity onto the Polish scene, Michnik was involved simultaneously as an activist and a theorist. He supplemented his public work with KOR and the TKN with another kind of political action: writing. Michnik has the unusual ability to reflect on and write about events in which he is a participant—a skill not unique but common to the dissident-theorists of the region. The facility with which Michnik, Havel, and others could move from genuinely creative political theory to innovative action was mutually reinforcing, and thus posed a very real dilemma for the authorities. To imprison the dissidents is to provide a hothouse for writing—as Havel’s Letters to Olga or Michnik’s collection Letters from Prison—attest. At large, such activists are equally troublesome, as their periods of enforced reflection add new ideas, vigour, and leadership to the movements to which they belong.

In 1976 Michnik wrote what is probably the most important essay of his dissident “career”, entitled “A New Evolutionism”. It was both prophetic and programmatic, historically grounded and politically concrete. In brief, Michnik’s argument is that there is renewed hope for Polish opposition to authoritarian communism, and this hope is found precisely in the interstices of Poland’s geopolitical reality. Furthermore, the space for action and room to manoeuvre can be enlarged through a program of action that addresses itself not to a “totalitarian power” but to “an independent public” (1985: 144). This manoeuvrability and the strategy it permits Michnik calls nowy ewolucjonizm—new
Michnik accepts at face value Soviet military and political presence in Poland and the parameters that this fact places on possible evolution. In so doing, Michnik is able to achieve a number of goals at once. First, the “reform or revolution” dilemma is instantly discarded as both “unrealistic and dangerous” (1985: 142). Second, the idea that you can change the system from within through either a revisionist or a neopositivist approach is exhausted theoretically and by reference to experience. The revisionists working within the party, who attempted to graft onto the authoritarian party-state the principles of democratic reform and human socialism--either in Poland or Czechoslovakia--either petered out or failed. In any event, that failure was guaranteed by the restrictions the USSR placed on any variance from the Soviet model. Third, learning the lesson of the WTO intervention which abruptly halted the Prague Spring, he explicitly recognizes that any form of military intervention in Poland would be disastrous.

The possibility for meaningful political change is ultimately tied up with Michnik’s analysis of the fortuitous concurrence of interests of the Soviet and Polish leaderships with Polish society. Michnik explains:

---

Michnik uses the term “neopositivists” in his writing to refer to the Catholic activists in organizations such as Znak who were supported by and sought compromise with the communist authorities. Under the leadership of Stanislaw Stomma, Znak entered the Sejm in 1957, signalling the regime’s shaky modus vivendi with the Church. Unlike the pro-regime PAX, neopositivists did not try to promote a conciliation between Marxism and Christianity--they rejected Marxist-Leninist ideology while recognizing the necessary geopolitical fact of Poland’s loyalty to the Soviet Union.
For all three parties, a Soviet military intervention in Poland would be a political disaster. For the Polish leadership, such an intervention would signify dethronement or the reduction of its position of leader of a nation of thirty-four million, with limited sovereignty, to that of policemen acting on behalf of the Soviet imperium. The Soviet leaders, however, certainly remember the international repercussions of their interventions in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, as well as the resolve of the Polish workers in December 1970 and June 1976. If we include the traditional anti-Russian sentiments of the Poles, and their propensity to fight out of sheer desperation (as demonstrated, for instance, in the Warsaw Uprising of 1944), then we can conclude that a decision by Soviet leaders to intervene militarily in Poland would be equivalent to opting for war with Poland. It would be a war that Poland would lose on the battlefield but that the Soviet Union would lose politically. A victorious Soviet war with Poland would mean a national massacre for the Poles, but for the Soviets it would be a political catastrophe. This is why I believe the Soviet leaders, as well as the leadership of the PUWP, will go far to avoid such a conflict. This reluctance delineates the area of permissible political manoeuvre; this alignment of interests defines the sphere of possible compromise (my emphasis; 1985: 143-144).

Michnik sees his own innovation not in the belief that “evolutionary change should be planned within the parameters of the ‘Brezhnev Doctrine’”—as this was also to some degree the case with the neopositivists and revisionists. Rather, Michnik’s originality pertains to the targeted audience of the reform process—not the state, but society. Michnik states: “Such a program should give directives to the people on how to behave, not to the powers on how to reform themselves. Nothing instructs the authorities better than pressure from below” (1985: 144).

This was not conceived, however, as conventional pressure from the angry or erupting masses to the powers that be—this also had been tried, by the students in 1968 and by the workers in 1970 and 1976. Under Michnik’s scheme, citizens acting
independently in society would take responsibility for their own actions, take control over certain areas of public life, and live and act openly and in solidarity with one another. As Jonathan Schell has stated in response to “A New Evolutionism” and in consideration of KOR, the organization which the essay effectively foreshadows:

In this deep reach of totalitarian government into daily life, which is usually seen as a source of its strength, KOR discovered a point of weakness: precisely because totalitarian governments politicize daily life, daily life becomes a vast terrain on which totalitarianism can be opposed. It was here that KOR implicitly pitted itself against the regime (Schell, “Introduction” in Michnik, 1985: xxvii).

“New evolutionism” is based on Michnik’s faith that particular strata in society will rise to the occasion, most notably the workers, the Church, and the intelligentsia.

Four years before the birth of Solidarity, Michnik announces:

“New evolutionism” is based on faith in the power of the working class, which, with a steady and unyielding stand, has on several occasions forced the government to make spectacular concessions [i.e. October, 1956; December, 1970; June, 1976]. It is difficult to foresee developments in the working class, but there is no question that the power elite fears this social group most. Pressure from the working classes is a necessary condition for the evolution of public life toward a democracy (1985: 144).

The Catholic Church has a special role to play in defending truth, standing up for human freedom and dignity, by encouraging independent thought and nonconformity. The intelligentsia’s duty (as it has been historically in Poland) is to be rigorously and systematically insubordinate, to “formulate alternative programs and defend basic principles” (1985: 147). Within this imagined drama (for it is still a creature of Michnik’s mind and not a reflection of Polish reality), he even generously scripts a role
for the "party pragmatist"--the party insider who may not appreciate democratic ideals but
nonetheless is affected by public opinion, economic forces, and understands "the
effectiveness of compromising with forces favouring plurality instead of brutally
suppressing them" (1985: 146).

Michnik concludes this powerful essay by direct reference to the power of truth
and implicity to civil society as both primary defence mechanisms in the war against
authoritarian communism and as bulwarks in establishing a democratic polity:

In searching for truth, or, to quote Leszek Kołakowski, "by living in
dignity," opposition intellectuals are striving not so much for a better
tomorrow as a better today. Every act of defiance helps us build the
framework of democratic socialism, which should not be merely or
primarily a legal institutional structure but a real, day-to-day community of

Michnik did not seek to overthrow the government of the People's Republic of Poland,
nor to fundamentally destabilize the Soviet model in the region. His aims were simple
and his advice direct--ignore the party-state, be active rather than passive, do what you
can rather than what you cannot, take responsibility for yourself, your community and
improve your own life and the lives of those around you. Nonetheless, the implications
of his approach were radical, and far from being ephemeral adjustments to the current
reality, were deeply substantive and far-reaching.
IV. Non-Violence as Theory and Practice

Violence has been historically connected with the world’s major social revolutions, where political upheaval and regime change were matched and indeed generated by intense and relatively sudden social transformation: in France, Russia, Mexico, and China. Violence has even become one of the defining criteria of the revolutionary process.21 Marx, the grand theorist of proletarian revolution, suggested that “violence is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one”. Revolutionary movements typically employ violence in an attempt (successful or otherwise) to overthrow an existing regime or government, it is part of their stock and trade. Up until 1989 it was axiomatic that the level of transformation was positively correlative with the level of violence involved in the revolutionary process. That this was so universally accepted among scholars helps to explain the reticence in defining the period 1989-1991 in Central and Eastern Europe as revolutionary at all.

In Poland, intellectual activists such as Adam Michnik and Jacek Kuroń turned this conventional wisdom upside down. Faced with the reality of the post-totalitarian Polish regime--its array of the instruments and methods of violence and deception backed up the overwhelming and inconceivable force of the nuclear arsenal of its Soviet godparent--the choice was made to renounce violence in its entirety. The proposition was

21See for example, Charles Tilly (1993), European Revolutions 1492-1992 (Oxford: Blackwell) and Theda Skocpol (1979), States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China (New York: Cambridge UP).
simple: forget the military-political contest and attempt instead to introduce and increase
the multilayered activities and organizations associated with normal civic life. Thus the
renunciation of violence and the emphasis on civil society are two sides of the same
strategy: they require and reinforce one another.

In the years since the Polish August and the spectacular growth of Solidarity were
dubbed the “self-limiting revolution” through to the Round Table Talks in Poland and
Hungary, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the oxymoronically titled “Velvet Revolution”
in Czechoslovakia, scholars have debated whether the events constitute a revolution at all.
Commentators have focused on the presence or absence of violence as a necessary but not
sufficient condition, whether the “restorative” elements of the process defeat the
possibility of any revolutionary designation, or on the lack or depth of required social
transformation. In my view, Jonathan Schell is completely correct in judging Solidarity
as not only revolutionary, but in his assessment that intellectuals like Michnik and Kuroń
revolutionized the concept of revolution in the process.22 Furthermore, I concur with
Schell that a defining feature of this “revolution in revolution” is the unwavering
commitment of the opposition--not just in Poland but in Hungary and Czechoslovakia as
well--to non-violent political practice.

A commitment to non-violence among Polish intellectuals was *sine qua non* for
the alliance strategy between the Church and the Left promoted by Michnik. However,

22Schell wrote these comments in his introduction to *Letters in Prison* in 1985 but
in this author’s view are equally valid in assessing the period 1989-1991.
over time non-violence became less of an indispensable condition and more of a morally-inspired credo, inspired not only by Catholic doctrine but the lessons of Polish history. The failed rebellions and uprisings of the nineteenth century taught the stereotypically romantic and insurrectionary Poles that when faced with mammoth force, they could only lose. Within the Polish opposition there was a keen sense of this history, and a purposefully ironic attitude. Much violence had been perpetrated on the Polish people as a result of the partitions and the German occupation. Yet since 1945 the violence continued under the banner of their “freedom.” An analysis of “freedom movements” with the Soviet Bloc after 1945 only served to strengthen the moral and political validity of non-violence. The chaotic brevity of the Hungarian revolution invited crowd-sanctioned lynchings against members of the security apparatus; this was met in turn by the harsh reprisals of the invading Soviet forces and the extent of Kádár’s repression. Neither the Polish October nor the Prague Spring, peaceful though they may have been in both reformist orientation and in their ultimate defeats, were successful exercises in either democracy or freedom--primarily because their target was the party-state rather than civil society.

---

23Nationalist uprisings that sought to put Poland back on the map during the nineteenth century occurred in 1830-1831 and 1863-1864. Historian Norman Davies calls this period “The Romantic Age of Insurrections” and discusses in detail the great divide in nineteenth century Polish politics as the debate between the “Romantic-Insurrectionary-Idealist” camp and the “Positivist-Conciliatory-Realist” camp. See especially Chapter IV, “The Legacy of Spiritual Mastery: Poland During the Partitions, 1795-1918” in Davies (1984), Heart of Europe: A Short History of Poland (Oxford: Oxford UP).
Adam Michnik made his most sustained defence of non-violence in his "Letter from the Gdańsk Prison". Written in 1985 during his second period of incarceration since 1981, he deliberately addresses the renunciation of violence, as a result of constant questioning by foreign observers of the Polish situation. His response is self-described as both pragmatic and idealistic. On a military-strategic level, it is obvious:

No one in Poland is able to prove today that violence will help us dislodge Soviet troops from Poland and to remove the communists from power. The USSR has such enormous military power that confrontation is simply unthinkable. In other words, we have no guns. Napoleon, upon hearing a similar reply, gave up asking further questions. However, Napoleon was above all interested in military victories and not building democratic, pluralistic societies. We, by contrast, cannot leave it at that (1985: 36).

To be sure, the military reality forces caution, yet Michnik supplements this reasoning with a different logic:

Taught by history, we suspect that by using force to storm the existing Bastilles we shall unwittingly build new ones. It is true that social change is almost always accompanied by force. But it is not true that social change is merely a result of the violent collision of various forces. Above all, social changes follow from a confrontation of different moralities and visions of social order. Before the violence of rulers clashes with the violence of their subjects, values and systems of ethics clash inside human minds. Only when the old ideas of the rulers lose this moral duel will the subjects reach for force--sometimes. This is what happened in the French Revolution and the Russian Revolution--two examples cited in every debate as proof that revolutionary violence is preceded by a moral breakdown in the old regime. But both examples lose their meaning when they are reduced to such compact notions, in which the Encyclopedists are paired with the destruction of the Bastille, and the success of radical ideologies in Russia is paired with the storming of the Winter Palace (1985: 86-87).

Above all, Michnik is concerned with separating the collision of "different moralities and
visions of social order" from the attendance of violence on the landscape of political change. The alternative vision can win hearts and minds without violence, and can even provisionally succeed. Moreover, the reflection and discipline necessary for non-violence displays an “historical awareness of the possible consequences of revolutionary violence” and the acknowledgement that terror corrupts and thus is contrary to a contemporary freedom movement.

Non-violence as a moral and political choice is also characteristic of the provisional and contingent nature of the Polish self-limiting revolution. In Michnik’s analysis, revolutionary terror and violence usually accompany Promethean visions of an ideal society, where “the road to God’s Kingdom on Earth led through rivers of blood”. Non-violence becomes an explicit rejection of Leninism and Jacobinism. Violence is never ennobling or redeeming, even when deployed by the oppressed in the name of freedom, welfare, or a just society. Doctrinaire socialist teleology has rendered the

24 In this regard, Michnik regards Solidarity’s “loss” after December 13, 1981 as a “victory in defeat”. Resistance to martial law was in the form of societal silence (not to be confused with acquiescence), which minimized loss, and allowed for the underground preservation of both Solidarity and the independent organizations it spawned (1985: 88).

25 In a long historical essay entitled “Conversations in the Citadel”, Michnik describes and argues against two prominent strains in Polish socialist thought—the universalist, anti-nationalist, and radically democratic utopianism of Rosa Luxemburg and the bureaucratic-revolutionary approach of Edward Abramowski. In different ways, both emphasized the importance of workers’s struggle in the eventual attainment of power, and were critical of Lenin and the Russian Revolution—both for the vanguardist approach and the autocratic and bureaucratic result. Although neither renounced violence as a means, Abramowski believed revolutionary methods decisively influenced the shape of political outcomes, and Luxemburg was critical of any attempts to deprive workers of
“technique of the revolutionary act...morally neutral”, best expressed in Lenin’s dictum, “You cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs”.

Solidarity was not an alternative to the authorities or an instrument in a broader struggle for power, a position which made violence redundant. Thus he states:

Solidarity has never had a vision of an ideal society. It wants to live and let live. Its ideals are closer to the American Revolution than to the French. Its thinking about goals is similar to that of the resistance against Franco in Spain, or against the “black colonels” in Greece; it is unlike the thinking of those who strive to attain doctrinal goals. The ethics of Solidarity, with its consistent rejection of the use of force, has a lot in common with the idea of nonviolence as espoused by Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.

In acknowledging the influence of Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., Michnik is also turning conventional twentieth century wisdom about non-violence on its head. According to this argument, non-violence, passive resistance, or civil disobedience can only have a significant political impact in states or societies where boundaries to legitimate authority are recognized and independent political opinion can be formed and expressed as a countervailing measure to arbitrary abuses of state power. Thus passive resistance worked in India because it was imperially controlled by Britain and the civil rights movement was able to galvanize support in America precisely because of the political space afforded free public discourse in both countries. Such an explanation logically denies the possible success of non-violence under a regime which defines its own limits, if any, is not democratically accountable, and regularly enforces its authority their civil rights, no matter what the goal. See Michnik, 1985: 293-304.
with political or security police. The true impact of the Polish opposition was the wide swath of autonomy it cut for itself outside the official realm—as measured by the continuation of Solidarity and other organizations underground after 1981, the persistence of the underground press, the TKN seminars, and the spiritual independence and material aid provided by the Church. It was deliberately inward-looking and therefore defined its own success. Thus in his essay “The Polish War”, written in 1982 at the nadir of the Polish opposition, Michnik could confidently counter party reformer Stefan Bratkowski’s claim that “no one can sit on a bayonet”26 with the reply that “no one can use a bayonet to wipe fifteen months of freedom from human memory” (1985: 35).

V. Kuron: A Bridge Between Generations

In 1968 the student activists demanded “real socialism” in the place of the bureaucratically stagnant party-state. Many of those leading the protests—such as Michnik, Lityński, and Blumsztajn—looked to Jacek Kuron as the kind of activist-intellectual they themselves wanted to be. Unlike Kołakowski, Kuron was not a privileged party intellectual who first turned revisionist and then rejected the party-state entirely. In any event, Kuron was too young to have been involved in the intellectual thaw of the late 50s. However, first as a scout leader and later as a scholar-researcher at Warsaw University and co-author of the famous “Open Letter” (with Karol

26Bratkowski purposefully quotes Talleyrand here.
Modzelewski), he was a mentor *par excellence* for the generation of '68.

The *Open Letter to the Party* was first published in Polish in Paris in 1966 (*List Otwarty Do Partii*), and thanks to its adoption as credo by the International Socialists, was translated into English, French, German, and Italian and distributed widely. In many respects it is a classically Trotskyist critique of authoritarian communism—as statist, antidemocratic, hierarchical, bureaucratic, and responsible for generating contradictions in production and social relations. All political decisions were made undemocratically by a narrow elite possessing monolithic and monopolistic control; counter-organization or opinion and the creation of political alternatives (even within the party) were strictly prohibited.

The party-state had translated its control over the economy into a form of ownership, and worse still, had done so to the overall detriment of Poland’s working class. Using the tools of Marxist political economy, Kuroń and Modzelewski analyzed the economic crises and contradictions endemic to the system. They criticized the overall “class goal of the bureaucracy”—which they describe as production for the sake of production. Industrial saturation worked well in the early postwar period, especially when new infrastructure was desperately needed, but increasingly had lead to overexpansion. Moreover, extensive industrial growth meant in practise a “general inadaptation of production to needs” (1982: 41), most profoundly indicated by the low level of household consumption. It generated a deficit in raw materials and fuel, which was in turn exacerbated by waste, shortages of key tools and equipment, and inefficient
production processes. Finally, the system seemed incapable of making the switch to a pattern of intensively-oriented growth, where increased productivity would arise from modernization, technical progress, product innovation, cost reduction and new methods of organization and labour process. This analysis hardly seems earth-shattering today given the volumes now published on the inefficiencies of the Soviet economic model. However, its timing and appearance on the Polish scene, coupled with the fact that it was written by two graduate students in disarmingly frank language, operating within a Marxist framework, made it especially threatening and in hindsight, more compelling.

Obviously the party elites did not welcome such criticism. What was more damning, however, was the evidence collected by Modzelewski and Kuroń with respect to the sociological condition of the working class. The authors carefully documented everything from how often Polish families consumed meat to the type of clothes worn (how many suits, of what cloth and quality). They included statistics on living space, incidence of hot and cold running water, and health conditions.\textsuperscript{27} State-provided housing and medical care were important, but placed in the context of the worker’s minimal existence, did little to achieve class betterment. Rather, such “benefits” of the party-state were only required to ensure the continued social reproduction of labour power. They state:

As a rule, the worker has the advantage of living very

\textsuperscript{27}The authors relied upon data from the Central Statistical Office and a research project conducted at the Warsaw Motorcycle Factory.
inexpensively in a government-owned building. His lodging is therefore part free. But to live and produce he must stay somewhere. At any rate, his apartment rarely has any luxuries and in most cases not even the elementary comforts. It is part of his subsistence minimum, supplied to him in addition to his wages.

The workers receive medical care free and can buy medicines at a discount, but these are necessary in order to preserve his labor power: they are ingredients of his subsistence minimum. If free medical care were abolished and rents increased, the worker’s wages would have to be raised in proportion to the increase in his necessary expenses. These non-returnable benefits and services are a necessary part of the worker’s subsistence minimum, a wage supplement as necessary to the worker as the wages themselves, and therefore a constituent of production cost (1982: 21).

In a few short paragraphs, Kuroń and Modzelewski dismiss the much-vaunted benefits of state socialism as a necessary production cost, unrelated to any ideological or altruistic claim about the satisfaction of basic human needs.

What got Kuroń and Modzelewski into real trouble with the authorities, however, were their revolutionary aims and conclusions. They argued that proletarian revolution was inevitable--perhaps not in the sense of a “call to arms” but certainly in terms of societal revolt against the rule of the privileged minority. In this sense, they foresaw the type of chaos that would result from an uprising of discontented and disorganized masses, as happened in December, 1970. Their policies of avoiding such a confrontation notably included greater (and genuine) political participation and democratization via the creation of a “workers’ multi-party system”, the management of enterprises via workers’ councils, peasant control of both land and agricultural products, at minimum the independence of existing trade unions, the abolition of “preventive censorship” and the
dissolution of the political security apparatus (1982: 72-76). Taken as a whole, their programme constituted, in their words “an anti-bureaucratic revolution” which they recognized would be threatening for the “established world order”--meaning both the Soviet Union and its satellites as well as Western capitalist and imperialist states.

Moreover, their actions surrounding the publication of the letter and their subsequent arrest served as an important example in terms of formulating an open rather than clandestine political opposition. After drafting their proposals, they first sought comments from scholars at the university from the History, Economics, and Philosophy Departments. In accordance with party regulations, they submitted their letter to the Warsaw party organization. Instead of an expected debate, they were arrested the following day on March 19, 1965. Their arrest, secret trial, and imprisonment initiated a series of shock waves among intellectuals and students, initiating the period of student unrest that came to a head in 1968.

Thus Kuroń himself was sidelined during the March events of 1968, serving the first of a number of prison sentences that did not end until 1972. His removal from the immediate political fray created the conditions for detached observation and reflection on

---

28 At the famous eighth plenum in October, 1956, a resolution was adopted that stipulated members may hold divergent views and submit them to their local party organization, as long as they did not appeal to public opinion outside the party about any decisions taken.
1968 and 1970, resulting in a new direction in his political thinking. Like Kołakowski, Kuroń saw the need to shift focus away from the party-state in terms of reform efforts. However, for Kołakowski this was vaguely presented, in terms of the “preservation of Polish culture” and the importance of “living in dignity”. Kuroń was able to put some flesh on Kołakowski’s theoretical bones, and suggested that an independent culture and society is not a precursor to some more organized and more political opposition, but can itself constitute—both formally and informally—an opposition and simultaneously aid in the democratizing process (Ost, 1990: 64). This is the heart of Kuroń’s idea of self-organization—samoorganizacja—that through the constant formation and reformation of initiatives, movements, and organizations citizens create and expand public space, and in so doing build democracy and reinforce democratic values. In the same manner as de Toqueville, Kuroń saw such “public work” as contributing to social tranquillity, generating positive material results, serving as de facto schools in teaching the values of associational freedom, contributing to an appreciation and the actual practise of freedom

---

29To the extent Kuroń developed his thinking in line with Polish reality and possibilities for change, he was also roundly criticized (like Kołakowski) by his former admirers in the West for his “disavowal” of earlier views. According to this Western Trotskyist interpretation, Kuroń’s change of heart amounted to a hopelessly reformist perspective, lacking in revolutionary aims and objectives. Such fatal flaws were as responsible for the defeat of Marxist revisionism as (later) for Solidarity itself. See in particular Colin Barker’s “Introduction” to the 1982 Bookmarks edition of the Open Letter, as well as Colin Barker and Kara Weber (1982), Solidarność: From Gdańsk to Military Repression (London: Bookmarks).
of the press, and providing engaged citizens with a sense of common good and purpose.30

Kuroń’s theoretical development can be documented in a number of essays he wrote in the 1970s, such as “Politics and Opposition in Poland” (1974), “Reflections on a Program of Action” (1976), “Notes on Self-Government” (1977), and “The Situation of the Country and the Program of the Opposition” (1979).31 In the first piece he introduces his ideas about opposition in and through an independent (civil) society and in so doing reconceptualizes his earlier ideas about democratization. In the others, written after the formation of KOR, he emphasizes the significance of the independent social initiatives and organizations, to some degree paralleling the thought of Adam Michnik.

Whereas in the “Open Letter” democratization involved bursting open the doors of party-state and making its organs and agencies responsive and truly participatory, a

30Kuroń’s work can be fruitfully compared with Alexis de Toqueville’s Democracy in America, especially Volume 2, Book 2, chapters 2-8 where he discusses individualism in democracies, how its revolutionary potential is countered by free institutions and associational autonomy, the important linkages between civil and political associations, and how self-interest is tempered by the common good.

31“Politics and Opposition in Poland” (Polityczna opozycja w Polsce) was first published in Kultura in 1974, and later included in Kuroń’s 1984 published collection of essays Polityka I odpowiedzialność (Politics and Responsibility) (London: Aneks); it has not been translated into English. “Reflections on a Program of Action” (“Myśli o programie działania”) was first published in Polish in the London journal Aneks, Nos. 13-14 (1977); and English translation (cited from below) appears in Polish Review 22 (1977). “Notes on Self-Government” (“Notaki o samorządzie”) was first published in the Warsaw samizdat journal Głos (Voice) 1 (1977). “The Situation of the Country and the Program of the Opposition” (Sytuacja kraju a program opozycji) was first printed in Warsaw samizdat periodical Biluletny Informacyjny (Information Bulletin) 29.3 (1979). All three were reprinted in Politics and Responsibility.
different notion of democratization is involved in "Political Opposition in Poland". Here Kuroń discusses democracy as the continually expanding sphere of non-coerced social activity. As Ost suggests, Kuroń's views are rooted both in Marxist humanist notions of praxis and creative human fulfilment, as well as Isaiah Berlin's (and, I would add, J.S. Mill's) concept of positive freedom (1990: 65). Democratic theory is taken away from efforts to reform the party-state and directed non-institutionally at society. Thus rather than emphasize the relative autonomy of the parliamentary parties in the Sejm (other than the PUWP) or the existence of free and fair elections of the deputies themselves, Kuroń and others steered clear away from the leading role of the party and the political rigidity of the party-state. Kuroń chose to concentrate on citizenship rights and democratic freedoms where the ability to organize autonomous associations is at stake--such as free assembly and association over voting rights, for example.

Because of the false and forced "unity" of politics and society under authoritarian communism, politics itself takes on a new and broader meaning. As the party-state must eliminate independent civil society in order to demonstrate the validity of its rule under the banner of the "universal" class--the proletariat--any action to revive independent activity constitutes political opposition. Thus Kuroń declares at the beginning of his article,

There are people in Poland today who are intentionally counteracting the fundamental principles of the system, a system that has been imposed on society by state power. These people are so numerous, and occupy such a significant place in society, that we can speak of the movement of political opposition as being a permanent element of life in Poland (cited in Ost,
And later:

I fear that very few participants of this movement realize the significance of their activities, or understand the dimensions, the influence, or the possibilities of the movement of which they are a part (cited in Ost, 1990: 66).

The participants in this opposition were not “falsely conscious”; rather, they were involved in activities and initiatives—what Kuroń calls “reconstructing social ties”—that were not viewed as conventionally political.

While Kołakowski was trading polemics with the British New Left and taking issue with the aspirations of the “new social movements” produced by the 1960s, a very similar undertaking was being theorized by Kuroń and his Polish counterparts. After the initial success of KOR following the Radom-Ursus riots in 1976, Kuroń became increasingly optimistic about the prospects for social self-organization. Thus in 1976, after Michnik writes “A New Evolutionism” Kuroń echoes his sentiments in “Reflections on a Program of Action” with a proposition that such organization continue, with the building and interweaving of new social movements:

It is essential...that society should organize itself into social movements, interacting on each other [and] expressing as fully as possible the aspirations of all. This is the program for creating in the social movements...a Poland which is the concern of every citizen and social activity: a country of integrated social action and thought (Kuroń, 1977: 69).

In this article, Kuroń differentiates other forms of resistance currently in operation in people’s Poland. He discusses the prevalence of illegal enterprise and self-serving
fraud and bribery—what political scientists often call clientelism and bureaucratic rent-seeking—as well as quasi-official manipulations of institutional budgets, plan targets, and annual results, amounting to a form of political game-playing and state planning roulette designed to increase the local share of the national pie. He contrasts this private, individualized, and socially disruptive form of resistance with open, organized protest. By this he refers to the synchronized organization of groups into social movements. The key basis of such organization is social solidarity, which is multiplied through the very action of building social movements and independent groups. Democratic values of trust, co-operation and solidarity are so important in Kuroś’s view that they overshadow the need for particular demands or a programme of action (1977: 67).

Kuroś does not consider such an approach to be idealistic or utopian. In fact, he cites four key experiences from the previous thirty years to demonstrate the prior existence of such movements (hence their future viability) as well as the substantive gains made by each. Successful Polish peasant resistance to collectivization and nationalization, first individually, then in groups, and finally through a national movement with a common purpose, remains for Kuroś one of the key lasting legacies of the Polish October. Second, in the periodic protest movements of workers in defence of their pay and social benefits—in 1956-57, 1970-71, and in 1976—a heavy price was often paid in terms of casualties and police violence, but many of their economic demands were
ultimately met. Third, the activity of the lay masses and the episcopate in maintaining and strengthening the independence of the Catholic Church--through attendance at masses, pilgrimages, parish activities, demonstrations, the construction of churches--represents a mass social movement unlike the limited and often compromised role of many other churches in the Bloc. Fundamentally and philosophically through its defence of individual freedom, freedom of conscience, and the dignity of the individual, the Church has reinforced important “universal values” consonant with Poland’s national historic culture (1977: 62). Finally, the collective efforts of writers, scholars, artists, and intellectuals in their efforts to maintain and further independent social ideas, keep alive the national history, and preserve and support the values of honesty, non-conformity, truth, and courage, has been a resistance movement itself. According to Kuroń, each of these movements

...restricts the power of the totalitarian state with a considerable measure of success. But none of them would have been successful, or at least so successful, if it had to operate on its own. The interdependence of all four and their continued existence since 1956 are essential features of our social reality (1977: 63).

Every new organization constitutes a tiny but important ice pick chipping away, at

32 Kuroń makes the important point that the only two periods of relative prosperity for Poland’s working class occurred in 1956-1960 and 1971-1975, both following powerful waves of national strikes. He contrasts these strikes, however, from isolated shop-floor protests, revolts by single shifts, or street demonstrations. The strike remains a valuable organizational tool when used strategically and with the force of both discipline and numbers--only when strikes “achieved the caliber of a social movement” were they truly effective in Kuroń’s view (1977: 61-62).
times almost imperceptibly, at the monopoly of the party-state. In the “Open Letter”, Kuroń and Modzelewski argued that revolutionary change would have to occur before authentic and meaningful democratic political activity could take place. Now such activity itself constitutes democratic action and is profoundly transformative in nature (Ost, 1990: 69). In “Reflections of a Program of Action” Kuroń almost discusses his ultimate goal of “Finlandization”—a parliamentary democracy with limited international sovereignty—in passing, partially because he now finds it impossible to separate political ends from their means of achievement.33

At the same time, like Michnik, Kuroń argues that although the self-organization of Polish society is both a necessary (and in some ways sufficient) condition for the democratizing process, the opposition must be careful to be “self-limiting” in its aims. The goal must be to improve, not overthrow or transform. This is partially due to the ever-present threat of external intervention, but self-limitation has other objectives. Initiating and organizing social movements realizes non-political aims in terms of increasing quality of life and building social cooperation and solidarity. More dangerous than the threat of intervention is a retreat to apathy on the one hand, or spontaneous

33Kuroń is quick to dispel, however, the party-state rhetoric that parliamentary democracy amounts meaninglessly to “bourgeois democracy” and notes that “the ownership of the means of production is in no way linked with the parliamentary system” (1977: 59). In this context, his commitment to some form of social ownership is implicit when he states: “While I have remained faithful to the essential values I wish to prevail, my views have changed as to the best and most practical methods of achieving our objectives” (1977: 52).
anarchic protest on the other. To some degree, these arguments are contradictory—how can self-organization be deeply transformative and democratic on the one hand, and self-limiting on the other? The answer lies in the related assumptions that transformative politics need not be revolutionary (in the conventional sense) and that democracy cannot be reduced to institutional arrangements. Both Kuroń and Michnik clearly understood that democracy is not something you either have or you do not have, it is as much about process as product, means as ends. Thus they grasped both theoretically and in the Polish context that democracy is something that defies easy categorization or definition—despite the mind-bending efforts of democratic theorists to do just that over the last half century.34

Kuroń’s commitment to self-organization as the primary means of democratization lead him to be critical of Solidarity itself, especially in the mid-to-late 1980s during its long and protracted “war of position” with the Polish authorities. In an important article entitled “Landscape After the Battle” he analyzed the sense of deadlock that activists felt in their underground existence.35 In it he argues against two commonly-

34 A good summary of the competing and overlapping meanings of democracy and the democratization process can be found in David Potter et al, eds. (1997), Democratization (Cambridge: Polity Press).

35 The article appears in English in Labour Focus on Eastern Europe 10.1, Uncensored Poland News Bulletin 22, and East European Reporter 3.2. It inspired considerable debate within the provisional council, a summary of which is printed in Tygodnik Mazowsze 220.16 and which is translated and accompanies the Labour Focus on Eastern Europe version. Quotations here are taken from East European Reporter 3.2.
held views—that nothing had changed (the Polish “war” successfully reversed Solidarity’s gains) and that nothing must be changed (in terms of the tightly-knit underground survival strategy adopted by Solidarity’s Provisional Council).

Against the first claim, Kuroń reminds his readership in Marxian fashion that “a counter-revolution—and what started on 13 December 1981 could be described as such—never returns the social situation to the time before the revolution” (1988: 30). Despite the declaration of martial law, the arrests, and the official shut-down of the independent trade union, significant and lasting gains were made. Solidarity was not completely liquidated, but successfully organized itself underground. Institutional pluralism was defended and indeed flourished—so much so that faced with the “competition”, the official press organs presented social and economic reality in a much truer light. The authorities now knew that without a radical improvement in living conditions—perhaps through comprehensive social and economic restructuring—political legitimacy could not be restored. Kuroń wants the superior-minded and self-sacrificing activists of the underground to recognize the “complex character of the counter-revolution” and the partial successes achieved by Solidarity. In particular, he wants to quash zero-sum commentaries that suggest if all had not changed, then nothing had been achieved (1988: 31).

Against the second claim, Kuroń suggests that the activists in the underground must adapt themselves to the new situation. In light of Gorbachev’s reforms, the release of Wałęsa, and the open publication of Res Publica—Solidarity cannot keep itself
Anticipating criticism, Kuroń recognizes that while many Poles fearfully avoid direct involvement with Solidarity as an illegal and banned organization, the vast majority of the population sympathizes with the movement and completely mistrusts the regime. For this reason, he recommends that Solidarity get involved with new structures in the official and unofficial spheres. Solidarity needs to keep pace with a rapidly-evolving reality, especially given the sprouting of recent organizations primarily organized by younger activists not necessarily involved (or even encouraged to be involved) in either the rank-and-file or the leadership of the underground movement.

Thus he states:

It is the official and unofficial spheres which are now of the greatest significance—all kinds of cooperatives, partnerships, self-governments (particularly local ones)—associations, independent but officially recognized publishers. Here the movement has the opportunity to regain its popular character. People truly committed to Solidarity, but fearful of illegality and all kinds of unrest, can join the official activities which have our support. What is equally important is that in this way, the extent to which society makes its decisions concerning itself may be radically increased—it can in reality start building from the foundations a democratic order. I believe that Solidarity structures should service this kind of activity—initiating various actions, organising professional assistance, and providing publishing facilities to help in organising all types of actions which put pressure on the authorities. In workplaces, all possible official means, starting with meetings and ending with the new unions, should be taken advantage of (1988: 32).

In the same way that Luxemburg criticized Lenin, Kuroń remained fearful of the “vanguardization” of the Polish movement. In his view it should remain popular, rooted locally in terms of organization and issues, expansive in its orientation, and open in terms of involvement. The movement was no “party”—it was the anti-party.
Finally, for Kuroń, such an approach is necessary for the Polish opposition to remain dynamic, willing, and able to push open windows of political opportunity. No matter what happens on the international and domestic political scene, for Kuroń “readiness does not mean merely waiting...it means action” (1988: 32). Although Kuroń could only guess at the ramifications of his strategy, the approach he takes indicates a shift in the “us versus them” attitude of the Polish opposition, a necessary step on the way to the Round Table Talks.

VI. Theorizing Civil Society: The Polish Case

As described above, the Polish conceptualization of civil society was intrinsically tied to the unfolding of dramatic events--from the workers’ massacre in 1970 through to the formation of KOR in response to the Radom/Ursus riots in 1976, finally culminating in “the Polish August” in 1980 and the formation of Solidarity. Solidarity itself was seen as the proof in the pudding; its independent existence indicated not the formation of a trade union per se, but in Michnik’s words, “the promise of a civil society” (1985: 124). In August, 1981, a year after the Gdańsk negotiations and four months before the imposition of martial law, Michnik wrote:

On the last day of August 1980 the deputy premier of the government of the Polish People’s Republic, Mieczysław Jagielski, and the chairman of the Interfactory Strike Committee, Lech Wałęsa, signed an agreement on the grounds of the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk; it was clear to all that a new chapter had opened in Poland’s history. Much was said at the time about this being a social agreement,” although it was only a preliminary one, merely a compromise that could temporarily satisfy both
the government and the people. For the first time organized authority was signing an accord with an organized society. The agreement marked the creation of labor unions independent of the state which vowed not to attempt to take over political power.

The essence of the spontaneously growing Independent and Self-governing Labor Union Solidarity lay in the restoration of social ties, self-organization aimed at guaranteeing the defence of labor, civil, and national rights. For the first time in the history of communist rule in Poland "civil society" was being restored, and it was reaching a compromise with the state (1985: 124).

The success of Solidarity lay in the originality of its approach. In contrasting the "Polish experiment" with the Hungarian revolution and the Prague Spring, Michnik contends that two essential differences must be stressed; "the first regards the direction of the changes; the second, their reach" (1985: 125). Whereas in Hungary the party apparatus disintegrated in the face of a rebellious popular uprising and the Prague Spring occurred because of a sweeping reformist impulse for change from above, the Polish events were much more limited, and centred on activities beyond and outside the party-state.

By this same reasoning, the success of Solidarity confirmed the death of revisionism--heralded by Kołakowski and proclaimed by Michnik. The eulogy for revisionism made new forms of democratization thinkable; events in Poland made civil society possible. In his retrospective analysis "The Prague Spring Ten Years Later" Michnik states:

This paradigm [East European revisionism] belongs to history, however, and it will never repeat itself. This is why all those who believe in the democratic evolution of the countries of Eastern Europe and who are waiting for another Twentieth Congress of the CPSU or for another January plenum of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist party are deluding themselves. I have in mind especially the
Italian and French Eurocommunists, who are waiting, once again, for the inspiration of a democratization process to come from the upper strata of the party apparatus. They are wrong because these days joining a ruling Communist party is the choice of opportunists. Those who believe in the ideals of liberty, equality, and the freedom of labor can be found only in the ranks of the antitotalitarian opposition. It is from them that the impulse for democratic actions must now arise. Such actions are unique in that they do not aim to win power but to help society organize itself through the gradual emancipation of groups and individuals from the grip of the all-powerful apparatus. The people have to look after their own interests, the independent flow of information, free learning and culture. Society must transform itself from a “sack of potatoes” (we owe this apt metaphor to Marx) into the executor of its own interests and aspirations. Only such a society can effectively oppose totalitarianism and become a real partner in power (1985: 158).

Michnik and Kuroń both appreciated the fact the Solidarity meant many things to many people, especially so in the case of competing intellectual analyses. One of the reasons Western intellectuals and activists flocked to “Solidarity Studies” in the 1980s was that in the new union or social movement one could find almost any and every political tendency. Thus Alain Touraine looked to Solidarity to confirm his ideas about social movement form and organization, Reaganite policy wonks found the ultimate people’s expression of anti-communism, marginalized Western Trotskyists noted the promise of worker radicalism and applauded the potential for shopfloor organization and revolution, and academics within and on the edges of the American “Slavic Studies” establishment mulled over the meaning of it all for the better part of a decade. In many respects, this was entirely the point, for as Michnik said:

...the Solidarity union is everything at the same time: a labor union that defends the rights of the working people in their places of employment; an office that prosecutes lawbreakers in the power apparatus; a defender of
political prisoners, law and order, and an independent culture—a true representative of the people in dealings with the authorities (1985: 129).

Michnik was also right to point out that the one thing that Solidarity was definitely not was a political party in the institutional sense; it had neither the ability nor the desire to take power.

Within Poland, different terms were used to identify this civil society-oriented approach. Michnik was most direct in his appropriation of the term “civil society” and the theoretical heritage that lay behind it. Kuroni preferred to speak of independent social movements rather than an independent or civil society, which fit into his paradigm of activist citizenship. Later he spoke more of self-organization or social self-organization, again privileging process and involvement over static description.

Polish economist Tadeusz Kowalik noted that discussion of an independent society—however it was called—had important antecedents in Polish history:

Similar concepts were used in the nineteenth century when they meant a struggle for state independence. For example, Edward Abramowski (1868-1918), a socialist and cooperativist thinker, whose ideas Oskar Lange called ‘constructive anarchism’, can be regarded as the first theoretician of an ‘independent society’ in this sense (unpublished response).

36 The analysis below relies not only on published sources, but on a series of questions forwarded to East-Central European dissidents by H. Gordon Skilling in the late 1980s. The Czechoslovak responses were included in Skilling and Wilson, eds. (1991), Civic Freedom in Central Europe: Voices from Czechoslovakia (London: Macmillan). With the kind permission of the authors, the Polish and Hungarian responses have been made directly available to me. The comments by Kuroni, Geremek, and Kowalik have contributed to my understanding of the Polish meaning and emphasis of terms used.
Historian Bronisław Geremek also noted the history of civil society as a form of opposition to the state had resonance not only for Polish activists and Polish history but consciously linked their project to broader European traditions. Notably he cites the influence of both liberal and socialist--Lockean and Gramscian--lineages of civil society.

From the Enlightenment, Locke, and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. Poles took seriously the conviction that society must rest on the consent of the governed, that civil society exists prior to the imposition of political rule, and that such rule must rest on some form of contract or mutual agreement. Moreover, this view of civil society views human beings as free and equal citizens capable of formulating public opinion, expressing some form of volonté générale, and establishing a community in defence of the public good. Like Kołakowski, Geremek sees in Marx’s view of civil society as an instrument of class rule (and thus generative of the interests of capitalism and not society as a whole) as an unfortunate precursor to the Jacobin model of powerfully centralized state, epitomized in the twentieth century by the Soviet model. However, he also finds within Gramsci’s writings the vision of a “regulated” society where the state is more marginal in terms of the distribution of power, where political life is focused “on a kind of positional warfare over hegemony in civil society rather than power in the state” (Geremek, 1992: 5).³⁷ Geremek notes that “in both the liberal and

³⁷ Geremek is one of the few dissidents studied here who explicitly refers to the Gramscian re-working of the Marxist idea of civil society, and it is worth noting that Gramsci himself was heavily indebted in his views to Benedetto Croce, an important Italian interpreter of Hegel.
socialist visions of civil society, the organizing principle is some notion of human rights—and by no means only those that concern the political sphere” (1992: 5). The postwar definition of human rights—evolving from prior conceptions of natural law and revised into its presently understood form as contained in the UN Declaration or the Helsinki Accords, served as an important nexus in bridging the differences between competing explanations of civil society.

How civil society was defined theoretically had important consequences for how Poles viewed what they were doing as oppositional, and with either potentially profound and deeply structural consequences or responsible for piecemeal change. This relationship between theory and practice is elucidated clearly by Geremek:

The notion of an independent society also had another meaning, referring to the Gdańsk agreements, i.e. a widening of the sphere of independence of social life, in the economy, and in culture and science, while preserving the principle of the monopoly of party rule in the state. One could say that we were assuming (although the assumption was never confirmed in practice anywhere in Eastern Europe) that the government would be willing to limit its monopoly and for example, to free the national economy, education, science and culture from the system of the nomenklatura. Is it possible to achieve this as a result of the evolutionary change of the system? One cannot exclude this, even abandoning revisionist illusions, but it is society itself which is undergoing most important transformations.

Seen on the broadest scale the Polish situation shows so far the possibilities of creating a civil society independently of the will and intentions of the authorities. This is more than a phenomenon of dissidence, and is different from the classical notion of opposition, which was based on striving to take over power. Société civile, in Polish conditions, presupposes mass opposition against the structures of authoritarian rule; it assumes the presence of individuals and institutions truly acting in the name of this society and the possibility of group actions aimed at the well-being of the country (unpublished response).
Writing after the fall of authoritarian communism, Geremek similarly reflected on civil society as the *idée centrale* behind the Polish opposition generally and Solidarity specifically:

The concept of civil society, understood as a program of resistance to communism, first appeared in Poland during the late 1970s and early 1980s, primarily in conjunction with the Solidarity movement. At long last there had appeared in the communist world an independent mass movement to contradict the ruling system. Organized as a labor union, Solidarity could boast not only ten million urban members—both workers and intellectuals—but also the support of the peasants, who made up in anticommunist intensity what they lacked in organization. Even Poland’s three-million member Communist Party could not be said to be fully outside this movement, for one-third of its members also belonged to Solidarity—and by no means simply as fomenters of internal division. When Solidarity spoke, therefore, it could do so in the name of “We, the People” (Geremek, 1992: 4).

Civil society was the concept that enabled the dissidents to move the idea of resistance—from something isolated, marginal, or even hopeless—to an effective oppositional force. Thus when Polish dissidents speak of *opozycja*, they connote the mobilization of civil society. *Opozycja* is not about an institutionalized or partisan opposition, nor the isolated activities of a small group of naysayers or disenchanted intellectuals disconnected from society.38 Thus Michnik and Lipski state:

In Kuroń’s thinking the movement for independent institutions can be classified as political opposition. In our opinion these independent institutions form a part of the broad movement of demands for civil rights, a movement aiming to make our society democratic and autonomous (Michnik, 1985: 150).

---

38 For a discussion of *opozycja* in this sense see Goldfarb, 1982: 11-13.
Michnik and Lipski were responding to Kuroń’s advocacy of a “movement of demands” in the 1970s—practical and non-political pressure on the authorities that would prevent a possible social explosion. Like his later essay “Landscape After the Battle” this opened up the question of collaboration and exploitation of the semi-official “grey zone” as either possible or desirable. Michnik and Lipski properly clarify the subtleties of Kuroń’s argument. The “movement of independent institutions” or civil society and the “program of demands within official institutions” run on parallel rather than intersecting courses. There is need for definition and clarification, which display an understanding of the deliberately fuzzy boundaries between the state and civil society—even under authoritarian communism, where one might too quickly assume that the demarcation might be easy and obvious!

Finally, civil society as a unifying theoretical umbrella brought together the various themes of the Polish dissidents, such as political responsibility, Kołakowski’s early exhortation to ‘live in dignity”, the moral and practical importance of non-violence, and the need to encompass and bring together the historically disparate strands of Polish opposition to authoritarian communism. Geremek acknowledges the naïveté of Solidarity’s conviction that it might gradually isolate the party-state apparatus and inject more societal involvement in politics, but at the same time asks us to realize the power of this potential:

The naïveté of this conviction was obvious, but its power could not be ignored. The simple old ethical injunction “Do not lie” had, after all, enormous political significance in widening resistance to the communist
system. Moreover, the cost of such nonviolent resistance was low, while its consequences were far-reaching indeed. Even the crudest totalitarian system requires a certain amount of societal acquiescence. Such systems thrive on political passivity, but they also need a certain amount of participation, even in fictional forms such as voting in fake elections designed to foster the appearance of democratic legitimacy. Moral resistance, though seemingly hopeless against systems that are based on political and military force, functions like a grain of sand in the cogwheels of a vast but vulnerable machine. The idea of civil society—even one that avoids overtly political activities in favour of education, the exchange of information and opinion, or the protection of the basic interests of particular groups—has enormous antitotalitarian potential (1992: 4).
Section 2

Chapter 6: Opposition Intellectuals in Czechoslovakia

I. Václav Havel's Theatre of the Absurd

As is well-known, Václav Havel did not make his reputation as a political essayist or social critic, but as a playwright. During his eight-year tenure at the Theatre on the Balustrade in the 1960s in Prague, he honed his writing abilities as a master of the Czech theatre of the absurd.¹ In Havel's 1986 interview with Karel Hvížďala, he muses about the definition and meaning of absurd theatre:

[Absurd theatre is] the most significant theatrical phenomenon of the

¹Veronika Ambros denies that Havel is a traditional absurdist playwright by reference to Martin Esslin's distinction between writers who "present their sense of the irrationality of the human conditions in the form of highly lucid and logically constructed reasoning" versus those who write about the "senselessness of human conditions" (à la Beckett). Ambros puts Havel in the first category, as heir to the political satire of the model theatre given the devices he regularly employs: "distortion of language, reduction of characters to types or even personification of certain ideological vices; and linearity of plot" (Ambros, 365). She also emphasizes the influence of Brecht, socialist dramaturgy, and what Jan Grossman called appellative drama: "a theatre that wants above all to pose questions to the spectator, often provocative and extreme ones [counting on] the spectator who is inclined to reply to these questions" (quoted in Ambros, p. 364). Unlike Ambros, who tends to root Havel solidly (and rightly) in the traditions of the Czech stage from the 1960s onward, I would emphasize the extent to which Havel's themes and characters rise above the particularism of time and place, a fact which tends to highlight their rootlessness and meaninglessness. Moreover, the plays of Havel deliberately responded to the reception of Czech audiences to the absurdist plays first performed in Czechoslovakia in the mid-1960s, by Jarry, Beckett and Ionesco. For this reason, I am inclined to consider Havel (as he regularly does himself) as an absurdist playwright. See Veronika Ambros, "Daniela Fischerová's New Palimpsest Between 'Living in Truth' and 'The Battle for an Island of Trust'", Canadian Slavonic Papers XXXVI, 3-4: 363-376, and Marketa Goetz-Stankiewicz (1979), The Silenced Theatre: Czech Playwrights Without a Stage (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), especially pp. 17-28.
twentieth century, because it demonstrates modern humanity in a "state of crisis," as it were. That is, it shows man having lost his fundamental metaphysical certainty, the experience of the absolute, his relationship to eternity, the sensation of meaning—in other words, having lost the ground under his feet (1990: 53).

The theatrical characters in absurd theatre generally and in Havel's plays in particular are in keeping with his down-to-earth view of the human condition. There is an existential human connectedness and sense of hope despite the chaos and crisis evident in our surroundings. Truth is communicated in everyday, almost trivial situations. Characters are neither overtly nor intentionally philosophical, but in their very banality manage to convey deeper meaning. To the extent that one can sort out good and evil in the mass of confusing greyness that constitutes an absurdist Havelian landscape, there is a thread of common and unheroic decency to the good, and unselfaware oafishness to the bad. Havel's characters are neither passionate nor didactic; they know "the phenomenon of endless embarrassment" (1990: 54). His plays from this period are strong, witty, and ironic, somewhat reminiscent of Chekhov, Beckett, and Ionesco but at the same time undeniably Czech in the thought and behaviour patterns of the protagonists. One can feel Kafka and Hašek's Švejk looming in the background of his dramas; the sharply comic aspect of many performances owed much to Prague's Liberated Theatre of the 1920s.3

2Most notably The Garden Party, The Memorandum, and The Increased Difficulty of Concentration.

3Jan Werich and Jiří Voskovec founded the Liberated Theatre (Osvobozené Divadlo) in Prague in the 1920s. Their vaudevillian political and social satire was unsurpassed in its day, and tremendously popular; their first show, "Vestpocket Revue"
Partially because Havel wrote in an absurdist tradition and from a philosophical outlook, it is impossible to neatly separate these dramas from his samizdat writing in the 1970s and 1980s, as “early” versus “later”, “fiction” versus “non-fiction”, or “drama” versus “essay/critique”. In reading Havel’s plays and other writings in sequence chronologically, I am struck by the continuous nature of his development as a writer, regardless of the nature of the material. Although I am primarily focusing on Havel’s critical essays, especially those reflective of his period of dissent and the development of his political ideas, his plays also mirror this development. Thus in my view Havel the playwright cannot be divorced from Havel the political thinker—they are the same person.

There is no doubt that on the basis of plot development and content alone, Havel’s plays ran for over two years straight. The Theatre became a progressive social force, with its trenchant comic attacks on national socialism and Czech conservatism. Like Voskovec and Werich, Havel uses many of the same devices: false syllogisms, inverted logical reasoning, and free association (Ambros, 1994: 364). For a complete discussion of the Liberated Theatre, see Michal Schonberg (1992), Osvobozené (Praha: Odeon). Werich and Voskovec were forerunners of the later Semafor Theatre of Jiří Suchý and Jiří Slitr; Havel was fortunate to briefly work under Werich as a stagehand during his last season at the ABC Theatre, and notes his debt to him in Disturbing the Peace (Havel, 1990: 39-41).

Havel himself gives credence to this view in Disturbing the Peace. In the 1960s, even as a relative outsider, Havel was attempting to grasp from within “the social mechanisms and the situation of man crushed by these mechanisms....” (1990: 65). His later plays, especially the Vaněk plays, Largo Desolato and Temptation examine the internal and highly personal dilemmas of those trying to resist who are caught irrefutably on the outside and must struggle from this position of disconnectedness. Havel sees these latter plays as directly related to his experience of dissent, and the Faustian theme of Temptation is powerful evidence of the depth, urgency, and psychological trauma of such an experience.
are political. However, I would also claim they are theoretical given their obvious engagement with such themes as the relationship between language and politics, identity and responsibility, and the personal implications of “living in truth”. For example, in The Memorandum he brings to life the depersonalization of power and the insidious consequences of using language for political ends; in all the “Vaněk” plays we see the what follows from the momentous decision to “live in truth”.5

Moreover, speaking particularly about his literary contribution, the earlier plays stand apart from the plays written after his initial prison experiences in their more intensely personal approach, implying a more troublesome and private series of moral choices, rather than simply the engagement of individuals with de-humanizing bureaucracies and the absurdities of modern organizations and life situations. To some degree, this process reaches a pinnacle in Havel’s Temptation, his own coming to terms with the Faustian dilemma.

The best known of Havel’s early plays is The Memorandum. First written and

5My position here follows my “expansive” notion of political theory more generally. In Czechoslovakia under normalization one could also argue that there was no separation of the “aesthetic” and the “political”, a logical outcome of the deliberate party-state fusion of culture and politics. Not only was the decision to write independently a political statement in and of itself, but authors who wrote “for the drawer” both chose literature as a way of writing about politics and addressed political themes while producing literature. Klíma’s Judge on Trial captures the essence of normalization as it was internalized and robbed individuals of their authenticity; the publication of Vaculík’s The Czech Dreambook was a political event that documented the angst of a generation. Indeed, one could say this is a defining trend in Czech literature as a whole, for it would be hard to maintain that Švejk should be taken at face value.
performed in 1966 at the Balustrade, it was quickly translated and produced abroad.

American theatre impresario Joe Papp first brought it to the stage in the United States in 1967; it received considerable critical acclaim and won the 1967-68 Obie Award for Best Foreign Play. The logic of the story is internal to the bizarre twists of partisan orthodoxy and the types of behaviour inspired by the bureaucracy endemic to authoritarian communism. At the same time, its generality, simplicity, and playful humour resonate with any audience living in modern mid-century setting, dealing as it does with alienation of bureaucracies everywhere and the impossibility of tracing lines of accountability in decision-making.6

In *The Memorandum* the managing director of a large organization catches wind that a new language called Ptydepe is being introduced throughout the office ostensibly at his behest.7 The new language, based on scientific principles of rationality and thus the

---

6The sense of spatial alienation of a large bureaucratic establishment is reinforced through Havel’s staging directions and the physical arrangement and patterning of the locations of each scene and their repetition. Jan Grossman’s first production of *The Memorandum* at the Theatre of the Balustrade included mundane props in order to visually convey bureaucratic ritual and monotony, such as an empty can in which water kept dripping relentlessly, loud outbursts of music, and the movement of the clerk’s eating utensils into and out of the filing cabinets symbolizing the symbiotic relationship between physiological need (eating) and bureaucratic routine. With mechanical precision, *The Memorandum* consists of 12 scenes and four locations, with the place of action being repeated four times, always in the same order. One office location is replaced with another; all are within the confines of the establishment. See Marketa Goetz-Stankiewicz (1979), *The Silenced Theatre: Czech Playwrights Without a Stage* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press), especially pp. 49-50 and pp. 54-56).

7In a compelling comparison to Kafka, Marketa Goetz-Stankiewicz likens the absurdist experience of Josef Gross in receiving a memorandum in a new language (and
theoretical opposite of all "natural" languages, will supposedly erase all possibilities for error and miscommunication. Paradoxically, the language is almost impossible to use and to learn, and an entire apparatus must be constructed for its effective implementation: a translation centre, special methodicians called Ptydepeists installed in every office department to monitor correct usage, and of course an array of new rules and regulations governing its procedural deployment. As becomes clear early on in the play, the introduction of Ptydepe is actually the brainchild of the deputy director Ballas and his silent sidekick Pillar. He keeps the managing director Gross in the dark to ensure that no obstacles stand in the way of implementation, and as an ingenious method of engineering a management coup.

Ballas is an individual fully in keeping with communist rationality. Entirely instrumental in outlook and action, he conflates his own personal interests with the overall good of the organization, with all means justifying any desired end. Gross protests to Ballas about his deviousness and his attempts to "set up" Gross and smear his character. He states: "Good God! Don't you make yourself sick?" To which Ballas predictably and amiably replies: "Of course we don't. When the good of Man is at stake, nothing will make us sick" (1980: 32). As a result of Ballas' innuendo and the false then discovering that the new language has permeated the office and is now officially sanctioned and regulated) to that of Gregor Samsa of Metamorphosis, who wakens one morning to discover he has become an insect. See Goetz-Stankiewicz, 1979: 55.

Ballas uses the first person plural throughout the play as he literally speaks for himself and his sidekick Pillar. Ballas' individual responsibility is dissolved into the
correlations he draws between Gross' motives and his behaviour, he forces Gross not to resign but to switch positions, taking the deputy directorship. In a statement completely stereotypical of every partisan victim of a bureaucratic purge trying to retrieve something in the name of a larger cause, Gross explains to an underling: “There was nothing else I could do. An open conflict would have meant that I’d be finished. This way—as Deputy Director—I can at least salvage this and that” (1980:35).

Havel is incredibly perceptive in this interchange between Ballas and Gross. On the level of his own experience of life imitating art, Gross’ dilemma is equivalent to that of the Writers’ Union in their attempts to quash the literary periodical Tvař (Face). In attempting to ban the periodical that they could not control (which they had set up in the first place to be independent), the logic of the “antidogmatic establishment”9 was to make a minor compromise and appease the hardliners by getting rid of Tvař. To risk open conflict by this logic was to endanger a struggle of greater importance, such as the general liberalization of conditions and greater “democracy” within the party at all levels.10 This collective “we”; at the same time Pillar’s identity is subsumed into that of Ballas given his continual silence and acquiescence.

9Havel’s terminology for the reform-minded but ideologically stringent communists who were in the forefront of the Prague Spring.

10 In Disturbing the Peace, Havel maintained that the argument that there is always “a bigger game at stake” is both delusional and endlessly self-propelling. He uses the example of Smrkovský, who in 1968 “argued in exactly the same way to justify having voting [sic] for the liquidation of Literární Noviny in 1967; and later Husák, in exactly the same way, would argue for the exclusion of Smrkovský from the political scene” (1990: 82).
is not simply a cute literary device for Havel, but the epitome of what he called “self-destructive politics”. As an insider, Gross’ moral weakness in The Memorandum is his inability to step outside of this logic; by accepting it, he promotes its future usage. This is exactly what Havel refused to do in his own defining experience of initial dissent in refusing to toe the Writers’ Union line vis-a-vis Tvář. He revealed the importance of this early lesson by reflecting that the model of political behaviour exhibited was just as critical as the actual content of the magazine itself, if not more so:

We introduced a new model of behaviour: don’t get involved in diffuse general ideological polemics with the centre, to whom numerous concrete causes are always being “sacrificed”; fight “only” for those concrete causes, and be prepared to fight for them unswervingly, to the end. In other words, don’t get mixed up in backroom wheeling and dealing, but play an open game (1990: 83).

The logical absurdity of Gross’ position is made clearer on the verge of his “rehabilitation” by Ballas. Gross confides in Maria, the secretary of the translation centre, and she makes a concerted effort to revive his spirits. His response is telling:

MARIA: If your conscience is clear, you’ve nothing to worry about. Your innocence will be proved, but you have to fight for it! I believe that if one doesn’t give way, truth must always come out in the end.

GROSS: (walks to Maria, sadly smiles at her and strokes her cheek): What do you know about the world, dear child! Still, I wish you could always stay like this! You’re right, one really ought to stand firm. The trouble is, I’ve never been very firm, more of an intellectual, always hesitant, always full of doubts, too considerate, a dreamer rather than a man of action—and that’s my bad luck.

(Pause.)

GROSS: When I think back, I see that I muddled up many things in my life myself. I often gave in too soon, yielded to threats,
and I trusted people too much.
(Pause.)

GROSS: If I ever have any influence on the course of things again, I’ll do everything differently. More real deeds and fewer clever words! I’ve never been sufficiently matter-of-fact, coolheaded, proud, severe, and critical—especially with myself.
(Pause.)

GROSS: It may be partly because I belong to an odd, lost generation. We’ve given ourselves out in small change, we invested the best years of our lives into things which turned out not to be worth it. We were so busy for so long talking about our great mission that we quite forgot to do anything great. In short, we were a mess!
(Pause.)

GROSS: But I believe that now I can at least face all this frankly, without hysteria and without self-pity; that I’ll manage to recover from all the upheavals; that I’m still able to forget the past and make a quite new and quite different beginning.


Of course, the reader is not surprised to learn that Gross, trained for so long in compromise and complacency, fails the first test of his newly-declared courage. He assumes the position of Managing Director once more, but is ultimately unable to purge the organization of Ballas himself or the maddening logic of his position. He cannot “learn” the lesson provided by his earlier experiences of alienation, estrangement, and marginalization. He is exonerated but cannot exonerate himself, and is thus unable to take a new stand involving responsibility and courage. Indeed Ballas “sincerely” repents and in so doing manages both to shift responsibility back onto Gross while finagling his way back into his former position of Deputy Director. Furthermore, Marie, the only “humane” person in the organization and the most sympathetic character in the play, is
fired because of her act of personal loyalty to Gross in finally agreeing to translate the memorandum. Again Gross avoids conflict, hoping that, as Managing Director, he “can at least salvage this or that” (1980: 79).

Ultimately, the character of Gross is representative of all that is wrong in Havel’s eyes with reform communism. Gross personifies the attempt of formerly sincere and stringent partisan intellectuals to absolve their past sins through the process of reform. Not only is this effort misguided and mistaken; it is inherently illogical because one cannot step halfway outside the system to reform it, or indeed reform it from within. The “lost generation” thus remains in the wilderness, its beautiful ideals shattered by the reality of their attempted implementation combined with the realization that making a new beginning is next to impossible. It is not merely an expression of wistful nostalgia for untainted youth when Gross exclaims at the end of the play, “Why can’t I be a little boy again? I’d do everything differently from the beginning!” (1980: 80)

In The Garden Party Havel takes a look at the manipulation of language by examining what happens when the protagonist Hugo takes advantage of its limitless possibilities. At the beginning of the play, Hugo is presented in a “normal” private family context: his worried parents wonder about the ability of their sons to get ahead and make something of themselves. Supposedly oblivious to this parental nattering, Hugo plays against himself in chess, both winning and losing the game at the same time. The chess game is a key metaphor, for when Hugo moves from this (deceptively) passive role to a more active character engaged on his father’s behalf to locate a childhood chum at the
garden party, he starts to behave as a chess player. Instead of utilizing the rules of chess to make his moves, he uses language, but in the same formulaic manner, as in the case of a master strategist using different plays. He moves and shifts words and meanings with the same deftness and precision as would a chess player use different pieces for their different abilities to move forward and thus move ahead the action of the game. Hugo plays the ideological rules of speech behaviour against bureaucrats themselves, so successfully that largely through his word games he is able to roust bureaucrats from their positions. Through his continued skilful manoeuvring, Hugo manages to get himself simultaneously into the positions of being in charge of liquidating the liquidation office and liquidating the inauguration service. Moreover, Hugo gets (himself) assigned “the extremely honourable and important task of constructing on the ruins of the former liquidation office and the former inauguration service a great new institution, a central commission for the inauguration and liquidation” (Havel, 1993: 48-49). His parents see this as the triumphal success of middle-class values, which throughout *The Garden Party* are playfully expressed and ridiculed by an endless stream of common-sense platitudes coming constantly out of the mouths of both mother and father Pludek.

The checkmate of Hugo’s victory is like the misuse and abuse of language—both destructive yet highly illusory. His success represents the extreme relativism of truth, to the point where any linguistic expression or attempt to convey it yields nothing concrete

---

11I am indebted to Veronika Ambros’ interpretation here; see Ambros, 1994: 364.
or meaningful. At the conclusion of the play, Hugo’s father inquires “Listen, who are you, in fact?” in a quizzical effort to pin down the chameleon-like and bewildering series of identities associated with his son’s meteoric rise. In fact, Hugo has no personal identity whatsoever, and Havel is essentially telling us that without something fixed in terms of morality or truth, authentic human identity is indeed impossible. In answering his father, Hugo replies:

Me! You mean who I am? Now look here, I don’t like this one-sided way of putting questions, I really don’t! You think one can ask in this simplified way? No matter how one answers this sort of question, one can never encompass the whole truth, but only one of its many limited parts. What a rich thing is man, how complicated, changeable, and multiform—there’s no word, no sentence, no book, nothing that could describe and contain him in his whole extent. In man there’s nothing permanent, eternal, absolute; man is a continuous change—a change with a proud ring to it, of course! Today the time of static and unchangeable categories is past, the time when A was only A, and B always only B is gone; today we all know very well that A may be often B as well as A; that B may just as well be A.; that B may be B, but equally it may be A or C; just as C may be not only C, but also A, B, and D; and in certain circumstances even F may become Q, Y, and perhaps also H. I’m sure you yourselves must feel that what you feel today you’ve not only felt yesterday, and what you felt yesterday you don’t feel today, but might perhaps again feel tomorrow; while what you might feel the day after tomorrow you may never have felt before. Do you feel that? And it’s hard to see that those who today understand only yesterday; while, as we all know, it’s necessary today somehow to try and understand also that which was yesterday, because—who knows—it may come back again tomorrow! Truth is just as complicated and multiform as everything else in this world—the magnet, the telephone, Impressionism, the magnet—and we all are a little bit what we were yesterday and a little bit what we are today; and also a little bit we’re not these things. Anyway, we all are a little bit all the time and all the time we are not a little bit; some of us are more and some of us are more not; some only are, some are only, and some only are not; so that none of us entirely is and at the same time each one of us is not entirely; and the point is just when it is better to be more, and to not be less, and
when--on the contrary--it is better less to be and more to not be; besides, he who is too much may soon not be at all, and he who--in a certain situation--is able to certain extent to not be, may in another situation be all the better for that. I don’t know whether you want more to be or not to be, and when you want to be or not to be; but I know I want to be all the time and that’s why all the time I must a little bit not be. You see, man when his from time to time a little bit not is not diminished thereby! And if at the moment I am--relatively speaking--rather not, I assure you that soon I might be much more than I’ve ever been--and then we can have another chat about all these things, but on an entirely different platform. Checkmate! (Walks out) (Havel, 1993: 50-51).

I have reproduced Hugo’s soliloquy here in full, because otherwise it is impossible to convey the layers of obfuscation behind his logical, common-sensical explanation. In fact, it is non-sense, completely subject to change on a moment’s notice, with no fixed reference point. Hugo is a parody of Zinoviev’s Soviet man, based on a construction of human nature as malleable as putty, so that nature can be changed at whim.

In these early plays Havel is already contrasting the difference between the internal lie of constant moral compromise and the necessity of “living in truth” as a means of breaking out of this vicious circle. It is indeed this notion of “living in truth” that marks Havel as much as a moral philosopher as a playwright, and also sets the stage for a dramatically different form of political theorizing and action within the community of dissent in normalized Czechoslovakia in the mid 1970s.

II. The Evolution of “Living in Truth”: Its Meaning and Consequences

In The Memorandum Havel’s portrayal of the absurdities of Ptydepe provides the reader or spectator with a humorous sense of the dysfunctional relationship between
language and meaning. In his essay "On Evasive Thinking" Havel addresses a similar theme but takes it one step further. "Pseudo-ideological thinking", a "ritualization of language", and what he eventually calls "evasive thinking" disrupt the relationship between language and meaning, ultimately causing enormous social damage. The social connectedness that language provides in terms of signifying reality and generating mutual understanding of that reality is severed through its ideological misuse. In a direct attack on the writers and journalists of his day who completely succumbed to the newspeak of authoritarian communism, Havel states:

This way of thinking, in my opinion, is causing immense damage. The essence of it is that certain established dialectical patterns are deformed and fetishized and thus become an immobile system of intellectual and phraseological schema which, when applied to different kinds of reality, seem at first to have achieved, admirably, a heightened ideological view of that reality, whereas in fact they have, without our noticing it, separated thought from its immediate contact with reality and thus crippled its capacity to intervene in that reality effectively (Havel, 1991: 11).

In this early attempt to deconstruct the logic of the political correctness embedded in the language of the system’s proponents, Havel wishes to lay bare a number of assumptions and highlight its logical conclusions.

First, false contextualization, at first a praiseworthy attempt to put discrete and local events into a wider context, distorts meaning through nonsensical correlation and disproportion. During the Prague Spring, for example, writers lauded themselves and

---

12Written at about the same time as The Memorandum and delivered as a speech in Prague on June 9, 1965 during the Writers’ Union Congress (Havel, 1990: 10-24).
their own ability to engage in public criticism as a great achievement of socialism rather than as a normal aspect of an open and democratic society. A writer censures public criticism over falling window ledges (causing death of passers by), calling his compatriots to free themselves from “petty, local, and municipal matters” and instead deal with “mankind and our prospects for the future”. Thus public safety and the degradation of local architecture is demeaned as of lesser importance in comparison with lofty, higher goals. Of course, not only is the subjectively felt and honestly expressed concerns of real people given short shrift, the ideological project of building socialism is reduced to empty platitudes.

Second, the “dialectical metaphysics” of evasive thinking results in “vacuous verbal balancing acts”, exonerating the speaker of any proposition from either taking a position or assuming responsibility. Here Havel refers to the overuse of such constructions as “on the one hand--but on the other hand” or “in a certain sense yes, but in another sense no”, in other words constant literary equivocation. This linguistic weakness absolves the writer/speaker of responsibility, and at the same time destroys one’s capacity for agency. In Havel’s words, “When we lose touch with reality, we inevitably lose the capacity to influence reality effectively” (1991: 14).

Later in the essay Havel nicely brings together his work as dramaturge at the Balustrade with his editorial experience at Tvar in his critique of the evasive thinking. His advice for the Writers’ Union is to act like a good dramaturge, that is, “help literature and authors be true to themselves” (1991: 19). This means avoiding circuitous and
platitudinous language, being direct in speech and action, and above all being open to
critique. By the latter Havel means not seeing in critique “naked terrorism”, “the new
face of dogmatism”, or some other anti-system response. Havel is sensitive to the
paranoia of recently rehabilitated writers who view criticism as the harbinger of neo-
Stalinism, but he wants to point out that such a view leads to a closed circle from which
one cannot escape.

This emphasis on language and literature was an obvious choice for Havel’s
engagement with the power structure of the Writers’ Union, yet it also signals early on in
his writing some themes he will continually come back to and refine. First among these
is his generalized emphasis on truth, here explained as honest and direct communication,
not muddied by ideologically-laden and ritualized obfuscation. Second, truth is linked to
self-actualization, the ability of one to live one’s life or pursue one’s profession
authentically, to gain recognition or criticism based on one’s own efforts or outputs,
regardless of prevailing political winds. Finally, Havel’s own stance--as an independent
writer, as an editor of an independent literary periodical, and as a Writers’ Union outsider
unafraid to challenge directly the modus vivendi of the entire organization--serves as an
example of a life consistently lived. “Walking the talk” becomes an important
behavioural standard for dissidents across the region, which Havel will later describe
more philosophically as living “as if”.

Two more articles written during and shortly after the Prague Spring provide us
with a more obvious sense of Havel’s development as a political thinker, and demonstrate
to what extent he was an outsider during the process of partisan reinvigoration and critical of its obvious contradictions. In *On the Theme of an Opposition* he is up front in his portrayal of the partisan debate surrounding the notion of political opposition as having one's cake and eating it too. Freedom of speech and public opinion, assisted by the media, is no substitute for an opposition if one-party rule is to continue, states Havel. He continues:

> The trouble is, democracy is not a matter of faith, but of guarantees. And although public debate is a primary condition of democracy, the essence of democracy—the real source of those guarantees—is something else: a public, legal contest for power. At the same time, public opinion (as represented by the press, for instance) can act as an effective check on government, and thereby improve its quality, only if it also has the power to influence government, and this can only be done if public opinion leads to a process of public choice—through elections, for example. Ultimately, power only really listens to power, and if government is to be improved, we must be able to threaten its existence, not merely its reputation. [...] (1991: 26-27).

As a statement of support for procedural democracy, this is hardly earth-shattering. He reasons that other alternative sources of an opposition, such as existing organizations and interest groups freed from their Leninist shackles or a reactivation of the multi-partisan National Front as a coalition are ultimately flawed because they do not satisfy a basic democratic precondition: the element of citizen choice. The article and its arguments are

---

13First appeared in the April 4, 1968 edition of *Literární listy*, then an influential intellectual weekly in Czechoslovakia. The article attracted attention because it openly demanded the creation of an opposition party, going well beyond the democratizing initiatives of communist reformers who remained wedded to the idea of the leading role of the party.
straightforward, apple-pie arguments in favour of multi-party democratic competition; but in fact the context in which Havel was arguing was anything but straightforward. As the Brezhnevite Soviet realists were to point out to Dubček’s administration, this was not even a veiled attack on the leading role of the party, the cornerstone of political unity and control. The geopolitical context is neither in the foreground nor the background of Havel’s piece, and thus history tempts us to judge it as naive in the extreme. Perhaps less obvious but equally naive is the assumption that effective political opposition must ultimately be mounted through parties, and here Havel changes his position in the 1970s given the extremities of the normalization period and the serious limits placed on any level of independent action.

In his “Letter to Alexander Dubček”14 Havel advises Dubček--after the signing of the Moscow Protocols but before he was politically deposed--to publicly take a stand against the post-intervention government policies of capitulation. He outlines three courses of possible action and likely consequences for Dubček: 1) renounce his earlier policies and bow to the ideology of his oppressors, thus lending his support for the discrediting of the reform process, all in the name of party solidarity, discipline and the higher interests of socialism; 2) silence (the route Dubček ultimately took); and 3) resisting all pressure, restate his understanding of and support for the reform policies of the Prague Spring, and take a position openly against the Soviet intervention. Strongly in

14 A private letter to Dubček dated August 9, 1969.
favour of the third option, Havel mounts the following arguments: 1) such a stance would amount to “speaking the truth, keeping to it, and rejecting everything that stands the truth on its head” (1991: 42); 2) by doing so a blow would be struck at the party leadership, revealing at once their “unprincipled distortion of reality”; and 3) it would set an example of “immeasurable moral significance”. Although Havel realizes he is a moralizing advice-giver, he also takes Dubček to task for the situation in which he finds himself. By signing the Protocols, Dubček merely postponed the fatal moment when he must say yes or no to the invasion; having believed in the leading role of the party, he must now show himself to be the leader. Again, we see Havel express his commitment to the truth as not only morally compelling but politically powerful. By speaking the truth, Dubček would set a forceful example:

People would realize that it is always possible to preserve one’s ideals and one’s backbone; that one can stand up to lies; that there are values worth struggling for; that there are still trustworthy leaders; and that no political defeat justifies complete historical skepticism as long as the victims manage to bear their defeat with dignity. Your act would place before us an ethical mirror as powerful as that of Jan Palach’s recent deed, though the impact of what you do will be of longer duration. For many citizens, your act would become a yardstick for their own behaviour, a compass needle pointing to a more meaningful future. You would not be forgotten, even were you to live in isolation, and your very existence would be a mote in the eye of all careerists attempting to profit from the occupation. You would enhance the prestige of Czechoslovakia’s struggle in the eyes of the world, and you would keep alive one of the more positive aspects of the communist movement. After some years (especially in the event of changes in the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union) you would undoubtedly be rehabilitated—quietly, no doubt, as tends to be the case in the Communist Party—because history cannot be halted and time must vindicate you in the end. And, when the opportunity arose to attempt once more, more gradually perhaps, but more consistently too—
what was tried unsuccessfully in 1968, society might make productive use of this enormous moral and political potential which--because you stood firm--was kept alive and continued to have an influence. [...] (1991: 43-44).

In his final paragraph of the letter, Havel returns to this theme:

There are moments when a politician can achieve real political success only by turning aside from the complex network of revitalized political considerations, analyses, and calculations, and behaving simply as an honest person. The sudden assertion of human criteria within a dehumanizing framework of political manipulation can be like a flash of lightning illuminating a dark landscape. And truth is suddenly truth again, reason is reason, and honor honor (my emphasis; 1991: 48-49).

In retrospect, Havel’s analysis of Dubček’s errors has remained remarkably consistent. In Disturbing the Peace (an interview 18 years afterward), he suggests that the government, “...instead of behaving like the proud representatives of the people...behaved like guilty servants” (1990: 106). As to their hopes of recapturing at least some of the gains of the Prague Spring, he states: “The leadership made concession after concession in the hopes of salvaging something, but all it did was saw off the very limb it was sitting on” (1990: 110).

If the above writings indicate the importance of truth not just morally but also politically, the apogee of this line of thinking is achieved in Havel’s most powerfully written and well-known samizdat essay “The Power of the Powerless”. However, before examining it in detail, we must first pay attention to what gave rise to it, especially the effect of normalization on Havel personally and on his formation as a dissident.
III. From Playwright to Dissident in Husák’s Czechoslovakia

Ironically, Havel became more involved politically in an activist sense after the Soviet occupation in 1968. On August 21, 1968 Havel was in Liberec in Northern Bohemia, staying with friends. He quickly got involved in local resistance activities, writing and broadcasting declarations from the local television station. Unlike the debates regarding Tvář, which were to some degree representative of internecine battles among writers, this was real roll-up-your-sleeves political action. The message of popular participation and resistance was very powerfully conveyed to Havel. In *Disturbing the Peace* he reflected on the unpredictable and unscientific nature of popular revolt and resistance:

None of us know [sic] all the potentialities that slumber in the spirit of the population, or all the ways in which that population can surprise us when there is the right interplay of events, both visible and invisible. Who would have believed—at a time when the Novotný regime was corroding away because the entire nation was behaving like Švejks—that half a year later that same society would display a genuine civic-mindedness, and that a year later this recently apathetic, sceptical, and demoralized society would stand up with such courage and intelligence to a foreign power! And who would have suspected that, after scarcely a year had gone by, this same society would, as swiftly as the wind blows, lapse back into a state of demoralization far deeper than its original one! After all those experiences, one must be very careful about coming to any conclusions about the way we are, or what can be expected of us (1990: 109).

Havel’s writings were blacklisted in 1969. He became a public enemy, in his words, “driven out of every position I’d once held...indicted for subversion (there was no trial or prison sentence)” (1990: 120). He described the early 1970s as “a single, shapeless fog” (1990:120). Moreover, Havel linked his own personal experience of
retreat and internal exile to that of the general populace:

People withdrew into themselves and stopped taking an interest in public affairs. An era of apathy and widespread demoralization began, an era of gray, everyday totalitarian consumerism. Society was atomized, small islands of resistance were destroyed, and a disappointed and exhausted public pretended not to notice. Independent thinking and creativity retreated to the trenches of deep privacy. (1990: 120-121).

The shared experience of normalization also made for strange bedfellows. Havel and other so-called “independent” writers came to terms with and in many cases developed friendships with the “antidogmatic” writers of the Writers’ Union--such as Pavel Kohout, Ludvík Vaculík, and Ivan Klíma. Cross-generational ties also developed between younger writers and the earlier non-communist writers of the 1950s (such as Zdeněk Urbanek). As Havel stated, “...the differences of opinion that had once separated [us] had long since ceased to be important” (1990: 121). Informal meetings at the Havel family farm house Hrádeček grew into miniature writers’ congresses; a ghetto of isolated but like-minded fellow travellers grew out of the social atomization and stagnation.

For Havel personally, the intellectual break from this essentially private activity came in 1975 with a decision to write an open letter to Husák. It was an intentional effort on Havel’s part to transform himself from a passive object of history into an active subject. Reclaiming his subjectivity meant taking a substantial risk, but by public intervention he not only regained his own confidence but also did exactly what the regime despised most. He destabilized the political game, the implicit social contract, by breaking the cardinal rule of silence. Outwardly society was compliant, tranquil, and
modestly prosperous; Havel, however, called attention to a profound spiritual, moral, and social crisis lurking just beneath the surface.

Havel sent his letter, addressed as “Dear Dr. Husák”, by regular mail to the president’s office in April, 1975. He also made copies available to foreign press agencies; it was first published in English in Encounter in September, 1975. It is not really a letter as such, but a lengthy essay on the themes of fear and consumerism, both of which Havel sees as the lynchpins of Husák’s successful consolidation of his government, backed up by the web-like power of the state security apparatus. “Dear Dr. Husák” is also a defining point in Havel’s writing, because it is really his first serious piece of philosophy.

Havel notes in his introduction that life and work have proceeded normally in Czechoslovakia, and that “discipline prevails” (1991: 50). People carry on with the daily routines of work, shopping, and living their lives, but this is not, Havel insists, to be taken as a sign of either success or failure of regime policies, or of societal agreement or disagreement. In Husák’s Czechoslovakia, people are motivated chiefly by fear, not of imprisonment or execution, but of losing a job, not being able to work in one’s chosen field, or not obtaining higher education for one’s children. Fear also compels people to do whatever is necessary to gain whatever small advantages they can, by joining a particular organization, spouting whatever platitudes are demanded of them, or taking part and voting for proposed candidates in general elections. Havel defines this fear as more than psychological; it has important ethical dimensions and consequences:
We are concerned with fear in a deeper sense, an ethical sense if you will, namely, the more or less conscious participation in the collective awareness of a permanent and ubiquitous danger; anxiety about what is being, or might be, threatened; becoming gradually used to this threat as a substantive part of the actual world; the increasing degree to which, in an ever more skilful and matter-of-fact way, we go in for various kinds of external adaptation as the only effective method of self-defence (1991: 53).

Havel notes that “it is not the absolute value of a threat which counts, so much as its relative value” (1991: 53). Ironically, in the same way fear is relativized and contextualized, truth is relativized to the point where it is rendered completely meaningless. The system of “existential pressure” is nurtured and maintained by the security police; meanwhile the regime recognizes only the kind of truth required at a given moment. This second feature also marks a point of departure from earlier periods of Stalinist authoritarianism: “unchangeable creeds” of the past are replaced by “creedless despotism” (1991: 64). This development is doubly ironic as the authorities nonetheless justify themselves and their actions in the same revolutionary ideology and language of the past, trapped by this rhetoric from recognizing the multiple levels of contradiction contained by its extended usage.

Another important theme that Havel raises in this letter and follows up with greater rigour in his later dissident writings is his discussion of the relationship between the increasing consumerism prevalent in society and the policies of normalization. He points out that it is functional for the regime to applaud a social orientation toward private needs and desires, not only because of the obvious economic benefits generated by
personal industry and consumer goods production (even if via the grey or black markets).

Rather, he claims, the authorities “welcome this transfer of energy” because of what it represents:

...an escape from the public sphere. Rightly divining that such surplus energy, if directed “outward,” must sooner or later turn against them—that is, against the particular forms of power they obstinately cling to—they do not hesitate to represent as human life what is really a desperate substitute for living. In the interest of the smooth management of society, then, society’s attention is deliberately diverted from itself, that is, from social concerns. By fixing a person’s whole attention on his mere consumer interests, it is hoped to render him incapable of realizing the increasing extent to which he has been spiritually, politically, and morally violated. Reducing him to a simple vessel for the ideals of a primitive consumer society is intended to turn him into pliable material for complex manipulation. The danger that he might conceive a longing to fulfill some of the immense and unpredictable potential he has as a human being is to be nipped in the bud by imprisoning him within the wretched range of parts he can play as a consumer, subject to the limitations of a centrally directed market (1991: 59).

This critique intentionally reaches beyond the boundaries of authoritarian communism, and like many of Havel’s concerns has wider resonance. It is not surprising that the capitalist or even “social market” economies of Western Europe are flooded with consumerist values. After all, as Marx pointed out, commodity fetishism is internal to the logic of expansion and growth of capitalism. As many ex-post-facto explanations of the downfall of communism have since 1989 pointed out, the attempt of post-totalitarian regimes to buy their way out of economic stagnation and political illiberality was not

15 In both “Politics and Conscience” and “The Power of the Powerless”, Havel suggests that post-totalitarian regimes are species of a larger category—consumer/industrial/technological societies.
only fraught with ideological contradiction, but in fact was emblematic of the mere lip
service paid to the foundationalist myths of state socialism during this time. Havel states:

Yet these same authorities obsessively justify themselves with their
revolutionary ideology, in which the ideal of man’s total liberation has a
central place! But what, in fact, has happened to the concept of human
personality and its many-sided, harmonious, and authentic growth? Of
man liberated from the clutches of an alienating social machinery, from a
mythical hierarchy of values, formalized freedoms, from the dictatorship
of property, the fetish and the might of money? What has happened to the
idea that people should live in full enjoyment of social and legal justice,
have a creative share in economic decision making, free participation in
political life, and free intellectual advancement, all people are actually
offered is a chance freely to choose which washing machine or refrigerator
they want to buy (1991: 60).

Havel takes the critique beyond the suggestion that state socialism does not now
nor ever will live up to Marxist idealism. He is particularly concerned about the social
anomie resulting from such a strategy, and on a personal, individual level, the ensuing
relativism and moral decay. The influence of French existentialism and German/Czech
phenomenology are evident in his discussion of what he calls “the crisis of human
identity”. The tragedy of human status in modern technological civilization “is marked
by a declining awareness of the absolute” (1991: 62). In this respect, Havel’s use of “the
absolute” can be seen as moral threshold or standard, not unlike Kant’s categorical
imperative.16 The evils of modernity, such as technology and bureaucratic rationality, are

16Much can and has been said about Havel’s use of the term “the absolute”. In
this case, I am interpreting it as an absolute moral threshold, yet at other times Havel
seems to allude to the absolute in connection with a Heideggerian notion of Being (i.e.
Dasein), or in reference to a higher consciousness, perhaps consonant with a universal
capacity of human beings for moral reasoning and thus responsibility for action. In a
not the result of authoritarian communism. In fact, they are implicit in any contemporary political regime, and thus pose a constant and related set of problems for authentic human existence.\textsuperscript{17} Consumer behaviour literally dulls our senses and encourages the weakening of bonds to the point of epistemological erosion. Over time, the elimination of a social conscience—at first politically dangerous to express, then only possible in the private sphere—is “naturalized”, and made normal and everyday. This has historical implications too, for if we remove from humankind the opportunity for meaningful public contact we deaden social time. The loss of social space results in the creation of a merely private zone of time governed by rhythmic and cyclical events representing only a microcosm of human interaction—birth, marriage, and death—that Havel characterizes as literally prehistoric (1991: 73).

Before concluding his essay, Havel uses the familiar example of the liquidation of cultural periodicals to bring the importance of culture to the forefront, as a means of

\textsuperscript{17} Aviezer Tucker contends that in these statements and in this line of thought (which he comes back to in “Politics and Conscience”) Havel is exposing his debt in particular to Heidegger, albeit through the phenomenology of Patočka (who was a fellow student of Heidegger at Freiburg) and especially via the influence of philosophical historian Václav Bělohradský (a student of Patočka who can be described as more Heideggerian than Patočka himself). See Tucker (1990) “Václav Havel’s Heideggerianism”, Telos 85: 63-78.
societal expression, a barometer of openness, and the ability of a regime to tolerate critical thought and opinion. He answers his silent critics that yes, the "wheels of society continue to go round even without all those literary, artistic, theatrical, philosophical, historical, and other magazines" and that probably only a small fraction of the population truly misses their existence (1991: 68). The forced elimination of such journals, however, is not simply a blow to culture or their readers. He states:

It is simultaneously, and above all, the liquidation of a particular organ through which society becomes aware of itself and hence it is an interference, hard to describe in exact terms, in the complex system of circulation, exchange, and conversion of nutrients that maintain life in that many-layered organism which is society today (1991: 68).

Knowledge, however stratified and compartmentalized by the boundaries of specific disciplines, technical details, or increasing complexity, always moves beyond a small group of experts and can have profound impact--Havel rightly uses the example of the specific knowledge of nuclear physics and the broader political dimensions of the nuclear threat.

Readers are not likely to "demonstrate in the streets" for the lack of a few extra books, but this is not the real point for Havel. The "real significance" is the long-term impact on cultural self-knowledge, and the negative legacy of such an absence.

Rhetorically, Havel asks:

What mounds of mystification, slowly forming in the general cultural consciousness, will need to be chipped away? How far back will one need to go? Who can tell which people will still find the strength to light new fires of truth, when, how, and from what resources, once there has been such thorough wastage not only of the fuel, but of the very feeling that it
Later on, he restates the issue:

The overall question, then, is this: What profound intellectual and moral impotence will the nation suffer tomorrow, following the castration of its culture today?

I fear that the baneful effects of society will outlast by many years the particular political interests that gave rise to them. So much more guilty, in the eyes of history, are those who have sacrificed the country’s spiritual future for the sake of their present power interests (1991: 71).

Finally, Havel characterizes the regime as “entropic”. Authoritarian communism increases and generalizes entropy by extending and tightening the mechanisms of social control. The party-state is monolithic, and society is in “a strait jacket of one-dimensional manipulation” (1991: 74). The strategy or logic is ultimately fatal, for as Havel suggests

In an effort to immobilize the world, it immobilizes itself, undermining its own ability to cope with anything new or to resist the natural currents of life. The “entropic” regime is, thus, doomed to become the victim of its own lethal principle, and the most vulnerable victim at that, thanks to the absence of any impulse within its own structure that could, as it were, make it face up to itself. Life, by contrast, with its irrepressible urge to oppose entropy, is able all the more successfully and inventively to resist being violated, the faster the violating authority succumbs to its own sclerosis (1991: 74-75).

It may seem at first glance simplistic to suggest that human life will recuperate and thrive

18Havel’s pessimistic prediction has unfortunately been borne out, at least to some degree. Many of the dissidents I interviewed have lamented the “loss of history” by its citizens, and many journals in the former Czechoslovakia--*The New Presence, Respekt*, and *Kritika & Kontext* have attempted to “fill the gap” with new/old interpretations of history, historiography, and a revisitation of past debates. This is directly related to the “loss of social time” discussed by Havel.
despite being "violently ravished" by such a power structure, but it nonetheless remains in my view a profound statement of human agency. Power such as that wielded by the authoritarian communist regimes of East-Central Europe was ultimately ambivalent despite its ideological pretext and pretensions. Beneath the "heavy cover of inertia and pseudo-events", Havel reminds us that *inevitably* there will exist "a secret streamlet" of seeming non-events, unofficial happenings, private and uncontrolled thought processes, and so on. From the standpoint of Western social science, this cannot be overlooked as it was precisely because scholarship and regional expertise focused largely on the official realm and the heavy hand of power that such resistance was continually downplayed or ignored outright. This essay, written a year and a half before the founding of Charter 77, begins to point nascent dissidents in a direction, to a range of possibilities for thought and action, that normalization had attempted to erase.

Havel neither urged revolution on the part of the people nor reform on the part of the country's leaders. He rather modestly asked Husák to take responsibility and to seriously consider the matters which he brought forward in his essay, and "act accordingly". Nonetheless, Havel reported later that he was fully prepared to be arrested for his actions, to the point where he began carrying around with him an "emergency packet" (cigarettes, toothbrush, toothpaste, soap, t-shirt, paper, and so on) wherever he went. The essay received considerable attention--in the foreign press, by the authorities (he even received a reply from the President's office returning his essay), and most importantly by his friends and colleagues. The essay was both a catalyst and a call to
action; the fact that it was circulating in samizdat just as Havel and others were organizing on behalf of Jirous and the PPU was significant.

IV. Theorizing Resistance: "The Power of the Powerless"

Without exaggeration, Havel's essay "The Power of the Powerless" was the single most-important theorization of the dissident movements in East-Central Europe prior to 1989. In my interviews across the region, it was repeatedly cited as absolutely seminal and influential; the only piece that ranks close is Michnik's "A New Evolutionism". It circulated widely in samizdat among Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, and Poles. It was published abroad in various editions, most notably in John Keane's edited collection titled *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens Against the State in East-Central Europe*, as well as in Jan Vladislav's edited collection *Living in Truth*. (It has since been republished under Paul Wilson's editorship as part of *Open Letters*, from which I quote here.) The best indication of its impact comes in the form of an anecdote told by Paul Wilson at the beginning of the essay's republication in *Open Letters*:

Here is what Zbygniew Bujak, a Solidarity activist, told me: "This essay reached us in the Ursus factory in 1979 at a point when we felt we were at the end of the road. Inspired by KOR...we had been speaking on the shop floor, talking to people, participating in public meetings, trying to speak the truth at the factory, the country, and politics. There came a moment when people thought we were crazy. Why were we doing this? Why were we taking such risks? Not seeing any immediate and tangible results, we began to doubt the purposefulness of what we were doing. Shouldn't we be coming up with other methods, other ways?

"Then came the essay by Havel. Reading it gave us the theoretical underpinnings for our activity. It maintained our spirits; we did not give
up, and a year later—in August 1980—it became clear that the party apparatus and the factory management were afraid of us. We mattered. And the rank and file saw us as leaders of the movement. When I look at the victories of Solidarity and Charter 77, I see in them an astonishing fulfilment of the prophecies and knowledge contained in Havel’s essay” (1991: 125-126).

The essay itself was quickly written as an intended contribution to a joint Polish-Czechoslovak volume of essays--one of the outcomes of the border meeting in 1978. Events conspired against the publication of the original volume, as the Polish contributions were not completed and in any event many of the Czech participants, including Havel, were arrested for their work in VONS. Almost a hundred pages in length, it begins ironically with the statement:

A specter is haunting Eastern Europe: the specter of what in the West is called “dissent.” This specter has not appeared out of thin air. It is a natural and inevitable consequence of the present historical phase of the system it is haunting. It was born at a time when this system, for a thousand reasons, can no longer base itself on the unadulterated brutal, and arbitrary application of power, eliminating all expressions of non-conformity. What is more, the system has become so ossified politically that there is practically no way for such nonconformity to be implemented within its official structures (1991: 127).

Although Havel raises the question of the identity and motives of these so-called dissidents and whether or not they might constitute something we might reasonably call an opposition, he focuses in the beginning and throughout the essay on a character who is not the self-appointed dissident. There are two kinds of powerless people Havel talks about—the dissident “as a category of subcitizen outside the power establishment” but also the non-dissident, non-trouble-maker who goes about his business as efficiently and
privately as possible, only doing what the regime demands in the name of a day's work. This second kind of powerless person is famously personified as Havel's greengrocer.

Havel's greengrocer is singled out not because he is extraordinary in any way, but precisely because he is very ordinary, and typical of normalized Czechoslovakia. The act which precipitates Havel's discussion--the placement of a sign in the fruit-and-vegetable shop he manages that boldly states "Workers of the World, Unite!"--is indicative of the behaviour both expected and required of the greengrocer. Havel explains that the greengrocer is "indifferent to the semantic content of the slogan on exhibit", he certainly does not "put the slogan in his window from any personal desire to acquaint the public with the ideal it expresses" (Havel, 1991: 132). The slogan is a sign, "and as such it contains a subliminal but very definite message" (1991: 132). It signals to the regime and to everyone else that the greengrocer is doing what is expected of him; in his obedience he is fulfilling his end of the social bargain. He is engaging together with the regime in the mutually-reinforcing process of ritual legitimation. In return, he has "the right to be left in peace" (1991: 133).

Havel reminds us that the ideological content of the slogan "helps the greengrocer to conceal from himself the low foundations of his obedience"; after all, he is not required to display a sign which states: "I am afraid and therefore unquestioningly obedient" (1991: 133). The greengrocer can hide behind ideology in protecting his own dignity, however debased it might be. Havel suggests that he must be allowed to say "What's wrong with workers of the world uniting?" should he in fact be challenged for his display
For Havel, ideology is an all-too-convenient escape route from human responsibility. Its necessary level of obfuscation and mystification offer us “the illusion of an identity, of dignity, and of morality while making it easier to part with them”. He elaborates:

As the repository of something suprapersonal and objective, [ideology] enables people to deceive their conscience and conceal their position and their inglorious *modus vivendi*, both from the world and from themselves. It is very pragmatic but, at the same time, an apparently dignified way of legitimizing what is above, below, and on either side. It is directed toward people and toward God. It is a veil behind which human beings can hide their own fallen existence, their trivialization, and their adaptation to the status quo. It is an excuse that everyone can use, from the greengrocer, who conceals his fear of losing his job behind an alleged interest in the unification of the workers of the world, to the highest functionary, whose interest in staying in power can be cloaked in phrases about service to the working class. The primary excusatory function of ideology is, therefore, to provide people, both as victims and pillars of the post-totalitarian system, with the illusion that the system is in harmony with the human order and the order of the universe (1991: 133-134).

Ideology is both necessary and important because it is the “glue” that holds the post-totalitarian order together in false harmony. It is effective because its complexity allows for considerable subtlety and flexibility. As in his plays and as was typical of Czech

---

19Havel makes the key observation that the deployment of ideology is a distinctly modern requirement; small and less-stratified dictatorships could exercise power more nakedly. However, with more complex mechanisms of power, with larger and more stratified societies (with greater numbers of individuals, organizational units, and transmission belts), ideology is required to “act as a kind of bridge between the regime and the people, across which the regime approaches the people and the people approach the regime” (1991: 134).
drama of the 1960s, the nature of ideology is exposed through the parable of the
greengrocer. Havel exposes and lays bare the very foundations of ideology through an
everyday example to which all can relate. Havel’s strategy is reminiscent of the post-
modern critique of Marxist ideology (but I would argue more substantive in terms of
possible alternatives). Havel would likely agree with Baudrillard:

The [Marxist] ‘criticism’ of ideology rests on a magical notion of it. It
does not decipher ideology, for it defines it as a given transcendent value,
a sort of manna which might attach itself to a few great representations
magically imbuing floating and mystified subjectivities called

Or with Derrida’s multi-layered notion of Marx’s conjuration. To visualize a spectre of
communism literally “haunting” Europe is to invoke a range of dualistic options such as
present reality/future possibility, threat/utopia, passivity/revolution. For Marx to move

---

Mourning, & the New International (New York: Routledge). Interestingly, in his
proclamation of the death of Marx and Marxism (and his simultaneous announcement
that we are nonetheless all heirs to Marx), Derrida infuses his analysis with a
Heideggerian phenomenology not unlike Patočka’s, and was in fact heavily influenced by
Patočka’s oeuvre in writing his more recent work The Gift of Death. To double the irony,
if one interprets Derrida’s long excursus on ghosts, specters, simulacra and other
synthetic images as representative of Marxist double-coding or ideology, one can
understand Derrida’s defensive stand on behalf of deconstruction as having “never been
Marxist” (1994: 75), that is, stringently anti-ideological. Of course, in order to take
Derrida at face value one must also accept that the linguistic turn inherent in
deconstruction specifically and post-modernism generally with its own many layers of
mystification and deliberate double-coding is sui generis and not in any way ideological!
For a critical comment on the relationship between Derrida, Patočka, and the post-1989
influence of post-modernism on post-communist intellectuals, see Aviezer Tucker (1998),
“Intellectual Responsibility: The Specter of Benda and the Phantom of Bakunin”, Telos
from critique to action, and to metamorphosize political theory into a mobilizational call to arms (the point being not to philosophize about the world but to change it) ideology is required. However, under post-totalitarianism, ideology is not a call to action, but a convenient excuse for passivity. In this respect, Havel draws our attention to an elemental difference between post-totalitarianism and its Stalinist, Leninist, and revolutionary predecessors.

The regime and its adherents and silent supporters live a continual lie. Ideology masks reality but at the same time the dissonance between lived reality and stated ideology exposes with dark humour the permanent hypocrisy embedded in the post-totalitarian order. Thus, ...

government by bureaucracy is called popular government; the working class is enslaved in the name of the working class; the complete degradation of the individual is presented as his ultimate liberation; depriving people of information is called making it available; the use of power to manipulate is called the public control of power, and the arbitrary abuse of power is called observing the legal code; the repression of culture is called its development; the expansion of imperial influence is presented as support for the oppressed; the lack of free expression becomes the highest form of freedom; farcical elections become the highest form of democracy; banning independent thought becomes the most scientific of world views; military occupation becomes fraternal assistance (1991: 136).

Because “the regime is captive to its own lies”, it must proceed to falsify not only present circumstances but also history and the future. On an individual level, one need not believe any of this, but one must behave like the greengrocer as if one actually did. The price to be paid is living the lie, regardless of one’s actual acceptance of it. However, by living the lie, and accepting their life within it, “individuals confirm the system, fulfill the
system, make the system, are the system”.

As Havel makes clear later in this essay and elsewhere, the lie runs through each of us, though to varying degrees. Everyone is enslaved by the lie and everyone is involved in perpetuating its existence. No one is exempt from complicity or responsibility. Havel states that in a post-totalitarian system, “this line runs de facto through each person, for everyone in his own way is both a victim and a supporter” (1991: 144). This does not mean, however, that all are equally responsible or equally unfree. The greengrocer is involved in propping up the regime in a minor way; the prime minister to a much greater extent—their responsibility mirrors the extent to which they are accomplices. Havel reasons that one’s position “in the power hierarchy determines the degree of responsibility and guilt, but it gives no one unlimited responsibility and guilt, nor does it completely absolve anyone” (1991: 144). The fact that humans are capable of living this way demonstrates the level of alienation endemic to such degeneration, but the prolongation of such existence is not a matter of fate, nor only subject to determination from above.

Post-totalitarianism is fundamentally at odds with the organic requirements of life. Havel contrasts the “conformity, uniformity, and discipline” of the former with the “plurality, diversity, independent self-constitution, and self organization” of the latter

---

21Havel has been remarkably consistent on this point, even during his presidency. He was extremely reluctant to sign the lustration legislation in Czechoslovakia following the Velvet Revolution. See Rosenberg, 1996: 97-101.
(1991: 134-135). So much so that “every instance of...transgression is a genuine denial of the system”. This is completely logical, for if the system commands absolute *prima facie* obedience, then any individual act against the automatism\(^{22}\) of required roles is, in a sense, meaningful for its very destabilizing quality. Herein lies the real power of the powerless. All human beings regardless of their moral or actual enslavement would like to have some moral integrity, in Havel’s view. The desire for free expression and authentic existence transcends the position in which we find ourselves. But to do something about it takes moral courage and entails some level of risk. In order to illustrate how a seemingly powerless person might in fact wield power and step out of a preordained existence of servitude, Havel turns again to his friend the greengrocer.

Havel asks us to imagine what might happen if one day something snaps in the mind of the greengrocer and against all prevailing logic, he stops displaying the slogan in his shop window. Moreover, consonant with this initial step he starts to do other things:

He stops voting in elections he knows are a farce. He begins to say what he really thinks at political meetings. And he even finds the strength in himself to express solidarity with those whom his conscience commands him to support. In this revolt, the greengrocer steps out of living within the lie. He rejects the ritual and breaks the rules of the game. He discovers once more his suppressed identity and dignity. He gives his freedom a concrete significance. His revolt is an attempt to live within the truth (1991: 146).

Of course the greengrocer ends up paying the price for his protest. First he is relieved of

\(^{22}\)Havel contrasts individualism not with collectivism, but with automatism. To act as an individual is *not* to act contrary to any collective will or consensus, but to affirm one’s authenticity as against non-thinking conformity, or automatism.
his position, is forced to take a lower level job in a warehouse. Quite possibly his pay is reduced, holiday plans cancelled, and the possibility of his children attending university vanishes. He will be harassed by his superiors and ignored by others. In fact, Havel describes the typical scenario of a dissident living in Husák's Czechoslovakia who dares to speak out. Given the heavy hand of the system coming down on the pathetic little greengrocer, why does he bother? What is possibly achieved by his actions? And wherein does his "power" lie? These are not easy questions, yet Havel comes up with a philosophically and practically challenging set of answers.

Most importantly, the greengrocer has exposed the lie as a lie. And this is no small feat, for as Havel states:

By breaking the rules of the game, he has disrupted the game as such. He has exposed it as a mere game. He has shattered the world of appearances, the fundamental pillar of the system. He has upset the power structure by tearing apart what holds it together. He has demonstrated that living a lie is living a lie. He has broken through the exalted facade of the system and exposed the real, base foundations of power. He has said that the emperor is naked. And because the emperor is in fact naked, something extremely dangerous has happened: by his action, the greengrocer has addressed the world. He has enabled everyone to peer behind the curtain. He has shown everyone that it is possible to live within the truth. Living within the lie can constitute the system only if it is universal. The principle must embrace and permeate everything (1991: 147).

The world of appearances is shattered, for the greengrocer's actions have highlighted an alternative, that is, real, reality. As far as the power structure is concerned, it does not matter how tiny or irrelevant the space occupied by the dissident greengrocer; his presence is ominous and threatening.
At bottom, the power of the powerless lies in truth. For Havel, this “singular, explosive, incalculable” political power exists within everyone, at least to the degree that the human order possesses a capacity for and predisposition toward the truth--Havel posits a radical equality in terms of human potential. This is even so in society alienated by a post-totalitarian regime, and its very alienation is proof of this capacity. Havel explains:

Individuals can be alienated from themselves only because there is something in them to alienate. The terrain of this violation is their authentic existence. Living the truth is thus woven directly into the texture of living a lie. It is the repressed alternative, the authentic aim to which living a lie is an inauthentic response. Only against this background does living a lie make any sense: it exists because of that background (emphasis in original; 1991: 148).

Living in truth thus becomes the most effective weapon against post-totalitarian power, and at the same time is the very essence of a nascent opposition to that power.

Obviously, truth as power is not a weapon on the same terrain as guns or tanks. The “confrontation” between truth and the power of the regime does not take place on the institutional level by conventionally political or military means, but “on the level of human consciousness and conscience, the existential level” (1991: 149). For this reason, the “effective range” of truth as power “cannot be measured in terms of disciples, voters, or soldiers, because it lies spread out in the fifth column of social consciousness, in the hidden aims of life, in human beings’ repressed longing for dignity and fundamental rights, for the realization of their real social and political interests” (1991: 149). Its effectiveness as a weapon does not in fact depend on the strength of its own forces
numerically, but on the “soldiers of the enemy as it were--that is to say, on everyone who is living within the lie and who may be struck at any moment (in theory, at least) by the force of truth....” (1991: 149). Havel describes it as “bacteriological” in nature: like an insidious contagion, it does not require a great many carriers to cause an “infection”.

However esoteric and highly philosophical the notion of truth as power might sound to those of us brought up during the Cold War in the permanent shadow of the nuclear threat, it is worth pointing out the highly practical dimensions of Havel’s strategy. By the time Havel wrote “The Power of the Powerless”, opposition activists and intellectuals had long since recognized that given the geopolitical realities of the Cold War, the stable and unchanging division of Europe guaranteed by Yalta (and not just the agreement, but all it symbolized), and the meagre size of the opposition itself, any direct or conventional confrontation with the regimes of East-Central Europe would have been futile in the extreme. Truth as power is both insidious and pragmatic, and the results of its deployment can be both visible and meaningful, however unpredictable. The consequences can be small or large-- “a real political act or event, a social movement, a sudden explosion of civil unrest, a sharp conflict inside an apparently monolithic power structure, or simply an irrepressible transformation in the social and intellectual climate” (1991:150). In short, as Havel would theorize together with his contemporaries, using the weapon of truth or living in truth constituted the germination or rebirth of civil society.

The effectiveness of truth can also be measured by the reaction of its adversaries. The Husák regime felt it necessary to mobilize its resources against Charter 77 via a harsh
media campaign and even an Anti-Charter not because it represented a real challenge but because it was a dangerous hole in a leaky dyke. Havel uses the example of Solzhenitzyn being driven out of the Soviet Union, "not because he represented a unit of real power"; rather their reaction was "a desperate attempt to plug up the dreadful wellspring of truth, a truth which might cause incalculable transformations in social consciousness, which in turn might one day produce political debacles unpredictable in their consequences" (1991: 150).

In his essay, Havel documents the importance of the trial of the PPU (as in "The Trial") for the creation of a new truth-based oppositional ethos, critical in the genesis of Charter 77. Charter activity created a new authentic forum for politics by its mere existence. Politics as ideological ritual exists alongside those who attempt to live within the truth, which Havel describes as those "who do not abandon politics as a vocation" (1991: 158), in the true Weberian sense. Politics in this sense does not involve "abstract projects for an ideal political or economic order", not just because of their utopian character or likelihood of failure. Those seasoned in the realities of ideological experiments in the 20th century know, according to Havel, that "the more they fix their sights on an abstract 'someday,' the more likely they can degenerate into new forms of human enslavement" (1991: 161). Rather, what Havel has in mind is more akin to the

---

23 Havel calls this "pre-political activity" to differentiate it from conventional party-state controlled politics and to signal its importance as a harbinger of greater possibilities.
Masarykian program for nation-building based on “small-scale work” (*drobná práce*). There is no behaviour model or blueprint for such work, but extending the realm of truth and the space for such activity to occur (that is, promoting independent citizens’ initiatives as well as an alternative *and* civil society) were obvious points to begin. Havel is not naive about the results, and dissent, or coming into conflict with the regime, is a likely outcome. To make his point concrete, Havel turns again to the example of the greengrocer:

Our greengrocer’s attempt to live within the truth may be confined to not doing certain things. He decides not to put flags in his window when his only motive for putting them there in the first place would have been to avoid being reported to the house warden; he does not vote in elections he considers false; he does not hide his opinions from his superiors. In other words, he may go not further than “merely” refusing to comply with certain demands made on him by the system (which of course is not an insignificant step to take). This may, however, grow into something more. The greengrocer may begin to do something concrete, something that goes beyond an immediately personal self-defensive reaction against manipulation, something that will manifest his newfound sense of higher responsibility. He may, for example, organize his fellow greengrocers to act together in defence of their interests. He may write letters to various institutions, drawing their attention to instances of disorder and injustice around him. He may seek out unofficial literature, copy it, and lend it to his friends (1991: 176).

The “independent life of society” is like an iceberg—only one tenth is visible. In

---

24 Havel refers to Masaryk’s emphasis on education self-improvement (in the sense of *Bildung*), works that would “stimulate national creativity and national self-confidence”, humanitarian projects, and an labourist ethos of work done well and with pride (1991: 172).
this respect, "dissent" as that activity practised by "dissidents"\textsuperscript{25} represents the only the tip of the iceberg. The genesis and evolution of independent initiatives and parallel structures operates in a symbiotic and dialectical relationship with the rest of society. Thus over time the post-totalitarian regime is capable not only of repression but also adaptation. Havel uses the example of the Polish flying university (TKN) to demonstrate his point:

...the Polish "flying university" came under increased persecution and the "flying teachers" were detained by the police. At the same time, however, professors in existing official universities tried to enrich their own curricula with several subjects hitherto considered taboo and this was a result of indirect pressure exerted by the "flying university." The motives for this adaptation may vary from the ideal (the hidden sphere has received the message and conscience and the will to truth are awakened) to the purely utilitarian: the regime's instinct for survival compels it to notice the changing ideas and the changing mental and social climate and to react flexibly to them. Which of these motives happens to predominate in a given moment is not essential in terms of the final effect (1991: 198-199).

Havel was heavily influenced by his dissident contemporary, friend (and later fellow political prisoner) Václav Benda in his discussion of how an independent civil society might develop and what its implications might be. He weaves together Benda's notion of a "parallel polis" (discussed below) with Ivan Jirous' notion of a "second

\textsuperscript{25}Havel defines dissidents as those citizens of the Soviet bloc who decide to live in truth and also meeting the following criteria: 1) their open expression of critical opinions means they are well-known in the West; 2) despite persecution they enjoy a level of esteem and an indirect level of power; 3) they focus not on narrow contexts or special interests but embrace causes more generally, thus their work and they themselves get branded as "political"; 4) they tend to be writers and intellectuals; and 5) an invisible line is crossed where the dissident is separated from her or his actual profession and thus defined primarily as a dissident (1991: 167-168).
culture”, coming up with a broad and far ranging set of structures that I will discuss and contextualize under the Western theoretical rubric of “civil society”. Like Gramscian “counter-hegemonic” pockets, the parallel structures in the Havelian formula constitute an alternative civil society where “a different life can be lived, in harmony with its own aims” (1991: 194). In the midst of this discussion, Havel addresses two important concerns: that of universality and the long-range potential impact of such an alternative.

With respect to the first, Havel is concerned that any parallel polis, second culture, or independent society not fall into the trap of ghettoization. Of course, Jirous’ “merry ghetto” had all the trappings of the exclusive, “in” group that it was, and this tended to be reinforced by persecution and marginalization. The trend is dangerous, both because of its inevitable restrictiveness, but because of what that restrictiveness could imply—“the expression of a narrow, self-contained responsibility” (1991: 194). Independent society must be “potentially accessible to everyone; it must foreshadow a general solution” and thus it logically follows that its participants must have “responsibility to and for the world” (1991: 194).

Regarding the political potential of living within the truth and its relationship to actual systemic change, Havel decries the possibility of engaging in any form of

\[\text{26In fact, Havel remained critical of Western leftist experiments that smacked of “retreat”, whether to an Indian monastery or via the creation of an alternative community or lifestyle because such a response “lacks that element of universality” necessary for taking responsibility and providing avenues for action. As Havel so tellingly states: “...not everyone can retire to an ashram” (1994: 196).}\]
risk/reward or predictive type of analysis. Nonetheless, he realizes that his proposals are vulnerable to the objection that “nothing will ever really change” or “not in my lifetime”—characteristic of the apathy or social despair of normalization. Thus he is careful to contextualize the possibility for impact within the crises latent but evident throughout the Soviet Bloc. He states:

The latent social crisis in such societies can at any time, independently of these movements, provoke a wide variety of political changes. It may unsettle the power structure and induce or accelerate various hidden confrontations, resulting in personnel, conceptual, or at least “climactic” [sic] changes. It may significantly influence the general atmosphere of life, evoke unexpected and unforeseen social unrest and explosions of discontent. Power shifts at the centre of the bloc can influence conditions in the different countries in various ways. Economic factors naturally have an important influence, as do broader trends of global civilization. An extremely important area, which could be a source of radical changes and political upsets, is represented by international politics, the policies adopted by the other superpower and all the other countries, the changing structure of international interests and the positions taken by our bloc. Even the people who end up in the highest positions are not without significance, although as I have already said, one ought not overestimate the importance of leading personalities in the post-totalitarian system.

There are many such influences and combinations of influence, and the eventual political impact of the “dissident movement” is thinkable only against this general background and in the context that this background provides (1991: 196-197).

It is not that such activities on their own can cause major systemic change, but taken in conjunction with the shifts outlined above, or a concatenation of unforeseen events (as arguably occurred in 1989), the interpenetration of independent society into actual and official society can be decisive. The prescient quality of Havel’s comments are all the more striking when one remembers that this essay was written seven years before
Gorbachev’s ascension to power in the Soviet Union. More importantly, in the meantime, independent society has important and intrinsic value on its own. Authentic life possibilities not heretofore known open up because of such activity, and on the terrain of “real everyday struggle” changes for a better life occur “here and now” (1991: 205). A “living sense of solidarity and fraternity” is developed through such communities, and this represents a kind of “rudimentary moral reconstitution” (1991: 212-213). Above all, Havel wants to make the case that the independent life which flourished around the Chartists and their activities was much more than a survival tactic of community-building or experience-sharing for disillusioned writers and academics. The effort is aimed at the concrete expansion of an independent dimension of space for public and beneficial work, work that at the same time serves to strengthen common bonds and literally to “transform people and the climate of their lives” (1991: 213). For Havel, the question is not whether such activity will bring a brighter future, but a recognition that by the very fact that this activity is occurring, the future is already brighter (1991: 214).

V. “Politics and Conscience” and the Destructive Capacities of Technology

“Politics and Conscience” was written as an acceptance speech upon receipt of an honorary doctorate at the University of Toulouse in 1984—a speech he could not, of course, deliver personally since he was not able to travel abroad.\textsuperscript{27} In it, Havel chose to

\textsuperscript{27}The University of Toulouse was the second university to grant Havel an honorary doctorate; York University in Toronto was the first. In the former case, he was
address his audience more broadly, touching on the relationship between personal conscience and political choices, especially as exemplified in the destruction of the environment. In his attitude to science and its dualistic nature as harbinger of progress/destroyer of the natural world (*Lebenswelt*), Havel was undoubtedly influenced by his brother Ivan, a trained computer scientist but in practice more a philosopher and critic of modern science.28 The environmental context of Havel’s own life experience is also significant—the forests of Northern Bohemia are among the most polluted in Europe (a living and dying testament to the impact of Stalinist heavy industrialization).

In this essay, Havel argues that the degradation of the natural world by industrial pollution is yet another illustration of the alienation endemic to modernity. Havel contrasts the adult experience of an average European, no longer rooted by personal experience or life history to the land, with that of a medieval peasant or conversely that of represented by Czech-born British playwright Tom Stoppard (whom Havel had met for the first time in June, 1977; Stoppard later dedicated his 1978 play *Professional Foul* to Havel in admiration). In the latter, the degree was accepted by the founder of Sixty-Eight Publishers Zdena Salivarová. Needless to say, since 1989 he has received scores of additional honours, including the Sonning Prize in Copenhagen, the Onassis Prize for Man and Mankind, the Indira Gandhi Prize, the Jackson H. Ralston Prize (Stanford University), the Philadelphia Liberty Medal and the Catalonia International Prize. He has been repeatedly nominated for, but has not won, the Nobel Peace Prize.

28Ivan Havel heads the Centre for Theoretical Studies in Prague, an independent centre for advanced study associated with Charles University. He is a trained mathematician and received his PhD in computer science from Berkeley. In his samizdat writings Havel was very critical of modern science for its assumption of objectivity and impartiality; he has since argued for an interdisciplinary plurality of “modes of cognition”, which might include mysticism, metaphor and other non-scientific modes of reasoning.
a young child, both of whom are existentially centered on the landscape of their immediate horizons in terms of defining the parameters of their experiences and giving them meaning. Havel also likens the "internal coherence" of the natural world to what he calls the "'pre-speculative' assumption that the world functions and is generally possible at all because there is something beyond its horizon, something beyond or above it that might escape our understanding and our grasp but, for just that reason, firmly grounds this world, bestows upon it its order and measure, and is the hidden source of all the rules, customs, commandments, prohibitions, and norms that hold within it" (1991: 251). Thus the mystery and order of the world are indicative of its very essence, and presupposes the Absolute. Here, the Absolute is not a moral standard or threshold but a reflection of Being.29 The hubris of humankind, represented by scientific rationality and resultant environmental decay, results from a narcissistic egoism that one can replace the eternal and pre-existing Absolute with a "new, man-made absolute, devoid of mystery...impersonal and inhuman" (1991: 251). The irony is that the man-made Absolute is inhuman and inhumane, impersonal and destructive, whereas the mysterious and non-human Absolute is more beneficent.

Havel describes the collectivization of agriculture as one example of the type of utopia-building characteristic of authoritarian communism, one which brought with it greater productivity and reduced social (that is, class) conflict, but with an environmental

29See the discussion of both these concepts in my analysis of Letters to Olga below.
price. Erasing the family farm from existence meant abolishing "that humbly respected boundary of the natural world, with its tradition of scrupulous personal acknowledgment". One can easily extend Havel’s analysis: in the same way that human labour was herded into urban factory-based production as a result of the enclosures in rural England (allowing for the prototypical development of modern industrial capitalism), so too were peasants herded onto collective farms through Soviet-style policies of collective agriculture. In both cases, the gods of progress were served at the expense of the accumulated topsoil, natural habitats for birds and other wildlife, the loss of indigenous species of plant and animal life. Havel is hardly exceptional here—in many respects his diagnosis of the problem is a simple extension of now-familiar social ecology to a political system whose boundaries are hardly recognized by the biosphere in any event. Following Czech philosopher and sociologist Václav Bělohradský, however, Havel attempts to bring environmental destruction to a personal level, and imbue a sense of personal conscience and historic responsibility.

The futile attempt to conquer nature to serve the ends of humankind outside nature is not only hubris but a denial of "personal "pre-objective" experience" and its replacement with an ethos of mastery and control. To make this possible, responsibility

---

30Before 1989 Bělohradský lived in exile in Italy and taught at the University of Genoa. After his release from prison in 1984, Havel read his book The Crisis of the Eschatology of the Impersonal, and later published an anthology of his work and those who analyzed similar themes as The Natural World as a Political Problem, through Edice Expedice. He was also a student of Patočka.
is discarded as a “subjective illusion” and “personal conscience and consciousness [is relegated to] the bathroom, as something so private that it is no one’s business” (1991: 255). Thus the prerequisite for the retirement of one’s responsibility is the total privatization of conscience—to the point where one’s consciousness cannot inform public actions or one’s political choices. Scientific rationality and “an abstract schema of a putative ‘historical necessity’” (1991: 255) serve as ideological superstructure, masking the twin rape of environment and conscience with an anonymous, abstract, impersonal, and even utilitarian logic.

This impersonal power, having disposed of any need for conformity with human conscience, reaches its apotheosis, says Havel, in [post] totalitarian systems, but warns that it is classically European in every respect, and thus European “civilization” must take responsibility for it:

As Bělohradský points out, the depersonalization of power and its conquest of human conscience and human speech have been successfully linked to an extra-European tradition of a “cosmological” conception of empire (identifying the empire as the sole true centre of the world, with the world as such, and considering the human as its exclusive property). The truth is the very opposite: it was precisely Europe, and the European West, that provided and frequently forced on the world all that today has become the basis of such power: natural science, rationalism, scientism, the industrial revolution, and also revolution as such, as a fanatical abstraction, through the displacement of the natural world to the bathroom down to the cult of consumption, the atomic bomb, and Marxism. And it is Europe--democratic western Europe--which today stands bewildered in the face of this ambiguous export (1991: 258).

The failure of the West European imagination is that it cannot see post-totalitarianism for what it in fact is: “a convex mirror of all modern civilization” (1991: 259). It is much
more ideologically convenient to cast Eastern Europe as the anti-democratic "other", the opposite of its achievements rather than a logical extension of its excesses. Extending his argument outward from "The Power of the Powerless", here Havel argues that dehumanizing, omnipresent power may be the hallmark of post-totalitarian regimes, but it is hardly the only birthplace of such power. In a metaphorical warning to those Western hardliners who believe that military might or plans for obliteration could wipe such systems from the earth, Havel suggests that such a policy would be like "an ugly woman trying to get rid of her ugliness by smashing the mirror that reminds her of it" (1991: 261).

In answer to the question he posed to Europeans East and West with regard to what can be done, Havel suggests the following answer, which he sheepishly admits is "general, very indefinite, and very unrealistic":

[The] task is one of resisting vigilantly, thoughtfully, and attentively...the irrational momentum of anonymous, impersonal, and inhuman power—the power of ideologies, systems, apparat, bureaucracy, artificial languages, and political slogans. We must resist its complex and wholly alienating pressure, whether it takes the form of consumption, advertising, technology, or cliché—all of which are the blood brothers of fanaticism and the well-spring of totalitarian thought. We must draw on standards from our natural world, heedless of ridicule, and reaffirm its denied validity. We must honour with the humility of the wise the limits of that natural world and the mystery which lies beyond them, admitting that there is something in the order of being which evidently exceeds all our competence. We must relate to the absolute horizon of our existence which, if we but will, we shall constantly rediscover and experience. We must make values and imperatives the starting point of all our acts, of all our personally attested, openly contemplated, and ideologically uncensored lived experience. We must trust the voice of our conscience more than that of all abstract speculations and not invent responsibilities other than
the one to which the voice calls us. We must not be shamed that we are capable of love, friendship, solidarity, sympathy, and tolerance, but just the opposite: we must set these fundamental dimensions of our humanity free from the “private” exile and accept them as the only genuine starting point of meaningful human community. We must be guided by our own reason and serve the truth under all circumstances as our own essential experience (1991: 267).

The reaction Havel favours is the employment of “antipolitical politics”—and here he is echoing common usage from the community of East-Central European dissidents. Havel defines his “antipolitics” as follows:

...politics not as the technology of power and manipulation, of cybernetic rule over humans or as the art of the utilitarian, but politics as one of the ways of seeking and achieving meaningful lives, of protecting them and serving them. I favour politics as practical morality, as service to the truth, as essentially human and humanly measured care for our fellow humans (my emphasis; 1991: 269).

Like another European philosopher concerned with the relationship between ethics and politics, Havel’s prescription of politics as practical morality is eerily reminiscent of Aristotle’s discussion of politics as the practical science. Aristotelian eudaemonia requires contemplation, excellence in reason, and moral virtue in action. The practical wisdom implicit in phronesis is necessary for the conduct of proper and farsighted political decision-making; it is the virtue of reasoned action with regard to the human good. Aristotle and Havel would be in full agreement on the right conduct of politics as imbued with morality, and that the wellspring of this morality must be a thick notion of personal responsibility.

---

31 See Book VI of Aristotle’s Nichomachean Ethics, “Intellectual Virtue”.
VI. *Largo Desolato, Temptation* and The Vaněk Plays

Not until a year after his release from prison in 1983 was Havel able to complete another full-length play, *Largo Desolato*. Although published abroad in Czech by *Poezie Mimo Domov* and *Svědectví* and brought to the stage in Bristol, England and in New York and Toronto, it did not reach Czech audiences until late 1989, following the Velvet Revolution. Although it is somewhat autobiographical—the protagonist is an author returning from prison—it is about more than simply the trauma of the released prisoner. In it Havel explores the character of his characters—no one is truly good or bad—and in this respect provides examples of the intermediate position most people occupy under authoritarian communism. Thus he demonstrates the “line” described so vividly in “The Power of the Powerless” running through each person. The play is also about taking responsibility for one’s own actions, one’s fate is intrinsically connected to the choices made or avoided in the path toward self-understanding and actualization. As well, *Largo Desolato* foreshadows the turn his later plays would take—especially the Vaněk plays—in focusing on individuals alienated from the all-encompassing system in which they live but are marginalized from rather than characters caught up in bureaucratic contradictions and compromised by them.

In *Largo Desolato* the protagonist Leopold Nettles is an archetypal “Central

---

32 Tom Stoppard translated the English version of the play, and produced a film version with F. Murray Abraham in the role of Leopold Nettles.
European Intellectual"-- employed as a professor (although this is not necessarily what marks him as an "Intellectual"), a loquacious and cultured individual given to self-agony and irritating equivocation, likely the descendant of the now-fading pre-war bourgeois establishment. He is a hypochondriac, paranoid and preoccupied with his own dilemma, which is illuminated by numerous visitations over five acts by other archetypal characters--two workers from a nearby paper mill both named Sidney; Leopold’s nervous, high-strung, and pill-popping lover, Lucy; the emissary of his concerned friends, Bertram; two nameless male characters who anonymously represent the regime and appear simultaneously polite and vaguely threatening; and Marguerite, an earnest but confused philosophy student who is an admirer.

*Largo Desolato* is in many respects a transitional play. Like his earlier complex, multi-character, full-length plays, there is an assumed expectation that Havel wrote it for the stage, perhaps with a naive expectation that it might someday actually be performed. The setting is neither a nameless organization or a liquidation office, but an apartment, albeit one that serves as a bustling public space as well as a personal and private space. The dilemmas of dissidence are fully explored in Nettles’ interactions with the other characters and the pressures put on him. The two Sidneys--"ordinary" workers from a nearby paper mill--visit twice and make clear that they are pinning their hopes on the professor to act accordingly, in the “role” expected of him as dissident. The Sidneys are willing to “risk” visiting Nettles, even steal supplies and official documents, but they perceive themselves as unable and in any event are unwilling to directly confront the
authorities. They have vested their political agency in Nettles. The two gentlemen who arrive representing "them" present Nettles with a compromise option to avoid further confrontation and perhaps arrest—to simply sign a document that he is not himself, that is, not the Professor Nettles who wrote papers considered subversive to the regime. Nettles faces a crisis of identity and responsibility through the course of the play. If he agrees to sign the paper, he renounces his identity and denies responsibility for his actions; it may be a face-saving device designed to give him a "fresh start" but only as a non-person. As a dissident, Nettles feels fraudulent in any case. Increasingly he feels like he is "losing his grip", his perspective, his ability to act as the "self-aware subject" of his own life (1987: 23). He cannot cope with the expectations of others around him--his wife, lover, friends, an admiring student--all of whom have built up a public identity apart from but on the basis of his actions. And all of the characters take turns informing Nettles that they will be sorely disappointed if he cannot meet these expectations. For example, his lover expects a certain commitment he cannot give, his wife wants him to steadfastly oppose the authorities and refuse to sign any denial of authorship/identity; his friends are concerned he might prove "unreliable" and "crack under the strain" (1987: 16-20). Nettles is forced to consider that an affirmation of his identity involves not simply a personal decision to live in truth, but living up to the expectations of the many "others" who want to live both in safety in his shadow and vicariously through his actions. There is more real-life subtlety, agony, and equivocation to Nettles’ choice than we find in the
thought-experiment of the green grocer in “The Power of the Powerless”.

With an ironic twist reminiscent of Rousseau, the audience must wonder if Nettles must be “forced to be free”.

*Largo Desolato* is considered by some to be Havel’s best play theatrically, but in terms of challenging the audience, it does not come close to *Temptation*. Havel wrote *Temptation* because he had read both Goethe’s *Faust* and Thomas Mann’s *Doctor Faustus* in prison, and after several false starts, he completed the play after only ten days of tortuous writing—wrestling with both the devil and the literary legend inspired by it.

Havel’s Faust is Dr. Henry Foustka, a scientist working in an institute with an indeterminate research program who deals with his own doubts about scientific methodology and its dominant and unquestioned role by exploring occult literature. He ponders the creation of the universe, the existence of life, the laws of biology, and modern survival, and wonders if there is not some deeper design concealed in the “multitude of...unbelievable coincidences that...exceed the bounds of all probability” that brought it all about in the first place. Like Czech philosopher Patočka, he is searching for a metaphysical explanation, and blames science for retarding humankind’s ability to find one. In his conversation with the Institute’s secretary, Marketa, he states:

---

Foustka: Has it ever occurred to you that we wouldn’t be able to understand even the simplest moral action that doesn’t serve some practical purpose? In fact, it would have to seem quite absurd to us if we didn’t recognize that hidden somewhere in the deepest depths is the presumption of something higher, some sort of absolute, omniscient, and infinitely fair judge or moral authority through which and within which all our activities are somehow mysteriously appraised and validated and by means of which each one of us in is constantly in touch with eternity?

Marketa: Yes, yes, that’s exactly how I’ve felt about it all my life! I just wasn’t able to see it, let alone say it so beautifully.

Foustka: So there you are! What’s even more tragic is that modern man has repressed everything that might allow him somehow to transcend himself, and he ridicules the very idea that something above him might have a higher meaning of some sort! He has crowned himself as the highest authority, so he can then observe with horror how the world is going to the dogs under that authority! (Havel, 1989: 33)

Havel’s Mephistopheles is almost a Švejkian caricature of the devil--the imposing and frightening demon is reduced to the dwarfish and seedy Fistula--a disabled person with questionable habits of personal hygiene living on a state pension. Fistula is definitely slippery and unsavoury, but the devil he invokes turns out to be the devil within Dr. Foustka himself. Foustka’s “temptation” is not the struggle of a fallen man against the power of evil, but a more modest form of hubris.
In a series of clever plot twists, the audience is led to believe that Foustka’s explorations of the supernatural are “betrayed” by his co-worker and lover Vilma. Foustka “rises” to the occasion with a confession and self-defence worthy of the self-criticism of a show trial script, appealing to both higher purposes and the objectivity of truth. In the end, Foustka is foiled by his own gullibility despite his efforts to be too clever by half. Fistula turns out to be the Institute’s informer. As this is revealed, we feel less pity and sympathy for Foustka than for Fistula, who is really only the devil’s representative, and trying to do a reasonably good job of it. Foustka has betrayed his own ideal to search for some truth apart from science, and has failed his own first test. At the end of the play he reacts with anger and with blame; his reaction is met with a bemused and superior dismissal on the part of the Institute’s Director:

Fistula: Wait a minute, now! Hold it! I never said that there is such a thing as the devil, not even while I was engaged in that provocation.

Foustka: But I’m saying it! And he’s actually here among us!

Fistula: Are you referring to me?

Foustka: You’re just a subordinate little fiend!

Director: I know your opinions, Foustka, and therefore I understand this metaphor of yours as well. Through me, you want to accuse modern science of being the true source of all evil. Isn’t that right?

Foustka: No, it isn’t! Through you, I want to accuse
the pride of that intolerant, all-powerful, and self-serving power that uses the sciences merely as a handy weapon for shooting down anything that threatens it, that is, anything that doesn’t derive its authority from this power or that is related to an authority deriving its powers elsewhere.

Director: That’s the legacy you wish to leave this world, Foustka?

Foustka: Yes!

Director: I find it a little banal. In countries without censorship every halfway clever little hack journalist churns out stuff like that these days! But a legacy is a legacy, so in spite of what you think of me, I’ll give you an example of how tolerant I am by overlooking my reservations and applauding your last testament! (Havel, 1989: 100-101).

With the character of Ferdinand (Bedřich) Vaněk, Havel unwittingly introduced a unique, multi-authored experiment in Czech drama. Vaněk is the protagonist in three of Havel’s plays spanning a ten year period from 1975 through to 1986—Audience (also translated as Conversation), Unveiling (also translated as Vernissage or Private View) and Protest. Moreover, the character of Vaněk was picked up by three other playwrights and political contemporaries of Havel—Pavel Kohout, Pavel Landovsky, and Jiří Dienstbier. Subsequently, Vaněk and the “Vaněk plays” as they came to be called, were emblematic of the twists and turns of the Czech opposition, especially given the fictional Vaněk’s
occupation as a dissident writer and playwright.\textsuperscript{34}

With Vaněk, the transition theatrically and politically that began with Nettles and continued with Dr. Foustka is complete. The plays were not written for the theatre, and the character is an anti-character, a complete outsider. Havel wrote the Vaněk plays for his friends and fellow-travellers in the Charter movement, at a time when he knew nothing he wrote could be performed publicly on a Czech stage. As such, they are intimate conversations more than plays--one-act party charades that presume considerable “in-group” knowledge from the participants. Within and between the plays--not only those written by Havel himself--there are references to each other’s foibles; the authors are collectively satirical in terms of how they are perceived publicly and to each other. For example, in Unveiling we hear about Pavel Landovsky’s legendary drunkenness, and in Protest Havel’s “grey zone” writer and television producer Staněk expresses horror at Pavel Kohout’s early Stalinist drivel and only dubiously accepts his credentials as a “dissident”. Because real-life events and characters are woven into the dialogue of the plays, and the fictional characters play certain archetypal roles, the plays constitute a serialization not only of dissident life, but of normalized Czechoslovakia in the 1970s and 1980s.

Marketa Goetz-Stankiewicz has written that Vaněk himself is the antipode of Švejk, and stands between the positive and negative characters of Hašek and Kafka

\textsuperscript{34}See especially Marketa Goetz-Stankiewicz (1987), \textit{The Vaněk Plays: Four Authors, One Character} (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press).
respectively in Czech literature (1987: xxii). Whereas Švejk is loquacious, colourfully retelling his adventures and subtly questioning authority through his relentlessly dense inquiries, Vaněk tells us almost nothing about himself. We learn he is a dissident playwright who has been imprisoned for his activism, is probably trailed by the security police, and could only find employment in a brewery because of his political stigma through the other characters in the plays. Vaněk is obviously polite, thoughtful, and intelligent but also bumbling and inarticulate--almost all of his sentences end in ellipses, either because he cannot think of the appropriate thing to say, or because his interlocutors constantly interrupt him. Vaněk's values, for which he has suffered so much, are never expressly delineated, nor does he explicitly critique those around him. Rather, he shows his modesty by doing his utmost to accept the decisions of others, not calling into question their integrity or their moral choices. He is obviously a proponent of human rights and has taken some strong and public stands, for which he has earned not only the respect but also the agitation of his fellow citizens. In Protest, speaking for those in the “grey zone” sympathetic to the dissidents’ cause but wary of personal involvement and its consequences, Staněk states:

Staněk: Now, listen Ferdinand, isn’t this a really terrifying testimony to the situation into which we’ve been brought? Isn’t it? Just think: even I, though I know it’s rubbish, even I’ve got used to the idea that the signing of protests is the business of local specialists, professionals in solidarity, dissidents! While the rest of us--when we want to do something for the sake of
ordinary human decency--automatically turn to you, as though you were a sort of service establishment for moral matters. In other words, we’re here simply to keep our mouths shut and to be rewarded by relative peace and quiet, whereas you’re here to speak up for us and to be rewarded by blows on earth and glory in the heavens! Perverse, isn’t it? (1993: 257)

To which Vaněk replies with a typical “Mmm...” only to allow Staněk to continue with his diatribe. A few pages later in the script, however, his begrudging admiration turns to anger:

Staněk: ...Because, as a matter of fact, these people [like Staněk, in the grey zone] secretly hate the dissidents. They’ve become their bad conscience, their living reproach! That’s how they see the dissidents. And at the same time, they envy them their honour and their inner freedom, values which they themselves were denied by fate (1993: 262).

Ultimately, Vaněk is a paradox. He is a writer whose writing we do not read, who seldom speaks; his voice is defined by negation. In this respect, he is also symbolic of the fate of the Charter signatories. By speaking out publicly, they were effectively silenced, and yet this silence was heard loudly and provoked action from both fellow-citizens and the party-state ranging from outright oppression to sympathy, guilt, and anger. Vaněk also personalizes the dilemma of the Chartists, and we appreciate their humanity, humour, and lack of judgment.

Václav Havel’s plays blend the aesthetic and the political--the aesthetic not in the
sense of l'art pour l'art or in terms of subservience to the political, but as a creative exchange within the public sphere. Absurd theatre in Havel’s view has neither the “arrogance” of having the “key to anything” nor is it nihilistic or hopeful. His plays are reminders, warnings, dilemmas of experiences that are fundamentally shared; his drama does not stand apart from life but is part of it. Jan Grossman, his mentor at the Balustrade in the 1960s, wrote the following lines in the preface to an earlier collection of Havel’s plays entitled Protocols in 1966:

In fact, great theater does not only reveal itself and its own story. It also reveals the audience’s story, and through that, the audience’s urgent need to compare their own experience—their own “subject matter”—with the subject matter offered them on stage.

This kind of theatre does not end with a performance, but on the contrary, the end of the performance is where it begins. I believe that Václav Havel has shown evidence in his plays of a genuine dramatic talent that very few in contemporary Czech theater possess (quoted in Kriseová, 1993: 47-48).

VII. Letters to Olga: “Being” and the “Absolute”

Letters to Olga is a volume of personal letters first published in the West in 1983 in a deliberate attempt by his supporters to publicize Havel’s philosophy, Charter 77, and the plight of Central European dissidents in their various movements of resistance to the state. It consists of a series of 144 letters Havel wrote while in prison from June, 1979

---

through to September, 1982, as a form of personally-imposed intellectual therapy.\textsuperscript{36}

*Letters to Olga* is also a prime twentieth century illustration of the Straussian thesis regarding persecution and the art of writing philosophy.\textsuperscript{37} In the preface to the English language edition, Havel states:

> The conditions in which I wrote these letters were harsh. All sorts of restrictions imposed by the prison authorities, some possible, some impossible, had to be abided by before the letters could even be sent. There was a desperate lack of space, time, and tranquillity for writing them. At first, my two fellow inmates [Václav Benda and Jiří Dienstbier] and I were allowed only to write about family matters. Gradually, however, we began to smuggle more and more general comments into our letters, and the prison censors gradually got used to these. I soon realized that the more abstract and incomprehensible these meditative letters were, the greater their chance of being sent, since the censors did not permit any comments to be mailed that they could understand. Slowly, I learned to write in a complex, encoded fashion which was far more convoluted than I wanted and certainly more complicated than the way I normally write (1989: n.p.)

\textsuperscript{36}This was a result of Havel’s first “long” period of incarceration, following the infamous VONS trial of October, 1979 (the others tried and sentenced were Otta Bednářová, Václav Benda, Jiří Dienstbier, Dana Němcová, and Petr Uhl). All except Němcová were imprisoned; she received a conditionally suspended sentence. Surprisingly and perhaps a result of sheer bureaucratic stupidity, Havel, Benda, and Dienstbier were imprisoned together at Hefmanice, in Ostrava.

\textsuperscript{37}In *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, political philosopher Leo Strauss advanced the thesis that much of the Western canon of political thought was written by authors so bold and innovative that their ideas themselves were dangerous, and thus they developed the skill of “writing between the lines” to avoid outright censorship. It is premised on the notion that the authors intended their works to address only “trustworthy and intelligent readers” who have the necessary skills to detect the “real” meanings embedded in the text. Although Strauss’ thesis has come quite rightly under attack for its generalized ahistoricity and inapplicability to many cases, it nonetheless partially applicable in the case of Havel’s *Letters to Olga*. See Strauss (1952), *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press), especially chapter two.
Havel even admits that the audience for his letters are, other than friends and family, the most “sensitive and observant readers” (1989: n.p.).

In his “Introduction”, Paul Wilson makes the salient point that *Letters to Olga* is unlike anything else Havel has written, not like the absurd human dilemmas of his theatrical *oeuvre*, nor like his “intention to stir up discussion around a specific cultural and political situation” which is characteristic of his non-fiction (1989: 17). Consequently, the *Letters* do not address specific political themes or concerns; they are intensely personal and primordial reflections on being, existence, discovering meaning within one’s existence, and how personal responsibility follows from this discovery. Havel is at his most philosophic and obscure, but as the *Letters* contain much personal and mundane information, they represent an effectively stark juxtaposition between the reality of prison life and the intensity of thought provoked by this confinement. For the purposes of this study, the *Letters* provide philosophical background to Havel’s overt and openly reasoned “public” arguments, a series of premises or first positions which underscore both his theatre and politics.

For example, read alongside or in conjunction with “The Power of the Powerless” and “Politics and Conscience” the *Letters* provide us with more information on Havel’s view of personal responsibility. In Letter #62 he reflects that the development of his plays reflect his ideas on the crisis of human identity; he states, “All my plays in fact are variations on this theme, the disintegration of man’s oneness with himself and the loss of everything that gives human existence a meaningful order, continuity, and its unique
outline” (1989: 145). In a similar manner, self-knowledge or understanding of identity gives rise to a sense of responsibility, a key theme in his essays and especially in “The Power of the Powerless”.\textsuperscript{38} Thus he states in the same letter:

...the importance of the notion of human responsibility has grown in my meditations. It has begun to appear, with increasing clarity, as that fundamental point from which all identity grows and by which it stands or falls, it is the foundation, the root, the center of gravity, the constructional principle of the axis of identity, something like the “idea” that determines its degree and type (1989: 145).

And later:

...as an ability or a determination or a perceived duty of man to vouch for himself completely, absolutely, and in all circumstances (in other words, as the only true creator of freedom), human responsibility is precisely the agent by which one first defines oneself as a person vis-à-vis the universe, that is, as the miracle of Being that one is. On the one hand, it is only thus that one defines and so infuses meaning into one’s dependency on the world; on the other hand, it is only thus that one definitively separates oneself from the world as a sovereign and independent being; it is only thus that one, as it were, stands on one’s own two feet. I would say that responsibility for oneself is a knife we use to carve out our own inimitable features in the panorama of Being; it is the pen with which we write into the history of Being that story of the fresh creation of the world that each new human existence always is (my emphasis; 1989: 147).

Carving out one’s identity as part and parcel of Being initiates both the processes of authentic existence and responsibility. However, in Havel’s metaphysics this involves

\textsuperscript{38}Recall that in “The Power of the Powerless” identity is inextricably linked to responsibility. The anomie of the mass is possible in the post-totalitarian regime because identity is surrendered to the “social auto-totality”. The “blind automatism” which drives the system is the lie running through each of its constituent parts. By “living in truth” identity is recovered and asserted as part of the process of assuming responsibility for oneself.
neither a Nietzschean/heroic will to power, nor a classically liberal sense of self as a free-floating individual disconnected from other individuals. Authenticity/identity and the taking of responsibility are public acts that occur dialogically in social space. Havel's characters superbly *act this out* in his dramas precisely because they talk through the dilemma that responsibility presents—whether it is Leopold and Marguerite debating Leopold's ability to recapture his "lost human integrity" or Staněk's apologia to Vaněk over signing the petition to release the musician. Thus the very nature of theatre makes it the ideal medium for the ideas Havel discusses—in his absurdist plays the ideas of *Letters to Olga* are concretely manifest.

Havel rejects the usual concrete answers to the question, "to whom and to what is a person responsible?" as telling the entire story. If one is a believer, one understands responsibility in relationship to God. Secular understandings reflect responsibility as a network of human relationships rooted in a particular society and culture, as an instinct to self-preservation, or psychoanalytically as conscience, sub-conscious calculation, or in terms of love and sacrifice (1989: 145). All of these latter kinds of explanations contain the danger of potentially relativistic, transitory, and even "ideological" responses; in this way we turn over the problem of definition to experts who preside over us with legal codes and religious or ideological commandments. Thus we obfuscate the only possibility for "discovering" responsibility within ourselves Havel deals with the problem phenomenologically, with reference to his own existence-in-the-world. Thus responsibility is finally understood when we can express it not only as relativity (in terms
of relationships to self and other) but go beyond this relativity to a recognition of what Havel calls “an omnipresent, absolute horizon” which is at one and the same time a framework, a measure, and a background which qualifies and defines us and our actions.

At first glance, Havel seems to be substituting God conventionally understood with a more existential or Kierkegaardian sense of an absolute, where an intense search inside one’s own existence yielded the possibility of an overwhelming and demanding commitment to a fundamental yet intensely personal truth. This commitment cannot be wholly rational; rather it is the subjective source of faith, belief, and hope. On a deeper level, Havel seems to want to provide reasons for faith and hope while reinforcing rather than abrogating personal responsibility. Most of all, he does not want us to yield to ideology of the rule of reason in place of faith. In his “Introduction”, Paul Wilson reminds the reader that Havel shares with phenomenology (especially the Czech variety of Husserl, Patocka, and Belohradsky) a concern that the assumptions behind mechanistic determinism form a slippery slope through which we lose our responsibility. The “I” becomes the “they” of the bureaucratic apparatus, of the class enemy, or the imperialist agent. Implicit is a critique of ideology as an “assigner” of blame, an act of negation, rather than a “taker” of responsibility, an act of choice demonstrating ability and agency.

Reading the Letters can be a frustrating experience for the reader of conventional political theory or philosophy, as his ideas are deliberately presented in a fragmentary and contradictory manner. However, it is useful to remember that Havel does not want to be Hobbes or Spinoza and create a consistent theory of the whole or a comprehensive system
of knowledge. Moreover, the multiformity and elusiveness of his presentation is necessarily reflective of his experience as a dissident and in this particular case as a prison inmate. In any case, he shared with many of his fellow dissidents throughout the region an abiding suspicion of philosophy that is overly abstracted from real life and experience. Lest we should try to make too much "sense" of his thoughts, and remembering his reflections and actions both deny nihilism, he states in Letter #78:

...I have never created, or accepted, any comprehensive "worldview," let alone any complete, unified, integrated, and self-contained philosophical, ideological or other system of beliefs which, with no further adjustments, I could then identify with and which would provide answers to all my questions. This was certainly not out of apathy (it is not difficult to take refuge beneath the protective wing of a ready-made system, and it may even simplify one's life considerably), nor on the contrary, out of any overanxious desire to take my stand, come what may, outside all currents of thought. It was simply because something very deep inside me has always resisted such an approach. I simply don't seem to have the internal capacity for it.

The origin of this "inability" is obviously something in my constitution, in how I am internally structured, as it were. I have already written you about what faith means to me: it is a particular state of mind, that is, a state of persistent and productive openness, of persistent questioning, a need to "experience the world," again and again, in as direct and unmediated a way as possible, and it does not, therefore, flow into me from some concretely defined outside object. For me, perseverance and continuity do not come from fixating on unchanging "convictions" but rather from a ceaseless process of searching, demystification and penetration beneath the surface of phenomena in ways that do not depend on allegiance to given, ready-made methodology. My entire "experience of the world" has persuaded me of the mysterious multiformity and infinite "elusiveness" of the order of Being, which--by its very nature and by the very nature of the human mind--simply cannot be grasped and described by a consistent system of knowledge (1989: 190).

For Havel, the ultimate irony is that constant questioning yields the ability to have faith
and to believe, if only in something vague as "Being", the "ultimate horizon", or as he often terms it, "the Absolute". Understanding this is a necessarily mysterious and even contradictory process.

Faith, and in particular faith in Being, provides human beings with a profound sense of meaning (Havel hints that without faith there can be no meaning), and like responsibility, points "toward something that is both beyond things and within them: their 'absolute horizon'" (1989: 154). This "absolute horizon" is a reminder that such concepts as faith and responsibility cannot be understood according to some rational calculus, or on an imaginary scale of relative utility. The absolute horizon or "Absolute" makes ethics possible—like the contradictory reality and unreality of a physical horizon within our eyesight and our experience, it is the outer rim of our existence, which we can see and not see, and is both real and mysterious.

Havel admits that contradictions in thought do not "bother him in the least", and also goes so far as to advocate what he calls "'parallelism' or 'pluralism' in knowledge" (1989: 191). In the same way that civil or independent society is a concrete manifestation that there are no absolute answers in political organization, least of all within any configuration of a state, philosophical reconciliation is "foolish, impossible, and utterly pointless". We should not even try to attempt reconciliation of Darwin with Christ, Marx with Heidegger, or Plato with Buddha because, in his words:

Each of them represents a certain level of Being and human experience and each bears witness to the world in his own particular way; each of them, to some extent and in some way, speaks to me, explains many things
to me, and even helps me live, and I simply don’t see why, for the sake of one, I should be denied an authentic experience of whatever another can show me, even more so because we are not talking here about different opinions on the same thing, but different ways of talking about different things (1989: 191).

Epistemological eclecticism may not produce a Leibnizian vision of the whole, but it is personally useful in grounding one’s own often problematic and unfathomable experience as a multi-layered being in a complex world. As Havel states in Letter # 83 in answer to the question “why live?” he is less concerned about “the different specific values and ideals in life” (which are inevitably arranged in contradiction to each other) than he is “about human existence as the subject of those values and ideals” (emphasis added; 1989: 208).

Readers familiar with twentieth century philosophy will note the influence of Heidegger in Havel’s choice of terminology, but are probably less familiar with Czech phenomenology through which Havel’s understanding of Heidegger has been mediated.39 This mediation, primarily through the work of Jan Patočka, is discussed below, but a few comments are in order with respect to the general influence of Heidegger.40

39 In his “Introduction” to the Letters, translator Paul Wilson notes that Havel’s use of expressions like “Being”, “existence-in-the-world”, and “thrownness” are translated from the Czech words “byt”, “pobyt”, and “vrzenost” which in turn are the standard Czech renderings of the Heideggerian terms “Sein”, “Dasein”, and “Geworfenheit” (1989: 19).

40 I am indebted here to Aviezer Tucker (1990), “Václav Havel’s Heideggerianism,” Telos 85: 63-78. Although I think Tucker’s incisive analysis does much to illuminate the Heideggerian roots of Havel’s writing, and he is absolutely correct in suggesting that, taken as a whole, Havel’s views and politics cannot be located on a
Heidegger, he analyzes grand issues like responsibility and truth by looking at the “everydayness” of life. Looking at things simply by how they present themselves to us, not mediated by the lens of science, ideology, or power, can be both liberating and demystifying. He grounds his philosophical reflections in “The Power of the Powerless” by asking us to consider for a moment the tricky dilemma of the greengrocer; in *Letters to Olga* he struggles with his own potential for indifference and resignation in the face of a long prison sentence. He balances his mundane worries and complaints through reflection and writing; when his moods get the better of him, he reflects on these as an expression of his humanity as well. Also like Heidegger, human beings must take personal responsibility for themselves and their actions if they are to lead an authentic and meaningful existence, and for humanity as a whole to recover from its fallen position and realize its full potential in terms of being. However, unlike Heidegger, Havel inserts a strong moral dimension into the idea of personal responsibility. Whereas Heidegger, following Nietzsche, is more bleak in seeing ethics as a negative metaphysical manifestation of modern nihilism, Havel has no problem positing the existence of absolute values. These values—which include the ability to live in dignity or truth, the

---

left-right axis, I strongly disagree with his description of Havel’s politics as somehow romantic, pre-modern, and atavistically reactionary. I would suggest a counter argument that rooting politics in non-state organizations and looking at the radical empowerment of citizens as the basis for democratic institutions is, if anything, post-modern in orientation. Havel does not look back with a golden eye to a medieval past of structured community interests, or an ordered social whole; rather, he looks forward *past* the organization of interests in political parties to broader and transnational social movements.
free expression of interests and beliefs, a prohibition against bodily harm (involving both physical and mental humiliation), responsibility for and to one’s self and by extension for and to the community and the world, human solidarity and trust—also form the basis of the Havelian conception of human rights writ large. Finally, both Heidegger and Havel locate alienation and loss of authenticity in modern technology, itself a product of rationalism, scientific materialism, and Cartesian objectivism.

VIII. Dissidence and the Western Peace Movement: Fragile and Reticent Allies

Havel wrote his essay “Anatomy of a Reticence” in April, 1985, in response to an invitation from a peace conference in Amsterdam (to be delivered in his absence). It was first published in English as part of a Charta 77 Foundation pamphlet from Stockholm in 1985, and was subsequently included in Jan Vladislav’s edited volume Living in Truth. In many respects, it is the inverse of the polemic between E.P. Thompson and Leszek Kołakowski, which focused to a large degree on Thompson’s disappointment at Kołakowski’s abandonment of Marx and his criticism of the Western New Left. As indicated above, this exchange was symptomatic of the West’s misunderstanding of the East, and displayed graphically how problematic it was to assume (on both sides) that the enemy of my enemy must therefore be my friend.

In this case, Havel wrote the essay to dispel some of the myths that Western peace activists held about dissident and human rights movements like Charter 77, and to explain why both the dissidents and the Western peace movements had an understandable mutual
“reticence” toward each other. He explains:

...to the Western peace fighters [a deliberate oxymoron Havel uses throughout the essay] the dissidents in the Eastern half of Europe must seem strangely absorbed in their provincial concerns, exaggerating human rights (as if human survival were not important!), suspisciously prejudiced against the realities of socialism, if not against socialist ideals themselves, insufficiently critical of Western democracy and perhaps even sympathizing, albeit secretly, with those detested Western armaments. In short, for them the dissidents tend to appear as a fifth column of Western establishments east of the Yalta line.

The reticence, to be sure, is mutual. It is not less noticeable in the attitude of Eastern European dissidents toward the Western peace movement. When we read Western texts dealing with the issues of peace, we usually find in them shades of opinion that give us reasons for a degree of reticence, as well (1991: 292).

One of the major reasons for the communication and understanding gap, in Havel’s view, is that after almost four decades of authoritarian communism, the word “peace” was drained of all meaningful content. The official party-state controlled media saturated the air waves and newspaper page with empty slogans and clichés: “Building up our homeland strengthens peace” or “The Soviet Union, guarantor of world peace”—the struggle for “peace” in these terms had become inseparable from the ideological facade of the system (1991: 293). “Peace” became devalued and trivialized, to the extent that the word inspired not only a universal lack of interest, but worse: “The citizens of our country simply start to yawn whenever they hear the word ‘peace.’” (1991: 294). Unfortunately in Havel’s view, the newspeak of “peace” is twinned with official reporting on Western peace movements as struggling with Western imperialists, and thus “peace” is associated in the mind of the somewhat critical or questioning individual with the policies of the
Soviet bloc. Havel reports that the likely response of the average Czech citizen to Western peace activists would be to show them the door, to equate an anti-NATO armaments policy with Soviet duplicity.

The Western peace movement in its present form (that is, in the mid-1980s) arouses suspicion for several other reasons as well. First, Havel senses within the movement, fairly or unfairly, a desire to impose a form of utopian order (called “peace”) on the world. Like most Central European dissidents, he expresses a deep mistrust of any abstract project promising “glowing tomorrows” according to some measurement of future common good. Later in the essay, Havel also explains why dissidents are uncomfortable in promoting possible alternatives in the interests of world peace. To do so would be to abdicate their alternative conception of politics as anti-politics and anti-utopia, and smack of disingenuousness. In Havel’s words, the dissident would trade his role as defender and witness and become a utopian dreamer playing at the role of organizer and tactician, “outside the credibility of power and outside the credibility of truth” (1991: 322). Second, his concerns are not assuaged by what he calls the often ideological and histrionic language employed by Western activists, also marked by an all-

---

41Havel seems to be splitting hairs when suggesting the peace activists are “utopians” whereas the Chartists with their more “modest” goal of getting the regime to recognize human rights covenants was more “realistic”. However, he recognizes that the world of the dissident is “naturally mad” —on the one hand the Chartists’ goals were wildly idealistic, on another, extremely (borrowing from the Poles) self-limited. The two sides of the utopianism/anti-utopianism of the community of dissent is analyzed by Milan Šimečka in his essay “A World with Utopias or Without Them,” in Peter Alexander and Roger Gill, eds. (1984) *Utopias*. 
too-serious sense of self-righteousness. He contrasts this humourless certainty with the
tonorous black humour of Central European culture. Citing Bakhtin, Havel suggests that
the stronger the oppression and thus the more serious task of opposition, the greater the
necessity to “desecrate the altar”. Finally, Czechoslovaks particularly have kept the
painful memory of the Munich betrayal alive, and thus have paid with their own national
fate for the policy of Western appeasement before Hitler. There are obvious historical
reasons why Central Europeans meet both utopianism and promises of peace with their
own tragically ironic scepticism.42 Without advocating the imperative to resist violence
with violence, he is concerned to ask questions about what is surrendered in the name of
stability and world peace.

Havel also wants to enlighten his Western peace activist audience as to the
dangers of a similar approach in Czechoslovakia, or anywhere in the Soviet Bloc.
Because of the overwhelming degree of security and secrecy surrounding military
installations in Eastern Europe, he reminds us that anyone trying to set up a peace camp
or approach a base with a placard would not receive fourteen days in jail with visits,
packages, and media attention, but more likely fourteen years in a high security institution
less likely, and it is quite clear from Havel’s analysis that the human rights movement

42This important point seems to be entirely missed by some Western
commentators; see for example, Ann Ward (1985), “Peace, Politics, and Utopia: Václav
embodied by Charter 77 was in many respects less likely to draw the ire of the regime than a peace movement. 43

Having explained the general “reticence”, Havel also tries to point to areas of common ground between the dissidents and the peace movement. He applauds the desire to place concern for the destiny of the world over material well-being. He agrees that addressing the production and installations of weapons is only symptomatic of the disease; disarmament negotiations must also address the underlying political reality of a divided Europe. For peace to be real and to last, it must be made and maintained by a community of free and independent nations. Moreover, “without free, self-respecting, and autonomous citizens, there can be no free and independent nations” (1991: 314).

Thus at the same time Havel “educates” his audience, he is also trying to make the case for linking human rights to issues of peace. For Havel, internal domestic peace is a necessary precondition for peace among nations. He states:

A state that ignores the will and the rights of its citizens can offer no guarantee that it will respect the will and rights of other peoples, nations, and states. A state that refuses its citizens their right to public supervision of the exercise of power will not submit to international supervision. A state that denies its citizens their basic rights becomes a danger to its neighbours as well: internal arbitrary rule will be reflected in arbitrary external relations. The suppression of public opinion, the abolition of public competition for power and its public exercise opens the way for the state power to arm itself in any way it sees fit. A manipulated population

---

43 One assumes that this is because the security interests of the Soviet Union were perceived to be at stake, rather than simply calling the local party-state to task for not living up to international human rights agreements that it had publicly agreed to and signed.
can be misused in serving any military adventure whatever. Unreliability in some areas arouses justifiable fear of unreliability in everything. A state that does not hesitate to lie to its own people will not hesitate to lie to other states. All of this leads to the conclusion that respect for human rights is the fundamental condition and the sole, genuine guarantee of true peace. Suppressing the natural rights of citizens and peoples does not secure peace—quite the contrary, it endangers it. A lasting peace and disarmament can only be the work of free people (1991: 314-315).

Thus for Havel and for the Chartists generally, the way to promote the interests of peace and to “support” the efforts of the Western peace movements, was to doggedly and distinctively continue their focus on human rights. Internationally, they saw themselves primarily as part of a worldwide movement for human rights, and saw their contribution to the peace movement through this context. Furthermore, because Havel and others warned the Western peace activists to avoid the construction of grand master plans and reproved their utopian language, they implicitly advertised an alternative: the kind of “antipolitics” practised by the Chartists and other democratic opposition movements in the region.

IX. The Decisive Influence of Jan Patočka

Not unsurprisingly, Havel dedicated “The Power of the Powerless” to the memory of Jan Patočka, his friend, fellow Chartist, and philosophical mentor. In both life and death, Patočka was to serve as the wellspring of philosophical and humanist inspiration not only for Havel but for the Chartists generally. Through Patočka, the Chartists also kept alive an important intellectual lineage, for the respected Central European
philosopher was both a student of his compatriot Edmund Husserl, who in turn was befriended and mentored by Tomáš Masaryk. Patočka was also a student of Henri Bergson and Martin Heidegger, and his own work was both a synthesis of and a series of answers to the questions raised by these mid-century giants.

As a whole, Patočka’s philosophy can be considered a dialectical synthesis of Masaryk’s objectivism and Husserl’s turn to subjectivity. He sought a philosophical reworking of order in history and of human life and existence neither in terms of Husserlian transcendental subjectivity nor Cartesian mechanized rationalism. Rather, for Patočka the basic structures of meaning and of life—whether conceived of as the premeditative natural world or as metatheoretical philosophical conjecture and explanation—as asubjective. Asubjectivity for Patočka implied that movements of history (facts and belief structures) and human beings themselves were autonomous. Objective history did not exist for Patočka in either the Marxist or Hegelian sense; human beings were active subjects yet radically contextualized in history and nature. These beliefs had profound consequences for how he viewed history, philosophy as a vocation, the task of education, and of the possibilities for human action.

Regardless of his close study of phenomenology and existentialism Patočka, like Masaryk, remained committed to the ethos of the Enlightenment, or at minimum the notion that the development of European culture and ideas created basic minimum
standards for human behaviour and opened up possibilities for human potential.\textsuperscript{44} Modernity and rationality were key standard-bearers in Central Europe, where simultaneously on the level of philosophy the stars of Nietzsche, Jaspers, and Heidegger were ascendant while the small country dedicated to democracy and humanism crumbled with the weight of Munich. Yet his commitment to the idea of reason is more like Habermas', as a means of understanding human connectedness, of providing a philosophical vocabulary. He rejected the narrow reduction of reason to sterile and limited positivist philosophy, in which he felt people fell prey more easily to the irrationalist appeal of ideology, whether national socialism or Stalinist dogma. What Patočka calls the “positivist hyphostatization of natural-scientific methodology”—the cult of reason—is symptomatic of a spiritual crisis in European thought and culture. Technical reason might be appropriate for natural or mathematical science, but for Patočka philosophy requires a kind of reason based on holistic metaphysical inquiry.

It is impossible here to detail Patočka’s many contributions to modern philosophy, for even today he is not well-known or investigated, despite recent vigorous efforts to translate and make available his work in the major European languages of philosophy—English, French, and German.\textsuperscript{45} However, my task is more limited—to provide some

\textsuperscript{44}See in particular Patočka’s essay “Masaryk’s and Husserl’s Conception of the Spiritual Crisis of Europe” in Kohák, 1989: 145-156.

\textsuperscript{45}No complete work of Jan Patočka’s writings is available in French, English, or German. Much translation and preparation is currently underway at the Patočka Archive at the Institut für Wissenschaften vom Menschen in Vienna, which holds the translation
shape and contour to his influence on Czechoslovak dissidents, most particularly the Chartists.

First, Patočka served as a human philosophical connection to the nation’s past—
from Comenius\(^{46}\) to Masarykian humanism and Husserlián phenomenology. As a lecturer and writer, Patočka was hardly a neutral transmitter of information. For example, he abhorred the narrow and atavistic “cult of Masaryk” that focused on his success as a statesman and nation-builder rather than as a philosopher of humanism and tolerance who acutely appreciated the contradictions of modern existence, the search for a meaningful ordering of the universe, and a moral sense of good and evil in the collapse of religious faith and the rise of modern science. Patočka brought to his students an awareness of the conflict of Masaryk’s own life experience, as critical of parochial and provincial Czech nationalism, yet ultimately destined to serve as the nation’s founder and greatest

---

and publication copyrights of all his work in languages other than Czech or Slovak. Complete German and French editions are in preparation and some volumes have been published. In English, aside from short pieces in journals and edited volumes, the only work dedicated to Patočka’s life and writing is that of Erazim Kohář (1989), *Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press). I am particularly indebted in my own analysis to Kohář’s philosophical biography which precedes his translation of eleven selected writings of Patočka’s philosophy and phenomenology.

\(^{46}\)Patočka was a major interpreter of Jan Amos Komenský or Comenius, largely thanks to his ban on academic employment and his work as a clerk in the Comenius Archive. Not only was he able to keep “working” as a philosopher through his close study of the life and thought of Comenius, but he did much to reorient the standard interpretation of Comenius—from an East-Central European version of Descartes to his alternative. Patočka’s work on Comenius also illustrates practically his historiography of ideas (Kohář, 1989: 27).
champion. Although he respected the scope of Husserl's phenomenological undertaking, he remained critical of his idea of "transcendental subjectivity",\(^{47}\) which he felt simply did not do justice either to the autonomy of humankind or to concrete reality.

Second, Patočka's ideas of philosophy as a vocation provide valuable insights as to the particularly philosophical orientation of Czechoslovak dissidents--particularly Havel--as well to Patočka's own reasons for signing Charter 77 himself. Patočka has an all-encompassing view of philosophy as providing a metatheoretical framework of intelligibility within which theories and ideas are generated. Like his teacher Husserl and like Plato and Aristotle whom he compellingly taught and admired, Patočka viewed philosophy as a first-order occupation, whose task it should be to comprehensive of the whole.\(^{48}\) It is, however, of a different order than the natural sciences, and thus philosophical theories cannot be verified or falsified in an overall matrix (Kohák, 1989:

---

\(^{47}\)Transcendental subjectivity is Husserl's answer to the post-Enlightenment dilemma of subject versus object. Husserl denied the possibility of objectivity completely but realized that simply substituting subjectivity would slide all meaning into a disconnected relativism. Thus he posits the idea of a transcendental subjectivity, which is prior to and more basic than any individual subject and thus provides a shared context for meaning and ideas (Kohák, 1989: 33). See also F.A. Elliston and P. McCormick, eds. (1977), *Edmund Husserl: Expositions and Appraisals* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press). This volume also contains in English one of Jan Patočka's critiques of Husserl, entitled "The Husserlian Doctrine of Eidetic Intuition and its Recent Critics".

\(^{48}\)Patočka decried the demise of metaphysics--both in terms of its negative connotation as unscientific and its displacement by rationalism, empiricism, and Marxist or Hegelian theories of history. In his essay "Negative Platonism", Patočka discusses how all of these positivist or dynamic and dialectical approaches presuppose a metaphysics--some kind of underlying conception of the whole or view of reality and how it operates. See Kohák, 1989: 54-56 and 175-206.
Philosophical inquiry is also about meaning and morality, about providing human beings with a vision or set of concepts with which to discuss and decide about good and evil. Philosophy may be fundamentally anti-utilitarian but it is not without passion or purpose; the faith of the philosopher is that he or she might with courage and determination speak some truth. Not unconnected to this view is Patočka’s rejection of the philosopher who in attempting to be relevant and engaged sinks to the level of doctrinaire ideologue, as an intellectual advertisement with all the deception that description purposefully invites. Such philosophical “titans” play God in his absence, doing injustice to ideals and to human faith and frailty in the process. This does not mean, however, that philosophers have no higher calling or purpose. Patočka’s philosopher, like the Socrates of Plato, must pose questions, leave the cave for the blinding light of the ideal, and find in barren soil some way to nurture this ideal. This vocation thrusts a heavy burden onto the philosopher’s shoulders, a Promethean task of responsibility.

Third, the echoes of Patočka’s Platonic philosophy and this notion of responsibility are echoed in the works of Havel and the Chartists. Havel’s sense of

---

Patočka borrows the term “titanism” from an essay by Masaryk of the same name. Patočka likens Masarykian titanism to Dostoyevskian nihilism—on might also add Benda’s clercs. “In attempting to storm Olympus,” writes Patočka, “the Titans...stress their moral autonomy, in vain they demand the right to live their own life, in conformity with their own free nature; they will never achieve that and will end by destroying their own life and the life of others; their strivings lead to immeasurable cataclysms which threaten the very life of Europe” (Patočka in Kohák, 1989: 140). Incidentally, the essay was written in 1936!
political responsibility is related to Patočka’s call of the ideal. Full humanity and autonomy cannot be achieved without assuming responsibility. Husserl’s Lebenswelt might provide affirmation of one’s self in the flesh and a certain subjective gratification and appreciation of self inserted into immediate and real context, but for Patočka human responsibility involves the affirmation of choice and action in rising to the task that can only be done by humans, providing an explanatory framework that will ground a moral order (Kohák, 1989: 22).

From Patočka, the Chartists also absorbed the Socratic interpretation of the Delphic oracle--to know thyself is to be aware that this knowledge-seeking is an epistemological task involving the knowledge of the whole. Patočka, like Socrates, was respectful of ignorance, and the careful yet ironic interlocution of the Socratic method. His own example inspired a cautious modesty in his students, who followed his reasoning that to “care for the soul” requires a seeking of the good. McRae accurately pinpoints the connection between Patočka’s Platonism and his Chartist influence and practice:

Patočka was influenced by Husserl and Heidegger, but in a more profound way, I think, by Socrates. Patočka’s notion of the “care for the soul” and his admonition to act in an authentic manner was a recipe for dissent under the communist regime. The regime enforced artificial obedience from the outward man, but was incapable of penetrating to the essential privacy of inner life, as it found expression in family and among friends (1997: 17).

In this sense, the Chartists formed a community of knowledge-seekers who, through the

care of their own souls, and guided by Havel’s dictum “live in truth”, took seriously politics as responsibility. The result was that dissent was neither private nor restricted to an isolated group of inner selves, but was extended to the public space of the agora—in the Czech context the many living room seminars, unofficial cultural performances, written and oral debates that comprised the Chartist community.

Finally, Patočka’s modified Heideggerian view of history was important for how the Chartists saw their own activism. The unique being of humans is the self-conscious awareness of freedom, in the context of one’s self and the selves of others in the world (Kohák, 1989: 28). The definitive task or “movement” of humanhood “is the act of freedom in which freedom rises above the anonymity of that overwhelming context and makes a context for itself” (Kohák, 1989: 28). We are rooted in our own history, but can act in it. Moreover, by studying history we are both doing it and transcending it. For Patočka, as for Marx, human beings make their own history. For Patočka, however, human beings can also transform themselves from passively accepting “fate” into freely and actively “choosing” destiny. In the process, the context is also transformed. The ability to act constitutes history. The implicit self-affirmation and agency is an act of freedom—today we might describe it as empowerment. Charter signatory Martin Palouš wrote that Patočka’s idea of freedom was similar to that of the Ancient Greeks—freedom

51 Compare especially with Part One of Division One of Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit* (*Being and Time*), especially where he discusses Being-In-The-World as the basic state of *Dasein* and *Dasein*’s encounter and intersections with the worldhood of the world.
was not conceived of as liberty or volition, but as *initiative* (Palouš, 1989: 39).

Acting on the stage of history is not simply an individualist enterprise, Patočka also discusses this in a larger framework as the “creative energy of history”, not transcendental but in every instance set in a particular context of space and time. In this way he accounts for the universality and the particularity of history as theory and discipline. To use again the example of freedom, as Palouš states, it cannot “depend on abilities or character of the isolated individual, rather, it [is] based on the existence and freedom of others” (Palouš, 1989: 39). The pursuit and exercise of freedom demands public space and a conversation among citizens. The community where the conversation takes place provides the specific space-time context; the value discussed has universal resonance.

The question is often raised as to why Patočka signed Charter 77 given its obvious and predictable consequences, or conversely, why he waited so long to “resist” the regime. In reading his work, it becomes easier to deflect the question, as it is premised on the notion of a sudden “turn” to politics, or a previous rejection of it. Signing the Charter was an extension of what Patočka had always been doing, whether as a student of Husserl, a clerk in the Comenius archive, or as a lecturer of an underground seminar.

---

52This explanation of history is also a useful metaphor for my study of the theory of the dissidents. East-Central European dissident “theory” could be meaningful only because it related to a specific space-time context, but it could also be universal to the extent that through this engagement this context was transcended.
Like Socrates, his task was to actively "do" philosophy, not face some forced and false choice between "politics" and "philosophy". The point was not to engage in politics for its own sake, but to logically follow the Socratic dictates of attending to issues of truth and reason in the search for the Good.\footnote{Some Charter signatories, such as Václav Benda and Martin Palouš, saw in Patočka's exhortations important moral, nonpolitical, and personal reasons for signing the Charter, but lamented his lack of an overall political vision. In my view, this critique is based on a narrowly-programmatic view of politics, surprising given the overall antipolitical attitude of the Chartists generally.} In a case of life imitating philosophy, Patočka, also like Socrates, eventually came to a collision with the authorities and lost his life in the process. Withdrawing from "political" life (conventionally understood under authoritarian communism) and devoting himself to philosophical inquiry did not prevent Patočka from taking a political position, one perceived as fundamentally destabilizing to the political order.

Patočka saw in the human-rights orientation of Charter 77 "a moral foundation", and this was likely a minimum condition for his support. In chastizing his own society, lacking such a moral foundation, he states:

No society, no matter how well-equipped it may be technologically, can function without a moral foundation, without convictions that do not depend on convenience, circumstances, or expected advantage. Yet the point of morality is to assure not the functioning of a society but the humanity of humans. Humans do not invent morality arbitrarily, to suit their needs, wishes, inclinations and aspirations. Quite the contrary, it is morality that defines what being human means (Patočka, in Kohák, 1989: 341).
The idea of human rights is nothing other than the conviction that even states, even society as a whole, are subject to the sovereignty of moral sentiment: that they recognize something unconditional that is higher than me, something that is binding even on them, sacred, inviolable, and that in their power to establish and maintain a rule of law they seek to express this recognition (Patočka, in Kohák, 1989: 341).

Patočka ties this morality to the philosophical and personal obligation to resist injustice as both an obligation to oneself and out of respect for "what is higher in humans, a sense of duty, of the common good...." (1989: 343). The above-quoted comments were written late in the philosopher's life, not as an academic treatise, but as a Charter text, circulated and commented upon in samizdat, and published abroad as one of the "voices" of Charter 77.

**X. Václav Benda's "Parallel Polis"**

Václav Benda is a contemporary, friend, fellow-Chartist and co-prisoner of Havel from 1979 to 1983. Both a mathematician and a philosopher, Benda was a student activist in 1968, serving as Chair of the students' council. He is well-known for his strong Catholicism, Manichean views, and unyielding and defiant commitment to his faith and his notions of truth and politics. In the post-communist era and in keeping

54This was more than obvious during our brief interview in August 1995. An illustrative anecdote: I asked Benda about the phenomenon of post-communist electoral success in the region and he flatly answered: "We don't elect post-communists in this country." In the elections later that year, Miloš Zeman's social democrats had better electoral results than any other political party, and it was only as a result of a coalition of centre-right parties that Václav Klaus managed to form a government. In the 1998 elections, Zeman's party did form a government—after a series of scandals brought down
with his consistently-held views, he was the parliamentarian who most fervently supported Czechoslovakia’s controversial lustrace law. Today he is aptly suited to his position as Director of the Office for Documentation and Investigation of Communist Crimes--ironically situated in the old headquarters of the StB on Bartolomějska Street in Prague. However, in 1978, shortly before his arrest for his involvement with VONS, and just prior to Havel penning “The Power of the Powerless”, Benda wrote a brief samizdat essay entitled “The Parallel Polis” which had immense impact on the Chartists, and abroad.

Following the teachings of Jan Patočka and with reference to the ancient Greek model of the polis, the centre of the political and democratic community, Benda sought to reinvigorate this ideal by proposing its creation as the centrepiece of alternative politics. Since its publication, the notion of a “parallel polis” has become synonymous with the construction of an independent civil society, and in some ways with its smaller scale and historical resonance, it proved to be both a powerful metaphor and rhetorical rallying point across the region. One of Benda’s chief motives in proposing a parallel polis was his concern about the deep “disillusionment and scepticism” prevalent among Charter Klaus and the ODS. When Tina Rosenberg, author of The Haunted Land asked him about the possibility of persons being wrongly targeted or accused as StB collaborators or informants, he replied “No mistake or error in the registry is possible...there is no evidence that there is anyone who is on the list without his knowledge” (quoted in Rosenberg, 1996: 113). Charles University philosopher (and Patočka biographer and translator) Erazim Kohák described Benda as a “fundamentalist [who] sees in black and white” (quoted in Rosenberg, 1996: 113).
signatories after the initial euphoria of the Charter release, combined with the virulent campaign of the regime against the signatories, most symbolically and tragically represented by Patočka’s death (Benda, in Skilling and Wilson, eds., 1991: 35-36). This is surprising in retrospect, especially considering the robust survival of the aims and purpose of the Charter right up to the point of transformation. Without wishing to exaggerate the influence Benda’s theorization of the parallel polis had on the strategy and tactics of dissidents in Czechoslovakia, it is nonetheless true that the essay was decisive in many respects, not the least of which was a complete and practical theorization of an expanding alternate public sphere.

For all his own personal moral absolutism, Benda saw that expecting the total “moral commitment involved in challenging an evil political power and trying to destroy it” was both suicidal and unrealistic. It was more realistic for a citizen to feel “morally obliged to size up the situation...and try to bring about partial improvements through compromise and reform” (Benda, 1991: 36). Whereas Patočka was firm in his moral foundation, his discussion of the Charter was noticeably abstract and organizationally intangible. As a corrective to Patočka and as a response to the disillusionment and despair following the initial arrests, Patočka’s death, official harassment and the propagation of the Anti-Charter, Benda suggests:

...we join forces in creating, slowly but surely, parallel structures that are

---

55 The essay can also be read as taking up more concretely the actual implementation of the ethical position outlined by Patočka before his untimely death.
capable, to a limited degree at least, of supplementing the generally beneficial and necessary functions that are missing in the official structures, and where possible, to use those existing structures, to humanise them (Benda, 1991: 36).

His rationale was a compelling re-statement of Michnik-like evolutionism:

This plan will satisfy both the 'reformists' and the 'radicals'. It need not lead to a direct conflict with the regime, yet it harbours no illusions that 'cosmetic' changes can make any difference. Moreover it leaves open the key question of the system’s viability. Even if such structures were only partially successful, they would bring pressure to bear on the official structures, which would either collapse (if you accept the view of the radicals) or regenerate themselves in a useful way (if you accept the reformist position) (Benda, 1991: 36).

Benda was careful to propose an alternative that was not zero-sum in character, a strategy of evolutionary reformism which by its very nature cut through radically to the very heart of the system.

In the context of even the idealism of the Chartists, Benda’s plan was to some degree elitist (with its implicit notion of “enlightening the masses” through such activity) and hopelessly naive—both of which he openly admitted. Ironically, it probably took someone of Benda’s uncompromising will and faith to push ahead with such an idea, and to do so with a sense of stubborn practicality that it might be achieved after all. To this end, Benda spells out the his plan in detail, in effect marketing his proposal to his fellow Chartists.

As a starting point, Benda notes that a parallel culture is already in existence in Czechoslovakia. Indeed in some areas, like popular music and the plastic arts, these phenomena are so strong and positive that “the parallel culture overshadows the lifeless,
official culture” (1991: 37). The second culture, given its dynamism and level of
development, would “serve as a model for other areas” (1991:38), especially related and
neglected fields like literary criticism, cultural journalism, theatre and film. He even
appeals to the parallel economy (and here he is referring not to an officially-tolerated or
semi-sanctioned second economy as in Hungary but in fact the black market) as a factor
in most consumer relations, and thus a source of potential.

On the intellectual front, Benda promotes a “parallel structure of education and
scientific and scholarly life”—in fact this is exactly what developed with the underground
university, as has been documented by Barbara Day.

With respect to the role of the Charter in such activities, Benda expected it to
continue playing a pivotal and central role, but not to limit or control other initiatives.
Furthermore, the Charter’s work would have to be made more effective and far-reaching
through a more dense and effective information network, ensuring broad circulation of
materials internally, especially beyond Prague.

Benda’s final suggestions even include the creation (over time, presumably) of a
parallel foreign policy, although he reckoned it would have little chance of success; it was
more an expression of the “internationalisation of the problem” (1991: 40). He also
recommended what he euphemistically called “mutual cooperation between related trends
in other East Bloc countries” (1991: 40). In fact, at the time this essay was written these
cross-border efforts were already materializing: the first Polish-Czechoslovak border
meeting took place in the summer of 1978. In the early 1980s Hungarian dissidents were travelling to Poland, and ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia were making contact with the democratic opposition in Budapest.

Aside from this famous and influential essay, Benda applied his very pragmatic and activist orientation to the Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia. Unlike Michnik, who argued for a Left-Church alliance from a secular Jewish perspective, Benda argued for social activism from a deeply religious position as a Catholic philosopher. His faith was a source of considerable personal strength, contributing both to his Manichean views as well as the missionary zeal he brought to his activism, not only as a member of Charter 77 and VONS, but also as editor of PARAF, a samizdat journal on philosophy.

For Benda, the cultural and political renewal he advocated in “The Parallel Polis” also amounted to a reaffirmation of Christian values. Not content to rest on this

---


57 The language of “Christian values” is interesting in its use and provides a stunning example of linguistic opposites East and West. For Benda, Michnik, and others writing on the role of the various national Churches in East-Central Europe, “Christian values” euphemistically refers to the belief in individual human dignity, the social tasks of traditional Christian charity--both to heal and to serve, following the teachings of Christ a non-judgmental declaration of love and respect of one’s friends and enemies, and on a more philosophical level support for metaphysical claims about the universe and horizons of meaning--contra Marxist orthodoxy and the ideology of authoritarian communism. In the West, the term “Christian values” has been usurped by and come to represent the aspirations of the religious right--especially in the United States--and stands
identification, however, Benda also pressed the Church hierarchy and laity to confront the monopoly of the party-state as an assault not only on religious freedom, but as responsible for isolating and atomizing individuals, making not only Christian community impossible but increasing susceptibility to loneliness and manipulation. He echoes Havel when he speaks of the “Iron Curtain” that separates not only East and West but runs through social classes, the family, and the individual.

According to Benda, a truly Christian attitude requires one not simply to pursue one’s own salvation, “imprisoning oneself in a ghetto-like mentality” but also to make “a total commitment to others” (Benda, 1989: 23). Accepting this “mission” as a Christian is not unlike a Charter signatory accepting the responsibility that automatically goes with signing. Benda states: “Uncertainty and risk are part and parcel of the Christian experience” (1989: 25). Similarly, in the same way Benda pushed the Charter to take a more concrete and programmatic stance in making the parallel polis come about, he pushes the established Church, in its own program of spiritual renewal, to support independent culture and education, speak out against persecution and coercion, oppose the ineffective and overtly anti-Christian charitable institutions of the regime, and preserve and extend the alliance between the hierarchy and “politically active Christians” like himself. Benda takes this position not in contravention of the long-established doctrine of the “two swords”; he paraphrases scripture in his statement, “When Caesar

for a host of policies from prayer in public schools to the anti-choice movement.
claims everything [as in the case of authoritarian communism]—including what is God’s—one may not render him anything whatsoever” (1989: 25). Although Benda is careful to oppose “political clericalism” he notes that in the time of opposition the Church must adopt a dual strategy: “as long as we are endangered by external pressure as much as by our own sinfulness, there is a need to confront both equally” (1989: 26). The time is not yet ripe for “political differentiation” between the Church itself and “politically engaged Christians”, or between “a purely spiritual renewal and a renewal of civic, national and patriotic virtues”—the two must work hand in hand.  

XI. The Collective *Oeuvre* of the Chartists

Charter 77 produced 572 documents over the decade and a half of its existence, mostly in the form of letters, communiqués (*sdělení*), appeals, and short statements or essays. Before “release” by Charter 77, documents went through a rigorous authorization and review process, to ensure authenticity. Even when documents were signed by one or several persons, they often bore the stamp of collective authorship, given the process of review and commentary. Although the important contributions of Havel, Patočka, and Benda warrant separate treatment in this study, the overall “voice” of Charter 77 is appropriately treated here as a collective enterprise.

58 Interestingly, Benda does foresee the future possibility and necessity of drawing a “strict line” between a Christian-Democratic political party and the Church itself. This is in fact what happened in Czechoslovakia, and Benda himself is an active member of the Christian-Democratic party in the Czech Republic today.
A number of recurring themes can discerned through even a cursory examination of Charter documents: linkages with and commentary on other dissidents and organizations in Central and Eastern Europe (which implicitly delineate strategy and explicitly outline personal and organizational connections); religious statements underlining not only the importance of religious freedom but also pointing to spirituality as the metaphysical glue between politics and morality; theoretical writings as well as a source of alternative “news” on arts and culture, the social and economic spheres, education, the environment, and statements on international affairs, primarily focusing on the superpower conflict, the peace movement, and the progress of the Helsinki process. Moreover, the Chartists did not only write and think about these issues abstractly; their work collectively bears witness to the abuses of an age. They carefully monitored and documented the injustices of authoritarian communist society, from the workplace to the prison system, provided evidence of discrimination toward minorities such as the Roma, and compellingly described the negative impact of pollution on the natural environment. However, the predominant theme and underlying ethos of the Charter was the emphasis on human rights and the theoretical presuppositions of this approach. Human rights as theory and practise constitute the primary theoretical contribution of the Chartists to the dissident oeuvre.

Charter 77 defined itself as a human rights organization throughout its history, beginning with its initial Declaration. In Czechoslovakia (as well as in Poland and Hungary), focusing on human rights served an important practical and theoretical
objective. Pragmatically and philosophically, human rights is about stripping politics to its naked core. Without respect for the life, belief, and expression of the citizen, authentic politics cannot be said to exist. Moreover, when we accept the internal logic of democracy, with the extension of the franchise and citizenship rights and responsibilities to adult members of society, we have to premise this involvement with some notion of human rights as natural and inviolable and posit basic equality among human beings. And because human beings do not exist alone as isolated individuals, such rights must be understood in a community context—thus free expression necessarily entails freedom of association to be practically meaningful. Human rights are therefore an essential precondition for public life. For this reason, an emphasis on human rights as a basic building block of civilized society could be fundamentally unifying. Charter 77 could and did appeal to a broad range of supporters precisely because ideological differences were nullified in the first-order effort to create a dialogue and level of understanding about the ramifications of accepting the human rights logic. As a result, independent socialists, former revisionists, non-communist writers and intellectuals, religious activists, workers, and professionals came together not simply as signatories but as the originators in a pan-societal conversation about what the ground rules of politics ought to be.59

59It is easy to forget in retrospect what an achievement this loose coalition represented, simply on its own. Czechoslovakia was not only under the oppressive yoke of Husák’s normalization, it was and had been fundamentally divided along class and political lines since 1948, and the euphoria of the Prague Spring was too short-lived and
The human rights emphasis also reinforced the Western tradition of legalism and the constitutional supremacy of law and the legal process. Martin Palouš (1996) has argued that the Chartist approach contributed heavily to the post-communist Czechoslovak legal order, literally by comparing Charter documents with the post-1989 Bill of Rights that is now an inseparable part of the Czech constitution (this argument is helped by the fact that many former Chartists assisted in its actual writing). As well, the constant commentary of the Chartists on human rights abuses around the world and their self-perception that human rights cannot be contained or protected within national borders underlined a strong element of transnationalization. The Chartists were concerned and wrote about how international mechanisms must support domestic lines of defence for human rights. International regimes of human rights must be codified in domestic law, and international human rights commitments extend the Havelian notion of personal responsibility to the international arena.60

In this context, the reader should not be surprised to learn that two of the most recent deputy commissioners of the UNHCR have been former Central European dissidents—Tadeusz Mazowiecki and Jiří Dienstbier. President Havel has been a strong supporter of a new permanent court for crimes against humanity to be established at the Hague.
Although the Chartists were careful in neither criminalizing the party-state nor directly challenging its monopoly on power, it remains paradoxically the case that in design and orientation the organization and its authors did just that. Publicizing the Helsinki Accords and the outlining the minimal conditions for the actual observance of human rights meant that Charter 77 was a de facto subversive organization. Embedded in the notion of human rights is the existence of a legal system founded upon the rule of law that can ensure both protection and implementation--some type of Rechtsstaat that is decidedly not in keeping with even the most liberal version of the Soviet model.

Beyond human rights, it is difficult to pin down a definitive “Charter position” on anything, and to do so misses the point entirely. The Chartists were an organizational and a theoretical contrast to the anonymously ideological bureaucracy of the party-state.

Commenting on Charter 77 in Infoch as part of an internal discussion on the purposes of the organization, Havel stated:

...if Charter documents are not to become depersonalized, shapeless, anonymous, bureaucratic texts, with an official tone as soporific as party speeches and resolutions, then there is nothing wrong with injecting into them a more personal tone, and perhaps even a provocative idea, insight, or formulation, especially when a document has come from a particular pen.... (1991: 325).

In the same article, he points to the deliberately fuzzy pluralism of the Charter:

In any case, there is no index of words, expressions, or ideas that are “authentically Chartist,” so the territory of what is “authentically Chartist” has no borders. Everything is a matter of a freely determined consensus and agreement, which of course can be influenced by a thousand circumstances both internal and external (1991: 325).
The ultimate irony is that Charter 77 was its own “Anti-Charter”; it did not need the regime to provide the organization with its own antithesis.

XII. Theorizing Civil Society: The Czechoslovak Example

In the same way that the existence of Solidarity ultimately represents the originality of the Polish contribution, and provided a living and breathing example of the rebirth of civil society, so too was the case with Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, albeit on a more limited scale. Czech historian and Charter signatory Vilém Prečan summarizes thus:

Charter 77’s emergence on the Czechoslovak political scene represents the fundamental watershed in the country’s development in the period after the defeat of the reform movement of 1968. It was a flash of light which made clear that history never ends, that it remains forever open. This new intellectual orientation, the principle of the indivisibility of freedom and the universal validity of human and civil rights, which Charter 77 professed, was a radical challenge to the totalitarian Communist regime. With the quiet and peaceful arrival of Charter 77 began the era of politics orientated to the renewal of civil society, of democracy and the rule of law founded on the unconditional recognition of human and civil rights (my emphasis, 1997: 3).

Similarly, Palouš credits Charter 77 with forcing a political abertura through the adoption of non-political stance, one that reinforced public responsibility:

As the Charter clearly laid out in its opening, it was not and did not try to be a political opposition party. However, its existence created an elementary precondition for a situation in which, in what was then Czechoslovakia, there could begin to emerge from the marasma of the normalised regime a particular phenomenon without which standard political life is unthinkable—civic [sic] society. The “parallel polis’ of the Chartists became a key for the renewal of horizontal communication in
society, interrupted under the Communist government, a prototype of those "intermediary bodies" which according to de Toqueville represent a necessary condition for the origin and existence of democracy (1996: 7).

Charter 77 also proved that the actual size of a community of dissent mattered less than its existence, visibility, and the societal variegation of its members. For most of the 1980s Western scholars compared dissent in Czechoslovakia as somehow less in quality because its "quantity" could not measure up to the powerhouse of Solidarity next door.

According to Prečan, dissent in Czechoslovak began and ended with the possibilities inherent in that society under authoritarian communist rule--the normalization process set up the material conditions out of which dissent could both grow but not spread. Charter 77 and the initiatives it spawned and encouraged did not cause the downfall of the regime, but when the crisis became acute in November, 1989 the "graduates" of its school of dissent and organization acted quickly, enabled the mobilization of social forces, and "stood at the head of the democratic revolution and led it to its conclusion" (Prečan, 1997: 11).

The existence and stubborn longevity of Charter 77 breathed life into the principles espoused by Patočka, Havel, and Benda. Through it a "parallel polis" was created, wherein its members and supporters could "live in truth" and act responsibly, in both the moral and political sense. Moreover, this alternative public sphere was neither an ersatz creation rendered impotent by the party-state nor a philosophical ideal removed from the lives of average Czechoslovaks. The modus operandi of Charter 77 stimulated the growth of the public sphere and encouraged social dialogue. In relation to the
institutionalized politics of the post-communist era, Palouš states:

[Charter 77] created an environment in which people could learn again to live in the public sphere, to examine the state of common affairs and at the same time not to let slip the moment when it was necessary to act; when it was necessary to leave the parallel polis and begin to make—with everything this implied—real, that is “political” politics. The question of communication and the ability to hold a dialogue within our society is essential even today. Even today it is a question of how the non-political and the political politics combine. In my view it is still true that the second cannot exist without the first, that without a moral and civic measure, politics as a mere play of power is bound to degenerate and no parliament or system of politic [sic] parties can save it from its fall (1996: 7).

Finally, although Charter 77 might be seen in retrospect as a “training ground” for future democratic politicians and leaders of civil society, that was not really the point at the time. Because the Charter contained members of differing convictions and strong voices, there was also a tendency, in Havel’s words, “to judge the Charter according to the politics of particular Chartists” (1991: 324). In turn, this led to speculative navel-gazing as to whether or not the Charter was leaning to the left or right over time or on a particular issue. As Havel argued in 1986, Charter 77 was not conceived on a left-right axis, nor did it conduct its business two-dimensionally on that axis:

Charter 77 is neither left-wing nor right-wing, not because it is “somewhere in the middle,” but because it has nothing whatever in common with that spectrum, because in essence, it lies outside it. As a civic initiative that is politically undefined and does not seek to implement a political program of its own, it is—if I may say so—“above” it all, or, to put it more modestly, outside it all. It is concerned with the truth, with a truthful description of conditions, and with a free and objective criticism of those conditions. Which means that it is and must be concerned with truth no matter whom that truth favors (1991: 326).
Section 2

Chapter 7: The Democratic Opposition in Hungary

I. The Philosophical Influence of Lukács and Bibó

The practical importance of Lukács as a mentor for the coterie of students that came to be known as the Budapest School has already been outlined. The influence of his philosophy was also immeasurable, but both the political and philosophical choices he made were often highly contradictory and controversial. The "first generation" of Hungarian dissidents—for that is really what the Budapest School was—saw themselves not only as Lukács’ colleagues or students but in fact described themselves as his disciples. Their self-chosen terminology is illuminating, because they both collectively and individually sought to utilize, extend, and reinterpret Lukács’ work not only in terms of his own life and struggle but more meaningfully in terms of their own.

It is impossible within the scope of this work to summarize the depth and scope of this scholarly and personal interaction, but some generalizations can be made with certainty. From Lukács’ early focus on aesthetics (for example, the Heidelberg manuscripts) through to his later work, a central theme in his work was the problem of culture, and this remained a definitive question for his students and adversaries. Heller has indicated that Lukács’ concern went well beyond the possible reconciliation of high

---

1 I am highly indebted in my analysis here to my conversation with Ágnes Heller (22 August 1995) but also to the insights of Heller and others in her edited collection, *Lukács Revalued* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell) and John Burnheim’s edited collection (1994) *The Social Philosophy of Ágnes Heller* (Atlanta: Rodopi).
and popular culture, to a schema that saw culture as synonymous with authentic life, or the “immanence of meaning in life”. For Lukács, the question became whether or not life can be lived without alienation—which it certainly could not be unless culture were to be completely transformed (Heller, 1983: 3-4). Lukács held out to his students the philosophical and existential possibility that life could in fact be shaped through culture, and thus it is no mere accident that Hungarian dissidents in their early attempts to create parallel institutions or initiatives called their efforts a “counter-culture”, a “second culture”, and even a “non-conformist culture”. Indeed the double-entendre of the phrase “counter-culture” was intentional, referring not only to their sixties counterparts in the West, but also to this deeper Lukácsian notion.

The same can also be said for the category of class. Although Lukács famously repudiated *History and Class Consciousness* largely for reasons of political expediency rather than philosophical retraction, he put forward an idea of class much more in keeping with Hegel and the writings of the “young” Marx than with the Bolshevism of Lenin and the Russian revolutionaries. His radically teleological idea of a self-conscious proletariat (or its elite representatives) struggling inevitably toward historical destiny and authentic subjectivity today seems almost ridiculous in its optimism, not to mention universalist assumptions. However, underlying this is a deep understanding of class as a powerful nexus of social relations and identity, one that can be unmasked through a detailed sociological analysis of interests and behaviours. Again, it is not accidental that among Hungarian dissidents one finds much more emphasis on class and the class-based nature
of authoritarian communism. Thus, as might be expected, we find in the Hungarian
canon Konrád and Szelényi's *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power* as well as the
notion of the sub-intelligentsia forming itself into a non-conformist, dissident-friendly
class in Kis and Bence’s *Toward an East European Marxism*. It is noteworthy that
neither of these books was written by the direct “descendants” of Lukács, that is, those
most closely associated with him (such as Heller, Fehér, and Márkus).

As was typical for his generation of radical intellectuals east of the Rhine, Lukács
demonstrated a deep mistrust of modern science. Unlike Marx, whose belief in scientific
progress and the emancipatory possibilities of technology was linked to the general
intellectual climate of the 19th century, Lukács was formed by the irrational and immoral
outcomes of science in the early 20th century--the vicissitudes and horrors of the Great
War, the increasing inhumanity of industry, the arrogant hubris embedded in the willful
replacement of value with fact, subjectivity with supposed objectivity, history with
timeless laws, and so on. Moreover, Lukács began writing *as a Marxist* (that is, after his
sudden “conversion” to Marxism in late 1918) at a time when Marxism itself was being
scientized and transformed in methodology, with “scientific” orthodoxy ultimately
represented as dialectical materialism. Thus Lukács set for himself the Herculean task of
extracting “the latent critique of science from Marx’s own method” whereby he could
reconcile his own commitment to Marxism with his own experiences, and do so within
the ever-limiting strictures of the Comintern. Connected with this critique is his loyalty
to historicism, his demand that one always take into account the *historical character* on
which all “facts” are based, and his concern that scientific rationality thinly disguises a
totalizing tendency definitely not compatible with human liberation. There are obvious
regional parallels with respect to the critique of scientific rationality, and understanding
these helps to explain the similarity in content and approach in the dissident oeuvre. For
example, one can draw a line from Lukács through his students to the environmentalist
concerns of the Hungarian dissidents. In the same way one can draw a line from
Husserl’s critique of science through to Patočka’s phenomenology, Bělohradský’s
condemnation of abstract reason and impersonal objectivity and Havel’s call for a
reconciliation between impersonal science and the boundaries of the Absolute, along with
the reclaiming of human responsibility for the biosphere.

Even if these lineages to the Lukácsian legacy could be demonstrated as simply as
I have attempted to in the previous paragraphs, it would be misleading to assume that this
was either a direct or easy inheritance. Lukács was highly problematic figure on which to
model oneself as an independent critic of authoritarian communism when he bowed
before the authorities so many times in his life. It was not without good reason that Isaac
Deutscher referred to Lukács as the ultimate theorist and apologist of Stalinism.

This task was most difficult for his immediate disciples. Without wanting to
whitewash his decisions but to understand them in context of his philosophy, Heller and
others sought to consider the body of Lukács’ thought as a complete whole, refusing to
take the easy road of dividing up his life and thought into “young” versus “old”, “pre-
1918” versus “communist”, or “politics” versus “aesthetics”. In their search for
continuity and with deep respect for the master, however, they often fell into the trap of
overcoming his contradictions through higher and higher levels of philosophical
abstraction of their own, a process which obviously demonstrated their own erudition and
detailed knowledge of Lukács’ every word and thought, but which unfortunately has
rendered much of the analysis impenetrable to all but the initiated and seasoned expert.²

On the other hand, for those more active in the dissident circles of the 1980s and
for the most part removed by one generation from Lukács himself (and by his death in
1971), the task of simply taking him for granted, warts and all, was somewhat easier.
Thus Tamás was stating the obvious when he claimed in his answer to Heller et al:

The exact list of the divergences between you and Lukács...a lucid summary of the critical aspects of your views formed in the 1960s, is
already lingua franca of my generation. Together with the results of
Kołakowski, Kosík, and the Praxis circle, they are part and parcel of that
secret syntax that shapes the language of all of us (Tamás, in Heller, ed.,

They were at the same time more tolerant of his contradictions (philosophical cohesion
not being a practicable or desirable goal anyway) and less forgiving of his political errors,

²A telling example is the critique of Lukács’ On the Ontology of Social Being (the
three volume examination was published posthumously in 1976) written by Heller, Fehér,
Márkus and Vajda for Telos and later republished as part of the Lukács Revalued
collection. In terms of reverence and detailed textual examination, the authors proceed in
an almost Straussian fashion to both clarify and offer a critique of the Lukácsian
ontology. Unfortunately, the critical rejoinder authored by Gáspár Miklós Tamás is
almost (but not quite) as impenetrable, and leaves the reader completely baffled,
especially by the relationship between the six-page excursus on St. Anselm and Lukács,
other than the fact that both were obsessed with the intellectual category of being as
separate and distinct from religious questions of faith and the existence of God.
especially given the fact that they were clearly taking a different path. To the second
generation, taking a stand outside and apart from the insidious tentacles of the Hungarian
party-state was as important as it was for Lukács, always and above all a loyal party
member, to stay within its boundaries.

István Eörsi, the poet-dissident, prisoner of 1956 and friend of Lukács, was in
many respects a bridge-builder, both generationally and intellectually. As to the legacy of
Lukács, Eörsi did not hesitate in laying bare the embarrassments caused by many of his
positions both personal and political\(^3\) but also lauded his fully-developed persona, devoid
of pathos, and willingness to take any position regardless of the heresy it might engender.
His positions were maddening yet enlightening, but as Eörsi warns, “great enlightenment
can also lead to great blindness” (1987: 15). At the end of his life, Lukács advocated a
“complete break” with Stalinism while admitting that Stalin’s successors had retained “all
the essential points of his heritage”—and also his own (1987: 15). He knew that Stalinism
could not evolve into its opposite, but never saw himself as oppositional. Ultimately, his
stubborn ability to live within his own contradictions while philosophically both

\(^3\)A few examples: his published 1919 rejection of Bolshevism as “immoral” in
surrendering democracy to terror even as he joined the party, and faced his own paradox
as a political commissar in ordering the execution of eight men for their refusal to fight;
his dogmatic and Stalinist repudiation of History and Class Consciousness and his later
equation of social democracy with fascism; and his early search for intellectual
community in critique which he continued throughout his life despite his self-described
“monological way of life” depicted in the self-deprecating slogan “my party, right or
3-16.
justifying and rejecting them made him problematic for the regime and a point of
departure for the nascent opposition. As Eörsi stated:

Lukács is not only unacceptable for the general public, but also for
official Hungary. His slogan “Back to Marx” implies that the system had
deviated from Marx and that its ideological foundations were crumbling.
Since Stalin, theory has had no other function than to legitimize everyday
tactical decisions. If this is so, then his insistence on the rebirth of
Marxism is undoubtedly very embarrassing. Who is interested in such a
rebirth? After all, the population of the country agrees with its leaders on
only one ideological point: both are indifferent to Marxism (1987: 16).

Lukács showed that philosophy generally and critical Marxism specifically could
be kept alive under authoritarian communism, but at a great intellectual and personal
price. His disciples showed that Lukács’ own ideas could be extended without personal
compromise but only within the realm of philosophy. However, as Marx said, the point
was not to philosophize about the world, but to change it. Thus the second generation
took the critique and attempted to live it, on the margins of society to be sure, but at the
same time attempted to reunite theory and practice in open violation of the party-state.

István Bibó represented a very different type of influence on the Hungarian
dissidents, one that was more the result of a conscious political choice. He was neither a
maître-penseur nor a Marxist. His goal was not to contribute to or mastermind some type
of grand theoretical Verstehen, but rather to offer much more positional analyses and
suggest tactical remedies to seemingly intractable social and political problems.
Hungarian journalist, critic (and former editor of Beszélő) Sándor Szilágyi accurately, I
think, calls Bibó “Central Europe’s Political Therapist”, and notes that his style was
appropriately laden with the language and metaphors of clinical psychology and psychiatry. Bibó did this not to overburden his analysis by adding fear and other human neuroses to already complicated histories, but as a pragmatic choice, a diagnostic tool:

...we encounter so many largely fear-induced decisions and political hysterias when analyzing the historical processes of Europe (especially those of Central and Eastern Europe because the preceding periods and generations bequeathed a huge burden of unsolved national social and political problems to the participants and leaders of public life). Thus it is not fear that shapes history—it is history that shapes fear (Szilágyi, in Nagy, ed., 1991: 528).

Thus to extend the metaphor, Bibó was not a medical researcher, but a pharmacologist.

His writings contain much in the way of historical explanation and an underlying examination of social processes but above all “invariably outline the remedy” (1991: 528). Szilágyi explains:

Bibó always offered a way out, whether the problem arose from the unresolved issues of post-war peacemaking, the border disputes of Eastern Europe’s small nations, nationalism, the conflicts between Arabs and Israelis or Irish and British, the democratic political organization of an occupied Hungary, the situation after the crushing of the 1956 Revolution, or European anti-Semitism. Was he then a kind of political witch doctor, an all-knowing miracle worker, possessing the keys to all solutions, so the rest of us should simply accept his sage counsel? Far from it: Bibó always emphasizes that the solutions he recommends do not promise easy and quick success; quite the contrary, they require more than a little effort from those affected by the unsolved problems. These efforts demand that the participants acknowledge human motives instead of satanic malevolence on the part of their opponents and show a readiness to compromise instead of insistence on total fulfilment of their own wishes. When he talked of the future, Bibó did not present a rose-coloured Utopia—all he illustrated, using clear, rational arguments, was that any solution born out of mutual selfishness and the cornering of an opponent does not bode well for the future. He tried to convince opposing parties that they should consider each other not enemies but partners, and that together they should seek out

An excellent example of Bibó’s style and approach to political problem-solving can be found in his lengthy and detailed essay “The Jewish Question in Hungary After 1944”. The essay was written in 1948, a time of intense political upheaval in the country. Amidst the bombardment of angry accusations and denials of Holocaust responsibility, Bibó characteristically entered the fray with a carefully reasoned and balanced essay, deliberately examining some of the most potentially inflammatory issues of his day. With scrupulous attention to historical detail and its human consequences, he addressed Hungarian “collective” responsibility for the events of 1944, going back to the first anti-Jewish legislative measures enacted by the Horthy government to the point where these

---

4Admiral Miklós Horthy was commanding Admiral of the Austro-Hungarian Navy during the first World War and effective head of state from 1920 through to 1944. His regime was marked early by anti-Semitic tendencies; for example, the mass murders of Béla Kun’s “Red Terror” was matched by a “White Terror” where many “leftists” (i.e. Jews) were murdered. In the years of Horthy’s consolidation of power, “democracy” was often employed as code word for Jewish power, which only added to societal confusion and contempt. Horthy rule can be characterized by a number of contradictory actions and policies which in the long run served to heighten anti-Semitism in policy and practise. Supposedly acting in defence of the feudal and conservative interests that supported it, Horthy’s government both restricted Jewish participation in politics and the civil service while preserving and in fact allowing them to strengthen their economic activities (many of the most prominent Ausgleich industrialists of the country were assimilated Jews; at the end of the first World War their initiative and capital were urgently required to rebuild a nation drastically reduced in size and output by the Treaty of Trianon). Following the Anschluss of Austria in March, 1938 and in an ill-conceived attempt to both placate the parties of the right (especially the Arrow Cross, Hungary’s version of the National Socialists) and Germany as a formidable ally, the government, the first of many “anti-Jewish laws” was introduced, whereby no more than 20 % of public, professional, and business positions could be occupied by Jews. That was later followed by lowering of the threshold to 6% (in 1939) and a “miscegenation law” prohibiting intermarriage in 1941.
degenerated into persecution, forced ghettoization, and indeed (in rural Hungary) deportation to the death camps.

What is particularly striking in reading Bibó's essay so long after the events he described took place is his dogged effort to locate himself in the middle of a debate marked by hyperbolic extremes. Thus he is not willing to blame Hungarians--either individually or collectively--for their inability to reject the discriminatory legislation against Jews or restrictions against their economic activities, because he tries to have the reader understand the social genesis of such action. On the other hand, however, he is absolutely unequivocal in calling his nation morally bankrupt for the fact that the majority of Hungarians operated on a continuum from enthusiastic assistance to ignorance and apathy in allowing the rural deportations and urban ghettoization to take place. He does not mince words when he destroys the myth (now carefully cultivated for over 50 years; at the time of writing for less than five) that somehow the Hungarians managed to "save" the Budapest Jews through their enlightened and strategic action. Similarly, however, he

Despite ongoing persecution and participation in forced labour battalions, however, Jews were not required to wear the yellow Star of David, live in ghettos or face deportation until March, 1944, at which point the Germans militarily occupied Hungary and swiftly initiated the Hungarian *Endlosung* in the countryside.

The Holocaust did not really "happen" in Hungary until late in the war, that is, not until the German takeover and the government of the proto-Fascist Arrow Cross, led by Ferenc Szálasi. Mass deportations began in the summer of 1944. Of the over half a million Hungarian Jews who perished, the vast majority were those from the countryside who were deported directly to death camps. Approximately 200,000 Hungarian Jews survived, thus making the Budapest community the largest to survive in the entire region. Some have claimed that Horthy "sacrificed" the rural (read: less assimilated) Jews in
does not avoid tackling the inflammatory question of Jewish culpability, and carefully examines how both Jews and non-Jews developed mutually negatively-reinforcing views of the other, and how these experiences were both socially and historically constructed and distorted. He examines all the explanations and components of anti-Semitism historically and contemporaneously, including its reemergence in the immediate aftermath of the war. With Thomist logic he considers all of the possible counterarguments to his own position before defending it.6

Although he recognizes the infinite complexity of the problem and the inability of any one approach to “solve” it, his recommendations can hardly be improved upon:

When it comes to the Hungarian situation, our most urgent task is to formulate and disseminate an attitude of accepting responsibility for the persecution of Jews, and to create a public conception that takes the issues of responsibility and culpability seriously, while also clarifying the conditions, extent and limits of calling people to account. When it comes to the relationship between Jews and the community, we must recognize the reality and feasibility of both assimilation and a separate Jewish consciousness, create suitably clear conditions and a benevolent environment for both, and at the same time remove all generalizations,

In order to “save” the Budapest Jews; Bibó argues that the only compelling factors that saved the Budapest Jews were a timely delay in the deportation plans due to international pressure, the “confusion of the siege”, and finally the liberation by Soviet forces. In the end, Hungarian and German authorities acting cooperatively simply did not have time to finish the job (see Bibó, 1994: 160-162).

6For example, Bibó discusses the reasons for not accepting responsibility for the persecution and murder of the Jews before advancing his own arguments. Similarly, he gives scholarly consideration to all of the possible explanations for anti-Jewish prejudice and anti-Semitism (including the patently anti-Semitic explanations) and all of the arguments for and against Jewish assimilation, including those advanced by Jews and non-Jews, both religious and secular.
forced attitudes and demands from the entire issue of community identification (1994: 310).

Moreover, Bibó is adamant in linking responsibility to the (re) establishment of a moral order. Taking such responsibility was a necessary precursor to the creation of a politics where serious and decisive judgments could be made and be trusted. Being *mature, civilized, and in keeping with European values* demanded such action, and in particular Bibó called leaders and the intelligentsia responsible—because they were leaders and intellectuals (1994: 187). Avoiding such tragedies in the future would be impossible without an honest and objective recognition of the sins of the past, and necessary for any project of national reconciliation. Finally, a strong respect for the human dignity of Jews and their rights should not only be extended to all national minorities but indeed serve as a hallmark for the citizenship of everyone. This would have to be achieved in the context of reshaping the political, economic, and social order toward classlessness and true equality—objectives toward which Bibó felt the postwar national government was making some headway.

A striking comparison which suitably demonstrates Bibó’s intellectual heritage can be found in János Kis’ essay “On Ways of Being a Jew”. Kis wrote the essay in response to an “Open Letter to the Hungarian Jewry and to Hungarian Society” written by Salom (*Shalom*), an independent Hungarian Jewish peace group on the fortieth anniversary of the Holocaust and published in *Hírmondó*. *Salom* called for an open examination of the relationship between Jews and non-Jews, which forty years after the
Hungarian Holocaust (and nearly that long since Bibó’s essay was written) remained unresolved. More controversially, however, it called into question the automatic assimilationist bias of both Jews and of non-Jewish Hungarians towards Jews which had been prominent since 1867 and hegemonic since 1945.\(^7\) Salom gave voice to a growing community of young Jews who were examining their past, felt both an affinity for and solidarity with the state of Israel, and wanted to establish and practise Jewish traditions, secular as well as religious. To some degree, this mirrored developments among Polish (especially Warsaw) Jews, and among other national minorities both in Hungary and regionally (for example, among the Roma intelligentsia, as well as Slovaks and Romanians of Hungarian descent).

In his response Kis reveals his own personal bias, as a completely secularized and Magyarized Jew, but one who recognizes that in “an environment [that] still recognizes and distinguishes them as Jews...to strive for complete assimilation is an idle effort [which] can lead only to a compulsion of overcompensation, inferiority complex, and humiliating exposure (1989: 236). What Kis wants to explore “is that Hungarian Jews may choose from various life strategies which are all compatible with the coexistence of Jews and non-Jews, a coexistence which is based on mutual respect” (1989: 235).

---

\(^7\)Hungarian Jews were politically emancipated with the Ausgleich and the inauguration of the Dual Monarchy in 1867. Both orthodoxy and Zionism resisted assimilation, but both currents as well as the attempted cultivation of an independent secular Jewish culture were effectively eliminated by the combined factors of the Holocaust, emigration, and Sovietization.
Although he does not recognize the avenue of conscious Jewish identification (meaning immersion in traditions, a cultivation of the past and fostering of cultural/religious heritage) as his own, he argues that it is in keeping with the type of liberal democracy he supports. He advocates the possibility of multiple and overlapping identities as not undermining but in fact part of the very fabric of democratic choice, "...that every individual may choose not only the guiding philosophical and moral beliefs of his life, but also his affiliation with ethnic-cultural communities...." (1989: 235). However, he wants to acknowledge that the problem is one of possibilities--more options are open than the one advocated by Salom, though theirs should not be excluded either.

Like Bibó, Kis advocates an "honest confrontation with the past" and in this respect he tackles not only Holocaust responsibility but the question of Jewish involvement and implication in the imposition of Hungarian Stalinism. Both speak in the language of "moral responsibility" and are thus compelled to take what might otherwise be unpopular or at least potentially inflammatory positions. Thus Kis writes:

Is it possible to speak, in this regard, of the Hungarian Jewry's moral responsibility for the Stalinist dictatorship? Up to a certain degree, yes. For whatever opinion a considerable portion of the Jews held about the regime, they accepted it on the grounds that, at least, the persecution of the Jews would not return. This view drove some Jews to a religious identification with Communism, others to a certain conditional sympathy with the regime even during its darkest years. Only a relative few were able to keep their distance (1989: 241-242).

While Kis admits that the parallel with 1944 is inappropriate as Stalinism was hardly construed as its revenge, he reasons that Jews "if they did take part in this terror...have to
face its lessons as well” (1989: 242). Kis shows no hesitancy in taking on Salom itself for deviating from its own principles when it comes to the relationships between Israelis and Palestinians. It is not only contradictory, states Kis, to support the 1948 UN resolution acknowledging the right of Jews to their own state but not recognize that Israel now occupies territory accorded to a sovereign Palestinian state under the same resolution. It is also tactically foolhardy in terms of promoting their own legitimate rights as a minority. Concerned with both the appearance and actuality of proper political conduct, Kis suggests that it is “never good to treat our principles in a casual manner” and certainly “not worthwhile to appear in advance as somebody who violates in thought the fundamental principle of equality among minorities, nationalities and nations....” (1989: 243).

János Kis is only one among many in the democratic opposition who have openly in conversation and writing admitted their great debt and obvious appreciation of Bibó. Nonetheless, it might be tempting to conclude that Bibó was “selected” by a tactically-minded second-generation oppositional elite as a more fitting intellectual forebear than Lukács, and that this reflected the turn from Marxism to liberalism. To some degree this is true but, aside from the obvious strategy of uniting the populists with the urbanists with such projects as the Bibó Memorial Book, what the democratic opposition appreciated more in Bibó was his style rather than any particular content. Bibó was famously characterized as “the most tolerant Hungarian”, described himself as “passionately objective”, and his writing shows more of a talent for mediation and arbitration than for
classical political theory. He believed strongly in the basic tenets of any negotiating
process: recognizing your adversaries’ interests as well as your own, searching for areas
of agreement rather than disagreement, mutual communication as a method of building
trust. It should not be surprising to learn that among his many influences and intellectual
mentors he counted Dag Hammarskjöld, whose lectures he attended at the Institute on
World Peace at the Hague in the mid-1930s.

What the democratic oppositionists appreciated about Bibó is that he was
absolutely the opposite of a zealot, completely free of all political illusions and owing no
allegiance to anyone for his well-formed and reasoned opinions. It was this position of
inner freedom that enabled him to chastize the Communists for the accusations of class
subversion against their coalition partners in the late 1940s while telling the landlords and
factory owners that democracy in Hungary would never mean a return to the world of
latifundia and industrial exploitation. This stance of independence and a commitment to
the idea that direct and open communication can both raise the level of discourse and
open up new possibilities was common to those who so actively nurtured Hungarian
samizdat.

In any event, Bibó was not a liberal in the classical sense, and his principles of
social and economic equality have more in common with socialism than capitalism.
Throughout his period of political activism, he identified with the Populist Movement, at
a time when the movement was at its most progressive phase, representing leftist writers
and intellectuals concerned with land reform, grass-roots democratic transformation, and
campaigning for a "third way" between the liberalism and Marxism.⁸

II. Kis and Bence: Toward an East European Marxism?

János Kis and György Bence published Toward an East European Marxism in the West under the pseudonym Marc Rakovski. The English-language version of the book⁹ is a collection of essays first published in French journals between 1973 and 1977; only later was it published in Hungarian samizdat under the title A sovjet tipusu társadalom marxista szemmel (Soviet-type Society from a Marxist Perspective). In fact, the title of the book and even its subject matter is ironic, as in many respects it represents the beginning of both authors' turn away from Marxism as a way of coming to terms with Soviet-type societies in East-Central Europe, not only analytically but politically as well.

In their introduction, Kis and Bence suggest that all previous East European Marxist analyses of Soviet-type societies can be basically reduced to three categories: those that accept the prima facie self-definition as socialism, those that claim such societies are transitional, or those that maintain that they are in fact some form of

---

⁸Bibó was a key author of the 1937 program for the March Front, which called for the elimination of traditional latifundia, a peasant cooperative movement, a land reform program whereby estates would be redistributed to the landless poor, opposition to both pan-German and pan-Slavic expansionism (Bibó was clearly against imperialism in all forms), institutionalized human rights and new radically democratic forms and procedures in keeping with new forms of land ownership and politics.

capitalism. They propose to take an entirely new approach, for they claim that if "marxism is possible at all in Eastern Europe, it has to stand on a completely new theoretical foundation" (1978: 15). Thus they state:

The hypothesis which we are going to take as the point of departure for our investigations is therefore the following. Soviet-type society is neither socialist nor capitalist, nor is it a mixture of the two systems. It is a class society sui generis, a different kind of class society existing alongside capitalism (1978: 15).

The approach is not without obvious difficulties, because a certain amount of conceptual stretching--if not outright reconfiguration--is inevitable, making a Marxist analysis as conventionally understood difficult indeed. Thus they state:

In order to approach the fourth hypothesis we have just set out above, it is necessary to reconsider the whole traditional structure of historical materialism. In the generally accepted framework of historical materialism it is impossible to give a description of a modern, non-transitional society where there is not capitalist private property but where the means of production are not at the collective disposal of the producers; where there is no bourgeoisie or proletariat but the population is still divided into classes; where economic priorities are not normally determined by the market, but neither are they chosen by means of rational discussion among the associated producers, and so on (1978: 15).

Thus for Kis and Bence conventional Marxist historiography works best for capitalism, its original intended object, but is very problematic when it comes to the authoritarian communist regimes of East and Central Europe. However, because of the "unilinear evolutionism" Kis and Bence suggest is inherent in Marx's historical materialism, one cannot suggest that Soviet-type societies can exist in and of themselves as class societies existing alongside capitalism. For Kis and Bence historical materialism permits "no
place for a modern social system which has an evolutionary trajectory other than capitalism and which is not simply an earlier or later stage along the same route” (1978: 17).

In fact, however, Kis and Bence do not take the reader on a voyage of discovery toward a new East European Marxism. The second chapter, “‘Market Socialism’ in Retrospect” deals with the antinomies of market socialism, both as an ideology and as it was actually practised. To the extent that the authors analyze the class-basis of those in whose interests the reform processes were initiated and examine the social forces underpinning such efforts, theirs is definitely an effort of critical political economy, but not necessarily a project of Marxist historiography. As they themselves admitted later:

We were looking for classes whose dynamism would lead to socialism, and we were unable to locate them. The fact that socialist movements did not exist, not even in embryonic form, would not have discouraged us. For Marxism has an old—even if only vaguely tested—recipe for such situations. If we could have supposed that the existing tendencies or movements would, in the near future, undergo such a differentiation that the evolution of socialist movements would follow, we could have turned to the old Marxist recipe. But there seemed to have been no ground for such a hypothesis. We had to content ourselves with stating rather empty formulas such as: the observable decentralisation of the economic system, the changes in the consumer habits of the working class or the evolution of an intellectual counter-culture might create more favourable conditions if, at a point, the cause of socialism would seem timely. But why would it become timely? We had no answer to this question (1980: 294-295).

More interesting from my perspective is the third chapter, “The Intellectuals”. Here Kis and Bence try to explain their own existence sociologically and intellectually: how is it that the Soviet-style system they lived under produced non-conformist
intellectuals such as themselves? Intellectual workers, in so far as they are “in regular contact with the process of cultural and scientific creation” are permitted a privileged yet narrow and certainly institutionalized form of debate and discussion, for without it such work could not continue. After all, as Kis and Bence suggest, “a minimum of public communication within the academic community is still an irreducible precondition of advancement in learning” (1978: 45). Over time this forms into a de facto public sphere, “serving as a functional substitute for political discussion and organisation among those who take part in it” (1978: 44). This may explain the possibility for open, unofficial and uncensored discussion, but does not in and of itself explain its evolution into an oppositional ethos. As Kis and Bence state:

...the general institutional set-up of scientific and cultural production invests the intelligentsia with the ability to form a collective consciousness of a relatively high level. But the simple existence of this set-up in itself explains nothing more than that. It does not explain the fact that the reproductive process of science and culture produces nonconformist intellectuals who, rejecting the official channels of communication reserved for the intelligentsia, try to work out ideas which by their very nature require a “counter-public sphere”, so to speak. Nor do these general conditions of intellectual production explain the emergence of a sub-culture, providing non-conformism with a breathing space (1978: 48).

To a large degree the development of such an opposition was made possible paradoxically first by the destalinization process’s rescinding of physical and ideological terror, and secondly through the death of internal reformism. Ironically, the inherent need of Stalinism to produce and denounce imagined enemies symbiotically generated the ability to produce the real McCoy. The authors maintained that,
By establishing a symbolic relation between the smallest details of individual behaviour and the broadest objectives of social development, the official ideology made any lack of conformity with the expected behaviour appear to involve opposition to the ultimate aims, a political crime which demanded terror as a response (1978: 49).

Moreover, the end of mass terror necessitated elite division within the tight circle of power emanating from the party-state between those who had been directly involved in its deployment and those (often affected by it) who agitated for demobilization. Destalinization as an elite phenomenon necessarily expanded as each side sought cultural products (literature, revisionist historical accounts) to demonstrate the correctness of its position.

At the same time, the professional autonomy granted to the physical sciences (necessary for technological advancement) combined with the “political research control and the social utilization of scientific results” to produce a unique East European phenomenon: the “expert” who with strong moral conviction “intervenes in social questions with a great deal of naïvety but also with a great deal of courage” (1978: 55). In some ways the privilege and space afforded the physical sciences initially led to greater possibilities for either open dissent and/or internal marginalization. In the social sciences, however, such choices were not available— as Kis and Bence suggested, when you are in “direct contact with ideological production, the correlation is far from

---

10 Privileges included the possibilities for private travel or as official representatives of scientific organizations, contacts from abroad, enhanced social status at home etc. Scientific researchers could also effectively self-marginalize by turning their attention to areas not the focus of international competition.
ambiguous" (1978: 56). Conformism and compromise thus become the hallmarks of most social scientists, faced with dilemma of having to choose between career advancement against the impossibility of conducting research *at all*. More curious and important for Kis and Bence, however, is the post-Stalinist production of a class stratum they refer to as the "sub-intelligentsia"--archivists, interviewers, researchers, translators, data-processing operators. Made possible by the "factory-type organization of scientific and cultural research", such "auxiliary personnel" make intellectual production possible, but are neither its chief beneficiaries nor dependent on its rigidly hierarchical relations. Nonetheless, they are able to generate enough income to guarantee a modest level of economic security, are in thinking professions, but are liberated from the types of compromises necessary at higher levels. This is the breeding ground for dissidence *par excellence*.

Sociologically, Kis and Bence have begun to explain the genesis of non-conformism at its very roots. Members of the sub-intelligentsia are "plugged into the communication channels of the intelligentsia", allowing both contact and an alliance with non-conformist intellectuals. At the same time, such intellectuals no longer occupy a lonely and large private marginalized space--they suddenly have a public, and out of this public emerges the counter public-sphere. The process is summarized as follows:

The work of an interviewer affords contact with sociological research, the work of a translator keeps him in touch with literature or with some field of social science, etc. Above all, among sub-intellectuals with degrees there are many who are not content with passively satisfying their curiosity, but try to have some autonomous scientific or cultural activity.
Their chances of success in submitting their work to the consideration of the scientific community or in having it published in book form or in an official review are clearly much less than the chances of the established intellectuals. They therefore have a very strong motivation to look for a non-official public sphere and to find readers, critics, and people with whom to discuss among their own ranks. This is still true even if we have to admit that for a minority of them their position as sub-intellectuals is only a temporary one, and (the result of a rigid labour market) they are only delayed on their way to joining the intellectual establishment. The nonconformists thus find quite a receptive audience among the sub-intellectuals; it is relatively easy for them to direct their aspirations towards opposition—aspirations which, having no place in the established science and culture, seek fulfilment on their own, outside the official institutions anyway (1978: 61-62).

By the late 1960s, Kis and Bence remind their readers that the “social conditions” were ripe for nonconformism in most East European countries. Post-Stalinist norms were in place, the limits of freedom (or lack of it) in most disciplines were more or less clearly delineated, the auxiliary jobs were plentiful and were filled by the dramatic increase in university graduates. I would also add to their argument that given the above conditions there was a considerable generational as well as sociological coherence to the cohort in question. Moreover, this group by their formative political experiences rejected the paths of their mentors and generational antecedents: reforming the system from above was not possible, conforming to its strictures was an intellectual and moral dead end. Although it is clear in retrospect that Kis and Bence generalize too widely from the specificities of the Hungarian experience,¹¹ they do much to explain both the possibility and the internal

¹¹For example, it can hardly be suggested that in the Czechoslovak case nonconformists could keep themselves meaningfully employed in auxiliary positions—unless one were to expand the definition to include coal stokers and garbage collectors!
dynamism for the transformation of a “sub-culture of sub-intellectuals” into an “embryonic counter-culture” (1978: 62). In the same way that the system itself began to “produce” nonconformist intellectuals and a sub-culture of the sub-intelligentsia, so too does a counter-public sphere grow into a more formalized political opposition. The existence and extension of such a sphere is guaranteed over time through such innovations as the phenomenon of samizdat publishing. However, Kis and Bence realize that in both their answer and from their experience they beg several additional questions.

First of all, does the counter-public sphere have any real connection to the workers, the bedrock of authoritarian communist society? For as Kis and Bence bluntly state, the workers “have no interest in the elimination of the underground” nor do they necessarily have any direct interest in its continuation (1978: 65). Is a nonconformist counter-culture simply the “irreducible epiphenomenon” of intellectual work, access to which all workers and other ordinary citizens are effectively denied? Their answer to this charge, written before the Polish August but certainly with knowledge of the alliance-building happening through KOR, is that in the first instance workers must organize themselves. Here Kis and Bence are not falling back on Marxist sloganeering. They genuinely could not see how any meaningful communication or political abertura could

Arguably in normalized Czechoslovakia the counter-culture was more completely severed from the officially-sanctioned realm. However, given the reprisals from 1970 onward, the ranks of the marginalized swelled to the extent that a counter-public sphere could develop internally without any dynamic interaction with the party-state. Thus many of Kis’ and Bence’s arguments still hold, if only onward from the point onward where cultural autonomy is concretized into actual opposition.
take place between social classes unless this precondition were met. This is neither inevitable nor easy, in fact the intellectuals tend to face an uphill battle in terms of workers’ perceptions of them as the privileged yet complaining consumers of their surplus product. This does not mean “the sole function of the oppositional ideologies is to talk to the nonconformist intellectuals themselves, to give them moral justification and hope to hold out” (1978: 66). Such a closed conversation would be futile, they admit, and this confession forces the authors to consider the charge (often levied by the conforming intellectuals who in their own way claim to be expanding critical space) that “the underground does more harm than good to the cause of cultural and social freedom” (1978: 66).

This leads Kis and Bence to the second and most critical question. What is the long-range effectiveness of such a development in terms of generating institutional change? They agree that it is practically impossible to gauge the impact of their efforts, as much depended on both internal (systemic) developments and the nature of the external environment (geopolitics, the Cold War). However, they do extol the practical virtue of what they call “propaganda by action” which one can see is extremely close in description and spirit to the Havel’s dictum to “live in truth”:

Propaganda by action means setting an example, showing by one’s own actions that it is not necessary to accept the world installed by the regime, that it is possible to act according to norms other than those of the existing institutional system. In societies where the dominated class has the means to create autonomous organisations, no particular significance is attached to this form of propaganda; generally speaking, it does not constitute a separate task but is an integral part of the normal functioning
of the class organisations and the everyday life of their members. Its importance is so much the greater in a society in which no one social class is in a position to organise itself, especially when the institutional system manages not only to impose its supremacy externally on all classes but also the models of behaviour and attitudes compatible with its reproduction. We are not saying, of course, that the cohesion of the system is ensured only or principally by a belief in the impossibility of change: it is ensured in the first place by institutional mechanisms and by institutionalised interests. However, this belief plays its part in ensuring the system’s coherence. Consequently, the counter-public sphere, as well as nonconformism as a mode of personal behaviour, decrease not only the coherence of the system, by their very existence (1978: 67).

This counter-public sphere, or nascent civil society, is thus disproportionately important under authoritarian communism. Walking the talk, living in truth, or propaganda by action becomes both the moral and political means to achieve and extend authentic public space. Furthermore, it is reinforced and encouraged by samizdat literature, which “breaks the monopoly of the ruling ideology’s patterns of thought, and introduces new concepts and alternative ideas into the social consciousness” (1978: 67). In turn, “the greater the diversity of the ideologies formed in the underground, the more differentiated social thinking becomes, and the easier it is to relativise the official ideology’s Weltanschauung” (1978: 67). The world-view and the limitless horizons of the party-state is diminished by the very existence of ideological pluralism.

In their analysis, Kis and Bence concede that on the surface, their views are consonant with those of the Western Left, but beneath it sharp differences exist. Western Marxists have a hard time understanding how the ideas of “moral regeneration and cultural renaissance as alternatives to political action” are necessarily related to “the
limitations of the underground’s practical opportunities”. Paradoxically an extreme stance, such as nonconformism, can and must be linked to a strategy of self-limitation. Revolution is not a political answer, in fact not even overt politics is. This oppositional approach must at the same time imply “a deep democratic content”, which it necessarily does if it is effectively promoting an independent public sphere which challenges “the institutional system itself, in which access to the public sphere is a privilege that depends on one’s position in the social division of labour and one’s educational qualifications. This, in fact, is also an answer to the first question, in opening up bridges to other larger, more populous segments of society.

The remainder of Kis and Bence’s book is dedicated to an analysis of the “two systems” of industrial capitalism and state socialism as well as what they call “the detours of East European Marxism”. In the first place, the authors are concerned to show the inaccuracies and ahistoricity of various convergence theories, both those created to “neutralize” the technological alienation and exploitation inherent in capitalism according to the efficient and necessary dictates of industrial progress, as well as those that seek to demonstrate disillusionment with authoritarian communism as not leading to real socialism. In the latter case, it is both necessary (and incorrect in the authors’ view) to demonstrate the extent to which authoritarian communism is like capitalism--the left criticism is not only to accuse it of right-wing deviation but actual convergence. Because Kis and Bence wanted to chip away at the illusions Western leftists had about Soviet-style societies, their attack on left convergence theories are illuminated by a particular
Thus they demonstrate *inter alia* that the ruling class in Soviet societies can never be property-owning as under capitalism, that there are simply no functional equivalents to share ownership or capital/money markets, that institutional decentralization does not result in greater economic independence *in practice*, and that the institutions and procedures of formal democracy and freedom of association generate political (and indeed class) competition and a functioning civil society inconceivable in the East.

Finally, Kis and Bence produce by way of conclusion an interesting idealist and materialist analysis of the ideological developments within Soviet Marxism—idealistic because they take the force and consequences of the ideological struggle as having great practical meaning (and demonstrate this to be the case), and materialist because they illustrate the social bases of the various positions taken historically and link them to class interest and societal tension. Beginning with Leninism, the debates of the 1920s, and the eventual (and predictable) Stalinist imposition of dialectical materialism, which succeeded in emptying official Marxism of all meaningful content, they tell the story of how the apparat succeeded in both adapting Marxism to its own needs while crushing political and ideological alternatives or variations (1978: 110).

Their account of the rebirth of Marxist debates during the 1950s owes much to their own position as both critics and inheritors of the Marxism of the “thaw”. Thus they praise and give credit to those who broke radically with “everything that had been used to justify the terror” and their return to original sources, such as Marx, Lenin, and Lukács
(1978: 131). They are most harsh in their condemnation of the “marxism of the thaw” as both naive and lacking in class content. Such Marxists assumed correctly that the political “deformations” of the Stalinist era were not just closely related to but actually stemmed from certain ideological errors, but they were naive in thinking that an ideological purge and a new set of objectives would do the trick in terms of reforming the system. As Kis and Bence state, “the internal structure of this critique is still determined by the object criticized, that is to stay (sic) by Stalinist ideology itself” (1978: 134). They refused to re-admit class analysis into the picture, as “the critics of the system of terror were insistent on the social homogeneity of Soviet-type societies” (1978: 132). To do otherwise would have meant reopening the cans of worms of the 1920s (for example, the peasant versus the industrial worker dilemma) or worse yet to admit the apparat itself was based on class interests different from those of the rest of society, most importantly, the proletariat. Moreover, their critique was premised on the practical need to end the terror, and the limitless and downward spiralling of “objectively” labelling as class enemies all who disagreed with or in some small way deviated from the official course. Acknowledging any level of class antagonism gave credence to conservatives and Stalinist-restorationist forces who wanted to suppress all disagreement by force.

This all becomes important for how Kis and Bence account for themselves as “underground marxists” in contradistinction to “official marxists”. With great debt to the “young” Marx and to Lukács, they insert back into Marxism a positive view of the potentialities of human kind. Human beings are by nature free and social beings, and
within certain limiting conditions can “create their own culture by their own interrelated actions” and have the “opportunity for...conscious and collective control of the evolution of their social life” (1978: 135). And they put class analysis back into the picture, which they believed at the time would allow them to generate a more subtle and valid critique of the actual workings of Soviet-style societies. In so doing they disengaged themselves from both the ruling group and the proletariat, opening up the way for “a search for the autonomous social base of marxism” (1978: 138). Again, however, this concession illuminated the problem of linkages with the working class, still necessary if such ideology were to be a) socialist in form and b) politically transformative in nature.

It is here in the last five pages of the book that they begin to come up with a conception of what an actual critical East European Marxism might look like, but in many respects, it was too little, too late. With great prescience the authors state:

Of course, if East European marxism is to find its connection with the working class in practice, and if by its own theoretical means it is to help the process of practical learning in which the socialist movement--organised and processing a class consciousness--spreads to an increasingly large part of the working class, it is not enough for marxist intellectuals simply to lose their illusions about the ruling class. There must also be such changes in the organisation of society and in the situation of the working class so that the institutions of power are no longer strong enough to fragment the working class. Until these changes can be foreseen, the marxism which has definitively broken away from official marxism is threatened with disappearance, or with dissolution among the non-marxist underground ideologies which are better suited to the social isolation of the nonconformist intelligentsia. But at least it has succeeded in avoiding the trap of trying to live as a parasite on official marxist ideology (1978: 138).

In fact, both phenomena occurred. Underground or unofficial marxism was doomed to
irrelevance as a political ideology for nonconformist intellectuals disconnected from the working class. And as it happened non-Marxist, or more accurately, not specifically Marxist ideas were in fact better-suited to the construction of strategy and tactics of dissent.

By the late 1970s, Kis and Bence recognized themselves as Marxists only in the genealogical sense. They retained elements of Marxism methodologically: that a social system must be understood in its totality, and that “significant reform” can only be possible with the support of “significant social forces”. Thus, the working class(es) in the very sufficiency of their numbers were necessary for political change to occur; they concurred with Michnik that the ultimate chance of success for new evolutionism lay in the hands (and actions) of the working class (1980: 285-286). Moreover, they maintained their sympathy for an optimistic “Marxist anthropology” and the philosophy of values they connected with Marx’s early writings. Connected to both propositions above is a notion of political engagement which though not exactly teleological in orientation certainly strives toward social betterment.

Kis and Bence did not simply “grow out of” their Marxist approach. It was more that their own personal intellectual trajectories led them to a place where the branches of their thought that led them back to a Marxist position were neither completely determinative nor uniquely Marxist. For example, their commitment to the development

12Thus it is no accident that it is in Poland and in the left wing of Solidarity that Marxism persisted ideologically in the 1980s.
of independent and oppositional social movements was philosophically related to the Marxist coordination of its political and socialist aims through the specific agency of the proletariat. But for Kis and Bence, their program of radical reformism, and the similar projects of other East-Central Europeans, the “autonomous self-organization of society” was also an end in itself, and completely unrelated to either democratic (or the democratizing of) socialism or a philosophy of praxis. As well, although they might agree with the Marxist conception of humankind that we are all “free, conscious, and universal being[s]…only held back by…historically developed circumstances”, this belief could not serve as a source of either hope or activism in the 1970s after the defeat of the old style of reformism. In fact, they contend that one can likely find more oppositional inspiration in an existentially-rooted concept of humankind as subject to perverse levels of manipulation but somehow equally perversely maintaining the innate ability “to break off from the Dasein of manipulation with some kind of a last, desperate effort” (1980: 285). Thus their conception of alienation owes as much to Adorno and Kafka as to Marx, and any notion of mitigating its presence (rather than through some project of liberation) is more modest in scale, such as Havel’s notion of living in truth.

Finally, Kis and Bence never went as far as a “total refusal” of Marxism--a charge explicit in their writing against “Polish ex-revisionists”--and here Leszek Kołakowski is obviously whom they have in mind.\(^{13}\) No Marxist of either present or past persuasion

\(^{13}\)In their postscript to the English published version of the *Profil* volume, from which this information is taken (which appeared as “On Being a Marxist: A Hungarian
would have to disavow all beliefs or history in order to feel comfortable in the new
opposition of East-Central Europe, but at the same time "is quite unlikely to derive any
relevant theoretical or political guidance from it [i.e. Marxism]" (1980: 266).

III. The Social Contract of Beszélő and "Radical Reformism"

The program of "radical reformism" was premised on being tactical rather than
totalizing. Its possibilities may not have been as great or promising as the grand
ideological swath cut by Marxism, but on the other hand, it did not set its sights on great
heights in the first place. János Kis and György Bence were quite self-effacing on this
point, and even suggested that "Radical reformism doesn't offer a political programme in
the strict sense of the world; it merely expounds some tactical considerations" (1980:
285). By its very tactical nature, radical reformism was intended to be self-limiting, but
also crisis-avoiding. "Tactical questions" such as the respect for human rights or the
expansion of independent social space were "not derived from the need for a different
system taking the place of the present one" (1980: 285). Echoing Michnik, the old
dilemma of reform versus revolution had been invalidated by East-Central European
experience:

---

View", Socialist Register, 1980), the authors respond to E.P. Thompson's famous "Open
Letter to Leszek Kołakowski" and Kołakowski's reply, "My Correct Views on
Everything" (which appeared in the 1973 and 1974 issues of the Register respectively).
Although they agree that by Thompson's terms Kołakowski can in no way consider
himself a Marxist, they consider themselves such in terms of Marxism as a heritage or a
tradition.
The assumption here is that social aims, worth fighting for in Eastern Europe, are those that can be realised without resulting in a crisis of power; anything else leads to the fabrication of utopias or straight to catastrophe. The alternative of reform or revolution is not a valid one in Eastern Europe, the sensible choice is between two kinds of reformism. The reformers of the 50s and 60s, the ‘old evolutionists’, wanted to promote their cause ‘from the inside’, by enlightening and convincing the political leadership. ‘Neo-evolutionism’, to use the term suggested by the Polish historian Adam Michnik, tries to draw the lesson from the failure of this tactical conception. Michnik concludes that internal criticism is not capable of influencing the leadership effectively: it is exposed to conjunctural changes of power and, in the long run, it is bound to give up its critical content. Serious and lasting pressure on the government can only by exerted by independent social movements (1980: 285).

The most important programmatic statement of “radical reformism” remains the 1987 special issue of Beszélő outlining the editors’ call for a new “social contract”. With the possibility of Kádár’s departure from the political scene combined with the ever-widening circle of dissent, Kis and others sensed that this would be a key document, around which discussion and debate would take place. Their intention was not to produce a statement of utopian vision or a call for radical grass-roots action, but they did want to move beyond the relatively narrow base of largely Budapest intellectuals to a wider audience. Thus the contract was intended to have mass-based appeal; it was written simply, with very concrete suggestions as to how one might begin to turn from a stance of generalized dissatisfaction and pessimism to targeted activism. For example, they advocate utilizing existing opportunities and exploiting them for making new demands and having their voices heard. Under the sub-heading “Don’t Just Grumble: Demand” they state:
Any forum where those below can have their say is acceptable. The briefing sessions that deputies of the National Assembly or council members hold for their constituents are good for this purpose. Programs sponsored by the Patriotic People's Front or the T.I.T. (Society for the Dissemination of Scientific Knowledge), as well as the clubs, political seminars, and open Party meetings are all steps in the right direction. But best of all are the public forums at work: the production conference, the shop meeting, the trade-union meeting, KISZ (Union of Communist Youth) and Party locals. Invite the country’s leaders to the factories and institutions. Bombard the headquarters of the political and voluntary public organizations with resolutions put into writing. Respond to the announcements of the Central Committee, the SZOT (National Council of Trade Unions), and the government. Demand that the materials of the reform debates be made available. Invite the authors. Adopt stances on their proposals. Elaborate concepts regarding the future of your workplace. And organize reform clubs at work (reprinted in Uncaptive Minds 1.1 (May 1988): 7)

The demand is nothing less than an exhortation for public involvement and debate, to join in the recreation of civil society and to participate in it.

Two other important points are in order with respect to the Beszélő program: first, it was a program, and second it was meant to be pragmatic and within the realm of the possible. The first point is almost so obvious as to be overlooked, but it is critical. As the authors state in the introduction to the issue: “The 1956 revolution gave Hungary its last political program” (1988: 8). Not only were the authors paying direct homage to the legacy of 1956, they were conscious of resurrecting many of the 1956 demands in a new context. To keep their demands within the realm of the possible, however, they recognized that time was needed, and compromises would be demanded. Thus they present the demands recognizing that they might fall short of political ideals, but also as a means of allowing the process and the discussion to advance further. In many respects,
the Social Contract reads as the opening position of one party in a delicate and complex set of negotiations. The party in question here--the democratic opposition--is concerned to be forceful in making demands, show the other side where they have already compromised (thus demonstrating their inherent reasonableness and willingness to bargain), and even generous in giving the other side credit where credit is due. Thus the authors state:

Political developments since the consolidation [i.e. post 1956] must also be recognized: the government has accepted mass consumption and tolerated certain elements of a market economy; several associations of Western orientation have been formed in the social sciences; the official ideology has been relaxed; specialized knowledge has gained in prestige; and the political differences between the new generation of Party cadres and the professional elite have narrowed. The external conditions have also improved: Hungary is more open to the West than thirty years ago; the threat of Soviet intervention has declined; and the Soviet Union's leaders are more tolerant (1988: 8).

Consonant with this logic, Beszéd demanded basic civil and political rights, the rule of law, press freedom and a healthy dose of constitutionalism, whereby there would be institutional checks on the rule of the party. They did not demand, as has been noted in chapter four, multiparty competition, institutionalized pluralism, or even abolition of the leading role of the party. There is a bit of political sleight-of-hand in operation, however, because practically the program demanded a form of functional division of governmental powers, whereby the MSZMP would retain control of foreign affairs and defence, thus ensuring the commitment to the Warsaw Pact. Internal affairs and the justice system--those institutions necessary for the installation of civil and political rights-
-would be influenced and effectively limited by opposition demands and a new *modus operandi*, to be constitutionally entrenched at some point. On matters more economic and less institutional, the program was more radical on the face of it, but not when one considers that Hungary was the country of great economic experimentation and of the New Economic Mechanism. They boldly ask for “equal rights for various forms of ownership in the economy”, the development of a real capital market, the dismantling of monopolies, and euphemistically “a flexible price policy in the interest of balance-of-trade equilibrium instead of policies to increase particular exports and restrict imports” (read: price deregulation and adjustment to world levels).

The Social Contract was immediately successful in sparking debate regarding its content. A letter published in the more radical *Demokrata* criticized the authors of the *Beszélő* program for creating a compromise that for all its logic was completely unsustainable—while Soviet troops remained on Hungarian soil and while the party remained in charge, there can be no possibility of cleverly dividing up ministries in a “yours, mine, and ours” fashion. Curiously, this argument, coming from a radical and uncompromising democrat, echoes the same argument of the partisan hard-liners throughout the region that allowing any thin wedge of reform will crack it open, political control was an all-or-nothing game. In a sense, this critique misses the most important and arguably more deeply democratic point of the authors—that democracy is not about zero-sum games or winner-take-all solutions, but about imperfect compromises and at times an ideologically inconsistent and impure matching of theory and practice.
This critique was at odds with another critique—that of Gáspár Miklós Tamás, who in fact gained greater renown at home and abroad for his views on the Social Contract, more noteworthy because he himself was a regular contributor to Beszélő and other samizdat journals. Tamás held not only that the system was essentially unreformable (again, not unlike the die-hards, but from the opposite perspective), but that the attempt to reform it unsuccessfully would, in a sense, erode the moral high ground of the dissidents. Reformed communism might be better than an unreformed one, but in Tamás’ view,

If people don’t have to suffer for their views but nevertheless still have no real influence over what happens, the longer such a situation continues the greater the difference develops between words and deeds. We cannot develop a normal political life for the future on such a basis (1988:12).

Tamás argued that it goes against the very nature of the communist system to engage in any form of power-sharing, to give concessions, to be anything less than what it is. The case of Poland remained, for Tamás, a case in point—even the weakest communist party in the region cannot allow civil society to become a counterpower, or not for long. These comments, made by Tamás at the time, seem to me to confuse the tactical position of the compromise with a statement of ultimate aims, which the Beszélő program surely was not. Seen in this light—as a manoeuvre or an opening position in a nested game—not only does it make more sense but its success cannot be denied.

The Beszélő program was not only timely but served to expand the universe of political discourse, to the point where less than two years later, proto-oppositional forces
at the round table talks could breezily move through and past these proposals to ones that were far more sweeping. The conditions for such a discussion had already changed radically by then, but one should not underestimate the program in helping to construct and shape those new conditions. Where the Social Contract was ultimately less successful was in its call for involvement and participation—a more grass-roots flowering of public debate and civic initiatives, at first through existing bodies and then in the transformation of them. From beginning to end, the Hungarian transition remained a largely elite phenomenon, and to the extent that an alternative civil society was created, it neither inspired mass participation nor was defined by it.

IV. Kis’ Democratic Alternative

After the imposition of martial law in Poland, the friendship and intellectual collaboration of Kis and Bence dissolved. At issue was a principled disagreement as to how the Hungarian opposition ought to proceed in the aftermath of December 13, 1981.14 Bence felt that moving forward openly and publicly with dissident activities after the brutal suppression of Solidarity was unfairly dangerous, and he was not in favour of risking the existential security of their followers. Kis was of the opposite view, and felt that the Polish situation showed both the possibility of meaningful political action, and

---

14My understanding of the subtleties of the conflict between Kis and Bence has been greatly enhanced by my personal and electronic conversations with Professor Éva Karádi of Budapest.
the importance of continuing forward. In a sense, the creation of Beszélő was Kis’ answer to Bence.

In early 1989, on the eve of the historic transformations that were about to sweep across the region, a collection of János Kis’ most important essays (largely from Beszélő) were printed in English under the title Politics in Hungary: For a Democratic Alternative. Most of the essays were written in response to contemporary events in Hungary from 1983-1988, but woven in and through them can be found Kis’ blend of political theory, insightful historical analysis, strategic and positional analysis, social commentary and critique. In his introduction to the volume, Timothy Garton Ash notes that one reason Kis has the intellectual authority he does is as a result of his range and diversity. He is a philosopher by training who writes practically and is historically specific and contingent. He is a student of Lukács (and therefore of Marx) who goes beyond this training to encompass Anglo-American liberalism. Finally, as Garton Ash states,

One particular strength of his political analysis is that he is almost equally good on all elements in the political process or ‘game’: on the Party as well as the democratic opposition to which he belongs, on the parliament, and on the vital intelligentsia groups--writers, journalists, economists, lawyers, sociologists, political scientists--which came together precisely in these five years (1983-1988) to form a growing, albeit still heterogeneous pressure group for change (“Introduction”, 1989: 5).

Moreover, reading the collection historically gives one a profound sense of the extent to which Kis was able to elucidate paths and alternatives while literally in the midst of what was going on. Hegel’s Owl of Minerva would be envious indeed, as only a cursory
examination of Kis’ exhortations would reveal: writing in 1987 that Kádár must go (shortly before he, in fact, did), supporting Popular Frontism while demanding that ultimately the party-state would have to negotiate some form of social contract with independent mass movements separate from it, demystifying and discrediting the “specific Hungarian path” represented by NEM while outlining the extent to which the economy was functioning on borrowed time and money, and finally describing the window of opportunity for political action cognizant of the possibility of a Soviet response yet minimizing its probability via a carefully-constructed oppositional strategy twinned with a deep understanding of the crises endemic and emergent in the Soviet Union itself that would militate against such an outcome.

In the essays “Can 1956 Be Forgotten”, “The Restoration of 1956-7 in a Thirty Year Perspective”, and “The Present Crisis and Its Origins”, Kis accurately locates the roots of the contemporary political and economic malaise in Hungary in the 1956 revolution. In fact, he also looks to the “lessons of the past” as not only delineating political impossibilities but conditioning political possibilities. Thus in his essay “Can 1956 Be Forgotten” he roots the legitimation crisis of the party not with the popular upsurge in 1956 or the invading Soviet tanks\textsuperscript{15} but with the internal disintegration of the

\textsuperscript{15}Here referring to the first invasion of October 23, 1956 and not the full scale force which penetrated the country on November 4. Arguably the presence of Soviet army units and their initial rout by poorly-armed and untrained insurgents mainly fighting in the streets of Budapest did much to provoke the rebellion even further. A more measured response on the part of the USSR, claims Kis, might have prevented the complete disintegration of the party, and thus the formation of the national unity
party: in Kis’ words, “...in effect they notified the world that they had to vanish from the scene” (1989: 26). Thus even under authoritarian communism legitimacy matters tremendously, and not because it flows from military force or the threat thereof. Needless to say, thoroughly understanding this reality was critical to success of the democratic opposition in terms of pushing the reform envelope during the Round Table negotiations.

An equally important lesson from 1956 is that just because it happened does not mean it will happen again. Because the Soviet military intervention was not an automatic response at the time,\(^\text{16}\) that many options and outcomes were both available and likely, he reinvents political opposition by endowing it with the possibility of agency and influence. Furthermore, Kis is brilliant in deconstructing the typical Hungarian refrain in favour of consolidation and concession over political opposition. He unmasks the restorationist view as both a coy and shameful rewriting of history. After all, he states:

The practices of power which the restoration leadership adopted while breaking the back of the resistance still retain their validity. These could be forgotten during the time of improvement in the consolidation, because the exercise of power was offering palpable improvements. Nowadays in government, and thus the movement towards both the multi-party system and political neutrality. These last two demands—amounting to the abandonment of the leading role of the party as well as a perceived threat to Soviet national security—virtually guaranteed that the Soviets would respond in force. Kis’ lesson is that things need not have reached this point. (1989: 26-27).

\(^{16}\)In fact, we now know from both an examination of Soviet archival materials and the investigative work of the Institute for the History of the 1956 revolution that Kis’ hypothesis was absolutely correct. There was a real debate in the Soviet leadership; military intervention was seen as a radical option to be exercised only if all other peaceful means of resolving the situation had been exhausted (see especially Litván, 1996: 88-90).
a period of decline no realistic policy is possible without reckoning with the historic burden of the restoration (1989: 34).

Kis demonstrates that Kádár’s success ultimately lay not in his restorationist policies of buying off the intelligentsia with perquisites and promoting the quiescence of workers with the consumer commodities as well as social tranquillity and a satisfactory standard of living (1989: 69-70). Rather, what Kádár managed to do was to usurp politics from the everyday lives of the people, and to deprive citizenship of meaningful content. It is this cynical elitism rather than its authoritarian window-dressing that makes the regime fundamentally anti-democratic.

Tactically, in terms of constructing an opposition in the 1980s, this type of analysis was also a bridge-building exercise reaching out to the freedom fighters of the 1956 generation, while at the same time providing reasons for opposition and involvement to succeeding generations. By focusing not only on the political and moral leaders of 1956--Imre Nagy, István Bibó, or Tibor Déry--but also on the activists in the council movement, Kis illustrates the political importance of civil society to democracy. He states:

These people and the entire workers’ councils movement provided a rare example of political dignity, wisdom and resourcefulness. They proved that a modern society possesses the political capacity for the practice of an effective democracy. This proof was provided by the Hungarian people, and by the generation before ours, though mostly still with us (1989: 75).

Thus Kis also sends his compatriots the message that only by rejecting paralysis and rebuilding civil society can the citizens of Hungary wrest politics back from the party-
state and make society *active* again. This is one of the finest legacies of 1956 for Hungary in the 1980s.

Kis marries this emphasis on civil society and its divorce from the party-state with a spirited defence of human rights and the rule of law. In this case, he appeals not to the past but illustrates the point by reference to the situation of the Hungarian minorities in Czechoslovakia and Romania. In his essay “Hungarian Societies and Hungarian Minorities Abroad” he has two audiences. Externally, he wants to explain and justify the particular Hungarian obsession with national minorities outside their borders, which as he explains is not only a matter of historic grievance and impractical irredentism, but more empirically an issue of proportion. Internally to largely populist yet proto-oppositional elites and movements he wants to promote his oppositional approach and ethos by appealing to an issue close to many hearts. At the same time, he wants to move populist thinking from potentially narrow ethnocentrism to an embrace of human rights in general, and to minorities living within Hungary as well as those ethnic Hungarians living outside Hungary.

Kis speaks of the Hungarian cultural community rather than a *narodnik* concept of nationhood. He also carefully separates issues—if those of Hungarian ancestry assimilate

---

17 As Kis explains, Hungarians living abroad represent a sizeable proportion of ethnic and linguistic Hungarians—between one quarter and one third live outside the country. To drive the point home, he makes a comparison which sadly has more resonance today than when originally written: “Comparable demographic proportions can be found only in the Balkans and a more absurd ratio exists only between the population of Albania and Kosovo” (1989: 200).
into the dominant cultures in which they now live, this is a source of sorrow but certainly not outrage (1989: 201). This remains a matter of choice, even if that choice might be structurally limited or skewed in favour of assimilation. Thus he wants to draw a distinction between the systemic preclusion of maintaining one’s Hungarian identity from the “flagrant violation of the minority Hungarians’ human rights”. Here he means such practices as the denial of state services, the prohibition of education in Hungarian, the abolition of Hungarian cultural and special interest organizations, professional discrimination against ethnic Hungarians, and so on. Finally, he is concerned that the minority question not be falsely linked to border questions, as he wants to avoid his support for Hungarian minority rights becoming fuel for irredentist claims. Even if Trianon might have been unjust, no set of European countries or Superpowers would likely agree to another redrawing of boundaries in the region for fear of unleashing yet another set of nationalist passions. Moreover, any new result would still leave minority masses on either side of the border, and massive deportation carries with it much historical baggage.\(^{18}\)

In his broader human rights approach, Kis wants first to connect Hungarian minority issues to human rights more generally speaking:

What I want is respect of their [Hungarian minorities’] human rights and their rights as a community, and the institutional protection of both. I speak of human rights, that is, rights which belong to every human being--

\(^{18}\)Today Kis would refer to the unsavoury practices of ethnic cleansing--a term not yet invented at the time of writing this essay.
Hungarian or non-Hungarian—and not about special treatment for Hungarians because of their history or cultural eminence. Of course I am particularly concerned if the victims of human rights violations happen to be Hungarians, that is, people who could be in my place and me in theirs if in 1920 the superpowers’ arbitrariness had drawn the borders in some other way. But I am also particularly concerned if Hungarians violate the rights of other ethnic communities; that is why I am more preoccupied with the situation of the gypsies in Hungary than in Poland (1989: 201).

Thus in the “Program of Action in Favor of Hungarian Minorities Abroad” published in Beszélő an entire section is devoted to the rights of national minorities within Hungary, as well as those abroad. The Roma/gypsy minority is specifically included. Next Kis wants to link discrimination against ethnic Hungarians (and minorities in general) to the dehumanization of the system itself. This means a recognition that one’s adversary—the common citizens of Romania or Czechoslovakia that may be full of hatred for ethnic Hungarians living on their soil—is also a victim. As Kis states: “We have to realize that the minority’s special deprivation of civil rights is inseparable from the overall disregard for human rights of every citizen” (1989: 202).

Kis’ solution to the minority question is the recognition and the acceptance of multiple identities, which may be ascriptive or chosen, national or civic, overlapping yet not necessarily contradictory. The state must obviously play a strong role in the protection and even advancement of rights but most difficult and important task happens on the level of civil society—on breaking down hostility, misunderstanding, and stereotypical falsehood and accusation between Hungarians and Slovaks, and between Hungarians and Romanians. Reaching across borders from one civil society to another is
critical; the final paragraph of the "Program of Action" states:

We must seek a dialogue with neighbouring countries’ democratic-minded circles. They are the ones who could be our collaborators and allies in the slow, gradual process of reconciliation. They must perceive that we are linked to them by commitment to the common cause of democracy, by real solidarity, and not merely by tactical interests (1989: 220).

In "On Our Limitations and Possibilities" Kis reiterates the importance of self-limitation advocated earlier by himself and Bence, but in a more popular and tactical format. That this needed to be done is understandable given that this essay was the published form of Kis’ contribution to the Monor Conference. In this respect, the influence of Michnik is obvious (and he openly acknowledges this is the case). He states the problem of political mobilization for change categorically in the opening sentence: “Since 1956 the Hungarian public has firmly believed that it is useless to think in terms of comprehensive alternatives to our predicament, for the Soviet state will do with this country whatever it pleases anyway” (1989: 115). From that point onward there was an “air of contingency” to whatever reform process the Hungarians engaged in under Kádár; small concessions might be rescinded at any time and the weight of Moscow bore heavily and unevenly on any form of within-system bargaining. Furthermore, speculation arose from the fact of this tension, for within the working operations of the Soviet model there was no public debate and thus much was inevitably left to “unverifiable heresy” (1987: 115).

Although Kis agrees with the near-certainty that the Soviet state would not
tolerate the transformation of system and simultaneously concludes that the opposition has reached the point to which "the system’s invariables are in question", he nonetheless concludes that there is considerable room for political reform within such limitations. Moreover, exploiting the possibilities within these limitations necessarily expands the space for future manoeuvrability.

That such manoeuvrability is possible at all is revealed by Kis’ careful analysis of the changes the Soviet empire has undergone since 1956 and how these are refracted through the lens of Hungarian political practice. As Kis, shows, in the first decade after 1948, indigenous Hungarian communists were totally at the mercy of their Soviet sponsors, because of Stalinist terror, the deep chill of Cold War isolationism, and the integration of the Hungarian economy into the Soviet orbit. 1956 in Hungary showed most dramatically the potential results of the post-Stalinist thaw in the region, both in terms of the emancipation of the communist intelligentsia as well as the independence of the populace--both went too far, too fast. In post-1956 Hungary, the stability and power of the leadership “depended on their ability to buy public peace with concessions which were acceptable both to their own apparatus and to the Soviet leaders” (1989: 117). Even though there existed an implicit agreement between the superpowers that the Soviet Union “may use force if one of its satellite governments is in trouble”, economic

19Kis alludes to the monopolistic control of politics by the party-state (i.e. the “leading role of the party”) as well as the primacy of state ownership and direction of the economy.
pressures throughout the 1980s made it less and less likely for this to occur. In terms of the regional political economy, COMECON could no longer yield an acceptable level of growth, either within the Soviet Union or among its satellites. If the Soviets had been able to extend their capacity to provide cheap raw materials and energy and in return absorb East European products limitlessly into their huge domestic market, the system might have been able to continue, but for reasons endemic and internal to state socialist economies, the centre could no longer hold. And if intensifying rather than extending economic growth was difficult, moving to a higher technological platform proved well nigh impossible. Thus he states:

The only way out of this situation is to transform the wasteful economic system and turn to markets which would link the region’s countries to a circuit of faster technological progress. Without such a change Eastern Europe is facing the danger of joining the underdeveloped, stagnating regions of the globe exactly at a time when in the West another technological revolution is taking place which pulls along some parts of the third world. The Soviet Union has nothing to offer that could substitute for this change, and consequently it is unable to halt the disintegration of its empire (1989: 117).

It is telling that in this essay Kis refers not to the overthrow of the system per se but its recovery from the current crisis besetting it. As Kis states:

I refer to a recovery, an evolutionary process, and not to the inducement of political collapse. And I refer to an evolution whose components would emerge from within the organic development of Hungarian society (emphasis in original; 1989: 116).

This notion of recovery implied not only an evolutionary process of structurally significant political reform, but was seen as the only necessary way out of the downward
It was natural for Hungarian dissidents like Kis to make linkages between the political necessity for change with economic reform because of the post-1956 trajectory of economic reform in the country. The NEM and the emergence of the second economy provided a model for nascent civil society:

It is noteworthy that the shift towards demanding legal rights and codified guarantees has begun in the same areas where the loosening of rigid forms, the circumvention of regulations, and the bargaining and reciprocation of favours have led to the accumulation of tangible results. These demands do not aim at the heights of national politics, rather they are directed at certain areas of everyday life. It is no accident that at first they emerged in the non-official sector of the economy when the various forms of small enterprises became legalized. It is no accident either that apart from the economy the primary target of these demands is the right to association and the realm of cultural and intellectual activities (1989: 122).

In Hungary from the late 1970s onward there was a strong relationship between substantially increasing the autonomy of the second economy and expanding this to the realm of civil society.

In Kis' view, there was in Hungary a perhaps historically brief and short window of opportunity in the late 1980s. There was both a need and a popular desire to solidify the legal and economic achievements that had added up over the years of Kádárite concessions. Further, the situation of the USSR increased the possibility of defending "a new compromise against external pressure" (1989: 122). The "crux of the compromise", moreover, was the eventual and evolutionary attainment of a clearly defined separation
between the state and civil society.  

The conclusions of this essay are reinforced by Kis’ “What Should We Fear”, published in Beszélő in 1988, three years after “On Our Limitations and Possibilities”. Kis addresses a fearful and anxious Hungarian public by telling them up front what they should not fear: the diminution of Soviet power, the disintegration of political authority, and most importantly the potential of a mass movement developing out of oppositional clubs, societies, and associations. Although the struggles of the demos are necessary to the birthing of democracy, Kis is paradoxically yet typically cautious about either the suppression of isolated demonstrations or the rapid growth of a mass movement that would sweep away the current regime only to be restored by internal or external violence later (a 1980s repeat of 1956 with a Solidarity-type twist). What Kis desires most (and in the end actually gets) is a “gradual and orderly transformation” of the system.

One method Kis advocates in moving both the demos and the regime toward this goal is the carefully designed and targeted use of strikes. Following the Polish example, he notes that strike movements specifically and collective bargaining generally are the practical realization of a strategy of self-limitation or evolutionism:

A strike is a form of collective action which has a great deal of built-in self-disciplinary force. A strike makes its participants understand that they

---

20 An example of Kis’ detailed reasoning and level of understanding is provided in his analysis between “public law” and “civil law” and how the formalization of the latter in conjunction with the reform of the former would substantially advance the idea of public mobility, in his words, “in the sphere of public law towards constitutional state, and in the sphere of civil law towards pluralism” (1989: 125).
are players in a game which demands nerves and patience and has a limited stake. A strike requires organization, and even in the absence of historical traditions, it readily offers effective organizational solutions. A strike offers as its great fundamental experience an education in social solidarity, the recognition of strength born of unity, and the insight that results can be achieved only through negotiations. Strikers learn quickly that they have to face the conflict, and that they need self-moderation and an ability to make concessions in exchange for gains (1989: 184-5).

Ironically, Kis effectively takes the opposite view from Lenin in his landmark essay What Is To Be Done? Lenin stressed that left to their own narrow inclinations, workers would never rise above a “trade union consciousness” and reach an understanding where revolutionary aims become paramount. Kis, on the other hand, believes that collective bargaining and the strike experience offer the learning ground for workers (the fundamental ideological and economic units in the state socialist economic enterprise) to move precisely beyond their narrow interests to a broader understanding of what must be done. Kis deftly restates the case for social over business unionism in the context of 1980s Hungary where Solidarity represents the former and the transmission belt unions of authoritarian communism are a bastardized version of the latter. In such an interface as Kis envisages, the movement/union/strike leadership would “have to learn to accept conflicts in a self-limiting manner, but also the party-state would have to learn to accept the curtailment of its power in order to avoid catastrophe” (1989: 185).

Of course, in Hungary popular mobilization did not occur Solidarity-style. History in the form of remembering Nagy and 1956 served as a more powerful motivator by signalling to the regime the memory and restiveness of the population. However, the
bargaining metaphor holds, especially in consideration of the fact that the real power shift occurred during the Round Table Talks in 1989.

V. Miklós Haraszti: The Nature of Repression for Worker and Artists

If Kis and Bence became well-known for their tightly-argued analyses of authoritarian communism, Haraszti can be contrasted as both the voice of passion and irony. His two major published works, *A Worker in a Worker's State* and *The Velvet Prison: Artists Under State Socialism* tackle different subjects in a highly complementary fashion. The first, originally produced in 1972 in manuscript form, was entitled *Darabbér (Piece Rates)*. The second was first published in the West in French as *L'Artiste d'État* in 1983, and later in Hungarian samizdat in 1986 as *A Cenzúra Esztétikája*. Both books attracted considerable attention at home and abroad, and cemented the author's reputation as one of the country's leading dissidents.

*A Worker in a Worker's State* was based on Haraszti's own experiences as a millwright after being placed under Police Control\(^1\) in 1970. He obtained a job at the Red Star Tractor Factory in a deliberate effort to experience the daily "reality of working class conditions". Whereas Kis and Bence argued later that the existing theories of Soviet-style societies could not effectively come to terms with the fact that they were

\(^1\)A form of probation or modified house arrest. Working at a job was permitted, but virtually all public life is forbidden, for example, all forms of entertainment, going to restaurants, and travel. No trial or charge was required, and such control could be extended at the discretion of the authorities.
neither capitalist nor socialist in character, Haraszti in his youthful idealism and sense of commitment set out to examine the phenomenon on the ground level. Haraszti completed the manuscript of the book at the end of 1972, attempted unsuccessfully to get it published officially, and was both arrested and tried for his efforts. He was charged with incitement to subversion, that is "he was accused of having written a book likely to stimulate hatred of the State and of having distributed it in several copies" (1977: 161). The court handed down a guilty verdict and sentenced Haraszti to eight months' imprisonment, suspended for three years.

The harsh treatment meted out by the relatively "liberal" Hungarian regime begs the question as to what the author did write to warrant such a fuss. Essentially, Haraszti writes a first-hand account of the dismal working conditions of the factory, centering on its infamous use and abuse of piece-rates for workers. Piece rates--or payment based on actual production rather than hourly-based compensation--was justified, we are told, as the "ideal form of socialist wages". It was logically dressed up by the scions of socialist management science as a bountiful incentive system with possibilities for limitless and ever-expanding personal wealth for those industrious individuals who applied themselves dutifully and efficiently to their work. In theory, Stakhanovite work ethic would be

---

22He originally had an agreement with an official publishing house to write about working conditions, but they returned the manuscript as "hostile". Szociológia editor Iván Szélényi agreed to publish parts of it in his journal, but by this time the authorities were aware of the situation and Haraszti was arrested. Szélényi appeared as a witness for the defence, and was suspended from the editorship in response (1977: 15).
matched by material reward. In practice, however, the worker lost by first playing by the
rules, and then by trying to work around them.

Haraszti describes how workers following the instructions for each job can only
lose. He states:

...if I keep exactly to the time allocations and to the technical directions as
laid down in the instructions, the maximum remuneration that I can obtain
for uninterrupted work, given one hundred per cent performance on my
part, remains less than the minimum payment described as a pure
formality. The piece-rate worker who is unaware that he works for a wage
per minute theoretically cannot assure himself of a full day’s pay, except
on the express condition that he does not stop work even for an instant.
Obviously, this is impossible (1977: 39-40).

What is worse, however, is that Haraszti finds that his colleagues have *internalized* the
logic of the piece-rate system, blaming themselves rather than the system when they fall
short of full wages:

When you work, you earn. A lot of piece-workers go along with the idea:
very few think that it is because of the system of payment, rather than
through a fault of their own, that they may make nothing for the minutes
spent studying the blueprint, drinking a glass of water, blowing their
noses, resting a little, or changing their tools (1977: 39).

Thus financial insecurity chases the worker to perform, rather than the ability to get
ahead.

The sad irony is that when the workers do try to turn the system to their
advantage, they cheat themselves in the long run. Haraszti vividly describes the practice
of “looting”, whereby workers “cheat the norm” by producing more in less time than
officially estimated. Only by ignoring “the instinct for good work”, that is by producing
shoddy goods quickly without reference to either safety standards or respecting the limits of both tools and machine can the worker raise wages beyond the minimal level. In fact, management both expects and demands this in order to meet production targets, prove increased efficiency, and maintain the long-term viability of the enterprise while officially condemning the practise. As might be predicted, increased production beyond the norm results in boosting the norms, so the workers ultimately trap themselves in a vicious cycle of continually making more for less.

Michael Burawoy (1985) has used Haraszti’s work in contrasting the experiences of factory workers under the regimes of both capitalist and authoritarian communist production. He contrasts his own work experience in the American auto parts industry with that of Haraszti, and finds that Haraszti suffered greater economic hardship and alienation. Employment security was combined with wage insecurity, intensified by the piece-rate system. The logistics of workers trying to beat the norms through labour intensification required them to participate in their own brutalization (1985: 172). Moreover, the social relations of the system inevitably fostered individualism and self-protection. There was no sense of worker solidarity, as the union functioned in collusion with management and acted as “factory watchdog”.

Burawoy compares the situation in Hungary to an earlier state of competitive capitalism, where

...workers’ bargaining strength is critically determined by the extent of enterprise control over the reproduction of their labour power. The more independent the reproduction of labour power is from enterprise control,
the greater is the ability to resist managerial offensives (1985: 189).

In the West, once the reproduction of labour was separated from the labour process, largely through state legislative protection and an accompanying social wage, there was a transition in the politics of production “from despotic regimes in which coercion prevailed over consent to hegemonic regimes in which consent prevailed over coercion” (1985: 190). Similarly, he argues that in the East it is the liberalization and withdrawal of state intervention that might permit this separation, although his class analysis suggests that benefits for some will be at the expense of others, as represented in the marginalization of the Roma and women. Class struggle exists, but is masked by the ideological rhetoric and structure of the system, suggests Burawoy. Nonetheless, it is evident in increasing rates of alcoholism, absenteeism, and labour turnover.

Writing in the early 1970s, Haraszti did not hold out much hope for the possibility of any spontaneous development of labour solidarity, and the desperate nature of his description seemed to rule out any intensification of class struggle. What is interesting, however, is that Haraszti’s analysis forms the ideological background to his later demands for political autonomy. By the early 1980s Hungarian dissidents could look backwards to the Hungarian workers’ councils of 1956 or across the border to early demands made by Solidarity activists for the self-management of enterprises. Haraszti clearly allied himself with János Kis as co-editor of Beszélő in looking to Poland as a positive example, despite the imposition of martial law. For any of these ideas to work, however, economic reform cannot be considered in isolation, as had largely happened
with the NEM. Real trade unions, and the levels of organizing presumed by their existence, require a level of real independence for social institutions from the state. Freedom of association translated into the economic realm as independent trade unions, a necessary prerequisite for reform, for which the healthy functioning of civil society was an important precondition. Not surprisingly, this is exactly the conclusion Burawoy draws from his analysis, and it meshes with where Haraszti ends up in the early Beszélő years.

In his later work *The Velvet Prison*, Haraszti turned his attention to a completely different target: the role of artists under state socialism. It seems fitting that, after having examined the experiences of the industrial worker, he turned to the cultural worker. In particular, he wanted to examine how under post-Stalinism a new aesthetics of censorship “emerged in which censors and artists alike are entangled in a mutual embrace” (1987: 5). Just as the system encouraged behaviour in workers making them complicit in their own degradation, the same was the case with artists. Writers and artists of all stripes were “condemned to collaborate with those that govern them” and indeed the state was “able to domesticate the artist because the artist made the state his home” (1987: 5). In telling the story of how this occurred, Haraszti is not simply making explicit the dynamics of a new and more subtle form of state censorship, but in another way is making generalizations about the very essence of post-totalitarianism in the region.

At the beginning, Haraszti compels the reader to understand the differences between the more obvious and “traditional” forms of censorship, that is “meddling [in
order to] silence opposition to the state”, and newer and more surreptitious forms. He states:

The old censorship is increasingly being superseded by something altogether new, less visible, and more dangerous. The techniques of the new censorship are fundamentally different from those employed by classical censorship. The heavy-handed methods of the past are pressed into service only when the new ones fail to function properly. That this occurs relatively rarely in Hungary testifies not to the state’s liberalization but to the growing success of more subtle means of constraint. Traditional censorship presupposes the inherent opposition of creators and censors; the new censorship strives to eliminate this antagonism. The artist and the censor—the two faces of official culture—diligently and cheerfully cultivate the gardens of art together. This new culture is the result not of raging censorship but of its steady disappearance. Censorship professes itself to be freedom because it acts, like morality, as the common spirit of both rulers and ruled (1987: 7-8).

Thus when Haraszti speaks of censorship it is a much more all-encompassing process, involving the entire production of culture and reproduction of cultural norms within the system:

If I still speak of censorship, what I refer to is not merely certain bureaucratic procedures but the whole context of culture, not just state intervention but all the circumstances that conspire to destroy the basis of autonomous or authentic artistic activity, not just political diklat but the individual’s Weltanschauung within an all-embracing and unified society, not only “legal” and “illegal” restrictions but also the secret psychological sources that sustain the state’s reach even in the last cell of culture. Hence I will refer not only to punishment but also to reward and sustenance, privilege and ambition. I wish to describe the kind of censorship that is not the skin of our culture but its skeleton. I am interested not only in the outer regulations but also—and primarily—the inner gravitation, the downward pull, of the artist’s imagination (1978: 8).

Haraszti is required to look systemically not just because the system’s logic is all-encompassing but because it has placed a special role, with accompanying privileges, on
artists. The explosion of cultural production in the postwar era in the region has been well-documented: more exhibitions of art, high attendance at the theatre, well-financed film studios. Of course behind the scenes were well-paid cultural workers with access to special retreats of (relative) luxury, decorated with state honours. The picture painted here by Haraszti is similar to that of Mirosz's Delta in *The Captive Mind*, who converts his nationalism and subverts his talent to the dictates of socialist realism, finding his ultimate patron saint in the state.

In its early period of Stalinist consolidation, "certain anachronistic characters" existed, whose advocacy of personal autonomy resulted in their being branded class enemies. Their intellectual progeny is the current crop of rebels, to whom they have bequeathed "a vanquished civilization whose promise of democracy, individualism, and critical thought has left a lingering, though fading trace" (1987: 10). They are naturally an extreme minority, and unlike Kis and Bence, Haraszti is more tragic in his assessment of their social base and their potentiality:

The new culture of totalitarian socialism has not given observers any reason to accord sociological necessity to these atavisms. I fear that the autonomous spirit is not a necessary product of any institution, class or social relation in the new society. And if this is so, then we have glimpsed the (perhaps only symbolic) sentence of death passed upon these outcasts (1987: 11).

Haraszti is both a romantic and a realist. He is romantic because he realizes that to choose autonomy over the new culture means "influencing the real culture of family, school, and workplace about as much as malfunctioning traffic light affects the life of a
city” (1987: 11), and realistic because he recognizes that “art and power are not natural enemies”, and that freedom is not, contrary to popular belief, an essential condition for art (1987: 12-13). In fact, even the popular modernist slogan *l'art pour l'art* is nothing more or less than a political statement reflective of its own historicity.

Much of Haraszti’s book is a highly stylized, self-mocking, and ironic explanation of how artists and censors came to be such cozy bedfellows, and the implications of such developments. Thus he explains that the role of artist-as-vanguard—and absolutely anti-authoritarian in ethos and aesthetics—is transformed in the post-revolutionary political situation into literate and popular defenders of those in power. From the radically independent yet ghettoized artist springs forth the artist as promoter and then defender of the revolution. None of this, including Haraszti’s description of socialist realism which follows, is strikingly original, but the manner in which the story is told is both cogent and highly entertaining. What is more original and dark in its implications is the culture of censorship that develops out of this cautionary tale, more insidious because it is embedded in the very behaviour of the artist. It is as if Haraszti has drunk deep from the wells of both Chomsky and Foucault, and applies the lessons of manufacturing consent and the subtle operations of the axes of power/knowledge to the production of culture in East-Central Europe.

Stalin suggested that writers were the “engineers of human souls”, to which Haraszti adds that as good middle-class bureaucrats, they take their role as organized professionals seriously indeed. They become “corporation artists”, the corporation being
the party-state. From this new material base, a new mythology and aesthetics develops.

In this respect, Haraszti does not refer to the crass dictates of socialist realism, but to its more subtle post-totalitarian mutations. This new aesthetics is mythological in terms of the perpetuation of such absurdities as the all-encompassing functionality of art, the permanent liberation of artists, and perhaps most ridiculous, the notion that within every restriction is some level of emancipation. Thus the artists themselves can pave the way for censorship to take its rightful place as constitutive of the very freedom it seeks to emasculate. Under the sub-heading of “Censorship as Freedom”, Haraszti takes on the voice and mantra of the state artist and constructs the following apology:

We are tied to a society of progress and necessity by bonds that are stronger than fear. I am one of those who is privileged to articulate my thoughts publicly. Other than the party politician, I am the only individual who can freely remark upon life’s complexities and freely use the accepted principles of discourse. What is more, I can be subjective; after all, I am a member of an artistic community that is supposed to express permitted subjective preoccupations. Naturally I come up against restraints. But I am too deeply involved for my position to be explained simply in terms of the barbed wire that surrounds me. I am not a silent inmate of the Gulag.

Why do I not test the limits? Because I am not being forced into a corner. Prohibition plays a different role in a centralized society than in a pluralistic one. No use searching here for a general, amorphous permissiveness that prohibition would diminish. Quite the contrary: here prohibition does not diminish but creates freedom. It provides a standardized satisfaction for the instincts that demand alternatives. In the case of the artist, the choice is between spoken or silent consent, between a fulfilled life and mere existence, between the artists’ retreat and the labour camp.

I am not being cynical. The choice available to me is not between honest and lying art, not even between good and bad art, but between art and non-art. The privileges that go with my profession play only as much part in my choices as the gun license does in the vocation of the professional soldier. Art is more important to me than upholding the myth
of art’s autonomy. In this respect I am not a victim but a true child of my
generation. I am the natural successor of the scientist who knew, even
before the advent of state socialism, the pleasures of privilege, security,
and influence that come with being part of an organization (1987: 72).

Censorship becomes “quality control”, at best a minor irritation in the life of the
artist. Excuses for state intervention include incompetence, irresponsibility, or
corruption. Maintaining the dignity and preeminent place accorded the profession is an
important objective, and thus artists begin to censor themselves and each other. At this
point, the role of the state is that it exists, even if limited external intervention is rarely
necessary. Hence artists are “professionalized” and as state employees they become self-
regulating. As a result, censorship becomes “progressive”, defined simply by Haraszti as

Haraszti paints a detailed picture of the many facets of this kind of censorship.
Innovation and creativity are allowed under the guise of organically making society more
manageable (1987: 109). Artists are parasitically independent in that artistic methods and
ideas (chiefly from the West) are imported and transformed and generalized to serve the
public interest (1987: 114). The unspoken policy of the “delayed green light” is adopted,
whereby all innovations and imports are cautiously examined and sanitized before
proceeding. As Haraszti states, all new ideas must be allowed to “mature”, that is, they
must “be favoured by the state”. This means that they must not only be “adaptable, but
also banal” (1987: 115). The “principle of clarity” likewise demands that any work of art
in question “must admit...an officially acceptable interpretation, and nothing must exclude
this interpretation" (emphasis in original; 1987: 117). Charitably, other interpretations are of course possible. Finally, context is all important in sending the right signals to the recipients of state-sponsored art. The reading and theatre-going public knows a particular work of art is acceptable because in each case the party-state is a silent co-author and co-producer.

Haraszti’s artist is in many respects like Havel’s greengrocer. Conformity is expected, but not agreement. In the same way that the greengrocer must routinely display his sign “Workers of the World Unite”, the state artist is required to demonstrate his “sincere participation”. In the case of the latter, it is significant that neither a “vision of the perfect society” nor “evidence of ideological fealty” is demanded (1987: 79). Within the expected parameters of performance, freedom of action and to carry out one’s business is the norm. To the extent that they are complicit in their own agreed-upon servitude to the established order, “living a lie” runs deep through both the greengrocer and the artist. They are neither passive victims of a post-totalitarian regime nor its active proponents, but are nonetheless part of its very fabric and thus sustain it. Haraszti explains that state socialism is not like a garment we can take on and off, but is “more like our skin: it grows with us”. Artistic cooperation and censorship are two sides of the same coin, both voluntary and involuntary, expressing both self-respect and servitude.

Haraszti explains that there is a surreal kind of free communication that exists “between the lines” in the system he describes. Correspondingly, on a societal level, “...it is public life itself that is the space between the lines” (1987: 145). Of course, this is not
to be confused with real freedom of speech, or legitimately independent trends in either art or society. In fact, it is illusory because it is dependent on the state’s social base, its widening level of toleration as measured by its own sense of security. Such “social space” was much wider in Kádár’s Hungary and much narrower in Husák’s Czechoslovakia.

Not surprisingly, given Haraszti’s deliberately hyperbolic adoption of the state writer’s voice as his own, he denounces his own cohort of dissidents as atavistic and naive romantics, searching for a new utopia when one has already been found. Their pathetic existence on the margins of society serves only as a cautionary tale to the state artist: “They are living memorials to the sad fate of individualism for a new generation that does not know the misery from which our state culture emerged” (1987: 157).

However, if the dense and careless reader is not able to see the twinkle in Haraszti’s eye as he makes this dull pronouncement, he makes it altogether clear in the afterward to the English edition:

I hope that I don’t have to defend my treatment of dissent in this book. I intended the very existence of this book to be a denial of its own deliberate exaggerations. I hope that its publication is a proof of the despair that darkens its sentences. For this reason, I chose to speak mostly in the third person, in the voice of a state artist, rather than joining the chorus of my own natural compatriots in the ghetto of romantic individualism. Like a ventriloquist, I adopted this voice in order to deliver the verdict that directed culture confers on the independent spirit. But I hope that the sentence is rendered invalid by the very fact that it has been pronounced publicly by me, and by the fact that you, dear reader, hold this pessimistic book in your hands (1987: 162).
VI. Theorizing Civil Society: Konrád’s _Antipolitics_

Unlike the other Hungarians discussed in this chapter, György Konrád was first and foremost a novelist, but his experience as a banned writer and as a sociological researcher propelled him in the direction of the democratic opposition. Although Kis in particular is more thorough in his theoretical reasoning and his philosophical training is far more evident in his scholarship, it is Konrád who was most well-known outside Hungary as its leading dissident voice. Like Havel, his fiction and its censure brought him both acclaim and notoriety abroad, paving the way for the considerable public and Western acknowledgement of his essay _Antipolitics_. Like Havel’s “The Power of the Powerless”, _Antipolitics_ is a sustained and inspired polemic, and touches upon all the major themes of the East-Central European dissident oeuvre.

It is not an accident that Konrád begins _Antipolitics_ with a critique of the Yalta division of Europe. Like Rupnik, Heller, and others, Konrád roots both the postwar division of Europe and the ensuing superpower rivalry in the series of military-political conferences culminating at Yalta and Potsdam in 1945. It is not simply that Yalta was a death sentence for the independence of the countries of East-Central and Eastern Europe in terms of the inevitability of Soviet domination and control, but it symbolized the unleashing of a certain logic against which the dissidents fought on both an intellectual and a practical level. As Konrád states: “To question the partition of Europe is dangerous and misleading because it fosters the illusion that it is possible to question it” (1984: 3). These lines have resonance in Hungary precisely because in 1956 the Yalta division of
Europe was questioned; Nagy was the only communist leader of the Bloc to try (with popular pressure, of course) to remove his state from the Warsaw Pact. Through Hungarian linkages with END and the development of its own indigenous peace movement, dissidents like Konrád were more than willing not only to question the presence of Soviet troops on Hungarian soil, but also the maintenance of American forces and arms in Western Europe as well.

Thus it is not surprising that the solution advocated by Konrád is both idealistic and pan-European in scope. Throughout his opening chapter, Konrád alludes to the necessity of an East-West European dialogue as an important preliminary step for long-term peace and independence on the continent. Either a Soviet-inspired solution, such as the “gradual, controlled transformation of the Soviet empire... into a community of nations capable of behaving like a partner towards the countries of Western Europe” or an American-backed “United States of Europe” are adequate to the task at hand. He states that it is a problem of political vision and conception: “Today’s Western Europe has no independent political philosophy, and so it offers none of the transcendence that would give meaning to a common enterprise like integration” (1987: 8). Like Charter 77, Konrád links peace to the dismantling of the Iron Curtain, and chastizes Western

23Konrád implicitly critiques Gorbachev’s notion of a “common European home” even prior to its introduction into the political lexicon of the West. Existing European unity before 1989—built on the twin pillars of EU economic integration and NATO membership (with minor states opting for or having negotiated neutrality)—was a farce because it was based on American sponsorship and divisive ideological and superpower struggle.
European governments accordingly:

Not a single European government has made the cardinal peace proposal: an appeal for the removal of the Iron Curtain. Europe's politicians have no bold, incisive peace strategy and don't seek to launch any useful debate. This intellectual passivity is simply a retreat before Soviet peace propaganda, which uses military force to make Europeans and the whole world acknowledge that what the Soviets acquired in World War II is theirs. From the Pacific Ocean to the Iron Curtain, their empire is a seamless whole; to contest it from within is counterrevolution, while to contest it from without is to meddle in their internal affairs. The Helsinki Declaration only confirmed, three decades afterward, the validity of the agreements reached at Yalta and, later in 1945, at Potsdam.24

It is pleasant to commiserate with the unfortunate Eastern European cousins, but let no one think the West is going to make any trouble on their account. They got détente, they got credits, what more do they want? What more? They want a creative initiative, a concrete, tangible peace proposal, a plan to take down the Iron Curtain. They want Western Europeans to understand that while Eastern Europe remains under occupation, Western Europeans cannot live in security. Western Europe is moving toward neutrality of its own accord, without even trying to demand that Eastern Europe be neutralized in exchange. It takes little intelligence to cling to the ideology either of blind loyalty to NATO or of unilateral concessions.25 Western Europe will find a worthy place for itself in the world only when it no longer allows for the US-Soviet dichotomy to determine its place (my emphasis; 1987: 8-9).

Konrád moves on to make the point that the "international ideological war" is above all a contest between national political elites, and has little connection with the

24The Helsinki Accords were lauded by dissidents as they held the regimes of the Soviet bloc accountable to international conventions of human rights, but criticized because the quid pro quo of the negotiations was Western recognition of postwar boundaries and the national political sovereignty of these governments.

25Here Konrád refers to the 1980s European peace debate between pro-NATO hardliners and the "doves" of the various peace movements who advocated unilateral concessions (and especially a moratorium on new missile deployment) in addition to bilateral disarmament.
daily lived experience of citizens on either side of the East-West divide. In fact, the sharp contrast between the interests of the superpowers and their respective political elites and the masses of citizens throughout Europe affected by them was of greatest concern. His answer to the impasse, an “historic compromise” whereby the Soviets accept the “democratic practice of Western European communism” and both sides must remove all troops and missiles form the continent, is designed above all to mitigate and perhaps reverse the years of accumulated differences between citizens as a result of the Iron Curtain. In Konrád’s view, the answer is to be found somewhere between the solutions of Finland and Austria. In such a trade-off, however, Konrad was most concerned that autonomy and sovereignty be neither partial nor contingent, as he felt resulted from the limited (and later quashed) autonomy granted Solidarity in Poland. Thus he states:

Better not to bestow any at all formally: we will not barter our salvation for a bowl of lentils. What we want is unlimited self-determination, unlimited democracy, unlimited freedom to speak out. Yes, we want at least as much freedom as the small nations of northwestern Europe have. Yes, we want the Russian troops to go home. If the postwar political situation demands that they be here, and now and then impose or ordain a military dictatorship, then we reject the postwar political situation. Let them go home, and we will go back (or rather forward) to the status quo that would have evolved here of its own accord, without such external disturbances as the communist seizures of power and the counterrevolutions of November 4, August 21, and December 13.26

We want that internal process with which East-Central Europe is already pregnant; we want bourgeois civil liberties and an embourgeoisement that is not hedged about with prohibitory decrees. We

26 The dates refer to the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, the WTO invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, and the imposition of martial law in Poland in 1981, respectively.
don't want the authorities to have discretionary rights over us. We want constitutional guarantees; we want it clear that semifreedom is not freedom, half-truth not truth, liberalization not liberalism, democratization not democracy. We want no less than what the most advanced democracies now have.

We will not get it by revolution. We will not get it through gradual reforms. We will not get it by a third world war. How will we get it? I see no other way except for Europe to propose to the two superpowers that they mutually withdraw from the Iron Curtain (1987: 53-54).

Konrád is not content to merely toss out his vision of a peaceful, nonaligned, and democratic future without providing some practical suggestions as what roads might be taken in such a journey, and providing a strategic map. For Western Europeans, the answer lies in broader and deeper integration, both politically and economically. Only by strengthening European identity will the historical anachronisms of national particularism and chauvinism be once and for all discarded, and will the continent develop a new sense of purpose, as well as the political and economic might to carry out its intentions. In the East, the answer is more variegated and complex, given a road less travelled and a decidedly more difficult voyage. It is in this description that the emphasis and meaning of the book's title, Antipolitics, has the force of full explanation.

Like his other East-Central European counterparts, Konrád defines the two untouchables--Warsaw Pact membership and one-party rule--as independent variables, but suggests to his readers that these "can be brought into more diverse and more flexible

\[27\] Konrád is not suggesting that the system itself cannot be reformed, but that it cannot be reformed solely within--as the failure of the Prague Spring and the NEM both demonstrate.
relationship with the dependent variables that are only relatively determined by them” (1987: 73). Thus he raises the following questions:

How, then, can we make the social status quo more of an independent variable with respect to the military status quo? How can we strengthen the horizontal human relationships of civil society against the vertical human relationships of military society? How can a society adapt to those two fixed facts—the Soviet alliances and the one-party system—in such a way that in every other sphere of life it can display the greatest autonomy: the freedom to express its own individuality, while at the same time cultivating its share of the common European consciousness? (1987: 74)

The goal of freedom is an absolute, and must be obtained. But as Konrád states, “the road that leads to it is relative” and the trick is to equip society with flexibility, autonomy, and versatility so that it is equal to the task at hand. With great fervour Konrád declares society with a strategy is stronger than an armed state (1987: 75). Thus the solution is found not in high politics or diplomatic intrigue but in low politics, in society, or in Konrád’s lexicon, antipolitics.

For Konrád, antipolitics is both noun and verb, vision and action, moral force and political strategy. It refers concretely to the process of resurrecting an independent civil society along side and distinct from the party-state, as well as a system of values that positions political activity and change not in institutions but among active and engaged citizens. Antipolitics discards all narrow and elite-based notions of politics and political change. In Central Europe in the late 1980s, Konrád contextualizes his meaning:

Antipolitics strives to put politics in its place and make sure it stays there, never overstepping its proper office of defending and refining the rules of the game of civil society. Antipolitics is the ethos of civil society,
and civil society is the antithesis of military society. There are more or less militarized societies—societies under the sway of nation-states whose officials consider total war one of the possible moves in the game. Thus military society is the reality, civil society is a utopia.

Antipolitics means refusing to consider nuclear war a satisfactory answer in any way. Antipolitics regards it as impossible in principle that any historical misfortune could be worse than the death of one to two billion people. It recognizes that we are a homicidal and suicidal species, capable of thinking up innumerable moral explanations to justify our homicidal and suicidal tendencies (1987: 92).

If politics is ultimately about “the rich network of relationships that we call power” then antipolitics is about constructing and realizing a counterpower. Konrád is concerned that Machiavelli is right in suggesting that power wills its own enlargement; the extension and consolidation of control is contained within its own internal logic. For this reason, meaningfully limiting power is a difficult if not impossible exercise to either conceive or carry out from within the power structure itself—in this case, the authoritarian communist party-state. By the same token, it is also why, according to Konrád, appeals to the Jacobin-Leninist tradition of revolution, struggle, and righteous possession of the one truth and the one way, are both fruitless and misleading. Such a teleological approach is fruitless because in the region, this is the road well-travelled, and unfortunately paved with bloodshed and terror, or at minimum, mediocrity and control. It is also misleading because with such demagoguery comes acquiescence to “the inescapable demands of some historical agenda”, inevitably resulting in the concentration of power in a newly-installed political elite (1987: 114).

Konrád’s notion of antipolitics can be likened to the social movement activism of
the New Left in the West, as well as to postmodern ideas of decentred political action, reliant upon overlapping and multiple identities and bases of resistance. Above all, Konrád’s antipolitics is built upon the philosophical assumption that politics need not and should not be enveloped by a ruling ideology or a ruling elite. He criticizes the West for being “captive of its own ideology” in buying into the arms race and superpower struggle and shrewdly suggests that if triumph over the East is paramount, a better weapon is economic policy (1987: 87). Similarly, Soviet-type communism comes under fire for privileging the state and its collective interests and agencies over the rights of human beings generally and minorities specifically. And sadly intellectuals have too often been willing volunteers in authoring the ideological explanations necessary for the sustenance of such regimes. Neither capitalism nor communism provides a guarantee against war, and both in practice involve so much social antagonism as to encourage its possibility.

Antipolitics works as an end and a strategy because it is based on everyday action within the context of everyday life. It is intrinsically oriented toward peace and cooperation rather than violence and war because it is on the micro-level, the level of family, community, village or neighbourhood, that human beings are most often able to help and love one another, make sacrifices if necessary, and resist crime. To be sure, violent acts occur here also, but we remember them because they are the exception, the interruptions in the flow of daily existence. As Konrád aptly notes: “History takes no note when a woman feeds her family” (1987: 103). Mass violence becomes more likely when these local bonds or communities are torn apart, through some combination of
historical and external forces, often including a series of ideologically-twisted
exhortations to engage in the process of constructing and demonizing an “other”.

Antipolitics presumes and expects a pervasive level of democratization, well
beyond the periodic exchange of political elites via free and fair elections. Konrád’s ideal
of “greater democratism” is consonant with Kuroić’s self-organization. As he states,
“When there is parliamentary democracy but no self-administration, the political class
alone occupies the stage” (1987: 137). Such self-management must include an opening
up and democratizing of bureaucratic processes, both within the central state and within
local workplaces and communities. Konrád states:

Workplace and local community self-government, based on
personal contact, exercised daily, and always subject to correction, have a
greater attraction in our part of the world than multiparty representative
democracy because, if they have the choice, the people are not content
with voting once every four years just to choose their deputy or the head of
the national government. That somehow seems very little when people
hope that, by taking a part in the affairs of the community, they can gain a
voice in their own destiny (1987: 137).

Following this logic, self-organization according to Konrád (and Kuroić) “means that
representative democracy spreads from the political sphere to the economic and cultural
spheres as well” (1987: 139). Democracy is both the prevailing principle of legitimacy
and the prevailing principle of societal organization. Citizens are involved and engaged
at all levels and in all spheres of social activity.

Moreover, there is historical resonance in Hungary for this type of approach--the
Hungarian Workers’ Councils of 1956 were the most spontaneous, vivid, and resistant
forms of democratic organization to spring forth from the revolution.\textsuperscript{28} In reference to the councils, Konrád is eloquent:

The message is clear in the resolutions drawn up by the workers’ councils during the Hungarian revolution of 1956: multiparty parliamentary democracy is essential; self-governance in a very concrete community is essential. Democracy is essential at every level. It occurred to no one to expatiate on how this would be a good thing at some levels but a bad thing at other levels. It was the dramaturgical function of 1956 to state the essential, without beating around the bush. Democracy is needed in factory management, in the government, and in relations with other governments. We need it in self-defence, so that others will not be able to humiliate, ruin, occupy and terrorize us (1987: 138).

The resonance lives in the minds of all Central Europeans because of 1956, 1968, and 1981. That these exercises in greater democratization and accountability were arrested does not prove that such approaches are impossible. To the contrary, it enhances “the attractive forces of the ideal” (1987: 140).

Predictably and in keeping with his emphasis on antipolitics, Konrád is extremely sympathetic to the existence and the goals of Solidarity in Poland. For Konrád, Solidarity’s “unexpected vigour and popularity confirms the hypothesis that in the state-socialist societies democracy in the broadest sense is now on the historical agenda” (1987: 142). Like KOR and in agreement with his Polish contemporaries, Konrád sees

\textsuperscript{28}The emergence and the structure of the workers’ councils was the most remarkable aspect of the 1956 revolution, according to Hannah Arendt. In \textit{The Origins of Totalitarianism} she discussed the dissolution of party lines, the imposition of informal but meaningful norms of problem-solving, avoidance of conflict-of-interest and personal abuse of power. For Arendt, the clearest sign of the reemergence of democracy in Hungary in 1956 was not the rapid reestablishment of political parties defunct since the late 1940s, but rather the rise of the council movement.
Solidarity as inheriting the role of “social self-defence”. Given its instant and improvisational appearance, there was no “ready-made theory and methodology waiting for it”, which in Konrád’s view was probably just as well. Ironically, however, the writings of virtually all the East-Central European dissident-theorists covered in this study negate Konrád’s premise, because if their writings from the early 1970s onward did not predict Solidarity, they certainly helped prepare fertile ground and cultivate innovative political responses not premised on reforming the party-state apparatus itself.

Perhaps more surprising is that Konrád’s affection for the Polish movement is undiminished despite the imposition of martial law and the virtual destruction of the above-ground organization. Although the movement was defeated by Polish tanks (backed by the threat of Soviet ones), the Polish democratic movement to some degree defeated its own self-limited aims by proving that “it is impossible to want freedom a little” (1987: 142). Rather than a source of despair, however, Konrád pinpoints in this failure its ultimate success—-that there can be no stable authority in the region unless ultimately terror is resorted to at some level, or some process of democratization is meaningfully initiated. For Konrád, as for Kis and Haraszti, “sensible accommodation” is not a viable option, and thus the Polish experience also serves to invalidate once and for all the historic Hungarian compromise of intellectual acquiescence in exchange for steady embourgeoisement.

Konrád does not expound in detail the types of actions or enterprises that might be classified as antipolitical, or furthering the goals of antipolitics. Overall this might be
perceived as a structural weakness, but the essay does not read like a how-to manual, and if it did, much of its rhetorical force and flourish would undoubtedly be lost. There is, however, an implicit understanding between the Central European author-cum-dissident-cum political essayist and his audience, and Konrád does not demean his readers by spelling out what they both know, which does not even require a careful reading-between-the-lines. His arguments are constructed with moral force, but he is not given to mere moralizing.

Konrád saves his practical arguments and criticisms for the community of dissenters of which he is a member. He cautions against playing into the hands of the international (read: Western controlled) media, with a footnote to the lack of assistance provided by the West for the freedom-fighters of 1956. The West looks only for sensationalism in its ideological war against communism; the foreign press can at best be accorded a limited role, “as auxiliaries in our enterprise”. Thus samizdat and the independent word is best targeted at Hungarians themselves—not a bad strategy given the fact that Hungarians were hardly given to massive social resistance after 1956. Impromptu experimentation is the daily stuff of antipolitics, and is cumulatively important:

Our real mood is one of neither victory nor defeat, but of experimentation. When I look around I see that everyone is starting something, planning, trying his skills, telling of some small success. It may be an experimental school, an interesting research project, a new orchestra, a publishing opportunity, a screenplay accepted, a little restaurant to open, an association of mathematicians, an attractive private shop, a private gallery, a trip to the West, cultural undertakings, independent publications,
In the Hungarian context, both the existence and growth of the second economy, and alongside it, a second culture, enliven and deepen civil society. With such initiatives there is “a slow expansion of the limits” to the point where even in the official realm “an honest documentary appears on TV, a good serious play at one of the theaters, an interesting study in a periodical” (1987: 167). Although the regime’s acceptance of a limited form of pluralism is a sign of the system’s strength in that it can afford to tolerate some dissent, greater independence in the public realm leads to greater independence in private thought, in the imagining of alternatives. Citizens are more likely to view themselves and each other as participants and subjects, and separate themselves from the party-state—in this respect economic autonomy goes hand-in-hand with what Konrád calls “intellectual self-management”:

Greater independence with respect to redistributive centralism; a brisk circulation in freely associating and self-governing intellectual groups in the marketplace of ideas; alternative enterprises dedicated not to maximum profit but to intellectual activity for its own sake, to make a living without any urge to get rich; in short, an amalgam of the second economy and the second culture—that is the road that beckons to the ablest young intellectuals of Eastern Europe. It is perhaps the only way they can emancipate themselves, step by step, from the rhetoric and intellectual discipline of the state (1987: 176).

Ultimately for Konrád, antipolitics is the essence of democracy. Democracy conceived and defined by Konrád is strongly participatory in nature, placing strong and active obligations on its citizens. However, this political form is determinative of all else; antipolitics is not only the primacy of local over central, individual over collective, but
democracy over its alternatives, and politics over economics. Thus Konrád states:

In a liberal democracy, socialist reforms can be adopted by parliamentary majority, according to the constitutional rules of the game. Democracy is more important and more basic than the reform of income and property relations. Democracy can include socialism, but one-party state socialism cannot include democracy. If it gives ground, citizens newly awakened to their dignity will destroy the rigidly centralized political structure.

A socialism that benefits the majority—whether by the just redistribution of income or by the just redistribution of power—is possible only in a society where the majority decides and the minority is free to voice its opinion without restriction. If the so-called achievements of socialism cannot be debated there is no democracy. It is a cardinal principle that the values of democracy precede those of socialism (while in no way denying them) (1987: 189).

If antipolitics is key to Konrád’s substantive views about democracy, he also makes it clear that the locus of antipolitical action is civil society, not the state.

Antipolitics is not about elites and institutions, but rather their opposite:

Antipolitics is the political activity of those who don’t want to be politicians and who refuse to share in power. Antipolitics is the emergence of independent forums that can be appealed to against political power; it is a counterpower that cannot take power and does not wish to. Power it has already, here and now, by reason of its moral and cultural weight (1987: 230-1).

Regarding the relationship between the state and civil society, Konrád states:

Antipolitics and government work in two different dimensions, two separate spheres. Antipolitics neither supports nor opposes governments; it is something different. Its people are fine right where they are; they form a network that keeps watch on political power, exerting pressure on the basis of their cultural and moral stature alone, not through any electoral legitimacy. That is their right and their obligation, but above all it is their self-defence. A rich historical tradition helps them exercise their right (1987: 231).
Thus Konrád imbues antipolitics with a strong and engaged conception of citizenship, one where involvement in and through the relational and independent networks of civil society provide daily confirmation of the democratic ethos at work. This is not a politics about the circulation or exchange of political elites, or the institutional business of the state. It is about “the rejection of the power monopoly of the political class” because antipolitics posits not only a redistribution of power but also a check on the institutional control of policy and its implementation (1987: 231). Moreover, antipolitics is possible almost anywhere and under any conditions. Even under authoritarian communism, citizens are free to construct their private lives as they wish, to infuse their leisure time, their relationships, and their private conversations with thoughts, ideas, experiences, and criticisms. Civil society can and does survive in harsh times, by retreating into the private spaces of families and circles of friendships. Thus social solidarity is preserved in an official sea of anomie:

Withdrawal into our huddled private circles enabled us to survive even the grimmest years of the dictatorship [during the Stalin era]. We didn’t really live in a state of constant tension because every evening we could be with one another. We talked a great deal; congregating in our lairs, we experienced a kind of campfire warmth (1987: 203).

Finally, Konrád in effect “transnationalizes” civil society by suggesting that the worldwide integration of the intelligentsia combined with the globalization of cultural production and consumption make this process inevitable. Konrád sees only positive outcomes. The “global conversation of genius” that began in the hard sciences has now permeated all aspects of intellectual life, which has the twin benefits of de-nationalizing
truth and de-instrumentalizing the bearers of it. Turning Marx on his head, Konrád wryly suggests: “It appears that the intelligentsia--not the working class--is the special bearer of internationalism” (1987: 212). The international infrastructure of communication--including personal contacts made through research, conferences, book fairs, film festivals, the international business of publication and distribution of the printed word--has made this possible. Moreover, the process has been enhanced by a vast array of technical aids, from fax machines and photocopiers to the entire telecommunications industry. Konrád sees freedom and de-ideologization in this process of marketization and commodification. After all, the intellectual need no longer be held captive as a spokesperson for a particular ideology, or some revolutionary of either the Left or the Right. Thus the task of the intellectual--to create, visualize, inspire, and illuminate--will only be complete “when there is not longer any institution--state, church, industrial enterprise, university--that can use him as an instrument” (1987: 223). As naive as it might sound, Konrád’s experience with the “dissidents’ international market of ideas” yields only happy consequences in the service of truth and freedom everywhere.

Konrád’s eloquent discussion of a resurrected civil society developing into maturity and opening up “a dialogue with itself” is in parallel with Havel’s “The Power of the Powerless”. In his discussion of the tools and methods of antipolitics, his sympathy for Polish evolutionism is obvious. If anything, Konrád and his Hungarian counterparts in the democratic opposition are more expansive in their notion of civil society and its engagement with the state. Politics is a continuum with civil society at one end and the
state at the other, but the processes of political change require involving the reform-minded intelligentsia of the party-state as partners in this gradualism. Thus antipolitics encompasses not only private, critical conversations between citizens in their non-working hours, but more traditionally social movements, single-issue political organizations with mass memberships (who may or may not conceive of themselves as political) as part of an overall strategy for democratization. In Hungary there was not the "Us versus Them" of the Polish opposition, nor the marked and persistent persecution which permanently ghettoized the Czechoslovak dissidents. This had consequences for their theorizing, most notably their successful theoretical exploitation of the "grey zone" which was neither party-state nor society, but interwoven through both.
Section 3

Chapter 8: A Feminist Reappraisal

I. Defining the Problem: Civil Society and the Shifting Boundaries of Public and Private

In the preceding chapters, I have argued that largely in response to the failure of “reform communism” and the various revisionist approaches taken in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, a community of dissident intellectuals began to theorize about and organize against the political and economic stagnation of the 1970s and 1980s in each of their respective regimes. Separately, collectively and with great complementarity they developed, in my view, an oeuvre of political-theoretical approaches and tactical insights and recommendations regarding not only the possibility but the probability of political change. Taken as a whole, the most distinctive features of their thought and activism were: 1) the self-conscious creation of a site of resistance which came to be variably known as an “independent society”, “civil society”, a “parallel polis”, “second society”, or “antipolitics”; and 2) the twin strategies of new evolutionism and non-violence, characterized most succinctly in Kuroń’s phrase “self-limitation” or perhaps Kis’ “radical reformism”.

A major argument of this study has been that the majority of key intellectual activists in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary all wrote and theorized about civil society in the 1970s and the 1980s, and their reflections grew out of personal experiences in attempting to generate a viable space for political change. The context in which their
writings took place was characterized by profound similarity: all were living in authoritarian communist regimes in the Soviet Bloc with planned economies and social orders regimented by Leninist "transmission-belt" organizations, and all three countries had experimented with reform communism, which deeply affected subsequent developments. As well, one can paint a picture of stark difference: for example, variations in the ability to hold and make public views contrary to the official ideology, including both censorship and forms of persecution, different religious institutions, different historical traditions more or less receptive to communist (and specifically Russian) ideas, and the very different paths taken after initial outbursts of reforms (normalization in Czechoslovakia versus the New Economic Mechanism in Hungary).

Nonetheless, operating within their roles as cosmopolitan, urban, Central European intellectuals, they severally and collectively developed a set of ideas about civil society which were connected to a larger project of political reform within authoritarian communism.

Regardless of what it was called, the following assumptions hold true for the dissidents' description of civil society and can be summarized thus:

1) Invoking the language of civil society was a purposive and deliberate attempt to make a critical linkage with the tradition of Western political thought, and this is evidenced by their references to Locke, Hegel, de Toqueville, Arendt, and even Plato, both in their writings and in conversation.

2) The use of this terminology and the intellectual tradition it laid claim to was
part of a larger argument about the boundaries of Europe, the geographical positioning of Central Europe, and in the post-1989 period, as part of its consequential "return to Europe".

3) The constitutive idea of civil society was the creation and maintenance of an independent space between state and society, through and in which various networks and associations could operate freely and without disruption, for example, trade unions, churches, social movements, cooperatives, and free presses and their products, schools of thought and (eventually) political parties. By focussing on society rather than the state and the significance of the independence and openness of institutions, their approach favoured the inclusion of a rich variety of activities, including everyday forms of resistance, passive non-compliance, and participation in (so-called) "non-political" self-help organizations, cultural activities, and so on.

4) Civil society as an interpretative label given to political priority was also intrinsically connected to and compatible with the strategy of "new evolutionism".

5) Civil society as envisioned by the dissidents is dependent on the cultivation of a culture of mutual tolerance, social solidarity and trust, non-violence, and the right to peaceably assemble and organize. Rebuilding civil society meant rebuilding civic virtue, in both the classical and republican senses of the term.

6) Civil society as operationalized in Central Europe, with its emphasis on openness and consensus was democratic in form and function. Moreover, most
would now agree that reconstructing civil society was integral to the series of transformations that reached a critical nexus in 1989, and is a necessary but not sufficient condition for consolidating democracies in the region.

It is useful to think of civil society as a particular social formation that both structures and dedifferentiates state-society relations. It names as crucially important and worth examining the intermediate spheres of social existence between the state and the family (and in some versions of the argument, the economy as well). In the Hegelian sense, civil society both mediates public/private and is mediated by them. Civil society is also fluid, flexible in terms of time, space, and subject matter, and often it is defined negatively by what it is not. Finally, it is both paradoxical and quixotic: the dissidents were tapping into an intellectual heritage several centuries long, but at the same time appealing to its populist edge. It is as an element of political practice rather than at the level of high theory (where specific resonance is usually lacking) that it has been most successful.

In the Central European context rebuilding civil society was not an idea cleverly construed in an historical vacuum, rather it was twinned with a carefully constructed political strategy which Adam Michnik called "new evolutionism" and János Kís called "radical reformism". First and foremost, this approach meant openly recognizing and working within the boundaries of geopolitical realities as they existed prior to Gorbachev’s ascendancy in the Soviet Union. As Michnik stated at the time:

The dilemma of nineteenth-century leftist movements--“reform or revolution”---is not the dilemma of the Polish opposition. To believe in overthrowing the dictatorship of the party by revolution and to consciously
organize actions in pursuit of this goal is both unrealistic and dangerous. As the political structure of the USSR remains unchanged, it is unrealistic to count on subverting the party in Poland. It is dangerous to plan conspiratorial activities. Given the absence of an authentic political culture or any standards of democratic collective life, the existence of an underground would only worsen these illnesses and change little. Revolutionary theories and conspiratorial practices can only serve the police, making mass hysteria and police provocation more likely (Michnik, 1985: 142).

Accepting the limits of political reform was also a tacit recognition that the key structural supports and ideological tenets could not be questioned, such as the "leading role of the party" and the role of the regional hegemon in prescribing the rules of the game. Second, and no less important, was the core belief that the possibility of internally-generated revisionism or reform communism was terminated by the events of 1968 (both in Warsaw and in Prague). All subsequent efforts to change the political system would have to be outside the party-state. Moreover, such movement was to be slow, gradual, and non-violent. By building or re-building civil society political consciousness would be developed, nonconformity and human dignity championed, and human rights to freedom and truth reasserted. The target of such an approach was not the party-state (this was the grave error of the revisionists in all three countries) but the people themselves. As Michnik states: "Such a program should give directives to the people on how to behave, not to the powers on how to reform themselves. Nothing instructs the authorities better than pressure from below" (1985: 144).

Underlying the dissident's model of civil society is a strongly-held but often unstated assumption about the appropriate boundaries between public life and the private
sphere. To be sure, the dissidents were aggrieved at the over politicized sterility of official public life as governed by the party-state. Their alternative, breathing new life into civil society—the space between political institutions conventionally understood and the private life of the individual—would reinvigorate an activist notion of citizenship, provide opportunities for an authentic public existence, and strategically serve as a powerful wedge forcing open (and later assist in forcing apart) the closed nature of the party-state. Both in theory and in practice this process inevitably generated a new kind of line-drawing exercise between the public and the private. The dissidents countered the monopolistic party-state with an “antipolitical” vision to create a parallel set of structures or movements that would serve as a new, authentic public sphere, even though this new public sphere was conducted on previously private terrain. When this alternative “went public” after 1989, it left private terrain and left behind what was most definitively private about it—family life, child-rearing and social reproduction, as well as an enhanced opportunity for women’s participation given its physical location in homes and at times suited to women’s roles.

The genesis of this chapter and critique lies in my own theoretical examination of this public/private split, which like all political theory did not develop in a social or historical vacuum. I was exploring these questions (and interviewing former dissidents) while travelling through Central Europe at a time when it seemed that a defining feature of the post-communist era was the near-exclusion of women from the public sphere. It occurred to me that in accordance with my thesis that ideas matter, there might be more
than a passing connection between the civil society model of the dissidents and the disappearance of women. Women were in many ways substantially invisible and unrecognized in the opposition movements in the region, despite their real and documented contributions. Moreover, this did not translate into a growing number of women in the formal political arena, and I wondered if this was not related to the triumphalism of liberalism that followed the transformation, whether intended or not.\textsuperscript{1}

Armed with the conviction that the dissident model of civil society has strong liberal underpinnings, I looked to Western feminist critiques of the public/private split in liberal democracies. In so doing, I encountered a problem of cultural translation, as these approaches were often met with derision by both women and men in the region, although often not for the usual conservative or ideological reasons. Put superficially, this dilemma is often posed in terms of why there is no feminist "movement" where such obvious "gender oppression" exists. However, in response to both "Western feminists" and current realities, a nascent women's movement has developed, although it is hardly a uniform phenomenon and most participants and activists would deny any relationship to feminism.

A useful introduction to what Havel might call the region-wide "antidogmatic"

\textsuperscript{1}On the liberalism of the transformation process and its effects, see in particular Andrzej W. Tymowski, (1993) "Poland's Unwanted Social Revolution", \textit{East European Politics and Societies} 7.2: 169-205. His thesis is that in Poland in particular, accompanying regime change was an "unwanted social revolution"—a movement away from the traditional "moral economy" of Solidarity to the liberalism of the post-1989 period.
response to feminism is my conversation with Miklós Haraszti. During my 1995 interview with Haraszti, I was compelled by his enthusiastic response to my questions as well as his supportive and thoughtful answers to stray from my original agenda. In our conversation we explored the civil society theory of the dissidents and my thesis that there might be some connection between the appropriation of liberalism and the systematic exclusion of women from the public sphere.

Haraszti’s view was that the ontological basis of the women’s movement in the West, claims to sisterhood notwithstanding, was the existence and implementation of an ethos of individual rights, in itself an outgrowth of liberalism. He explained:

What is not always realized by the otherwise quite anti-establishment, anti-liberal [Western] feminist is that feminism is an outgrowth of the movement for human rights. There is no collectivist origin in feminism, even if in its later consequences it cannot operate without a notion of collective rights. And [the women’s movement] cannot become strong without that notion of collective rights, but originally [it must involve] a direct implementation of a version of individual rights....(Miklós Haraszti, personal interview, 19 August 1995)

According to Haraszti, until the concept of individual rights becomes, in his words, “an actually and naturally working notion of society”, there can be no women’s movement. He also emphasized the concrete and specific circumstances of the transition, such as family displacement (and I would add shock absorption) generated by the macroeconomic policy shifts, and increasing inflation and unemployment.

Haraszti also discussed the appropriation of the Western consumerist model, and how it was reinterpreted given the specific experiences of women under authoritarian
communism. Labour was valorized, and women were encouraged both ideologically and structurally to work. However, he described kindergartens (early childhood care centres), which were paradoxically seen by the Western women’s movement in its lack of subtlety as a great socialist achievement, as “militaristic, uniform and aggressive ideologically”. Being able to stay at home with children for a longer period was viewed very differently, as a method not only of opting out of the labour force, but of opting out of a meaningless public sphere, to have the opportunity to create a more authentic alternative. The official representation of women was tokenist in form and content; Haraszti called it “staged pseudo-political participation”. Moreover, he explained that “the [most satirized] party functionaries were women”. He criticized “Western feminism” as being “too party-like, too militaristic, too movement-like, which plays into anti-Bolshevik sentiment”.

Furthermore, the sanctification of equality under authoritarian communism did not result in “real” equality for women or men, but rather a degradation of their subjectivity. Personal humiliation and social servitude did not render equality completely illegitimate, but it certainly introduced a pervasive aura of suspicion and cynicism with respect to the concept.

Although I could criticize Haraszti for being reductionist and not allowing for the full diversity of theory and practice that constitutes feminism in both North America and Western Europe, these were also sentiments later echoed by a number of feminist friends in their frustration at communicating with their Western counterparts. The entire conversation was enlightening, and one that defied easy labelling, me as “Western
feminist”, or he as “male chauvinist”. Not only did he not fit the convenient stereotype of the hand-kissing East-Central European gentleman whose tendency is said to be either gently patronizing or entirely dismissive with regard to issues of gender, but I apparently did not fit his stereotype of a Western militant feminist dogmatically asserting my theory over his experience. However, before further discussing the complications of a transnational transplantation of feminism, the connections between the dissident theory of civil society and the Western liberal tradition must be more fully explored.

II. Civil Society and the Western Liberal Tradition: A Case History in the Exclusion of Women

How is it that we can speak of the East-Central European “civil society project” as being distinctively within the liberal tradition? First of all, its very existence as something between public and private presupposes a separation of spheres, is not only functional for but intrinsic to the liberal political tradition. This is true of both the Lockean and Hegelian variants of civil society, which correspond to continental European “organicist” and Anglo-American “rights-oriented” forms of liberalism. Second, the values it presupposes--tolerance, rule of law, self-determination, basic freedoms such as free speech and the right to assembly and association--are the bedrock of liberalism. Third, because independence is granted or accepted, there is an implied goal of the sharing and distribution of power, information and influence in society--a series of checks of balances of the type described by de Toqueville. This is a multidirectional
phenomenon, described best by Charles Taylor when he speaks of civil society as a “web of autonomous associations, independent of the state, which bound citizens together in matters of common concern, and by their existence or action could have an effect on public policy” (my emphasis; 1990: 96). Both liberalism and civil society are also only possible given a particular notion of the individual, one which we can ground historically and theoretically as a product of Enlightenment rationalism, separated and freed from traditional social ties and the ascriptive criteria which previously defined one's identity.

**Gellner’s “Modular Man” and Shil’s Civic Virtue**

It is precisely the notion of an individual in the liberal sense described above that one can associate with Gellner’s description of “modular man”:

It is not so much that his word is his bond, but that his word is his word even when spoken softly, without emphasis, in ordinary circumstances, without artificial heightening of the atmosphere, so to speak. And he must be capable of lucid Cartesian thought, which separates issues rather than conflates them and takes them one at a time: the non-conflation of issues, the separation out of the social strands, which makes society non-rigid, presupposes not merely a moral willingness, but also an intellectual capacity (1995: 42).²

For Gellner, modular man and what he is capable of is the precondition of civil society:

It is the political consequences of modularity which are really

---

important. Modular man can combine into effective associations and institutions, without these being total, many-stranded, underwritten by ritual, and made stable through being linked to a whole set of relationships, all of these then being tied in with each other and so immobilized. He can combine into specific-purpose, ad hoc limited associations, without binding himself by some blood ritual. He can leave an association when he comes to disagree with its policy without being open to a charge of treason. A properly terminated contract is not an act of treachery, and is not seen as such. A tenant who gives due notice and pays the recognized rent, acquires not stigma if he moves to a new tenancy. Yet these highly specific, unsanctified, instrumental, revocable links or bonds are effective! This is civil society: the forging of links which are effective even though they are flexible, specific, instrumental. Society is a structure, it is not atomized, helpless, and supine, and yet the structure is readily adjustable and responds to rational criteria of improvement (emphasis in original, 1195: 42).

Gellner’s “modular man” may be the building block of civil society, but the premises of his existence, Cartesian rationality, and above all the social deployment of his abilities remain unexplored. Modular man is required to neatly separate fact from value, existence from essence, emotion from action. However, at the same time, he is required to engage in highly sophisticated transactions, such as the fulfilment of contracts, which require an intense level of trust and fellow-feeling. Self-interest governs, but only conditionally; loyalty to a Weberian legal-rational order replaces traditional authority structures. Indeed Gellner asks how it is possible to even have civil society, for it presumes an atomized individual, yet at the same time guarantees the “politically countervailing associations” that prevent “political emasculation” (1994:99). Gellner uses the example of man’s essential “modularity”, the ability to be cooperative with others on an ad hoc basis. Like modular furniture there is no over-arching purpose (the
coherence and commitment necessary in buying non-modular furniture) and no meta-
ethic (no inescapable style or aesthetic stamping the overall look). Yet implicit in
Gellner's account is some form of social recognition, ability to act reciprocally, the
creation of a solidarity (at least about the rules) that makes civil society possible. After
all, even modular furniture requires a commitment on the part of the manufacturer to
compatible hardware, or it is incapable of joining and working together to form larger
wholes.

Edward Shils' examination of what makes civil society tick focuses on the
necessary prerequisite of good behaviour on the part of its members, which he simply and
aptly describes as civility. Like Montesquieu's virtue or Machiavelli's virtù, Shils'
civility is "an attitude and a pattern of conduct" (1991b: 11). Shils manages to pack a
lot into this simple notion, from the idea that civility between persons assumes that each
includes the other in the same "moral universe"; it "postulates a minimal dignity of all
citizens" and thus "includes concern for the good of adversaries as well as for the good of
allies" (1991b: 12-13). Shils does not speak of social solidarity per se, but his description
of the "collective self-consciousness" where each member of a community gives some
precedence to the interest of the collectivity and which prevents the "extremes of
partisanship" and other centrifugal pressures from dominating the polity (1991b: 14-15).
Again keeping in mind that the common good requires a fairly high degree of social
trust, the expectation is there that others are obliged to do the same.

For both Gellner, Shils, and many others, civil society seems prima facie a
political good in terms of liberalism, perhaps a prior condition for an even greater political good, democracy. Civility and reciprocity are the Kantian categorical imperatives of public life. Both Gellner and Shils are also representative of many contemporary accounts seeking to revive and promote civil society, and which to a greater or lesser degree imply social solidarity, trust, and tolerance as their basis. But what if civil society is also a deeply gendered concept, not only in the simplistic sense of the traditional relegation of women to the private sphere out of civil society's reach. Perhaps when we unmask civil society and speak less of social solidarity and tolerance, which seem outwardly gender-neutral, we find the hard core of the concept, which is the old liberal ideal of fraternity. Carole Pateman makes a very salient point in suggesting that “in discussions of the social contract and civil society” fraternity must re-enter the picture alongside liberty and equality. After all, it was not for nothing that the revolutionary slogan of 1789 proclaimed “liberté, égalité, fraternité”. Fraternity was central to both the development of socialism and liberalism, as it is the “crucial bond integrating individual and community” (Pateman, 1988b: 103). Fraternity is what makes both Gellner’s “modular man” and Shils’ “civility” possible at all.

**Pateman’s Unmasking of Fraternity**

Carole Pateman presents a convincing argument in *The Sexual Contract* that “modern patriarchy is fraternal in form and the original contract is a fraternal pact” (Pateman, 1988a: 77). Leaving aside the question of whether social contract theory is
either an adequate or specifically gendered way of describing modern authority (either historically or ahistorically), I want to focus on Pateman's claim that fraternity is an historically masculine bond. In addition, I want to extend Pateman's analysis, arguing that fraternity is essential to the concept of civil society and its revival.

Pateman discusses how in establishing fraternity as a political ideal, men were able to, in a civic sense, rise above their kinship ties or father-son relationships and subject themselves equally (at least in an abstract sense) to a higher authority. They became brothers—a term that simultaneously suggests both close familial understanding and equality. "Individuals" did not enter the social contract that made civil or civilized society possible; brothers did. Brothers are the ideal subjects of civil society because they can square the circle: act with respect to each other as equals and expect a level of reciprocity while at the same time engaging in competition as siblings. To the extent that they are brothers in the kinship sense, however, there are limits to such competition, and an inviolable moral code without which such ties would have no meaning. In public space, fraternity is civilianized and universalized, and the common bond of brothers is transposed onto the community. At the same time, the unity of the brotherhood implies a rejection and in fact a replacement of traditional authority based on the right of the father over the son. The "individuals" (men) of the foundationalist myths of liberalism—that is, the social contract stories—relate to each other as equals, meaning brothers and never fathers. It is also important to note that even in civil or political society, their essential brotherhood is not cast off, but subliminally expected to continue despite the language of
individualism. For if it were not to continue to some degree, social unity and cohesion would be next to impossible. This argument has been reinforced by actual historical experience, in that the sense of community and loyalty have been significantly enhanced through appeals to the psychological bonds associated with ascriptive identities of ethnicity, nation, and even class—all of which one is born into (1988b: 119).

Without addressing civil society specifically, Pateman emphasizes that the heart of fraternity lies not in civil fraternity, but in “the bonds of the fraternities that give meaning and worth to a formally equal status” (1988a: 81). Assuming that Pateman's civil fraternity is the esprit of citizenship writ large with its attendant duties of public participation, fraternities are not simply the secret societies or fraternal orders, but the traditional shop-floor organized trade unions, craft associations, men's social clubs, debating societies, et cetera. It is exactly these types of organizations and associations which comprise, in most accounts, civil society.

Now in contemporary discussions of civil society enlightened authors and Central European dissidents speak of social solidarity and mutual trust as the bedrock of civil

---


society rather than fraternity—does this linguistic sleight of hand sanitize fraternity from its historically gendered meaning? Pateman discusses how in the evolution of contractarian political thought, Hobbes, Pufendorf, Locke, and Rousseau all had a common interest in opposing the doctrine of patriarchalism because of the need to separate the “political right of the fathers and the natural freedom of the sons” (1988a: 82). To establish fraternity as a viable basis for negotiating a contract, patriarchal power had to be dealt with, and the ideas of Sir Robert Filmer in particular defeated. Nonetheless, however eager the contractarians of various stripes were to demonstrate natural equality—a prerequisite for fraternity—the father's prior first right of conjugal control over his wife is given short shrift. Ultimately, conjugal or sex-right becomes the non-political right of the husband over the wife in the private sphere, whereas the authority of the father as political is defeated in the private sphere, only to be recreated in the public sphere as the basis of political rights and equality among men. Pateman states:

The classic patriarchalism of the seventeenth century was the last time that masculine political creativity appeared as a paternal power or that political right was seen as father-right. Classic contract theory is another story of the masculine genesis of political life, but it is a specifically modern tale, told over the dead political body of the father, and sex-right is separated from political right (1988a: 89).

The situation of women as naturally subject to men by sex-right means they lack the structural capacity to be or become political; moreover given their rootedness to house and children and the very physicality of reproduction, they cannot “develop morally” to
the point where they could constructively engage in civil society. Pateman discusses the extent to which women’s social roles are naturalized and control over women’s lives and bodies is ensured through sex right, but she could problematize fraternity even further. Certainly, as she states, men as political agents and *as men* have a common and unifying interest in upholding the contract in order to guarantee that “sex right remains operative” (1988a: 103) but even outside this claim, there is simply no basis on which fraternal bonds could possibly encompass or include women. Furthermore, there is no alternative capacity or opportunity to establish some sisterly version of the same. This is expressed most vividly in Pateman’s discussion of the birth metaphor. She states:

The birth of a human child can produce a new male or female, whereas the creation of a civil society produces a social body fashioned after the image of only one of the two bodies of humankind or, more exactly, after the image of the civil individual who is constituted through the original contract (1988a: 102).

Because men become capable in liberal contractarianism of the political birth that really counts, that is, the Hegelian transition from a natural or family order to civil/political society, women’s role as the actual (not imaginary) giver of life is depoliticized. Fraternity not only excludes women by the way it structurally depoliticizes what women do that men can not (give birth), but the ongoing maintenance of fraternity depends on the continuation of that very exclusion. Under such arrangements, a woman’s choice is

5See for example, Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, especially his discussion of the necessary “progress of inequality” and the rights of property in the Second Part, as well as his discussion of the relationship between Émile and Sophie in Book V of *Émile*. 
farcical: for to join the “brotherhood” and thus attempt to interact on a purely formally
equal level, means a denial of the body and tacit acceptance of substantive inequality.

The sexual division of labour and the related public/private split are not just
functional but intrinsic to taking fraternity further as a method of sustaining social bonds
and building a community among like-minded (and like-gendered) inhabitants. Similarly,
the oppositional dualism of the public/private split is reflective of evolving political
theory and practice:

Liberty and equality appear as universal ideas, rather than the natural
attributes of the men (the brothers) who create the social order within
which the ideals are given social expression, only because the civil sphere
is conventionally considered on its own. Liberty, equality, and fraternity
form the revolutionary trilogy because liberty and equality are the
attributes of a fraternity who exercise the law of male sex-right. What
better notion to conjure with than ‘fraternity’, and what better conjuring
trick than to insist that ‘fraternity’ is universal and nothing more than a
metaphor for community (emphasis in original; 1988a: 114).

If we can agree that fraternity or its gender-neutral replacements such as “mutuality”,
“social solidarity”, or as Pateman suggests “community” are historically constituted in
such a way that we can only understand them in relation to both the theoretical debate and
the real civil societies that flourished from the 18th century onward, then a thorough
examination of the separation of private from public requires closer examination.

How women are simply written out of the picture becomes even more devastating
when you consider how later theorists (for example, Rousseau and Hegel) do discuss the
distinction between private and public in their various civil society debates—as between
personal or economic interest and the higher universal public interest. Women and the
family are extra-private in these debates; they usually do not “make the cut” even into the private sphere, and certainly therefore not into civil society. In the Hegelian account, for example, women and the family (essentially merged together) form the first moment of his account of Ethical Life in the *Philosophy of Right* and are literally, in his parlance, disintegrated or are transcended “in a *natural* manner” (emphasis in original; 219)\(^6\) in the transition from the family to civil society.

**Rescuing Fraternity: Habermas and His Critics**

So if women cannot be part of the fraternal compact either because they cannot act fraternally or cannot join the compact, how can a modern retheorization of the public sphere help us overcome these real and theoretical obstacles? In resuscitating the idea and the reality of civil society, did the East-Central European dissidents have no choice but to inherit its gendered underpinnings as well? Is there some way of rescuing the public sphere from its historically gendered nature? One important reformulation of the public sphere that claims to provide for radical democracy and greater inclusivity is that of Jürgen Habermas in his writings on communicative action and his system of ethics or “universal pragmatics”. In this sense, his more recent work can be understood as an optimistic solution to his *Habilitationsschrift, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. A useful place to begin an examination of the Habermasian public sphere

are the critiques offered by Seyla Benhabib, Iris Marion Young, and Nancy Fraser, especially since his account in a sense idealizes the 18th century public sphere as the real achievement of bourgeois liberalism.

Both Seyla Benhabib and Nancy Fraser have written critiques of Habermasian public sphere in the volume edited by Craig Calhoun entitled *Habermas and the Public Sphere*—a volume which expresses the theoretical engagement with Habermas’ early discussion of the public sphere since its translation into English in 1989. Iris Young is another feminist theorist who in many of her essays has engaged with Habermas on both his ethics and his historicization of public sphere, which she refers to in her own work in a more contemporary and inclusive manner as a “civic public”. All three are sympathetic to Habermas’ task, especially in his self-prescribed incarnation as the intellectual standard-bearer of modernism and the Enlightenment. However, they all find flaws so basic and intrinsic to the model itself that from each of their perspectives inclusivity becomes so paramount as to throw the project back to square one.

Benhabib considers both the Arendtian and the Habermasian models of the public sphere in her discussion. Hannah Arendt remains an important figure in both the background and foreground of these discussions, for her description of the public sphere (more generally described as public freedom). She has been equally influential for Habermas, his feminist critics, and the East-Central European dissidents. In its best and broadest sense, Benhabib describes Arendt’s public space as topographically and theoretically emerging wherever “men act together in concert” (1992: 78). The “acting in
concert" part of the equation is most essential, because it is the directed and purposive nature of such deliberation/action that makes the activity public, and hence constitutive of Arendtian freedom. Thus a bustling market square where individuals are busy with their private business, with different motives about what to buy and when, where conversations are characterized by the details of multi-faceted and diverse transactions, does not constitute a public space in this higher sense. However, a group of Central European dissidents gathering in a private living room to hear a samizdat reading and enter into a discussion following the reading does qualify as a public space. The radical potential of Arendt's logic, which she does not extend but Benhabib does, is that

...when freedom emerges from action in concert, there can be no agenda to predefine the topic of public conversation. The struggle over what gets included in the public agenda is itself a struggle for justice and freedom. The distinction between the social and the political makes no sense in the modern world, not because all politics has become administration and because the economy has become the quintessential public, as Hannah Arendt thought, but primarily because the struggle to make something public is a struggle for justice (emphasis in original; 1992: 79).

For Benhabib, Arendt defeats herself with her "phenomenological essentialism", that is, she limits the concept of public space by assuming only certain types of activity qualify (in Arendtian terms, both "work" and "labour";\(^7\) or the substantive content of the discussion is circumscribed by her narrow view of the political (Benhabib, 1992: 80). Arendt ignores the many bases of power asymmetrically operating in the economy, via

\(^7\)See Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), especially sections III and IV on "Labor" and "Work" respectively.
the use of technology, and through control of the media—which later on, Habermas
decidedly does not. However, in a sense this flaw in Arendt is more easily recoverable
than her practical and theoretical denial of how the public sphere itself is socially and
historically constituted so as to exclude many groups from participating in public
discourse, for example, women.

It is not enough to correct Arendt by adding women to the picture and chastizing
her politely for her lack of a feminist consciousness. Rather, one must look at the
structural obstacles that prevent the adding of women from naturally occurring since the
advent of the panoply of liberal and largely legalistic rights gained by women since the
dawn of the twentieth century. Of course, chief among these structural obstacles is the
separation of public and private spheres, and the relegation of women’s (unpaid) work to
the private sphere. Even when women made up an increasingly larger proportion of the
workforce (as occurred in most advanced capitalist countries in the 1960s and the 1970s)
it is now clearly documented as sociological fact that women do more of the housework,
child-rearing, and carry overall the emotional burden of the family. So where women do
enter the public sphere meaningfully it is usually within the context of herculean effort,
great personal sacrifice and/or an atypically supportive social structure (read: partner,
children, extended family).

To what extent does Habermas “improve upon” the Arendtian model? According
to Benhabib, Habermas’ more radical and democratic view of participation, which
explodes the political beyond traditional conceptions to include the social and cultural
spheres, is a promising start. The importance of debate, speech action and the joint building of dialogue and "practical discourse" runs throughout Habermas' writing, both as an early historical depiction of the construction of the public sphere, as well as in his complex theories of communicative action in his later work. However, even though this model is certainly more inclusive with its concern for equal chances at the discussion table, there is a problem when it comes to the shared procedures and norms that underlie the "ideal speech situation" and his discourse model of ethics. Principally, as Benhabib points out, Habermas inherits a number of dualistic distinctions from the contractarian theorists, which become evident when he claims, for example, the primacy of "public issues of justice" over "private conceptions of the good life", or of "norms" versus "values" (1992: 88-89). Benhabib's nervousness becomes clear when she reminds us that "these distinctions have served to confine women and typically female spheres of activity like housework; reproduction, nurture and care for the young, the sick, and the elderly in the private domain. These issues have often been considered matters of the good life, of values, of nongeneralizable interests" (1992: 89-90). Refocusing the discussion simply onto justice, and leaving open the question of what might constitute it, would be a much more inclusive approach.

Like Benhabib, Iris Marion Young finds Habermas' communicative ethics a "promising starting point" in the construction of "an alternative conception of normative
reason"—one that implicitly underlies a more heterogeneous civic public. Modern philosophy from Descartes onward has had a totalizing logic of identity, one which forces difference into an oppositional, leftover category. On a microcosmic level, this category includes all that is irrational and at the same time implicitly inferior and feminine, such as feelings, needs, and desires (1990a: 96-98). Republican philosophy and practice meant that in terms of the history of societal development, the public realm was defined as unified, impartial, universalist, and homogeneous—indeed it was necessarily so given the new and transcendent role of the state in this public realm. Habermas claims to have abandoned the assumption of normative reason as "impartial and universal" in his ethics, but Young shows that he has not succeeded. Being counted in does not count enough. It is not simply a matter of obtaining equal time, states Young, but the shared activity of discussion is defined in such a way as to exclude different forms of communication, such as gestures, facial expression, tone of voice, rhythm, and the rhetorical features of language such as evocative terms, metaphors, dramatic emphasis, and so on (1990a: 104-105). Creating a shared meaning or set of understandings is stultified by these restrictions, and more importantly the way we are affected by others within the course of a discussion is ignored and has no place in factual or normative (read: important and

---

rational) discourses (1990a: 107). This may seem trivial when placed alongside the larger question of who’s in and who’s out of the public sphere, but in fact it is precisely upon this type of reasoning that otherness is generated and dichotomies constructed. Against Habermas’ communicative-yet-exclusionary-ethics, Young proposes two ethical premises which ought to form the foundation of what she calls a “heterogenous public life”: “(a) no social solutions or practices should be excluded a priori as being the proper subject for public discussion and expression; and (b) no persons, actions or aspects of a person’s life should be forced into privacy” (1990a: 108).

Nancy Fraser is in some respects more blunt in her criticism of Habermas. Fraser claims the situation both historically and presently is more complicated than Habermas intimates; she states that “...declaring a deliberative arena to be a space where extant status distinctions are bracketed and neutralized is not sufficient to make it so” (1992: 115).

It is ironic that this criticism seems remarkably similar to the charges levied much earlier against the Rawlsian “original position”. On another level, however, Fraser is very nuanced in her views, rejecting not only the option of tossing out the public sphere as totally compromised, but also the idea as an ideal simply has yet to be fully realized in practice. Instead, she argues for a reconfiguration of the public sphere in two important ways.

---

9In addition to Fraser’s contribution to the Calhoun volume, see also Nancy Fraser (1989), “What’s Critical About Critical Theory? The Case of Habermas and Gender” in her book Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), pp. 113-143.
ways.

First, Fraser unequivocally asserts that we must do away with the assumption of bracketing status differentials, or being able to act “as if” they do not exist. Here one can also apply Fraser’s critique to the radical moral equality postulated by Havel in “The Power of the Powerless”. For Havel, we are all capable, regardless of our different positions in society, to act “as if” the relations of power were not heavily stacked against us, and generate moral and political agency within ourselves. This leads not only to a more “authentic” existence on a personal level, but also adds up to political force. Havel does not need to “correct” his views for material inequality or its consequences, because he assumes moral equality as a present condition and an outcome. However, this has the effect of depoliticizing the general material or gender-based inequality that Fraser wants politicized. Fraser believes that the goal of both the public sphere and of democracy more broadly, if they are to be truly meaningful and inclusive, must be substantive social equality.

Second, Fraser suggests we should acknowledge diversity and support what she calls of a multiple of “subaltern counterpublics”, or “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups [can] invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs” (1992: 123). Moreover, this does not preclude a more limited but overarching public arena where the honing of multicultural literacy in the broadest sense will allow the more limited publics to talk to one another. A precondition for these conversations must be openness—that is,
there are no *a priori* boundaries regarding what can be discussed, contested or enter public debates. Needless to say, this conception is empowering to social movements of all stripes, and promotes a type of radical pluralism that does not logically or inevitably collapse into identity politics or ideological separatism. Finally, we must do away with the "desirability of a sharp separation of (associational) civil society and the state" (1992: 134), one that she contends promotes the existence of "weak publics"--those that can muster opinion formation and to some degree contestation, but have virtually no decision-making capacity or power. A proliferation of strong and diverse publics is most important, and this can be translated associationally and institutionally into self-managed workplaces, housing cooperatives, parent-controlled child-care centres, and so on.

**Social Solidarity as the Sequel to Fraternity?**

I hope I have demonstrated that in the revitalized discussions of civil society and the public sphere, we ignore the critiques of Pateman, Benhabib, Young, and Fraser at our peril. In fact, the examples chosen here to highlight the gendered nature of civil society --the liberal anthropologist Gellner, the conservative sociologist Shils, and the radical democrat and philosopher Habermas--were deliberately selected to show that this problem is indeed interdisciplinary and cuts across the traditional left-right axis of

10 Fraser contrasts these "weak publics" of the associational model with "strong publics" that can perform the functions of both opinion formation and decision-making. Chief among these are sovereign parliaments.
political commitments in the West as well as the East. I am not suggesting that we discard the resurgence of civil society theory in the Western academy as only extending fraternity. As Benhabib and Fraser have noted in their discussions and improvements of the Arendtian-Habermasian model, civil societies or the public sphere(s) work best for women and men in providing radically open and democratic opportunities for social engagement, where there are no real or imagined boundaries in terms of how participation is realized, or what can be discussed. In other words, fraternity cannot become social solidarity simply by imagining it as such; it has to be socially and historically constructed from scratch, in the same way that the original civil societies were.

III. East Meets West: The Complications of Transnational Feminist Discourse

Ann Mische, Hana Havelková, Nanette Funk and others have discussed the differences between public and private under authoritarian communism and among the newly democratized/liberalized countries of the region. Following both Havel and Arendt, Mische describes how the party-state both encroached on and took over areas of

life previously considered private and literally publicized them. In so doing, vital areas for political agency and subjectivity were lost (Mische, 1993: 246-247). Paradoxically, the private sphere--most notably the family--became infused with the values of public space and in many respects became a “substitute public sphere” (Havelková, 1993b: 68-69) or an “ersatz public sphere” (Funk, 1993: 323). Within the context of private homes independent initiatives were cultivated; within the family or among close friends open criticism could take place, alternative histories and futures could be explained or posited. The family was a safe place to discuss social and political issues, and was perhaps the only facet of existence where the majority of the population could claim to “live in truth” in the Havelian sense. Mische describes how in the household/family women were in a relative position of advantage as the “strong (generally dominant) members of the one sphere in which some semblance of subjectivity could be maintained....” (1993: 247).

Similarly, Havelková has described the family as the “refuge of moral values” (1993a: 68); she states that “the family and close friends were the only school of political thought given the absence of an opportunity in the media, the schools, or elsewhere for public discourse” (1993a: 68). This was probably highlighted, as Funk points out, by the lack of other alternatives prior to 1989. The emphasis on family was connected to women’s realistic expectation that within their families they were more likely to experience satisfaction and mutual support. Not only was there no meaningful independent public sphere, but people generally had little money, were unable to travel freely, and thus had neither the income nor the mobility to engage in many “leisure time” activities.
A major part of the civil society project was thus the re-publicization of what had been pushed into the zone of the private, in not just an effort to recover authentic politics, but also to recapture subjectivity on a profound level. Rethinking political agency becomes as important as the shifting definitions of public and private in the early social processes of the transformations. Nonetheless, as in Western liberal societies, the private sphere under authoritarian communism was also the site of depoliticized and feminized activities such as unpaid domestic labour, child-rearing, cultural and religious reproduction, and so on. It is, however, too simple to suggest that these activities were moved into a "more private private" sphere; for example, cultural reproduction takes on a decidedly public tone when the "real" (unofficial or alternative) history of the nation is being taught. Nonetheless, it is also the case that women active in the "antipolitics" of the opposition across the region were not proportionately represented at higher levels, and this also reflects both their lower levels of involvement numerically and the fact that their contributions were less visible. On the other hand the official public sphere, while ostensibly legislating and maintaining equality between the sexes, was the overarching and oppressive site of control through which the web-like penetration of the party-state was omnipresent.

As evidence of the inequality faced by women in the formerly-existing private sphere and the arena of oppositional politics in Poland, Shana Penn discusses how in the martial law period the gendered nature of Solidarity's existence was exposed in her article
"The National Secret". The continuation and very survival of the movement depended upon the intervention of women *publicly*—in the sense of performing key functions such as underground newspaper production, the coordination of regional underground headquarters, and the maintenance of connections with Western media and international support networks. Through a series of interviews with former Solidarity women, Penn provides us with astonishing examples of women's creativity, hard work and courage, on the one hand, and their effective silencing, on the other. In many cases, the male leadership of the union was imprisoned, but as Barbara Labuda also suggested, they did not have the "skills" to effectively manage and take the movement underground. This was seen as a "natural" for women given their situation in Polish society as reified wives and mothers, the invisible pillars of society, a myth reinforced through the ubiquitous social power of the Catholic Church. As Penn describes:

On the one hand, women had decided to be invisible. Their identities had to be kept secret or the whole operation would have been infiltrated. On the other hand, this reinforced women's invisibility in the public sphere. It is not surprising that they were not noticed in an underground. What was more obscure than women operating a clandestine network (1994: 62)?

An extremely memorable example in Penn's account is the case of Danuta Winiarska, an organizer of workers and farmers in the Lublin area. Wisely believing that it was unlikely for anyone to take her seriously as "the boss", she invented a fictional male *doppelganger* named Abramczyk, and persuaded others that she was acting in his name and on his

---

orders. Penn's discussion of Solidarity is both appropriate and telling—after all, if women seemed invisible in a mass movement of over ten million members, how likely is it that they would be active in the leadership of the much more marginal oppositional movements in Czechoslovakia or Hungary? Penn also comments that from a Western perspective, it is hard to understand how these women did not emerge from this formative and important experience with some analysis of gender oppression. Penn concludes that had they done so, their impact would have been revolutionary, and assisted in their transition to above-ground political activity in a post-communist world. However, many women in the region writing about women, the opposition, and Western feminism suggest that this expectation is short-sighted at best, and does not fully appreciate the range of reasons why women's roles are less public and less overtly (or institutionally) political. For example, Havelková describes this absence as much a reflection of the specific character of politics as of any historically particular or cultural impediment to participation. Politics is both more inflexible as a work arrangement and in some respects less obviously relevant to women's daily lives than other public sphere activities. Moreover, as she points out, given how the transformation process has been dominated by economic discourse, women are more likely to focus on either keeping or improving their labour market position than on running for political office. A second important interest is the reorientation of the family and women's roles within it. In this hierarchy, politics as a category of either involvement or as an arena of solidarity runs a poor third place.

To a certain degree, Penn exaggerates the invisibility of women, for in many
respects women’s shared experience of activism in Central Europe belies such interpretations. However, activism does not equal recognition, and it is this lack of recognition, especially outside the region where the “big names” of well-known dissidents have always been male, that underlines Penn’s surprise and indignation as she uncovers “the real story”. My own account, in which all the dissidents studied for their political theory are men, reflects this bias.

Slovak feminist Jana Juráňová has specifically linked the absence of an openly feminist or “women’s agenda” or even the recognition of gender inequality as a problem with the segregation of men and women into different political spaces. She notes that social segregation between women and men is negatively correlated with women’s status. That is, where there is a strongly gendered division of labour, women are more likely to be victims of discrimination and oppression. Where work is shared, especially in the private space of the home, the work itself is less likely to be seen “as inferior and repugnant, but as important” (Juráňová, 1997: 2). She discusses how in Slovakia both in the public and private realms there is an invisible line separating male and female spaces. The church is largely female, the pub male. Even within the home, the haven in the heartless world, the “beautiful” space often hand-decorated or arranged, is “female”, the “sacral” space of bible and study is male. In this context it is easier to understand how the politicization of the private sphere that occurred when dissident activities took place in private homes destabilized the gender order, simultaneously providing for and limiting opportunities for women. Within the home, the boundaries between “male” and “female”
spaces were more fluid and could be more easily negotiated. At the same time, when “normal politics” took over after 1989 and the liberal division of public/private was reinstituted, the numbers of women involved in high politics dropped dramatically. One must be careful, of course, not to conflate the institutional arena with the broader public sphere. As Jiřina Šiklová has warned, avoidance of overtly political roles, perhaps an indication of their inflexibility and perceived irrelevance to women’s daily lives, does not necessarily mean the women do not occupy other important positions. She has estimated, for example, that over seventy percent of leaders of NGOs in the Czech Republic are women (personal interview, 21 October, 1997).

If under authoritarian communism women had at least a level of power and subjectivity related to the private sphere of the family (and I am purposefully not considering the falsity of their equality-by-quotas in the official public realm of the party-state), in the post-communist period, the invisibility of women heightened, as is noted by Elzbieta Matynia, a one-time Solidarity and oppositional activist who was trapped outside Poland when martial law was declared:

When I first returned to my native—and already virtually “postcommunist”—Poland in the summer of 1989 after an eight-year absence, one of the things that struck me most vividly was that in the new and exuberant public life of the country there was an almost total absence of those capable women who had played such an active and essential role in the clandestine operations of the prodemocratic movement of the 1970s and 1980s. I knew many of them well and had been active along with them, but, like them, I had never defined the crucial problem in terms of gender. The primary objective of every social protest and movement then had been to fight for the political rights of all members of society. All other issues had seemed to be of secondary importance; it was felt that
these could be dealt with after the final battle for democracy had been won. But now, as I watched the freewheeling debates in the new Parliament and read about those newly created democratic institutions, I found myself wondering where all the women were.13

Gender inequality, however, became a new source of tension as it a) was seemingly on the rise, and b) was openly discussed. This tension was exacerbated by, as Matynia states “enormous social and cultural pressure coming from both men and women to disregard the issue and even to ridicule those involved in discussions of it” (1995: 374). In the four countries she examines—Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia—Matynia finds a similar set of historical conditions and current realities: legal equality rights and relatively high labour force participation rates for women combined with unequal pay, rampant discrimination in hiring, rising unemployment, a “legacy of fairly uniform communist legislation, such as protective labour legislation, child care provisions and abortion rights” (1995: 382) now under attack as a result of economic restructuring.

Previously-existing quotas under authoritarian communism guaranteed the visible (albeit passive) presence of women in political positions—with the elimination of these quotas, women’s participation has dropped from approximately 30% to between 8 and 14% of parliaments in the region (1995: 383). The topic of violence against women is rarely addressed (despite the real and increasing problems of sexual harassment and domestic rape); questions of sexual identity and racism are almost unheard of and in any event are


In her review of women’s organizations and their attempts to find a voice, Matynia also examines the validity of the plethora of reasons offered for resistance and opposition to feminism as a notion and a cause. In the Czech Republic, a common theme is “we are over-emancipated”, a reference to the “forced” social equality of not having the “choice” between motherhood and the labour force and the image of the token communist women --the *soudruzka*. Among Czech women there has been a resistance to labelling as either feminists or *soudruzky*. Feminism has been compromised by the communist portrayal of the heroic working woman--either in the party or the enterprise, which is doubly ironic given that the number of women holding high positions of political office were pathetically few. In the relatively more authoritarian experience of Czechoslovak communism, the family more than intellectual or social movement organizations served as a haven and a social agent for the perpetuation of an alternative set of values. Therefore it has come to be associated as a site of resistance rather than gender oppression. In Slovakia, where democratic consolidation is still an open question, only a small group of urban and educated women identify as feminists, and are also “perceived as belonging to the antinationalistic and anti-Meciar opposition” (1995: 391), perhaps reflecting an earlier stage of unity of dissent that has been shattered in the liberalization process in other countries in the region. In Hungary, Matynia refers to the importance of women in the “second economy”--this partial acceptance of a privatized yet informal set of market principles meant that women often felt a triple burden--an official job, the
maintenance of the household, and the involvement in the goulash economy. Some nascent and self-described feminist groups have emerged, such as the Feminist Network, but it has been forced to retreat from the “discredited label” of feminism and is focusing on projects which emphasize self-help, such as a shelter and hotline for those suffering from domestic violence, and legal services for women facing difficulties with Hungary’s now more restrictive divorce and custody laws (1995: 394). In Hungary, traditional women’s organizations have emphasized the special role of women in debates surrounding ethnic nationalism; however, in Poland, the tension between “motherhood and motherland” is even stronger. The influence of the Catholic Church, the Marian tradition, and the iconic preservation of the image of Matka Polka, the Polish mother, have conspired ideologically against the creation of a discourse based on gender inequality. Nonetheless, the issue of reproductive rights was galvanizing organizational experience for women in Poland as abortion rights came under attack by the Polish Parliament in 1993. Throughout the region there is a strong resistance to centralized, bureaucratic or formally structured women’s organizations. The exception to this rule are the successor organizations to the former national women’s organizations that were of the Leninist “transmission-belt” variety. Overall, Matynia concludes that the set of autonomous activities of various women both formally and informally do not at present constitute any form of “movement” in the Western sense, and nor is there a general sense of movement politics as being in their best interests. The current situation is “debate-driven” and “transitional”; contacts with Western feminism are critical of past patronizing
attitudes, but supportive of newer and more collaborative efforts, best represented by the Network for East-West Women (NEWW). NEWW was initiated by women from the United States at the behest of Yugoslavian activist Slavenka Drakulic and has been a considerable source of both financial and intellectual support. Governance is joint, however, and at least on the level of intentions there is a desire to create mutual dialogue and understanding, and not "teach" those from the former East how to become "Western feminists".

The evidence of a backlash against women found by Matynia is reinforced by a number of other authors, who in some senses ought to have been in hindsight less "surprised" by the assault against women's social rights that were part of the communist legacy. The fact is that the current transformations in the region, which have been accompanied by some shocking effects for women, have been underwritten by a restructuring of the public and private spheres. Joanna Goven\textsuperscript{14} has written on the backlash in the press, public and parliamentary debates and the reactionary legislative response to the role of women in Hungary. Despite the inequalities evident under authoritarian communism, women's "enhanced" role under the former system has been under virulent attack, to the point that any legislated measures of equality between men and women are perceived to be part of the problem, not part of the solution. Goven highlights the divorce laws in Hungary—which have been challenged because women are

most often the initiators of divorce, obtain custody of the children, and consequently child support payments. Thus women are painted as destroying the family, acting selfishly in their own interests, holding their former spouses to ransom. This backlash was a result of the unique blending of socialist egalitarianism with traditional official attitudes toward women. Goven states:

But the official notion of egalitarian marriage was accompanied by continued essentialist thinking with regard to gender: divorce-court practices were informed by the view that women were naturally better suited to be caretakers of children. This view, combined with Hungary’s severe urban housing shortage, helps explain why there are no provisions for joint custody over children in Hungarian law. Official views of women as naturally more suited to parenthood dictated that the children typically be awarded to them; the housing shortage dictated that when the court disposed over a jointly acquired home, whoever had custody of the children should also have the home. And women’s generally low salaries made child-support payments from former husbands a financial necessity (1993: 234).

Unfortunately, similar stories have been told regarding the debate over abortion rights in Poland, it the gendered nature of increasing unemployment, and declining rates of political participation and representation of women at all levels of government. It is

---


clear that women have not been equal participants in the transformations; in fact their social equality and political power has been visibly eroded in the past five years.

Or has it? Hana Havelková has questioned the notion of unproblematically assuming that a backlash has occurred, at least in the Czech Republic, and her arguments are subtle and worth noting, especially with respect to the important differences between countries in the region, and because things are not always what they seem. Havelková notes that in the Czech Republic, liberalized abortion has been in place since 1957, women’s unemployment is very low, and in fact since 1989 ten percent of Czech women have dramatically improved their social status (Havelková, 1996). Perceptions of inequality often ignore the fact that life experiences of women under authoritarian communism were extremely homogenized, because their life patterns were subject to strong structural determinants. Thus any changes in the labour force participation rates or involvement in particular occupations such as medicine or accounting are read as inequality rather than differentiation. What Westerners often point to are the sea of male faces in the Czech parliament, where the percentage of women deputies has dropped from 10 to 8 percent. However, as the earlier representation of women was purely formal tokenism, it is hard to know if this figure of 8 percent represents a real decline or not. Clearly there is a lack of issues around which women can be easily mobilized; Havelková suggests there may be a level of dissonance between women’s abstract conception of their

---

17Thus Havelková argues that the persistence of both equality and inequality are the unique legacy of authoritarian communism for women.
citizenship and the concrete reality of their citizenship, which includes experiences from the past, perceptions about a turbulent present and projections based on both onto an unknown future. On the one hand women can claim “we do not feel like victims” and “the gender of our democratic representatives does not matter” and at the same time suggest “women’s practicality and sensitivity might make a difference” or that women can gain much both socially and economically from the transition. This is not necessarily evidence of contradiction or false consciousness, but rather an indication of the profound level of societal transformation underway in the Czech Republic and elsewhere.

Nonetheless, I would contend that political and economic liberalization—all within the context of the pressures of globalization—brings with it not just dissonance and disruption but a mammoth reordering of public and private. It is impossible to predict how this might manifest itself in each country in terms of the situation of women generally, as the situation of women will to some degree become more heterogeneous with increased economic differences. To the extent that women’s previously-held rights (or social “givens”) are assaulted or may be under attack in the future, it can also be seen as a potential base around which women can organize. To organize as feminists, however, remains problematic.

Jiřina Šiklová, a former Czech dissident who has been instrumental in organizing the Prague Gender Studies Centre, has outlined a number of reasons why Western—and especially American—feminists should not be surprised if women in Central Europe do not openly and uncritically embrace the goals of a transnational women’s movement. First, like Haraszti, Havelková, and Matynia, she reminds us that the formerly-existing women’s organizations in all Soviet-style regimes were largely Leninist transmission-belts, neither independent nor able ideologically to admit the structural inequality of women in supposedly socialist societies. It is important to remember that although gender equality was legally and in most cases constitutionally entrenched and included significant social benefits, the daily reality of women’s lives, whether as workers or mothers did not mesh with the rhetoric. For example, like their Western counterparts, women in Central and Eastern Europe have been plagued by the continuation of a highly inequitable distribution of household labour. Moreover, the dual nature of women’s work and the primacy of the mother role has been traditionally reinforced by the Church, history, and now nationalist mythology.


20Women’s maternal roles are being increasingly naturalized in the discourse of nationalist movements. With respect to Hungary, for example, see Nora Jung, “About Feminism and Nationalism during the Coffee-Break”, paper presented to Vth Congress of ICCEES, Warsaw, 5-11 August 1995.
Second, Šiklová describes the considerable mystification surrounding the role of women in the paid labour force under authoritarian communism. Women did not view their labour force participation as voluntary or emancipatory. Moreover, focusing on children and family (the classic escape from the pervasiveness of the party-state) allowed women to be more non-conformist in the daily reality of their lives. In the transition period, there is also a cost-benefit calculus with respect to the work/home decision that has taken place in the minds of many women. The price to be paid for a likely mediocre income and substandard child care is simply seen as too high. This view is reinforced by the perceived virtue of the family as a haven in a heartless world, and a sense of "greater concern for the collective family good over their individual benefit" (Funk, 1993: 322). Moreover, the workplace as a site for feminist politics is also anathema. Policy supports such as pay or employment equity imply a reintroduction of false anti-meritocratic principles into the workplace and are likened to the old quotas: they are resisted or seen as attaching stigma to their intended beneficiaries. Serious empirical study is required, but anecdotally it is clear that women are the ones leaving the labour force either by choice or involuntarily as the first targets of neoliberal economic restructuring.

Third, activist women did not see men as patriarchs but as both victims and co-conspirators in a similarly downtrodden situation—"They were not our rivals but humble

---

21 For a full discussion of the legacy of state socialism with respect to the 'woman question', see Barbara Einhorn (1993), Cinderella Goes to Market: Citizenship, Gender, and Women's Movements in East-Central Europe (London: Verso), chapter 2, pp.17-38.
partners working at the next desk or machine" (Šiklová, 1993a: 7). Šiklová’s memories match those of Matynia’s “capable women” working alongside men who did not think to define the major issues of the day in terms of gender--after all, this was authoritarian communism they were living under! In this respect, the charges of Central and East European women against the misunderstanding of Western feminists are not unlike the critiques of African-American women against mainstream feminism as racist, and unable to understand the solidarity African-American women and men feel in their common struggle.²²

Finally, women and men throughout Central and Eastern Europe are averse to any all-encompassing alternatives which sound remotely ideological, militant, and speak of any sort of collective struggle. As Haraszti pointed out, feminism in its various guises is seen as an “ism”, or as some form of a new religion or messiah. Given the discrediting of the authoritarian communist version of Marxism-Leninism, this is perfectly understandable. It does not help that much feminist theory, even of the post-modernist variety, is filled with the type of ideologically-loaded language that makes the skin of the average Central European crawl.²³ It is also worth mentioning that those deeply involved

²²There is considerable serious academic material on this subject, but what most graphically illustrates the difference in recent American history is the very divergent reactions of white American women and African-American women to the “not guilty” verdict which concluded the O.J. Simpson trial.

²³This became clear to me personally while attending Ann Snitow’s workshop “Theories on Gender and Culture” in Kraków. Women from the region were fairly unified in their distaste of some of the feminist classics--for example, Bell Hooks and Marilyn Frye’s
in the democratic opposition movements of Central Europe-- with samizdat publications and prison sentences behind their names and public personae--were steeped in Orwell, Arendt, Miłosz and Kołakowski. Their intellectual debts are marked by their commitment against any form of totalizing logic. For better or worse, feminism is seen as a new uncompromising theory of history and as a project for political practice--a charge which is not entirely unwarranted although, I would contend, for different reasons.

Linguistic aversion to feminism is also related its central problématique--equality. On the one hand, there was and still remains strong societal support for egalitarianism; this is often cited as one of the reasons for the phenomenal electoral success of the post-communist parties. On the other, the notion of a forced or state-supported equality has been delegitimized. To illustrate this point, consider the argument of Nancy Fraser summarized above. Fraser is arguing for the necessity of substantive economic equality discussions of “oppression” and “liberation”. Writing in the West, someone like Judith Williamson can write about the need for a Marxist ideology of semiotics as a useful way for feminists to import notions of power, function, and class in a critical analysis of the images of women in mass culture, all the while quoting Rosa Luxembourg. The problem is that, regardless of the academic utility of her approach and her ability to expose the pejorative nature of the imagery she describes, it does not sell among women or men in Central Europe. (See Judith Williamson (1986), “Woman Is an Island: Femininity and Colonization” in Tania Modleski, ed., Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture, pp. 99-118.)

as preferable to the impossible “bracketing” of differences as a precondition for a meaningful public sphere. Equality is often seen as an excessively idealistic goal, or even left-wing in its agenda. Although equality remains a central dilemma for Western liberalism (as discussed by Pateman) and for the critical theory of Fraser and Benhabib, especially given the near-global rise of neoliberalism, it is less historically-loaded in an ideological sense. The terrain of possible contested meanings has been well-travelled by both academics and politicians. This is not so for the nascent feminist theorists of Central and Eastern Europe, where ideas of equality written as directed social betterment or as a telos are deeply problematic. Equality itself has become a problem; an undesirable social goal given its historical association with the failures of authoritarian communism. Equality is too closely related to forced social levelling, mediocrity, and the acceptance of the lowest common denominator as an achievement. What is needed, according to this logic, is a healthy dose of market rationality—"a little inequality to promote innovation, excellence, higher standards, and even a return to Europe! Any project of recovery, redefinition, or even reconfiguration is fraught with difficulty and conceptual confusion. This is made doubly difficult by the fact that the region is more and more succumbing to a narrow and neoliberal logic of equality rather than its more expansive and developmentalist counterpart.

An identical linguistic problem occurs with any discussion of “liberation” or “freedom”. Both Havelková and Haraszti suggest that individual freedom as self-actualization had no meaning in a context where women were officially “liberated”. The
“freedom” that Central and East European women enjoyed under authoritarian communism to participate in the labour force in numbers equal to men was not liberating at all: the grim reality was a double working day, lengthy separation from children and family members, lower wages and reduced professional and social mobility.

Also writing in *Bodies of Bread and Butter*, Jiřina Šmejkalová-Strickland and Jana Hradilková suggest some more subtle reasons for the discursive denial of feminism. It is not just a broken and deformed Marxist tradition which is to blame, states Šmejkalová-Strickland, but the fact that new currents in postwar intellectual history were absent or not widely known—such as the feminist examination and reappropriation of Freudian categories and the poststructuralist approaches (through both of which much feminist theorizing was accomplished) (1993: 9-10). Both discuss vocabulary challenges: terms such as “gender”, “discourse”, “image”, and “representation”, do not have accurate equivalents in Czech. Hradilková discusses the inevitable controversies and misunderstandings that have accompanied the transnational dialogue between “Eastern” and “Western” feminists, and of the need to ground whatever an indigenous feminist project might be in women’s real history and experience, and in the process also attempt recovery and de-ideologization of the past.

Women such as those actively involved in the Prague Gender Studies Centre, those interviewed by Matynia or the women I have met involved in feminist projects\(^{25}\) in

---

\(^{25}\)For example, the creation of the Education and Information Centre and the feminist periodical *Aspekt* in Bratislava, the work done by the Centre for Girls and the SOS hotline
my own travels in the region often complain about the problems with using the word “feminism”, in terms of the open antagonism it tends to invite. Stereotypically, Western feminists are at best well-educated and well-meaning women with too much money and time on their hands, who have the luxury of tinkering with the social structure (highlighting, at least, the partial success of anti-Western communist propaganda!) . At worst, they are virulent man-haters. Taking on the label means taking on its baggage as well, as women on both sides of the Atlantic know only too well. In my view, however, this is a strong similarity between feminists East and West. For although Western feminism has been successful in constructing a strong social movement and indeed a counter-public à la Nancy Fraser, the voice of feminist theory and practice is still marginalized to largely academic and political circles and, significant social victories notwithstanding, remains non-existent to the lives of most women.

What also becomes clear in reading this new body of literature is that some of the existing social science and historical explanations regarding the “second-class status” of women in Central and Eastern Europe simply do not fit. Historical or political-cultural explanations that focus on the region as more backward or developmentally-thwarted either ignore the reality of prewar women’s movements (for example, suffragette

in Belgrade for young victims of violence resulting from the Balkan War, or the numerous shelters set up for battered women, as in Nowa Huta, near Kraków, Poland, to name a few. Other organizations comfortable with the “feminist label” include the Prague Gender Studies Centre, the Feminist Network in Budapest, the Warsaw Women’s Centre and the Polish Feminists’ Association.
movements, or the serious discussion of women’s issues by such a revered
politician/scholar/national hero as Tomás Garrigue Masaryk26) or seek to essentialize
gender oppression as either a cultural variable or a deposit of the Leninist legacy.27
Women in the region have some of the same and some different reasons for not
identifying with feminism, either for themselves individually, or as a legitimate social
project.

Thus there exists and remains the problem of uncritically and unself-consciously
importing Western critical and feminist categories into an analysis of the current politics
of the region. Why is there nonetheless such a pressing need to engage in such a
complicated dialogue? Despite the difficulties, what does feminism have to offer? The
number of answers that have been offered will continue to proliferate. One of the more
obvious is based in the existing unequal relations between East and West— the possibility
for financial and technical support. This, combined with the intended construction of a
transnational feminist dialogue, is behind the creation of the Network for East-West
Women (NEWW). There are also precedents for transnational discourses between

26See Wilma Abeles Iggers (1995), Women of Prague: Ethnic Diversity and Social
Change from the Eighteenth Century to the Present (Oxford: Berghahn Books) for a
discussion of the role of women involved in the struggle for national and women’s rights in
Prague, as well as portraits of many of the women involved, as well as H.G. Skilling (1994),
T. G. Masaryk: Against the Current 1882-1914, (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State
University Press), especially chapter 8, “Defender of Women’s Rights”.

27See Ken Jowitt (1992), New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction (Berkeley and Los
women, as the recent United Nations conferences in Nairobi and Beijing attest—although on the one hand they are official governmental showpieces linked to the International community of events and organizations, and thus dissociated from most women’s lives, they are also remarkable places for women to gather and openly discuss and contest issues, their definition, and their interrelationships (especially in the case of the NGO forums). Feminist women in the academy also form a transnational, multi-lingual and multi-cultural counter-public. Feminism as a product of the West, liberalism and the Enlightenment has also had to deal with the severe critiques of exclusion, bias, and relevance from African American and Third World women, which have resulted in a more varied, self-critical and reflexive approaches. Finally, challenges by post-structuralist and post-modernist analysis have forced women to examine the category “woman” itself as essentialist, unable to provide theoretical sophistication and specificity to the differences among women, based on class, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and the lack of shared history, culture or experience.28 Most importantly, however, Western feminism has a number of ways and means of dealing with both liberalism and capitalism, and how gender inequality is functional to both. Thus Western feminist critiques are more helpful in the current context than in providing an historical frame of

reference, given the shifting boundaries of public and private into a neoliberal mould that is more familiar to Western observers.

In my conversation with Haraszti, he claimed that feminist critiques from the West would only be relevant when the situation of women in Hungary approximated the situation of women in the West, at least in the sense of having to cope with both the liberal redefinition and denial of rights. My first reaction was to dismiss this as a transplant of some form of liberal or modernization stage theory. On further reflection, however, I believe the reconstruction of civil society, the norms of citizenship, and the effects of constitutionalism along liberal lines and concomitant redrawing of public/private lines in a manner functional to the new order, have formed a kind of breeding ground for primary identification of women around the notion of gender. Peggy Watson has ironically made a similar argument to Haraszti when she states that feminism as identity politics (a reductionist and controversial definition to be sure) requires the "politicisation of difference" that is part and parcel of the reconstruction of civil society.²⁹ Proof for this claim is necessarily fragmentary, but one can cite the relatively high levels of effective women’s organizing when the primary aspects of social citizenship are up for contestation across the region (as in the case of abortion rights). Organization around gender, however, is not always friendly to Western notions of feminism, as is evidenced

by the involvement and strong support of women for religious/nationalist organizations and movements that hold very traditional views about the role of women as nurturers of cultural and physical reproduction. I would not go as far as to suggest, as both Haraszti and Watson contend, that women must experience oppression *qua* gender oppression before political identities can be formed in a manner friendly to feminism; this does assume an all-too-unilinear pattern in both what constitutes feminism and how one gets there. However, as Watson, Mische, and Havelková all point out, the party-state, which dictated needs and obliterated not only public space but in a real sense the notion of citizenship (in its formal and abstract sense), also made gender differences irrelevant, *at least on the public level*, and this in turn muddied the waters greatly in terms of what was left of the private sphere.30

Šiklová’s analysis of the type of women’s organizing that can both achieve measurable goals and attract women’s support are anti-political in the same sense of the previous opposition movements were anti-political, “...not controlled by some party, but

---

30In my view a similar argument could be advanced in terms of ethnic identity as well. Under authoritarian communism, prescribed social unity declared difference relating to both gender and ethnic identity as atavistic and irrelevant. Not surprisingly, new identity-formation around the categories of gender, nation, and language and often hotly contested by the former dissidents and theorists of civil society (Adam Michnik being a very good example). The actual differences between gender and ethnic identity, as bases for identity formation, as well as how they are theorized, resurface post-1989. Thus while Michnik and Palouš treat the issues of nationalism, ethnic cleansing, and the persecution of ethnic minorities with great seriousness and intensity, gender is ignored and pushed underground. Ironically, the very fact that these movements flourish is a signal of the successful consolidation of civil society. As Andrew Arato points out, civil society is not merely the arena for the social movements we happen to like.
as a movement deriving its existence from the interests of women” (1993a: 8). She cites the example of the Prague Mothers, an “informal, spontaneously-arisen organisation” devoted to ecological concerns (the industrialized areas of Bohemia are among the most environmentally-damaged in all of Europe), especially as they affect women’s reproductive capacities. Groups such as Prague Mothers reject the label of feminism outright; however, those who do identify as feminists both East and West should be encouraged to be ecumenical in approach and take seriously such socially-active women.31

If Šiklová is optimistic given the growth of these new home-grown organizations and sees them as the latest and most positive incarnation of the democratic opposition movement she herself was intricately connected with, Goven takes a far more pessimistic view. She sees the antipolitical approach taken in Hungary and elsewhere as a “celebration of the private”; within the home and family as an alternative public sphere, “women were expected to provide, where possible, the emotional and material support for men’s building of civil society” (1993: 225). Although Goven’s caricature of women as making tea and sympathy for the male-dominated democratic opposition movement would likely cause activists such as Šiklová in the Czech Republic and Labuda in Poland

---

31 There are some strong currents in Western feminism that advocate a similar approach of inclusiveness with respect to movements that do not necessarily identify themselves as either political or feminist, but nonetheless because of their activism and rootedness in women’s daily experiences, have contributed to radical social change. In particular, see Naomi Black (1989), Social Feminism, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell UP).
to bristle with disdain and disagreement given their own experiences, one cannot argue with a) the male predominance of the movements across Central Europe and b) the considerable anecdotal evidence of women's secondary status within these movements. The dichotomization of civil society and the state meant that the private-private, as opposed to the private-cum-public, was completely marginalized and indeed invisible. Not only did this serve the interests of the party-state (idealization of the family and the role of women as Worker-Mothers, and even the acceptance and promotion of Motherworkers to mask the inadequacies of the regime in living up to its egalitarian pretensions and its resolution of the problems of women's inequality), but it also helped oppositionists give focus to the state as the "ultimate source of all oppression" (Goven, 1993: 226). To some extent this explanation also provides some necessary context to my own interview with Miklós Haraszti. To Haraszti, feminism is not only an outgrowth of liberal society that had not yet been attained, but a luxury the opposition could not afford at an earlier stage.

In strong disagreement with Haraszti and against some arguments of necessary

---

32My own interviews with Jana Juráňová from Bratislava, Slovakia and Lidia Bialek of Kielce, Poland confirm this. After intense involvement in PAV (Public Against Violence), her local branch of P.E.N. International and a stint for Radio Free Europe and disappointment in being relegated to administrative tasks or not taken seriously in her own right, Juráňová chose a new path--as one of the founders of Aspekt, an openly-feminist periodical. She calls it her "sanity" given the "insane" nationalism around her. Bialek, on the other hand, lived in the shadow of her husband, the local Solidarity organizer in Kielce. As an English teacher and a translator, Bialek's skills were much in demand; however, her own self-perception in reflective hindsight is one involved in translating the ideas and actions of others, not of having a voice of her own.
historical linear progression (the problems of which Haraszti knows only too well!), I suggest that this is the critical time for women in Central Europe to be organizing themselves—first, to counter in more than rearguard fashion the current backlash against women, and second, to assert their own issues based on their own experiences. This may not—probably will not initially—happen under the rubric of feminism, and in any event, feminism should come to have a particular set of rooted meanings, not those ideologically imported and transplanted from the West.

As for the model of civil society fashioned by the dissidents and linked to the tradition of Western political thought, its earlier disadvantages in the overwhelmingly antipolitical context prior to 1989 may yield some fruitful developmental possibilities. As Benhabib and Fraser have noted in their discussions and improvements of the Arendtian-Habermasian model, civil societies or the public sphere(s) work best for women and men in providing radically open and democratic opportunities for social engagement, where there are no real or imagined boundaries in terms of how participation is realized, or what can be discussed. Women on both sides of the Atlantic need the space to create the politics of their own choosing according to their own needs and agendas. Associational life apart from the party-state initially and now apart from government and politics writ large will afford Central European women the mutual support and building of skills that will assist in the construction of their own counter-public. This has and will take place within the context of a radical reconfiguration of the meanings of public and private, and a generalized politicization of previously
depoliticized roles and subjects. In the same way that the dissidents breathed new life into civil society, going beyond the traditional revisionism of post-Stalinism, women’s organizations in the region today can go beyond the gendered limitations of civil society, injecting new life into the (now old) slogan, “the power of the powerless”. The very rejection of the fixed boundaries of politics involved in the civil society approach, however, might yet guarantee its theoretical and practical utility. Moreover, combining an appreciation of pluralism or in Fraser’s language, “multiple counter-publics” with moral commitment to tolerance and non-violence, will continue to be hallmarks of non-institutional politics. Women in the West can learn much from their experiences, as Central European women engage with Western traditions of feminist theory and organization.
Section 3

Chapter 9: Political Economy as Critique: The Dissidents Meet the Market

I. The Great Transformation: The Sequel

Writing in 1994, contemporary historian and journalist Timothy Garton Ash wrote that “returning the region to capitalism is like transforming a fish soup back into the aquarium from which it was made” (1994: 5). The metaphor--funny yet fantastic--captures with an ironic twist both the circumstances and the seeming impossibility of the economic “transitions” of Central and Eastern Europe post-1989. But as Karl Marx stated in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, history does repeat itself, the first time as tragedy and the second time as farce. For in the dog days of the twentieth century, two hundred years after the revolutionary triumph of the French bourgeoisie and almost a hundred after the consolidation of the Great Transformation so aptly described by Karl Polanyi (1944), the mythology of neoliberalism and the increasingly global penetration of transnational capital was for the most part welcomed or begrudgingly accepted by the former dissidents and intellectual elites of East-Central Europe.

Initially, or at least on cursory inspection, this hardly seemed surprising. Were not these dissidents the same bothersome people that had been thorns in the side of communist authorities for at least two decades? They had agitated for their regimes to respect human rights, wrote passionate tracts against totalitarianism and the importance of “living in truth” (Havel, 1991), made a strong case for non-violent yet dramatic political change (Michnik, 1985; Kis, 1989), argued against the inefficiencies and excesses of
centrally-planned economies (Kis and Bence, 1978; Haraszti, 1987), and several had even gone so far as to suggest that the entire edifice of Marxism was a house of cards given the many failures of “really-existing socialism” (Kołakowski, 1978). Now, if one is against communism, must one *ergo* be for capitalism?

However, the question is not so easily asked or answered. The reader must again be reminded that these same dissidents as a whole came from the Left. Sociologically, they were for the most part from the same sixties generation whose Western counterparts erupted in the streets of Paris in May, 1968 and attempted to foment revolution during the Chicago convention of the Democratic Party later the same year (Berman, 1996). Many arrived at their positions of dissidence as a result of their collective disappointment at the failed efforts at reforming communism from within. In his younger years, Kuroni’s trenchant critique of authoritarian communism owed much to both Trotsky and Lenin; in the sixties Haraszti self-identified as a Maoist. Among the Chartists, there was a strong “caucus” of both independent socialists and those attracted to Eurocommunism. Moreover, however strongly they might have rejected the reality of authoritarian communism, many were willing to continue labelling themselves as socialists--right up to 1989. Furthermore, a trademark of most dissidents was their allegiance (or at least strategic lip-service) to socialist economies in one form or another. Of greatest concern were the *political* excesses of authoritarian communism--disrespect for human rights and the rule of law, the lack of formal democracy at any level, pervasive censorship, and so on.
Something funny happened on the way to the Central European version of freedom, peace, and universal love. In 1989 the same Jacek Kuron who had once chastized his political superiors for their lack of commitment to Marxism was chastizing ordinary Poles and telling them to brace themselves for even greater price hikes in foodstuffs and essential commodities previously (and heavily) subsidized by the government. The first non-communist Minister of Labour in the region in forty years was telling the citizens of his country to tighten their belts and experience short-term pain for long-term gain. As I shall argue below, this was no simple, personal ideological change of heart, a Central European case of Jerry Rubin abandoning long hair for the stock market.

The purpose of this chapter is to subject the political theory of the dissidents in Central Europe to a critique informed by radical political economy. In the early 1990s when important macroeconomic decisions were being made, former dissidents now occupying key positions in the institutions of the state and civil society were often instrumental in tipping the balance in favour of rapid and radically neoliberal approaches to market transition that necessarily involved great risks and enormous social and economic costs. I argue that this was not only a matter of simplistic anti-Marxist avoidance of alternate economic models (reform communism and independent socialists had generated a vigorous debate on the so-called “Third Way”), nor was it solely a matter of the absence of economic analysis due to the “self-limitation” strategy to which the dissidents had cleverly subjected their arguments (so as to not call into question the basic
tenets of the Soviet model). I suggest that there were two major structural weaknesses in their thought and in their action. The first relates to the overall preference given to civil society and rights-based arguments in the theoretical groundwork of the dissidents and their movements, which predisposed them toward markets in general and later neoliberalism in particular. Moreover, this is perhaps indicative of a disregard for and a lack of understanding of both the economic crises facing authoritarian communism and in the immediate transition period the face and nature of capitalism in its globalizing phase. The second weakness concerns their capacity for action and response, given their own backgrounds, the disadvantageous circumstances under which they were living and writing, and the speed of the transition itself.

II. Return to Europe: The Best of Times and the Worst of Times

To some degree as a result of the element of surprise and the rapidity of change, the events of 1989 ushered in a wave of euphoria, enthusiasm, and hope for the possibility of new prosperity (or at least sustained economic stability), new political choices, and a new era of social solidarity where newly-won political rights would change the rules of the game. Not too far underneath the journalistic rhetoric lay, after all, the ideas of civil society nurtured by the dissidents during darker times. However, ten years later societal expectations have been defeated or dampened by harsh new realities. Central and East Europeans awoke in the nineties to the crushing weight of their “triple transition”: the simultaneous transformation of economic and political systems combined with nation-
building or nationalist tensions bursting open the seams of the state itself. That this was also the case in Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic--by virtually all accounts today the “success stories” of the transition--is indeed telling.

From 1990 to 1995 double-digit inflation persisted throughout the region--falling only to 9.1% in 1995 in the Czech Republic, the country with the highest per-capita revenues and lowest national debt. Given the battle against inflation, wages have fallen sharply in real terms. Employment in the state sector shrunk as the engines of privatization accelerated in each country and although the growing private sector did generate new jobs, new and newly-privatized enterprises could not hope to absorb the

---

1I am indebted in my use of this terminology to Claus Offe, who coined the term to describe specifically the “revolution” in Central and Eastern Europe, to distinguish it from the earlier “transitions” to democracy in Southern Europe and Latin America. Unlike those earlier transitions with dealt largely with political regime change, Central and Eastern Europeans have had to also cope with ethno-territorial disputes (new borders through secession, demands for local or regional autonomy from linguistic and ethnic minorities, national and sub-national migrations et cetera) as well as massive marketization and privatization, involving “the transfer of the hitherto state-owned productive assets to other forms of proprietor and...the creation of an entirely new class of entrepreneurs and owners....” (1997: 31-32). Sitting in a classroom in Kraków, Poland, in the summer of 1995 with representatives of the post-1989 generation of graduate students from 16 Central and East European countries with Offe explaining in painful detail the mammoth nature of the transformation as well as its problems and contradictions was a harsh and palpable “reality check” for all the participants, myself included!

2Poland began the decade with an annual inflation rate of 586%, which fell to 28% in 1995. In Hungary the rate hovered between 20 and 30% from 1990 to 1995. See World Bank (1996), From Plan to Market: World Development Report 1996 (New York: Oxford UP): 174. Inflation rates for 1997 (the most recent year for which statistics are available) are: Poland, 15%; Czech Republic, 10%; Slovak Republic, 6%; and Hungary, 18%. All inflation rate statistics are based on the consumer price index in each country.
army of the unemployed. Work was previously considered a right; after 1989 it was a privilege, one that even free marketeers could not claim was based on either determination or ability. Foreign and local markets disappeared and products and technologies previously considered low-quality or simply backward were suddenly obsolete. Labour productivity has only recently reached levels similar to the crisis-ridden era of authoritarian communist rule of the late 1980s, when many economists criticized state-socialist economies for their poor and uncompetitive productivity rates. There is an increasing gap between “rich” and “poor” however defined. Gini coefficients measuring inequality have increased across the region, but at least in the countries studied here have remained below average OECD levels; the most dramatic rise in inequality remains concentrated in the top quintile of the population (World Bank, 1996: 69-70). However, the nouveau riche are more than likely to have been former members of the Communist nomenklatura, who have traded their managerial expertise and bases of knowledge into positions of capitalist ownership.

3Unemployment rose quickly following 1989 in Poland and Hungary, less so in Czechoslovakia (after the 1993 “velvet divorce” the Czech Republic had much lower rates than the Slovak Republic which immediately shot up to almost 15%; the current unemployment rates of the Czech and Slovak Republics are 5% and 12.8%). Although unemployment rates have declined in recent years (currently 12% in Poland and 9% in Hungary), as in other OECD countries this drop is as reflective of the expiration of unemployment benefits or permanent withdrawal from the labour force (as has been the demographic pattern for women) as it is of real job growth.

Moreover, newly-liberated societies have had much to cope with in terms of increasing violence and the shredding of the social fabric that has accompanied the transitions. Crime is on an upward trajectory, especially violent crime, often resulting from extortion, arms smuggling, theft, drug trafficking, prostitution, and internecine criminal rivalries. Previously sacrosanct social guarantees and programs, which are now often negatively associated with “force fit” equality, have been withdrawn or are under threat.\(^5\) New social divisions of labour are being created, gender roles are being re-defined and many guaranteed at least a minimal and secure standard of living are falling through the cracks. Poverty and homelessness are but symptoms of the new (dis)order. Nationalist and irredentist sentiments, widespread overt and systemic prejudice against the Roma, and even a new form of anti-Semitism (without the convenient target of an accessible or identifiable Jewish minority in most cases) have surfaced or spread in intensity.

Finally, the economic and social dislocation created by both the fall of the old order and the birth pangs of the new has been taking place in an unenviable and troubled international context. In comparison with the \textit{Stünde null} faced by a ravaged Europe at the end of the Second World War, there has been no Marshall Plan, no international

\(^5\)For a thorough discussion of the linkages between neoliberal economic restructuring and new (old) conceptions of citizenship implicit in the withdrawal of social guarantees, tolerance of high unemployment etc. see Claire Wallace, “Citizenship and Social Policy in East-Central Europe,” in Marguerite Mendell and Klaus Nielson, eds. (1995) \textit{Europe: Central and East}. 
consensus on financial aid or redevelopment, and perhaps most importantly, no golden age to follow, characterized by an implicit postwar settlement to structurally protect rebuilding nations and workers from the excesses of unchecked capital. Currency devaluation and the liberalization of prices has not been accompanied by a great surge in international investment, and in the wake of the global currency crises, it has become more difficult to either attain or attract foreign direct investment. The great promise and goal of the “return to Europe”—now transformed into membership in the European Union (EU)—has been fraught with difficulties. Those inside the EU and those who watch it closely have long-term doubts about the viability of extension of the EU beyond the lucky first tier of entrants—Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Estonia, and Slovenia. Even for this privileged group, full entry will not take place until 2003, and it is not yet clear how “full” this membership will be, given the angst of West European countries over the prospects of being flooded with cheap labour, goods and services, and the current inability of the prospective members to meet the stringent requirements of the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy. What has happened? Prophetically, Marx’s portrayal of

---

For a full discussion of the issues of EU enlargement and its consequences for the region as well as for current EU members, see Enlarging Europe: Risks and Responsibilities, special issue (1998) of Transitions 5.4. While Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary are all anxious to join the EU, read as re-affirming their membership in the company of both prosperous and democratic European states, the price to be paid will be high, on both sides of the new EU frontier. Czech industry will require fundamental re-structuring and rules allowing for greater transparency and accountability must be imposed on its capital markets. Poland, having long avoided agricultural modernization after successfully resisting collectivization during the previous era, must now face a day of judgment—the majority of Poland’s small farms will either
the upheavals wrought by capitalism in nineteenth-century Europe is relevant once more:

Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation.... All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of his life, and his relations with his kind (reprinted in McLellan, ed., 1978: 224).

This chapter will focus not on the international level or on the political-institutional level, where early efforts (in Hungary and Poland flowing smoothly if not always directly from the Round Table Agreements reached in 1989) installed the rules of multiparty electoral competition, provided for the revamping of judicial and constitutional systems, entrenching the rule of law in terms of process, and enshrining the private property and contract as a result. Rather, as stated earlier, I want to examine the relationship between the set of ideas espoused by the dissidents and the profound crisis in political economy that followed. In so doing, I am assuming that human agency plays a more privileged role in moments of magnified and rapid historical change (as do O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1989) and that ideas matter profoundly in the sense of delimiting opportunities, helping to formulate political-cultural responses, and in

consolidate or face extinction. All prospective members must meet the exacting fiscal and legal standards of the aquis communautaire. Rules ranging from banking supervision to accounting standards must be harmonized. Within the existing membership of the EU, debate over accession has been stormy and although 40 billion euro have been promised to facilitate the process of economic transformation, EU annual budgetary expenditures are expected to double between 2002 and 2006, especially given increased agricultural and social spending.
predisposing key actors to some decisions or courses of action over others. Following Stark (1992), I contend path dependence is indeed important in assessing the processes of transformation, but would add that it has an *ideological* dimension as well.

Much of the debate in academic circles committed to radical or critical political economy has been on the disastrous effects of shock therapy (ST) on the region, and how these might have been alleviated if alternate courses of action had been followed. Especially at the issue is the policy dominance commanded by Jeffrey Sachs, the neoliberal creator and prophet of ST, and his regionally-based disciples and admirers (for example, Balcerowicz, 1995). Also on the menu is an open attack on the neoliberalism of ST’s adherents, the not-so-hidden agenda of its Western proponents in proposing changes to the direct and immediate benefit of the G7 (now G8), the lack of any meaningful Western assistance, and the deleterious impact of such a rapid economic experiment given the overall conditions in which it was conducted both internally in each of the countries involved and externally, that is, insertion into the new global economy.

---

7I use the phrase “policy dominance” deliberately, for although mountains of academic literature has already been generated in economics departments regarding the “lessons” learned from the transition processes and the various approaches taken (fast versus gradual, etc) much if not most of it takes the Sachs approach for granted or as a point of departure. See Somogyi, ed., 1993; Poznanski, ed., 1993; Williamson, 1994; and Poznanski, 1996. Shock Therapy’s “big bang” approach as originally conceived in the Polish context involved five facets: 1) immediate price liberalization; 2) subsidy cuts to both households and industry; 3) tightened monetary policy and the cancellation of cheap credit; 4) currency devaluation and convertibility; and 5) the removal of existing trade restrictions to guarantee international market access. For Sachs own analysis of his rapid reform programme and its results, see Sachs, 1991; 1994; 1995; and especially 1993, *Poland’s Jump to the Market Economy*. 
(Nuti and Portes, 1993; Amsden et al., 1994; Gowan, 1995; Gill and True, 1997; Pickles and Smith, 1998). Although this analysis taken collectively provides us with a trenchant critique of both the failed assumptions and results of ST, the literature does not problematize to any great degree why these decisions were taken and other alternatives not sufficiently explored. Pickles and Smith (1998) discuss how the possibility for a Third Way was immediately “foreclosed” by a “dominant discourse” we have come to call “transitology”, but fail to ideologically demonstrate how this foreclosure took place.⁸

Amsden et al. suggest that the late-industrializing model adopted by the East Asian newly industrializing countries (NICs)--and to some degree built on much earlier “late-industrializers” such as Germany, as described by Gerschenkron--would have been more helpful and less costly than the ST programme. However, Amsden et al., do not insert this hypothesis into the debate about the so-called “Return to Europe” which would have undermined such a policy choice--forgetting, for the moment, about the speed of the transition, and the fairly significant problem of sensory overload and information deficits in the early 1990s, not to mention the limitation of choices given debt-restructuring, especially in Poland and Hungary. Similarly, Gowan proposes that the replacement of the former COMECON and its economic linkages with a hub-and-spokes relationship with Western Europe was a fatal flaw of ST which significantly undermined pre-existing

---

⁸Pickles and Smith follow Burawoy (1992) in describing “transitology” as reworked modernization theory and Sovietology, whereby various policy/institution/sequencing mixes are debated and discussed with a view to the establishment and consolidation of market economies and liberal democracies (1998: 4).
economic relations and linkages, setting back immediate possibilities for economic growth, and helped to create a peripheral and dependent status for the region. However, Gowan does not stop and reflect for one moment about the political viability of such an option, especially in Central European countries with a historically strong resistance to their political and economic definition in relation to Russia/the USSR. A fundamental premise of the dissident political project was the reconceptualization of the region from “Eastern” to “Central” Europe, along with its concomitant “return to Europe”.

Here I am suggesting that given the enlarged scope for agency afforded by the moment of transition, that both the neoliberal proponents of ST, as well as their left critics, have to some degree operated in a vacuum devoid of ideological context. For example, Gowan criticizes Sachs for his conventional rational choice economic

\[9\] It is also important to remember that both the reconceptualization and its discursive presentation as a “return” occurred considerably prior to 1989-1991 (when the notion of “return” began to take on more immediate economic and strategic connotations as in joining the EU and NATO). For a summary of key viewpoints, see Stephen R. Graubard ed. (1991), *Eastern Europe...Central Europe...Europe*.

\[10\] Here I am using “ideological context” in the sense of Quentin Skinner in his groundbreaking essay “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas”, reprinted in James Tully, ed. (1988) *Quentin Skinner and his Critics*. One of Skinner’s main arguments is that texts in political theory must be understood in their linguistic context, which includes decoding or recovering authorial intention, which necessarily leads to an examination of possible “conventionally recognizable meanings”, or an ideological context or framework. Skinner is searching for a nuanced and not a unidirectionally determinative view between ideas and the histories in which they are embedded. However, as as been seen in the above chapters, my notion of context is “thicker” than Skinner’s, involving popular culture, history as both “events” and “interpretations”, political economy, and the embeddedness of the thinkers and their ideas in daily social life.
assumptions, but to a certain degree accords Sachs too much legitimacy and independence as the mouthpiece of neoliberal reform in Central and Eastern Europe. Because much of his critique is limited internally to Sachs’ prescriptions and whether or not the desired economic results were achieved, he can at the same time posit other alternatives that might have yielded better results (such as maintaining COMECON) and criticize key actors for not considering and/or choosing such alternatives. Embedded in this approach, however, is the same set of assumptions regarding rational individual actors maximizing their interests. What was missing was a full range of policy prescriptions, thus the wrong choices were made. Breaking up COMECON was not just simply the result of Sachs’ prescriptions with the encouragement of Western (primarily American) influence; it was also seen as a desirable end for intellectual elites linked to dissident circles in the region. It may have been an economic mistake of gross proportions, as Gowan suggests, but economic considerations were clearly not the only factors in operation.

Given that I am arguing that one of these “other factors” included the context of dissident ideas, manifest either in the actions and decisions of former dissidents who assumed positions of power in the state and civil society, and in the general milieu of public debate in the very early stages of the economic transition, I must now turn to the relationship between their ideas and their actions.
III. Civil Society and Market Economy: An Affiliation of Process and Outcome

It would be misleading to suggest that intellectual activists within or among Central European countries had a homogenous set of views or proposals for economic reform in the region, or even a coherent economic agenda at all. The strong exception remains Solidarity in Poland, where economic proposals were not only forcefully put forward (both via the Gdańsk Accord and during the Solidarity Congress a year later), but there was also some bargaining power/societal leverage through which one might contemplate actual implementation. Solidarity itself is difficult to unpack in terms of an overall economic agenda, given its incredible size as a social movement (swelling to almost ten million members in 1981), the sheer diversity contained within it, and the fact that its demands and proposals changed over time. As the retrospective and burgeoning literature on Solidarity demonstrates, you can empirically locate somewhere in Solidarity whatever you want to, from anarcho-syndicalist tendencies to nascent support for a free market economy. Elsewhere, however, the focus was on human rights, cultural freedom and the fight against all forms of censorship and state control, the expansion of civil society as a tentative prototype of a potential alternative, the need to authenticate politics with morality (or "living in truth" in the Havelian prescription). When questions did focus on matters of political-economic orientation, the situation became even more confusing. At one time or another probably a majority of dissidents referred to
themselves as socialists (Havel included), but the use of the term had definite Alice in Wonderland connotations, meaning anything the author wished it to mean. At the same time, being anti-socialist did not necessarily mean being against socialism (as in the “Anti-Socialist Element” t-shirts sported by most of Poland’s youth), but only against the really-existing variety. There was simply no overall regional coherence in terms of support for a particular vision of political economy. In this section, I will briefly explore the Solidarity agenda and its linkages to and discontinuities with the Balcerowicz Plan that followed fairly immediately after the consolidation of the Mazowiecki government, as well as the more opaque linkages between the ideas of dissident intellectuals of

---

11 For earlier and later perspectives, see “It Always Makes Sense to Tell the Truth: An Interview with Jiří Lederer,” in Open Letters (1991: 97); Havel’s interview by Karel Hvižďala in Disturbing the Peace (1990: 8-10); and “What I Believe”, in Summer Meditations (1992: 61).

12 At times Havel considered himself a “moral socialist”, rejecting “overly fixed categories...empty ideological concepts” in favour of standing on the side of the oppressed, against “...social injustice and the immoral barriers that degraded man and condemned him to the status of one who serves” (1990: 9-10). Michnik considered himself to be writing in the long-standing Polish tradition of “independence-oriented and democratic socialism” (1985: 330). Because of the history of the Polish workers’ movement, the PPS, and the SDKPiL of Rosa Luxemburg, Michnik could speak of belonging to a long-standing socialist tradition, even when he openly acknowledged that the term itself was “discredited and ambiguous” given its association with post-war authoritarian communism. Even Hungarian dissidents such as Kis and Bence who more self-consciously shed socialist vocabulary acknowledged their debt to the Marxist tradition, and Konrád was most apt in stating: “I don’t like communism because I see it as a coherent system of pointless prohibitions and abridgments of freedom. (It doesn’t follow from this that I have to like capitalism, in reaction to which communism arose, since the fact of communist exploitation doesn’t put a prettier face on capitalist exploitation.)” (1984: 236-237).
Czechoslovakia and Hungary and their predisposition to support broadly neoliberal transition programmes. Finally, I assert that there is more than an elective affinity between the political liberalism inherent in the dissidents writings and the subsequent marketization and privatization of Central European economies. Ultimately, this is manifest as support for the market as a process and the market as representing a series of desired outcomes.

Anyone exegetically analyzing the Gdańsk Accord or the proceedings of the programme resulting from the Solidarity Congress would be forced to yield to the conclusion that both demands and proposals inherent in the Solidarity agenda can be described as socialist in character and prescription (Kowalik, n.d., 1995, Flakierski, 1993). Moreover, as the new union further organized itself and became more aware of the severity and depth of the economic crisis, its demands became more sophisticated and

---

I am leaving aside for the moment the hotly debated question of the sociological genesis of Solidarity’s demands—as initiated and championed by the workers or as the brainchild of the intellectual opposition. One view (especially represented by Staniszkis, 1984) contends that workers vacillate between narrow economism (Lenin’s “trade union consciousness”) and unrealistic utopianism, therefore intellectuals need to politicize their demands. The other view (represented by Laba, 1986; Laba, 1991) suggests that the workers were capable of formulating sophisticated political demands by themselves, as is evidenced by a comparison of the 1971 demands solicited by the Party-State following the massacre in Gdańsk-Gdynia with the 21 demands of August, 1980. Without attempting to simplify the complexity of the debate or its underlying assumptions, however, it is fair to concede in hindsight that both the workers and the intellectuals (and these roles were not always static) had a considerable impact on both the Gdańsk Accord and the rapid growth of Solidarity that followed. Moreover, what is perhaps unique to the Polish situation is the degree to which both workers and intellectuals acted in a historically self-conscious manner, with reference to past traditions and events.
focused more on macroeconomic reform (Flakierski, 1993). This was clearly evident in the programme resulting from the Solidarity Congress in 1981.\textsuperscript{14} Solidarity was the catchword for understanding inter-subjective relationships both economically and politically, as opposed to competitive self-interest. Equality of opportunity is counterposed to party privilege. Finally, self-government (or self-management, as it is sometimes translated) is called for, a new socio-economic order which Kowalik (n.d.) describes a synthesis of “plan, self-government, and the market” (my emphasis: 13). Kowalik summarizes and translates the program as having four requirements:

a) The abolition of the command-distribution system of economic steering, the separation of economic administration from the political regime and the suppression of a political cadre reliant on party nomenclature.

b) Basing the organization of the economy on socialized enterprise, guided by an employee council which is to represent the workers and which is authorized to appoint directors chosen through a competitive system for the operational management.

c) The reinvigoration of the market through the destruction of bureaucratic obstacles, and
d) The socialization of planning, whereby the different projects of the central plan are opened to public debate and public approval (my emphasis: 13).

Solidarity was neither questioning public ownership nor the party’s monopoly on power.

What is particularly interesting in the Polish case is that these demands did not exist in an ideological vacuum, but mirror sociological research done at the time. Surveys conducted

\textsuperscript{14}See in particular the resolutions of the Congress, reprinted and translated in George Sanford, ed. (1990), \textit{The Solidarity Congress, 1981: The Great Debate} (New York: St. Martin’s Press).
by Nowak (1981) suggested that although few Poles identified as Marxists (and a great majority defined themselves as Catholics), what Kowalik describes as "socialist values" were prevalent. Nationalization of industry, land reform, economic planning and abolition of the prewar class structure were all approved of and accepted. Moreover, respondents favoured egalitarianism to the point of accepting preferential opportunities to those in lower economic strata, and agreed that "society as a whole and the state in particular are responsible for the equalization of life opportunities and for the potential of all citizens as well as for the satisfaction of peoples' basic needs" (Kowalik, n.d.: 5). It is also important to note that the economic proposals put forward by Solidarity were intrinsically connected to political demands for decentralization and the democratization of the political system.

Moreover, the "right" of an independent trade union to exist in Poland was probably (or at least initially) seen as the thin edge of the wedge of pluralism and civil society as much as a means of eventually achieving some level of worker self-management. In Kuroń's thinking, independent unions were part of a movement of independent institutions that constituted a de facto political opposition. In his famous essay "A Year Has Passed", Michnik explicitly linked Solidarity with the "promise of a civil society":

The essence of the spontaneously growing Independent and Self-governing Labour Union Solidarity lay in the restoration of social ties, self-organization aimed at guaranteeing the defence of labour, civil, and national rights. For the first time in the history of communist rule in Poland "civil society" was being restored, and it was reaching a
compromise with the state (Michnik, 1985: 124).

Suffice to say that the imposition of martial law in December, 1981 put a full-stop to Solidarity’s agenda. During the 1980s various half-measures were taken by the party-state to reform the economy but without serious infrastructural changes these were doomed from the start.\textsuperscript{15} Poland was also coping with the results of Gierek’s risky strategy of the seventies, which had been a colossal failure. Now the country was saddled with indebtedness with little to show for it, had unexportable goods of low quality, and lacked both technology or money to sufficiently modernize industries or generate new growth in the area of consumer commodities. The only way out of the political crisis and the only way to legitimately justify military suppression was economic success, but this was structurally impossible. However, the extended period of stagnant incomes and declining living standards in the 1980s also began to change public perceptions about the long-term viability of any form of state socialism. By the late 1980s, economic efficiency and authoritarian communism were perceived directly at odds with one another. By the time of the wave of strikes in 1988 it was increasingly clear that 1) reform efforts conducted unilaterally by the party-state were not successful; and 2) any major economic

\textsuperscript{15}There is a large literature on attempts to reform the economies of authoritarian communism and why these ultimately resulted in failure. Measures were often limited or partial and could thus not succeed given larger structural constraints, were subject to frequent policy changes and reversals, and an overall unwillingness and incapacity to carry out reform, especially given the lack of regime legitimacy, expertise, and openness to alternatives. With regard to East-Central Europe, see especially Fehér, Heller, and Márkus, 1983; Burowoy, 1985, 1992; Nuti, 1979; Kornai, 1992; Staniszkis, 1991; Verdury, 1996.
restructuring would require some social consensus or legitimacy, which the regime could not command or possess (Flakierski, 1993). This paved the way for the re-legalization of Solidarity and eventually the Round Table Talks (RTT).

The underground years also had a strong impact on Solidarity as an organization and its practices. For the majority of the mass membership, this was necessarily a time of retreat, apathy, and withdrawal. With many Solidarity leaders imprisoned or underground, there was not the same opportunity to formulate proposals for change, nor had they willing partners or bargaining power. During the underground years, decision-making was largely undemocratic, in direct contrast to the obsessive democratic proceduralism of the 1980-1981 period. As Kowalik points out:

> Above all, the mass movement transformed into an organizational structure in which co-optation and nomination replaced democracy. Decisions taken by individuals or small groups were arbitrary, not allowing for critical or independent evaluation of their positive or negative aspects. Loyalty, servitude, and discipline were now to hold the union together (1995: 96).

By the time of the RTT, the Solidarity leadership had become a narrow group of activists, many of whom were intellectuals and like Michnik and Kuroń had longstanding oppositional credentials. Kowalik (1995) is correct in asserting that they had lost touch with their social base; I would add that they were self-confident in their own ability to conduct negotiations on behalf of the społeczeństwo--the Polish people.

One of the three sub-tables of the RTT concerned economic affairs, and the resulting agreement echoed the 1981 programme in its support for self-government.
There was also an implicit bargain in the making, as Tymowski points out:

The (economic) Round-Table agreement also promised to support the Jaruzelski government’s economic reform measures, which it had been trying to implement since initiating re-application to the International Monetary Fund in 1987. In general, the political concessions to Solidarity at the Round Table (re-legalization, loosening of censorship, participation in parliamentary elections) were regarded as a reward for acceptance of the government’s austerity policies.

Who owed what to whom changed fundamentally, of course, when Mazowiecki assumed the premiership in August 1989. However, if there was a legacy on economic matters bequeathed to Mazowiecki and his team from Solidarity through the Round Table it was a general perception that a way must be found to shed the command aspects of the economy and introduce market mechanisms within the framework of self-government in industry (1993: 187).

Tymowski goes on to describe how in the early days of Mazowiecki’s administration, there was support for employee stock-ownership programs (ESOPs) and even discussions with World Bank representatives on how to make privatization efforts consistent with the Solidarity ethos. Poznanski also argues that the Mazowiecki government had the option of pursuing stabilization via deflationary wage reductions; given the history of social bargaining, a contract could have been struck between workers and the government (1996: 175). However, the Balcerowicz plan rejected these ideas in favour of ST (1993: 187-188). Clearly, the Balcerowicz approach represented a decisive break with the egalitarianism and self-government of Solidarity; however, it also highlighted the contradiction between earlier notions of moral economy (Tymowski, 1993) with

\[\text{[16]It is noteworthy that both Tymowski and Poznanski are simply suggesting that kinder, gentler methods of transition were on offer, not that some kind of "Third Way" be taken seriously.}\]
economic neoliberalism. It also confirmed the divorce between the new political elite (that is, the former Solidarity leadership) from the masses. This was no joint or democratic effort, and was thus radically different from the direct democracy of the Solidarity Congress. Massive institutional change was top-down, directed by an elite convinced of the need for a rapid and systemic approach, and to some degree insulated by perceived technical expertise, support from the Prime Minister and other intellectuals (for example, Geremek and Kuroń) who were repositories of public trust and had considerable moral legitimacy, international institutions,17 the delay of early elections, and the foreclosure of a debate on possible alternatives.

Moreover, people like Michnik and Kuroń used their credibility to the maximum in promoting the Balcerowicz reforms. Kuroń played a major role in the appointment of Sachs as an advisor to the Mazowiecki government. Michnik used his position as editor of the new and influential newspaper Gazeta Wyborcza, not only to promote the rapid introduction of the free market, but also to condemn the mass demonstrations that followed, as “compromising the social order, violating the law, and destabilizing the state” (emphasis in original; Kowalik, 1995: 96).

Because of the relative speed between events such as the re-legalization of

---

17 Although much can be said about how beholden Poland was at this moment to the IMF and the World Bank, given partial debt relief and the well-known commitment of these organizations to a particular brand of structural adjustment, the fact remains that many Polish economists were more enthusiastic about shock-therapy than IMF representatives. Said another way, Jeffrey Sachs found more than a willing audience in Balcerowicz et al. See Tymowski, 1993: 188.
Solidarity, the conclusion of the RTT, first elections, and the implementation of the Balcerowicz plan, as well as the break-up of the original Solidarity union, popular mobilization was short-lived and limited (at least by Polish standards!) To some degree, the “moment” of mobilization had occurred and been spent earlier in the Polish context, in the events of 1980-81. Martial law had emasculated the breadth and depth of civil society so carefully nourished by KOR and the dissident intellectuals in the late 1970s.

Kowalik (1995) is correct in suggesting that it is far too simple an explanation to suggest only that the a) new political elite was only acting on the basis of its objective material interests in the new order; b) certain individuals were blindly ambitious; or c) that they were implicated in and also stood to benefit from the “power for capital” trade-off with the old nomenklatura (see Staniszkis, 1991). Kowalik brings considerable subtlety to the debate in Poland, and discusses important factors such as the break-up (and complete fragmentation) of Solidarity as a political force and the role of the intellectuals as “modernization missionaries”. I agree entirely with his assessment that the scope and rapidity of change had much to do with the “return to Europe” and the “cult of the West”.

In a telling quote, Geremek states:

Recognizing the difficulties which we would face under the Balcerowicz plan, I know that it, in fact, was the only possibility which would allow Poland the chance to attain a place in the European economic order. In other words—without sacrifice, and very serious sacrifice, we did not have a chance to [cross] the threshold and [begin] the process of integration. I also knew that we had to move very quickly because Europe had no intention of waiting for us....(my emphasis; quoted in Kowalik, 1995: 101).
However, Kowalik addresses only tangentially the theoretical links between the ideas of
civil society espoused earlier and the particular type of market reforms chosen later. In
order to pursue these linkages, I will pull both Czechoslovakia and Hungary into the
discussion, for together with Poland the dissidents from these three countries created an
oeuvre of thought with a demonstrable affinity to marketization.

It is clearly not the case that in lacking the social movement and the key
participation of workers, intellectual activists in Hungary and Czechoslovakia constructed
their ideas or wrote samizdat without regard to a social base or a consideration of socialist
alternatives. For example, in Hungary reform economists such as Bauer were attempting
to construct scenarios that opted out of slavish determination by either plan or market;
political writers such as Kis and Bence (1978) attempted to articulate an “East European
Marxism” distinctive from Soviet-type ideology and the platforms of Western communist
parties. Likewise, among the Chartists in Czechoslovakia, there existed both an
organized faction devoted to revisionism, drawing from the 1968 Action Programme and
Eurocommunism and a group of loosely-organized socialists (both of the democratic and
the revolutionary variety). However, one of the overall strategic reasons for Charter 77’s

18The “ex-communists” were treated with both suspicion and derision by other
Chartists; Zdeněk Mlynář was a leading figure (until his subsequent emigration) and Jiří
Hájek its chief spokesperson. Others included Milan Hübl and Jiří Dienstbier. Among
the socialists were those, like Jaroslav Mezník, who self-consciously saw themselves as
the legitimate heirs of the Czechoslovak National Socialist Party of the immediate
postwar period and to European social democratic traditions more broadly. Others, such
as Rudolf Battěk, saw themselves as completely independent of past linkages, and some
considered themselves leftist in the revolutionary sense, such as Jaroslav Šabata and Petr
existence (and its continued success) must not be overlooked. An important purpose of
the Charter was to unify oppositionists about what a) they could agree on; and b) could
legally do something about, that is, the requirement of the regime to live up to its
international commitments represented by Helsinki’s Third Basket. As in Poland, key
writers and opposition leaders intentionally privileged political over economic reform,
and once revealed, the Western liberal substance of their politics was both open and
receptive to marketization (although not unproblematically, or without considerable
tension).

From the mid-1970s onward when dissidents in Czechoslovakia and Hungary
began to discuss civil society or initiatives independent of the state as not only widening
the space for alternative and open political activity, the “parallel economy” (Benda, 1978)
or “second society” modelled on Hungary’s second economy (Hankiss, 1988) was
sometimes offered as either a prominent example or as a constitutive part of the
enterprise. In fact, the black market in goods and services served as a model in a number
of respects: 1) it was completely independent from and uncontrolled by the state (except
that it was obviously sensitive in a reactive way to the inefficiencies and shortages of the
official economy); 2) it was an example of how parallel structures were capable of
supplementing and perhaps to some degree supplanting official structures; 3) it was a
model of responsiveness to consumer needs; and 4) although it was illegal and required

Uhl. These group and tendencies made written contributions to Charter documents as
well as publishing independently. For further information, see Skilling (1981).
organized criminal activity for effective penetration, in contrast to the waste and inefficiency of the planned economy twinned with the bestowal of considerable privileges on the *nomenklatura*, it was seen to some degree as morally superior. The magic of the market was evident in the fact that, unlike the poor quality goods available through state stores, the black market provided a broader array of high-quality imported goods, albeit at much higher prices. Furthermore, the market was not seen as destructive of the other aspects of an independent society (such as an alternative culture, or a parallel structure of education); rather it was conceived as a mutually-supportive dynamic to these other spheres. By placing the market alongside the other non-state institutions of civil society, it is neutralized and made benign. However, the market clearly has more power and penetration than does, for example, the Church or the media. This concern is consistent with the left critique of the "cult of civil society" among Western academics who see the approach of Keane (1988) and Cohen and Arato (1992) as masking the real exploitation of property relations under capitalism (see especially Wood, 1990). This predisposition across the region to the market as a process or mechanism also flowed from formative experiences with reform communism. What united thinkers such as Oskar Lange, Wlodzimierz Brus, Ota Šik, and (the earlier writings of) János Kornai was a commitment to a marketization, or some simulation of it, with an economy based on socialist forms of ownership. Under these types of schemes, microeconomic decisions are made independently at the firm level based on shadow commodity prices, operating under the general aegis of rules and procedures prescribed by the centre (Altvater, 1993). Although
the attempts at reforming communism from within were never given half a chance to succeed, given Soviet intolerance and the authoritarian nature of the system, their collective failure was a signal to many (some initially, some much later) that the creation of a humane socialism out of the communist corpse was impossible.

The market as a process also involves an ideology more than friendly to the political liberalism of the dissidents. In economic theory as ideologized by its neoliberal adherents, individual actors associate with each other in exchange relationships on the basis of rough equality of opportunity. Both sides act on the basis of a rational calculation of their self-interest and their transactions with one another are assumed to be fair and transparent. Rules of the game are established to ensure that this is the case, and there is a neutral third party should any disputes arise. Moreover, this neutral third party, the state, is also bound by rules and checks on its own behaviour. There is a simplicity and efficiency to the overall process, which consists of millions of these freely-conducted transactions. Ignoring the possibility of any distortions or externalities that disrupt the perfectly competitive scenario, profits accrue to the most efficient and productive enterprises. Prices for products and commodities are set in accordance with the “natural” ebb and flow of supply and demand, and in any event will be kept reasonable or appropriate via the forces of competition. Finally, the public good is served through the

---

19Here I am thinking of not only the failure of the Polish October in 1956 and the Prague Spring in 1968, but also of the limited and contradictory approach embodied in Hungary’s New Economic Mechanism, and even the proposals for worker self-management outlined in the Solidarity Congress of 1981.
expansion of industry, the accumulation of capital, the opportunities provided to all. Moreover, if you combine the Mandeville's dictum that "private vices equal public benefits" with Smith's famous sympathy principle, you provide a moral as well as an economic basis for capitalism.20

The dissidents wanted to be able to "live in truth", so that human relationships would be honest and transparent and politics would be based on authenticity and morality. They wanted rules of fair play to be established, where international human rights agreements would be honoured. The rule of law would be established, and individual citizens would be protected from arbitrary arrest and detention.21 In their working lives and social relationships they wanted to associate publicly or privately with whomever they wanted, and express themselves freely without censorship. They wanted to be able to live autonomously without interference, and choose their occupations and lifestyles accordingly. It is not particularly original to suggest the obvious parallels

20Przeworski (1992) makes the salient point that even as neoliberal economic theory was being embraced in Central and Eastern Europe, it was being called into question by recent developments in neoclassical economic theory. Claims to the effect that markets efficiently allocate resources or only markets generate growth are undermined, for example, by research confirming the impossibility of a complete set of markets, and the important contributions of state investments in education and public health on economic growth. See 1992: 45-74.

21Thus it is with good reason that the World Bank Development Report From Plan to Market has a chapter dedicated to the rule of law, for the "fair and transparent" application of well-defined laws and regulations (especially regarding property and contract) is essential to the creation and functioning of free markets. See World Bank, 1996, chapter 5, "Legal Institutions and the Rule of Law", pp. 87-97.
between market economies and political liberalism; however, it bears remembering given the dissidents’ debt to the civil society tradition and rights orientation of political liberalism. Thus it is made obvious when Havel states:

Though my heart may be left of centre, I have always known that the only economic system that works is a market economy, in which everything belongs to someone—which means that someone is responsible for everything. It is a system in which complete independence and plurality of economic entities exist within a legal framework, and its workings are guided chiefly by the laws of the marketplace. This is the only natural economy, the only kind that makes sense, the only one that can lead to prosperity, because it is the only one that reflects the nature of life itself. The essence of life is infinitely and mysteriously multiform, and therefore it cannot be contained or planned for, in its fullness and variability, by any central intelligence (1992: 62).

In fact, because the market required freedom in which to operate (or at least a regulated protected space where rules of competition guaranteed some semblance of fair play), this necessary precondition of its existence might somehow act as a protective bulwark for other freedoms. Thus in the Lockean spirit and in the tradition of the Scottish Enlightenment, private right is not separate from public interest. Rather, the two coalesce and are indeed mutually supportive. Hence the market became the economic portion of an indivisible package. Needless to say, there is much experience beyond Western Europe to suggest that democracy and the market do not always go hand in hand and much historical evidence to suggest that their uneasy coexistence is the result of unique historical conjunctures (Moore, 1966; Therborn, 1977, 1984a; Przeworski, 1992). However, it should also be said that the dissidents largely focused on the historical nexus of capitalism and democracy as it evolved in Europe.
The market was also associated with a particular set of desired outcomes. Given the demonstrative example of Western Europe next door, the market was associated with the construction of institutional democratic forms, liberal political values, cultural and social freedoms, an open society, and general economic prosperity. In supporting the market or assuming its existence as unproblematic, dissidents did not have just any market in mind but in particular the social market economy associated with the post-war European welfare-state. Implicit in this model are the social entitlements of citizenship outlined by Marshall (1963) as relative economic welfare and security, and the right to share in a civilized life according to prevailing societal norms. The obvious contradiction between the inequality of condition inherent in the market as an outcome and the equality of opportunity associated with the market as a process remained unexplored, but the former is clearly at odds with the latter, springing from the liberal-individualist tradition with its emphasis on formal legal political rights.

Nonetheless, the European market of the golden age was the focus of attention. The market was a European invention, having a market was a precondition for belonging to Europe. The autocracy and inefficiency of central planning was “Eastern” or “Asian” (read “Russian” or “Soviet”). Moreover, because the historical experience of post-war Western Europe was valorized, the ideological tarnish of neoliberalism did not wear off. After all, the glaring evidence suggesting many of the political assumptions of neoliberalism are questionable, such as democracy is the best safeguard of property rights, or that democracy favours economic performance, comes from the nations
formerly known as the “Third World”.

The fact that the desired outcome was a particular market rooted spatially and temporally in postwar Europe displays at minimum a profound naiveté regarding the state of the world in the 1990s. Central Europe wanted to become Austria, West Germany, or Sweden just as these nations were experiencing severe crises in the neocorporatist arrangements which underpinned their tripartite postwar settlements and welfare states (see Goldthorpe, 1984; Therborn, 1984a, 1984b; Lash and Urry, 1987; Liepíetz, 1987; Streeck and Schmitter, 1991; Altvater, 1993). Although recent research suggests the so-called “golden age” in postwar Europe was less than golden (Webber and Rigby, 1996), Central European expectations were frozen in time. Moreover, the increasing globalization—or at least regionalization—of capitalism has meant either/both the erosion of state sovereignty or/and its internationalization as well as the accommodation or synchronization of national interests with the requirements of larger trading blocs (Panitch, 1994; Cox, 1987; Gordon, 1988; Hirst and Thompson, 1996). This second “great transformation” has been accompanied and indeed made possible by a severe and intransigent form of economic discipline buttressed by neoliberal ideology, as manifest in the policies of state central agencies, inter- and intrastate organizations, the programmes of political parties and even the lukewarm panacea offered by Western labour movements in the name of progressive competitiveness (Panitch, 1994). In Central Europe this has all been naively translated into anxiousness about membership in the EU and its economic promise, the terms of which are, in any event, highly ambiguous in the post-
Maastricht era (Judt, 1996).

Given an earlier blindness to these problems, the market was unproblematically characterized also as "normal", and Central Europeans longed for a return to normal (truly European) life. Tymowski writes of the Polish experience in this regard:

During the Solidarity period, and before, a common complaint was that People's Poland made it impossible to live a normal life, one in which promotions and other rewards would be granted on merit and hard work, rather than party affiliation, in which securing everyday necessities would not depend on endless queuing or "facilitating" access through personal connections (*zakłtowanie*), in which art and public ceremonies would allow expression of true feelings and commitments rather than politically expedient loyalties. Despite the population's massive social mobilization in the Solidarity movement, people considered themselves cursed by living in interesting times and longed to be free of the obligation of political engagement (Tymowski, 1993: 178).

Meanwhile, Michnik naturalizes the market and mythologises the socialist response in European culture:

Within the realm of European political culture the market was something *perfectly natural*, but at the same time its by-products—the mentality of egoism and a respect for the power of money—were embarrassing. Within the realm of this culture, as an answer to this sort of mentality, was created the socialist *myth*. The socialist myth in European culture can be understood, then, as an expression of shame in the face of an uncritical acceptance to the law of the jungle (my emphasis, 1995: 529).

In the Czech context, Havel justified his original support for the celebrated neoliberalism of Klaus (then Minister of Finance) in the following manner:

...we wanted a *normal* market system of economics. The program of breaking up the totalitarian system and renewing democracy would founder if it refused to destroy the basic pillar of that system, the source of its power and the cause of the material devastation it lead to—that is, the centralized economy (my emphasis, 1992: 63).
Normal meant the pricing of labour based on the accumulation and expenditure of human capital ("merit" and "hard work"). Normal meant the opportunity to unburden oneself of politics because a normal situation was one where economics dominated politics, and not the other way around. The construction of the market as a natural entity echoes Hayek's critique of socialism as a dangerous disruption of a "spontaneous" order of freely-associating individuals (Wainwright, 1995). Market economies express a primacy of economics over politics, and as long as there are some transformative mechanisms such as democratic institutions or an even limited public sphere or civil society, they can respond to crises of legitimation in a highly elastic way (Altvater, 1993). This definition of economic priority and the abnormality of a heightened politics is consistent with many dissidents' characterization of themselves as "apolitical" and not wanting to be involved in politics (or engaging in "antipolitics"), but feeling morally compelled to speak up in an abnormal situation (Konrad, 1984; Klíma, 1994; Vaculík, 1987, 1995).

Aside from being "normal" and "European" in its genesis and development, the market was also linked symbiotically with pluralism in ideas. Thus the marketplace is not restricted to material goods and services, but extends to what Konrád calls "the global

---

22There are of course contradictions here, because there was also a repudiation of socialism and economics generally because of the perceived connection between economic planning, centralization, socialized ownership and state control, authoritarianism, the lack of accountability, and so on. Wherever the exigencies of economic necessity were seen as dictating politics, limiting free expression, and prescribing certain approaches for the public good (for example, for writers and cultural workers, the doctrine of socialist realism), economics was seen as a menace.
information market”, whose buyers and sellers are the “international intellectual elite” (1984: 216-217). Markets encourage free-thinking and challenging ideas, whereas censors prohibit and regulate what can be bought and sold--thus limiting and even destroying innovation. Destatification, deregulation, the free operation of markets--taken together, these offer unparalleled opportunities for the “intellectual worker” as an individual and for an exponential increase in product selection in the cultural marketplace. As Konrád dramatically states:

> Creative intellectuals don’t want to be bosses; they want to be able to tinker, to invent, to create what they have imagined. Our utopia is simple enough: it is enough to be able to work--something magnificent in itself, provided our labors are not humiliating and useless. The creative intellectual is the superworker, the one who undertakes the most complicated kinds of activity. He is all right if he can offer his abilities on his own terms, not on the buyer’s. No one will rest until the market for culture belongs to the proprietors of ability. They will not rest until they get what belongs to them--their spiritual authority, the authority of ability on the market of labor and ideas. That’s been true since the beginning, for thousands of years. The liberation of the intellectuals has been going on all that time and will never end (1984: 234).

Ironically, Konrád’s utopia, with all his emphasis on the dignity of unexploited labour and the value of the independent producer, sounds a little Marxist, at least until he discusses the market as the impartial arbiter of merit and worthiness.

> As naive as this might sound to those well-versed in the contemporary critiques of capitalism, it pales in comparison to what Konrád has to say on the irrelevance of the capital-labour conflict:

> The conflict between capital and labor is beginning to concern us
less than the one between those who on the one hand, to maintain existing
capital relations, try to limit others’ freedom of work, of discovery and
innovation, and of critical thinking, and those who on the other hand want
to work tranquilly and well, without hindrance, who work enough on their
own and want thus to earn an honest living.

Hardworking people don’t crave luxury; that’s not on their minds. Their dispositions demand finer and more genuine pleasures. They find it ridiculous that anyone would try to impress others by spending freely. The great scientists and writers have been rather modest people. The scientist and jack of all trades are alike in that they find enjoyment in discovering things. They like to work until they’re thoroughly tired and then sit around in the evening drinking with friends. They differ from all those whose main occupation is to harass others, take them to task, terrorize and confuse them, even on occasion destroy them. So it’s those who work versus those who make trouble (1984: 235).

Aside from the fact that the above statements are exceedingly patronizing, coming even as they do from the great critic of the intelligentsia-transforming-itself-into-state-power, Konrád’s views are compelling if only in their circularity. How can Konrád possibly claim that the capital/labour conflict is unrelated or not relevant to working freely without harassment, and the ability to earn a decent day’s wages? The answer lies partially in the fact that Konrád is evidently not talking about the capital/labour conflict as we know it, but is referring to the ideological fetishization of the conflict under authoritarian communism. However, this explanation does not excuse Konrád for generically putting the scientist and the jack of all trades in the same box--both as modest hardworking people--and then blaming intellectuals en masse for their primary occupation as order-givers. Again, Konrád is not really talking about intellectuals in general, but the partisan, compromised, and therefore treasonous variety. Ultimately for Konrád, communism is an “aberration on the road toward the liberation of work” (1984: 236). He might not love
capitalism, but at least market principles guarantee a minimum threshold of freedom to work, or put differently, engage in intellectual labour unrestricted by the party-state. The free marketplace in ideas is definitely worth something.

It is still a logical leap from the normalization of the market to unqualified support for private ownership. This is especially the case in Central Europe where there existed a rich tradition of market socialist approaches. Given the steady privileging of political rights over economic entitlements in many dissident writings, however, this should not be surprising. Property rights are integral to liberalism, and in many European theorizations of civil society, the protection of property is indeed a *raison d'être* for its existence and historical development--to wit Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Hegel. Again, there was no overall unity, nor a great decision to embrace private property at the moment of transition, beforehand, or afterward. From the early 1980s onward, support existed for social ownership and multiple forms of ownership, including private property. Democracy was intrinsic to any scheme, as only with some form of popular control or basis of consent could civil society be guaranteed its independence, and the state and economy not be fused together. Konrád writes:

Let Eastern European communists accept the Eurocommunist principle of pursuing socialism only within the context of democracy, and only to the extent that society voluntarily agrees to it, through a pluralistic political system. It would be easy to let a multiplicity of forms of property and rights to use it evolve, in a free yet orderly way, with the state--a democratic state--assuming a significant, indeed indispensable, role. If communists could accept democracy rather than "democratic centralism," then socialism would no longer be a crude simplification in which the state swallows up all private and civic autonomy (1984: 52).
In almost Hegelian fashion, the particularity of property rights is both transformed and overcome by the democratic state, and civic autonomy and freedom are at once preserved and elevated. This viewpoint, combined with the underground influence of writers such as Mises, Hayek, and Friedman, predisposed some dissidents to valorize private property and the material incentives it represents as an essential ingredient to both the market and civil society.

However, the commitment to democracy in general and the rule of law in particular did set up an argument in favour of privatization. The rule of law and property rights were connected as political goods—weak property rights were translated to mean an indecisive state. Put another way, property rights combined with and engendered by the rule of law generated a capable state, but one simultaneously held in check by the rules of its own making. Furthermore, the idea of private ownership might reinforce democratic control, as the individual has greater independence from the state and at the same time as a potential beneficiary is a shareholder in the arrangements of governance best suited to her or his economic performance. Following standard free market logic applied to politics, the example of good corporate governance provided by private owners not only contributes a de facto argument for privatization, but also inevitably leads to the facile conclusion that governments ought to be run more like corporations.

Moreover, because the dissidents perceived their own theory and practice as beyond traditional left-right cleavages and the contradictions that might be generated by taking different positions on that axis, they were frankly less bothered by their
commitment to marketization and privatization than otherwise might have been the case. This is especially revealed in the post-1989 speeches of Václav Havel, where the subtext is not only acceptance but indeed a promotion of the economic reform program of Czechoslovakia and later the Czech Republic. The excesses of unchecked capital are indeed a concern, but Havel tends to place this alongside other concerns, such as environmental disaster, world demographic problems, or the threat of ethno-nationalism and its eruption into regional conflict.

The problem is not the privileging of one conflict over another (for example, nation trumping class). What is at issue is a general recognition that underlying all of these crises that have come to dominate the modern era is the technological rationality ushered in by the Cartesian revolution. Thus he states:

The modern era has been dominated by the culminating belief, expressed in different forms, that the world--and Being as such--is a wholly knowable system governed by a finite number of universal laws that man can grasp and rationally direct for his own benefit. This era, beginning in the Renaissance and developing from the Enlightenment to socialism, from positivism to scientism, from the Industrial Revolution to the information revolution, was characterized by rapid advances in rational, cognitive thinking. This, in turn, gave rise to the proud belief that man, as the pinnacle of everything that exists, was capable of objectively describing, explaining, and controlling everything that exists, and of possessing the one and only truth about the world. It was an era in which there was a cult of depersonalized objectivity, an era in which objective knowledge was accumulated and technologically exploited, an era of belief in automatic progress brokered by the scientific method. It was an era of systems, institutions, mechanisms, and statistical averages. It was an era of ideologies, doctrines, absolute interpretations of reality, an era when the goal was to find a universal theory of the world, and thus a universal key
Why is this epistemological lesson relevant? For Havel, the end of communism brought this era in human history to an end, and truly initiated the post-modern age. More than indicating the triumph of capitalism over any form of socialist alternative, the fall of communism signalled the end to the epistemological regime that generated both systems. He continues:

The fall of communism can be regarded as a sign that modern thought—based on the premise that the world is objectively knowable, and that knowledge so obtained can be absolutely generalized—has come to a final crisis. This era has created the first global, or planetary, technical civilization, but it has reached the limit of its potential, the point beyond which the abyss begins. I think the end of communism is a serious warning to all mankind. It is a signal that the era of arrogant, absolutist reason is drawing to a close, and that it is high time to draw conclusions from that fact.

Communism was not defeated by military force, but by life, by the human spirit, by conscience, by the resistance of Being and man to manipulation. It was defeated by a revolt of color, authenticity, history in all its variety, and human individuality against imprisonment within a uniform ideology (1997: 89-90).

Marketization and privatization are effectively de-problematised in this approach, not because they do not have consequences, but because they are only reflective of a larger set of issues requiring a different set of answers. In the Havelian prescription, there must be a complete paradigm shift in thought, one that rejects universal solutions, accepts mystery and the unknowable, but at the same time makes a profound commitment to

23 As philosophical as Havel's comments might sound, it should be noted that I am quoting here from his speech to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, in 1992!
absolute and unqualified responsibility. Responsibility remains the bridge between morality and politics, the prime directive of a post-modern politics:

...we still don’t know how to put morality ahead of politics, science, and economics. We are still incapable of understanding that it is the only genuine core of all our actions—if they are to be moral—is responsibility. Responsibility to something higher than my family, my country, my firm, my success. Responsibility to the order of Being, where all our actions are indelibly recorded and where, and only where, they will be properly judged (1997: 19).

Havel can make this argument because, following both Hegel and Heidegger and distinctive from Marx, he believes “with great certainty” that “consciousness precedes Being, and not the other way around, as Marxists claim” (1997: 18). Material circumstances can therefore devastate the body of humankind, but not its spirit. This makes the power of the powerless possible, and thus he can also claim, “...the salvation of the human world lies nowhere else than in the human heart, in the human power to reflect, in human modesty, and human responsibility” (1997: 18). Capitalism in any of its guises may yet be another reflection of instrumental rationality, but at the same time by Havel’s reasoning it cannot be a prison any more than could authoritarian communism. Moreover, for Havel many of the worst excesses of modern society are common to both communism and capitalism: rampant consumerism; excessive and senseless growth; disregard for the environment; continual confrontations based on distinctions of otherness--based on racial, cultural, and religious differences; the loss of subjectivity and thus the inability to assume responsibility.

Ironically, all claims regarding the importance of pluralism notwithstanding, much
dissident thought harbours strong idealistic--even utopian--leanings. This is clearly evident in reading Konrád's _Antipolitics_ (where even an anti-utopia ends up sounding utopian) or Havel’s “The Power of the Powerless”. That conservative, go-slow, or evolutionary approaches to marketization and privatization were generally out of favour is perhaps less surprising given the radical roots of their thought. Neo-classical critic of ST Peter Murrell (1992) discusses how piecemeal versus radical policies of economic transition are respectively reflective of conservative and utopian world views. The utopian approach is characterized by a desire to clean the slate (rid society of authoritarian communism), make irreversible policy choices (there is no going back), and focus on design and theory rather than judgment and practice. Although I would argue that Murrell’s dichotomy is overly simplistic, there is underlying the dissident project a strong instinct to see society remade, or paradoxically via the civil society approach, coach society into re-making itself.

Jeffrey Sachs himself acknowledged the importance of the receptive new leadership on more than one occasion in implementing a neoliberal reform program in Poland. In _Poland's Jump to a Market Economy_, he is explicit:

Key Solidarity leaders understood that their enormous political support should be translated into radical economic reforms. It is important to appreciate these political roots of Poland’s economic reform strategy. Poland’s strategy has been rightly perceived as very radical. It has been widely criticized as well as praised. But one of the criticisms--that this was a program designed by academics who did not understand politics, society, and so forth--is absolutely wrong. The notion of moving radically, rapidly, and decisively forward was strongly held by the political leadership of Solidarity....The “shock therapy” was not something applied
as an intellectual construct by Polish technocrats or foreign advisors, and still less something imposed on Poland by the IMF, which was not even present at the formative stages of the program. The radical reforms resonated with the new democratic leaders, as well as with the economic needs of society (my emphasis; 1993: 42).

Not only did the ideas have resonance, but the new governments immediately post-1989 enjoyed an enormous popular and moral, even if only predictably short-lived legitimacy. Thus they had the support necessary to undertake what would otherwise have been extremely unpopular stabilization and liberalization measures. To some degree, inability to deal with endemic economic crisis brought the regime to the table in Poland and Hungary (the “demonstration effect” was far more important in Czechoslovakia). Thus, in Poland at least, the government of Mazowiecki could clearly get away with more radical economic reform than the previous government of Rakowski. Indeed, Mazowiecki could do so and still unilaterally suspend debt payments to Western creditors with the blessing of Western politicians.

IV. Capacity: Limitations in Theory and Practice

The weakness concerning the capacity of the dissidents does not concern the intrinsic nature of their ideas or the affinity of their internal logics to market economics and neoliberal reform. Rather, it relates to a whole host of practical considerations which taken as a whole help to explain the structural context in which they operated first as dissidents and later as decision-makers.

The first of these limitations is the rapid unfolding of events and the element of
surprise involved, both for Central European dissidents and for Western social scientists. The failure of the predictive power of political science has been well-documented (Przeworski, 1991; Tarrow, 1991; Bermeo, 1991) and we have been especially chastized for not recognizing everyday forms of resistance as an alternate Hirschmanian “voice”. Dissidents were by their own and other accounts similarly unprepared, and this disability was compounded by the accelerated downfall of authoritarian communism after many years of stagnation and only outward tentative signs suggesting the severity of the current crisis and the profound nature of regime instability. Former dissidents were literally thrust into positions of considerable power in most cases with literally no preparation other than their “careers” as dissidents. The case of Jiří Dienstbier in Czechoslovakia was prototypical: he had previous experience as a foreign affairs correspondent in the late 1960s, and was later imprisoned for his activity in Charter 77. Like many deprived of meaningful work for which they had been trained, Dienstbier worked as a coal stoker, and went directly from this position to being Foreign Minister of the ČSR. The requirements of political leadership are taxing and the ability to sustain a coherent vision difficult during the best of times, but even more difficult to summon at moments of systemic collapse with almost no advance warning and no immediate preparation.

Second, most of the dissidents were technically “unqualified” for the positions they assumed. Most were not career politicians or economist apparatchiks. By the very nature of their dissidence they were outside of existing structures of the party-state. Apart from the few like Jiří Hájek who had positions of power in revisionist governments, the
dissidents had no experience commanding bureaucracies or state agencies, or maintaining a vision in the face of systemic inertia or endemic resistance to change. Some, like Michnik, Kuroń, and Kis were lifelong agitators for radical reform with a definite (albeit evolving) political and/or economic agenda in mind. However, many were driven into the dissident camp by virtue of their personal non-conformity with the prescribed rigidities of authoritarian communism. Writers such as Konrád, Havel, Klíma, and Vaculík became dissidents by default; they wanted to write and publish freely without either direct party-state interference or more insidious forms of self-censorship. When I had the opportunity in 1995 to ask Michnik why he had supported the Balcerowicz Plan and had not engaged in debates about alternatives, he shrugged, smiled, and ironically stated, "I'm not an economist".  

There was a deficit of information prior to and a deficit of external expertise after 1989. At the beginning of this chapter I cited Amsden et al. and their frustration at the Central Europeans for not considering Asian late-industrializing approaches as models. Given the closed nature of the system and pervasive censorship, full access to independent, Western, contemporary scholarship was limited. Even with effective translation and samizdat distribution, there were inevitable gaps. There was considerable familiarity, for example, with the transitions to democracy in Southern Europe, and Spain was often used as point of possible comparison with Poland. Information on

---

industrialization in Asia would have been less available, and in any event the dissidents had an incredibly Eurocentric bias. As information channels were few, there was also inevitable ideological skewing. The major “independent” sources of foreign news and world events were Radio Free Europe, the BBC World Service, and Voice of America. Given the overt agendas of these broadcasters, it is not surprising that young Czechs interviewed in the early 1990s would associate liberty with Reagan or Thatcher, but would have never heard of Edward Thompson or Petra Kelly (Wainwright, 1995: 32).

There was an expertise deficit, or at least strong ideological proclivities that served as a de facto limitation. In interviewing Haraszti in Budapest, I asked him about why Hungary had taken the road it had in terms of privatization. His response can be paraphrased as follows: “We had more privatization to do than Margaret Thatcher ever dreamed of. And the problem was, the only available experts in privatization were Thatcherites”.

Moreover, the indigenous experts available and keen to the task of economic transition were largely former reform-minded bureaucrats such as Balcerowicz or Klaus, and they were already sold on capitalist restoration. By the late 1980s when the dissident

---

25Miklós Haraszti, personal interview, 18 August 1995. To put Haraszti’s comments in context: between 1990 and 1995 the World Bank estimated that transition economies in Central and Eastern Europe and in the newly-independent states of the former Soviet Union privatized more than thirty thousand large and medium-size enterprises, whereas the rest of world privatized fewer than seven thousand between 1980 and 1991—during the time Reagan and Thatcher ruled America and Britain (World Bank, 1996: 4).
theory met with a confluence of international events and domestic crisis to produce spectacular results, another ideological transition was underway. As Nuti states, "...the target model of economic reform switched from the search for a market-oriented version of socialism back to the restoration of a capitalist economy, with dominant private ownership and enterprise" (Nuti, in Somogyi, 1993: 40). This is reinforced by Poznanski, who argues that far from their public image as fearfully inert, party-state bureaucrats in Poland were inveterate reformers, and their collective experiences as well as the previous failures of half-measures convinced them to support a dramatic and literally shocking break from the past (Poznanski, 1996: 255-257). In Hungary, János Kornai was convinced by 1986 that the ability of state-socialist economies to reform themselves from within had been totally exhausted; he too made the ideological jump to a market economy. Once it became clear through the results of the RTT in both Poland and Hungary that the former nomencclatura would not be punished for their allegiance to the previous regime, and that their privileged access to goods, services, and benefits might translate favourably into ownership and entrepreneurial opportunities, they were able to promote the transition with considerable self-interest.

Finally, there was the linguistic limitation represented by a generalized popular and intellectual aversion to any sort of past or present alternative that might be labelled socialist. Because the term is so muddied by its associations with really-existing socialism, it is difficult to divorce content from context. The destruction of the linguistic terrain of socialism and the association of its specialized vocabulary with former regime
(however twisted by the Marxist-Leninist ideology of the party-state), serves as an automatic barrier to a discussion of left alternatives. For many of the same reasons that women in the region reject “feminism” as an “ism”, underlying the rejection of the word socialism is the concomitant rejection of any alternative that has a totalizing logic, assumes any form of militancy, or speaks of any sort of collective struggle. Both conjure up images of force-fit equality, or notions of an uncompromising and self-righteous theory of history with promised “liberation” from “oppression”.

The linguistic limitation and aversion to socialism should also be understood in context of how theoretical terminology has different connotations in “Western” and “Eastern” Europe due to actual practice. There is an implicit assumption among most former dissidents--made most explicit in the post-exile writings of Kołakowski--that really-existing socialism was a bona-fide brand of socialism and thus its strategies and outcomes do call into question the entire socialist project. Former Hungarian dissident and philosopher Gaspar Miklós Tamás (1992) lends this argument more subtlety when he discusses how the socialist projects differed in the two halves of Europe in the first place. In the West the overriding emphasis was on social justice and equality, and the banner was taken up by social democrats (more or less successfully) as well as Eurocommunists. In the East, aversion to capitalism and parliamentarism by indigenous socialists combined with the modernization and industrialization of the Soviet model (read as beating the

\[26\]These conclusions are formed by my personal experiences travelling, studying, and researching in the region. See also Goldfarb, 1992; Hoffman, 1993; Persky, 1996.
West at its own game), not to mention the transfer of revolutionary subjechthood from worker to vanguard party, necessitated a very different approach. For both Lenin and Luxemburg, ending alienation and oppression was the ultimate goal. In practice, self-conscious discipline, rational organization, and the complete subjugation of pluralism were the means. Forced social homogenization would yield socialist man, where human existence would be identical both metaphysically and materially with the *Gattungswesen*, or "species-being" of humankind (1992: 63). Thus the project of the dissidents was formed in opposition to this determined homogeneity, and also helps to explain why legitimacy remained so elusive to the authoritarian communist rulers.²⁷

Today the linguistic confusion continues unabated in the region, where "anticommunism" can mean "anticapitalism", and where post-communist parties or their managerial elites have either carried out or supported neoliberal reforms. Even the terms "marketization" and "privatization" themselves have coded meanings. Based on her research in Hungary, Jean Laux (1997) has written that while paying lip-service to the IMF and the expectations of Washington, a "double-discourse" occurred which reflects a very different on-the-ground reality. The devil is in the details, and since many if not most of the ministers of the Western Church of neoliberal economic reform have no or

²⁷It also explains why so many dissidents came from the Left and the indigenous (that is, not Soviet) socialist camp—the regime could never live up to clarion calls for either equality or justice. For this reason, internal "deviationists" and "revisionists" always had fodder, and Western communists and/or socialists could say with confidence that the "East" did not meet their stringent test of possibly-existing socialism.
little knowledge of Slavic or Finno-Ugric languages and no grounding in various national histories, traditions, and cultures, they do not necessarily have a grip on how their pronouncements and dikta are translated into the vernacular. Everyone says “privatization” is a good thing, but privatization can mean re-nationalization through various cross-shareholding and cross-ownership schemes where the state remains the ultimate proprietor (Tamás, 1992: 70). An Alice in Wonderland kind of duplicity takes place, where Central and East European governments pander to whatever Western government happens to be at the table, serving up social democracy to the Austrians, Gaullism to the French, Thatcherite conservatism to the British, and Reaganomics to the Americans (Tamás: 1992).

These limitations do not exist independently, but in fact combine together with exponential effects. Information deficits and selective access obviously affected key actors’ abilities to consider differing alternatives and frame their advantages and disadvantages. Their decision-making environment was framed by their belief structures as constructed by their writings and experiences as dissidents, their experiences with the failures of internally-generated communist reform, the generalized linguistic aversion to socialism, their overall policy and administrative inexperience, and the logic of speed related to systemic collapse and the growth of expectations. Given these reference points, they were hardly inclined to be wowed by socialist or leftist alternatives in the face of teams of advisors from international lending, financial, and political institutions, established mainstream Western universities, private Western foundations, and foreign
heads-of-state and their diplomatic corps.

Contemporary political economy, that is to say, theories and explanations of how the economic and political are intertwined and what types of relationships ought to exist between productive forces and social relations, is a lens through which dissident political theory and practice can be examined. To a large degree, questions of political economy were not taken up seriously in the discourse of the Central European opposition. This is at first both puzzling and difficult to understand given their genesis on the Left, their formative experiences with reform Communism, and the fact that many sympathized with or affiliated themselves with socialist alternatives. Their privileging of politics over economics reflects not only a carefully-worked out strategy of self-limitation so as to not attract the ire of their Soviet masters, but also an intrinsic affinity between their theories of civil society and marketization. After all, there is an uneasy and tenuous coexistence between civil societies and capitalist market economies everywhere.

Ironically, now that much of the neoliberal agenda has been effectively implemented and consolidated in the region, former dissidents are again raising their voices in protest. This is manifest in many ways, but the ideological battle between “the visions of the two Václavs”\(^\text{28}\) in the Czech Republic is illustrative. The ongoing debate and continued antagonism and antipathy between (now former) Czech Prime Minister Klaus and President Havel in the Czech Republic is legendary. Klaus, ever the admirer of

\(^{28}\)I am indebted to Martin Palouš for this phrasing.
Hayek, Friedman and Thatcher, has taken the role upon himself to be the champion of neoliberalism, to the point of regularly and publicly chastising his EU counterparts for their socialist tendencies—this is in the era of Maastricht and the stringent requirements of monetary unification. However, after the Czech monetary crisis and privatization scandal of 1997, Klaus went from being Europe’s poster-child for neoliberalism to finding himself an unemployed party leader. Furthermore, the failures of the Czech experience highlight the degree to which the nightmares of the past weigh heavily upon the brain of the living. Even with low unemployment, low debt, low inflation, rapid westernization, and voucher privatization, the transition process has been plagued by shady dealings, conflicts-of-interest, and the vicissitudes of international bankers.

Havel, on the other hand, has assumed the role as the nation’s moral conscience, as a person of “heightened responsibility” able to appeal directly to the people as he is above the fray of disreputable politics and economic greed. Havel, of course, would

---

29 The most recent example of this occurred at the University of Toronto where Klaus received an honorary doctorate of laws and used the occasion and his address not only to praise Czech achievements in building a free market economy but to express his concern about creeping socialism in Western Europe. Address to the Special Convocation, 21 February 1997. Klaus’ scornful evaluation of the EU led to an interesting exchange between the former prime minister and EU Commissioner Hans van den Broek at the World Economic Forum at Davos in 1996. During a debate on the adaptation of agricultural policies to EU standards, Klaus suggested that the agricultural policies of the EU ought to be changed (given the subsidies inherent in the CAP). van den Broek replied that “it is not the EU who wants to get into the Czech Republic” (quoted in Adam Cerny (1998), “Prague’s Reality Check”, Transitions 5.4: 52-55.

hardly call himself a thoroughgoing critic of capitalism, but from his self-description as a Masarykian humanist and "post-modern politician", he does comment on its excesses, to say the least. For Havel, the problem is not marketization and privatization per se, but the fact that this process has run too far ahead of the consolidation of civil society. He states:

The issue here is not very complicated. To put it simply, if our daring economic reforms are not accompanied by the purposeful development of all aspects of civil society, our life will soon become one-dimensional and arid, limited to a race for profits, accompanied by an apathy toward public affairs and a dependence on the state to do everything for us (1997: 147).

Paradoxically, not too long after the dissidents climbed onto the bandwagon of global capitalism, prominent capitalists and their ideologues with a stake in the region have become suspicious of its unintended impacts, especially in the wake of the recent global currency crises. Long a critic of the paucity of Western aid for the region and of the International Monetary Fund’s bail-out programs in particular, Sachs is now championing capital controls, debt write-downs, and conversions of debt-to-equity. Moreover, he has publicly chastized the IMF on numerous occasions for undermining local political legitimacy through their absurd rulebook of conditionality, for being secretive and unaccountable, and for the inherent anti-democratic elitism in the organization’s approach—negotiating terms with government leaders when nations are at the eleventh hour and careening toward bankruptcy—and avoiding political and/or

Politics as Morality in Practice (1997).
parliamentary review at all costs (Sachs, 1998: 24-25).

Sachs believes that Washington has tried via the IMF and its other mechanisms of post-Cold War global leadership to have it all and on the cheap; no one is buying the myth any longer that the rich can help the poor merely be helping themselves get richer and thus improve living standards along the way. Too many “developing countries”--Russia as well as Brazil, Poland as well as Chile--have seen inequality dramatically rise with the spending power of an insulated, luxury-buying elite disconnected via conscience and social base from the increasing poverty of those at the bottom. Thus he is calling for the expansion of the G8 to a G16, where the qualifying entrance exam must be democratic governance. He wants greater accountability; in his view, capitalism will not succeed or be credible unless developing countries are given a serious voice in shaping new global institutions and a new international agenda. Above all, Sachs wants to reconnect not only the ideological linkages but the material rewards between free markets and democracy in the public mind of the world citizen, without, of course, advocating any form of economic democracy.

Sachs’ caution is seconded by the bemusing change of heart of financier and currency speculator George Soros. Soros is hardly an outsider to the region, and has made it a personal hobby to promote democracy, marketization, and what he, after Karl Popper, calls “an open society” throughout Central and Eastern Europe.31 Lately he is

31Through the vehicle of the Soros Foundations, he has pumped over $100 million US per year into the region via national institutes, support for the arts and culture,
concerned with the “untrammelled intensification of laissez-faire capitalism” and how the “spread of market values...is endangering our own open and democratic society” (1997: 45). Although Soros is careful to dissociate capitalism from its earlier enemy, communism; he recognizes its ideological qualities and how it can (albeit inadvertently and not deliberately, in his view) endanger the civil society that he has been so concerned to finance and cultivate. He hints that a global open society is required, one that has institutions and mechanisms necessary to preserve itself and at the same time mitigate the excesses of laissez-faire ideology. Although there is an owl of Minerva tone to these types of complaints and concerns, clearly the earlier concern for political rights and the creation of civil society is being reasserted.

We do live in interesting times when international financiers are prominent players in a discussion on transnationalizing civil society as a means of dealing with capitalism on its own global terrain. The scene becomes more curious when the screen is split to reveal that former dissidents on the political stage who have allied themselves with strongly pro-market approaches have repeatedly gone down to electoral defeat. Egalitarianism still runs high in a region bred on the historical necessity of class struggle, and although most of the prison graduates of authoritarian communism would be loathe to describe recent events with a Marxist lexicon, “struggle” is indeed taking place—if only economic reform, public health initiatives, independent media and publishing (OMRI), and education, largely via the financing and operation of the new Central European University in Budapest and Warsaw. See Building Open Societies: Soros Foundations 1995 Report.
702

in employment rather than bread lines. Workers hurt by the second “great transformation” are unlikely to endorse any form of revolution in the short term, but they are successfully throwing “paper stones” at their elected officials.

Ultimately, the inherent tensions between building a civil society or healthy public sphere and the logic of neoliberalism must be explored further and systematically examined. Of course, any discussion of either an international civil society or a civil society rooted in and connected to the democratic power of states (the only kind of democracy that exists these days, after all) must take as its point of departure global capitalist governance as much more than a passing “reality check”. If a genuine civil society is, in Havel’s terms, “the best insurance against various kinds of social tension and political or social upheavals” and serves as the bedrock of democratic states, then it must move beyond state borders if this “life-giving environment” is not snuffed out in the global race for profits. As Marx himself might have said, now that political emancipation (from authoritarian communism, that is) has taken place, we must now turn to the pressing problem of human emancipation.
I. Toward a Reconstituted Public Sphere: Central European and Western Intersections in Theorizing Civil Society

The concept of civil society is one of the key contestable concepts in the Western “canon” of political thought. It is historically critical in understanding both the development of capitalism and liberal democratic forms and practices. Moreover, as I have illustrated earlier, the way in which various theorists have categorized civil society helps us to understand the differentiation between the public and private spheres and how these are gendered. In turn, the dichotomy of public/private problematizes the relationship between the individual and the social, and lays the ground for tension between public ethics and private interests.

---


2 In responses to a potential Skinnerian critique of my approach—that I am either a) tracing an ideological line in the history of the concept of civil society that does not exist, or b) that a critique is inappropriate as there is considerable confusion as to linguistic usage (and translation), I would answer to both that the intellectual tradition/use of “civil society” is explicit, and differences in use and shades of meaning are spelled out wherever possible within the limits of brevity. Certainly since the beginning of the eighteenth century, there has been a direct response by one thinker to another in so far as civil society is concerned: Hegel to Locke, Ferguson, and Smith; Marx to Hegel; Gramsci to both Hegel and Marx, and so on.
Aristotle first used the phrase *koinonia politike* or political union or association to refer to the public sphere. This was later translated as *societas civilas* or civil society, and was generally a reference to an independent political entity. Classical political theory, as represented in the writings of both Plato and Aristotle, did not distinguish between “state” and “society” in the same way as modern political theory. Once you left the private domestic household and entered the Greek *polis*, you were automatically in the public realm, a unique community or social whole which incorporated political life into the daily public existence of its citizens. Although the *polis* was not all-inclusive and effectively marginalized women and slaves from political existence, its strength was its overall unity and coherence, a direct mapping of the political onto the public realm that modern life cannot permit.

Edward Shils notes that the term *societas civilas* “had a fluctuating presence in medieval political philosophy where it was distinguished from ecclesiastical institutions” (1991a: 5). Adam Seligman has shown how in the historical trajectory between ancient and modern political theory, the tradition of the natural law became a crucial component in the later construction of the idea of civil society (1992: 17-20). Particularly important was the fusion of Christianity and natural law--the achievement of Saint Thomas Aquinas and the medieval scholastics. The integration of reason and natural law with Christian morality and divine grace allowed the construction of a new legal and political order. The state was seen as furthering and supporting the ends of Christianity, but law was separate and positive in development and implementation. Many other ideological, political and
religious developments came into play before Hugo Grotius could theorize in a modern sense about natural law--debates regarding sovereignty, the legitimacy of resistance to royal rule, the political problems posed by the splintering of the Christianity as a result of the Reformation. Thus John Locke, with whom we often crystallize the set of ideas that came to be known as liberalism, neither "created" civil society nor exclusively gave it its modern liberal definition.

What makes Locke's view of civil or political society\(^3\) so consistent with liberalism is his theory of property, which prefigures its essential characteristics. In the *Second Treatise* Locke's discussion of property precedes his chapter on civil society. Property exists in the state of nature, but it is not protected. Individual property ownership for Locke is necessary, rational, and legitimate.\(^4\) It is based on man's appropriation of the goods of nature required for his sustenance and his obligation to God for self-preservation. Property is made *private*, however, by mixing one's labour with it--separating it from both the common fruits of nature and delimiting it from the property of others. Property, however, would be a fairly limited phenomenon in the Lockean account

---

\(^3\)Locke uses these terms interchangeably.

\(^4\)It is important to note that Locke's theory of property should not be understood solely in modern economic terms. Locke's theological premises are crucial for his epistemological individualism and his morality. Humankind as part of the Universe is first conceived by Locke as God's property, and from this act of divine creation flows duties and moral principles. See John Dunn (1969), *The Political Thought of John Locke: A Historical Argument of the "Two Treatises of Government"* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP) and Steven Lukes (1979), *Individualism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell).
if not for the introduction of money, which allows for greater accumulation of private possessions, allows for differentiation by a universal standard of value, and introduces possibilities for trade. Even *before* the discussion of the appropriate political arrangements, a measure of social organization is presupposed—a framework that includes a natural justification for private property, and by necessity inequality among men.

For Pufendorf, Locke, and Kant, society is natural, but civil society is not. Humankind is naturally sociable; for this reason Locke prefaces his discussion of political or civil society with an analysis of other ties that bind, such as the relations between man and wife (sic), and parents and children. However, these are limited and private relations of power and despite some resemblances, differ considerably from the nature of relations in political society. The state, as an instrument of society, conserves, regulates, indeed *perfects* society. The potential for greater freedom is realized because the state is simultaneously granted powers but at the same time is limited by them. Within the liberal tradition, we see in the development of civil society, as Keane suggests, “a history of attempts to justify might *and* right, political power *and* law, the duties of subjects *and* the rights of citizens” (1988a: 34).

Locke’s view of property, the construction of political society to protect it, based on the view of rational man as possessing inherent theistically given rights, applied more coherently to the late seventeenth century than to the nascent capitalism of the nineteenth century. Locke’s “mutuality of contract and consent” and the potential for the realization of freedom, independence, and equality becomes much more problematic in light of the
tumultuous changes in the economic and social spheres that followed him. How the private accumulation of wealth and property could be reconciled with social stability and the public good was a compelling dilemma for Bernard de Mandeville, Frances Hutchinson, Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson and David Hume. In particular, the writers of the Scottish Enlightenment realized that the new operation of labour and capital meant that individuals acted out their private interests in the public sphere--and therefore had a dangerous level of social autonomy unless grounded in some new form of moral order.

Adam Ferguson, in writing *The History of Civil Society* has in mind both a realm of urbane civility, punctuated by social and cultural institutions, as well as a flourishing commercial and professional life (Shils, 1991a: 5; Seligman, 1992: 38-40). Ferguson was naturally sceptical about the unintended consequences of economic growth and the division of labour; he was concerned about the effect this would have on a sense of community, neighbourhood, and social interconnectedness.

Adam Smith, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, has an answer to this problem. He roots morality in human behaviour and nature. His famous “sympathy principle” is an attempt to explain how self-interested human beings can nonetheless act morally. God has fortunately also endowed us with the capacity for “reason, principle, conscience” which in turn guides our ability to sympathize with others. Moreover, human sympathy acting in concert with the invisible hand of the deity ensures that acquisitiveness and the selfish accumulation of wealth will also result providentially in the betterment of the social whole. The unintended promotion of the public good is the moral message in *The
G.W.F. Hegel, in formulating his theory of state and civil society, had read Adam Ferguson and was influenced by the Scottish synthesis of sympathy and mutual reciprocity with self-interest. At the same time, he was disturbed by the Kantian separation between public right and private morality. Kant's famous dictum that individuals should never be used as means to an end points us in the direction of Hegel's dilemma: how to resolve the dangerous tension between the particularity and subjectivity of market exchange and property relations with the need for and realized existence of an ethically-based political community looking after the common good. Hegel also wanted to achieve this synthesis theoretically by grounding his argument in individual will and abstract right. He wants to demonstrate that the various "moments" or elements of Sittlichkeit--ethical life--involve a progression from particular to universal where freedom is fully and actually realized in the state. Social life and private interest are not incompatible after all, given the correct structuring of institutions and the harmonization of different aspects of life between them.

In the Philosophy of Right, Hegel moves from a discussion of familial love and unity to civil society more broadly because need and interdependence drive the individual from the family into the world. The livelihood of one person is bound up and interwoven with the livelihood, happiness, and rights of all. Families are interconnected and only through this connection are their collective needs and rights actualized and secured. Civil society mediates between the family and the state; it is the level where particularity rather
than universality is preeminent, but not exclusively so. This particularity is most evident in the economy, what Hegel calls the “system of needs”. It is no accident that Hegel used the term *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* to describe civil society, and Marx picks up this usage. The operation of the economy gives free rein to accumulation and the fulfilment of desire. Hegel recognizes that this can be both extravagant and degenerative, and at odds with the fulfilment of self-actualized freedom. Although Hegel accepts Smith’s invisible hand, he would state that behind self-seeking lies not God, conscience, nor moral sentiment, but reason. The dialectical unfolding of this reason means that the necessary particularity of self-seeking will be transformed and overcome.

This “spectacle of extravagance and misery as well as physical and ethical corruption” is tempered somewhat naturally in Smithian fashion by the “system of all-round interdependence”. At the same time, the physical and intellectual resources of all individuals in the community form a human infrastructure of “universal and permanent resources” which can be drawn upon to ensure both individual livelihood and the economic health of society. Hegel reinforces this moderating influence on subjective self-seeking and in turn makes room for universalizing elements in civil society through his introduction of both estates and corporations. The “police”--better understood as regulatory agencies or

5Estates or social groupings are organized around general economic or political functionality, for example, resulting from the specialization of labour, and correspond to the three “moments” of *Sittlichkeit*: the substantial or immediate agricultural class; the reflecting or formal business class; and the universal class of civil servants.
public authorities--provide a legal net to ensure public safety, the smooth operation of the market, and so on. Taken together, these institutions are the integrative dimensions of Hegelian civil society, helping to alleviate pauperization and alienation. Ultimately, the reconciliation of the particular and the universal takes place in the ethical community of political life, the Hegelian state. Hegel attempts to square the circle--provide for the operation of private interests but not at the expense of the public good.

Of course, Marx completely denies the feasibility of Hegel’s task. Marx’s discussion of civil society begins in the real world of actuality--Wirklichkeit--and from this position he wants to demystify and uncloak Hegel’s analysis and its premises. For Marx, civil society is nothing more or less than the equivalent of bourgeois society--literally in this case, bürgerliche Gesellschaft--and represents all of its interests, especially as illustrated through the workings of capital. As Keane has shown, Marx’s description devalues the distinction between state and civil society while simultaneously conflating all group organization and social stratification to the logic and contradictions of the capitalist mode of production (1988a: 32). The potential independence or activity of other organizations of civil society--churches, scientific and literary associations, hospitals and charitable organizations--is denied because their “fate is assumed to be tied

Corporations, on the other hand, operate more like a “second family”, functioning both as both an economic association and a system of welfare, in the broadest sense. The corporation also protects occupational interests and provides and regulates education and training. Hegel makes it clear that if the weakest link in the corporate chain is provided--indeed guaranteed--a measure of subsistence or charity--the chain of society will be stronger as a result (see Philosophy of Right, para. 253).
unequivocally to the overwhelming power of capitalism” (1988: 32). Although Marx correctly insists that we view civil society and other social phenomena not as natural but historically specific and contingent, his theory tends to ignore the fact that both real civil societies and theorizations of civil society predated capitalism. As a result, the dimensions of some of those earlier meanings, such as the need to mediate or control state power or guarantee its legitimacy, are lost. In any event, in the Marxist conception the distinction between the state and civil society is both false and undesirable. Once the victory of the proletariat is assured through class struggle and the means of production is placed under it, social harmony and unity will follow.⁶

*Contra* Marx, in definite opposition to the Soviet model, yet in sympathy with twentieth century socialist theorists such as Gramsci and Lukács, the dissidents in East-Central Europe *intentionally* and *self-consciously* situated their thought within the European tradition of theorizing about civil society. Moreover, their debt to this tradition is synthetic, as they draw from both what I will call, following my analysis above, the “Lockean” or Anglo-American, and “Hegelian” or continental European, lineages of the concept of civil society. Common and central to Locke, Hegel, and the East-Central

---

⁶For an interesting and controversial discussion on the unity of civil and political society in Marxist thought, see Leszek Kołakowski, “The Myth of Human Self-Identity: Unity of Civil and Political Society in Socialist Thought” and reply by Stuart Hampshire entitled “Unity of Civil and Political Society: Reply to Leszek Kołakowski” in Kołakowski and Hampshire, eds. (1973), *The Socialist Idea: A Reappraisal* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson). Of particular interest to the reader of this study is that Kołakowski predictably takes the view that the forced social unity under authoritarian communism is intrinsic to Marxist thought.
Europeans are questions about the appropriate relationship between public and private spheres, the nature of the political and intersections of private rights and public goods, and the dual nature of the individual as an innately social being yet possessing private rights. In this sense, the project of the East-Central European dissidents is what Keane would describe as an exercise in “active democratic memory”. Having an “active democratic memory” means constructing future-oriented political theory with eyes in the back of one’s head as a contemporary and pluralistic means of stimulating the imagination:

[An active democratic memory] can be a subversive weapon in the hands of those who support (often in the name of future generations) the present-day extension of democracy. An active democratic memory recognizes that the development of fresh and stimulating perspectives on the present depends upon the criticisms that break up habitual ways of thinking, in part through types of criticism which remember what is in danger of being forgotten. Hence, the democratic remembrance of things past is neither nostalgic nor atavistic. It turns to the past not for the sake of the past—as if the secrets of present miseries were hidden there—but for the purpose of securing more democracy in the present and future. An active democratic memory knows that past traditions of political discourse can furnish us with more than a few surprises and provoke us into enlightening disagreements. They can remind us of some of the “perennial” problems of social and political life. And thereby, they can help us understand who we are, where we stand, what we might hope for (Keane, 1988a: 33).

Keane suggests that having “an active democratic memory” which looks simultaneously backward at tradition and forward with optimism also confounds the Left-Right historiography with respect to political thought. Moreover, for the dissidents, referring to the dilemmas and ideas of the classical texts of political thought was a method whereby they could lay claim to an ideological shared heritage with Western
Europeans, and bring forth in their own histories various democratic and cooperative traditions and levels of resistance to external power.

James Turner Johnson (1992) argues that in their quest for an independent society, Michnik and Havel echo the type of civil society posited by John Locke. Absent from East-Central Europe at the time these intellectuals were writing was a real or imagined social contract where individuals seek freely to come together for common purposes to form a state, whereby those purposes are protected and advanced. For Johnson, Locke’s notion of the consent of the governed is central, which he compares with Michnik’s celebrated description of the Gdánsk agreement between the Polish government and Solidarity. Although Locke assumes that from the state of nature men come together voluntarily for both their individual and common good to create a government, Michnik begins with the reality of post-totalitarianism (1992: 44). Michnik’s innovation is his discussion of “how civil society might be brought into being within that hostile context” (1992: 44).

Zbigniew Rau (1987) goes further than Johnson, and suggests that what makes the Lockean contractarian approach so applicable to the dissident civil societies of East-Central Europe is their evocation of the morality of Locke’s “three-dimensional individualism”. In Rau’s account, Locke’s individualism is composed of the ability of human beings to act morally and self-consciously as subjects in social life; the principles and duties of moral conduct adhere to the individual as an agent, ultimately responsible to God; and finally the political and collective expression of these individual moral beings is
civil society. Conceived in this way, Lockean civil society provides us with an ideal-type in which the voluntary and collective efforts of individuals give a political and public dimension to their individually-realized concepts of justice. For Rau, the moral conviction which gave rise to the voluntary creation of alternative social groups and movements such as Charter 77 and Solidarity is profoundly Lockean in content. Both Charter 77 and Solidarity were constructed around the central value of individual dignity—from this came moral agency, responsibility, participation, solidarity, and action. Moreover, the extreme conditions under which civil society was brought about in East-Central Europe highlight the significance of the moral and political consensus important to Locke, as well as his use of the state of nature to explain real and dynamic processes such as arbitrary rule.\(^7\)

From Locke and the liberal tradition, the dissidents strongly emphasized the rights of citizens to resist arbitrary power. To be legitimate, government \textit{must} rest on the consent of the governed. Such capacity for resistance is strongly indicative of the freedom of the citizenry. Moreover, in the East-Central European context, the potential

\(^7\)Locke’s arguments against absolute monarchy in the \textit{Second Treatise}, which Rau takes to be an extreme manifestation of the state of nature, are relevant for understanding the dissident civil societies of East-Central Europe in their parallel but unequal relationship with the party-state. Post-totalitarianism in this context can be read as another state of nature where no laws can be considered just, and thus under this scenario, the alternative political community contained within civil society can makes its own “appeal to heaven”. See Zbigniew Rau (1987), “Some Thoughts on Civil Society in Eastern Europe and the Lockean Contractarian Approach” \textit{Political Studies} XXXV: 573-592.
for freedom is both actualized and extended through the process of resistance to the party-state. This resistance was located within civil society, both parallel to and against the party-state. Although seemingly tautological, it was nonetheless the case that the civil society approach taken by the dissidents was self-reinforcing: actualizing freedom meant re-building civil society and re-building civil society actualized freedom.

Following Locke, Hegel, and the Enlightenment tradition, the dissidents were prepared to view the individual as the key social unit. Individual autonomy and authenticity were inviolable, and could not be reduced to class interests. Many of the former dissidents I interviewed spoke of the social variegation of their movements proudly, as this fact stood in opposition to all they had been taught about the ascriptive nature of class identities. This position was reinforced by the Hegelian notion of the independence of human consciousness, whereby the power of the powerless was possible and a liberal defence of human rights was strategic and necessary.

Unlike Locke, Hegel, and Marx, the dissidents did not focus on property forms or protections. Privacy was usually not conceived according to economic definitions or as ownership, and when it was, the terms were inverted. The workers’ state essentially owned its worker-citizens, controlling the terms and conditions of more than just their paid employment. More important was the creation of an ideological opposition and a public space independent of the party-state. Ironically, because full employment was a fact literally taken for granted and the socialization of property remained unquestioned, the dissidents were relatively free to resuscitate the concept of civil society and
conveniently side-step the issue of the implications of a privately-controlled capitalist market economy (hence my critique in the previous chapter). The party-state had effectively liquidated the market and private property and eliminated employment insecurity, and for the most part the dissidents saw no need to re-introduce these elements, especially as long as the leading role of the party served as guidepost for self-limitation. It should also be said that the East-Central European emphasis on non-property related forms of human subjugation was in stark contrast with and sometimes in reaction to what they viewed as the obsession of Western European socialists with questions of property, ownership, and class conflict. What the dissidents failed to realize in their conception of civil society is that any attempt to reintroduce "independent" initiatives also involved public/private distinctions, which in a sense bring us back to the Hegelian dilemma.

Even though the Hegelian dilemma of squaring private rights with public goods was not explicit in dissident theory, there remains a Hegelian echo in demands for universality in the realm of the particular. For every mention of "rights" in Havel or Michnik, for example, there is also a discussion of social solidarity and of community. As in Hegel, politics is seen as a form of ethical life. In Havel’s notion of politics as responsibility, we see a transformation of Sittlichkeit through the ideological mediation of Heidegger, Husserl, and Patočka. Morality in politics is an extension of a deeply personal ethic of responsibility which drives the individual into the world, into action in the public sphere.
Civil society for the dissidents was neither apolitical nor beyond politics, as was implied by the Hegelian "system of needs", nor is it synonymous with the class interests of the bourgeoisie, as in Marx. Even liberals who acknowledge civil society as necessary to the healthy functioning of democracy tend to place it outside of representative institutions specifically and outside politics generally. According to the dissident oeuvre, civil society is fundamentally antipolitical, which does not mean that it is not political per se, but that it provides and generates an alternative non-institutional form of politics.

The two preceding chapters highlight the implicit and explicit dangers to the civil society approach as I have outlined it in this study. To the extent that civil society rests on gendered liberal distinctions between public and private that serve to structurally exclude women, the risk is the continued political and social marginalization of half the population. Any civil society approach must question its very premises in order to become more flexible and inclusive if it is to be held up as an alternative model. As well, the marketization and privatization inherent in the practices of late twentieth-century capitalism threaten to undermine civil society in a potently efficient manner, in much the same way that the Soviet model sought to stamp out independent society as inhibiting its imperatives.

---

8Apolitical in the conventional sense, not in the sense of antipolitics as conceived by the dissidents.
II. Dissident Thought as Reconstructed Liberalism

For those who have grappled with the multiple historical “meanings” of 1989 and the dissident thinking that gave theoretical contours to the momentous events wrought during that year, a consensus has more or less emerged, in Jeffrey Isaac’s words, “on behalf of an avowedly liberal interpretation” (1996: 292). The basic argument is that the East-Central European dissidents have bequeathed to us--the “West”--either the same-old or a newly-reinvigorated form of political liberalism. There are several flaws to this argument, the first of which stems from confusing the theory with the results. Although I argue that ideas have mattered profoundly in the period leading up to post-communist transformation, ideas are not the only forces shaping the political universe. Second, this interpretation ignores the considerable tensions between liberalism conventionally understood as underwriting the political practices of Western liberal democracies and the ideas of the dissidents. A subset of this argument is a tendency to confuse liberalism with democracy, that is, to hold that a pro-democracy perspective must make one a political liberal. Third, the argument is supported by the self-description of many former dissidents as “liberals”, misleading to many because it ignores the different connotations of that term in the region from those in the Anglo-American academic context. Finally, the liberal view tends to serve the agenda of many of the authors themselves, who claim superiority of liberal democracy over authoritarian communism and thus want to infuse 1989 with not only self-validation but even a restorationist impulse. Whereas in the previous section I have shown the dissidents’ debt to the Western traditions of political
thought, here I hope to demonstrate where the "originality" of dissident theory lies.

Ralf Dahrendorf, in his historically-ironic essay *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe*, suggests that 1989 is a vindication of the tried and true ideals of liberalism, of a tolerant and "open society":

At its core, the European revolution of 1989 is the rejection of an unbearable and, as we have seen, untenable reality, and by the same token it is a reaffirmation of old ideas. Democracy...pluralism...citizenship...are not exactly new ideas (1990: 27).

This thesis has been put most strongly and in sustained form by Dahrendorf's student, Timothy Garton Ash. Concluding his "eye-witness" account of the "refolutions" in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin, and Prague, he claims the dissident intellectuals-cum-politicians have no deep ideological reservoir from which to draw:

If I am right in my basic analysis, they can offer no fundamentally new ideas on the big questions of politics, economics, law, or international relations. The ideas whose time has come are old, familiar, well-tested ones. (It is the new ideas whose time has passed.) So is all they have to offer us their unique, theoretically intriguing but practically burdensome problems? Or might they have under their threadbare cloaks some hidden treasure? (1990b: 154).

The "hidden treasures" discussed by Garton Ash are tellingly represented as a trove of desirable human qualities rather than as political goods, and for this reason they are immediately conceived as atavistic and sentimental in the post-1989 period:

Travelling through this region over the last decade, I have found treasures: examples of great moral courage and intellectual integrity; comradeship, deep friendship, family life; time and space for serious conversation, music, literature, not disturbed by the perpetual noise of our media-driven and obsessively telecommunicative world; Christian witness in its original and purest form; more broadly, qualities of relations between
men and women of very different backgrounds, and once bitterly opposed faiths--an ethos of solidarity (1990b: 154).

Dahrendorf and Garton Ash are the but the tip of the “liberal interpretation” iceberg. Stephen Holmes describes the radical change post-1989 as a “liberal revolution” (1992: 27); Bruce Ackerman identifies 1989 as the “return of revolutionary democratic liberalism” (1992: 1). Similarly, in his account of 1989 When the Walls Came Tumbling Down, Gale Stokes writes, “Theirs was not a revolution of total innovation, but rather the shucking off of a failed experiment in favor of an already existing model, pluralist democracy” (1993: 260). Writing more recently, Peter Rutland states that in Eastern Europe in the ten years since 1989, “There has been no resurgence of communism nor an appearance of any ideology or philosophy that comes close to mounting a universal challenge to liberalism” and “Liberal democracy, with its ambivalence over final ends and with its agreement to disagree over practical solutions, would be the only game in town” (1999: 27).

It is indeed ironic that in many accounts the implicit or explicit standard of theoretical innovation is Marxism, or some variant of the socialist project. In its teleology, its revolutionary and counter-hegemonic approach, its incisive analysis of the old world combined with the brave promise and delivery of something not only new and better but historically necessary, Marxism is presented as grand theory par excellence. One of the reasons liberals appropriate the East-Central Europeans unproblematically as liberals is that they did not engage in a revolutionary project involving cathartic violence
and a determined makeover of society and humankind. According to this logic, any more “limited” form of political theory, one that is evolutionary, or non-violent, or does not aspire to total change, must be liberal. Thus underlying the “end of ideology” or “end of history” approach of Francis Fukuyama is the following logical sequence: Marxism has failed, therefore ideology is no longer relevant, therefore we all universally recognize that liberal democracy is the only legitimate alternative. According to this view, I would add, all “partial theory” must be liberal theory. Marxism is loaded with extra ideological content at the same time liberalism is effectively de-ideologized. Thus it is difficult for those seeking to appropriate the East-Central Europeans as liberals to conceive of their contribution to political theory as anti-utopian yet idealistic; liberal in some ways but not others; radically democratic; strongly moralistic yet pluralistic in outlook; rejecting collectivism yet embracing collective action; inherently contradictory; and on no place on earth fully realized.

There is also an ex post facto quality to the liberal appropriation of the dissidents. Without 1989, without the triumphalism of American claims about “winning” the Cold

---

War, I suspect dissident theory would be viewed much differently. If the pace of change had been slower, less dramatic--as surely it looked like it would be at the time of the Polish Round Table Talks--the “spin” might be quite different. It is telling that in the late 1980s, when theorists such as John Keane and Andrew Arato were seriously engaging with the East-Central European dissidents and their oeuvre, the project was described as re-democratizing socialism, or looking past Marx to radically participative and leftist ideas of civil society that both preceded and succeeded Marx. On the book jacket to *Democracy and Civil Society*, published in 1988, Steven Lukes glowingly describes Keane’s approach: “Probing, lucid, and historically informed, these fine and timely essays offer new perspectives in rethinking socialism”.

Many commentators have also, in my view, confused (or conflated) dissident theory with the results of the 1989 revolutions in Europe. Looking at the situation ten years hence, East-Central Europe *has* provided us with the “best cases” of liberal-democratic transformation. Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic have met all the basic polyarchal tests of democratic consolidation: free and fair elections with multi-party competition; peaceful changeover of governments; the establishment of the rule of law and the independent functioning of the judiciary; peaceful resolution of seemingly intractable conflicts (the best example being the “Velvet Divorce” of the Czech and Slovak Republics); constitutions have been written or amended to set the rules of the overall game, are seen as legitimate, and all confer considerable rights protection on citizens. A tolerant and liberal conception of citizenship has been challenged by
authoritarian populism and ethnic nationalism, and more or less been successfully
defended. Given what has happened in many other parts of Eastern Europe and the
former Soviet Union, from the harshly authoritarian re-communization of Belarus to the
endless downward spiral of ethnic violence in the former Yugoslavia, this is no small
achievement. However, it is both facile and misleading to describe dissident thought as
liberal and then credit it with the overall result, which also owes much to geography,
political culture, relative ethnic homogeneity, a more favourable economic climate and
various exogenous factors.

Nonetheless, it is certainly the case that the dissidents advocated liberalism in
terms of over-arching institutional arrangements. They wanted public choice,
parliaments, human rights, and the rule of law, and said so on many occasions. They can
also be described as liberal in the sense of attaching great importance to tolerance and
pluralism in the public sphere, and it should be said that on this level they have been
enormously influential in shaping public debate.

Another central reason for the liberal tag has been what Vladimir Tismaneanu
calls the rediscovery and internalization of the values of the American revolution (1992:
617). As a whole, the dissidents conceived of themselves as the ideological descendants

---

10 In the centuries-old Russian debate between slavophiles and Westernizers, or
native populists and liberals, the dissidents tend to be lumped into the “liberal” category.
This is definitionally problematic given that many also exalt religious and national
traditions, but at the same time are supportive of civic communities and post-modern or
post-traditional identities.
of the Federalists. The French Revolution represented the Jacobin-Bolshevik cult of reason, ideological utopianism and infallibility, a beautiful set of ideas gone perversely wrong. The American Revolution, on the other hand, was more usefully symbolic. It was a revolt of upstarts, pitched against a mighty world power, was anti-state in its ethos and modest in its aspirations. The dissidents were seditious according to the prevailing norms of the party-state, but champions of truth and freedom according to their own discourse. Thus Adam Michnik states:

...the American Revolution appears to embody simply an idea of freedom without utopia. Following Thomas Paine, it is based upon the natural right of people to determine their own fate. It consciously relinquishes the utopian vision of a perfect, conflict-free society in favor of one based upon equal opportunity, equality before the law, religious freedom, and the rule of law. From the American Revolution also comes the idea of a plurality of exiles. The Revolution was fought by people who had tasted the bitterness of humiliation and servitude. And it brought about a republic of people who have become conscious creators of their own destinies. We see in America the embodiment of the principle of an open society and an open nation (1992: 623).

And like the American Revolution, the revolutionary nature of which at times has been hotly debated, the 1989 revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe do not constitute a full-scale social revolution. The dissidents were not revolutionaries wanting to remake society in accordance with their own indubitably correct ideals. Like the American revolution, theirs was a political and not a social revolution. They appreciated the American Revolution the same way Hannah Arendt did, as a realization of the capacity for self-initiated freedom within a fully deliberative public sphere. For Arendt, the American Revolution, unlike the French Revolution, epitomized the values of caution,
deliberation, dialogue, and judgement. It was neither reckless nor romantic, less inspirational but more pragmatic.\textsuperscript{11}

However, there are other aspects of their thought which at least generate tension with the liberal description. Here I have in mind the radically anti-political conception of civil society; the notion of politics imbued with morality, authenticity, and active subjectivity; the ethos of social solidarity, the implications for participation flowing from the Havelian understanding of political responsibility; and the broad re-definition of politics itself. There is something more here than the routine and Schumpeterian exchange of competitive elites or the liberal pre-occupation with privacy and the compartmentalization of political life. Put another way, what Garton Ash describes as the "hidden treasures" of the democratic oppositions of East-Central Europe are just that, and should not be relegated to the museum shelf or be lost in the atavistic sentimentalizing of contemporary historians and journalists.

There are, of course, several ways of looking at this contribution. One possible view is that the dissident \textit{oeuvre} is liberalism-plus, with the above components adding extra value to the basic model. Jeffrey Isaac makes the argument that, upon closer examination, the ideas of the dissidents are fundamentally democratic, but not

“unambiguously liberal democratic” (emphasis in original; 1996: 303). He elucidates this claim:

This is not to say they are antiliberal. Liberal ideas of individual liberty and liberal institutions of constitutional government are surely valued as the necessary ingredients of human freedom and dignity. But they are not viewed as sufficient for many of the democratic oppositionists. There is, if you will a democratic “surplus value” that the liberal interpretation of 1989 quietly expropriates (1996: 303).

However, as Isaac demonstrates, liberals such as Ackerman and Garton Ash are uneasy with the implications of dissident thought for the liberal paradigm, on the one hand, and the politics of the transformation, on the other. Ackerman thinks that Havel’s hallmark phrase, “living in truth” has an “authoritarian ring”—he is clearly uncomfortable with the notion of the truth, that is pursued with a “grim philosophical passion” (1992: 32-33). Good Anglo-American liberals are not philosophically at ease with what they perceive as the moral absolutism in Havel or Konrád. Garton Ash believes that “living in truth” fails at the level of practical parliamentary politics, the daily grit and grime of liberalism, in his view:

Now we expect many things of politicians in a well-functioning parliamentary democracy. But “living in truth” is not one of them. In fact, the essence of all democratic politics might rather be described as “working in half-truth.” Parliamentary democracy is, at its heart, a system of limited adversarial mendacity, in which each party attempts to present part of the truth as if it were the whole (Garton Ash, 1990c: 52).

Another variation on the liberalism-plus model is the argument that what worked well for authoritarian communism does not necessarily translate well into the realpolitik of post-communist or existing liberal democracies. Thus Elizabeth Kiss (1992) argues that the
antipolitics of the democratic opposition "translates badly into the post-communist era" because it basically depends on individual citizen action and subjecthood. The transformation, on the contrary, has been largely an institutional exercise, steered and managed by elites.

A theoretical dispute arises on the basis of what is privileged—liberalism or democracy. Thus contra Garton Ash and Kiss, Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato have argued that it is precisely because of the civil society emphasis that the dissidents have something major to contribute to democratic theory. In their landmark study *Civil Society and Political Theory*, Cohen and Arato explicitly acknowledge their debt to the East-Central Europeans, in particular to Michnik, Konrád, and Kis. Cohen and Arato claim to have taken the civil society concept further than the dissidents by taking it "public", that is, developing it from an oppositional strategy to a theoretical approach designed to reinvigorate the public sphere (and by implication, both democracy and democratic theory). Their debt to the dissidents is displayed in the way they endow social

---

12Cohen and Arato's work is far too complex and multi-dimensional to adequately summarize here, however, it should be noted that in their reconstructed theory of civil society, the concept is part of a three-part framework of social relations. As opposed to the formerly dualistic (Hegelian) notion of state/civil society, they conceive of state/civil society/economy. However, these are not clearly delineated or in a necessarily hierarchical relationship to one another. The economy and the state are two sub-systems, both of which are integrated and mediated by the relations of money and power. Moreover, the "cultural linguistic" background of the polity is critical, not in terms of institutions, but on the level of social resources, as shared normative content. Civil society, according to Cohen and Arato, involves "all of the institutions and associational forms that require communicative interaction for their reproduction and that rely primarily on processes of integration for coordinating action within their boundaries."
movements with political agency and retain the importance of self-limitation as an effective end and means of political practice. Moreover, they discuss rights as having their genesis and legitimacy in civil society, echoing the types of claims made by Charter 77 and KOR. The Cohen and Arato appropriation of dissident theory strengthens the alternative to the liberalism-plus argument, that the dissidents indeed made a contribution to democratic theory beyond adding a little extra to liberalism. Moreover, I would add that Cohen and Arato do not add much to the civil society part of their argument beyond the dissidents' original intentions. Michnik, Kuroń, Havel, Kis, and Konrád never saw civil society solely as an oppositional strategy, but as an end in itself. Process was as important as outcome, hence its fundamentally participatory and democratic content. Antipolitics was always about doing politics differently, not simply engineering a clever end to authoritarian communism.

Both the Garton Ash-Ackerman interpretation and the liberalism-plus argument seek reinforcement by claiming that since the dissidents have variously described themselves as liberals, then it must be so. Thus Isaac praises Adam Michnik and György Konrád for their commitments to civil liberties, parliamentarism, pluralism, and scepticism. After all, writing in the midst of revolutionary change, Konrád stated:

Why am I a liberal? Because I am sceptical about everything human, about our collective self; because for me there are no institutions, persons,

(1992: 429). Following Habermas, they discuss communicative action in the operation of civil society, as a "linguistically-mediated intersubjective process" through which norms are questioned and consensus is developed through constant negotiation.
or concepts that are sacrosanct or above criticism. Because in human thinking I recognize no obligations or taboos. I demand freedom even among my circle of friends. I have that now; they listen to me with interest. For me, liberalism is, first of all, a style: worldly, civilized, personal, ironic (1990b: 189).

Context here is very important. Liberalism today is often understood in East-Central Europe as an alternative set of values, in opposition to xenophobia, ethnic nationalism, or anti-Semitism. It most often has these connotations rather than referring to a particular ideology or set of institutional arrangements. When Miklós Haraszti discusses the transformation in Hungary ten years later he says that, "...it is a firmly liberal system...[which] continued to develop in a liberal direction under consecutive partisan administrations" (1999: 33). The liberalism of the "handshake transition" means entrenched respect for human rights and democratic institutions, but it also reflects democratic cultural attitudes. To be liberal is to be open to criticism, tolerant of others, civic-minded, and in the region this means bucking historical trends that in the past have favoured authoritarianism--of either the communist or the populist-fascist variety. To be liberal is to be progressive, rebellious, even idealistic. In this sense, one can be liberal and many other things at the same time. In my view, the fact that the dissidents have been embraced in many circles as liberals says as much about the lack of an alternative discourse in America as it does about Central and East European distaste for the lexicon of socialism and social democracy.

Indeed, some commentators have insisted on calling former dissidents liberals even when they called themselves socialists (especially in their earlier writings). Thus in
his introduction to Michnik's *The Church and the Left*, David Ost decodes Michnik's "socialism" as "liberal communitarianism" or "republicanism". Ost supports his argument as follows:

The liberal aspect is most clearly on display in his ardent defence of individual rights, freedom of expression, and full religious and political tolerance. Michnik appeals to John Stuart Mill as his authority, not Karl Marx or anyone from the socialist tradition. No political ideology could even be considered socialist if it did not have a communitarian aspect to it. What is special about Michnik's communitarianism, however, is that it too is of an essentially liberal pedigree. He is decidedly unsympathetic to the communitarianism of Leninism and the old Left, with its focus on organic unity between state and society, its vision of a state embodying the needs and interests of all citizens. Michnik recognizes the totalitarian implications of such communitarianism and rejects fundamentalist Catholicism for having similar organicist aspirations. Michnik's communitarianism is based on a free and active citizenry participating extensively in discussing and legislating the issues that confront them. Community is generated through the process of politics, not its outcome (Ost, "Introduction" in Michnik, 1993: 6).

Although Ost does credit Michnik for his critiques of capitalism and strong support for social justice and welfare guarantees, he claims that nothing Michnik demands theoretically could not be accommodated "through primarily a market economy and Western parliamentary structure" (1993: 6). Later on Ost suggests that Western readers "may be surprised that Michnik's socialism is little more than a defence of liberalism and individualism" (1993: 7). In my view, either Ost has a fairly thick and elastic conception of liberalism--a convenient liberal trick if there ever was one--or there is more to Michnik's thought, and for that matter, the other dissidents as well.

For although Michnik does cite Mill extensively in *The Church and the Left* and is
making a strong argument for toleration, he also draws extensively from the traditions of Polish socialism. Abramowski’s commitment to cooperative socialism, the struggle for an authentic parliamentary tradition by the PPS and the radically participative views of Luxemburg are just as important to Michnik in defeating a narrowly Leninist view of political involvement and laying the groundwork for social solidarity and coalition politics. In The Church and the Left he even acknowledges the problem of maintaining socialist ideals under authoritarian communism, advising his readers to stay the course while embracing religious tolerance:

The secular Left is in a particularly difficult situation in Poland. It must defend its socialist ideals in the face of an unpatriotic totalitarian power shouting socialistic slogans. Yet it is precisely for that reason that the defence must be firm, consistent, and uncompromising, free from sectarianism, fanaticism, and obsolete scenarios. Leftist thought must be open to all antitotalitarian and pro-independence ideas, and thus open to Christianity and the riches of the Christian tradition (1993: 210).

Moreover, I would suggest that parliamentarism and a market economy do not deliver on the promise of civil society, as both circumscribe the opportunities for direct citizen involvement in the public sphere.

We should, of course, be careful of the various labels the dissidents wore because as they themselves discovered through the process of political action and theorizing about it, none of the existing labels seemed to fit. Thus today you have Michnik describing himself as a “radical democrat” and Havel claiming to be a “post-modern politician”. They are equally uneasy with either the socialist or liberal tag, not only because of the baggage the terminology implies, but because neither is entirely appropriate to their
Refocusing the lens to look at democracy rather than liberalism provides us, I think, with a better understanding of dissident thought as a whole and the contribution it makes to political theory. The creation of liberal political institutions in East-Central Europe only partially fulfills the promise of the democratic opposition, and what remains cannot be mandated or secured by parliamentary privilege. Here I am referring to the thick notion of responsibility and active citizenship implied in the civil society approach, and the kinds of actions that can and do flow from it. Liberal democratic politics in an institutionalized sense is about claims of procedural (and to a lesser degree, distributive) justice—who gets what, when, and where according to a fair, temporally responsive and accountable set of rules. Locating within civil society the nexus of political responsibility and authenticity has different implications entirely. Freedom and responsibility do not begin with a constitution or the right to vote; they are generated from within via self-empowerment.

Havel wrote that the injunction to “live in truth” must occur within each person. It is only when the greengrocer refuses to put up someone else’s sign and finds his own public voice that he takes on political responsibility and becomes a citizen. Thus the dissidents were always insistent that by creating an alternative to authoritarian communism via their parallel polei, they were in fact building islands of freedom. As Michnik stated in The Church and the Left:

In Polish intellectual circles it is common to complain about the
restrictions on our rights, about the lack of freedom, about censorship. Far be it from me to minimize the importance of these issues. And yet it is not only the political authorities who are responsible for our moral and intellectual life. We all share responsibility. The authorities can expand or restrict the boundaries of freedom, but they cannot make people free. Our freedom begins with each one of us, not with the authorities. If we do not circulate our carbon-copy book manuscripts, if we do not publish in uncensored emigré publications, if we are silent in the face of persecution, then it is not the authorities who are responsible for this but we ourselves (1993: 212).

This kind of freedom is more dialogical and solidaristic than the individualism of classical liberalism can reasonably support. Human beings live together, inhabit a common world, and must care for it through the relationships they begin with each other. Political responsibility is very direct and concrete, unsullied by the type of ideological thinking decried by Havel in his essay “On Evasive Thinking”. Moreover, accepting political responsibility, acting in concert with others to generate freedom in the Arendtian sense, cannot be the result of a Rawlsian social compact chosen via self-interest from behind a veil of ignorance. Ultimately it is only an ethical or a moral imperative, which is why dissident thought is imbued with such a strong sense of spirituality, of religious mission. It matters less from which faith this imperative arises, only that it does arise. In this way we can paradoxically conceive of a moral absolute that functions not so much as a single criterion of truth or morality, but as an imperative for action that may differ from person to person. Havel’s phrasing of an “absolute horizon” is appropriate in this sense

---

13Jean Bethke Elshtain (1993) has explored the Havelian sense of political responsibility, and his anti-utopian, anti-cynical idealism in her essay “Politics Without Cliche”.

because although physical horizons on a landscape change with our perspective, they are nonetheless there.

Furthermore, civic initiatives, social movements, and the self-organization of society are necessary not only for building and safeguarding democracies, but this approach simultaneously mitigates countervailing tendencies pulling us in the opposite direction, such as consumerism, alienation, the retreat to tribalism and ethnic or religious particularism, and the self-interested corruption inherent in any form of political clientelism. The fact that these pressures are neither exclusively “liberal” nor “socialist” in character but are indicative of the malaise of our age highlight the fact that antipolitical politics attempts to leave Left-Right cleavages behind. Traditional paradigms of political organization are also in question; thus Havel speaks a great deal today of the artificiality of borders in a globalized world where states are often the recipients as much as the generators of injustice or inequality.

The strategies and tactics employed by the dissidents in building civil society with a sense of self-limitation are explicitly not revolutionary, but neither are they the conventional representative options of liberal democratic politics. Protests—in either written or public form—are by their very nature outside the “normal” political arena and come from somewhere else, usually civil society. “Ruthless criticism of all that exists” in the philosophically Marxist sense combine with peaceful civil disobedience, and purposefully yet carefully challenge the legal and political norms of any social order. Yet at the same time, self-limitation requires that the activist never sacrifice means for ends,
or push too hard for a confrontation with the authorities, whoever they are. A continual and openly democratic process of judgement is required to determine where the boundaries lay at any given time. The antipolitician abjures violence not only because of its human costs but also because of its political deficits.

As John Keane describes it, the East-Central European dissident commitment to non-violence is also antipodean to the classic revolutionary syndicalist recipe for dramatically toppling the state and state power by means of extreme violence (1996: 80). George Sorel’s Réflexions sur la violence and Michnik’s “Letter from the Gdansk Prison” are polar opposites. The Sorelian conception treats violence as necessary and indeed purifying, in the theoretical spirit of the “just war” against interminable evil. The East-Central Europeans were suspicious of the ideological zeal of any Sorelian or Jacobin justification—hence Michnik’s comment about storming Bastilles and unwittingly building new ones. Manichean “us versus them” characterization was inimical to democratic oppositions of the region, even in Michnik’s Poland where the divisions between apparatchik and dissident were most strongly felt. Violent revolutionary traditions and proponents of direct action are bent on destroying the other, whereas dissident thought is built on tolerance and acceptance of everyone, especially the other (Keane, 1996: 80).

This acceptance of the other reflects the fundamentally democratic and democratizing approach of the dissidents. Self-protection was necessary, and if violence was not the answer then the opposition movements looked instead at building social
cooperation, solidarity, and trust. Democratization in this sense did not imply representation (by others) but involvement (of oneself).

In the same way that the dissidents rejected revolutionary violence, they similarly rejected the idea of a single revolutionary or universal class. Even though the on-the-ground reality of the democratic oppositions reflected a strong intellectual bias, these intellectuals hardly saw themselves on the road to class power. The antipolitics of civil society was by nature pluralistic, and in the same way power was dispersed throughout society, so too was antipower. No one social group, party, class, or movement could completely represent the oppositional “will” and certainly not any form of absolute, society-wide volonté générale. Partisan politics--both in the revolutionary and the parliamentary sense of the phrase--involved speaking and acting on behalf of others, whereas the civil society approach sought initially to locate resistance to the party-state and political responsibility more broadly within the individual. Living in truth was both a local and a personal decision.

Acting effectively and boldly yet non-violently both reinforces the respect for human dignity and human rights, but also requires a fairly high degree of situational creativity. It means you can both “walk the talk” (respect human rights in theory and practice) and can truly out-smart the authorities with an endless array of non-violent tactics. This multivalency was more difficult for the party-state both to understand and combat, for it was contrary to its own nature and required a different approach and kind of thinking. After all, fighting violence with violence requires no great innovation on the
part of the aggressor or the victim. In fact, as the recent conflicts in the former Yugoslavia have demonstrated, the more violence is met with violence, the less likely one can tell the "difference" between the poles of combat.

Isaac refers to this "vigorous yet self-limiting praxis" as "rebellious politics" and places the dissidents on a twentieth century continuum along with Hannah Arendt and Albert Camus. All were and are "animated by the ideals of human dignity, solidarity, and self-determination" and shared a similar distaste for totalitarianism—in fact all were instrumental in fashioning a language through which it could be discussed (1992: 252). Whereas the critical and humane democracy of Arendt and Camus was quashed by the bipolarization of geography and thought after the Second World War, the East-Central Europeans have, in Isaac's view, effectively revived this tradition and extended it.14

Dissident thought in East-Central Europe through its praxis involved a re-thinking of the sphere of politics itself. At first this was a practical necessity of the civil society approach. Because revisionism was effectively dead in the region and the focus of the opposition became antipolitical in nature, resistance to authoritarian communism had to be located outside the party-state. With this shift in political tactics came the theorization that meaningful and authentic political life should begin first and foremost at the level of citizen activity. Moreover, this approach was inclusive, democratic and carried with it a pedagogical dimension. One simultaneously learned and created democratic values of

trust, social solidarity, and cooperation through action--the “small-scale” work envisioned by Masaryk, Patočka, and Havel or the “social self-defence” posited by Kuroń, Michnik, and the KOR intellectuals. Furthermore, on this line of reasoning, Kis’ argument against Bence was triumphant in the Hungarian opposition. After martial law was imposed in Poland, Bence did not want to go further with an “open” opposition--with samizdat journals, signature campaigns, and other activities for fear of the existential risks involved. To Kis’ credit, he saw that it was precisely through the strategy of openness that the opposition could style itself as a democratic opposition, rather than the creation of a clandestine elite.

On a second level, and perhaps most concretely in the Czechoslovak case, the dissidents drew a line between politics and morality that effectively changes our perspective on politics. Several reasons account for this re-definition. The dissidents sought to counter a crude line of Marxist orthodoxy that sought to situate morality, and in particular individual dignity and respect for individual rights, as an ephemeral reflection of bourgeois ideology and society. Within the intersubjectivity of communication they saw authenticity and cooperation. Respecting individual rights, even as narrowly expressed as the entrenchment of liberal political freedoms, was fundamental to living in truth and creating democratic alternatives. According to Alan Montefiore, the message of morality he reads into Havel is so strong “...that on a deeper understanding of the matter, the sphere of the political is to be understood as contained within that of the moral, and that certain types or aspects of moral behaviour or attitude are of their very nature also
profundely political (1990: 224). By making morality inclusive of politics in this sense, it becomes imperative to political judgement on a very practical level.

III. Political Theory Engages With Dissident Theory

Support for my argument that dissident thought should be taken seriously as political theory is reinforced as I continually come across public intellectuals, social critics, and political theorists who build on the arguments of Havel, Michnik, and others and in so doing extend the influence and contemporary relevance of the East-Central European oeuvre. They conclude, and I concur, that dissident thought has a message for Western democracies as well as the continuing relevance for the post-communist regimes of Central and Eastern Europe in a number of crucial respects.

In the West, post-Fordism has bequeathed to theorists and activists alike a number of dilemmas: the neoliberal response to the fiscal crises of the postwar state; the decline of strong nationally- and mass-based, “catch all” parties; the diminishment of parliaments in the face of expanded executive decision-making; globalization and the increasing irrelevance or at least marginalization of the nation-state; and the demographic decomposition of the traditional class identities. In the two decades before the Fall of the Wall in the West, “progressive” intellectuals and activists were looking neither to an alliance with the state or particular parties, nor solely to the transformative possibilities of the academy. At the same time as Havel, Michnik, and Kis were challenging the traditional left-right dichotomy, the theory and politics of the “new social movements”
emerged as both a means of dealing with these dilemmas and as an expression of new and cross-cutting political identities. These movements were not seen in the traditional Marxist sense as amorphous precursors to party formation, but as political alternatives in themselves. They expressed difference, challenged the notion of class as a dominant or all-encompassing explanatory variable or as potentially emancipatory, remained within themselves deliberately heterogenous and open to contestation in both discourse and tactics. Moreover, they provided new opportunities for intellectuals to exercise their political responsibility outside the state-party framework. For example, it was reasonable for many environmental scientists, feminists, and African-Americans within the American university system to link up with non-academic constituencies in social movements and pursue their mutually-compatible objectives in a fruitful alliance with one another.

Thus theorists such as Andrew Arato, Jean Cohen, and John Keane have sought to

---


theorize about civil society with both the Western experience of new social movements and the East-Central European œuvre in mind. Moving from his earlier discussion of “civil society” against the state in Poland, Arato has added the Habermasian public sphere. Keane has utilized the concept of civil society as a means of thinking past what he sees as the outmoded fixations of democratic socialism on the party as the vehicle for change and the “undemocratic...unrepeatable and therefore obsolete” ideal of full employment. He argues that his civil society approach is more grounded and realistic than the utopianism of André Gorz and more political than the “feasible socialism” of Alec Nove.

To the extent that the “new social movements” theory and practice have reached a stalemate in the 1990s, the civil society praxis of the dissidents provides a possible new direction. For even though conservative commentators begrudgingly admit that, thanks to

---

17Compare Arato’s account of the Polish opposition in “Civil Society Against the State: Poland 1980-81” and “Empire Vs. Civil Society: Poland 1981-82” in Telos 47 and Telos 50 respectively with the complete theorization of Cohen and Arato (1992), Civil Society and Political Theory. Further, Cohen and Arato can be situated in the context of the re-excavation of the concept of civil society (this time purposefully as Zivilgesellschaft rather than bürgerliche Gesellschaft) within German social theory emanating from the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research and current debates on the “Rot-Grün” coalition. See also Ulrich Rödel, Günter Frankenberg, and Helmut Dubiel (1989), Die demokratische Frage (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag and Ulrich Rödel (1990), Autonome Gesellschaft und libertäre Demokratie (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag). John Ely (1992) critically reviews all three in “The Politics of ‘Civil Society’” Telos 93, 173-191.

the ethos and politics of the new social movements and their practitioners, they lost the Kulturkampf, much remains unchanged. Thanks to feminism, the gay rights movement, and environmentalism, women have greater social and economic equality as much through several decades of consciousness-raising and activism as through legislative and judicial change; our families and societies have become more gay-positive even when our laws are not; and we have no-smoking bistros, recycling bins, and declare municipalities to be nuclear-free even when corporations still get away with massive and continued pollution of our air and land. But both new social movements and parliaments have run into a wall of citizen complacency and apathy that threatens to become more than a serious legitimacy deficit. Increasingly, parliaments, politicians, “special interests”, and lobbyists are all held in equal contempt.

The dissident experience points to a recapturing of political agency under seemingly impossible circumstances, where alliances are built on basic yet radically participative democratic goals and stress over-arching commitments rather than a collapse into particularistic identities. Moreover, this agency begins not with group membership or a narrow or exclusive definition of identity, but with the individual raised to her or his highest common factor--as a citizen. At the same time, this citizen is rooted firmly in a community with social obligations and political responsibilities.

Left liberal or “communitarian” thinkers such as Michael Walzer and Charles Taylor have also appropriated the East-Central European discourse on civil society. Writing in 1989, Taylor invoked civil society as not only articulating “the hopes of those
fighting to open spaces of freedom" but presciently predicted that the concept would be just as important with the turnover of power in the East as a revitalization of democratic politics in the West (1990: 95). The experience of the dissidents in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, according to Walzer "...invite us to think about how this social formation is secured and invigorated" in the West (1991: 293). As Walzer suggests, we should take heed:

We have reasons of our own for accepting the invitation. Increasingly, associational life in the "advanced" capitalist and social democratic countries seems at risk. Publicists and preachers warn us of a steady attenuation of everyday cooperation and civic friendship. And this time it's possible that they are not, as they usually are, foolishly alarmist. Our cities are really noisier and nastier than they once were. Familial solidarity, mutual assistance, political likemindedness—all these are less certain and less substantial than they once were. Other people, strangers on the street, seem less trustworthy than the once did. The Hobbesian account of society is more persuasive than it once was (1991: 293).

The promise of the East-Central European conception of civil society is that it fills many gaps in alternative political views of "the good life" without completely replacing or supplanting any of them. Walzer outlines four other definitions seeking to create the most supportive environment for "the good life": 1) New Left theories of participation and active citizenship that combine Rousseauian idealism with early American republicanism; 2) Marxist and syndicalist theories which focus on economic activity and the creative and fulfilling value of labour; 3) the capitalist reification of the marketplace where human beings are consumers rather than producers and maximize their preferences through abundant and continual choice; and 4) attachment to "the nation" by "ties of
blood and history” (1991: 294-297). The beauty of the civil society approach is that it is not unidimensional, and allows for the complexity of human society and our diverse attachments. Thus both Marxist and capitalist visions undervalue all accounts which do not prioritize *homo economicus*, and both the New Left ideas of radical participation and Marxism undervalue all associations except the *demos* and the working class (1991: 298).

According to Walzer, human beings are *social* before being political or economic beings. Moreover, accepting this view does not deny that we are simultaneously entangled in a network of associations, forms of ownership, kinship ties and organizations, religious faiths and institutions, and so on, which are multi-layered, involve political and economic choices and conflicts, and account for the actual complexity of modern life. The civil society project points Walzer in the direction of what he calls “critical associationalism” as a means of reinvigorating citizenship and public life without taking away from the need for social (and socialist) economic cooperation, individual autonomy, or national identity. Taken seriously, such a project could aid in decentralizing the state, socializing the economy, and pluralizing and domesticating nationalism (1991: 303).

For both the “socialist” or “post-Marxist” civil societarians like Keane, Cohen, and Arato as well as communitarians like Walzer or Taylor, the success of civil society in East-Central Europe speaks for itself. In a world defined by endemic crisis and the collapse or theoretical dismemberment of holistic ideological solutions, we do not have many “best practices” in theory or practice to choose from in late twentieth century. Democracy is often isolated as the ultimate political good, but there are so many flaws in
existing democracies, and the path to constructing or revitalizing democracy seems so fraught with pitfalls and contradictions, that it is all too easy to conclude that the postwar liberal democracies of the West are a never-to-be-repeated experiment. For this reason alone, the fragile yet stubborn islands of civil society in East-Central Europe in the 1970s and 1980s provide us with more than a glimmer of hope.

Finally, in most Western liberal democracies today we are faced with the twin problems of lies and illusions in politics and the widely-perceived immorality of our practising politicians. At the same time as citizens are increasingly apathetic and retreat into the private sphere, they are also increasingly sophisticated at de-coding the strategies of spin doctors, whether in the hire of partisan organizations or media conglomerates. The gap between truth and reality in politics has never seemed larger, but it is also more obvious. The recognition that the semantic content of political speech is twisted beyond recognition to be meaningful to the average citizen is an important first step. Dissident thought and practice points to a critical second step: that authentic politics beginning within civil society and carrying through into the formal institutions of democracy carries with it a strong imperative to truthfulness and respect for truth. One does not have to suggest that there is an absolute standard of truth or morality which should guide citizens and politics in their communications with each other to make this a meaningful requirement. Indeed, the fact that there may be a competition among truth-claims or different bases for morality—for example, stemming from differing religious and cultural practices—will simply make the process more inclusive and democratic. Kantian
judgement and the communicative ethics of Habermas both enter the picture here. What is absolute in this process is the sense of responsibility that must flow from the acceptance of morality in politics.

IV. Marginalization or Public Engagement: The Role of Central European Intellectuals in the Post-Communist Era

There is a classic story that is constantly being re-told throughout Central Europe in the late 1990s. Like many of the folk and fairy tales emanating from the region, the story has an ahistoric or timeless quality—it could have happened yesterday, a hundred years ago, or ten years ago. The tale begins with a rag-tag group of dissidents huddled around kitchen tables in farmhouses, in local pubs, in urban cellars, and mostly around others who resisted authoritarian communism with great moral courage and not inconsequential personal sacrifice. Many were harassed by the security police. Some were beaten up or imprisoned for lengthy periods. Maybe their children could not go to university, or they lost their own university teaching positions.

These individuals were often quietly supported and their well-worn publications furtively read, passed hand over hand. We still do not know the scope or depth of their influence at this time, for it could not be scientifically measured. They were mostly avoided in the streets and by their acquaintances, as they tended, by their example, to expose the passivity and complicity of the vast majority of the population. A few of them acquired an international reputation—or notoriety—and this gave them a certain immunity
which was as much a curse as a blessing.

When the winds of historical change blew in their direction, they were often the only independent players on the political stage with integrity and honour. They spoke passionately in defence of the ordinary citizens of their countries who had so long been under the subjugation of the party-state and warm feelings of camaraderie flowed between them and the crowds in the streets. Human dignity won the day; collaboration was conveniently forgotten. You could not help but be touched by the sense that history was in the making, that these citizen intellectuals were about to become philosopher-kings. Not for the first time in this part of the world, a new dawn in politics and human history was proclaimed with fanfare, this time immediately witnessed via satellite connections by the rest of the world. The old regime which seemed, despite the cracks and fissures, solid enough to last considerably longer, crumbled like a house of cards.

Conspiracy theories often join the story at this point, going so far as to suggest that the dissidents were in the pay of the previous regime, or at least cleverly manipulated by it, so that the terms and conditions of a transition to liberal democracy and market economy would be written as favourably as possible for the former nomenklatura. Whatever you are inclined to believe, the dissidents suddenly found themselves propelled into positions of power and authority, either by election or the sheer force of popular will.

The political careers of these philosopher-kings were both anticlimactic and short-lived. Their ideas—noble and idealistic—were well-suited to the opposition but not the realpolitik of normal politics. Some were too uncompromising to be good politicians;
others were too uncomfortable in the corridors of power. To make matters worse, they began to squabble amongst themselves, and their ensuing political divisions were messy and unseemly. As a result, some stepped down from office; others were defeated in national elections. Once on the margins of society, to the margins of society again they returned.

There were new risks and rewards in the political and economic arrangements which governed society, with new choices but great social costs. People were disappointed at the slow pace of the actual transformation, as opposed to its revolutionary promise. The aftermath of the euphoria was a series of giant national hangovers. When everyone woke up, and accommodated themselves to the new reality, politics became boring again.

Like many stories, this one is built upon real events and contains some “truth”.19 It even has several morals—that dissidents do not by nature make good politicians, or that ideas ultimately cannot triumph over the impersonal bureaucratic inertia of modern political life. We may nod sagely at this point, but unfortunately in this story the evidence does not convincingly support these common claims. What actually did happen?

It is certainly the case that many former dissidents were propelled into new or newly-created positions in institutional politics. In Czechoslovakia a playwright became

---

19As recounted above, this a deliberate caricature, but not too far off many contemporary accounts. Within this vein, see Michael T. Kaufman (1997), “From Dissidence to Dissonance” and Jiří Pehe (1997), “Reshaping Dissident Ideals for Post-Communist Times” both in Transitions 3.3, 5-8.
a president, in Poland a Catholic intellectual became a prime minister. It is also the case that in the “transitional” governments--which contained members of the “old” and “new” regimes--many former dissidents became members of parliament and cabinet ministers. It is also true that after this first initiation into high politics, many left willingly or unwillingly--Miklós Haraszti, Gábor Miklós Tamás, Miroslav Kusý, Martin Palouš, Adam Michnik, and Konstanty Gebert, to name only a few.

However, the myth of the dissidents re-marginalizing themselves through their political ineptitude or annoying moral superiority is just that, a myth. Not unsurprisingly, many of the former intellectual activists found themselves at home in the political arena and have made impressive contributions to building and consolidating democratic institutions and a democratic political culture, by their ideas, commitment, and office-holding. Jacek Kuron ran unsuccessfully for president in 1995, but remains an active member of parliament and leader of the Freedom Union party. Bronislaw Geremek is Polish foreign minister. Jan Lityński and Zbigniew Bujak are members of the Sejm. Václav Benda is a member of the Christian Democrats in the Czech Republic and is the Director of the Office for Documentation and Investigation of Communist Crimes. Petr Pithart is vice-chair of the Czech Senate, and Rudolf Battěk is a senator. Peter Uhl is Government Representative for Human Rights and Minorities. Saša Vondra is the Czech ambassador to the United States. Jan Čarnugurský is head of the Christian Democrats in Slovakia and last fall went from being chair of the opposition to Minister of Justice. Gábor Demszky is mayor of Budapest. And, albeit with little “political” power but
considerable moral suasion, Václav Havel remains in his post as president of the Czech Republic.

Moreover, those who left high politics hardly retreated into a sedentary private life. Adam Michnik left the Sejm to become editor-in-chief of Gazeta Wyborcza, the most influential and widely-circulated newspaper in the region. Konstanty Gebert left the Sejm for a stellar journalistic career, as foreign correspondent for Gazeta and has just founded a periodical which reflects the growth and dynamism of the rebirth of Warsaw’s Jewish community, entitled Midrasz. Jan Urban is editor of Transitions, an important contemporary journal whose reportage covers the entire former East Bloc. Jiřina Šiklová founded the Prague Gender Studies Centre and is currently a professor of sociology at Charles University. Dana Nemčová heads the Olga Havlová Foundation. Martin Palouš was head of the Czech Helsinki Assembly, but has returned to the civil service this past year as deputy foreign minister. Miroslav Kusý is head of the philosophy department of Comenius University in Bratislava. János Kis is no longer a chair of the SzDSz, but remains actively involved, in addition to his post as chair of the Department of Political Science at the new Central European University. György Bence founded the “Invisible College” in Hungary and is a professor of philosophy at ELTE. Miklós Haraszti is currently on the board of Hungarian Radio and Television and teaches politics and media democratization at universities in both Hungary and the United States. György Konrád was the president of PEN International, and was recently appointed head of the Institute for Advanced Study in Berlin. Again, these are only a handful of examples.
In fact, taking the civil society approach *seriously*, many of the former dissidents have taken up leadership positions within those very independent associations they sought to create in the first place. They know full well that democracy is *not* simply about free elections and parliaments. Many have chosen to build democracy not by sitting as office-holders but by making civil society their job. In this sense, I would argue that there has been much *continuity* in the theory and practice of the former dissidents, Western and journalistic accounts notwithstanding.

Although it is not correct to suggest that intellectuals have withdrawn from political or public life, they do face new kinds of marginality. The marketization and globalization of mass culture have dealt many a harsh new reality. When samizdat competed in a small and closed market with the agit-prop of the party-state, there was no contest. Thus carbon-copied manuscripts in Czechoslovakia or journals from the underground presses of Poland or Hungary assumed a disproportionate influence and importance in comparison with their overall number. However, when the speeches of Havel or the editorials or Michnik must compete with *Playboy* magazine, Harlequin romances, American sit-coms on television, and CNN, the airwaves and bookshelves--open and uncensored though they may be--tend to crowd out the moral heroes of another age.

It is an intellectual truism that it is much easier to be against something than for something. Critique is much easier than theory; opposition more dynamic than the implied quiescence of support. This is even more the case with the former dissidents as
they deliberately avoided promises of redemption and sweeping teleological theories in the first place. The former dissidents still do not support ideologies, and their voices are heard strongly against new forms of authoritarianism, anti-Semitism and other forms of ethnic and religious prejudice, and exclusivist nationalism. But this leads average citizens to grumble, “What exactly are they for?” Even the clever and aphoristic György Konrád is reported to have said at the 1991 conference of International PEN, “What is left when there is no more devil?” Taking the moral high ground of imprecision, toleration, and distrust of power does not translate well for populations brought up on the slogans of authoritarian communism, only now to be hit with the slogans of advertising.

There is a morose and plaintive tone to the post-1989 international conferencing and intellectual navel-gazing of many former dissidents. One does not quite buy the self-proclaimed happiness of Adam Zagajewski, who made the following remarks at a 1992 conference entitled “Intellectuals and Social Change in Central and Eastern Europe”:

---

Aside from my own interviews with former dissidents on this point, my analysis in this section relies heavily on the proceedings of two important conferences on this issue. The first, supported by the National Endowment for Humanities and entitled “Intellectuals and Social Change in Central and Eastern Europe” was held at Rutgers University on April 9, 10, and 11, 1992. The proceedings of that conference were transcribed and published as a special edition of Partisan Review, from which I quote here. The second, sponsored by the French Institute and the Collegium Budapest and entitled “Intellectuals, Between Morals and Politics” was held in Budapest on March 21, 22, and 23, 1996, in Budapest. The unpublished and translated proceedings of the conference (which was held in Hungarian, French, and English) were provided to me by Éva Karádi and are used with permission. Some of the contributions were published in Hungarian in the Spring, 1996 issue of Magyar Lettre Internationale.
Now it’s all over. Now it’s all about money and nationalism. Writers, who once represented mythical entities, now represent just themselves. I welcome this development enthusiastically; it suits me well. What’s mythical and visionary hasn’t ceased to exist; it has returned to where it belongs: to poetry, instead of nourishing political illusions. Just one thing has become more problematic: literary conferences.

Who are we writers, those of us who have not entered the administration of new, transitional democracies? Now we represent just ourselves, our past and future, our mistakes, and *bons mots*. And—as far as political struggle against bad, oppressive systems is concerned—we have turned into historians who can dwell on their remembrances for decades. I don’t want to be misunderstood. I am not sneering at the historical function of literature, quite the contrary. But we are no longer oracles. We are writers, lonely and slightly comical figures, fighting with a white sheet of paper, exactly like our colleagues from Australia and Italy, San Marino and Andorra (1992: 670).

Well, at least the partial success of 1989 has assured that in the countries studied here, there is no such thing as a second-generation dissident. Other than being the guardians of memory and truth regarding authoritarian communism, or as individual writers and poets competing for market share, or philosophers, sociologists, historians, and economists competing with each other for academic posts, what *now* is the social role of these dissidents? Former Romanian dissident and intellectual Andrei Plesu suggests that both the dissidents and the former communists faced the same dilemma of ideological unemployment, and reacted similarly:

So dissidents after 1989 did something that did also (sic) the communist party: they renamed themselves. They renamed themselves as intellectuals. And this was a very typical renaming of both sides of the old regime. The communists became socialists and the dissidents became
intellectuals. If was safer for both sides (1996: 10).\textsuperscript{21}

The participation of these intellectual-activists in the parliaments and the extra-parliamentary organizations of civil society has nonetheless generated a vigorous debate in the region regarding the appropriate role for intellectuals in politics. Given the deep ambivalence many feel toward the transformation after ten years, it has been asserted that the new role of intellectuals in the region is to be the critical consciences of their respective societies. Those involved in the debate differ, however, on the type of critique or responsibility assumed by intellectuals as well as their appropriate social location.

Within this debate, intellectuals are still considered to be both a fact and a social force in East-Central Europe.\textsuperscript{22} However, intellectuals are no longer associated with radical universalism of any sort, and most especially the Marxist variety. Consensus on

\textsuperscript{21}In the East-Central European context specifically, I would maintain that the communists renamed themselves as capitalists--for the most part, socialism is laid claimed to by neither side.

\textsuperscript{22}This point might seem banal, but is worth making given that many of the intellectuals involved in the debate have claimed that the idea and tradition of intellectuals--in the sense of having a social stature and in terms of making an expected social contribution--is particularly European. Ágnes Heller, for example, maintains that there is no tradition of intellectuals in America, not simply because of the professionalization of expertise, but also because there is no expectation that they should play a particular role. According to Heller, European intellectuals think transcontextually, reflect on "all the essential things which are going on...[and] feel some responsibility for these things" (Heller, 1996: 2). Vladimir Tismaneanu, on the other hand, believes there is a American tradition of intellectuals. He concedes ironically, however, that it is primarily a tradition of Central and East-European emigration and exile, one he associates with New York intellectuals, and in particular with the impetus behind the foundation of the New School for Social Research (and publications such as \textit{Dissent, Social Research, the New York Review of Books}, and so on).
this point has tended to push intellectuals in one of two directions, either as having a limited "cause" or as a defenders of otherness and diversity. Translating this into politics, having a cause can mean having a different level of responsibility, which in turn may require a particular moral stance. Defending otherness or diversity is understood in the liberal sense of promoting tolerance, the protection of human rights and minority rights, pluralism in civil society, and so on. Divided this way, the second definition is more limited, but the first can also include the second. Thus Gaspar Miklós Tamás speaks compellingly of intellectuals being the voices of freedom against all forms of tyranny, regardless of origin, and especially today against all forms of ethnic and religious particularism. Václav Havel speaks more broadly of the modern technology of power which is endemic to all societies and regime-types in the twentieth century, and the requirement of intellectuals to infuse within an open and participative politics a sense of responsibility and a moral dimension.

As to whether or not intellectuals should be involved in politics as politicians, there are also primarily two camps, haunted by two spectres. The first camp, headed by Timothy Garton Ash, argues that although intellectuals may be politicians and many politicians are well-read and more cultured than average citizens, there is a gulf that separates the two and ought to be respected. The differentiation is based in social roles, and is reflected through language:

If a politician gives a partial, one-sided, indeed a self-censored account of a particular issue, he is simply doing his job. And if he manages to "sell" the part as the whole then he is doing his job effectively.
If an intellectual does that, he is not doing his job; he has failed in it. The intellectual is not the guardian or high priest of some metaphysical, ideological or pseudo-scientific Truth with a capital T. Nor is he simply the voice of *Gesinnungsethik* (the ethics of conviction) against the *Verantwortungsethik* (the ethics of responsibility) of the politician, to use Max Weber’s famous distinction. But he does have a qualitatively different responsibility for the validity, intellectual coherence, and truth of what he says and writes (1995: 36).

There should be, in Garton Ash’s view, a naturally adversarial (although not necessarily hostile) relationship between independent intellectuals and politicians. Whereas the intellectual seeks truth and warns against the abuses of untruth, the politician speaks in half-truth (1995: 35). The appropriate role of politicians in defending truth is to create and sustain a political environment in which debate and disagreement can take place. The appropriate role of intellectuals--and here he means the thinker or writer who engages in public discussion and politics most broadly--is to express the conscience of the nation and the voice of the oppressed (1995: 36). Here we are met with the spectre of Benda, and *la trahison des clercs*. As an intellectual you can be a *spectateur engagé* like George Orwell or Raymond Aron, but you can never be an independent critic and a political animal simultaneously. The slippery slope of intellectual service in favour of tyranny--even if a grand end of justice and equality are promised--remains an inevitable possibility.\(^{23}\)

\(^{23}\)There is a naturalistic fallacy inherent in the argument of both Garton Ash and Benda, which is fully explored by Ernest Gellner (1990), “*La trahison de la trahison des clercs*” in Ian Maclean, Alan Montefiore, and Peter Winch, eds. (1990), *The Political Responsibility of Intellectuals* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP). In brief, Gellner’s position is that the argument that intellectuals should stand apart from practical politics in favour of non-immediate and universal values is wholly pragmatic rather than logical. Gellner suggests that rather than holding up the actions of the *clercs* to the transcendental ethic--
Havel has consistently taken the opposite view, heading up the second camp, and the public debate between the playwright-president and the journalist-historian continues unabated. For Havel there is a necessary fluidity to the roles, and his own experience is proof enough. You can be the theatre critic, the playwright, the director, and the actor—if not at the same time, then at least sequentially. In fact, the wearing of different hats has a cumulatively positive impact. In essence, it is the theory of a true dramaturge—the actors on stage bring some of their previous roles into their current roles, and the play and the audience are both the better for it.

For Havel, intellectuals in post-communist countries should look at politics not as a dilemma to be shunned but as an opportunity to be embraced. With typical dramatic flourish, he states:

What if the strange situation in which many independent intellectuals in the postcommunist countries have found themselves is not a dilemma, but a historic challenge? What if in fact it were to challenge them to introduce a new tone, a new element, a new dimension into politics? If may well be that destiny, by thrusting us so unexpectedly into this position, actually meant to entrust us with a special mission (1997: 98-99).

For Havel, contemporary politics needs “a new impulse...a badly needed spiritual dimension”—one which just might be injected by the former dissident intellectuals as their “something special to offer to the rest of the world” (1997: 99). Intellectuals might in accordance with which they are implicitly measured anyway--Benda paradoxically commits the very sin he preaches against in his sermon. According to Gellner’s line of reasoning, it makes more sense rather than less for those wholly committed to “truth”, “impartial objectivity”, or “reason” to follow their own conclusions to the extent they necessitate political action.
possess this capacity because they are not specialists, nor do they represent special interests. However, they do claim to have a “role”, one that is informed by social responsibility:

...politics should be principally the domain of people with a heightened sense of responsibility and a heightened understanding of the mysterious complexity of Being. If intellectuals claim to be such people, they would virtually be denying the truth of that claim by refusing to take upon themselves the burden of public office on the grounds that it would mean dirtying their hands. Those who say that politics is disreputable in fact help to make it so (1997: 101).

Here Havel throws down the gauntlet. Not only does he think intellectuals ought to be involved in politics, but he goes so far as to suggest that principled avoidance does little but make matters worse. His position is consistent with his notion of responsibility, of active citizenship and the diverse practice of politics. In conclusion to the speech quoted above he takes on Garton Ash directly, whom he suggests as been too influenced by “the banal idea that everyone should stick to his own trade” (1997: 102).

For Havel being an intellectual in politics is not a Weberian calling, but a special task to which East-Central European intellectual activists are uniquely qualified. He takes this view because he sees strong affinities between what the dissidents embodied in their movements and their ideas, and what is needed in politics today. A strong message of dissident theory is the requirement for an injection of morality in the clash of political forces, as an ally of democratic judgement and as an antidote to ideology. Thus he states:

The dissident movement was not typically ideological. Of course, some of us tended more to the right, others to the left, some were close to one trend in opinion or politics, others to another. Nevertheless, I don’t
think this was the most important thing. What was essential was something different: the courage to confront evil together and in solidarity, the will to come to an agreement and to cooperate, the ability to place the common and general interest over any personal or group interests, the feeling of common responsibility for the world, and the willingness personally to stand behind one's own deeds. Truth and certain elementary values, such as respect for human rights, civil society, the indivisibility of freedom, the rule of law—these were notions that bound us together and made it worth our while to enter again and again into a lopsided struggle with the powers that be.

By politics with a spiritual dimension, I do not understand a politics that is merely a technological competition for power, limited to what can be practically achieved and seeking primarily to satisfy this or that particular interest. Nor do I mean a politics that is concerned merely with promoting a given ideological and political conception. And I certainly do not mean a politics based on the idea that the end justifies the means. I mean, rather, a politics deriving from a strong and utterly personal sense of responsibility in the world, a politics deriving from the awareness that none of us—as an individual—can save the world as a whole, but that each of us must behave as though it were his power to do so. I certainly don't need to emphasize that the origin of such a responsibility is metaphysical (1997: 111-112).

Havel's reasoning is made compelling by his consistency. He has not developed the position of the "actively-involved intellectual" post-1989 to justify his assumption and retention of first the Czechoslovak and later the Czech presidency. Rather, his position on the political role of intellectuals flows directly from his dissident writings on responsibility and the concept of "living in truth".

The moment you connect "truth" and "ideas", the question of responsibility is philosophically and pragmatically unavoidable. Truth-claims tend to generate a sense of passion and commitment which makes the option of disinterest or disavowal not only inconsistent but on another level unethical or immoral. Thus Havel sets up his own
argument so that his conclusions are inevitable. Reverting to “The Power of the
Powerless”, the greengrocer makes a break with the regime and rejects the ideological
obfuscation of ritual slogans such as “Workers of the World Unite” when he begins to see
*things as they really are*. The moment the greengrocer reflects on his own
phenomenological universe, and becomes susceptible to truth, he discovers both
responsibility and power. As long as he remains untouched and uninterested in the
semantic content of the slogan and the “pillar of lies” on which it rests, he excuses
himself from involvement. But the moment he discovers his identity and dignity by
living in truth, he begins to wear the mantle of political responsibility. In this sense, at
least, the political responsibility of the intellectual and of the individual citizen are
similarly intense. By locating the power of the powerless in such a personal decision,
Havel also radically democratizes the nature and possibility of such responsibility. Havel
is not suggesting that intellectuals should be in politics as a reflection of their
responsibility, but that intellectuals should be in politics because reflecting on this
responsibility makes it a moral requirement.

Yet here is where we also find the spectre of Plato. As Garton Ash states, if you
ask someone to freely associate the terms “intellectual” and “politics” together in the
1990s, the response almost anywhere in continental Europe or the Anglo-American world
would be “Václav Havel” (1995: 36). I would only add that the connection is even more
likely if the question were who comes to mind when you suggest the term “philosopher-
king”. The echoes of Plato we find in Havel are not those of a neo-totalitarian philosopher
bent on constructing the ideal city based on the cohering ideals of truth, justice and the good over and potentially against the citizens of the *polis* who cannot possibly be the judge of such things. Havel’s Plato is tamed by the Czech *demos*. The philosopher can be king only because citizens can also be intellectuals.
Bibliography


Bermeo, N. ed. (1992). Liberalization and Democratization: Change in the Soviet Union
and Eastern Europe. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins.


Frauen Anstiftung e.V. (1994). *Prelude: New Women’s Initiatives in Central and Eastern Europe and Turkey*.


Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.


Tamás, G.M. (1994). “A Disquisition on Civil Society,” *Social Research* 61.2, 205-


Young, I.M. (1990a). Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory. Bloomington: Indiana UP.


Personal Interviews


Klíma, Ivan. 30 August 1995 (by telephone). Prague.


Flying Seminar, Toronto

Abrahám, Samuel. 15 February 1999.

Ambros, Veronika. 20 March 1999.


Iiggers, Wilma. 10 January 1999.

Keane, John. 18 November 1996.

McRae, Robert. 10 January 1997.

Palouš, Martin. 16 January 1999.

Salivarová, Zdena. 26 April 1996.

Schonberg, Michal. 16 March 1997.


Škvorecký, Josef. 24 June 1996.

Wilson, Paul. 25 February 1996.
Filmography/Videography


Holland, A., Director (1989). *To Kill a Priest.*


Jaromil, J., Director (1968). *The Joke*

Menzel, I., Director (1966). *Closely Watched Trains.*

Němec, J., Director (1968). *Oratorio for Prague.*


Szabo, I., Director (1993). *Sweet Emma, Dear Böbe*


