By the same author

History of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia

As co-editor

Totalitarianism
America in Our Minds

THE OTHER EUROPE

Jacques Rupnik

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To the memory of Jan Patočka

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> The cause of the Party's defectiveness must be found. All our principles were right, but our results were wrong.... Our will was hard and pure, we should have been loved by the people. But they hate us. Why are we so odious and detested?
>
> (Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon*)

On coming to power the Communist Parties of the Other Europe claimed to be 'parties of a new type'. This was an understatement. A party is meant, by definition, to be merely a part of the political spectrum. By monopolizing the spectrum, the ruling Communist Parties ceased to be political parties in the proper sense of the term.

By the same token they have abolished the distinction between 'right' and 'left'. Are Jaruzelski, Ceausescu or Honecker supposed to be on the right or the left? For most people in Central Europe, the question has become utterly irrelevant. It also explains why leading dissident intellectuals such as Adam Michnik, Vaclav Havel or György Konrad resent the use of Western political labels to describe the politics of their countries, including dissent.

None of the traditional attributes of a governing party (the separation of powers, elected popular representation, the freedom from political control of various areas of social and cultural life) apply to the Communist system.

The ideological justification for the confiscation of politics is the theory of substitution: the working class is the better self of the nation; the Party is the vanguard of the working class; and the Party leadership knows best which way the wind of history is blowing. The Communists therefore are convinced that their rule is not only necessary, but also irreversible.

This ideological claim (declared to be a 'scientific truth') is the origin of the extraordinary arrogance of Communist power in its determination to inflict a 'radiant future' on the most reluctant of societies.

It is inadequate to describe the lands of the Soviet bloc as one-party states. The Communist Party tolerates, at least formally, several satellite parties (admittedly without real power), but more than that, the expression is misleading because it may suggest that the institutions of these countries are similar to those of the Western democracies except that the ruling party has somehow managed to bar its opponents from access to power. In fact the nature of the political system is fundamentally different in that it is precisely the Party which controls all existing institutions, all social organizations and, most important, the state itself. The Czech-born sociologist Thomas Lowit even maintains that the state in the Soviet bloc has become a legal fiction, a mere extension of the 'polymorphous' Party.

So if the Party is not really a political party, the state is not actually a state. Since the distinguishing feature of the Communist Party is its merger with the state, a more accurate description would be that of Party-state. No major decision by a government ministry can be taken without prior consultation with the Shadow Cabinet in the Secretariat of the Communist Party, and all state organs at every level operate under the direct control of the corresponding Party organ. This is clearly explained in a textbook published in the 1970s for the Hungarian Party School, where future apparatchiks are trained:

> The central organs of the state (Parliament, Council of the Presidency of the People's Republic, the government, the ministries) are placed under the guidance and control of the central Party organs . . .: the Central Committee of the Party, the Political Committee, the Secretariat of the Central Committee. . . . At every level, it is the Party territorial organizations and their leading organs which direct and control the organs of the state. At every level, these [Party] bodies decide the most important questions of the work of the state.

Similar statements are to be found in Party guidelines in all the countries of the Other Europe. They explain in concrete terms what is meant in their respective constitutions by the 'leading role' of the Party. Any opposition to Party policy can be branded as 'illegal' and prosecuted as 'anti-state subversion'. The Party cells that operate within each institution serve to supervise the implementation of the Party's leading role.

The key to understanding the Party-state is the personnel selection system known as the nomenklatura. It is essentially a list of posts in the state bureaucracy which can be filled only by people properly vetted by the Party. The nomenklatura system, a Soviet invention exported to Eastern Europe, operates at different levels – central, district or local – of the Party. So the Premier of a Soviet bloc country is an appointee of the Party leadership, just as a town-hall clerk owes his job to the local Party committee. The wording of Party guidelines concerning the nomenklatura is remarkably similar from country to country. Here is a sample from Czechoslovakia:

> The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and the organs of the higher echelons of the Party have full decision-making power in the field of cadres. . . . The implementation of the nomenklatura constitutes the manifestation of the leading role of the Party and of democratic centralism. . . . The nomenklatura must be observed by all leading personnel in all spheres of social life. . . . Nobody can be appointed to a nomenklatura post, nor be recalled from office, without the prior approval of the competent Party organ.

This implies that political loyalty, rather than merit or competence, is the guarantee of tenure in office. 'Negative selection' is the basic principle of co-option into the nomenklatura. Though vital for the understanding of how these countries are ruled, the nomenklatura document remains confidential. A Polish nomenklatura list from the 1970s (published in the West) reveals the astonishing degree to which the Party controls appointments not just in the state administration or, as might be expected, in the army and in the police, but also in the so-called social organizations. These include, in addition to the trade unions and the organized youth and women's movements, the lawyers' and journalists' associations, sports organizations and even the volunteer fire department.

The size of the nomenklatura varies, but the trend, especially in the Brezhnev era, has been one of expansion. As an East German Party journal put it, 'The greater the progress in the building of socialism, the greater the role and the responsibilities of the Party.' Generally speaking, the nomenklatura grows in periods of tightening Party control. The Polish nomenklatura was estimated at 160,000 posts at the end of the 1970s; after martial law it mushroomed to 250,000. In 'normalized' Czechoslovakia the figure is 115,000–130,000, double the figure of twenty years ago. However, the actual number of people involved is much higher, since certain posts are

:he state are filled with senior Party apparatchiks, who thus hold a dual position. The historian Bronislaw Geremek has written that in :he past the Polish aristocracy represented about 10 per cent of the nation. Today, the power is in the hands of a party representing less :han 5 per cent of the population. In turn, the nomenklatura, the 'inner party', represents less than 1 per cent of the population.

Being co-opted into the nomenklatura brings with it material privileges. Former Hungarian Premier Andros Hegedus recalls that in the 1950s 'we had practically no expenses. We could order cloth at the Party's tailor. We did not even have to pay for what they delivered from the department store. We did receive some sort of symbolic bill, but I guess it was only for administrative purposes. . . . We lived in a sort of consumer Communism.' The 'we' applies, of course, to the Party elite. Meanwhile, an ordinary housewife would have to queue for hours to buy a couple of pounds of potatoes.

Administrative corruption and nepotism in the Balkans is as widespread today as it ever was. But Central Europe used to be different. Today it is rampant there in economic life as well as in the state administration. In pre-1968 Czechoslovakia President Novotny used to give senior Party officials an envelope every month containing varying amounts of cash; how much depended on the degree of loyalty of the particular official or on the need to buy his quiescence or support. Under 'normalization' the phenomenon has only increased. Politically one of the most sensitive scandals in the two decades since the Soviet invasion erupted in 1986–7, when numerous officials, including Foreign Minister Chnoupek, were implicated in charges that lavish gifts to politicians had secured favourable treatment for an ambitious Slovak district.

If power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely. The post-ideological ethos of the 1970s and 1980s has encouraged a highly acquisitive mood inside the Party establishments. The massive availability of hard currency thanks to foreign credits (a relatively new actor in Communist politics) did the rest.

The disclosures made during the Solidarity period revealed the extent of the corruption in Poland and the way it was directly derived from the total interpenetration of Party and state apparatus. Sixteen members of the Central Committee had to be sacked and several ministers arrested, half the Party first secretaries and provincial chiefs (*wojewodstwa*) were removed and the line of corruption went (like most things in the Party) all the way down the chain of command to local officials and the industrial managers they were supposed to supervise. Some 3400 Party cadres were sanctioned for corruption in 1981. During the hearings of the Grabski Commission set up that

year to investigate the causes of the Polish crisis, one of its members, Wronski, spoke of the emergence of a 'large bourgeoisie' in the country that was living 'above acceptable standards; and this in a socialist country ruled by the Communist Party! And there was another bourgeoisie too, of those with Party cards, and they too were living beyond their means.'

It would be naive, of course, to assume that bribery, nepotism and embezzlement of public funds in the ruling caste have simply disappeared in the wake of Gorbachev's anti-corruption rhetoric or because a general is in charge. It will take the next political upheaval to give the public once again the privilege of looking into the opaque practices of the nomenklatura.

In the meantime the Polish nomenklaturists seem to have done rather well under Jaruzelski. In the words of J. Winiecki:

> After martial law the number of posts covered by the nomenklatura increased sharply to 250,000. To increase the number of posts filled on the basis of Party loyalty rather than competence, of course, casts a shadow on the real intentions for reform of the authorities. This is one way of saying that things have got worse. Another indication is the allocation of scarce foods. For instance, 40 per cent of the cars destined for the domestic market went through their nomenklatura system for the faithful, rather than through the market. And this is only one example among many.

The nomenklatura is the nearest thing to Orwell's 'inner-party'. Its monopoly of power cannot be challenged from without – not even (except in crisis situations) from within the Party itself. There are in fact two parties in one: the apparat, or hard core, and the rank and file. The total membership of the ruling Communist Parties represents less than 10 per cent of the population, but all power rests in the hands of the apparat, representing roughly 10 per cent of the Party membership. The dual party is the result of an apparent contradiction in Marx's views. He held that the dominant ideology in society is that of the ruling bourgeoisie; but at the same time the liberation of the workers will be the task of the workers themselves. This left the future of the revolution highly uncertain. Lenin solved the problem with his concept of the 'professional revolutionary': the Party is the vanguard of the workers and the apparat is the vanguard of the vanguard.

This division materialized in the very early days of the new regimes in East-Central Europe. In 1948, for instance, the Hungarian Party issued 106,859 Party cards to the hard-core activists (total Party

membership, after the merger with the Social Democrats, stood at 1.1 million members). So it is not just that society is divided between Party members and the rest of the population, who are treated like second-class citizens, but that the Party itself is divided between members of the apparat and the rest enjoying, so to speak, second-class membership.

Why does the apparat bother to surround itself with a relatively powerless Party membership? The answer is that it blurs the dividing line between those who have power and the have-nots. The power of the apparat is legitimized in its own eyes by the support of the members who, in their various walks of life, see to it that decisions are implemented, and thus perform a control function in the society. In this sense, the Party is the instrument of the apparat.

The membership also provides a permanent reservoir of prospective officials. These are not elected but rather co-opted into the Party elite, as Hungarian writer Gaspar Miklos Tamas points out: 'They are hand-picked by the top, but slightly different people are picked now than before; not the enthusiasts, not the fanatics, but those people generally in factories who are seen as upwardly mobile, people who want to make a career and who did show some signs of loyalty in their work, in a factory Party cell, in the workers' militia or in another such organization.'

What is in it for the rank and file? Why do people join the Party in these days of ordinary, routine socialism, now that the great ideological promise has fizzled out? There are a variety of motivations. For most – especially for white-collar workers and the intelligentsia – it is the necessary prerequisite for a promotion in their field. The Party card is in effect a work permit. Others become members simply because they do not dare turn down an insistent offer. In most cases one is indeed asked to join the Party at the workplace: the head of the local Party organization needs to fill a quota and to turn him down might have unpleasant professional consequences. Some genuinely seek to gain even a limited role in local affairs. In exchange for a tiny portion of power (and the accompanying prestige that might be attached to it) the rank-and-file member acknowledges the absolute authority of the apparat. Krzysztof Pomian describes this as a tacit 'deal' between the apparat and the members in which the latter become 'accomplices': 'it allows them to satisfy their legitimate aspirations for social recognition and allows the apparat to turn them into a part of its support system of power, using them to subject the whole society to a surveillance which would otherwise be impossible to achieve.'

No wonder the 'deal' breeds cynicism and apathy. The Czechoslovak Party paper *Rudé Pravo* (24 August 1983) bitterly deplored this state of affairs: 'It is a serious matter that our Party members live in near-anonymity. They cannot be formally rebuked for this, because they pay their membership dues, regularly attend Party meetings, and take part in agit-prop sessions. However, they have nothing to say on serious matters under discussion, they never raise their hands, and they never speak their mind. They never oppose others, but they never fight for their Party.'

Karel Kaplan joined the Czechoslovak Communist Party at the end of the war in the town of Zlin (now called Gottwaldor) where, like the current Party leader Milos Jakes, he worked in the well-known Bata shoe factory. After 1948, he became a Party functionary, so he knows both the rank and file and the apparat.

'Most members react to their powerlessness with apathy,' writes Kaplan.

> This is the way they express distaste for carrying out policies in which they do not believe. They also know that they can play no role in the formation of policy or even influence policy in their own situations. Yet they do not want to break with the Party or are afraid to. Most Communists thus live at odds with themselves.

Political participation, a favourite topic of Western political scientists, exists only on the surface; it resembles the Olympic ideal of Baron de Coubertin, namely that the important thing is not to win (the elections) but to take part. Political life has been turned into a ritual punctuated by major non-events such as May Day, the anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution or a Party conference. This is because real power, real politics are confined to the top of the Party hierarchy.

The chief characteristic of the Communist political system is its extreme form of concentration of power. Total power is in the hands of the Party Politburo and the secretaries of the Central Committee – in all about twenty people. According to the theory of 'democratic centralism' the Party Congress elects a central committee which in turn chooses a praesidium. In practice it is exactly the other way around: the twenty 'strong men' from the Praesidium and the Secretariat select the Central Committee members to be formally approved by the Congress. The Congress delegates themselves are similarly selected under the supervision of the apparat. The Party is a pyramid where communication is only vertical (horizontal links are formally prohibited) and where decisions tend to be handed down from the top. The apparat is subordinated to the Secretariat and to the Party leader. Zdenek Mlynar is a former member of

the Czechoslovak Party Politburo, from which he resigned in the aftermath of the Soviet-led invasion of August 1968. This is how today he described the extent of the concentration of power, unparalleled by any other type of regime:

> The Party apparat controls the whole state, the economy, the army, the judiciary, etc., without actually being accountable to anyone. Because it does not actually manage anything, only controls and appoints, it does not need any qualifications. And this makes it an apparat of pure power, which makes it possible for a small group at the top, which forms the Party Politburo, twelve people in fact, to be able, when they want, to decide, whenever they want, about anything and everything, about laws, international agreements, the economic plan, about hiring or firing someone from his job.

Soviet-style socialism failed to create the 'new man' its ideology promised, unless one counts the apparatchik. Based on his twenty years' experience in the Party machine, Karel Kaplan offers interesting insights into the apparatchik's mental world and way of life:

> Joining the power group means entering a different world – the world of powerholders, with their narrow set of interests, desires and range of conversation. They create their own lifestyle, different not only from that of ordinary people but also from the lifestyle of lower-level functionaries. They have their own morals, their own manner of discussion and manner of speech. Their lives are free of the burdens of ordinary everyday life. Their thinking, intentionally, tends to be as close as possible to the thoughts and desires of the number-one man in the state.

The personal lives of the officials at the central headquarters are supposed to be above suspicion. Family problems, drunkenness, etc., are, says Kaplan, considered 'political' and dealt with by a Party committee. What in Stalin's days used to apply to the whole population and in particular to all Party members (the abolition of the separation between public and private life) is now sustained only in the Party bunker. The Central Committee Secretariat has become the ultimate depository of 'real socialism':

> Apparatchiks who work in the Secretariat look after their own interests and satisfy their appetites for power. This world is, however, completely different from its surroundings – the real world. It defies comparison with the everyday life of ordinary citizens. Here the voice of social reality sounds muffled and distant. There is no interest in sounds that clash with the mentality of the majority of the apparatchiks in the Secretariat. They are repressed and silenced. Most significant, perhaps, is the fact that these apparatchiks think that their world mirrors society as a whole; that their opinions, interests, and wishes reflect those of the Party and citizenry.

The reluctance to leave the Party (especially in the more tightly run regimes in Czechoslovakia, East Germany or Romania) is often based on much the same reasons as the eagerness to join it in the first place: careerism and a certain protection from the political repression to which the rest of the population is subjected. The only category of the population that does not have to play this game for professional reasons are the workers, for you cannot be demoted from the working class. But there too, as even a brief visit to the Party cell at the salami factory in the Hungarian city of Szeged reveals, Party life gives an impression of apathy and excruciating boredom. Imre Bokray has just been invited to join the Party. 'No,' he says, 'you don't need any special characteristics to become a Party member; you must above all be a good worker, and know the Party's work well.' Was his joining likely to alter his relationship with fellow salami workers? 'There should be no difference in my relationship with my fellow workers because I have joined the Party. The most important role of a Party member within the factory is to do his best in his productive work, and to be able to influence his fellow workers in a suitable, positive direction.' While Imre Bokray is joining the Party, with what seem to be limited ideological interests beyond the idea of becoming a 'model worker', Istvan Tilinko has just left that same Party organization because of, among other things, what he describes as a too low boredom threshold:

> Party meetings cannot be described as interesting. The meetings are altogether monotonous, devoted just to one topic: the economic situation. When they hold Party conferences, then they bring it up, the same thing that was already adopted at a higher level of the Party or in the Ministry; they more or less repeat the same thing that people hear on TV or on the radio. They always go on about the state of the economy; that's all. Some people take a nap. . . .

Boring or not, the Party is particularly anxious, for ideological reasons, to keep a high proportion of workers among the rank and file (corresponding partly to their proportion in the population and partly to the political orthodoxy of the Party). In Czechoslovakia,

the post-1968 purge of the Party was accompanied by a massive reproletarianization of the Party membership (nearly half of the members are allegedly workers). In Kadar's Hungary, where the emphasis was on winning the new white-collar class, the workers represent less than a third of the membership. One may, of course, question the meaning of such statistics. On the eve of the birth of Solidarity in 1980 the Polish Party proudly announced that 45 per cent of its three million members were workers. Within months of the announcement the Party faced a general strike in which the overwhelming majority of its working-class members joined the new Solidarity trade union. When the crunch came, formal membership brought less than formal support.

The ruling Parties of the Other Europe have always oscillated between the concept of 'Leninist' vanguard party and the mass party model. In the immediate aftermath of a crisis, they claim to be the misunderstood vanguard. This was the case after 1956 in Hungary, 1968 in Czechoslovakia and 1981 in Poland. Later, when the self-confidence (or simply confusion) has returned, a new recruitment drive is launched. In Poland, following the workers' riots of December 1970, the Party lost 110,000 members, leaving just over two million. By 1975 the figure was 2.3 million, after which the Party recruitment machine went wild: by January 1980 membership topped the 3-million mark to reach 3,160,000 in June, only weeks before the collapse. This works out to an impressive average of 13,000 new members a month over the last five years of the Gierek leadership. Clearly, the Gierek regime lived not just on inflation and borrowed money; it also lived on inflated membership figures and borrowed legitimacy.

The most striking feature of the membership boom of the Gierek years in Poland was its extremely high turnover. While a million and a half new members joined in the 1970s, half a million members (mainly workers) left the Party. This suggests that, at least in some of the Soviet bloc countries, to leave the Party (as opposed to being expelled) is no big deal any more. Poland, as always, merely magnified a more general trend. Between 1970 and 1975 the Hungarian Party recruited 200,000 new members, a quarter of the total membership. The idea behind the recruitment drive was a sort of 'salami tactic' in reverse: to win, 'slice by slice' (to use Rakosi's formula), different sections of society for the Kadarist compromise. It seemed to work in the 1970s but it no longer does. Between 1975 and 1985 41,000 members left the Party (another 15,000 were expelled and 35,000 removed for minor offences). The Party paper *Magyaroszag* announced in April 1988 that 46,000 people (5 per cent of the total) had not 'renewed their cards' that winter.

The acceleration of membership turnover has in a way trivialized the image of the Party and deflated the Communist mystique. It has become the common feature of the decay of ruling Communist Parties in East-Central Europe. The most dramatic cases are, of course, the major political crises. In 1956 the Hungarian Communist Party collapsed during the October revolution, with membership of the new post-revolutionary Party climbing back up to around 80,000, a mere 10 per cent of the old membership. In post-1968 Czechoslovakia the Party was purged of half a million members. In Poland, thanks to the combined effects of Solidarity and martial law, the Party lost one million members in 1981. If we add to this the scale of the Party purges of the Stalinist era we come to the conclusion that roughly every third adult in Central Europe has been, at one point or another, a member of the Communist Party. The Party is in fact a large 'sieve' through which considerable sections of society (and not just idealistic intellectuals or careerist technocrats) have at various stages passed. This, to be sure, lends a special nuance to the 'them and us' image that these societies have of their relationship with the state. The largest party in Central Europe today is the party of the former Communists; expelled or drop-outs, merely disillusioned or overtly hostile, they are the reminder of the failure of the socialist dream.

Variations on a Theme: Nationalism and Decay

After more than forty years the power of the nomenklatura is still the basis of Party rule in most of the Soviet bloc. Yet, over the years, it has become less effective and, at the same time, has undergone a process of diversification from country to country. The collapse of Communist ideology as a source of legitimacy leads most parties to seek nationalist substitutes, while the economic and social decay of the system provokes a variety of responses from the ruling Party: greater emphasis on total control in East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Romania, and a tendency to relinquish some control in Poland and Hungary. What is too often presented as a debate between reformers and conservatives in the Gorbachev era concerns essentially different assessments of the balance between viability and control, reflecting degrees of decay and retreat.

It is not easy to speak about a vanishing subject. How can one reconcile the apparent contradictions inherent in East-Central European Communism at the end of the 1980s? Ideology is all-pervasive

yet, as a means of communication between the powers that be and society, completely bankrupt. One answer is to see Communist ideology no longer in terms of its intellectual merits or historical connections with the European socialist tradition, but essentially as an instrument of power.

Intellectual sterility does not mean that the ideology has become dispensable as the prime source of legitimacy of Communist rule. What, historically, distinguishes the Communist regimes from other, often more brutal, dictatorships is precisely their ideological claim. Not only did the Party tell you what to do, it told you what to think. And the Party paper was always there to make sure that everybody knew what the official version of truth was at a given point in time. This Stalinist concept of ideology as a secular religion began to crumble in 1956 when it became clear that Stalin and his faithful disciples in the Soviet bloc merely used ideology to justify the unjustifiable: sending alleged class enemies to labour camps and sometimes Party comrades to the gallows, or invading a neighbouring country simply because it had a different view of socialism.

Today, there are many practitioners but few real believers in the Communist Church, and the Communist Party has learned over the years that nobody really believes in its ideology any more. Yet it cannot afford to drop its ideological claim altogether, because ultimately that is the regime's only source of legitimacy. The Communists have some difficulty asserting their right to rule in the name of the nations' past and they certainly cannot claim a democratic mandate for the present. So they have to cling to ideological legitimacy as an imaginary mandate from the Communist future. Now this may not be very convincing for the peoples of Central Europe, but it remains vital for the internal cohesion of the Party, for its sense of purpose. To abandon ideology would be admitting bankruptcy and would demoralize the entire Party down to the last secret policeman.

Thus ideology remains in place as a ritual and as an instrument of social control. Instead of the 'end of ideology' it might be more appropriate to speak of the exhaustion of the utopian and mobilizing dimensions of Communist ideology. These had survived the Stalinist era: Khrushchev in 1961 still planned not only to 'catch up and overtake' the capitalist West, but to achieve the Communist paradise by 1980! In some ways Dubček's 'socialism with a human face' was the last attempt to rejuvenate Communism in Central Europe within that utopian ideological framework.

The post-1968 period was marked by the return from utopia to the realities of Communist power. Hence the concept of 'real' or

'developed' socialism emerged, and the Communist future fades away from the ideological horizon. Real socialism is not the projection of a new society, but merely a preparatory stage. As Czech philosopher Lubos Sochor put it: 'reality itself becomes the projection'.

This deflation of ideology has a double advantage over the utopianism of the past. It conveniently removes the possibility of questioning policies in the name of ideals. The lack of illusions also presumably spares the pain of disillusionment, which had been one of the main factors in the 'revisionist' pressure for change in the de-Stalinization era. The concept of 'real' or 'really existing' socialism, rehashed *ad nauseam* by Soviet bloc ideologists as a response to the Prague Spring and later to Eurocommunism, came to mean both the only existing and the only genuine kind of socialism.

Within the context of Marxist theory the concept of 'real' socialism is a dubious one; it is rather reminiscent of the well-known Hegelian formula: 'What is rational is real; what is real is rational.' The Soviet bloc ideologists of the 1970s and 1980s seem to be saying: 'What is socialist is real; and what is real is socialist.' From the exhaustion of utopia to the preservation of the status quo, 'real' socialism is the ideological monument to the deep-seated conservatism of the ruling nomenklatura.

Though necessary to sustain the cohesiveness of the Party, even revised and now, under Gorbachev, updated versions of the ideology are of little use in dealing with society as a whole. Hence the search in recent years to fill the ideological vacuum with substitute sources of legitimacy: economic modernization on the one hand, and nationalism on the other. The former means that the Party leaves aside the Communist utopia and claims to be the sole force capable of bringing these (with the exception of East Germany and Czechoslovakia) less developed countries into the age of industrial modernity. The most explicit proponents of this shift were Gierek in Poland and Kadar in Hungary, but most of the other parties followed in the same footsteps. Political discourse since the 1970s has been reduced to economic performance accompanied by (in the early stages) promises of improved living standards. Today's reformist *perestroika* is a variation on this theme.

However, with economic recession and the exhaustion of foreign credits, economic legitimacy too became a spent force. So the parties reached into the bottomless reservoir of East-Central European nationalism. After the 'radiant future' and the modernization of the present this was a leap into the past in search of what has been the dominant political ideology since the nineteenth century and, of

course, the prime rival of socialist internationalism. In contrast to the staleness of the rhetoric of 'real' (sometimes 'surreal') socialism, nationalism seemed the most mobilizing of available ideologies.

This is not to be confused with the brief and, in most cases, not very convincing attempt by the Communist Parties at the end of the war to present themselves as the descendants of the progressive or revolutionary traditions of their nations. The current reappropriation of nationalism by the Communist apparat usually concerns the most authoritarian (right-wing) and ethnic brands of nationalism.

In this respect it goes beyond 'national Communism' as it emerged first in the Balkans. The Balkan model was essentially an attempt by a Communist apparat to gain a degree of autonomy from Moscow while maintaining – even strengthening – internal orthodoxy. This was initially the case in Yugoslavia after 1948 (liberalization started only much later). Enver Hoxha's Albania after the break with Moscow in 1961 was turned into ultra-Stalinist autarchy; since the mid-1960s a similar pattern has emerged in Ceausescu's Romania. Interestingly, these countries were economically the most backward in the socialist camp and, from Moscow's point of view, strategically less important than Central Europe.

The last decade has seen less emphasis on the alleged independence of a Communist apparat from the Soviet overlord (the limits of that are known to all in Central Europe), and a growing reliance on attempts to tap the brand of nationalism where the apparat hopes to find the most popular support. Here, authoritarian nationalism (often connected with pre-war traditions) and ethnic nationalism come into play. General Jaruzelski, after first trying to imitate Pilsudski, now courts the 'realist' nationalists by catering to the tradition of the pre-war National Democracy movement of Roman Dmowski. Ceausescu flirts on and off with the fascist ideology of the Iron Guard. The same tendency can be seen, in a more benign form, in the East German Party's reconciliation with Prussian authoritarianism.

The exploitation of ethnic nationalism within Communist Party-states has become even more explicit, whether it is turned inward (discrimination against national minorities, anti-Semitism) or directed outwards (against a neighbouring Communist state). Extreme anti-minority policies currently affect the Hungarians living in Romania and the Turks in Bulgaria. In Czechoslovakia Husak used the Slovak card to gain a modicum of support for his policy of normalization, or at least as a divide-and-rule tactic. In retrospect the anti-Semitic campaign launched by the Polish Party after the events of March 1968 was perhaps the first major and most blatant antecedent.

Poland: After the Party in Uniform

On 13 December 1981, General Jaruzelski went on Polish television to announce martial law and the crushing of Solidarity. He did not once mention the Polish Party of which he was the head. Claiming to speak as a military man, he put forward the idea that the army and the Church should replace the Party and Solidarity, which were locked in a suicidal confrontation as the representatives of state and society. What the subsequent months and years have shown is that Jaruzelski was merely the Party in uniform rescuing a fast-disintegrating Polish United Workers' Party which by then was not very united and certainly no spokesman for the workers.

The Polish military takeover had all the standard ingredients of a military coup (draconian martial law, mass internments, the seizure of the communication networks) except one: it was aimed not at overthrowing the existing civilian power (the Communist Party) but rather at liquidating the main force that had challenged the Party's political monopoly of power. In effect, the Polish Army stepped in to fill a political vacuum left by the vanishing authority of its own Party. That collapse was rooted in the deep and chronic social and political crisis which culminated in the summer of 1980 with the defiance of the Party by the entire working class in whose name it claimed to rule. The speed with which the Party's authority collapsed was proportional to the rapid emergence of Solidarity as an independent social movement and the genuine voice for popular aspirations. The 'withering away' not of the state (as Lenin predicted in 1917) but of the leading role of the Party within it has been a central feature – though obviously with varying degrees of intensity – in all the major post-war crises in Central Europe. In 1956, 1968, 1981, the dual nature of the ruling Party was brought out into the open: there was the mass Party which was disintegrating and the apparat, with its key security component, which did not collapse. Thus in Poland, while the rank-and-file members were, under the impact of Solidarity, leaving the Party or trying to democratize it from within, the hard core stayed put and waited. As we now know from Colonel Kuklinski (a close associate of Jaruzelski who defected to the West), on the very day Solidarity was born plans for martial law got under way. Everything was prepared long in advance for the moment when, in the words of hardliner Marian Orzechowski, 'the force of

arguments would be replaced by the arguments of force'. The only problem was who would actually take the decision and when. And that depended on Moscow's limited patience and the internal struggle within the Polish leadership.

Several months before the coup, the Polish government organs had been undergoing a process of creeping militarization. Army generals assumed key government posts and military squads were despatched to some two thousand towns and villages to prop up faltering local administrations. These actions were clearly part of a dress rehearsal for the military takeover. After the coup, the Military Council announced that it would exercise power through 'departmental, provincial, municipal and parish military plenipotentiaries'. Other military plenipotentiaries had been despatched to government ministries, provinces, towns and even factories, to ensure what was described as the 'normalization of social and economic life'. They were mainly high-ranking officers (colonels or generals) who had the right to remove governors (*wojewodas*), plant managers or other officials. It seems that the military also played a significant part in the purge of the Party after 13 December.

The fact that the Party's military–security apparatus retained its cohesion and ability to act in a crisis marked by the collapse of most institutions has far-reaching significance. It is a precedent that points to the primarily domestic function of the armies of the Warsaw Pact allies of the Soviet Union. If the current decay of the system continues, the militarization of Communism might prove an attractive option for others as well. Tomorrow it might be used in Romania or in Yugoslavia.

The rise of the Party in uniform was significant in yet another way. In the face of the demise of Communist ideology as the source of its legitimacy, the Party tried to draw on nationalism as a surrogate rallying force. Though Jaruzelski paid lip-service to Party ideology, his main concern was to exploit traditional popular pride in the army as the embodiment of patriotic values and 'law and order'. The political expression of this was supposed to be PRON, the Patriotic Movement of National Revival. As the late Polish writer Konstanti (Kot) Jelenski remarked: 'There is a limit to how many times you can use the word "nation" in an acronym; but if they had thought it possible to use it five times, they would have tried to.'

A 1981 opinion poll asked which institutions the public had greatest confidence in. The Catholic Church came in first, followed by Solidarity. The army came in a good third, far ahead of the Party. Hence the idea of an ideological transfusion from the army to the Party. Hence also Jaruzelski's efforts to present himself as the new

Pilsudski. The good standing which the Polish Army enjoys in the eyes of Polish society predates Communism. For historical reasons the very concept of civil war was alien to the Poles and the army was always perceived as an integral part of the nation. Marshal Pilsudski's name remains associated with Polish independence from Germany and Russia but also with his political role in the pre-war republic. In 1926, Pilsudski staged a coup 'to put the house in order' after a period of unrest and parliamentary chaos. And this is indeed the 'Bonapartist' image that General Jaruzelski wanted to capture for himself and the Party in uniform. In what Marx might have called the '18th Brumaire of General Jaruzelski', the army presented itself as the arbiter between an incompetent (and corrupt) Party bureaucracy and the old demons of anarchy allegedly represented by Solidarity.

This argument could not really be sustained by the arrest of a few corrupt Party officials while five thousand Solidarity activists were being interned in what is suitably called 'Hell Peninsula'. Although Jaruzelski himself might have preferred his coup to be compared to the 1926 Pilsudski model, rather than to the suppression of the Hungarian revolt of 1956 or of the Prague Spring of 1968, the attempt failed as soon as the first workers were shot at Gdansk and at the Wujek mine. Thus, given the limited credibility of the 'civil war' argument, Jaruzelski used, more effectively, the 'lesser evil' argument, still repeated today by his assistant Major Gornicki to justify the rise of the Party in uniform:

> This is a necessity. When the stakes are so high, you have to choose the lesser evil. This is precisely the word the general used while proclaiming martial law, and I don't think there was another way out, except a much more harmful and dangerous one.

In other words, the Polish Army intervened only to preempt intervention by the Soviet Army. On this, opinions are divided between those, like the then West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, who believe that Jaruzelski is first of all a Pole and a military man and only then a Communist, and those who think he is first of all a Communist, then a military man who happens to be a Pole. The idea that Jaruzelski saved Poland from itself is dismissed by Solidarity as a pseudo-patriotic varnish on the destruction of a social movement which needed no lessons in patriotism. If anything, says Solidarity, this is a case of mistaken identity: the coup saved the Party from society rather than Poland from 'you know whom'.

However, although the Party in uniform (including Jaruzelski himself) now prefers to return to civilian clothes, it cannot restore

the old ideology. It is now stuck with its nationalist prop. The Polish Party thus represents more clearly than any other the various stages of the erosion of official ideology: the transition, under Gierek, from the Marxist promises of the past towards economic legitimacy based on modernization and the improvement of living standards; and the transition, under Jaruzelski, towards realpolitik nationalism.

Ironically, the fact that Jaruzelski's leadership, installed by a military coup, is by definition authoritarian does not mean it is conservative. Indeed, the Party in uniform ignored the old hardliners (such as Olszowski or Grabski) in favour of a more pragmatic wing which claimed that the restoration of social stability was the pre-condition for the introduction of reform, and that the crushing of Solidarity could still lead to some form of Party-controlled dialogue with society. The scale of the economic disaster and pressure from the opposition and the Church have now led the Party to re-examine more realistically its concept of its leading role.

Mieczyslaw Rakowski is perhaps the best-known spokesman for this line. After twenty-five years as the editor of the weekly *Polityka*, Rakowski earned the reputation of a reformer. Though today, after his close association with General Jaruzelski during martial law, he is more popular with the Western media than with the Warsaw intelligentsia, his return to the Politburo in 1987 has been heralded as the true advent of Polish-style Gorbachevism.

The Party itself, according to Rakowski, should be at once stronger and more realistic in order to push through its package of economic and institutional reforms. Internal cohesion or 'unity' is, in the Leninist vocabulary, the prerequisite for a degree of self-limitation. 'There is no doubt', Rakowski says, 'that democracy was limited in our country, and in the whole socialist bloc, for forty years. But now at the end of the 1980s we are facing a new generation which grew up after the war. It has totally different experiences from my generation, which I call the war generation. And this is why we have to make the next step towards democratization now.' So should one conclude that forty years of one-party rule have made the country ripe for more democracy? Not quite; both sides have simply been forced to tone down their ambitions. The new generation, indeed society as a whole, is completely oblivious to official ideology: 'It is ready to accept socialism on one condition, that there are no more gaps between words and facts.' The basic assumption is that the Communists are here to stay because of the Soviet factor. Provided the proper conclusions are drawn from this, the message goes, the Party would be prepared to admit defeat in certain spheres (such as the management of the economy or ideological control) and give up

its claim to be the sole representative of 'the moral and political unity of the Polish nation'.

In recent years, the authorities have tried to launch a series of consultative bodies (starting with the Patriotic Movement of National Revival and ending with the Consultative Council) intended to give some representation to society, but they had little credibility and produced few tangible results. The failure led to the implicit suggestion by Rakowski and others that the overtures, to become plausible, would have to go further. Initially, Rakowski thought he could get away with concessions to the Church and to the 'national realists' associated with the pre-war tradition of the National-Democracy movement. But the strikes of August 1988 brought Solidarity back to the centre of the Polish political scene. It marked an unexpected reversal of the situation even for the opposition which, while remaining attached to Solidarity as a symbol, was undergoing a process of decline and fragmentation. In order to defuse the strikes and mainly in order to buy an insurance policy for the future, the Jaruzelski regime was brought to accept the return of Walesa's Solidarity which they had tried to destroy. Imagine that: Generals Jaruzelski and Kiszczak in a dialogue with Kuron and Michnik, the very people they had put in jail after the military coup of 1981. However, such concessions to the pressures of society in a context of economic disaster should not be confused with Hungarian-style reformism. In November 1988 Rakowski still claimed that the re-legalization of Solidarity was out of the question. In January 1989 he admitted dialogue with Solidarity provided it parted with the leaders and the ideas which had kept it alive under martial law. In March he negotiated without conditions. This is not reform, but a debacle by any other name.

Even though Jaruzelski's motives are purely tactical ones (make Solidarity share responsibility for the necessary introduction of drastic economic policies), it is difficult to over-estimate the political significance of the concessions made: for the first time since the war the political monopoly of power by the Communist Party has been broken, thus opening a period of transition in which democratic forces can resurface as legitimate political actors. By the same token the simple dichotomies of the past (state versus society) are being altered: new divides appear in both camps. Jaruzelski has had to impose his compromise with Solidarity on the Party hardliners, while Walesa faces opposition by his grass-roots radicals who fear a 'sell-out'.

The Polish Party makes such concessions as a means of staying in power. Yet it remains unclear which way the new political system

will evolve. Some, like Bronislaw Geremek, who led the round-table negotiations with the authorities, believe that the June elections are the first step in a gradual and peaceful transition to democracy. Others see the possibility of an evolution from totalitarianism towards a more benign form of 'ordinary authoritarianism' which could turn out to be a transitory phase towards democracy. Communist rule as we knew it has ended, but no one can predict with confidence what even the near future has in store. Poland, as often in the past, remains the laboratory for political change for the whole of the Other Europe.

Romania's Dynastic Communism

Why was 25 January 1988 'a most significant moment for the entire Romanian nation'? Because 'the great hero among the heroes of the nation, the architect of modern socialist Romania' had turned seventy. This was not the latest Romanian joke, but the birthday message of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party to its leader. Actually, leader is too weak a word. The proper term is *Conducator* best translated as Guide, *Führer* in German or *Vozhd* in Russian. Perhaps the most accurate translation, one that best conveys the tragicomical character of the man and the grotesque pomposity of the occasion, would be *Duce*. 'The greatest son of the Romanian people' received (or rather awarded himself) several new honours, including, for the fourth time, Hero of the Socialist Republic of Romania. Only President Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife Elena are holders of that award, an illustration of their special place at the top of the Romanian Party; others have to content themselves with being more mundane Heroes of Socialist Labour or of the New Agricultural Revolution. In addition to the national commendations Ceausescu reaped on his birthday, the Order of Lenin arrived from Moscow, the Order of the White Lion from Prague and, appropriately, the Karl Marx Order sent by the East German Party. As if this were not enough, the Party journal *Lumea* published an imaginary birthday message from Queen Elizabeth II praising Ceausescu's 'widely recognized excellence, experience and influence'. As it turned out, the 'message' was taken from the Queen's toast at a state banquet in Buckingham Palace, during Ceausescu's visit to Britain in 1978. This little manoeuvre shows just how desperate Communist dictators can be for international recognition, as well as the extent to which Western enthusiasm for Romania's allegedly maverick caudillo has diminished over the last decade.

Romanian political life is now reduced to orchestrated celebrations of the merits and achievements of the 'helmsman of national destiny'. Party conferences and the anniversary of the National Liberation of 23 August are merely occasions for measuring the 'leading role' of the Party in terms of displays of devotion to a megalomaniac who personally selects the slogans to be chanted when he comes on stage. Five minutes before the opening of the gala performance for/by the presidential couple, the five thousand people who have been officially invited and duly screened at the entrance fall into total silence; they hold their breath as the atmosphere becomes oppressive, almost unbearable (at least to those not familiar with this kind of group therapy). Then, suddenly, they explode in a frenetic standing ovation as 'He' enters the presidential box. Once you recover from the shock of the thunderous applause and rhythmic chanting of 'Ceausescu–PCR' (which stands for both Romanian Communist Party and Partidul–Ceausescu–Romania), there is a moment of disappointment: you expected the *Duce*, or at least a tall, imposing figure *à la* de Gaulle; instead what appears is a midget of a man, undistinguished, grimacing unpleasantly to a crowd which takes it as an encouragement to step up its welcome.

The 'genius of the Carpathians' may have been a bit of a letdown, but the grandiose show that follows makes up for it. Even if you have seen all the documentaries from the 1950s, read learned articles about the totalitarian ritual, this is the nearest one comes nowadays to the 'real thing', the perfection of Stalinist kitsch. The speech to the *Conducator*'s glory is interrupted at regular (two-minute) intervals with a standing ovation not for the speaker (the audience actually turn their backs on him) but for 'Him'. Then a choir of young pioneers picks up from there:

> Vibrant is in us our ardent love
> and our hearts are filled with songs
> What we are, we owe it to the Party
> And the Party made us masters of all that is
> Under the banner of red truth
> The country is united
> Facing the future
> Let's march forward cheerfully
> Let's march forward with the Party of
> Our beloved *Conducator*

A mauve light introduces a leading actress who reads eulogies and poems inspired by you know whom:

> We have to be grateful for the providential existence of this man, so deeply attached to our ancestral soil, we have to be grateful for his eternal youth, we have to be grateful for being his contemporaries and thank him for all this. It is only through his willingness that we are really masters in the house of our souls.

The phrase 'eternal youth' immediately acquires real meaning as you see 'Him' on a giant screen, looking twenty years younger, visiting a steel mill or lecturing the peasants on a collective farm on the merits of chemical fertilizers. Elena Ceausescu is never far behind, modestly described as 'the most eminent personality of everyday and international scientific life'. Meanwhile the stage is invaded by men in blue overalls and women in white doctor's coats (supposedly representing the workers and professional classes), who chant something to the effect that they make up the social base of the regime. At the climax of the three-hour show, they are joined on stage by folk dancers from the various provinces of Romania. The whole society, the whole nation, demonstrates loyalty and gratitude to the Party and to 'Him'.

Romanians always refer to 'Him'; even in private they avoid mentioning his name. Just in case 'They' overhear. 'They' stand for the omnipresent and much feared *Securitate*, the secret police. Ceausescu's wife is called simply Elena. So with 'Him', 'Them' and 'Elena' you have all you need to know about contemporary Romanian politics.

The Romanian Party has been confiscated *de facto* by the Ceausescu clan. Ceausescu became Party chief in 1965, Elena Ceausescu was promoted to the Party leadership in 1972. Long in charge of Ideology (a Romanian imitation of the Chinese Cultural Revolution), she is now directly in charge of personnel appointments in the Secretariat of the Romanian Party. Thus the Ceausescus were able to consolidate their power by eliminating all those who did not owe their position to their clan. Another technique is the quasi-permanent reshuffle of government and Party officials designed to prevent anybody from staying long enough in office to build a power base which could be used, one day, to challenge the presidential couple. Ceausescu's narcissistic and nepotistic rule means job insecurity for the nomenklatura. His son Nicu, thirty-eight, is a member of the leadership, and some fifty close or more distant relatives hold key posts in the Romanian nomenklatura. But that is not enough. To ensure that his personality cult continues after his death, the ageing leader has extended the cult to his family and appointed Nicu to the Party executive and, in October 1987, as head of the Party in the important province of Sibiu. This post is

intended to provide an adequate power base and training ground for when succession time comes. In the name of the father ...

The Ceausescu regime is without doubt the most repressive in the Soviet bloc today. Its appalling human-rights record has led to the loss of support even from the West, including United States suspension of Romania's Most Favoured Nation (MFN) trading status. Though enjoying a number of material privileges, Party officials themselves fear the whims of the presidential couple. A document written by an official from the Hungarian minority in Transylvania and recently published in Hungarian *samizdat* describes the situation as follows:

> The presidential couple decides personally in which apartment [senior officials] can live; when, for how long, where they will spend their holidays. It might seem unbelievable, but it is so. All the systems in the world are based on reward and punishment. Ceausescu works only with punishment. It is a reward that there is no punishment.

One of the perennial problems of Communist politics is that too much power is concentrated in too few hands. In Romania the hands happen to belong to the Ceausescu family. Since the deaths of Stalin and Mao no Communist leader has indulged in such an overriding personality cult as the *Conducator*, with the possible exception of North Korea's Kim Il Sung. His dictatorial regime too rests on a most curious mixture of Marxism–Leninism and virulent nationalism. On one level, 'Ceausescu' looks like a sequel to the Stalinist era. Vladimir Tismeanu speaks of a combination of Stalinism with the Byzantine tradition, the personality cult as 'the main institution which guarantees political and symbolic reproduction of the system'. But in many ways the extravagance and the ruthlessness of Romania's ruling family seems closer to the most extreme Third World dictatorships, such as that of Idi Amin or Emperor Bokassa. When he finally does go, there will be a sigh of relief, even – or especially – among those who, year after year, are brought in to cheer him.

'He is Romania. We are his sons.' This statement from the Party press provides a clue to the connection between the personality cult and the other key feature of Romanian Communism, its virulent nationalism. The origins go back to the 1960s, when the Romanian leadership resisted Soviet economic policies. But the real launch came in August 1968, at the time of the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia, when Ceausescu made his famous speech defying the Soviet Union. This was the first overt effort to channel popular

nationalist feelings in support of the Romanian Party. But even then it was clear that Ceausescu was not defending Dubček's democratization programme, but merely claiming the right to autonomy for each Party. As it turned out, he meant autonomy to extend the Party's absolute power as far as possible.

The historical irony is that of all the Soviet bloc parties the Romanian has the least indigenous roots. It counted less than a thousand members when it was brought to power by Russian tanks in 1944. Today its ideology is adamantly nationalistic. This naturally posed a few problems, but nothing that the properly guided rewriting of history could not handle, provided it assimilated the basic principle that nationalism is the love of the fatherland, and the Party is the modern embodiment of the nation. History thus became a centrepiece of Party propaganda.

First came the anti-Russian component in the form of various discussions (in those days still quoting Marx) regarding the province of Bessarabia, which was annexed by Russia in 1877, included in Romania in 1918, and retaken by the Soviets during the Second World War. The next step was to downplay the Russian role in securing Romanian independence as a result of the Russo-Turkish war of 1877. Finally there is the extraordinary claim that the liberation of the country and the anti-German coup of August 1944 was the work of the Romanian Party (under the influence of the then unknown Ceausescu), virtually without Soviet help. Romanian films even show how the Romanian Army (which incidentally fought bravely alongside the Germans on the Eastern Front) single-handedly liberated the country and then proceeded to liberate Hungary.

Relations with Hungary provide another focus for Romanian nationalism. The main bone of contention is Transylvania, where nearly two million Hungarians are deprived of basic minority rights, especially in cultural life. The region has been part of Romania since 1918. For most of its previous history it was part of Hungarian civilization (even though Hungarians have always been a minority there). This at least is the claim of the three-volume *History of Transylvania* published in Budapest in 1986 by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences under the editorship of the Minister of Culture, Béla Kopeczi. The study provoked merely the latest in a long series of polemics between the two countries in which Romanian historians are obliged to substantiate the Party's nationalist claims. Thus, in April 1987, *The Times* of London carried a full-page Romanian advertisement denouncing the Hungarian work as 'A Conscious Forgery under the Aegis of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences' –

the history of Transylvania presented as a history of Hungarian conquest.

The battle for Transylvania centres on the question of who was there first. The Hungarian *History* states baldly that 'before the beginning of the thirteenth century, there is no evidence – historical, archaeological, toponymic – for the existence of a Romanian population in Transylvania.' According to the Hungarians, the original population of Transylvania was Slavic (Russian, Bulgarian), not Latin as the Romanians maintain.

The official view from Bucharest is that the Romanian nation had already formed long before the Slavs reached this territory. The superiority of their civilization led naturally to the assimilation of other (Slavic or German) populations. The ultimate exercise in ethnogenesis is the theory of the Dacian origins of the Romanian nation put forward on the instructions of the Party in the 1980s. While in the 1970s the official version had been satisfied with the influence of the Latin legacy on the shaping of early Romanian history, in the 1980s the Party set out on an unending quest for Romania's mythical Dacian beginnings, long before the Roman conquest in the second century. Despite their defeat, the Daco-Romanians were revealed to have been the equals of – and in many ways superior to – the Romans. Much as the Albanians claim to descend from the Illyrians or the Bulgarians from the Thracians, the Romanians go back to the Dacians. Bombastic articles about the 'Dacian Empire' or the 'Dacian Imperial Millennium' started to appear, reaching new heights of absurdity. A Romanian singer who had lost her voice and turned to the study of Dacian culture discovered, among other things, that the Dacians must have been familiar with acupuncture.

In 1980 the Romanian Communist Party celebrated the 2050th anniversary of the 'first centralized independent Dacian state'. In case 'centralized' and 'independent' reminded the reader of something, 'it is not by chance,' as the Marxists say. After a brief liberalization at the end of the 1960s all the institutes of historical research were directly subordinated to the Academy, and directly to Elena Ceausescu. Thus, for the first time, history appeared in the Party programme at the Ninth Congress of the Romanian Communist Party in 1975. Who said that under Communism the future is known and that the most difficult thing to predict is the past?

At a meeting of its Political Executive Committee in May 1986, the Party decided to commemorate the 600th anniversary of Prince Mircea the Old's accession to the Wallachian throne. The Prince, no longer to be called 'the Old' but rather 'the Great', was 'among

the great European rulers' of his time, whose political and diplomatic achievements supposedly lend themselves to parallels with today's Romania. At his presidential inauguration in 1974, Ceausescu was presented with a sceptre giving the first monarchic touch to his 'Communism in one family'. Articles then appeared comparing him to Julius Caesar or to Napoleon (quite a change from Lenin, the model of the past). Lately Party instructions are to go more native. So Ceausescu is now presented as the latest in a long, prestigious line of national heroes. This is sometimes easier to achieve through the agency of inspired poets than by historians. Victor Tulbure, in the weekly *Contemporaneul*, praised the spiritual affiliation of Ceausescu with (in order of appearance) Horea, the leader of a peasant uprising in Transylvania at the end of the eighteenth century, with the fifteenth-century Prince of Moldavia Stephen the Great, with Nicolae Balcescu, a prominent figure in the revolution of 1848, with Prince Cantemir, a political thinker of the early eighteenth century, with Mihail Eminescu, Romania's national poet in the second half of the nineteenth century, and with Prince Michael the Brave who, at the end of the sixteenth century, first unified the principalities of Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania:

> He [Ceausescu] descends from Horea's bones, from Stefan's breath
> From Balcescu's light, and from Cantemir's thought
> He is a dream out of Eminescu's dreams, and he descends from Michael who
> wanted a sole abode for his people under eternal stars.

Thus do Ceausescu and his Party claim to rule in the name of two thousand years of Romanian history. In a curious blend of Communist dogma and nationalism, they have gradually tried to reclaim or absorb everything nationalistic and authoritarian. The latest development is the rapprochement with the ideology of the pre-war Romanian extreme right, with General Antonescu (who also called himself *Conducator*) and the Iron Guard. They converge in their traditionalist nationalism (what the late Romanian philosopher Constantin Noica called in a famous essay 'The Romanian feeling of being') and in their radically anti-Western, anti-liberal stance. A novel by Constantin Toiu, published in Bucharest in 1987, entitled *The Fall in the World* is one of many illustrations of this trend. It is the story of the reconciliation of two men, one an ideologically motivated Communist, and the other, a no less idealistic follower of the Iron Guard who dies in 1939. The message is that there is little

doubt where the latter's 'heart and mind' would be if he had had the luck to live in Ceausescu's Romania.

Ceausescu's attempt to co-opt in support of his dictatorial rule some of the more unpleasant traditions of Romanian nationalism is by far the most blatant in the Soviet bloc. Like most such attempts it is a surrogate and a fraud.

In true totalitarian fashion, at the same time as Romanian Communists reclaim the past they are destroying and falsifying it. While Party historians labour to try to establish the Dacian origins of Communist rule, scholarly historiography has been purged and virtually eliminated over the last decade, as becomes clear from even a brief visit to the Museum of National History in Bucharest. A whole floor of the Museum is devoted to iconography – portraits, tapestries, sculptures – of the presidential couple. A huge room presents Ceausescu as world statesman. A map of the world, showing Bucharest as its centre, indicates his two hundred visits to more than eighty countries. Next to it are displays of photographs of him with the numerous world leaders he has met. These serve as a depressing reminder of the West's long infatuation with a dictator who is considered in the whole of East-Central Europe to be a disgrace to European civilization.

While official historians and poets portray Ceausescu as the culmination of a long line of historical figures, his clan has systematically crushed or forced into emigration the nation's intellectual elite. Popular culture is hailed as the true art form of the socialist future, with endless folk dancing dominating the already brief (two hours daily) television programming. Yet the Romanian village, the last remnant of that traditional culture, now faces eradication under a continuing project called 'systematization', which has already been applied to towns and cities. Under current plans for 'rural consolidation', seven thousand villages (including, naturally, those of the ethnic minorities) with old individual houses are to be demolished by the year 2000 and the people rehoused in three-storey apartment blocks with communal kitchens.

Urbanization of the countryside might seem an odd step for a regime intent on appropriating national history, but Ceausescu is above all obsessed with leaving his stamp on the face of his country. He has already done irrevocable damage to the capital, where his urban-renewal scheme has resulted in overnight razing of villa districts in the old heart of Bucharest. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century churches and monasteries were not spared; nor was the town's only Sephardic synagogue. As if one could imagine Paris without Le Marais or Prague without Mala Strana! The continuing

›bliteration of old Bucharest is also the ultimate onslaught on what s left of the old cultural elite. One case among many is that of he painter Nicolas Vermont and his daughter Zoe, also a painter. Ordered to leave their family home at one day's notice, Zoe jumped rom the window of her apartment when the bulldozers moved into ıer garden. Forty thousand people have been expelled from their ıomes under similar conditions.

What then has replaced the jewels of Byzantine architecture, he highly individual villas, the gardens? A correspondent for the *Economist* vividly described the scene:

> During the day much of the city lies under choking dust clouds kicked up by the building work. The work continues through the night, illuminated only by occasional arc lights (normal street lighting is virtually non-existent, because of a shortage of electricity). The shadows of troglodyte figures scurrying home across devastated building sites are momentarily cast up high against the sides of buildings by the intense light of acetylene torches. The majestic horror conjures up images of Dante's inferno.

Ceausescu's inferno is exemplified by a vast square worthy of the ision of Albert Speer. Here the individual feels appropriately puny ı the face of the all-white Mussolini-style 'civic centre', which ouse government bureaucracies and the palatial headquarters of ıe Communist Party. But then the Piata was not built for individuals ut for the masses. It is intended to hold crowds of half a million eople on national holidays and Ceausescu's birthday celebrations. 'rom there the brand-new 150-yard-wide motorway called Boulvard of the Victory of Socialism leads straight to the presidential alace – a grandiose architectural extension of Ceausescu's ego.

After being manipulated, the country's past is now being estroyed. Ceausescu's refusal in 1968 to take part in the Warsaw act invasion of Czechoslovakia gave him a 'maverick' image in the Vest and helped him to use nationalism to win popular support. .fter twenty years of alleged independence, Ceausescu's nationalist alloon has been pricked. Bankrupt, economically dependent on Ioscow, he now pitifully returns begging to the Soviet fold while ı exasperated population watches Bulgarian television as a form of scapism and prays for Gorbachev to shorten its ordeal. Romania's ommunist nationalism comes full circle: *Ex oriente lux*.

Hungary: Towards Constitutional Communism?

'To what extent is the Party prepared to share power? And who actually sets the limits?' These two simple yet fundamental questions were put by the editors of the Hungarian Communist Youth journal *Magyar Ifjusag* (in the January 1988 issue) to the Politburo member in charge of ideology, Janos Berecz. They are an indication (among many) of how far ahead of Gorbachev's *glasnost* the Hungarian debate is, and how rapidly the mood of the country and of the Party had changed at the end of the Kadar era.

The basic tenet of Kadar's policy for the last twenty years was that, given what happened in Czechoslovakia in 1968 (not to mention in Hungary in 1956), the prerequisite for the safe pursuit of gradual economic reform was the absence of all political reform. Hungarian 'goulash Communism' developed while the political strings remained firmly in the hands of the Party apparat.

This Kadarian model, which had some success in the 1970s and was still being praised (after the defeat of Solidarity in Poland) as the best of all possible Communist worlds, has now effectively collapsed. Kadar's replacement in May 1988, after more than thirty years as Party leader, marks the end of an era. The generational turnover in the leadership (Kadar's successor Karoly Grosz is fifty-seven) coincides with long-overdue political changes. Not that a complete reversal of policy is likely now that the Gorbachev generation ('youths who start their political careers at fifty and blossom at sixty,' remarks Hungarian writer György Dalos) can at last indulge their taste for power. In fact, in contrast to Poland where Party leaders are changed only after workers' strikes, the Hungarian transition was smooth. Brought to power by Soviet tanks, Kadar won a measure of tacit consent, then lost his way at the end, backtracking on reforms which (to outsiders) were associated with his name. He was pushed out but could have left just three or four years earlier without being hated. 'The man was in many ways better than his system,' says Dalos, and compared to Ceausescu, Zhivkov, Ulbricht or Husak his standing 'would not be so bad, if there had not been a certain Alexander Dubček . . .'

The Kadarist consensus with society was based on economic reforms, some real, some merely anticipated. Ironically, it was the reform economists who delivered the first devastating blow to Kadar's old concept of the 'leading role' of the Party. In a study completed at the end of 1986 entitled 'Turning Point and Reform' a team of Hungary's leading economists concluded that reform just does not work and that what is needed to put things right is not

simply more free-market measures but democratization of decision-making as well. The Party should cease interfering with the management of the economy. The separation of Party and state – the extent of whose authority should be defined by law – would then provide an adequate framework for economic activity. This implies decentralization and the assigning of priority to professional competence over political reliability – an overt challenge to the nomenklatura. In other words, political reform has become the acknowledged precondition for the pursuit of economic reform.

The most comprehensive proposal from within the Party came from Mihaly Bihari, then an adviser to Imre Poszgay, the leading figure in the reform wing of the Party. Bihari's report, *Reform and Democracy*, submitted at the end of 1987, opened with a forceful indictment of the paralysis of the Party leadership under Kadar: it accused the ageing leadership of fearing the very idea of change, of refusing to face the facts about the crisis or to hear criticism from the rank and file, even those from its own apparat. In trying to preserve the bureaucratic stalemate the leadership had created a crisis of confidence in the Party, Bihari said. The implementation of even half of Bihari's proposals for political reform would amount to a *de facto* dismantling of the 'leading role' of the Party as we know it. One proposal is that the separation of Party and state, much like the separation of Church and state in nineteenth-century France, be written into the constitution. The separation of powers implies an independent judiciary, and the proposal advocates the establishment of a Constitutional Council (to check the constitutionality of laws) and a Supreme Court. The rule of law, the return to a *Rechtstaat*, which Hungary, like the rest of the Habsburg Empire, enjoyed back in the nineteenth century, is presented as a necessary modernization of a decaying Communist political system.

Budapest's Westminster-like Parliament is a reminder that a century ago Hungary aspired to become a Western-style democracy. For decades the largest parliamentary building in Europe was merely a façade. The real decisions were taken at the White House, the local nickname for the Party headquarters just a stone's throw away. But now, after the 'rule of law' and 'modernization', 'pluralism' has become part of the reformers' vocabulary. Party reformers, like Imre Poszgay, have moved further than in any other Party in the Soviet bloc to reconcile the Communist Party with pluralism in society, and have argued that Parliament should become a genuine forum for interest groups such as trade unions, farmers or environmentalists. For the optimists, this is a move in the right direction, from the recognition of pluralism to democratization at both the local and the

national level. Most reform proposals wanted the government to be made answerable to a Parliament in which different groups would be allowed to present competing programmes or bills. In other words, a multiparty system by another name.

To the sceptics all this looks like an attempt to square the circle. At best, 'pluralism' in a one-party system could lead to a Communist version of corporatism. Instead of claiming to represent all interests in society, the Party would become the supreme arbitrator between them. This, a Budapest historian suggested, could lead to increased 'feudalization' of the Party. Senior Party barons, representing various industrial or regional branches, are already competing for centrally distributed resources – one of the legacies of the Kadar era. The extension of 'pluralism' to new corporations might help open up the system or it might simply accelerate its 'feudalization', its breakdown into fiefdoms and corresponding decline, much like (and this is the privilege of a historian's detachment) seventeenth-century Poland or Bohemia. This trend would certainly be the antithesis of the spirit of Gorbachev's reforms, which are aimed at restoring the power of the centre through a sort of enlightened despotism.

The decisive factor in judging the chances of the optimistic and sceptic scenarios will be the amount of autonomy granted to society in the form of freedom of association and expression, and the changes in internal Party life. In other words, the Communist Party should return to the way things were before Lenin issued his ban on factions in 1921. This proposal, coming twenty years after the crushing of the Czechoslovak reform movement, is tantamount to a rehabilitation of its programme.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the current discussion on political reform in Hungary is the steady penetration of ideas, which until a few years ago were confined to the ranks of the democratic opposition, into the programme of the Party reformers. It could be argued that, in striking contrast to Poland, the ideas of the Hungarian opposition have had a growing influence on the more enlightened circles of the Party while so far having relatively little impact on society at large. The Party is flirting most conspicuously with the 'neo-populist' wing of the Hungarian opposition. Poszgay attended in September 1987 the founding meeting of the Democratic Forum, a grouping of reformers and populists whose attitude to the government is more conciliatory than that of the 'urbanist' intellectuals of the democratic opposition. One of the Forum's main concerns is calling attention to the suppressed Hungarian minority in Transylvania. In January 1988 the Hungarian Party leadership issued a statement declaring responsibility for the fate of Hungarians

wherever they are (meaning, specifically, in Transylvania). Efforts to provide assistance to the flood of over 40,000 refugees from Romania could be considered as hints in the same direction. The different treatment by the authorities of two demonstrations in June 1988 is another indication: repression of a gathering of the democratic opposition on Batani Square commemorating the execution in 1958 of Imre Nagy; tacit approval of the mass demonstration on behalf of the Hungarians from Transylvania.

In June 1987 the *samizdat* journal *Beszelö* published a political programme entitled 'Social Contract', written by leading spokesmen for the democratic opposition Janos Kis, Ferenc Koszeg and Ottila Solt. The document proposes a compromise in which the Party would retain its authority over defence and foreign affairs (i.e. dealings with Moscow), while society would recover its autonomy and democratic institutions. Parliament would assume sovereignty with the Party holding only the power of veto. After constitutional monarchy this, for all practical purposes, is constitutional Communism . . .

To be sure, there were important differences between Party reformers such as Poszgay and the programme of the democratic opposition. The former give priority to institutional changes and inner party structure, while the latter are more concerned with gaining autonomy for civil society. But they converge in their aim of dismantling the 'leading role' of the Party. In September 1987 a letter addressed to the authorities was signed by one hundred prominent Hungarian intellectuals including dissidents, economists, Party reformers and hitherto moderate members of the Establishment. The letter makes the connection between the economic crisis of the system and the 'urgent need for institutional reform': The refrain that a widely based socialist democracy and social consensus exist in Hungary must be abandoned. The construction of a system of balancing the interests of the different apparats leads neither to democracy nor to the securing of consensus, nor is it suitable for the strengthening of government power.' There follows a long list of demands which point the way from Party-controlled democratization to democracy: freedom of association, freedom of speech and of information, local self-government in villages and towns (an old Hungarian tradition), democratization of the electoral law, and the responsibility of the government to Parliament.

The pace of political reform in Hungary accelerated dramatically after Kadar's removal from office in May 1988. A mixture of boldness, confusion and outright demoralization in the Communist Party combines with the emergence of new political parties whose

very existence marks the end of the post-war era. The signs of disarray in the Party are unmistakable. First, there is a mass exodus from the Party. Asked about his Party membership, a well-known academic quipped ironically: 'I am not leaving the Party because I don't want to be taken for an opportunist.' Although the size of the Party apparatus is shrinking rapidly, it has become extremely difficult to fill vacant Party positions. In a provincial town the job of Party Secretary (which until recently would have been considered by many a desirable springboard for a career) has been filled only by the twenty-eighth candidate invited to apply! A factory manager, asked on Hungarian television whether he would take the post as Party Secretary for the 13th District of Budapest, answered that he might consider it, but only on an unpaid part-time basis. Hungarian Communism has now invented the free-lance apparatchik!

Political divides are no less important. A senior official commented ironically on the state of the Party in the spring of 1989: 'There are now three parties in one: that of the social-democratic reformers (led by Poszgay), the moderate pragmatic socialists (led by Prime Minister Nemeth), and that of the "true" Communists (who put their hopes in Karoly Grosz). We'll have to resign ourselves to the likely departure of the "true" Communists . . .'

The scope of the new freedom of expression and associations granted to the opposition is virtually unprecedented in post-1918 Hungarian history. And to some extent the demoralization of the Party goes hand in hand with economic failure and the rise of democratic aspirations in society. Yet it would be misleading to attribute the spectacular political changes in Hungary merely to the deterioration of the economy or to the pressures of a dissatisfied society (as is the case in Poland). The floodgates were not broken through from below, but opened from above. The novelty of the policy of the Hungarian Communists in the Gorbachev era is their capacity to anticipate change; to accept it and even sometimes introduce it before the pressure builds up. They have discovered that the best way to absorb or defuse democratic change is to create space for it before the opposition can position itself as a credible alternative. It is the opposition parties, still in a formative stage, who are asking that the call for free elections not be rushed. The Party used to shoot on everything that moved. Today, in Hungary, they try to preempt the movement by joining it. Any new idea or proposal from the opposition is immediately trivialized by the Communists' acceptance. When you run out of things to say the idea is to pretend that nothing any longer matters. This is the Communist version of what Marcuse used to call 'repressive tolerance'.

reconciled with Christian ethics, with the counterweight of a redistribution of wealth generated by the market not through the state but through society itself. Of course only a society with a very high sense of Christian values would be capable of that. Neither Communism nor consumerism will do; Poland must show a 'third way'.

Is this brand of 'constructive anti-Communism' plausible? Only provided that Russia is not left out in this economic roll-back of the Communist state. Gorbachev, says Dzielski, provides a unique opportunity to 'civilize' and 'Europeanize' Russia through the introduction there too of a market economy. 'Gorbachev must understand that a Poland (and more generally, a Central Europe) with a disintegrating economy is a liability, always prone to working-class unrest and perpetuating the myth of a coming anti-Russian insurrection. A market-orientated Polish economy would be more prosperous, thus more stable and thus a more reliable neighbour.'

To be sure, Gorbachev's Russia and Jaruzelski's Poland will remain tightly run regimes, but a market economy will help the transition from totalitarian to ordinary authoritarian rule, Dzielski predicts. 'It is not the military, not even the police, but the Party bureaucrats, the nomenklatura, who are the main opponents of the market.' The economic scenario is thus also meant as a lesson in realpolitik. Whether or not one is prepared to follow the logic, one cannot help thinking that only in Poland can 'neo-liberalism' claim to reconcile Milton Friedman, Pope Wojtyla and Gorbachev!

The emergence of the doctrine of economic liberalism in Central Europe is a sign of the failure of the command economies. But the limits to its realization will depend on the balance between decay and Party retreat from economic management. But what is supposed to be the social base of this liberal revival? The new individualism and *embourgeoisement* have their limits. You cannot rebuild a liberal economy just with taxi drivers and shoe-repairmen. To paraphrase Henri Michaux's famous aphorism: the liberals of a nation of hairdressers will always be more hairdressers than liberals.

As Montesquieu knew in the eighteenth century, there is no power without ownership, and an economic market is unlikely without a political market. The challenge of the 1990s for East-Central Europe is whether the crumbling of the economy can bring the Party to accept the idea of the 'minimal state' and thus create space for the emancipation of society. In the 1970s it was assumed that a more prosperous socialist economy would give civil society more room for manoeuvre. Today it is economic collapse that is forcing change. Can a more open economy lead to a more open society?

8 The Politics of Culture

> One of the implications of history today, and still more of history tomorrow, is the struggle between the artists and the new conquerors, between the witnesses to the creative revolution and the founders of the nihilist revolution. As to the outcome of the struggle, it is only possible to make inspired guesses. At least we know that it must henceforth be carried on to the bitter end.
>
> (Albert Camus)

When the Polish writer Czeslaw Milosz wrote his famous essay *The Captive Mind* in 1952, he saw the triumph of Communist ideology as irreversible. A writer, Milosz thought, had only three options: he could collaborate, emigrate or remain silent. Fortunately, the history of Central Europe since 1956 has disproved that pessimistic verdict from the Stalinist era. Whereas in the 1950s the Communist regimes could count on substantial (genuine or merely enforced) support among intellectuals, today the bulk of cultural life worth speaking of takes place largely outside the realm of official ideology, either because the boundaries of official tolerance have been stretched or because culture has been driven underground. From legitimizers of the powers-that-be the intellectuals have become a moral counterweight. For intellectuals, both the self-emancipation from censorship and the parting with political power have played a key role in the emergence of dissent.

Socialist Realism

It is difficult today, when the official ideology has been turned into

a mere ritual, to appreciate fully the extent of ideological control imposed on the Soviet bloc countries under Stalin. Marxist–Leninist dogma and the faithful imitation of Soviet norms affected all aspects of cultural life. Philosophy was reduced to the struggle of dialectical materialism (Diamat) against idealism. Even research in the fields of physics, biology (Lysenko) or physiology (Pavlov) was supposed to demonstrate the superiority of 'proletarian science'. The history of each nation was rewritten to give the appearance of legitimacy to regimes that had none, and to stress historical bonds with Russia. This proved a particularly difficult task in Poland, where even Communist leaders sometimes felt that excess zeal could be counter-productive. In 1951 the Poles translated a two-volume *History of Poland* which had been produced by the Institute of Slavic Studies in Moscow. Its first reader, Party leader Boleslaw Bierut, wisely decided not to publish a book that systematically presented Russian military expansion as stages in Poland's national liberation.

In the arts, the period was marked by the imposition of what Zhdanov, the chief Soviet ideologist of the day, called 'socialist realism': art had little to do with reality as it was but rather depicted reality as it ought to be. Here again ideological control went hand in hand with slavish adoption of the Soviet model. Jozsef Revai, known as the Hungarian Zhdanov, described in 1951 what Sovietization of culture meant:

> Soviet culture is the model, the schoolmaster of our new socialist culture. We can absorb and use the rich experience of the Communist Party [Bolshevik] of the Soviet Union not only in state-building and in the economy, not only in the techniques of class struggle, but also in the creation of a new socialist culture.

This meant in fact systematically rupturing the historical ties of the lands of Central Europe to Western culture and embarking on cultural Russification.

Art, literature, music – everything had to have a political purpose. In 1952 a leading Hungarian writer Tibor Déry published a novel, *The Reply*, dealing with pre-war Hungary and the role of the Communist Party. Himself a lifelong member of the Party, Déry claimed the right to write in terms that did not always fit the political clichés of the day. Revai, the chief inquisitor, promptly replied:

> In our country, the writer does not have such a 'right'... We don't give the writer a free pass, we don't give him the 'freedom' to distort the living truth. We don't accept the thesis that the 'taste and judgement' of the writer are superior criteria for what he should write and the way he should do it. The taste and judgement of the writer can be contrary to the interests of the people or of the Party. It is not the state and the people who ought to conform to his taste and judgement; it is the writer who, through work and study, should express solidarity with the construction of socialism.

Needless to say, the literature produced under such guidance tended to be highly unreadable or, at the very least, required a special sense of humour. In *Life is Elsewhere*, Milan Kundera makes a distinction between lyrical poetry, which he equates with a quest for the absolute and as such highly compatible with revolution, which often turns into dictatorship, and the novel, which for him is the art of reason, maturity and truth where you cannot cheat. This is why there are no great Stalinist novels. But Stalinist poetry, from Nezval in Czechoslovakia to Aragon in France (or Kundera himself in his youth), left us beautiful verse because, says Kundera, 'through the magic of poetry, all statements become the truth, provided they are backed by the real power of real experience. And the poet certainly experiences deeply, so deeply his emotions smoulder and blaze. The smoke of their fiery feelings spread like a rainbow over the sky, a beautiful rainbow spanning prison walls....'

This 'lyrical' dimension of the Stalinism of the early days, however, does not mean socialist-realist poetry was always more readable than the fiction. Usually, it was just as conventional, just as subservient to politics or just as embarrassingly grotesque:

> I have a thousand smells in my nostrils:
> Perfumes, roses, chloroform
> But what is it compared to the smell of life
> When a turner beats his work-norm!

Czech poet Ivan Skala wrote those lines in a 'Letter to Poets' in 1950. 'No, one cannot be dead, quiet, without feeling/Today also grows, for us and in us, the sunny side of the world'. Skala composed verse of similar quality and enthusiasm for the 'sunny side of the world' to praise the hangings of 'traitors' to the Party and is, to this day, highly thought of in official Prague. But there were dozens of would-be official poets like him: 'He came into the world/as one bursts into a hurricane.' 'He' was Klement Gottwald and the author the most promising of the surrealists in the 1930s, Vitezslav Nezval. (Meanwhile Louis Aragon, Nezval's alter ego in Paris, was writing 'Ode à la GPU'.) An endless stream of poems about five-year plans, steel workers and, of course, tractor drivers issued forth: 'Today a

young woman boldly sits/on a stormy tractor . . .' (Jan Pilar, 1950). The tone occasionally became menacing: 'He who does not keep in step with us/lash him with a belt!' (Jiri Sotola), or supremely self-confident: 'Wipe out the filth of sexuality! Let your verse/be charged like a machine gun/with truth and love where need be./And a thousand Sartres, Kierkegaards, Freuds will not be consoled' (Josef Kainar, 1950). A touching motif juxtaposed Lenin or Stalin with little girls: 'In front of Stalin of white marble, stands a girl with a necklace' (Vlastimil Skolaudy).

> For the eyes of a little girl, prematurely wide,
> he ordered to shoot and spare no one
> who hid grain and exchanged bread for jewels only.
> This is how much he loved children, comrade Lenin.
> (V. Merhautova, 1952)

Even music was to be in tune with the Party's political needs. Following an international (mainly from the Soviet bloc) congress of composers held in Prague in 1948, where the composers pledged to rid themselves of 'subjectivist' and 'cosmopolitan' tendencies, the Union of Czech and Slovak Composers launched a musical five-year plan to match (and complement) the economic one. The text provides a unique insight into the new role of art under socialism. 'Music is to effect the plan of reconstruction and the heightened class struggle. We want to help fulfil the plan,' the musicians proclaimed. The distinction between so-called 'serious' and 'popular' music was to be abolished. 'Music for the people' was the motto of the day. But the people's needs had no longer to be ascertained from dubious surveys or commercial interests, but from the 'conscious Communist workers', 'a Marxist forecast of the development trend'. Each and every artist and musician 'must be an ambassador of the people's democratic regime, the herald of the new order, a fighter for socialism'. The five-year plan for music noted that, in order to convince others, the artist himself must first of all be convinced. 'Hence the need for Marxist training for all composers and musicologists.' In particular, vocal art should 'reflect the class struggle'. 'We must, therefore, put an end to any attempts at an apolitical approach and at ideological emasculation of vocal creation' (*sic*). This meant the eradication of 'instrumental formalism' and the emphasis on 'popular songs of Slavic nations, particularly the USSR'. The Communists in East-Central Europe were especially keen on folklore, which provided an art that was by definition 'popular' (i.e. as opposed to bourgeois art) and national. The aim was to 'teach the people their own songs and to this end learn to play light, portable popular instruments, such as the harmonica or the guitar'. The emphasis on collective singing and dancing ('especially for agitational purposes') required new lyrics. 'In the creation of new mass songs the composers will take into account the new hero of labour and the new working collective. This will be the basis of a new singing epic.' Socialist art, says the document, is no longer interested in 'sentimental stories' or 'individualistic tragedies'; it requires a 'new collective hero'. The individual is only relevant as an 'expression of the whole'. These guidelines were to apply to radio programming and film scores.

Unfortunately, one cannot in Czechoslovakia dismiss such a concept of culture as merely belonging to the Stalinist past. In fact it has been reimposed in post-1968 Czechoslovakia, often in almost identical terms, in the new, duly purged, artists' unions. Thus, to use only one example, a survey of post-war Czech music by Jaroslav Sedivy published in Prague in the 1980s again stresses the 'mobilizing and educational element in the civic, political sphere of art'. After the ideologically dubious 1960s with their emphasis on 'alienation', 'the Christian idea of love without a class perspective', Sedivy describes the 1970s as having witnessed the 'consolidation of the musical front', in which composers are again allegedly in tune with the Party. Radio, television, record companies need committed music. How do the Party cultural watchdogs assess the output? Compared to other art forms, like literature or paintings, 'post-war music devoted to the themes of the Victorious February 1948, Labour Day, the great works of Czechoslovak socialism, the socialist transformation of the countryside, cosmic flights (with reference to Soviet cooperation with socialist countries), V. I. Lenin, etc., has not yet produced truly exceptional works'. The author considers his criticism all the more justified in view of the allegedly high quality of music composed on other subjects such as the liberation of the country by the Red Army, peace, 'the struggle for social progress all over the world', or the sixtieth anniversary of the Communist Party.

This is one example among many from the Czechoslovakia of the 1980s. History repeats itself, Marx wrote, tragedy returns as farce. In contrast to the famous quip, Stalinist art of the 1950s was the farce; post-1968 cultural 'normalization' is the tragedy.

The iconography of socialist realism was everywhere the same: it hailed the advent of the new man. East-Central Europe of the 1940s and 1950s inherited it from the Soviet Union of the 1930s. In the 1980s it can still be found in Romania and Bulgaria as well as in Cuba or Ethiopia. Socialist realism derived from the Stalinist view

that man was merely the product of society and that a radical change of society and culture was the surest way to change man's consciousness. So while social-realist painters portrayed workers and peasants cheerfully marching towards the radiant future, the 'new man' theory could also justify experiments in social engineering, even re-education in the gulag. The vision had a utopian, lyrical dimension (which accounts, at least in part, for its initial appeal among creative people); but the reality has chilling, totalitarian overtones.

The personality cult became, of course, a major inspiration for the arts. On the occasion of Stalin's seventieth birthday in December 1949, a competition was launched in Hungary for the design of a statue of Stalin to be erected in the centre of Budapest (an episode vividly described by Janos Poto in the Hungarian journal *Historia*). Some twenty-five sculptors presented their work to a selection committee chaired by the chief ideologue and Minister of Culture, Revai. He described the purpose of the exercise as follows: 'This statue is born of the soul of the Hungarian nation. It is a Hungarian statue. The political thought of the old ruling classes was symbolized by dwarfs such as Werboczy [who wrote the first Hungarian legal code]. We shall correct this. We shall symbolize our political will with real giants, with heroes of the nation, fighters for freedom and national independence.'

Some of the competitors apparently got a bit carried away, their version of Stalin sometimes resembling Napoleon or the Hungarian poet Petöfi. The head of the Budapest City Council complained about the bad taste of some of the statues: 'Some of the faces are so distorted that one should immediately start proceedings against the authors.' The happy winner of the contest, Sandort Mikus, tried to convey his deep involvement with the subject: 'Often at night Stalin's face appears to me; I turn on the light and draw the traits of his face, the way he stands, his gestures are engraved in my mind.'

The statue was inaugurated in Budapest on 16 December 1951, in front of 80,000 people. A writer in a literary weekly commented: 'How immense he is! that is our first thought. How good he is. This morning I read a poem by Lebedev which hails Stalin as the gardener of the earth. I still think of that poem: "The black earth breathes, the grass and the trees are full of dew. We know this well, our dear gardener's smile under his moustache".'

Less than five years later the 'gardener of the earth' was denounced by Khrushchev as one of the greatest criminals in the history of mankind. On 23 October 1956, on the first day of the Hungarian revolution, the statue of the hated dictator was pulled down and his head rolled in the streets of Budapest.

At the beginning of *Man of Marble* (1976) the Polish film director Andrzej Wajda makes an autobiographical allusion to his own film about a 'hero of socialist labour' from the Stalinist era. Today he recalls what socialist realism meant for the artists of his generation:

> There was a great deal of passion and misunderstanding at the beginning when all the implications were not clear yet. We thought that socialist realism was a kind of continuation of the Soviet artistic avant-garde of the 1920s. We thought that behind it was some idea, some urge to create a new art which would be different from Western art. We were young and searching in that direction. But it soon became clear that what the authorities had in mind was simply to imitate Soviet art. You had to paint the way the Soviets did, you had to compose the way they did and writers had to write like the writers in the Soviet Union. Of course, one has to ask, what was it all for? The reason was that the arts were a fragment of a larger whole with an aim to create a new, socialist man. He should have different feelings, a different morality and a different view of the world; so that he could, almost independently of those who lead him, know his place: to be a little screw in a huge machine.

Socialist realism attracted believers but also opportunists who used politics as a literary springboard. The Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert gave a merciless account of a young careerist's (he calls him Tadzio) imaginary, yet only too realistic 'confession': 'I went to meeting with older writers who were supposed to instruct us,' sa Tadzio. 'They were wonderful poets and novelists from before the war, but from the very beginning they did not like us because we were young. Therefore we launched a frontal attack. We told one of them that he was a symbolist – which was a terrible insult. We told another that he was a passéist – which was also an insult – and we left slamming the door. After we had left, we got together and decided to form a group.' But even the group, which initially enjoyed the sponsorship of the Minister of the Interior himself, eventually fell out of favour and dispersed: 'Miecek went to *Poglad* and started to praise socialist realism in art – all those peasant women with cows and happy miners. I continued to write. I was getting tired of poetry. The time is not suitable for poetry, I said, and I had better write a novel. It had to be a factory novel. But my colleagues were faster. Silesia and the miners were taken care of. Witold got the shipyards, somebody else – sugar plants. I got the furniture industry. A bit marginal, but I took it anyway.' The account is a bit 'rough', as Herbert admits, but probably close to the truth.

This all-encompassing Party control of cultural life gradually started to break down in the post-Stalin era. Adam Wazyk's famous 'Poem for Adults', published in Warsaw in 1955, marked the beginning of the end of the utopian age:

> I will never believe, my dear, in a magic spell;
> I will never believe in minds kept under glass;
> but I believe that a table has four legs,
> but I believe that a fifth leg is a chimera,
> and when the chimeras rally, my dear,
> then one dies slowly of a worn-out heart.

Wazyk spoke for a whole generation of 'believers', not just in Poland, when speaking of the grief entailed in his loss of faith: 'Have I lost the gift of seeing, or the gift of convenient blindness? I am left with a short note, with these verses of a new grief.'

But more than grief there was revolt among writers in Warsaw and Budapest at their parting with the ideological camouflage of terror. Within weeks of Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin's crimes at the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Party in Moscow in 1956, Polish, Hungarian and (more cautiously) Czech writers demanded greater creative freedom. At a session of the Polish Council of Culture and Art the poet Antoni Slonimski denounced socialist realism as 'a precision tool for destroying art'. The persecution of critical thought in past centuries, he added, appears to have been 'almost idyllic' compared to the Stalinist era. Jan Kot, Poland's leading expert on Shakespeare, said on the same occasion:

> We have been trying to explain reality and not to learn the truth; to explain and justify at any price, even at the price of truth. Thus modern history became a great mythology before our eyes. Whenever the facts stood in the way, the facts were changed. If genuine heroes were obstacles, they evaporated. Literature which was not allowed to speak about crimes, literature which had to keep silent about trials which shocked men's minds and which were the daily reality for years, literature which had a sealed lip and wandered even further and deeper into lies, created a more and more fictitious vision of reality.

Almost word for word similar voices were heard at the meetings of the Petőfi circle in Budapest in 1956 or in Prague at the Writers' Congress in 1956 and again, more forcefully, in 1967.

But while Stalinist ideology crumbled, the institution of censorship it left behind was there to stay. Indeed the history of cultural life in Central Europe can be told as the artists' double emancipation:

from the regime's ideology and the straitjacket of censorship. Paradoxically, it is the regime's extreme politicization of culture which is the prime constraint on the artist, the writer and the film-maker, and makes him long for art that would escape political control, that would not be judged solely in terms of its political audacity. Yet the same constraints often give literature and the arts in the Other Europe that extra sharp edge and the writer a unique status in society. Stefan Heym, a leading East German writer who was expelled from the Writers' Union in 1979 after the publication in the West of his novel *Collin*, compares his situation to that of the writer in the West:

> As a writer in the West you can write practically anything you like, it doesn't make any difference, nobody gives a damn. Of course, your work is being read, people may be entertained by it, but it has very little political effect. In this part of the world it's entirely different. The writer has more weight; that is why you have censorship, because his word counts and because politicians must take what he writes seriously. Therefore it is much more fun to work in this so-called socialist part of the world.

Is it because the writer's word has more weight that you have censorship, or is it censorship that gives the writer's word more weight? At any rate, battles with the censor have not always been 'fun'. In a system where the news media are not free, where the average citizen tends to believe exactly the opposite of what he has heard on television, where people read only the sports page in newspapers because 'it's the place where they don't lie', literature and the arts is where people know they can find a more genuine insight into the world they live in. It is fiction that is often closest to the reality, to a basic human truth. Of course, under censorship, that truth is often conveyed indirectly; people learn to read between the lines. 'In Poland,' says Ryszard Kapuscinski, 'we read every text as allusive; every situation described – even the most remote in time and space – is immediately applied to Poland. Every text is a double text. Between the lines we look for the message written in invisible ink, and the hidden message we find is treated as the only true one.'

Kapuscinski's own book about Iran under the Shah is an illustration of what he describes, as is Stefan Heym's *King David Report*, which uses a biblical setting for a brilliant analysis of the historian's relationship with truth and power in a totalitarian state.

Art and especially literature becomes the mirror of a society, the only place where its contemporary problems or the 'white spots' in its history can be discussed. It is in this sense that literature gives the society its identity.

In East Germany in the early 1970s several young authors described in their books the alienation of youth in an authoritarian state. Ulrich Plenzdorf's *The New Sufferings of Young W.*, which became a cult book in 1972, is the story of a teenager dropping out of the system after a row at work; his attempt to live freely on the margins of society ends tragically, with the suicide of the dropout, a hitherto unknown hero in East German literature. Wolker Braun's *Incomplete Story* and Reiner Kunze's *Wonderful Years* (1976) were moving depictions of the petty but relentless harassment of young people by officialdom. Clearly, the authorities were no longer prepared to tolerate any longer such exposés of their failure in the eyes of the young generation. Kunze was forced to emigrate after being told by a senior official, 'You won't survive what we have in store for you.' The rift between the writers and the regime became complete when the singer Wolf Biermann was forced into exile. Others followed: Jürgen Fuchs, Sarah Kirsch, Günter Künert, Thomas Brasch. It has been said that the best German literature is in the East. It should be added that some of the best East German literature is now in the West.

For a few years the authorities seemed to have bought some respite. But the alienation of the young generation, its resentment against militarism and ideological control, is stronger than ever. And there are new young writers to express its frustrations and aspirations. One of them is Lütz Rathenaw, born in 1952, first arrested in 1980 after the publication in the West of his short stories *Prepared for the Worst*. In one of the stories a ruler, declining to enforce his personality cult, demands that worship be accorded to his dog. In another, two men fight a duel over a disagreement as to how many times humanity could be annihilated in the next war. His view of German history is no more to the liking of the authorities than his humour:

> The finger I left at Verdun,
> an ear at Stalingrad –
> I give my head:
> to our new state.

The subject of censorship, the confrontation of the individual with the impersonal machine of the state, is also a theme in Monika Maron's writing. In *The Female Defector* she describes some of her own dilemmas through the thoughts of Josefa Nadler, a journalist and the main character of the novel: 'Whatever is not printable isn't thought through. It's only a short path from unprintable to unthinkable as soon as you agree to measure reality by this standard.'

The 'I' of the writer clashes with comrade 'We'. 'I will say this once and for all: whoever speaks of himself in the plural has to allow me to address him in the plural. Anyone who is a "we" also has to be a "you" and a "they". And if they make their opinions into mine without asking permission, I'll say "me" to me and "them" to them.'

Monika Maron's work is banned and her only contact with the public is through readings in Father Eppelmann's church in East Berlin. What she resents most about the current situation is less the degree of control *per se* than the constant 'patronizing guidance' of the state which affects people's everyday life: 'The GDR functions like an authoritarian kindergarten.'

The new realism and the art of the metaphor as counterweight to official dogma occur as well in the cinema, be it Polish films after 1956 (Polanski, Wajda, etc.), the Czech films of the 1960s or Hungarian films since the late 1970s.

The favourite themes of the Czech 'new wave' ranged from an indictment of impersonal bureaucratic rule to the exploration of sexual freedom. But all these films were, after all, produced by the state bureaucracy. One explanation is that, when ideology begins to crumble, the Party ideological watchdogs lose their touch and the empty space is filled by a new generation of film-makers, keen to break the official taboos. Not with politics, but with irony, with imagination, with a new language that society can identify with. The Czech 'new wave' was the product of a close interaction between film directors, writers and critics. There was a rich and free-spirited cultural life in the Prague of the 1960s which helped to bring about some of the masterpieces of European cinema.

For the first time Czechoslovak cinema became free from the constraints of the market, but also from the dictates of ideology. Antonin Liehm, a leading Czech literary and film critic at the time, explains this transformation:

> In the 1950s it became increasingly clear that the liberation of film from the dictates of the market meant its subjugation to the dictates of the state. But when the system started to break down and the people in charge of film at all levels became unsure, less strict, the system regained some of its positive qualities: the creators of film were getting more control over the industry. The nationalized system could be the worst when it's tightly run but, as Czech director Ivan Passer [now living in the United States] said, when this system falls apart it is the best system you can have. Film-makers were never so free as in the 1960s in Czechoslovakia. The same is true, at different times, of the other

film industries in East-Central Europe. And, who knows, something like that could now also happen in the Soviet Union.

Jiři Menzel, director of the Oscar-winning *Closely Observed Trains*, recalls the emergence of the 'new wave':

> I remember that not just us at the FAMU Film School, but everybody felt some scorn for what they saw on the screens or read in newspapers. People would say 'it is like in a film' when they meant that something was not quite true. This created a craving for something truthful. I remember what a discovery at the end of the 1950s and early 1960s American documentary films were for us. They taught us how to use the camera. Cassavetes' *Shadows*, that was a great discovery for us, compared to those elaborate films made in studios with actors covered with make-up. A whole generation suddenly knew not how to make films, but what kind of films they did not want to make.

Milan Kundera, who was one of the teachers at the Prague Film School, calls that generation the 'children of Kafka'. This is because they shared with the author of *The Trial* a tragicomic vision of the world:

> In contrast with the classical mind which divides the world between the sphere of tragedy and comedy, Prague (or Central European) humour ignores such boundaries. It is not therefore so much a different humour as a different view of the world which considers the comical side as an indivisible part of every human situation. Nothing, nobody is spared the comical which is part of our condition, our shadow, our relief and our condemnation. Forman leaves us in no doubt: *Firemen's Ball*, his last film shot in Czechoslovakia (1967), starts with a funny dialogue about the cancer of the firemen's chief, and his humour becomes unbearable and masterful when at the end another old man watches his house in flames.

In *The Castle*, Kundera notes, Kafka had also dealt with a firemen's feast which turns into a tragedy. 'Neither Forman nor Kafka meant to show disregard for the glory of fire extinguishing. But both like to show the behaviour of the institutionalized man (the representative, *par excellence*, of modern mankind) precisely in the most ordinary and absurd situations, precisely in its most subordinate and innocent incarnations.'

Firemen's Ball takes place in a provincial township in Bohemia. The ball is organized by a group of totally inept firemen who are unable even to prevent people from stealing the prizes for the lottery, let alone put out a fire. At the end of the film they discuss what they should tell people about the situation. But by the time they decide to go out and tell people the truth there is nobody there; nobody is interested any more because everybody knows. The film ends with the man whose house has burned and the fireman sleeping in the same bed in a snowstorm; the victim and his 'protector' find themselves in the same situation: they have both lost everything.

After the Soviet-led invasion *Firemen's Ball* featured prominently on the list of forbidden films. Next to it was another masterpiece of the late 1960s, Jan Nemec's *Report on the Party and the Guests*. The novelist Josef Škvorecký, closely associated with the Czech film-makers of the 1960s, explains why a film about an unusual birthday party provoked the 'normalized' censor to attach to Nemec's film the label 'banned forever':

> One of the ideas about Communism, never, of course, expressed in so many words, is that revolution, in spite of the feelings or wishes of the people, will force them into happiness. And that's what the film is about. A host invites guests to a party; many are uneasy, clearly not as happy as they should be and one of them decides to leave the party. So the host sends dogs after him. The film ends with the whole screen darkening and those hounds of Baskerville obviously hunting the man who decided not to be happy.

The party as a metaphor for the Party. Breaking the tacit loyalty to the Communist Party, and the will to act as an individual, was something subversive for both the purveyors of collective happiness and the silent majority. And this is why what might seem an elitist film for intellectuals had such an impact: 'It is a demanding film,' says Škvorecký. 'You have to have some experience of modern literature. But even not very educated people in Czechoslovakia understand Kafka better than most in the West. Take *The Trial*: a man is being arrested and does not know why; in the end he perishes without ever learning why. This is something that in Kafka's time was just a nightmare. But then it became a reality for many people in our country. So people understood such a film very well.'

Nothing could be further removed from Soviet-style film-making (where war movies were what Westerns are for American cinema) than the anti-heroic neo-realism of the Czech 'new wave'. What provided the discreet charm of the Czech films of the 1960s was the simplicity of their almost microscopic observation of reality (Ivan Passer's *Intimate Lighting* or Forman's *Loves of a Blonde*): in the

microcosm of human action they found a portrait of society as a whole. This accounts for the political dimension of films with apparently non-political subjects such as *Firemen's Ball*: art as demystifier of ideology.

When censorship collapses the artist finds himself in a new situation, free to be concerned only with his art rather than with the fate of the nation. This is what Jan Nemec, director of *The Party and the Guests*, said to A. J. Liehm during the Prague Spring of 1968:

> The difference between today and yesterday is primarily that we all find ourselves in a situation that we were not ready for. The cards have been redealt, the game is open and, for a moment, everyone can play what he wants. The moving force of all our activity has been 'the struggle against the dark forces of reaction', to borrow a phrase from Stalin's *History of the Bolshevik Party*. The driving force has fallen by the wayside, at least for the present. When one lives in a society which is essentially unfree, it is the obligation of every thinking person to attack obstacles to freedom in every way at his disposal; which is what happened. Now, of course, everyone is faced with a choice: what does he really want? What does he feel must be done and said in the new situation, in which people are no longer behind barbed wire, but rather within a normal society so that, in our case, a different sort of activity will be called for?

We shall never know what Hungarian or Czech artists would have done with their newly conquered freedom in 1956 or 1968. One can note, however, that the great works of post-war Central European literature were not written and the great films were not conceived during the brief periods of freedom (when censorship collapsed) in 1956, 1968 or 1980, though many could then be published or shown to the public. This is even more striking in the Soviet Union today. No new names have appeared. There is a distinctly 'necrophiliac' feel about Moscow's bestseller list under *glasnost*. From Akhmatova's 'Requiem' to Tvardovski's 'Right to a Memory', from Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* to Grossman's *Life and Destiny*, from Platonov and Bek to the émigrés Nabokov and Bunin, all the missing pieces of Russian literature (and, through them, all the taboo subjects of post-revolutionary history) are now revealed to an insatiable public – posthumously. When censorship relaxes, it is time to empty the drawers.

Instead of a return to a 'normal society', as Jan Nemec hoped for, Czechoslovakia was promptly bullied into being a 'normalized' one. The intellectuals who played such a prominent part in preparing the

cultural background to the Prague Spring naturally became the prime targets of the post-invasion 'restoration of order'. What followed was the most ruthless and uncompromising suppression of a culture in the Communist world, except perhaps for the Chinese Cultural Revolution. What the French poet Louis Aragon called the 'Biafra of the spirit' meant that hundreds of authors were banned and their works removed from libraries; more than two-thirds of journalists were purged; university professors (including 145 historians) became window cleaners, nightwatchmen or stokers. (Maybe this is what the Party ideologues meant by 'raising the cultural level of the working class'?) Their students were subjected to a very strict system of political vetting. To mention only one example of what 'normalization' of culture and education means, the 'loyalty oath' for high-school teachers states: 'In line with the principles of Communist education I will strive to develop my pupils' love for their socialist fatherland, to inspire respect for the working class and the Party and raise them in the spirit of Marxism–Leninism.' As Milan Kundera put it: 'In its duration, extent and consistency, the massacre of Czech culture after 1968 has had no analogue in the history of the country since the Thirty Years War.'

Josef Škvorecký, who, like Milan Kundera, now lives in exile, is best known in the West for his novel fittingly entitled *The Engineer of Human Souls*. But he is also a publisher of authors now banned in Czechoslovakia: 'We publish, among other things, a dictionary of banned Czech writers which now has some five hundred entries. I am not saying that all these people are geniuses. Many of them are, of course, average or worse than average. But they are writers and they have the right to express themselves. So imagine that in a country of ten million Czechs there are five hundred names on the blacklist. You would have to multiply this by twenty to get the number of American writers that would be banned under such a regime.'

Words such as 'counter-culture' or 'underground' culture have been used, sometimes too loosely, in the West since the 1960s. In Central Europe they have acquired a real meaning. Czech culture was literally driven underground by the Husak regime. Hence the extraordinary variety of unofficial cultural life: from *samizdat* publishing to the 'living-room theatre', from unofficial philosophy seminars to rock concerts by banned groups such as the Plastic People of the Universe. The poet and translator Jan Vladislav has been deeply involved with independent publishing in Czechoslovakia, not just since 1968 but since 1948:

> Czechoslovakia's parallel culture is not merely the legacy of the Prague Spring of 1968; it is the continuation of the spiritual resistance of the 1950s. Interestingly, because it involved after 1968 a number of people who had worked for many years in the official structures, it gave the independent activities a more effective, more 'organized' character than before. The 'normalization' of the 1970s also engendered a change of outlook. In the 1950s, Czech and Slovak spiritual resistance was geared, quite naturally, to an eventual relaxation of regime pressure, and events were to vindicate such an approach. During the 1970s the resistance quickly came to realize that the prospects for change from within the regime were far from favourable and it was therefore vital, without delay, to work either on the fringes of the official structures or entirely outside them.

For the writers this was a completely new situation. Writing directly for *samizdat* was a liberation from censorship, and, perhaps more importantly, from self-censorship. Although it can be a liberating experience, writing for the unofficial network also implies a risk of being cut off from one's audience. Unlike in Poland where *samizdat* publications are sold in thousands or tens of thousands, in Czechoslovakia typewritten copies are distributed in hundreds. Even though each copy reaches dozens of readers some writers are concerned about the danger of creating a closed, elitist culture which remains divorced from the society at large. The situation is particularly difficult for a playwright like Vaclav Havel. For whom does he write?

> Drama is an art which is created in a concrete place, it has to have a home. It is written for a certain cultural and spiritual situation without which it cannot live. It is not something that can be transferred at will and it was very difficult for me to get used to writing plays which are then performed only abroad, in England or in Yugoslavia. I write as if my plays were to be performed here and now. My plays are circulated in *samizdat*, on tape or even video cassettes. Actors from the Prague theatres all know my plays and generally know more about my work than I do about theirs. But a play is destined for the stage and I find, time and time again, that people do not know how to read plays; and why should they? Plays aren't meant to be read, but to be seen on stage. So I find myself releasing into circulation some kind of semi-finished product. It's tough but I've grown accustomed to it.

Although the development of *samizdat* has since the 1970s become a common feature of cultural life in Central Europe, only 'normalized' Czechoslovakia displayed such a clear-cut divide between officially controlled and independent culture. The trial of the leaders of the Jazz Section of the Musicians' Union at the end of 1986 was the ultimate paranoid gesture in the authorities' attempt to suppress what Škvorecký aptly called the 'grey zone' between the two cultures.

Elsewhere in Central Europe the limits between them have recently become increasingly blurred – that is, in countries where there is an independent culture to speak of. In Romania there is no literary *samizdat* and the obsession with control even led Ceausescu to introduce a new law which requires all typewriters to be registered. Asked about the effects of the law a member of the Writers' Union answered, 'I would not know. I write in longhand . . .' In Poland and Hungary the combination of the vigour of independent culture with the relative tolerance of the authorities is creating a new situation in which the divides of yesterday no longer seem to be a sure guide.

In some countries such a 'grey zone' can develop thanks to the role of the Church, which is by definition an institution on the borderlines of dissent and officialdom, challenging the official ideology while enjoying a legal if constricted existence. In Poland, especially since martial law, the Catholic Church has provided protection for artists banned from the official media. Concerts, exhibitions, theatre performances, poetry readings take place in parish halls, the only place where people can gather freely.

A similar role, though on a smaller scale, is played by the East German Protestant Church. The Kirchentag, the annual festival of the Church, is the largest and certainly the freest cultural manifestation in East Germany. And because it is free it has its own 'dissidents'. This is a curious gathering, the socks-and-sandals brigade of the Christian–Marxist dialogue, hippies, egalitarian socialists, Christian ecolo-pacifists and punk groups. It is in East Germany that you will find the last sincere Marxists in the Soviet bloc. The ideology of East German counter-culture is a mixture of critical Marxism, Protestant moralism and 'Green' anti-authoritarianism. It has preserved a somewhat dated 1960s mixture of socialism and post-industrial utopia – and earnestness. . . . While in West Berlin angry punks and squatters fight all night with the police, a mere stone's throw from the Wall, expressing their bitter hatred for the capitalist society, in East Berlin even the punks have an innocent look in their eyes especially when, also a mere stone's throw from the Wall, they chant, 'Gorbachev! Gorbachev!'

In Poland, the Church is the official counter-culture, the reposi-

tory of an alternative ideology. It has its Catholic University at Lublin, its Cracow-based publishing house (Znak) and its weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny*, the only truly independent legally published paper in the Communist world. Founded in 1945 the paper was shut down in 1953 when it courageously refused to print an obituary for Stalin. But since its revival in 1956 during a period of liberalization, it has managed to sustain its independence and a prestigious list of contributors, which includes the former Archbishop of Cracow, Pope Wojtyla. The quality and the moral stature of the paper has, according to its editor for forty years Jerzy Turowicz, been even more firmly established since its relationship with the censor has been made explicit:

> With the relatively more liberal law on censorship passed in 1981 we have the right to indicate the places where censorship interfered, so that the reader is aware of what is going on. Although we are reasonable and prudent people, with a lot of experience, we have every week two or three articles taken out, not to mention smaller cuts on virtually every page. They concern a variety of issues, especially politics, of course, and Church–state relations.

Despite the initial crackdown on the cultural milieu in the immediate aftermath of martial law, Poland has (once again) become the freest country in the Soviet bloc in terms of the regime's tolerance of unofficial views. This, despite official rhetoric, owes little to Gorbachev-inspired *glasnost*; it is the result of the formidable expansion of unofficial publishing over the last decade. Poland has moved from a situation where most of the leading intellectuals wrote directly for the *samizdat* to a situation where the same article can appear in both the official and the unofficial circuit. The *samizdat* is almost the victim of its own success.

The most telling illustration of the change was the legal publication in 1987 of a hitherto leading *samizdat* journal *Respublica*. There was a heated discussion in opposition circles about the political implications of breaking a boycott imposed on official media since the military coup of December 1981. Marcin Krol, a well-known historian, is the editor of the journal. What happens when a dissident meets a censor?

> It was a difficult dilemma, of course. But we thought that we could not spend the next twenty or thirty years waiting. Today we are the first journal which is totally independent of the state and of the Church. It is a strange feeling for me going to see the censor, but hardly a totally new one in this country since the war. He says, 'I understand what you mean, but we have to do that'; and I say, 'I know you have to do that, but . . . ' I don't always understand their approach because they are interested in words, not in thoughts. For instance, you can describe all kinds of horrors so long as 'totalitarianism' or 'Communism' is replaced by 'Stalinism'. Or instead of 'the Soviet Union' you are asked to put 'a neighbouring country'. Most confiscated things actually concern the Soviet Union, but then everybody in Poland knows what the Soviet Union is; so it's hardly the most intellectually stimulating subject.

Most appropriately for a journal of liberal orientation *Respublica* is privately owned. Indeed, financial independence is, for Marcin Krol, a precondition of editorial independence: 'To promote independent culture you need a space. To have a space you also need money and in Poland there are only two sources of support: the state and the Church. I am a Catholic but we try to be independent of both.' Is he worried that his change of status from dissident to legal might, in the long run, jeopardize his integrity? 'You must know where you stand. If you are unsure of yourself, it is risky to try to reach a compromise. To make a compromise you have to have a very strong commitment to a set of values you wish to promote.'

Poland used to be the country where things were simple, the battle lines were clearly drawn. No longer so. Now it has been admitted, the ideological bankruptcy of the Party is being put to good use – to the confusion of everybody else. In this respect Poland's cultural life might come to resemble that of Hungary, the country *par excellence* of 'repressive tolerance'.

Hungarian intellectuals have become the most prolific writers on the subject of censorship, ever since censorship itself started withering away. That was fifteen years ago when leading philosophers of the Budapest school (A. Heller, F. Feher, G. Markus) were advised to exert their critical powers in Australia rather than in Budapest, when György Konrad became Hungary's best-known non-person, and Miklosz Haraszti went on trial for disseminating a manuscript rejected by an official publisher. The year was 1974, the title *Piecework*; Hungarian *samizdat* was born. The Party suffered a defeat and has since given up hope of restoring the ideological foundations of censorship. That was its original sin. By losing the ideological compass and becoming increasingly vague and permissive about norms and taboos that had been the spice of cultural life in Central Europe for more than four decades, the retreating

Party managed to spread utter confusion in the ranks of the Hungarian intelligentsia. Besides the 'happy few' such as Konrad, Kis or Haraszti who are published in *samizdat* (thanks to the diligence of their publisher, Gabor Demszky), the others suffer at the hands of a vanishing censor. Each step in the liberalization has only contributed to the brewing discontent. Now that there are almost no taboos left (except, of course, the Soviet Union) the revolt has been brought into the open. At the conference of the Writers' Union in 1987 the dissidents took over and the Party loyalists became the 'dissidents', forced to set up a rival confidential grouping. And the rallying cry of the triumphant yet increasingly angry mob of emancipated writers? 'Bring back censorship!'

This is a typically Hungarian paradox, but it is not meant to be funny. The writer Istvan Eorsi has been the first to launch the campaign for the restoration of censorship. The abolition of the office of the censor, the argument goes, has merely shifted the responsibility for censorship on to the editors and ultimately on to the writers themselves. Sandor Csoori, the best known of the 'populist' writers, denounced the unbearable lightness of self-censorship as something 'insidious as a fog or smoke: it does not suffocate you but makes you cough. You catch mental bronchitis.'

From the safe distance of the 'velvet prison' of *samizdat* Miklos Haraszti provided a compassionate verdict:

> The old censorship is increasingly being superseded by something altogether new, less visible and more dangerous. . . . Traditional censorship presupposes the inherent opposition of creators and censor; 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 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.

Intellectuals in Opposition

'None of this would have happened if a couple of writers had been shot in time.' Thus spoke with characteristic frankness Nikita Khrushchev, nine months after the Red Army had suppressed the Hungarian revolution of 1956. It reveals the (exaggerated) power Communist regimes then attributed to intellectuals. Intellectuals in the Other Europe have traditionally been seen as an alternative elite: spokesmen for nations without a state in the nineteenth century; for nations without a voice after the Second World War. From the poets of the revolution of 1848 to the dissidents of 1988, culture in Central Europe has often been the substitute for politics, and the intellectuals have been the 'conscience of their nation'.

But they were a 'false conscience' at the time of the Communist takeovers. Paradoxically, the advent of Communism, which destroyed the independence of cultural life, has been welcomed by a majority of intellectuals in Central Europe. They had identified with the ideological promise of the Party, which in turn rewarded them with the illusion of power and the realities of privilege. But soon they found their golden cage constricting, and the crimes committed in the name of lofty ideals too nauseating. Critics from within at first, they became critics from without; from advocates of the independence of culture they became advocates of the independence of society. As such the story of Central European intellectuals since the war is an integral part of the European intellectuals' love affair with Marxism – the story of the 'God that failed'.

'By the time the Communist Party openly took power,' notes Hungarian writer Miklos Haraszti, 'the majority of artists were already committed to loyal service.' This was particularly true of Czechoslovakia. A brochure entitled *My Attitude Towards the Communist Party* was published before the Communist takeover in 1948. It read like a 'Who's Who' of the Czechoslovak intellectual elite of the time. Communists did not rely only on force. In fact they followed a Gramscian model: achieving 'cultural hegemony' even before they won a complete monopoly of political power. The emergence of the 'organic intellectual', loyal to the Party, confusing truth with political expediency, was the result not just of fear, but of conviction. In Czeslaw Milosz's words: 'The pressure of the state machine is nothing compared with the pressure of a convincing argument.' Why did so many intellectuals succumb? Was it just a case of the intellectuals briefly going astray, or was it compromise with far-reaching consequences, what Julien Benda in the 1930s called the 'betrayal of the clerks'?

Milosz himself gave us memorable portraits of leading Polish intellectuals seduced by the 'New Faith' that came from the East: former Catholic nationalists (like Andrzejewski, author of *Ashes and Diamonds*) or survivors of the death camps; pre-war fellow travellers and post-war converts returning from exile to take part in the building of socialism (Galinski, Slonimski). There was a mixture of fascination and the feeling of impotence, opportunism and the urge to

belong to an irresistible and irreversible force of history.

'Why did I become a Communist?' asks the main character in Kundera's novel *The Joke*, and explains the excitement of belonging to a movement that was at the 'steering wheel of history': 'At the time we could really decide the fate of the people' – not just 'dizziness with power', but also dizziness with mastering history. Marx, after all, claimed that the task of the intellectuals was no longer to interpret the world but to change it.

But there was also, Milosz suggested, an element of deceit, the 'art of the Ketman', of outward conformism, transposed from the Islamic to the Communist world – to the point where it became unclear who was deceiving whom. Might not the adapting conformist writer be in the end deceiving only himself?

Milan Kundera echoed this theme in his short story 'Edward and God': 'If you obstinately tell a man the truth to his face, it would mean that you are taking him seriously. And to take something so unimportant seriously means to become less than serious oneself. I, you see, *must* lie, if I don't want to take madmen seriously and become one of them myself.'

Beyond the paradoxes of fascination and deceit perhaps the main reason for the appeal of Communism at the end of the war was the collapse of the old world and its values. If you have seen and experienced hell you do not want to 'improve' it but radically to change it. As Jan Patočka observed, Masarykian liberal rationalism was not enough in the age of Hitler and Stalin. Widespread contempt for liberal values and politics accounts, at least in part, for the weak resistance to Communism. Antonin Liehm was part of that generation: 'At the end of the war the Soviet solution seemed to many of us to be the only one, because the Western solution had crashed so badly at Munich in 1938 and after. So, under the wings of our "progressive" tradition of a culture committed to social change and our young men's experience, we eventually ran directly, blindfolded, into the trap of Stalinism.'

The historical setting is no doubt essential, though perhaps not a sufficient explanation for understanding the post-war itinerary of Central European intellectuals. Professor Vaclav Černý (with Jan Patočka possibly the most important, yet marginal, intellectual figure in post-war Czechoslovakia) gives a less generous interpretation. In his memoirs (1984) he paints a devastating picture of the Communist generation, the 'class of 1948': zealots and opportunists, careerists quick to lead the purge and grab vacant jobs while the going was good. There is bitterness, sometimes unfairness, in his uncompromising account, but only a scholar of his stature and of his

generation (born in 1905 like Sartre, whose existentialism was his philosophical inspiration, and like Raymond Aron, with whom he shared the privilege of being for four decades the lonely *spectateur-engagé*-proved-right-in-the-end) could write so freely about the glory and demise of the Czech intellectual.

Černý's alter ego in Poland is the poet Zbigniew Herbert. He challenges the view that there was no other way than to give in to the 'enslavement of the elite':

> The Great Linguist, Stalin, once said that one does not need to buy a nation. One simply has to have engineers of human souls. The government needed legitimacy which was provided by the intellectuals, the so-called 'creative' intelligentsia, and especially the writers. So I left the business. I did not want to be part of it.

Herbert, with false modesty, denies that saying 'no' to the Great Linguist required courage. For him it was . . . 'a matter of taste'.

The years 1956 to 1968: reason versus conscience. De-Stalinization called off the period of 'gardening in a cemetery' and opened a period of soul-searching. What was the relationship between socialist theory and terrorist practice? Was Stalinism a mere 'deformation' on the otherwise healthy foundations of socialism? And if so one should be careful not to throw out the socialist baby with the dirty bathwater (the dirty bathwater being the millions who died in the gulag). Such questions dominated intellectual debate from Khrushchev's Twentieth Congress speech to the Prague Spring of 1968. Between 1956 and 1968 Central European intellectuals denounced Stalinist crimes in the name of socialist values and ideals. After the crushing of the Prague Spring they renounced socialist ideas in the name of the crimes committed after 1948 and again after 1968. Such a dialectic of 'crimes and ideals' is not unique to the Stalinist period. French intellectuals initially denounced slavery in the name of the ideas of the Enlightenment. Many of their twentieth-century successors denounced Western liberal values in the name of the crimes or injustices attributed to colonialism.

The intellectual foundations of 'revisionism', a critique of Stalinism from within the Marxist ideology, were remarkably similar in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Its leading philosophers were Leszek Kolakowski, György Lukacs and Karel Kosík. It entailed a critique of Stalinism in the name of a return to an increasingly elastic interpretation of the thought of the 'young' Marx and of the 'old' Engels. Above all it rejected 'ends justify the means' theory and asserted the primacy of ethics over politics, of the Kantian

ategorical imperative' over Marx's laws of history.

Khrushchev's vehement denunciation of Stalinist crimes without offering a plausible explanation left the Marxist intellectuals in disarray. Many, as Norberto Bobbio wrote, were concerned that the famous secret speech was not a 'Marxist analysis'. But then, 'neither is *Macbeth* a Marxist text. A cry of horror is neither Marxist nor anti-Marxist: it is a cry.'

The itinerary of the leading philosophers of 'revisionism' in a way highlights the ambiguity of the phenomenon, its power to erode the system and its limitations. György Lukacs exemplified the contradictions of the Party intellectual. He was, as is well known, Thomas Mann's model for the character of Naphtha in *The Magic Mountain*. Like Naphtha, the Jesuit, Lukacs was torn between the rigours of an order with a universalistic ideology and the independence of a man of culture. Often on the margins of heresy, he eventually always gave in to the Party, accepting humiliating self-criticism in 1949 and again after 1956. He provided his numerous disciples (Agnes Heller, Ferenc Feher and Mihaly Vajda among others) with intellectual ammunition against the sterility of Communist dogma. Yet when it came to the crunch his motto remained: 'My Party right or wrong' – even when tanks were called in to settle philosophical arguments. In Istvan Eorsi's play appropriately called *His Master's Voice*, Lukacs is the main character. As Stalinist crimes come to be discussed the character of Lukacs answers: 'I too had many problems with Stalin. For example, I could never decide whether he had read Hegel.' One of the very few Marxist philosophers of stature will also go down in history paying tribute to political idiocy: 'Even the worst of socialism will always be preferable to the best capitalism.'

Kolakowski and Kosík represent a different itinerary: from 'revisionism' to a complete break with Communism. The former was forced into exile after his expulsion from Warsaw University and has published in the West a most devastating critical study of Marxist thought. He has remained a major intellectual influence on contemporary Polish dissent. Karel Kosík, author of *The Dialectic of the Concrete*, has been reduced to silence for twenty years. The last time he broke that silence was in 1975 when the police confiscated from him a thousand-page manuscript. Its title was: *On Truth*.

The Prague Spring of 1968 was the high point of 'revisionism', the culmination of the conflict between critical intellectuals and political power. Because the Czechoslovak de-Stalinization had been delayed, it eventually came with a vengeance. In the forefront was the Communist generation of 1948, recovering from its Stalinist

hangover and compensating (sometimes over-compensating) for its past failures. A 'revolution within the revolution', 1968 marked the apotheosis of the political influence of the intellectuals acting as a bridge between the Party and the people, 'enlightening' the ruler while expressing the democratic aspirations of the society.

The tanks of August crushed the hopes of a reformed 'socialism with a human face' and defeated the intellectuals' attempt to salvage the ideals of their youth. Yet many experienced defeat as a liberation, a belated reconciliation with their nation. Pavel Kohout, the Communist poet, wrote in his *Diary of a Counter-Revolutionary*: 'For the first time, after twenty years, I have the sensation of belonging to the nation.' Milan Kundera wrote of the traumatic days of August 1968: 'It was the most beautiful week in our lives.' Eva Kanturkova, the novelist and former Charter 77 spokesperson, recently described it as the 'expulsion from paradise', the prime virtue of which is that 'the one-time critical loyalists finally found themselves in the same position as the rest of the nation'.

The divorce was by no means confined to Czechoslovakia. In Poland it was completed with the pogrom against critical intellectuals following student unrest in March 1968. In Hungary it started with the petition against the invasion of Czechoslovakia (signed by Heller and Feher) – the first open protest against the Kadar leadership since the days of the Hungarian revolution – and culminated with the purge of the Budapest school (of Lukacs disciples) in the early 1970s.

The intellectuals' revolt against the bureaucratic machine could be effective only so long as ideology was taken seriously. In the era of routinized Marxism, the Party cared less and less for the support of the intellectuals. No need for 'engineers of human souls' any more. As Zbigniew Herbert put it, 'They loved us, they pampered us, and suddenly they dumped us.'

This marked the end of the utopian mentality and the advent of a new, more humble role for the intellectual. In Kolakowski's words, 'when intellectuals tried to become spiritual leaders or professional politicians, the results were not usually encouraging. The marketplace, with all its dangers, is in the end a more appropriate place for them than the royal court.'

The outcome of the failure of 'revisionism' and the divorce between the Party and the intellectuals was the collapse of Marxism in Central Europe. Except in East Germany, nobody takes it seriously any more. These developments, all associated with the emergence of dissent, have reshaped the intellectual landscape in Central Europe. First, there has been the return of genuine pluralism in a restored, independent intellectual community. The 'demotion' of

the Communist intellectuals created a new equality of 'status' and access to *samizdat* publishing. For the first time since the war former Communists and conservative Catholics, liberals and social democrats engaged in genuine dialogue, united above all by a common concern for the defence of human rights and for the autonomy of society from the totalitarian state. The Polish Workers' Defence Committee (KOR) set up in 1976, the Charter 77 movement in Czechoslovakia or similar initiatives among the Hungarian democratic opposition testified to the changing role of dissent. Adam Michnik's 'new evolutionism' and Vaclav Havel's 'power of the powerless' provided the intellectual framework of this new approach: from the (pseudo) politics of reform from within the Party-state to the 'anti-politics' of the self-emancipation of civil society.

Yet that very process, which the intellectuals so ardently desired, may also help bring about their demise or at least leave them with a more marginal role in society. Different aspects of this trend are revealed in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

In Poland, where civil society is strongest, the role of the dissident intellectual has been challenged in the 1980s from two sources: Solidarity and the Church. Aleksander Smolar has fittingly described the mixed feelings of the intellectuals during what Michnik called 'sixteen months of carnival':

> Paradoxically, for the intellectuals, the rise of Solidarity – this great achievement also of intellectuals – signified a sort of second fall. This time it was not a moral fall; it did not mean betrayal of their vocation or of national obligations. But after being demoted by Communist power at the beginning of its rule, they were now dethroned by the new worker elite. The names of the new national heroes and leaders were unknown only a day before: Lech Walesa, Zbigniew Bujak, Wladyslaw Frasyniuk, Anna Walentynowicz. They became moral, social and political authorities for millions of Poles.

Paradoxically, Smolar adds with a touch of irony, it was General Jaruzelski's crackdown on Solidarity in December 1981 which also marked the opposing intellectuals' 'comeback on the historical stage'.

Yet by that time the 'stage' was already occupied by another 'organic intellectual', the Catholic Church. In the aftermath of the defeat of Solidarity, as often in the past, the Church appeared to many as the ultimate rampart against totalitarianism. And the Church indeed provided consolation and a home for retreat. The defeat of society coincided with the spiritual triumph of the Catholic Church. The Church so effectively provided a shelter for alternative cultural

activities that there is virtually no space left now between Church and State. As Marcin Krol put it: 'To be independent of the state is in a sense easier than to be independent of the Church.' Is there not a danger, as some already suggest, of a tacit duopoly in Poland between a totalitarian Party-state and the Church's hegemony in society? And if so, what does that imply for the Polish intellectual? He strove for forty years to make Polish culture independent from the state, but how independent is he now of the Catholic Church? Is there not a danger of a second 'betrayal of the clerks' as they abandon, once again, the intellectual's independence and identity?

Such provocative questions were asked by Adam Michnik, as if to dispel the very anxieties they reveal, in front of a packed audience in a Dominican church in Cracow. Michnik, after all, is perhaps the best qualified to discuss them. His essay 'The Church, The Left and Dialogue' in the mid-1970s had considerable influence in bringing about the convergence between the hitherto hostile traditions of the lay left and the Catholic Church. Such a convergence around the values of truth, human dignity and the defence of human rights is possible, Michnik argued, because under Communism it is precisely the Church that helped to preserve them in society. The Church in a way had to remain traditionalist, even obscurantist, to insulate the Polish people from spiritual Sovietization. But today Communist ideology is bankrupt and can hardly be presented as a major challenge. Rather, the triumph of the Church is such that questions can be asked about its likely effects on the pluralism of Polish culture, particularly the place of its lay, independent, free-thinking component. Michnik identified these two traditions with the names of Cardinal Wyszynski and Witold Gombrowicz:

> That which is valuable in contemporary Polish culture arose at the crossing of its great historical paths. At the meeting of the Christian spirit with the free-thinking spirit, competing with each other and mutually enriching each other. . . . We, unhumble Polish intellectuals, live between the prayer of Cardinal Wyszynski and the raillery of Gombrowicz, between the truth of the chaplain and the truth of the jester. Both are necessary to us because each of them in its own way teaches us efficiency and humility.

It is not easy to plead for pluralism and independence when the logic of a totalitarian system has stressed the primacy of the unity of the nation's spiritual resistance, its need to be identified with one institution. Yet this is what Adam Michnik, the most committed and independent of Polish intellectuals, calls for:

> Be then devout, unhumble intellectual, but don't renounce scepticism in a world of political commitments; member of an anti-totalitarian community, protect your homelessness; while preserving faithfulness to your national roots, nurse your permanent uprootedness; into a world of shattered moral norms, carry the simplicity of evangelical injunctions, and fill the smooth world of officially codified values with the laughter of a jester and the doubting of a libertine. For your destiny is neither to celebrate political victory nor to flatter your own nation.

Hungary's equivalent of a civil society is the 'second economy'. Whereas in Poland the social movements of the past, and the Church, are powerful promoters of cohesion in society, the Hungarian 'second society' is atomized. The economic crisis has given it greater autonomy, but it has also revealed its inner divisions and tensions. This puts the opposing intellectual in a difficult position. It is not easy to be a spokesman for an atomized society. Only nationalism could provide such a possibility, as the populists are well aware. But for the 'urbanist' of the democratic opposition, the spectre of anti-Semitism prevents this from being an option.

In October 1987 a gathering of Hungarian intellectuals (writers, economists, historians, philosophers) hired a boat for a trip down the Danube. The topic was 'The Present Crisis: Prospects for the Future'. Khrushchev's advice, to ensure the future of Communism in Hungary, would probably have been to sink that boat. As it turned out, the 'boat of the future' was a symbolic goodbye to the Kadar era and to the 'prophetic' role of the dissident intellectual.

> For how many years have we been afraid [asked György Konrad], for how many years have we been speaking quietly among ourselves? I am sorry, friends, but I was getting tired of this extended state of being underage. We've created the aesthetics of the 'how to remain a little boy, even with grey hair, even bald'. There is a crisis? Great! The town is becoming interesting. There is something in the air. The midwives are busy. A condition wants to be over. A time of Chroniclers. What is it that wants to be born? A new paradigm. The 'homo étaticus' opens like a wardrobe, and out steps the citizen! The normal citizen, come of age, who considers what he says and says what he thinks. He doesn't ask permission for free-thinking. Here we are, socialist citizens, Central Europeans. Marginal society on the margins of East and West. And for that reason drawing from both experiences.

After years of *embourgeoisement* the current economic and political crisis reveals a society in a state of flux. What sociologists describe as its atomization has also brought about a new individualism. Making money can be despised by intellectuals as an unhealthy obsession with consumerism, but the new 'burgher' (bourgeois/citizen) will now demand rights. Maybe the intellectual opposition as a community will become less important in an age of rampant individualism, but both the old intellectual and the new bourgeois will help recreate a civil society of citizens, emancipated from the paternalistic state.

Such an optimistic view of the crisis is challenged by Janos Kis, a philosopher and a leading figure of the democratic opposition. Whatever its initial merits, he argued, Konrad's 'anti-politics', or the moral superiority of 'anti-politics' over the 'filthy business' of politics, is hardly relevant in times of crisis. The idea of a convergence – the writer free from censorship and the entrepreneur free from bureaucracy, a mixture of economic individualism and ethical elitism – can hardly help a society to define what to think or how to act. The scale of the present crisis heralds the return of 'real' politics, of competing forces and answers to overcome it.

The return of the individualistic citizen and the return of 'real' politics may not be mutually exclusive. But both will challenge the role of the intellectual as a surrogate spokesman for society.

Czechoslovakia is a third case where the role of the intellectual has been altered, this time through isolation. After 1968 the intellectuals who had been the moving force behind the Prague Spring became the prime target of the repression that followed. For the Czech intellectual (the situation was somewhat different in Slovakia) this marked a shift from power to society, from politics to 'anti-politics'. The dissident intellectuals became a moral counter-power, partaking of Havel's 'power of the powerless'. In the words of Jan Vladislav:

> Even if they do not strive directly for power in the community, in a sense they have it regardless. It is a power of a particular kind. In general it operates outside the established power structures, which is probably one of the main reasons why the powerful consider this kind of power so dangerous though its resources consist exclusively of words and ideas.

The politics of counter-culture and the ethics of spiritual resistance have created in Czechoslovakia a strong sense of a dissident

community. They also account, at least in part, for its relative isolation.

The emergence in January 1977 of the Charter 77 human rights movement has created a new situation for the Czech intellectual: he has moved from autonomy to defiance of power. Vaclav Černý described the Charter as 'a milestone in the cultural development of the nation, a moment in the history of Czech spirit, restoring the moral backbone, reviving the feeling for law, justice, human dignity and the will for truth. It was a warning and a reminder to power-holders, all of them, everywhere.'

It was undoubtedly the philosopher Jan Patočka who became the *spiritus movens* in the shift from politics to the ethics of resistance. In attempting to define the nature of Charter 77 he stated:

> No society, no matter how good its technological foundations, can function without a moral foundation, without conviction that has nothing to do with opportunism, circumstances and expected advantage. Morality, however, does not just allow society to function, it simply allows human beings to be human. Man does not define morality according to the caprice of his needs, wishes, tendencies and cravings; it is morality that defines man.... The aforementioned relationship between the realms of morality and the state power indicate that Charter 77 is not a political act in the narrow sense, that it is not a matter of competing with or interfering in the sphere of any function of political power. Nor is Charter 77 an association or an organization. It is based on personal morality. It is aimed exclusively at cleansing and reinforcing the awareness that a higher authority does exist.

Jan Patočka, the first spokesman of the Charter, died after eight hours of police interrogation. The Husak regime's hysterical campaign against the Charter if anything reinforced the notion that the totalitarian challenge was above all a moral one. This accounted for the strength and the appeal of the intellectuals' ethics of resistance, but it also accounted for some of its limitations. As historian Petr Pithart observed, in the face of power, which is obsessed only with self-preservation, the opposing intellectual obtains, almost by default, a monopoly on truth. By the same token he must be aware of the dangers of confinement in a virtuous ghetto existence. Are the dissidents an isolated elite or the tip of the iceberg?

The Catholic philosopher Vaclav Benda was in 1978 the first to suggest the extension of ethical resistance to the creation of parallel structures: the assertion of the responsibility of each individual for

the fate of society became rather the command to create an alternative society, a 'parallel polis'. The thinking was close to Michnik's 'new evolutionism', but the process of self-organization in civil society did not follow the Polish pattern, remaining confined to the cultural sphere. The passivity of an atomized society, the absence of independent institutions playing the part of the Polish Church, the intellectuals' preoccupation with a threatened European cultural identity rather than with the more mobilizing powers of nationalism, mark important differences between the Czech and Polish intellectuals' attempts to establish ties with their society over the last decade. The Czech intellectual did not manage to reach out to society the way his Polish counterpart did. But then, nor did he have to 'compete' for moral authority with the Church or with Solidarity.

The independent intellectual feels left out of the tacit social contract between a totalitarian power and a consumer-oriented society on which 'normalization' rests. Respected, even admired by the society for his courage to 'live in truth' (which it does not have), feared by the powers-that-be for relentlessly exposing their illegitimacy, the Czech intellectual's cultural and moral substitutes for politics place him in a difficult yet in many ways gratifying position: he holds the symbolic power of the written word and of moral defiance. Virtuous and isolated, he sometimes wishes to be relieved of his role as the 'conscience of the nation' and to be, once again, 'just a writer'. Vaclav Havel's play *Largo Desolato* is a moving depiction of the intellectual over-burdened with demands from society, tired of his role as the professional supplier of hope.

Yet he cannot escape that role because it is, after all, his destiny as an intellectual. Havel, who after the death of Jan Patočka became the pivotal figure of Czech spiritual resistance, speaks of 'the tragedy of fate stemming from responsibility; the futility of all human endeavours to break out of the role that responsibility has imposed; responsibility as destiny'.

9 Beyond Failed Totalitarianism

Wherever there is tyranny
Tyranny there is
Not just in the muzzles of rifles
Not just in the prisons

Wherever there is tyranny
Everyone is a link in the chain
You are enmeshed in corruption
You too are tyranny

(Gyula Illyes, *A Sentence on Tyranny*, 1952)

The concept of totalitarianism has been fraught with paradox and misunderstandings in East–West communication. At a time when the countries of East-Central Europe were being incorporated in the Soviet bloc and were experiencing the 'pure' totalitarianism of the Stalinist era, they were, for obvious reasons, absent from the debate on the concept taking place in the West. Conversely, twenty years later, when the concept had been virtually banished from Western Sovietology as an unscientific product of the Cold War, it was reappropriated by all the independent thinkers in East-Central Europe. The watershed year 1968 marked a political parting of the ways and was the catalyst which set the concept of totalitarianism on a separate course, East and West. In the West, 1968 marked the dawning of détente, which profoundly affected the way in which politicians, academics and journalists assessed the nature of the Communist system. For the intellectuals of the Other Europe the Soviet tanks in Prague were seen as final evidence of the failure of reform from within and of the existence of a permanent 'totalitarian' core at the heart of the Communist system. Consequently, in examining the journey followed by the concept of totalitarianism, one must take into account the various attempts of the Central European intellectuals to make sense of the experience of their societies over the last forty years and the extent to which they affected, or were influenced by, West European perceptions of their predicament.

In the early days of Stalinism when a large number of leading intellectuals were engaged in providing the new Sovietized political system with legitimacy, while many others were silenced in the gulag or completely marginalized, independent ideas about the new regime of the 'radiant future' were confined to private diaries. Jiri Kolar's 1949 diary, now published under the title of *Eyewitness*, is a powerful testimony to an individual's spiritual resistance in the midst of surrounding 'total mobilization'. In the circumstances, East European involvement in the debate on totalitarianism could only be indirect, via such émigré authors as Czeslaw Milosz. In his *Captive Mind*, Milosz provided one of the most original insights into the subjugation of intellectuals by a totalitarian ideology, by what he called the 'new faith' from the East.

The poems of Gyula Illyes in Budapest, of Jiri Kolar in Prague or Zbigniew Herbert in Warsaw show that not all the intellectuals in the Other Europe swallowed the 'murtibing' pill Milosz spoke about, the pill that converts one to 'the new faith from the East'. They provided – with a lucidity never since equalled – remarkable insights into the nature of totalitarianism. Their writings point to another feature of attempts to define the totalitarian phenomenon: originally they tended to be literary and philosophical rather than political. In the West the concept had first assumed literary form through Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, whose publication was followed by Hannah Arendt's classic work of political philosophy. Only after Orwell and Arendt was it systematized by political science.

Although the same sequence of literature–philosophy–politics can be discerned in both West and East, in the former it was condensed into the span of a few short years, while in the latter it has extended over three decades. There are a number of reasons for this. First, as soon as it appeared, and in spite of its limited circulation behind the Iron Curtain, Orwell's novel had a real impact in the intellectual circles there, whereas Western political science had a much delayed effect. East European intellectuals were not to come across Western political writings on the subject until the period of de-Stalinization, which naturally meant that they were more preoccupied with change from within the system rather than with totalitarian obstacles to change. In other words, between 1956 and 1968 they were keener to disprove the concept, reject it as outdated. Only after the crushing

of the Prague Spring of 1968 did the word 'totalitarianism' make a fresh appearance among what became known as dissident circles.

This reappropriation of the concept by unofficial political thought in Central Europe has taken place on different levels. In the first place the word 'totalitarianism' or the adjective 'totalitarian' have become common parlance. A sociological survey of corruption conducted in post-Solidarity Poland (carried out by Kicinski in 1983) revealed that a majority of those polled considered the political system as its main cause. The most frequent responses encountered were 'the concentration of power in the hands of a few' and 'the lack of democracy, making control by society impossible', but there was also 'the system of totalitarian rule' and 'the nomenklatura'.

Secondly, the term has become the common denominator of dissident political writing. A recent instance of that – one which reveals how much the concept has taken different paths in Eastern and Western Europe – is the difference in the role played by references to totalitarianism in discussions about disarmament between Western peace movements and a major section of East European dissident opinion. Their disagreement can be summed up by saying that, in the eyes of many dissidents, Western pacifists tend to focus their attention on the manifestations of military threat, i.e. upon the stockpiling of nuclear weapons; for their part the 'dissidents' prefer to stress the roots of conflict, which they perceive as stemming from the logic of a totalitarian system which risks transforming the internal 'state of war' into an external one.

In the wake of 1968, political scientists in their approach to the Communist system took into account not only the concept of totalitarianism, but also the new realities of the Brezhnev era. The failed or interrupted revolutions of Budapest in 1956, of the 1968 Prague Spring, or of Solidarity in Poland in 1980–1 forced a double conclusion: that totalitarianism is no longer what it used to be, and that the Party-state hold over society has changed since the Stalin era. Those three great struggles (not to mention other minor ones) are proof that the system is far from static, and that its stability is extremely precarious. On the other hand, those three very different attempts to confront, dissolve and then neutralize the 'totalitarian core' of the system all came to grief, which has prompted dissident political writers to reconsider the concept of totalitarianism in the light of the constants as well as the realities of the Communist system.

The way the concept of totalitarianism is employed in the Other Europe also depends very much on circumstances, and on what might be described as 'the possible future', as it is perceived at a

given point in time. Although it is an oversimplification, one is tempted to say that the concept of totalitarianism does not feature prominently in political vocabulary when there is a hope of change on the horizon. Conversely, the expression makes a comeback when the prospect of overcoming the Yalta legacy seems to have been postponed until doomsday. But here one should be careful not to over-generalize: Polish political discourse of the 1970s and 1980s referred to totalitarianism at the same time as it was preoccupied with the idea of transforming the relationship between state and society.

It is this interaction between the realities of Soviet-style Communism and their analysis by independent thinkers drawing on the different experiences of their countries that lies at the centre of the following effort to trace the course taken by the concept of totalitarianism in Eastern Europe. It is possible to speak of two major phases which correspond to two attitudes towards the concept of totalitarianism: the first, corresponding roughly to the period of de-Stalinization (1956–68), could be called the East European contribution to efforts to demolish the concept; the second, sparked off by the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 and 'consolidated' by the establishment, in December 1981, of martial law in Poland, has taken the form of an original effort to redefine the concept of totalitarianism, its sources, its means of social control and its present crisis. It remains to be seen whether the Gorbachev era will inspire a reappraisal of the totalitarian phenomenon.

Totalitarianism Redefined

The events of 1968 represent the zenith of both Communist 'reformism' and the challenge to the concept of totalitarianism. But the crushing of reform and, more generally, the ensuing period of conservative restoration throughout the Soviet bloc were perceived as the defeat of the very idea of a fundamental reform of the system from within, and the ultimate proof of the impossibility of 'detotalizing totalitarianism' (Svitak). It also meant, according to Kolakowski, the 'clinical death' of Marxist revisionism in Eastern Europe. From that moment, Communism 'ceased to be an intellectual problem and became merely a question of power'. One is tempted to add: Communist ideology ceased to be an intellectual problem, whereas power became one.

The second, related aspect of this evolution is the progressive jettisoning of the concept of 'Stalinism', the jettisoning so dear to

the 'revisionist' Marxists of the 1960s in the East and the 'Eurocommunists' of the 1970s in the West. Solzhenitsyn is categorical on the subject: 'there never was any such thing as Stalinism (either as a doctrine, or as a path of national life, or as a state system).... Stalin was a very consistent and faithful – if also very untalented – heir to the spirit of Lenin's teaching.' The touchstone of Solzhenitsyn's argument is the gulag, the concentration-camp system whose origins go back to Lenin's time, and, most importantly, whose extent and central role in the system are what makes Communism akin to Nazism. Indeed, the bulk of writings by the survivors of the gulag, such as Solzhenitsyn, Evgenia Ginzburg, Varlam Shalamov and Anatoly Marchenko, makes the concentration-camp system and its links with Marxist–Leninist ideology the pivot of Communist totalitarianism.

It was within this new intellectual framework that the concept of totalitarianism surfaced once more, and subsequently became a common denominator in independent political thinking in Eastern Europe. This rediscovery of the concept (and realities) of totalitarianism was by no means a return to the American political science of the 1950s. It was a completely new attempt to redefine the concept in the light of the system's evolution and the new methods of Communist rule. One can distinguish two basic approaches, corresponding to two definitions of the concept of totalitarianism. The first of them – more literary and philosophical – attempts to discern the 'essence' of totalitarian rule. The second approach relies on political analysis in seeking to lay bare the new workings of totalitarian or 'post-totalitarian' rule; both approaches nevertheless converge in exploring the origins of the totalitarian phenomenon.

The Orwellian Heritage: The 'Institutionalized Lie'

Tell me what is your reading of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and I will tell you who you are. The Orwellian year of 1984 has brought from East and West a new spate of very contrasting interpretations of the famous novel.

One example among many. In 1984 an *Orwell Kalender* was published in West Germany with contributions from leading writers depicting the slow slide of Western societies into something supposedly resembling an Orwellian world of television screens, nuclear weapons and environmental destruction. Cases of people being sacked from their jobs for political reasons were mentioned as further evidence. In order to illustrate Orwell's insight into the superpowers

(Oceania and Eurasia) waging wars by proxy, *Der Orwell Kalender* gave a detailed chronology of conflicts since 1945, including a long list of US involvement in Central and Latin America and even, curiously, the 1969 'football war' between El Salvador and Honduras. No mention, however, was made of the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia or of 'martial law' in Poland.

The same year another Orwell calendar was published in Warsaw by the NOWA independent publishers. Under each month it lists appropriate anniversaries which leave no doubt whatsoever of the real identity of Big Brother (and its totalitarian alter ego Little Brother): '2 April 1948. The Big Brother starts blockade of a city soon to be surrounded by a Wall'; '3–6 August 1940. The Big Brother swallows up his three little neighbours' (the Baltic Republics): '1 September 1939. Little Brother marches eastwards.' '17 September 1939. Big Brother marches westwards and together they swallow up their common neighbour' (Poland).

The two calendars (and one could give many other similar examples) point to the contrasting interpretations of Orwell and more generally to the totalitarian phenomenon in the two halves of Europe. In the West *Nineteen Eighty-Four* now tends to be read as a prophecy or a warning about the threat to open government stemming from the emergence of new technologies of communication and social control. In the lands of so-called 'real socialism' Orwell is read as an allegory, as a lucid and often incredibly accurate analysis of the nature of Communist rule. This duality might well be inherent in the ambiguities of Orwell's novel, which would also account for its universal success. But the contrasting ways in which the novel is read in the two Europes reveal different perceptions and assumptions about the totalitarian phenomenon. They also point to some of the difficulties of East–West intellectual communication.

> Many have read Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, but few have a knowledge of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Because of the difficulties in obtaining the book and the risk faced by anyone possessing it, it is only known to a handful of members of the 'Inner Party'. These privileged individuals are fascinated by Orwell's Swiftian manner of observing details so familiar to them. It is impossible to employ such a style in the countries of the New Faith because allegory, being by nature capable of several interpretations, would run counter to the precepts of socialist realism and the requirements of the censor.

This observation by Czeslaw Milosz in 1952 deserves to be 'up-

dated'. First, it is difficult these days to overestimate the profound impact that Orwell's novel has had on the intellectuals of East-Central Europe. It is one of the great post-war literary works that have marked a whole generation. The book escaped from the sanctum of the 'Inner Party', to which Milosz refers, and has been widely distributed in *samizdat* form. Orwell's readers have recognized themselves in this book, which, in the countries of 'existing socialism', is regarded not solely as a work of science fiction but as a description – a precise and pertinent one at that – of their reality. Intellectuals of the Other Europe read *Nineteen Eighty-Four* with the same feelings as Winston Smith on discovering the key to the system in Goldstein's book: they discover 'what they knew already'.

The Czech philosopher Milan Simecka describes movingly his identification with Orwell's hero: 'Like Winston, I had grown up in a totalitarian system, had never been elsewhere, lacked all knowledge of the past, the present, not to speak of the future. In a way too I was an employee of the Ministry of Truth and lived in the thrall of its ideology. Just like Winston, I knew only too well how lies were manufactured....' Simecka says he felt 'invariably stunned when, again and again, I would come across situations in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* resembling my own, events and experiences which were so like those I had seen only the day before'. Those who, like Simecka, 'have lived through the "victories" and defeats of real socialism, are struck when reading *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, by the many astounding similarities, until the London of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* becomes willynilly synonymous with home'. When he finished Orwell's novel, Simecka says, 'the book lay in front of me, I looked at its last page, and I think my hands shook a little. I had an incommunicable feeling of identification, and the feeling would not be chased away even outside in the sun. I was alone with my comrade Winston Smith, and we both knew what it was all about.'

Not surprisingly, an Orwellian or Swiftian literary genre, well suited to describing and interpreting the Communist system, has evolved over the past decade, the masterpieces of the genre being Tadeusz Konwicki's *Minor Apocalypse* and Alexander Zinoviev's *Yawning Heights*.

'Mendacity is the immortal soul of Communism,' said Leszek Kolakowski. This sums up what it is that constitutes the essence of the totalitarian system in the view of Central European intellectuals: the primacy of ideology as the institutionalized lie. The Orwellian theme of 'the lie' and resistance to it (or 'living in truth' as Havel put it) is the point of departure for the reconstitution of independent political thinking in the Soviet bloc countries.

Kolakowski provides the most lucid explanation of the lie's function in the totalitarian system. By systematically destroying historical memory and manipulating all information, the totalitarian regime destroys the basic criterion of truth. Since truth changes in accordance with the needs of the rulers, a lie can become the truth, or rather the notion of truth disappears: 'This is the great cognitive triumph of totalitarianism. By managing to abrogate the very idea of truth, it can no longer be accused of lying.'

In other words, we are not talking about the 'white lies' or half-truths in which politicians in all possible political systems indulge. We are talking about the Lie with a capital L, which constitutes the foundation of a political system, what Kolakowski calls a 'new civilization'.

Defined in this way, the totalitarian lie rests on double pillars: the destruction of memory, and totalitarian language. Consciousness is impossible without memory. And the destruction of the past and of historical memory is precisely at the heart of the totalitarian endeavour: 'A people whose memory – either individual or collective – has been nationalized and passed into state hands, and is therefore perfectly malleable and manipulable, are entirely at the mercy of their rulers; they have been robbed of their identity' (Kolakowski). Under the 'regime of oblivion', any attempt, however limited, to preserve one's memory and hence one's freedom to think represents, according to Simecka, 'an act of self-preservation, and self-defence in the face of total disintegration, as well as an assertion of human dignity. Nowhere in the world does history have such importance as in Eastern Europe.' In Milan Kundera's words: 'The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.'

Needless to say, the totalitarian power's manipulation of history is enforced in the name of history, since the regimes claim to be the embodiment of historical necessity. In Vaclav Havel's words: 'It began with an interpretation of history from a single aspect of it; then it made that aspect absolute and finally it reduced all history to it. The existing multiplicity of history was replaced with an easily understood interaction of "historical laws", "social formations" and "relations of production", so pleasing to the order-loving eye of the scientist.'

The destruction of history as memory goes hand in hand with the replacement of actual events, 'stories' that constitute history, by a timeless succession of preordained rituals. In a 1987 essay Havel describes the 'normalization' period in Czechoslovakia as a 'cessation of history':

> History was replaced by pseudo-history, by a calendar of rhythmically recurring anniversaries, congresses, celebrations and mass gymnastic events; in other words by precisely the kind of artificial activity that is not an open-ended play of agents confronting one another but a one-dimensional, transparent and utterly predictable self-manifestation (and self-celebration) of a single, central agent of truth and power.

Czeslaw Milosz subtitled his *Captive Mind* an 'Essay on the People's Logocracies'. While the conquest of power could be achieved through 'the barrel of a gun', the maintenance of power is achieved through the 'muzzle of language'. This key idea of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* – that totalitarian power cannot be maintained without a totalitarian language which is not solely the vehicle of the state ideology but is above all intended to prevent the emergence of 'heretical' ideas – has been taken up again by dissident intellectuals in Russia and East-Central Europe alike. And rightly so. Indeed, the historian Michel Heller has convincingly shown this Orwellian heritage through official Soviet reference books, which exemplify the concept of discourse and language current in the Soviet system.

The aim, according to Heller, is to 'confer a political nuance on all words', in line with the regime's goal of 'politicizing all areas of life'. Looked at in this way, Soviet Communism would appear to be a 'linguistic dictatorship' by the MacLuhan method (the 'medium is the message'): 'the state has rationalized language and the means of information; it has become both the medium and the message; its subject of discourse is itself. It declares that the state is the most important thing of all, of which the citizens are no more than minuscule parts. Hence power must be maintained. Earlier ideologies admitted discussion. In contrast, this magnificent technology of power – the rationalization of the vocabulary – prevents any response.' This is not solely a theoretical model but, as Milan Simecka points out, 'a process which is already so far advanced in Eastern Europe that it truly threatens to destroy the capacity of a defenceless population freely to articulate a non-official evaluation of political, social and economic realities'.

How can this vision of a totalitarian 'logocracy' be reconciled with what has been said about the bankruptcy of the official ideology? The answer is to be found in the notion of the 'existential lie', which is quite distinct from conscious (or even enthusiastic) support for the ruling ideology. Indeed, in the present situation, according to Vaclav Havel, 'one need not believe all these mystifications, but one must behave as if one did, or at least put up with them tacitly, or get along with those who use them. But this means living within a lie. One is not required to believe the lie; it is enough to accept life with it and within it. In so doing one confirms the system, gives it meaning, creates it ... and merges with it.' Looked at this way, it is irrelevant whether, in terms of 'effectiveness', the official propaganda receives conscious support or merely arouses more or less cynical indifference. Most importantly, the institutionalized lie is an impersonal one. One can live in the lie without being taken for a 'liar'. 'The impersonal lie and the impersonal murder are two forms of the political art that the totalitarian states have brought to perfection' (Fidelius).

From Social Control to 'Social Contract'

Western political science in the 1950s (especially the classic work of Friedrich and Brzezinski) defined totalitarianism by a set of criteria which included the presence of a charismatic leader, mass terror, the 'permanent purge' and ideological mobilization. These criteria were superseded not only by Khrushchevian (or now Gorbachevian) reformism, but also by the conservatism of the Brezhnev era. Instead of rejecting out of hand the concept of totalitarianism in favour of others, borrowed either from the study of Western political systems (such as interest groups, political participation), or from theories of 'modernization', independent political thinkers in East-Central Europe have redefined it in the light of their experience of the past twenty-five years. These analyses tend to stress the new machinery of social control: an evolution of the means of power, rather than of its nature. Among these studies one should also distinguish between the more theoretical approaches, such as those of Zinoviev and Mlynar, which seek to supply a coherent explanation of the relative non-violence of social control, and the analytical approaches which try, by observing closely the realities of the 'normalization' process, to discern how a model of 'totalitarian normality' functions in practice, so as to bring out both the factors of its stability and its current changes.

The theoretical trajectory of Zdenek Mlynar (an 'official' Czech politologist turned Politburo member in 1968, turned 'dissident' and forced into exile in the 1970s) provides a good illustration of the time-lag between Eastern and Western thinking on totalitarianism. At the very moment in the 1970s when Western Sovietology was coming to accept Mlynar's ideas from the 1960s about how a 'limited pluralism' and the existence of interest groups could be insti-

tutionalized, the Czech author himself – by then a signatory of Charter 77 – was discovering the merits of the concept of totalitarianism, which he considers to be the most 'adequate' interpretation of the Communist system. And irony of ironies, in order to (re)discover and reformulate the concept, and rid it of certain outdated parameters, Mlynar invokes cybernetics and the concepts of power elaborated by another political scientist, Prague-born Karl Deutsch. The latter, at a celebrated symposium organized in 1953 by the American Academy of Sciences, asserted the inevitability of the centrifugal dynamics which would eventually strike at the very heart of the Communist system. Now Mlynar has redefined totalitarianism precisely by taking as a starting point Deutsch's definition of power:

> By power we mean the ability of an individual or an organization to impose extrapolations or projections of their inner structure upon their environment. In simple language, to have power means not to have to give in, and to force the environment or the other person to do so. Power in this narrow sense is the priority of output over intake, the ability to talk instead of listen. In a sense, it is the ability to afford not to learn.

In terms of this definition, says Mlynar, totalitarian power is able, in all spheres of activity and in relation to all 'subjects' (social groups, economic agents, citizens), 'to impose the extrapolation or projection of its internal structure'. The chief characteristic of totalitarianism is its continuing capacity to limit all scope for independent action in every possible sphere of social activity. In other words, it has nothing to do with the degree of violence or terror employed. Power remains 'totalitarian' even when the forms of repression are less visible (albeit still virtually present). One could go so far as to say that a system becomes truly totalitarian only when the 'terrorist' phase is completed, i.e. when all the subjects have lost their autonomy and capacity for self-government (the opportunity to change objectives, behaviour, etc.). Consequently, it is not a matter of interpreting the limitation of autonomy solely in terms of legal or penal constraints; it must always be interpreted also in the 'cybernetic' sense with which Deutsch invests it:

> A society or community that is to steer itself must continue to receive a full flow of three kinds of information: first, information about the world outside; second, information from the past, with a wide range of recall and recombination; and third, information about itself and its own parts. Let any one of these streams be long interrupted, such as by oppression or secrecy, and the society becomes an automaton, a walking corpse.

Autonomy is thus limited by the fact that those in power tend to control all these sources and circuits of information. In Mlynar's view, it is possible to talk of totalitarianism in those cases where the only contact that the overwhelming majority of the population is able to have with other subjects or the outside world is through those circuits controlled by the regime (which is consequently able to determine the nature and extent of that information).

Through his reflections on the relationship between memory and autonomy, Mlynar renews the theme dear to Orwell (and now Kundera) of the erosion of memory as the permanent goal of totalitarian power. In this respect, ideology continues to be the mainstay of the 'real socialist' countries by creating a system based on the 'jamming' of information and memory. Hence all the talk of the revolutionary break with the past, the 'New Age', the 'new community of socialist nations', the 'new social forces' and, last but not least, the 'New Man'. The ultimate logic of totalitarianism would be the instrumentalization of all components of society as a consequence of its lost autonomy. What Mlynar proposed was no more than a model, and he is the first to admit that in reality there is a whole range of situations as well as of possibilities for future developments. The main thing is to discover the 'threshold ' at which autonomy is lost in order to provide a definition of a totalitarian situation. Thus, as soon as one moves from the theoretical model to the analysis of reality, the concept of totalitarianism gives way to notions such as 'totalitarian situations' or an 'underlying trend towards totalitarianism'.

Alexander Zinoviev has gone furthest towards constructing a theoretical model explaining the mechanisms of non-violent social control and the stability of the Soviet system. In fact, he rejects the very concept of totalitarianism because, in his view, it overemphasizes the similarities between the terrorist methods of wielding power employed by Nazism and Stalinism. Such apparent similarities apply solely to the installation phases of those regimes; consequently, the concept of totalitarianism ignores the specific features of the Communist phenomenon. Zinoviev regards Nazism as essentially violence 'from above', whereas Communism, in its mature phase, is 'totalitarianism from below'. In contrast to Solzhenitsyn, who regards the concentration-camp system as the incarnation of Communism's true nature – a yoke foisted on people from outside – Zinoviev sees the camps at most as an epiphenomenon and regards

Communist society as the culmination of 'mankind's natural, inherent' activity. Communism as a form of social organization corresponds, according to this interpretation, to a natural phenomenon in the history of mankind, which he calls the communal spirit; it is a system in which the usual counterbalances or safeguards of community life (law, morality, religion, etc.), that is, 'civilization', are suppressed.

Taking up a position somewhere between Hobbes and Henri Laborit, Zinoviev sums up the essence of communalism in the phrase: 'Man is wolfish towards Man.' The key component of the system is the 'cell', by means of which the individual is slotted into society. This cell (the factory, the state farm, the institute, etc.) constitutes the microstructure whose salient features are reproduced at the level of the state macrostructure. In other words, in contrast with the dominant theories in Central Europe which present totalitarianism as a conflict between the Party-state and a fragmenting society, Zinoviev regards the Communist state as a reflection of a communalist society whose cell is the key reproductive link and the chosen place for the formation of the 'New Man', *homo sovieticus*. This view ultimately leads to the conclusion that every action, whether individual or collective, must necessarily be 'manipulated', even when it is directed against the regime. From such a standpoint, resistance becomes meaningless, since everything is programmed or manipulated. Thus, however original Zinoviev's idea of regarding Communism as a social rather than a political system, and however much he puts his finger, even hyperbolically, on one of the major sources of the system's stability, his *homo sovieticus* nevertheless borders on caricature, and is in sharp contrast to the analyses of 'Communism as reality' coming out of Central Europe.

The Contours of Totalitarian Power

What, then, are the contours of totalitarian power in its post-ideological and post-terrorist phase? The 'polymorphous Party' is the sole autonomous organization in a system in which all other institutions of state and society are subordinated to it. The Party ensures the monopoly of use of the state apparat and thereby all organized forms of social life. This subordination of state to Party operates by means of the nomenklatura, which ensures the Party's control over key posts in the state's administration. This unified and unifying Party can, occasionally, diverge from the political line formulated in Moscow but may never abdicate its monopoly of power. Any failure on this point (as in Czechoslovakia in 1968) calls for a massive purge. There is always a new 'vanguard' waiting in the wings.

For the benefit of Western observers, unimpressed by the quiet, boring façade of everyday life, Vaclav Havel attempted to explain why Czechoslovakia is not a poorer and duller version of Switzerland:

> Almost every day I am struck by the ambiguity of this social quiescence, which is essentially only the visible expression of an invisible war between the totalitarian system and life itself. It is not true therefore to say that our country is free of warfare and murder. The war and the killing merely assume a different form: they have been shifted from the sphere of observable social events to the twilight of an unobservable inner destruction . . .; the slow, secretive, bloodless, never quite absolute yet horrifying ever-present death of 'non-action', 'non-story', 'non-life' and 'non-time'; the strange collective deadening – or more precisely anaesthetizing – of social and historical nihilization.

'Civilized violence', as Simecka calls it, has replaced the arbitrary terrorist violence of the Stalin era. It is harassment rather than physical terror, selective non-bloody repression. The police and judiciary make a show of respecting the regulations in force and prefer interrogations during office hours to those at three o'clock in the morning. This change is perfectly illustrated by the role of the 'confession' in the functioning of the Communist system, as analysed by historian Karel Bartosek. Defining the confession as the 'total submission of the individual to the lie and the agents of the lie', Bartosek traces the development from the 'big confessions' of the 1950s show-trials to the 'petty confessions' of 'normalization' in the 1970s. The 'big confessions' of the show-trials had a deterrent function *vis-à-vis* the population, who had to take part in institutionalizing the lie in the course of campaigns in which the media whipped up a climate of hysteria. By contrast, the 'petty confession' method exacts submission to the lie from the population by means of purges, screening and 'loyalty oaths', as in Poland during martial law. The goal is to create 'complicity' with the system, and to smash the individual as the 'last step in the subjugation of civil society'.

Although violent methods and the use of tanks prove necessary in times of open crisis, the Communist regime possesses other, no less effective means of atomizing society. The system of 'petty confessions' is able to function only because the state is the sole employer. Simecka provides a remarkable definition of this system:

> The totalitarian state has far more powerful weapons at its disposal [than violence]: all citizens are its employees and it is no problem to shift them up or down a scale of incentives – rewarding the good and punishing the bad. This capacity is a thoroughly modern weapon. It has worked well, because it was brought into play only when existing socialism, in its infrastructures, most resembled a consumer society, i.e. when it had something to reward or punish with.

Not only did this recipe prove particularly effective in the period of 'normalization', but it in fact represents the very basis of the Communist system in its post-terrorist phase. Since employment of labour is the pre-eminent instrument of social control, the workplace, as Peter Kende points out, is 'the prime location for the regimentation of Sovietized societies'. Within this system, police repression is replaced by the personnel office, the police officer by the personnel officer. Hungary, which enjoys the reputation of being 'different' from other Communist countries, is a past master in the use of more sophisticated methods of repression and social control.

From social control it is a short step to an implicit 'social contract' between the state and the citizen: the citizens 'adapt themselves' by giving up their individual rights (civil liberties) and collective rights (freedom of association), and receive in exchange job security and a slowly – though fairly steadily – rising standard of living. The advent of the consumer society has reinforced this 'contract' which has been in gestation since the 1960s. According to Simecka, the contract 'is a far more reliable guarantee of order in the state than all those expensive and ever-expanding organs of surveillance. The essential condition for the functioning of this contract is the level of enjoyment the state permits its citizens in their private lives.' This system has been perfected since 1968 with the creation of a (small) 'army of unemployed', i.e. dissident intellectuals. The 'new social contract' in fact requires the intellectuals to submit to censorship, in other words to renounce their function as intellectuals. But, even here, things have greatly changed since the 1950s. 'Under Stalin,' says György Konrad, 'censorship was both positive and aggressive, nowadays it is negative and defensive. Before, it used to tell you what to say. Now it advises you what not to say.... In a totalitarian situation, censorship cannot be formalized.' In the same way that the transition has been made from mass terror to 'civilized violence', totalitarianism now prefers internalized self-censorship to institutionalized censorship. The relative isolation of dissident intellectuals (except in periods of open crisis) would seem, in a way,

to confirm the effectiveness of these new techniques of totalitarian social control.

Totalitarianism or Authoritarianism?

Might not these new non-violent mechanisms of social control and the very emergence of dissidence since the 1970s in fact prove that it would be obsolete to speak in terms of totalitarianism?

Ideology which was once – with terror – the pillar of the system, has been reduced to a ritual, and over the past fifteen years Communist regimes have tended to seek legitimacy either through nationalism (Romania) or through economic measures (Hungary). This inevitably recalls the sort of values that, Juan Linz tells us, are espoused by right-wing 'authoritarian' regimes: nationalism, economic development, order. If one also takes into account the growing role of the military – particularly in Poland – one is tempted to see there the signs of an evolution from totalitarian to authoritarian/bureaucratic regimes. The latter display a 'very limited pluralism', do not have any precise ideology but instead exhibit a typical 'mentality' in which, according to Linz, 'a leader or a small group exercises power within formally ill-defined but perfectly predictable limits'. Interestingly, the two political scientists who seem closest to this position turn out to be Polish (one close to the regime, the other to the opposition). The first is Jerzy Wiatr: he formulated his idea of Polish-style 'authoritarianism' (or Bonapartism) on the eve of the military *coup d'état* in 1981; he was calling for 'a new political system' in which the army and the Church (as institutions enjoying legitimacy, representing the state and society respectively) would take the place of the Party and Solidarity, which were engaged in a suicidal confrontation. After the coup, Wiatr was appointed by General Jaruzelski to head the Institute of Marxism–Leninism, but was relieved of this post after the Soviets publicly denounced his views.

The other theory of the slide from 'totalitarianism' into 'authoritarianism' came from quite a different standpoint. In her book entitled *Poland's Self-Limiting Revolution*, Jadwiga Staniszkis analysed the dynamic of relations within a Communist regime, seeking 'a reduction from above of totalitarian domination' to prevent its happening 'from below'. It is in order to be better able to absorb this pressure from society that 'post-totalitarianism' resorts to a 'bandy-legged pluralism' or to the 'fragmentation' (horizontal and vertical) of state structures and a sort of 'corporatism' whose appar-

ent aim is that of 'borrowing from the Catholic Church its legitimacy'. The aftermath of the 13 December coup would seem to have put paid to the hypothesis of a slide towards an 'enlightened authoritarianism' having more in common with Pilsudski than Marx and Lenin, and practising a corporatism legitimized by the *modus vivendi* with the Church. With the 'restoration of order', one also saw the re-emergence of the Party and its (admittedly moribund) ideology. Poland perhaps illustrates a double failure: a 'failed totalitarianism', given that the Party can no longer claim to control all spheres of social life, and a 'failed authoritarianism' as well.

In the end, all these debates over whether or not the Communist systems deserve the authoritarian label hinge on the status of ideology. Is the Soviet system still 'utopia in power', as Heller and Nekritch maintain, or is it being transformed, as Castoriadis suggested, into a 'stratocracy' with nationalism taking the place of Marxism? Writers from East-Central Europe have made some very apposite contributions to this debate. Whereas none of them seems to discern an incipient 'stratocracy' in East-Central Europe, and although the plausibility of the phenomenon with respect to the Soviet Union is sometimes recognized (by Vajda, for example), most writers concur in the view that the ideology is in a state of decomposition. The 'radiant future' has given way to the 'cold utopia' (Simecka).

In the 'post-totalitarian' phase, ideology nonetheless remains not only the sole means of communication between the state and the citizen, but also, and perhaps above all, the chief means of homogenizing and integrating the ruling apparat. The upshot of this is a dichotomy in the system, which is 'totalitarian' inside the Party (clinging to an ideological legitimacy) and 'post-totalitarian' outside (with a mere ideological ritual).

No so-called 'totalitarian' system can achieve total control over society. It would be better, therefore, to talk of the system's totalitarian tendencies (anchored in the ideology, with its own inherent self-perpetuating logic, according to Havel). What differentiates Communist totalitarianism from other so-called 'authoritarian' dictatorships is not the degree of violence but its intention.

The Origins of Totalitarianism

Authors from the Other Europe have breathed new life into the debate about totalitarianism; they are equally thought-provoking about totalitarianism's sources. For the East-Central Europeans, the chief source is, understandably, external – that is, in Jacek Kuron's words, Soviet:

> The totalitarian system was imposed on Poland thirty years ago by the armed forces of the Soviet Union with the approval of the Western powers, in particular the United States and Great Britain. The system's stability is assured by the Soviet Union's propensity – demonstrated on three occasions already – to reimpose itself by force on any nation which might attempt to liberate itself.

Apart from this fact, which is as essential as it is elementary, one notes in the course of the past decade a new approach to the internal factors. This approach might help reveal the more deep-seated social and cultural supports of the totalitarian system's hold over societies.

The Czech philosopher Jan Patočka takes up Husserl's view on the crisis of the European conscience, a crisis whose origins he sees in the triumph of an impersonal rationality which he contrasts with the subjective universality of *das Lebenswelt*. Thus, in the same way that, in Patočka's view, Galileo based the science of nature on a mathematization of the universe, so also according to one of Patočka's most talented disciples, Vaclav Belohradsky, does Machiavelli reduce politics to a technology of power. Looked at in this way, modern political theory from Machiavelli to Max Weber converges towards an autonomization of the state, whose functions obey a rationality divorced from conscience. From the moment that legitimacy is founded on (or confused with) rational–bureaucratic legality, there is the risk that legitimacy and conscience will be absorbed by the institution or the apparat. This theme of 'law' devoid of 'human meaning' and therefore, in the extreme, absurd runs through the whole of early-twentieth-century Central European literature, and it is no accident that it is in Kafka, Musil, Broch or Roth (i.e. somewhere between Prague and Vienna) that one discovers the most enlightening premonitions of the totalitarian potential within impersonal rationality. And, for certain writers, there is a great temptation to see in socialism – first imaginary and then 'real' socialism – the culmination of modern state power's long march towards 'transparency' and 'innocence'.

From this point of view, the factor which transformed these potentialities into realities was Marxism and (for Kolakowski or Shafarevich) socialism as such. The Machiavellian state may well be 'impersonal', but it remains circumscribed within the field of politics: it has no ambition to change 'human nature'. The Marxists, and

even Gramsci (precisely in his study of Machiavelli) maintain that mankind is no more than a 'fixed ensemble of historically determined social relations'; consequently, by changing these conditions, regimes can transform human nature. When interpreted in this way, Karel Kosík argued, the theory of the 'New Man' risks drifting towards an 'insane utopia' legitimizing unlimited and irresponsible power.

Kolakowski and Shafarevich share the view that all socialist doctrines involving the central control of production and distribution inevitably engender the temptation to control minds. Starting with Plato's Republic, Shafarevich draws up the family tree of what he considers to be the 'kernel' of the 'socialist doctrines of the medieval heresies' (Cathari, Hussites, etc.) and the various types of utopia, not forgetting the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. These all bear in his rendering an uncanny resemblance to twentieth-century 'existing socialism', with its 'destruction of private property, religion and the family' and its corresponding 'demand for equality'. In short, when the socialist utopia is made into a science, the result is fairly predictable. Kolakowski, on the other hand, believes that the socialist utopia only becomes totalitarian when it is combined with a revolutionary will: it is in this sense that Bolshevism and fascism for him are closely related, incarnating the internationalist and nationalist variants of socialist totalitarianism respectively.

Intellectuals, the State and the Regime

Although, as we have seen, bureaucratic étatism and Marxism are often perceived as the sources of totalitarianism, one should not forget the factor that links them, i.e. 'the intellectuals' march to power' (Konrad and Szelenyi). Milosz and Kundera explored the individual reasons for the fascination of intellectuals with the 'magic circle of power' and its ideology. The contribution of the Hungarian school has been to investigate the motives of the intelligentsia as a social group.

The 'Hungarian thesis' can be summed up in the following way. In the absence of a real bourgeoisie, it is the state in Eastern Europe which becomes the actual driving force of economic modernization; the intelligentsia naturally identifies with the state and, more than elsewhere, its nationalist and socialist ideologies acquire a clearly étatist complexion. Looked at in this light, the Marxist phase (the triumph of Communism) was no more than the culmination of a lengthy process in which the intelligentsia, as the repositories of

teleological and technological knowledge, gradually merged with the modernizing state: 'whether bureaucrats or revolutionaries, the East European intellectuals had long since taken on board a teleology of either the nationalist or the socialist variety. Thus they forged themselves a redoubtable weapon in the battle to establish their own class power. As victors they married the two brands of teleology to produce the ethos of state-run socialist redistribution.' Marxism, Haraszti says, is the perfect ideology for an intelligentsia which, by identifying with the state, becomes the sole repository of the keys to 'rational distribution' and 'social engineering'.

This is the genealogy of what the Polish sociologist Paulina Preiss called 'total bureaucracy'. A basic trait of this phenomenon is the elimination of the autonomy of subsystems. Budapest Professor Mihaly Bihari analysed this 'descent' of politics into the economic sphere and its consequent 'incorporation into the political system'; 'the result of the total politicization of the economic system and the economization of the political system was the fusion of these two subsystems and the total disappearance of their relative autonomy'. According to another Hungarian author, Béla Polok, Communism, particularly in its Stalinist phase, by homogenizing the agents of the different spheres of social action has represented a regression: the suppression of the achievements of several centuries of modernization.

At this point, discussion of the totalitarian phenomenon merges with a critique of the étatism which made the East-Central European societies vulnerable to Communist takeover. Notwithstanding the specific nature of the Communist system, and the break it represented with the cultural and political tradition of those countries, the discussion does not omit an analysis of the endogenous factors which may have played a role.

This accounts for the current appeal of neo-liberalism and the rediscovery of the theories of Hayek and von Mises, who based their critique of modern étatism on its Austrian incarnation, of which several countries now incorporated in the Soviet bloc were the legatees. The other aspect of this approach, which one finds in the writings of historians, philosophers and writers alike, is the idea that the twin phenomena of war and revolution brought about the totalitarian systems of the twentieth century. These phenomena not only provoked enormous political changes, but also rocked the values which were the very foundation of civilization. Hence Solzhenitsyn's fixation in *The Red Wheel* upon the way in which the interaction of war and civil war paved the way for the first Communist state. One finds a similar preoccupation among several Central European

historians, for whom the establishment of the Communist system after the Second World War was not just the unfortunate outcome of the Cold War, but rather the continuation of the destruction or reshaping of social, political and cultural structures which started with the war and Nazi occupation.

Jan Patočka examined the issue from a philosophical perspective in his celebrated essay, 'The Wars of the Twentieth Century and the Twentieth Century as War'. He views the problem of totalitarianism as symptomatic of the crisis of European cultural identity and the triumph of a metaphysics of history, which identifies being with force, which in turn paves the way for the 'totalitarian night', in which an external 'state of war' goes hand in hand with an internal 'state of war':

> in the twentieth century war has become a revolution against existing everyday values.... War is a universal declaration that 'everything is permitted'; as savage freedom, war invades states and becomes 'total'. Everyday life and the orgy are organized by one and the same hand. The author of five-year plans is also the director of show-trials, which form part of the witch-hunt of modern times. War represents at one and the same time the greatest project of industrial civilization; the product and the instrument of total mobilization (as Ernst Junger saw so well) and the release of an orgiastic potential which nowhere else could cause destruction to such an extreme limit of intoxication.

Beyond Totalitarianism

When a social order survives for more than seventy years, it is relevant to raise the question of its legitimacy. The Hungarian philosopher Agnes Heller regards the Soviet Union as possessing a 'negative legitimacy' derived from the absence from society's consciousness of a recognized alternative to the existing social order; here too is a fundamental difference between the Soviet Union and Central Europe as to the way totalitarianism is experienced and perceived. Indeed, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary differ from the Soviet Union, in Heller's view, in that they find themselves in a 'state of permanent crisis of legitimacy', which in periods of open crisis (1956, 1968, 1980) not only affects society but also provokes the decomposition of the Communist Party itself. It is a crisis of legitimacy fuelled both by the 'demise of ideology' and by the economic crisis. According to Vajda, the chief contradiction of the system is the 'fact that it can maintain its totalitarian power structure only by channelling all human activity into the private sphere; to this end, however, it is forced to introduce a mechanism which threatens the system as much as the socially orientated initiatives.' In the face of what Djilas calls the 'disintegration of Leninist totalitarianism', the gulf is widening between the centre of the empire and its peripheries. This gulf is also reflected in dissident writings on totalitarianism.

Tolstoy's novel *Anna Karenina* begins with the famous sentence: 'Happy families are all alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.' One is tempted to say that in the view of dissident writers all regimes of the 'radiant future' are alike in terms of their political systems, while each of the societies concerned has its own particular experience of the 'unhappy' realities of totalitarianism. Whereas most of the unofficial writings refer to the concept of totalitarianism, each of them defines it differently, and the approaches of the different authors naturally reflect the situation of their own country and the characteristics of their political culture.

The notion of civil society is clearly at the centre of the divide between images of totalitarianism and alternatives to it in the Soviet Union and East-Central Europe.

In Polish oppositional thinking of the 1970s and 1980s, Communist power, invariably defined as totalitarian, is to be 'rolled back' by the revival or reconstitution of civil society. Adam Michnik's famous 'new evolutionism' was the key turning point when the opposition ceased addressing the Party-state and turned directly to society. The Party was to be driven back, so to speak, into the state by the steady emancipation of civil society through a continuing process of self-organization. The corollary of this idea is that one can try to 'undo' totalitarianism at the peripheries of the empire so long as one keeps the Party-state as a necessary umbrella and intermediary with the 'centre'. General Jaruzelski's military coup cut short the Solidarity debate over the limits of 'new evolutionism', but without being able to restore the *ancien régime*. To the extent that Solidarity represented a 'self-limiting' revolution, what followed was a 'self-limiting counter-revolution'. Thus the present situation is no longer shaped by a powerful social movement like Solidarity, but there are a variety of old and new ways in which the societies of Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia try with mixed results to sustain their aspirations for autonomy. The economic decay of the system created space for market and privatization; the collapse of Marxist ideology enhanced the search for autonomy in the sphere of culture.

This leads Kuroń to reformulate the idea of the autonomy of civil

society: 'Today Polish society is outside the totalitarian system. Now we have to bring ourselves to inject our independence into dependent state structures. Now is the time for what I call the "interdependent economy". It is the time to form self-management workers' councils in factories, to make state enterprises autonomous, to replace administrative control with the market.'

This is very much in line with Hungarian political thinking of the last decade in which references to the totalitarian features of the system are a by-product of discussions concerning the political obstacles to a genuine evolution in the direction of a market economy. Hungarian economic thinking (by no means confined to the democratic opposition) identifies the economy with society and calls for its independence from the Party-state. Whether belonging to the liberal variant (e.g. Tibor Liska as a 'Friedmanite' proponent of the integral market) or to the more socially aware libertarian self-managing one (e.g. T. Bauer and Forintos), the Hungarians tend to agree that a Polish-style solution is to be avoided, and that in Hungary the economy (the local equivalent of society) should become an autonomous sphere while keeping the Party-state involved in a self-limiting process or retreat.

In Czechoslovakia, too, the thinking about totalitarianism and civil society reflects a specific situation. In the face of the apparently unending 'normalization' process, considerations tend to focus on the 'metaphysics' of totalitarian language and modes of thinking relentlessly imposed on society by the system. Hence the importance of the emergence of a 'parallel' or 'underground' culture which helped to bring about the Charter 77 movement as a community of citizens, a 'parallel polis', as Catholic philosopher Vaclav Benda called it. As in the 'Age of Darkness', the period of the Counter-Reformation in the Czech lands in the seventeenth century, culture becomes the substitute for politics. From this point of view, totalitarianism's victory over society can never be lasting so long as the nation's culture has not been quelled, so long as there survives the 'resistance of the typewriter'.

There are, however, two mutually reinforcing theses concerning totalitarianism in East-Central Europe which downplay the notion of civil society. The first, put forward by several Hungarian historians and sociologists, stresses that the weakness of civil society in the region actually predates Communism (and sometimes even contributed to its introduction). The second is a reminder that totalitarian systems have systematically attempted to destroy whatever civil society was left at the end of the Second World War. The first thesis tends to lump Russia and Central Europe together, the

idea being to seek in social history the rationale for post-1945 Eastern Europe under Soviet rule (the boundaries of the so-called 'second serfdom' roughly coincide with those of the Warsaw Pact). Stimulating responses to this view can be found in Jeno Szucz's essay showing that there were 'three Europes' (if one wishes to go back to historical regions in Europe). The history of the Hungarians, the Poles or the Czechs might not fit the Western model but it certainly had even less to do with the Eastern, or Russian, model. Kundera's article on the 'tragedy of Central Europe' torn between its cultural allegiance to the West and its political 'kidnapping' by the East takes the argument one step further: the 'Caesaro-Papist' tradition of subservience to the state and its ideology, and the very absence in Russia of the notion of civil society, are seen as primary historical–cultural features separating Russia and Europe.

The second, less loaded argument is that, as Raymond Aron pointed out, 'fortunately or unfortunately, political systems rarely entirely fulfil their essence'. This was all the more so in Central Europe where a political culture radically different from that of Soviet Russia helped to sustain the idea of society as something distinct from the state and thus created the conditions for the emergence of new society-centre dissent after 1968.

Georges Nivat, a leading French expert on Russian culture, once observed that the key word for understanding Russia was *narod*, the people. In contrast, the key word for understanding contemporary Poland is society. It could also be argued that most of the countries in East-Central Europe represent an intermediate stage between the atomized Soviet-style people and Polish-type civil society. Vaclav Benda's 'parallel polis' or Elemer Hankiss' 'second society' are the nearest Czech and Hungarian approximations to the Polish model of the emancipation of civil society in the post-totalitarian era.

There is no better illustration of the gulf that separates Central European and Russian ideas about totalitarianism than the thinking of Solzhenitsyn or that of Alexander Zinoviev. The latter sees a totalitarianism from below, *homo sovieticus* belonging to a 'community' but certainly not a 'society'. Solzhenitsyn believes that Communism came from without, and that it has 'stifled Russia'. At the root of the catastrophe is the fact that people have 'forgotten God'. Communism is the fruit of unbelief, the result of a process of secularization of the state which can be traced back to the Renaissance. Whereas Communism has suppressed the spirituality of the Russian people, it is the West, the origin of the 'disease' of atheism and secularization, which is now in a state of internal decay, warns Solzhenitsyn.

In contrast, the Central Europeans insist on their Western cultural ties even in the field of political or economic thought. Significantly, the Poles centre their thinking on the notion of 'civil society'; the Hungarians on the market economy and the liberal tradition; and the Czechs on their attachment to European culture. In other words, here are three components of their European and Western heritage which are all obstacles to the ambitions of totalitarian power. As far as the Russian participants in the debate are concerned, these are mostly writers of genius who, when it comes to political thinking, turn into prophets of doom who blame their 'misfortune' either on the hated West or on a Sovietized people who, when all is said and done, have got what they deserve.

However, above and beyond their different analyses of the 'essence' of totalitarianism, its mechanisms or its strengths and weaknesses, all the *samizdat* authors mentioned here, who represent the emergence of independent political thinking in Russia and Central Europe, are united in contradicting Orwell's vision of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* on one point. In contrast to the pessimistic message conveyed by the case of Winston Smith, who ends up 'loving' Big Brother, running through the writings of independent intellectuals is the implication that the resistance to totalitarianism, even in the gulag as Solzhenitsyn shows, is possible and necessary. This stance is echoed in the break with the 'enslavement to everydayness' and the 'solidarity of the shaken' that Patočka speaks of, in Adam Michnik's 'living in dignity' or Havel's 'living in truth'. But at this point we have already gone beyond political analysis of the totalitarian phenomenon to enter the field of ethics and 'spiritual resistance'. It is symptomatic that this should happen, because it suggests that it is precisely this ethical unity of resistance which in the end is the common denominator, among dissident thinkers, of reflections on totalitarianism. If this is so, we can justifiably conclude that we are not dealing with a 'scientific' concept, but a 'subjective' notion which, like 'democracy' or 'liberty', rests on a value judgement and inevitably implicates those who employ it.

Part 4
THE LAST EMPIRE

10 Reform and Revolution

> The peoples of Europe enjoy only the degree of freedom that their audacity conquers from fear.
>
> (Stendhal)

When Moscow sneezes Central Europe catches a cold. Change at the centre of the Empire is bound to have repercussions at the periphery. However, because Communist rule is weaker there and because these societies have a stronger democratic tradition, the risks of change are much greater there than in the Soviet Union itself.

Gorbachev has little experience with the countries of Central Europe, but he must have on his mind the unrest and revolt in Poland and Hungary prompted by Khrushchev's de-Stalinization. He might also ponder that the Red Army's suppression of the Czechoslovak reform movement in 1968 was followed by two decades of conservative stagnation not just in Prague but in Moscow as well. Are reform of the system and reform of the Empire compatible? Is Gorbachev the great white hope of disillusioned Central Europeans? Or might, as many in the West already worry, the unruly Central Europeans jeopardize the prospects of *perestroika* and provoke a setback for East–West relations? Perhaps the best way to understand the Central European response is to recall that, if anything, it is the nature of Soviet domination which has been the prime cause of instability in the area. The crises of Budapest in 1956, Prague in 1968 or Warsaw in 1980 were all separate attempts to reform or shake off a Soviet-imposed system in countries with a radically different political and cultural tradition.

Budapest 1956 was the first anti-totalitarian revolution to shake the foundations of a Communist state. The subsequent practice of

calling it a 'revolt' or an 'uprising' is essentially an attempt to present it merely as a violent outburst, at the expense of its political significance. It is also a way to gloss over the fact that the violence (as well as the decision to leave the Warsaw Pact) was provoked by a first Soviet intervention on 24 October, which in turn brought about a second one on 4 November. The year 1956 also brought the first war between Communist countries.

In 1968 the Czechs and Slovaks were anxious to avoid the Hungarian syndrome: they wanted not the collapse of the Party but its rejuvenation. The fact that it was the Party itself which initiated a reform carried out in the name of socialism, combined with the absence of anti-Russian feeling in the population, had convinced the Dubček leadership that their comrades in Moscow would show understanding for a reform not directed against them or against the system, but designed to improve it and make it more attractive. In retrospect, of course, there was some naivety in Dubček's attempt to persuade Brezhnev that the abolition of censorship and the curbing of police control were good for the popularity of the Party and for socialism in Europe. Brezhnev, as we know from Zdenek Mlynar's account of the post-invasion talks in Moscow, replied that he could not care less about the image of socialism in the West, that security for him meant control, and that, as they had been since the end of the war, Czech borders were also Soviet borders. Twenty years later, only Dubček still believes that it was all a terrible misunderstanding.

Twelve years after the Warsaw Pact troops rolled into Prague, Solidarity was born in Gdansk. It was the first genuine workers' revolution since the Paris Commune of 1871. But instead of pictures of Marx they carried pictures of the Polish Pope; instead of the 'Internationale' they sang 'Poland is Not Yet Lost'.

The lesson from Budapest and Prague had not been forgotten: neither a violent revolution against the Party nor a reform from within, Solidarity emerged as a powerful social movement from the roots. Solidarity was also the first revolution which aimed not to seize state power but to gain autonomy for society. It was a self-limiting, non-violent revolution – not quite the stereotype of Polish revolutionary Romanticism. Its violent suppression had far-reaching consequences for the whole Soviet bloc. After a revolution in Budapest and a Party-led reform in Prague, the defeat of Solidarity seemed to bar all prospects for fundamental change; it left a feeling of hopelessness, a feeling that everything had been tried and everything had failed.

Moscow too showed that it had learned a great deal about crisis

management in Central Europe (if not actually about its causes and significance): a bloodbath by the Red Army in Budapest in 1956, a collective Warsaw Pact invasion in 1968, then a domestic military coup by proxy in Poland in December 1981. In each case the methods used to suppress a reform movement were more sophisticated – repression was quicker, casualties were fewer – than in the previous one. And each time, Soviet involvement in repression was less direct. The effectiveness of the 'restoration of order', Moscow found out, was related to the degree of its delegation. But there are drawbacks as well: the delegation of repression makes Soviet control over the ensuing process of 'normalization' more difficult. General Jaruzelski liquidated Solidarity with considerable aplomb, but his policy of seeking a compromise with the Catholic Church, instead of rooting out the heresy as Gustav Husak had done in neighbouring Czechoslovakia, has proved to be a considerable constraint on 'normalization'.

'Normalization, in Communist language means the restoration of Soviet control over the country, and of the Party's self-confidence and control over society. It rests not just on repression, but above all on society's acceptance of defeat. Indeed 'normalization' has succeeded when overt violence becomes no longer necessary. Kadar's Hungary provided the model: the Party had experienced its first great scare and had seen how quickly its rule could crumble. It realized that after 1956 things could never be the same. Hungarian society also knew that it stood little chance against the might of Soviet tanks; evolutionary change would have to take place within the system. According to one argument, something good could come out of the tragedy: severe punishment (the execution in cold blood of Imre Nagy in June 1958, and the continuing executions of hundreds of participants in the years up to 1960) in a way prepared the ground for Kadar's offer of compromise – 'Who is not against us is with us.' This, of course, is a cynical argument. Kadar had never read Machiavelli and his 'discovery' was purely a pragmatic one: to avoid a repetition of 1956 repression is not enough; the Party should keep its exasperation with society to a minimum while remaining within the limits of what is acceptable to Moscow.

Kadar was helped by the favourable context created by Khrushchev's second wave of de-Stalinization in the early 1960s. Kadar also obtained the co-operation of the intellectuals, by allowing them to publish without humiliating recantations. Finally, he was able, for some twenty years, to offer the workers a slow but steady increase in living standards. This does not mean that Kadar *had* to follow a flexible policy. Ceausescu's Romania or Husak's Czechoslovakia are

reminders that there is no such thing as an imperative for reform, nor set limits to the suffering inflicted on a society by the local satraps.

When Gustav Husak took over from Alexander Dubček in April 1969, many thought he would be a Czechoslovakian Kadar. After all, like Kadar, he was a former victim of Stalinist purges and a prominent reformer during the Prague Spring. Who remembers that on the eve of the invasion of 21 August 1968, Husak declared: 'I am firmly convinced that the new course represented by Comrade Dubček is so powerful among the Czech and Slovak people that there is no force capable of turning us back'? Except, of course, a Soviet invasion, which gave Husak the opportunity to offer his services to the Russians. Only a week after the invasion Husak concluded his speech at the Conference of Slovak Communists with the words: 'For my part, I support Dubček's concept, I took part in its elaboration and will support it fully: either I'll stay with him or I'll leave.' Within months Husak had signed a new 'treaty of friendship' with the Soviet Union, accepting the Brezhnev doctrine of limited sovereignty, and embarked on an extensive and ruthless eradication of reform. In contrast to Kadar, who never allowed Rakosi's old guard to return after 1956 (Rakosi's rule had preceded the reforms of Imre Nagy), Husak allied himself with the ultra-Stalinist faction led by Vasil Bilak. What followed were twenty years of repression and stagnation. Compared to the Hungarian model, the Czechoslovak 'normalization' was only a semi-success, or a semi-failure. True, it brought Moscow twenty years of quiet. The economic carrot helped to buy the passivity of the population; the skilful use of the Slovak card, as part of a 'divide and rule' strategy, did help find a constituency for a 'normalized' status quo. But the intellectuals have not been co-opted, and rigid control rather than the search for consensus is still official policy. After two decades of complete immobility and paranoia about the spectre of 1968, Husak has been unceremoniously ousted. 'What did you do in 1968?' was the question asked by Husak's inquisition in all the purges and 'verifications' which led to the expulsion of half a million people from the Party. Husak assuredly deserves Kundera's nickname as the 'President of forgetting'. By clinging to power he tried to impose amnesia on a whole nation.

In Poland martial law and the repression of Solidarity were effective, but certain ingredients of 'normalization' in the Hungarian or even the Czechoslovak style were lacking. The leaders of Solidarity were neither physically liquidated as Nagy was in Hungary nor forced to capitulate as Dubček was in Czechoslovakia. Walesa and

Solidarity remain as a symbol of continuity and resistance. The co-optation of intellectuals is impossible. The Church can be used as a moderating, stabilizing influence, but in exchange it has obtained the recognition of its ideological dominance in society. Over the last decade the Polish Church has incorporated the notion of human rights into its doctrine. The Pope's homilies on this subject during his successive visits to his homeland suggest that, whatever practical arrangements Primate Glemp may have conceded, the Polish Church stands for spiritual resistance to 'normalization' – another major difference with post-1956 Hungary or post-1968 Czechoslovakia. Finally, the economic disaster of the 1980s meant that Jaruzelski had nothing to offer the workers after the crackdown on Solidarity. The result is sporadic strikes in the factories and, as Jacek Kuron points out, the new official trade unions are often closer to the legacy of Solidarity than to the old-style 'transmission belt' of the Party.

Bronislaw Geremek, the well-known historian and an adviser to Solidarity, says that society is tired of confrontation, but that the experience of martial law has deepened the 'them and us' divide.

> After Budapest in 1956 resistance was destroyed within weeks. After 1968 in Prague resistance was destroyed in one year. In Poland, more than six years after the coup, you still have the same movement, weaker than before, but still in existence. You have hundreds of underground publications. For the first time in the Eastern bloc we are a country in which the opposition is a political fact. When I say the opposition, I mean a civil society with its own means of communication and expression, with an independent public opinion. How could one call this real normalization?

Looking back at the three major crises it is clear that the techniques of repression have proved each time to be more effective. But 'normalization', what Simecka called the 'restoration of order', each time proved more difficult: fairly good in Hungary, mediocre in Czechoslovakia, very dubious in Poland.

At the end of the 1980s the legacy of the three interrupted revolutions is being reclaimed, though nobody believes they will be repeated. In Hungary, the end of the Kadar era also ended what Janos Kis called the 'contract of silence' concerning 1956 which a traumatized society had tacitly accepted. Today the legacy of 1956 is reclaimed not just by the opposition but especially by the young generation, which does not remember the repression of the 1950s and sees the promise of consumerism rapidly fading away. There is

a symbolic and a political legacy at stake. 'Our problem,' says György Konrad, 'is that of Antigone. We have to bury our dead; those who fell during the revolution or were afterwards executed in so cowardly a manner.' On 16 June 1988 a demonstration to commemorate the assassination of Imre Nagy was dispersed by police, whereas only two weeks later a much larger demonstration, in support of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania, received official blessing. Ironically, thirty years after 1956, nationalism is more acceptable to the Hungarian Party leadership than rehabilitating one of its sons, perhaps the only one whose name is really popular in the country. A year later they were forced to grant a national funeral to Nagy without being able to claim credit for it. The reason for their lagging behind the public mood was their inability to accept the substance of the 1956 legacy. For a nation that had suffered two humiliating defeats in this century, a nation divided along cultural and political lines, 1956 provided a liberating experience of unity around the defence of democratic ideas. Nobody wishes a replay of 1956, but the reclaiming of its values by the democratic opposition is of importance for the future of Hungarian politics.

In contrast to Kadar's post-1956 'contract of forgetting', the Prague regime's relentless settling of accounts with the ideas and the protagonists of 1968 means that, even twenty years later, the question still touches a raw nerve in Czechoslovakia. There are essentially three responses to its legacy. That of Dubček and the Communist dignitaries expelled from the Party: after a long period of silence (and criticism from non-Communists) they, at last, feel vindicated by Gorbachev. Their only mistake was to be right twenty years too early. 'The basic ideological directions are the same,' says Dubček.

> The needs and the aims in both cases are the same: economic reform and the democratization of the Party and the whole society.... In our official propaganda to this day the idea prevails that there is no similarity between the two programmes. But you need only look at our Action Programme of 1968 and their programme and you'll find that they are very alike.... But Gorbachev has one advantage: for him there is no danger of the tanks which rolled over us in 1968.

Zdenek Mlynar, who was a member of the Party Politburo in 1968, is critical of Dubček's illusions:

> There was the illusion of the Party leadership about its own possibilities within the Soviet bloc. You had the idea of reform, but under no conditions was a rift envisaged with the Soviet Union, as had happened in Yugoslavia. And with such assumptions one could only do what the majority of the leadership would agree to at the time; that is, roughly what Kadar was doing in Hungary. In that case there was hardly any point in starting at all. Illusion number two was that, because twenty years of totalitarian diktat had freed the way to democratization, the Czechoslovak Party leadership enjoyed enormous support and that this was likely to continue and to guarantee that people would always be satisfied with what the leadership granted. Finally, there was the population's illusion about the leadership: that it can transgress certain limits provided there is sufficient push from below.

The more plausible, Realpolitik approach favoured by Mlynar would have been a slower and more controlled process of reform. To abolish censorship while keeping the hardliners in the Party apparatus, even at the highest level, was a recipe for disaster. Meanwhile Prague intellectuals seemed to follow the slogan of their Parisian counterparts: 'Be realists, demand the impossible!'

The non-Communists, in their assessment of 1968, are less concerned with the merits of Party tactics in the clash of reformers and conservatives. Vaclav Havel sees in the Prague Spring the culmination of a long process of 'self-awareness and self-liberation of society'. If anything, the lesson of 1968 was that a Communist monopoly of power cannot be dismantled by the Party itself. In a *samizdat* study entitled *Prague Spring 1968: Hopes and Disillusionment*, published twenty years later, Miroslav Synek writes:

> Just as the nations of our continent are unlikely to forget the Napoleonic Wars, the slaughter at Verdun or Hitler's European campaign, so the year 1968 will be forever etched in the historical memory of the Czechs and Slovaks. That sudden and spontaneous outburst of popular activity and its cynical suppression provided unmistakable proof that a ruling Communist Party is incapable of restoring democratic liberties to a closed society. 1968 is a permanent warning to all nations and peoples that grand talk about peace and friendship, sovereignty and territorial inviolability count for far less than the interests of naked power.

As an attempt to reconcile a ruling Communist Party with the democratic political culture of its people, the Prague Spring came

too late for Khrushchev and too early for Gorbachev. It is not an experience that will be repeated. Yet it is a reminder of how quickly things can change, of 'all the potentialities that slumber within the soul of the populace'. 'Who', says Vaclav Havel, 'at the time of Novotny's decaying regime, could have anticipated that in the space of half a year genuine civil awareness would stir within that self-same society, or that a year later a society so recently apathetic, sceptical and virtually demoralized would resist foreign invasion with such audacity and resourcefulness!'

In Poland, Solidarity and General Jaruzelski's military coup showed the success and the limits of the strategy of 'new evolutionism'. But even the crushing of the independent trade union did not mean a return to the situation that existed before 1980. There is a cumulative effect in the emancipation of Polish society from the state through a series of crises. In 1956 the Church and the peasantry (allowed to return to private agriculture) gained autonomy from the state. In 1968 intellectuals made their break with the ideology of the regime. Through a series of strikes in 1970, 1976 and 1980 the workers made their bid for self-organization. In the periods between crises the regime has, of course, tried to regain control and withdraw its concessions but with only partial success. Thus the whole period since 1956 can be seen as a gradual process of the emancipation of civil society.

For Jacek Kuron the crises are essentially periods when the social movement expands:

> It goes back to 1956. We had not yet abandoned Communism but we were already of the opinion that social movements should be independent of the Party and the government. 1968 and 1970 were crucial times for the relationship between the intellectuals and the workers. In 1968 the intellectuals realized that they must ally themselves with the workers. After 1970 the workers reached a similar conclusion about the need for an alliance with the intellectuals. KOR [the Workers' Defence Committee] was born from this experience, and its attempts to foster the self-organization of social movements eventually bore splendid fruits in 1980. True, Solidarity has been crushed and driven underground, but this cannot change the fact that the foundations of the totalitarian system have been broken. We have created and sustained freedom of expression so that the authorities have had to open up the official media. Because of the pressure of the Solidarity underground, even all those dummy social movements which they created now cease to be dummies. There is only one road: from totalitarianism to democracy, and we have covered a great length of it. If you compare the way in which we live today – this very conversation, here – with the times when for a word, for a joke, one went to prison, you will see that we live in a different country, in a different social order.

Poland, as always, magnifies a trend. A would-be totalitarian state coexists with a society which it can no longer control with the old methods. As Adam Michnik put it, this is not 'socialism with a human face, but totalitarianism with broken teeth'. Its relative tolerance is proof not of enlightened liberalism, but of weakness and disintegration. Between abortive reforms and abortive 'normalizations' society tries to assert its autonomy.

On three occasions attempts at democratic change have been suppressed by Moscow all the more easily because the countries which made them were isolated from the other countries of the Soviet bloc. But today there is change in Moscow and a crisis brewing simultaneously in several countries. There is a growing awareness – at least among the opposition – of the interdependence of the fate of the nations of Central Europe. The optimistic view is that, for the first time, conditions might be ripe. The greater breathing space conquered by society, the argument goes, combines with change and adaptation within the political system. Thanks to Gorbachev there is a chance for the long-awaited synthesis of change from above and from below, from within and from outside the system.

There is also the dramatic, catastrophist reading of the new situation: historically, the combination of economic crisis and political liberalism is a known recipe for disaster. Some, like Zbigniew Brzezinski, at one time America's National Security Adviser, believe that Central Europe is in a pre-revolutionary situation. In 1988 a new Spring of Nations is in the offing, parallel to that of 1848. This, of course, would mean the end of Gorbachev's *perestroika*, with unpleasant repercussions for East–West relations.

The problem with the revolutionary scenario is that it rests on a concept of 'crisis' which is used as a common denominator for situations which are completely different. To say that Poland is in crisis is hardly new; 'crisis' has been on and off the 'normal' state of the country since 1956. Crisis, used to describe Ceausescu's Romania, is a polite understatement. For Hungary it is a slight exaggeration: crisis there means a sharp deterioration in comparison to the apparent prosperity of recent years. In Czechoslovakia 1988 has been launched with Husak's departure from office and Dubček's interview in *L'Unità* claiming that the difference between him and

Gorbachev is no more than twenty years. Exciting, but hardly evidence of 'crisis'.

The 'optimo-pessimistic' view of the situation is that few people in Central Europe expect anything from hypothetical upheavals because there is little reason to believe that, with or without Gorbachev, the Soviet Union would behave any differently from how it has in the past. Gradual change of far-reaching significance is taking place, but in a context of decay, even disintegration: the steady erosion of imperial Soviet control over Central Europe combines with the erosion of state control over society. Ideology has collapsed under the combined forces of the use of tanks against 'socialism with a human face' in Prague and against workers in Gdansk. Ideocracies without an ideology, the Communist regimes have been looking for substitutes, of which nationalism is the favourite. Ceausescu has followed the Balkan pattern of authoritarian nationalism. After his military coup General Jaruzelski abandoned the language of Communism for that of nationalism. The Hungarian Party, so reluctant to express any national feeling under Kadar, is now endorsing the cause of the Hungarians in Transylvania. Even the East German Party, for whom the very word 'nation' used to be taboo, is now reclaiming the Prussian past; Clausewitz and Bismarck are rehabilitated, Martin Luther and Frederick the Great are presented as forerunners of socialism. The immediate advantages of attempting to tap the nationalist feelings of the population are obvious. But it might also prove to be a dangerous game. The dynamics of popular nationalism might outrun those who wish to manipulate it; Moscow too might find it useful to play 'divide and rule'. Yet, in the long run nationalism is bound to foster centrifugal tendencies within the Soviet Empire.

Economic decline has become the prime cause of change. In the 1970s it was fashionable to predict that economic modernization and more trade with the West would eventually also bring greater freedom in the East. Statesmen such as Chancellor Schmidt and President Giscard d'Estaing were convinced that economic interdependence would make the systems of the Other Europe more stable and thus more relaxed. These hopes have failed to materialize. In the 1980s the Soviet bloc economies have been sliding into decay and demodernization. At the end of the war, as one observer put it, the Communist Parties of Central Europe claimed to follow 'national roads to socialism'; today, they seem to follow national roads from socialism. The degree to which the Party retreats from the economy reflects the scale of the disaster: this, as much as political circumstances, explains why Poland and Hungary are the forerunners of reform, while the conservative economies of East Germany and Czechoslovakia are doing relatively better. The combination of decay and retreat opens more space for independent private initiative. But this is not a zero-sum game in which the crisis of the Party-state system of control automatically means greater freedom for society. The economic collapse, especially in Poland, affects social services, the fabric of everyday life. The Party's partial withdrawal from the economic sphere gives society the opportunity and the challenge to provide alternative answers to the crisis. The question for the future is, as Janos Kis suggested, whether after decades under anaesthesia the pace of self-organization in civil society can match the pace of disintegration in the Communist system.

As the Soviet bloc regimes fall into decay, it has dawned on some of the more enlightened Party leaders that the crisis might have something to do with the Party's obstinate insistence on controlling things. Besides, if you control everything, you also get blamed for everything. Hence the idea that the Party should retreat from the sphere of culture and the economy and relax political control as well. But this is easier said than done. Can you shake off your Stalinist legacy and yet retain power? And once you start retreating, where do you stop? Each Party has to find its own answers to these questions, answers which depend not so much on Gorbachev as on the strength and the resistance of each society.

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