



## Lifting the Curtain

On March 5, 1946, Winston Churchill gave name to a new political reality: "From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent." For two generations since, the division between East and West stood as what seemed an immutable fact of European political geography. Cold warriors warned about the "domino theory" and the dangers of advancing communism. But in 1989, the dominoes started falling the wrong—or right—way, as the people of Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania toppled Soviet-style regimes.

In the shadow of these still vivid events, our contributors provide new perspectives on a region in flux. Ivan Sanders explores the idea—and growing reality—of "Central Europe." Reminding us of what is now being dismantled, historian John Lukacs recreates the politics of daily life in his native Budapest in 1945, the Year Zero of East European communism. Stephen Deane, a journalist who lived in Czechoslovakia from 1984 to 1986, summarizes the events of last year and points to the challenges ahead. Finally, poet and essayist Stanislaw Baranczak speculates about the plight of artists and intellectuals who now find themselves working in a world where all the rules are being changed.

# THE QUEST FOR CENTRAL EUROPE

by Ivan Sanders

Once upon a time there was a region of Europe united not so much by language or even history but by something more elusive—by hard-to-define common sensibilities and affinities. What is referred to ever more longingly today as Central Europe has in reality always been a crazy quilt of nationalities inhabiting countries wedged between the vastness of Mother Russia and the paternal rigor of Germany. Yet, because many of these countries were for centuries under Austrian tutelage, their people, sharing a common fate as more or less oppressed subjects of a far-flung empire, did develop mental habits and strategies that were remarkably similar. They also came to share certain values, not the least of which was a yearning for, and identification with, Europe.

Now it is not at all uncommon for people on the fringes of civilization to compensate for their provincial ways by espousing mainstream values more ardently than those at the center. The word *Europe* undoubtedly had a nobler ring in the eastern reaches of the continent than in its western parts. For centuries, Poles, Czechs, and Hungarians were propelled by the desire to live up to European standards and by the equally compelling need to dwell on the peculiarities of their own sorry history. In the process they created cultures that were not quite Western but not peripheral either.

In time, the passion to close gaps, to measure up and press ahead seemed to pay off, and by the end of the 19th century the major cities of these in-between lands were

catapulted into a modernity more daring, more dazzling than that of many a Western European metropolis. Yet the sophistication, even cultural radicalism of turn-of-the-century Vienna, Budapest, and Prague sprang from a spirit of defiance and iconoclasm that had been around for centuries. A penchant for irreverence and irony; a predilection for the odd, the grotesque; the ready espousal of the startlingly new, the startlingly complex—these are qualities that inform some of the greatest achievements of modern Central European culture: the literary art of Franz Kafka and Robert Musil as much as the painting of Gustav Klimt and Oskar Kokoschka; the music of Schoenberg and Béla Bartók as well as the theories of Sigmund Freud. To this day, a certain type of morbid humor, unflappability in the face of change, grace under perversity, suggest to many outsiders a quintessentially Central European characteristic. (The troubled hero of Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* expresses this perception: After sardonically reviewing a hard-luck life story filled with absurd deaths and suicides, he quips: "A terribly Middle-European joke, if you ask me.")

The brilliance and dissipation of the waning years of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy were memorably captured by a number of writers throughout the Empire. In retrospect, the turn-of-the-century Viennese playwright Arthur Schnitzler, the Hungarian novelist Gyula Krúdy, the Czech Jaroslav Hašek, the Croatian Miroslav Krleža appear, for all their differences, to be kindred spirits. What they share is a tone, at once satiric and elegiac, suggesting

a very worldly understanding of complex political and psychological realities. Without consciously articulating a common Central European ethos, these writers evoked the rigidity as well the nonchalant slovenliness and strange beauty of the same declining world.

For much of the 20th century, however,



Prague (1848). From Mozart's time to Kafka's, Prague was a major center of European culture.

concern for the integrity of Central Europe was not on anyone's agenda. After the post-World War I collapse of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, the so-called successor states, carved out of the former empire, were more interested in nurturing their own national identity than in seeking common ground. Mitteleuropa remained a Ger-

man dream, but its prewar architects had naturally meant unity under German stewardship. The term Central Europe was in fact invented by Tomáš Masaryk, the first president of independent Czechoslovakia (1918–1935), to counter the quasi-imperialist Mitteleuropa concept. After Hitler's ascent to power, most of the small nations of the region did fall under his sway, and Middle Europe became a German sphere of influence. Allied victory at the end of the Second World War transferred domination to the Soviets in the East. In a matter of years Central Europe became the Eastern bloc. "Central" or "Middle" survived only as geographical, climatic designations without any political or cultural content.

The revival of the idea of Central Europe may be a relatively recent phenomenon, prompted by specific political and cultural circumstances, but on a more elemental level we may speak of a much older, semantic struggle. Poles, Hungarians, Czechs, and Romanians have always resented being labeled East Europeans. Naturally enough, people who cherish their ties to Europe and consider the very word "West" an enticement, a challenge, want no part of an Eastern world with its connotations of remoteness and primitivism. How much more preferable it is to be in the *middle* of things, or better still in the *center*! For these nations, almost as painful as the reality of Soviet domination was the knowledge that, for the rest of the world, they were now, culturally too, appendages of the Soviet empire. This view remained unchallenged for decades, as Westerners became accustomed to speaking about these countries as a single unit, a bloc, or as

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Russia's client states, satellites, although ironically enough, their political connection, the fact that they had all become, and remained for 40 years, Soviet-style dictatorships, proved to be the most tenuous, easily dissolved link among them.

It was the Czech novelist Milan Kundera, living in exile in Paris since 1975, who resurrected the term Central Europe during the early 1980s. What seemed at first nothing more than impromptu reflections on the fate of Europe became an eloquent and poignant defense that met with an unexpected response in both the East and West.

In a 1980 interview with the novelist Philip Roth, Kundera was still defining his terms: "As a concept of cultural history," he said, "Eastern Europe is Russia, with its quite specific history anchored in the Byzantine world. Bohemia, Poland, Hungary, just like Austria, have never been part of Eastern Europe. From the very beginning they have taken part in the great adventure of Western civilization, with its Gothic, its Renaissance, its Reformation—a movement which has its cradle precisely in this region. It was here, in Central Europe, that modern culture found its greatest impulses . . ." A few years later, in his most frequently cited essay, "The Tragedy of Central Europe," Kundera went much further, arguing that Central Europe was, until recently, the West's last best hope, a place where ideas could still arouse passions, the written word still mattered, and artists were people to reckon with. What Kundera had in mind, however, was not a precisely defined geographical reality, certainly not a collection of sullen and downtrodden satellites: Central Europe becomes for him more of an imagined realm of shifting borders, a would-be confraternity, a republic of letters stubbornly upholding supreme cultural values. Yet, he maintained wistfully, even the dream is winding down, and So-

viet Russia is not the only one to blame. Europe, too, has changed; even in its Western heartland, culture has "bowed out," yielding its place to the all-pervasive, crassly commercial mass media. And since a distinctive Middle European identity can be defended only in a world that "maintains a cultural dimension," the tragic end of Central Europe seems at hand.

Of course not everyone was this pessimistic. To somebody like George Konrád, the Hungarian novelist and essayist, the dream as well as the reality of Central Europe is very much alive. He discovers the common spirit in small things: in congenial turns of phrase, in shared jokes, in knowing glances. For him, and others, the legacy of the long-defunct monarchy survives. Konrád describes Central Europe as the place where railroad stations are still painted "monarchy yellow," where Viennese operetta continues to be standard fare, where a coffee-house culture in some diminished form still exists. Other respondents to Kundera's essay preferred the more romantic, heroic connotation of the term "Central Europe," turning it into a metaphor for civilization and freedom. And for some, the designation assumed an almost spiritual quality. To the Polish-born poet Czeslaw Milosz, for instance, Central Europe is an "act of faith," a "utopia."

But unlike Kundera, neither Konrád nor Milosz would think of faulting Western commercialism for the historical decline of Central Europe. For both of them the problem lies in the political division of Europe, in the entire postwar order, in imperious decisions made by the Great Powers at Yalta. These decisions may have been inevitable—after all, in global power matches small nations are always losers—yet, these writers insist, it is the very vulnerability of Central Europe's small states that in the

## AN UPSIDE-DOWN UTOPIA

*The old Austro-Hungarian empire, as depicted in Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities* (1930), seems all delightful contradiction. In "Kakania"—an abbreviation for the double monarchy but also suggesting "caca"—nothing logically should work but everything does, barely.*

Kakania, that misunderstood State that has since vanished, was in so many things a model, though all unacknowledged. . . . Whenever one thought of that country from some place abroad, the memory that hovered before the eyes was of wide, white, prosperous roads dating from the age of foot-travelers and mail-coaches, roads leading in all directions like rivers of established order, streaking the countryside like ribbons of bright military twill, the paper-white arm of government holding the provinces in firm embrace. And what provinces! There were glaciers and the sea, the Carso and the cornfields of Bohemia, nights by the Adriatic restless with the chirping of cicadas, and Slovakian villages where the smoke rose from the chimneys as from upturned nostrils, the village curled up between two little hills as though the earth had parted its lips to warm its child between them. Of course cars also drove along those roads—but not too many cars! The conquest of the air had begun here too; but not too intensively. Now and then a ship was sent off to South America or the Far East; but not too often. There was no ambition to have world markets and world power. Here one was in the center of Europe, at the focal point of the world's old axes; the words "colony" and "overseas" had the ring of something as yet utterly untried and remote. There was

some display of luxury; but it was not, of course, as over-sophisticated as that of the French. One went in for sport; but not in madly Anglo-Saxon fashion. One spent tremendous sums on the army; but only just enough to assure one of remaining the second weakest among the great powers.

The capital, too, was somewhat smaller than all the rest of the world's largest cities, but nevertheless quite considerably larger than a mere ordinary large city. And the administration of this country was carried out in an enlightened, hardly perceptible manner, with a cautious clipping of all sharp points, by the best bureaucracy in Europe, which could be accused of only one defect: It could not help regarding genius and enterprise of genius in private persons, unless privileged by high birth or State appointment, as ostentation, indeed presumption. But who would want unqualified persons putting their oar in, anyway? And besides, in Kakania it was only that a genius was always regarded as a lout, but never, as sometimes happened elsewhere, that a mere lout was regarded as a genius.

All in all, how many remarkable things might be said about that vanished Kakania! . . . On paper it called itself the Austro-Hungarian monarchy; in speaking, however, one referred to it as Austria, that is to say, it was known by a

past made them hardy, taught them flexibility, tolerance. The problem, according to Konrád and Milosz, is not the decline of culture or the proliferation of kitsch feared by Kundera but intrusive superpowers politicizing, polarizing Europe. The erosion of Central European values can be stopped only by resisting superpower encroachments, by dismantling burdensome political and defensive structures, by being "antipolitical," to use George Konrád's favorite term. In 1984, Konrád not only rejected Kundera's bleak prognosis for the region; he affirmed—prophetically, it would

appear today—his own hopes for a brighter future: "I refuse to identify with either a tragic or sarcastic pessimism about Central Europe because I don't accept the chasm in the middle of Europe as necessary. On the contrary: I regard the present status quo in Europe as the product of force and compulsion, and I believe that it is artificial, temporary, and indeed already disintegrating. It is not a social but a military reality. It is not a social but a military reality. I believe that the social reality can slowly struggle free of the grip of the military reality."

By the mid-1980s the rehabilitation of

name that it had, as a State, solemnly renounced by oath, while preserving it in all matters of sentiment, as a sign that feelings are just as important as constitutional law and that regulations are not the really serious thing in life. By its constitution it was liberal, but its system of government was clerical. The system of government was clerical, but the general attitude to life was liberal. Before the law all citizens were equal, but not everyone, of course, was a citizen. There was a parliament, which made such vigorous use of its liberty that it was usually kept shut; but there was also an emergency powers act by means of which it was possible to manage without Parliament, and every time when everyone was just beginning to rejoice in absolutism, the Crown decreed that there must now again be a return to parliamentary government. Many such things happened in this State, and among them were those national struggles that justifiably aroused Europe's curiosity and are today completely misrepresented. They were so violent that they several times a year caused the machinery of State to jam and come to a dead stop. But between whiles, in the breathing-spaces between government and government, everyone got on excellently with everyone else and behaved as though nothing had ever been the matter. Nor had anything real ever been the matter. It was nothing more than the fact that every human being's dislike of every other human being's attempts to get on—a dislike in which today we are all agreed—in that country crystallized earlier, assuming the form of a sublimated ceremonial that might have become of great impor-

tance if its evolution had not been prematurely cut short by a catastrophe.

For it was not only dislike of one's fellow-citizens that was intensified into a strong sense of community; even mistrust of oneself and of one's own destiny here assumed the character of profound self-certainty. In this country one acted—sometimes indeed to the extreme limits of passion and its consequences—differently from the way one thought, or one thought differently from the way one acted. Uninformed observers have mistaken this for charm, or even for a weakness in what they thought was the Austrian character. But that was wrong . . .

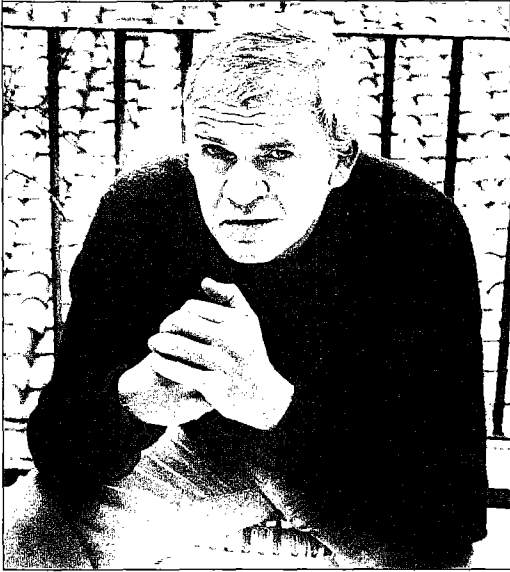
Kakania was, without the world's knowing it, the most progressive State of all; it was the State that was by now only just, as it were, acquiescing in its own existence. In it one was negatively free, constantly aware of the inadequate grounds for one's own existence and lapped by the great fantasy of all that had not happened, or at least had not yet irrevocably happened, as by the foam of the oceans from which mankind arose.

*Es ist passiert*, "it just sort of happened," people said there when other people in other places thought heaven knows what had occurred. It was a peculiar phrase, not known in this sense to the Germans and with no equivalent in other languages, the very breath of it transforming facts and the bludgeonings of fate into something light as eiderdown, as thought itself. Yet, in spite of much that seems to point the other way, Kakania was perhaps a home for genius after all; and that, probably, was the ruin of it.

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Central Europe as a concept was in full swing. After 30 years of disuse and even disgrace, the term was now on the lips not only of politically sensitive writers but of journalists, academics, and, increasingly, politicians and statesmen as well. Scholarly conferences and symposia were organized around the subject; journals devoted to the culture of Central Europe were launched on both sides of the Atlantic; even American critics like Irving Howe and Susan Sontag jumped on the bandwagon, writing admiringly of a new flowering of culture in the heart of Europe. As literary critics dis-

sected Central European works for common characteristics, and as historians and political scientists deliberated on political consequences, the idea of Central Europe was upheld not only as a defense against Soviet imperial designs but also as a counterweight to home-grown provincialism and nationalism. George Konrád put it succinctly: "Being Central European means learning to keep our nationalism, our national egotism, under control." In an area where justified patriotism always had a way of turning into chauvinist swagger or parochial mystification, there is plenty to keep



*Novelist Milan Kundera popularized the idea that Central Europe—far from being an “Eastern bloc”—was in essence West European.*

under control. Frequent mention was made of the special role played by Jews in Central Europe’s cosmopolitan cultures. Historically speaking, Jewish successes in East Central Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries presupposed a relatively tolerant, liberal society. As soon as narrowly defined national interests began to prevail, and an exclusionist, xenophobic kind of nationalism became the order of the day, Jews lost ground. And later in the century, the most extreme forms of nationalism had only to combine with military might and the efficiency of a modern totalitarian state to threaten their very existence. Central European Jewry is largely gone, its one-time influence fast becoming a historical memory. Yet to many, Jews remain the paradigmatic Central Europeans—tenacious individualists surviving the vicissitudes of history.

An awareness of history, a “historical imagination” as Czeslaw Milosz put it, resides at the heart of Central European culture. Where everything is infused with a

sense of history, there are no neutral subjects. Literary treatments of the most innocuous themes resonate with oblique political suggestiveness. The ongoing debate about Central Europe as a cultural entity itself illustrates this phenomenon, for it raises a number of uncomfortable questions about the peculiar relationship between art, history, and geography in this region. It was again Milan Kundera who caused a storm of controversy when in 1985 he published a literary essay in which he gave a negative appraisal of the Russian novelist Dostoyevsky—an appraisal that seemed to attack Russian culture directly, indeed to attack Russia itself. “What irritated me about Dostoyevsky,” Kundera writes in this essay, “was the climate of his novels; a universe where everything turns into feeling; in other words, where feelings are promoted to the rank of value and of truth.” Standing in contrast to this oppressive emotionalism was Kundera’s own rational, skeptical world view, which he considered far more invigorating.

Responding to Kundera, the Russian émigré poet Joseph Brodsky charged that the Czech novelist, was guilty of “sentimental distortions” of his own; Brodsky also found Kundera’s concept of civilization limited. Brodsky reminded the reader that Kundera is after all “a Continental, a European man,” and “these people are seldom capable of seeing themselves from the outside. If they do, it’s invariably within the context of Europe, for Europe offers them a scale against which their importance is detectable.”

**T**he controversy between Central Europeans and Russians flared up again at the well-publicized 1988 Wheatland International Writers Conference, held in Lisbon. The Russian participants, many of them attending a Western-sponsored conference for the first time,

were uneasy about the concept of Central Europe, preferring to see individual countries in Eastern Europe, each with its own distinct culture, rather than an ill-defined whole. To them, Central Europe seemed both a myth and an affront; they sensed in all the talk of newfound European unity an attempt to detach Russia from Europe, to question the European character of the bulk of Russian culture. The same Soviet delegates were even more stunned when called to task for not doing enough as writers to force their government to remove its troops and tanks from East Central Europe. They bristled at the suggestion that they instinctively identified with their country's ambitions and interests. ("When am *I* going to take *my* tanks out of Eastern Europe?" asked an incredulous Tatyana Tolstaya, a descendant of the 19th-century master novelist, Leo Tolstoy.) Yet here too, the émigré Joseph Brodsky rallied to his compatriots' defense and stated that "the problems of Eastern Europe will be solved once the internal Russian problems will be solved."

But it wasn't only defensive Russians who refused to believe in the existence of Central Europe. There were enough skeptics in the countries concerned who felt that this fanciful redrawing of Europe's cultural map—restoring a unity that never was—amounted to little more than an intellectual game, indulged by East European émigrés out of touch with the world they left behind. It is true that the most vocal proponents of the Central European idea have been writers living in exile—Milan Kundera and the late Yugoslav novelist Danilo Kiš in Paris, Milosz in Berkeley, the Czech Josef Škvorecký in Toronto, or the Polish poet Stanislaw Baranczak in Cambridge, Massachusetts. And even some of the others, dissident writers who didn't leave their homes permanently, became infatuated with the notion of Central Europe while on visits abroad.

Those who never left were less sanguine about the prospects of Central European harmony. Knowing the ethnic strife and the historic rivalries of Eastern Europe, they kept reminding the idealists that there was enough to divide these countries even if the Soviet Union were to relax its grip on them. Besides, they added somewhat cynically, monolithic rule probably helped keep a lid on some of these potentially explosive conflicts. One need only think of the traditional hostility between Czechs and Slovaks, Poles and Germans, Hungarians and Romanians, Turks and Bulgarians.

In the West, too, the mystique of Central Europe has had its detractors. At yet another conference, this time at Ulm, West Germany, a German historian, Thomas Rotschild, offered a devastating analysis of the "intoxication" with Central Europe. First of all he called into question the alleged kinship between various East European art forms. (Czech filmmaking is radically different from Hungarian and Polish cinema, he claimed; a Hungarian Jewish novelist like George Konrád has more in common with the American Philip Roth than with Austrians like Peter Handke or Thomas Bernhard, etc.) Rotschild feared the leveling, standardizing effects of Central European integration even as he noted the conflicting motives behind the advocacy of regional unity:

When Milan Kundera, the Moravian writer living in Paris, or the Hungarian George Konrád rave about Central Europe, they mean something very different than when [the Trieste-based literary historian] Claudio Magris or his Austrian friends do the same; and all of them harbor very different notions from the Germans who with dubious justification have recently also been attracted to Central Europe. And while this turning toward the actual historical entity or to a future and still indistinct Central Europe may hold a number of attractive possibilities for Germans eager to curb powerful American influences, the Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, and



Hungarians favoring Central Europe are anxious to break away from the Soviet Union. And finally Austria, in the face of an oppressive German presence, is reviving its own Habsburg dreams of economic and cultural supremacy.

The conference at which these words were spoken was held in the summer of 1989, at a time when the winds of change could be felt in only two East European countries: Poland and Hungary. But in the months that followed, a most extraordinary series of events seemed to render the entire debate over Central Europe irrelevant. As one hard-line communist regime after another fell into the dust, as 40-year-old political structures came tumbling down along with the Berlin Wall, the division of Europe seemed at an end. In the ensuing euphoria, the unity of Central Europe was just too small a prize. The "European house," a phrase first promoted by Mikhail Gorbachev, became a metaphor for the oneness of Europe. East European historians who a few months earlier had excitedly formed "Central Clubs" were now setting up all-inclusive European forums.

**B**ut although the communist order in Eastern Europe may indeed have crumbled, and the Soviet Union may be in retreat, such developments alone would not make the Eastern countries more Western. Just a few years ago George Konrád said that if it was impossible to go over to Vienna from Budapest for an evening at the opera, then it was impossible to talk about a normal state of affairs in Central Europe. By the end of 1989 the borders were wide open, and any Hungarian able to afford high-priced Viennese theater tickets could certainly make the trip. But have the new freedoms really changed the quality of life for most Hungarians? As Konrád's fellow countryman, the novelist Péter Esterházy, put it: "Our culture may be Western, but our life is still Eastern."

Suppose a massive infusion of Western capital does help the economically ravaged, post-communist societies struggle to their feet. The question still remains whether a wholesale merger with Europe is what those calling for East-West unity really had in mind. Obviously, for millions of East Europeans used to privations and hungry for Western comforts, the prospect of this type of wealth-sharing is a tantalizing one. But even if all-European integration on a grand scale were feasible in the near future (which of course it isn't), the submersion of individual identities it may produce should give one pause. Understandably, it was again intellectuals with an affinity for Central European ideals who, at the height of last fall's jubilations, cautioned about overhasty, and possibly irreversible, political decisions. German writers, such as, Günter Grass (born in Danzig, now Gdańsk, Poland) and Christa Wolf (born in East Prussia), in opposing the push for German reunification, were clearly not interested in perpetuating old-style communism in East Germany but in preserving a Central European alternative to the Federal Republic. To them, a non-communist German Democratic Republic would not be a redundant entity but a country more actively involved than its slicker, more jaded Western counterpart in maintaining the humane socialist values of an older Europe.

Elsewhere in Europe, the revolutionary changes have focused attention on uniquely Central European problems and solutions. Last November, a little-noted though quite remarkable meeting took place in Budapest involving the foreign ministers of Austria, Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Italy, with the purpose of discussing regional economic and cultural cooperation. The unusually cordial and hopeful meeting was bent on renewing old ties and locating points of common interest. However, more important than the conference's specific

agenda was its symbolism. The meeting of neutral, NATO, and Warsaw-pact countries not only affirmed "antipolitical" Central European principles, it also pleased those with longer memories, to whom the Budapest meeting seemed like a reunion of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy.

Of course, nostalgia for the monarchy is nothing new in Central Europe, but lately sentimental affection has given way to programmatic admiration. Never have historians and politicians had so many kind words for the liberalism, the civilized *Gemütlichkeit* of the former multinational empire; never have they viewed its less-than-perfect unity with greater understanding. In Hungary, one political party even nominated the heir to the Austrian throne, Otto Habsburg, for president of the Hungarian Republic. Otto, a West German citizen, graciously declined, though his supporters in Budapest have not given up. As Habsburg historian Péter Hanák noted recently, "The growing mutual attraction between the former ruling dynasty and Hungarians waiting for a miracle is a fact of life in our day." Indeed, some Hungarians and Austrians feel they have already reestablished their Central Europe. The joint Vienna-Budapest World's Fair, planned for 1995, is perhaps the most grandiose expression of the rekindled Danubian consciousness.

Is this the real thing then, an Austrian-inspired new Central Europe? At least one local hero, Claudio Magris, Central Europe's leading literary historian, would welcome the idea. His influential book, *Danube* (1986), celebrates the diversity, the glorious eccentricities of Danubian civilization, in which the protean river becomes the paramount symbol of this civilization, standing in direct contrast to the Rhine with its mythic association of exclusivity and racial purity. "The Danube," writes

#### POLITICS: A DELICATE BALANCE

*Claudio Magris in Danube depicts the art of governing in Central Europe:*

The Habsburg art of government does not stifle dissidence or overcome contradictions, but covers and composes them in an ever-provisional equilibrium, allowing them substantially to go on as they are and, if anything, playing them off against one another. The ruler of the Empire is, by definition, a Proteus himself, changing his mask and his policy with supple mobility, and he therefore has no wish to transform his Protean subjects into a set of identical citizens. On the contrary, he allows them to pass from love to rebellion and vice versa, from depression to euphoria, in a game without end and without progress. He has no wish to impose some rigid unity on the various peoples, but to let them be themselves and live together in all their heterogeneity.

Magris, "is German-Magyar-Slavic-Romanic-Jewish Central Europe, polemically opposed to the German Reich." In *Europe, Europe* (1987), Hans Magnus Enzensberger's portraits of Budapest and Warsaw also stress the stunning irregularity and multiformity of this Central European world, in which an essence, if there is one, is to be sought in a clamor of competing voices, contradictory desires, clashing styles. A third Western observer, the British journalist Timothy Garton Ash, in *The Uses of Adversity: Essays on the Fate of Central Europe* (1989), tries more persistently to define essential characteristics, though, after subjecting the writings of prominent Central European intellectuals to rational analysis, he too comes up against glaring inconsistencies and self-contradictions.

None of this should surprise us. There is no immutable Central European "essence," just as there is no immutable Central Europe. In Central Europe, adjusting to history's whims has and still takes daring

and cunning, plain-speaking and dissemblance. Thus can that most Western, most cerebral of Central Europeans, Milan Kundera, turn a blind eye to reason when his nation's fate is at stake. And thus can the equally European George Konrád claim that in his part of the world people have always been "artful dodgers, longshot players, sneaky idlers, rascals [who] paid a price for being honest more than once."

The classic literary example of Central European wisdom could well be Jaroslav Hašek's *Good Soldier Švejk*, with its crafty realism and live-and-let-live attitudes. Švejk and the peculiar anti-heroic heroes of the contemporary Czechoslovakian writer Bohumil Hrabal have been important for people groping for models and for those reaching across arbitrary borders to find soulmates in other countries.

To outsiders it is often the protean flux and disparities of the Central European experience that are the most striking. Exasperated by the region's contradictions, Timothy Garton Ash concludes that "if the term Central Europe is to acquire some positive substance, then the discussion will have to move forward from the declamatory, the sentimental, and the incantational to a dispassionate and rigorous examina-

tion both of the real legacy of historic Central Europe . . . and of the true condition of present-day East Central Europe."

There is no question that, after the recent upheavals, there are new challenges—the need to democratize societies as well as governments, to better understand neighbors, to strike a balance between independence and integration are just a few. And they all require new approaches—less passion perhaps and more sobriety, more trust.

But the subjective element, the wariness, the skepticism will most likely remain, as well they should. "Skepticism," wrote an eminent Central European not long ago, "is inescapably a part of the spiritual, cultural, and intellectual phenomenon that is Central Europe . . . . That skepticism . . . is generally rather strange, a bit mysterious, a bit

nostalgic, often tragic, and at times even heroic, occasionally somewhat incomprehensible in its heavy-handed way, in its caressing cruelty and its ability to turn a provincial phenomenon into a global anticipation of things to come."

It may bode well for the future that the man who offered this appreciation of the Central European sensibility, the former Czech dissident playwright Václav Havel, is now the president of his country.



The Good Soldier Švejk features a Central European hero: The "fool" Švejk, pliant and realistic, who outwits the rigid authorities.

# BUDAPEST 1945: THE YEAR ZERO

*by John Lukacs*

**I**n my stepfather's cellar I was waiting for the Russians. I was 20 years old, a deserter, with false military identity papers; if I were to be found out by the National Socialists or by the field gendarmerie, I could be shot or hanged on the spot. I had left my unit, an anti-aircraft battery in the Hungarian army, in November of 1944. The bedraggled remnants of the army were about to be shipped westward, eventually to Germany, together with the retreating collaborationist Arrow Cross government. To the east of Budapest the Russians were less than 40 miles away. We thought that they would march into the city in a few days. Together with my mother and a dozen relatives and friends, we moved into that cellar, a subterranean office and warehouse owned by my stepfather. But the Russians progressed very slowly. They did not enter the city until they had surrounded it completely.

On the night before Christmas the first Russians moved into the western hills of the city, on the Buda side. All day we had heard the dull thudding of guns from that unaccustomed direction. The city was dark, the Danube carried the corpses of Jews who had been shot on the quays the night before; but people were still carrying small Christmas trees and packages home.

Snow fell on Christmas Day again. We now knew (and not merely heard) that the Russians had encircled Buda. We knew this not from Radio Budapest but from the BBC, to which we could still tune in on our small battery-powered radio.

The Russians were cautious. Each day

they advanced through 50, perhaps 100 blocks. Each day the Germans moved back their remaining tanks and trucks, trying to stable them in the narrow streets of the inner city. They had no anti-aircraft artillery left. When daylight came, the Russian planes began circling over the broken rooftops of the city, dropping bundles of small bombs on anything that moved, and on every kind of vehicle, including burnt-out wrecks. Gradually the scenery of the inner city became a last encampment of the Third Reich, an Augean stable of what was left of military metal. In the cellar we huddled, hungry and cold. After a week or so we began to hear the Russian loudspeakers at night: songs, proclamations, inviting the Hungarian soldiery to surrender. I was more than game to surrender: I had wanted to be liberated from the Germans for a long time, preferably by the British or the Americans, or now by the Russians, it mattered not which.

And finally they arrived in the city. As we stood in the doorway, peering out, Russian soldiers came by, one by one. They came in single file, close to the peeling, bulging, crumbling, shot-pitted walls of the dark apartment buildings. The first of them was the first Russian I had ever met; and the nicest Russian I was to meet for a long time. He was an officer, wearing a tightly padded uniform, a fur cap, with large binoculars hung around his neck. He had horn-rimmed glasses and a large mouth. He looked like a Weimar-Berlin film image of a Red Army officer, the kind of Russian who speaks German, likes chess and children and Beethoven. As matters turned

out, a rare kind.

It was 9:45 on the morning of January 18, 1945. Zero Minute, Zero Year.

**A**fter the Russians arrived, all kinds of interesting affiliations formed. The oddest kinds of people joined the Communist Party. They included a rich stockbroker friend of ours, a tough-minded capitalist if ever there was one. He was a hardheaded (rather than hardfaced) man who made out well not only after the war but during it, including during the siege. One could always be sure that F. had a car when no one else did, that he had a black-market supply of gasoline, food, fuel, clothes, *napoléons d'or*, etc. In short, a merchant adventurer, a master opportunist.

I had a certain liking for him, for he was not ungenerous; he had an appreciation of good books and a fine sense of humor. I told him that he was wrong to join the Communist Party, and I tried to explain why. That it was morally wrong, and bad form, I did not say, partly because he was an older man, and also because I knew that it would cut no ice with him. I explained my theory of the antiquated nature of communism and of its evident failure in the long run. He listened patiently, but I saw that he was a bit bored with it; it was too theoretical for him, too idealistic perhaps.

Yet he was not as hardheaded as he thought he was. The few advantages of his Party membership were not worth the game. He thought that his quick and shameless adjustment to the powers at hand would provide for his independent comforts in years ahead; he convinced himself not only that communism came to

Hungary to stay but also that his kind could stay in Hungary under communism. He was wrong. He mistook the wave of the present for the wave of the future—the occupational hazard of opportunists, including the most talented ones. And so eventually he retreated from communism: In 1949—after two years of unnecessarily protracted expectations and anxieties—he bought himself a legal exit passport for a large sum (obtainable for much less money to non-communists two years before) and emigrated to Australia, where he would die on a ski slope at the age of 60.

In the dark December of 1944 I brushed against one of the self-conscious secret resistance conventicles that—alas, too late—were finally sprouting in Budapest and that, for once, were mostly composed of what could be called professional intellectuals: university people, journalists, cultural officials of the former government, men and women on the fringes of cultural diplomacy. The leading figure of this group, J., was in his thirties, the son of respectable Calvinist gentry, dark, saturnine, and handsome except for his buck teeth, with the then relatively rare accomplishment of speaking English, having visited the United States on a government study grant before Pearl Harbor. An older friend had brought me to his wife's apartment. J. announced that he was a communist. This was before the Russians arrived. I was impressed. His announcement suddenly suggested a new kind of Hungary in which *this* kind of man might be an important personage as a communist. I thought that J. was a very knowledgeable Machiavellian, a younger statesman of sorts, who would soon reach some

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kind of high position in a new Hungarian regime.

After the Russians had arrived, I met J. sporting a proletarian cloth cap, in Lenin's style, day in and day out, in the streets as well as inside their unheated apartment. Perhaps because he had studied the 1917 strategy of the great Lenin, J. struck out for a career not so much within the Party itself (his membership in which he did not cease to flaunt) as within the organization of the Trade Unions—the Soviet track. The time

was ripe, J. and his associates considered, to apply the union principle to all kinds of professions, especially to government and municipal offices—or, more accurately, the time was ripe to secure new and important positions for themselves through the impeccable instrument of Trade Unionism.

Besides providing leadership for my suddenly diminished family—my stepfather was hit by a shell on the street during the last days of the siege and died after three days of agony—I had not much to do. The university had not yet reopened; at any rate I had few courses to complete. Every day I trudged through the ruins of the desolate city to the headquarters of the Association of Trade Unions, where one of the attractions was the free bean soup distributed to the staff every noon. Very soon I suspected that not much would come out of this unionism. The older unions of printers and of metalworkers were already controlled by the communists. The order of the day was to let people like J. exist as long as they had no real power, which, indeed, was the case, except that J. and his friends did not know it. They were wholly preoccupied with their activities, having convinced themselves that



*The Battle for Budapest. In late 1944, the Russian troops arrived, driving out the German and collaborationist armies.*

playing at power was the same thing as the exercise of power—the occupational disease of bureaucrats and, even more, of intellectuals.

Very soon after arriving at the Association of Trade Unions I found that I had really nothing to do. Nor did the others. They, however, concealed this condition with a feverish activity of meetings, conferences, associations, and “workshops” (I have yet to encounter a “workshop” that has anything to do with work), often behind closed doors. It was my first experience of the kind of intellectual bureaucracy that followed the phase of intellectual bohemianism as surely as other phenomena of the 20th century followed those of the 19th. My colleagues were making paperwork for themselves; and they were taking their functions, paper functions, very seriously. After the siege there was in Budapest a shortage of everything, from flour to matches, even a shortage of water. Of paper, miraculously—or perhaps not so miraculously—there seemed to have been no shortage at all.

Already on the second day of my ap-

pearance at the Association of Trade Unions I found that the most febrile kinds of intrigues were forming: confidential meetings behind closed doors from which certain people were excluded, others suddenly admitted. All these bureaucratic war games were criss-crossed by plots and paths that may have come from somewhere but that surely led to nowhere. Indeed, within a year the Association of Trade Unions was gone; within five years J., the Early Communist, found himself in prison; another five years later he was acquitted, whereafter he was appointed to an important position within the government's export-import organization, having finally acquired the official limousine and the diplomatic passport—a communist pilgrim's progress, a not untypical Hungarian career in the middle of the 20th century.

Late in March the Americans arrived—an event that I must describe in some detail. According to the arrangements made at Yalta, there was to be an Allied Control Commission in each of the former Axis countries, composed of Soviet, British and American representatives, a political and a military mission. The Russians, of course, ruled the roost in Budapest, and everywhere else in Eastern Europe (just as the Americans ruled similar commissions, say, in Rome). In retrospect, this American and British presence in Hungary was so ephemeral (the mission left in 1947, after the peace treaty between the Allies and Hungary was signed) that in the long and tragic history of my native country it is hardly worth mentioning at all. This remains a fact; and yet, oddly enough, it was not quite that way. Something of that air of American omnipotence in 1945, the impression that the United States, in an unprecedented way, was the greatest power in the world, transpired throughout the globe, lighting even the gloomy and depressing

skies over Budapest. There were perhaps not more than 200 Americans, fewer than 100 of them in uniform; yet somehow their presence in the capital seemed to be as evident, and almost as ubiquitous, as that of the Russians.

This condition was inseparable from the sudden and passionate Americanophilia of my countrymen, many of whom translated all of their expectations accordingly. Months before the war ended, hundreds, maybe thousands of people who knew some English daydreamed about getting a job with the British or the American missions. On the morning when the first Americans arrived, a nervous, teeming crowd of people besieged the entrances of the building they were to occupy; I heard that some people had arrived in the freezing dawn hours to get a first glimpse of the promised Americans in order to rush at them from favorable starting posts.

Presently, just about every American, whether high officer or private, became the acquisition of a Hungarian wife or mistress. The head of the military mission was a major general, a former governor of Oklahoma, who had his son posted to Budapest, where the latter was promptly annexed by a young bourgeoisie, his father's ambitious secretary who had fought for her desk on the first day and won it by gleaming tooth and red-lacquered nail. They were subsequently married and left for the United States on a special military plane. What happened to her in Oklahoma I now wonder; at the time, her story was a miracle tale, one of the *fabliaux* of 1945, Year Zero.

I would have liked very much to be annexed to the Americans or to the British, but I did not participate in the crush and rush of the first days, not so much because it would have been demeaning but because I had suffered from intellectual ochlophobia, the fear of crowds, since an early age. I thought I'd write my own ticket—a

## HUNGARY'S FATE: 1945–1956

In February 1945, the Allied leaders—Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Joseph Stalin—met in the Crimean city of Yalta to make plans for the postwar occupation of Nazi-dominated territories. But the fate of Hungary, like that of other East European countries, had already been largely decided. As early as December 31, 1944, the Soviet Union had established a provisional government in Hungary, which included parties from the non-communist left. Initially moderate, the Hungarian communists worked hard to rebuild the country, while pledging to guarantee democracy, private property, and small private industries. But poor showings in the first four elections prompted the Soviet-backed party to blackmail, intimidate, and even imprison popular opposition leaders.

In May 1949, after winning a carefully orchestrated election, the communists drafted a new constitution establishing Hungary as a "People's Republic." Mátyás Rákosi, the first secretary of the Worker's Party, launched ambitious nationalization and collectivization drives, all of which foundered. Facing widespread discontent, the regime adopted a "New Course" in 1953, and a new prime minister, Imre Nagy, discontinued collectivization and permitted the production of more consumer goods. A bitter power struggle between Nagy and Rákosi continued until 1955, when the reformer was expelled from the party and Rákosi and his successor, Ernő Gerő, put the nation back on a proper "Stalinist" course.



*The Yalta Conference, February 4–11, 1945.*

In October 1956, inspired by Nikita Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin, Hungarian students took to the streets demanding reforms. But the peaceful protest was met by police violence, and the demonstration escalated into an armed uprising. Calling in Soviet troops, Gerő created rifts within his own party, and Nagy was reinstated to head a coalition government. Moscow withdrew its troops and agreed to negotiate. But Nagy pressed his hand too far, demanding Hungary's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact and neutral status. The Soviet tanks rolled back into Hungary, reaching Budapest on November 4, and after several weeks of bloody fighting, the "National Communist" János Kádár stood at the helm of an obedient Soviet satellite.

resolution that, again, involved me in an enterprise in which nobler and baser purposes were mixed. Having recognized the futility of my association with the Association of Trade Unions, I spent a night at home, literally burning the candle at both ends (candles were rare and electricity still nonexistent), composing a political memorandum in English that I intended to hand over to an American diplomat of the first rank. The memorandum consisted of information that I thought was not available elsewhere, items involving misdeeds by the

Russians or the communists. My idea was very simple. I would inform the Americans about such matters, not only for my country's benefit but also for my own.

Somehow I had secured a list of all American personnel in Budapest, wherefrom I deduced that the person I ought to contact was the first secretary of the legation. I presented myself at the legation about a week or so after it had established itself in Budapest. The line of supplicants and applicants had not much thinned, but the very fact that I asked for Mr. Squires by





A 1947 poster for Hungary's Three-Year Plan. The first socialist state plans in Eastern Europe were devoted to repairing the ravages of the war.

his name seemed to have made an impression on the Hungarian receptionist, who, after a moment of hesitation, took the small envelope containing my visiting card on which I had written, in impeccable English, something like this: "The bearer of this card would like to have the honor and the pleasure to discuss certain matters of interest with Mr. Squires."

I was admitted to Squires's office. He was, I vaguely recall, a large, affable man, not quite as diffident as his British counterpart would have been, but reflecting, rather, the peculiarly American compound of being both perplexed and incurious at the same time. I babbled something in English about how important it was that the American mission be properly informed about certain important matters. I do not remember his saying anything. I put the

memorandum upon the table. He said, "What can I do for you?" or words to that effect. On a coffee table I saw copies of *Time* and *Life* magazines. I hadn't seen their likes for many years. I said something to the effect that I would be only too glad to furnish him with the most confidential, and accurate, kind of political information about developments in Hungary if he would let me have a small supply of these superb American journals. He told me to help myself. I felt that I had just achieved a great, an unimaginable coup. I clutched several issues of *Life* and *Time* to my chest. I floated homeward in a cloud of triumph. In our unheated dwelling, grimy and redolent of the saddening odor of poverty, I faced the ruined beauty of my Anglomaniac mother. "Guess what I have!" I said. My mother turned radiant. She could not believe my luck.

Squires was one of those rich Americans from a good family who had entered the foreign service in the '30s because it was a more interesting career than banking: a type that, I am sorry to say, has disappeared from the ranks of the American foreign service by now. This I recognized later, having also learned that his main interests included liquor and polo, a kind of period mix that makes me almost nostalgic. He seemed not very much interested in Hungarian politics, perhaps because he was smart enough to know that there was not much that the United States could or even should do. He was also enough of a man of the world to know how to disembarass himself, in a smooth and professional way, of this young freak who, for all he knew, might be a Soviet or communist agent.

Eventually—and I cannot now remember exactly how—I found a less unwilling recipient of the kind of information that I had to offer. He was Rear Admiral William F. Dietrich, the third

in command of the American military mission: an honest navy officer of the old school, a practicing Catholic who abhorred communism without at first saying so, who would not only welcome my confidences in a fatherly manner but who, a year later, would be the person most responsible for getting me out of political trouble. Arranging for the transportation of my only suitcase in his personal car across the border to Austria (whereto I escaped), he then furnished me with the kind of character reference that ensured my receiving a priority visa to the United States once I presented myself to an American consulate in the West. In short, he may have saved my life.

By the time Admiral Dietrich and I had become friends, that is, by the summer of 1945, I knew many Americans in Budapest, at least by sight. There was not, as far as I can remember or ascertain, a mean one among them. To most of us, the Americans seemed the brightest, the smartest, and the best among all the human types who were to be found in Hungary in those crucial and tragic times; and, indeed, in many ways they were.

I can, however, recall two types of Americans who left unpleasant memories. They were not members of the American missions. Sometime in the late summer of 1945 the news that a visit to ruined Budapest promised certain paradisiacal prospects for certain American visitors must have begun to circulate in certain circles in New York. *Cognoscenti* (Am.: wise guys) such as the publisher of *Esquire* magazine would arrive on a visit, hugely enjoying the pleasures of the flesh that were easily available to them in this downtrodden and beggar-poor country. There was something obscene in this, especially when they later described their visits in the style that was typical of *Esquire* at the time and that, alas, has become typical of most American magazines since then: the kind of prose whose

principal purpose is to tell what kind of shoes, what kind of cheese, what kind of people, and what kind of sexual compositions are “in”—a concept of connoisseurship that is public, not private. For what is the use of the discovery of a superb little wine from an unknown vineyard, or of a superb ruined city where formerly aristocratic privileges and pleasures can be secured for peanuts, unless the fact, even more than the subject, of one’s discovery can be displayed in public?

**T**he other kind of unpleasant visitor was the sort of émigré who, having left Hungary before the war and being well on the way to a lucrative or spectacular career in the United States, usually in the capacity of either a scientist or a moviemaker, would arrive in Budapest from a Paramount Studio or from a Rockefeller University, full of arrogance, unease, and contempt for the miserable and despondent people of the country. I particularly remember one of these tatty birds of passage, already beyond the prime of his life, decked out in the regalia of an American colonel or brigadier, shuffling his flat feet across the lobby of the American mission building. I read about him a few days later: He was professing the right kind of leftward opinions of the time. His sour countenance seemed to reflect his opinions: Hungary got what she had coming to her, that is, the Soviet occupation, the best thing for a people who had been stupid enough to be allied to the Germans. Years later in the United States he became a scientific adviser to the Eisenhower administration, one of the scientist-spokesmen for the production of bigger and better hydrogen bombs. In an interview he gave in the '50s I read: “I know what communism means: I know what the Soviets did to my unhappy country.”

The British were a slightly different

story. There were fewer of them; they were diffident and also more aloof. Because of geography and tradition and because they were the standard-bearers of the struggle against the Third Reich from the outset, we thought, before Year Zero, that the British, rather than the Americans, would be the chief Western power in our part of Europe after the war—which, of course, did not turn out to be the case. They were far less impressed with the charms of Hungary and of Hungarians than were the Americans; they acted as if they knew that Hungary now belonged to the Soviet sphere of interest, and that there was not much left to do.

My first meeting with them was sad. I was plodding home on a late March evening when the suddenly warm and liquid air and the brightness of the twilight promise the pleasantness of summer for people in more or less normal conditions, while for others this development of implacable warmth and of light serves only to illuminate one's wretchedness and misery—March, and not April, being the cruelest month, at least in my native city. I knew that the arrival of the British and American missions was imminent. Suddenly, rounding a bend on the empty boulevard, I came upon two British officers, with red tabs, one of them carrying his cane, taking a brisk after-dinner walk, no doubt. I stopped. "Are you British?" I asked. "Oh, it is so good to see you"—or words to that effect. We exchanged a few words, and they went on. I was only 21 years old, but even then I felt that this encounter had the sad tinge of a long unrequited love. So they had come, after all—even if it was too late, after so many years of disappointments, after so many years of waiting, of hope, of tragedy. I sensed a kind of embarrassment as they went on. We, who loved the British in 1940—memories that even now give me a *frisson*—imagined their future victory: the triumph of a British-led Europe where free-

dom, decency, and a kind of easy elegance would exist anew. But it was not to be such a world.

At any rate (certainly at any rate of exchange) the British were poorer than the Americans. They were poorer than they had ever been, but as snobbish as ever. For the British, unlike for other peoples, snobbery is the outcome of diffidence as much as of arrogance, perhaps even more. They were unwilling to get involved with men and women whom they could not place and on whom, on occasion, they might have to depend. It was all restrained, modest, and cold with a slight touch of being almost shabby. It was all contrary to Hungarian expectations, though not to my own, having attended school in England for two years as a teenager.

Still Anglomania lived on. One of my pathetic memories of Year Zero includes a wedding reception in the fall. A Hungarian girl, the only daughter of an impoverished, gray-faced doctor, had fallen in love with a British sergeant, a North Englishman, with the long, knobby face of his class, which, as I instantly recognized even before he spoke, was that of the lower-middle variety. But this his bride, and her family, did not (or perhaps did not want to) know. I can still see her nervously smiling in the living room of that apartment (the reception was held at home), furnished with the remnants—German china, Bohemian glass, faded runners, grayed lace, a worn rug—of a destroyed bourgeois past that once had belonged to a world that was civic, fussy, stuffy, but, after all was said, reasonably honorable. Her luck, the fortune, to be married to an English soldier at this time, to be carried off as a bride to England! I, and perhaps some others, knew that there was something very wrong: that her progress from this broken-down boulevard apartment with its low-bourgeois bibelots to a gas firegrate somewhere in the Mid-

lands was not necessarily up. After all, for someone born in Hungary even the ubiquitous cooking smell of paprika and onions frying in cheap lard—especially ubiquitous now when it could no longer be confined to kitchens—was preferable to the coal-smoke and sultana-cake and weak-cocoa odor of mid-England; and even the broken remnants of a past, that grand piano whose chords had long lost their twang and whose polish had long lost its shine, and the doctor-father's *Collected Works of Goethe* in the glass bookcase, were symbols of

matters that would not exist where this girl was about to go. This decent and good Englishman stood there uneasily and self-consciously cracking jokes with two of his pals; he was getting roped into something that was embarrassing and difficult. I doubted whether the marriage would last a year. Perhaps he did, too. The bride, well-tutored, articulate, Hungarian, did not know it. In a very Hungarian way, the wish *was* the thought, again and again.

I have now described the few hundred Americans and Englishmen who were temporary residents of my native city at the time. But how about the Russians, of whom there were hundreds of thousands around, who ruled my country and all of the surrounding countries then, and indeed, until just the day before yesterday?

The Russians? Well, there is not much to say about the Russians. They were everywhere and they were nowhere. All kinds of funny, and some not so funny, books have been written about them, about their childishness, their primitiveness, their brutal-



*In 1948, large factories were nationalized throughout Eastern Europe. Industrial production shot up, but, with the production of consumer goods throttled, the standard of living failed to rise.*

ity—about the Russian soldiers who tried to shave out of flush toilets, mistaking them for washbasins, or who gulped down entire bottles of eau de cologne, mistaking them for perfumed vodka.

During the 18 months that I spent under Russian occupation I did not meet a single Russian who spoke an intelligible French or English or even German. They all seemed to have been stamped out of a mold: their minds even more than their bodies. Under Soviet rule the eternally passive masses of the Russias had been activated—up to a certain level, in certain ways. They were taught to read and write; they were taught to think in public categories, for the first time in their history. They had acquired a new skill: They had learned words and phrases that were public answers to public questions. They were more than satisfied with this achievement: a verbal achievement that rendered them civic and “cultured.”

What impressed me even at that time was the Russians' deep-seated sense of inferiority. They, the conquerors, seemed

quite stiff and uneasy at the receptions of the American mission. In spite of their elephantine and hideous power they would react to the slightest kind of criticism; they insisted that respect be paid to them on any and every occasion; all in all, they were very unsure of themselves, perhaps especially in the presence of Americans, for whom, I am sure, they had an emotional kind of admiration that they tried their best (and also their worst) to suppress. I was not at all surprised when, a few years later, Stalin began the ridiculous campaign proclaiming to the Soviet peoples and to the world that the inventors of the telephone, the airplane, etc., etc., had not been Americans or Europeans but Russians.

It was mainly because of the Russians that the distaste for communism in Hungary was so extraordinarily widespread. I thought then, and also much later in the United States—arguing with Americans about this in vain, until I was blue in the face—that communism was not much of a danger, that once the Russians removed themselves from a European country they occupied, communism and communists would vanish there. The very fact that something was propagated by the Russians made it repugnant. Other European peoples who had lived under Russian rule decades before, the Finns, Baltics, Poles, had had this experience. In this respect German rule, precisely because it was more civilized on the surface, probably would have harmed Hungary more in the long run, for then the culture of the nation would have become more than considerably Germanized. As matters turned out, after more than 45 years of Russian occupation, the Russian influence on the culture and civilization of my native country has been zero.

This brings me to the deficient appeal of communism and of communists. During

Year Zero I could see who were the kinds of people who joined their Party. The brightest among them were the opportunists such as the earlier-mentioned J., or the capitalist friend of my family who chose to join the winning side because it was the winning side, *pur et simple*. (Among opportunists no less than among revolutionaries there is such a type as *un pur*: the person who will allow no compromise to sully his dedication to the supreme cause of opportunism.) Oddly—or perhaps not so oddly—the Russians, forever eager to be appreciated, especially by people who were smart, had a respect for such opportunists, much more than they had for the motley variety of convinced communists. What struck me at the time was how many of the latter were—how should I put it?—people with a deeply embedded sense of personal, rather than cultural, inferiority. To be sure, all of us suffer from the wounds of some kind of humiliation, all of us nurture at least one complex of relative inferiority in our hearts; but there are some people who allow these sentiments to grow to an extent that they became a dominant factor in their personalities and aspirations, and this seemed to be the case with most of the communists I met in 1945. They were unsure, suspicious, narrow, and bitter: in sum, preternaturally *aged*—as was indeed the philosophy of Marxism, that cast-iron piece left over from the junk heap of 19th-century ideas.

Sometime during the summer of Year Zero I met Georg Lukács,\* one of the few famous communist intellectuals, who had just arrived from Moscow. He, too, had the appearance of a tired survivor from another age: a leftover from the Weimar period. Everything about him was drooping and sliding down: his glasses, his eyelids be-

\*I am no relative of this man, with whose name mine has been sometimes confused. His international fame was resurrected—or rather, artificially inflated—by Anglo-American intellectuals circa 1960. Few people have bothered to read him in his native Hungary.

hind his glasses, his ears, his nose, his large cynical mouth, his coat, his cravat, his tobacco-stained hands. His countenance, curiously like that of many other Weimar intellectuals whom I would later encounter in America, reminded me of a dirty ashtray. He knew German better than he knew his native language, which he spoke with a weary coffee-house accent. His conversation, or what I remember of it, consisted mostly of tired *Kaffeehaus* witticisms with which he tried not only to lighten the customary Marxist platitudes but also to cover up the fact that he knew remarkably ("remarkably" being the *mot juste*) little of what Hungary had lived through and what Hungarians were thinking. His last contact with his native country had occurred more than a quarter of a century before, during Béla Kún's regime, which, for him, were halcyon days. In sum, an intellectual fossil.

Most of these still-believing communist intellectuals moved by inclinations that were Trotskyist rather than Stalinist. Of course they would go to any lengths to deny this. This is, too, why I was not at all surprised when, on Stalin's orders, a few years later the police government of Hungary began to get rid of some of them in the most cruel and brutal manner imaginable: No matter how cowardly and conformist, they were, after all, international communists, not dumb Muscovite minions; they were not particularly good at being both brutal and vulgar, unlike their Russian masters. This was also why I was not surprised that most of these surviving communist intellectuals were in the vanguard of the 1956 uprising, when they had finally realized that the rule imposed on them was so stupid and senseless as to

be intolerable. They also realized that "intolerable" is what people no longer want to tolerate.

The year 1945 was already into autumn. In September Baron U., a great banker and capitalist, and a very genial man to boot, gave a party in his relatively untouched mansion, where he invited leading members of the government and of the political parties, including Rákosi, the potato-headed, unscrupulous boss of the Communist Party, back from Moscow. (I was not among the guests.) I asked F, the Baron's relative—an older man, another former great industrialist and an officer of the Hungarian-British Society—why U. would do such a thing. "You are too young to understand, my boy," F said. "We were brought up by the principle"—he said it in English—"right or wrong, my country." I was impressed by his response; I could not answer him and thought about it for a long time, feeling, however, that there was something wrong with this. Many years later I read G. K. Chesterton with delight: "My country right or wrong is like saying, 'My mother, drunk or sober.'" Still, Chesterton's aphorism related to an England, swollen with pride, in the aftermath of the mafficking and the jingoism of the Boer War. We, in Hungary, another generation later, were stiff and swollen not with pride and possessions but with hunger and hatred, including self-hatred. I was struggling against the communist subjugation of my country, yet if someone had offered me American or Swiss or Portuguese citizenship I would have accepted it in an instant. "Right or wrong," I thought, "*my* country?" From this time on not much remains to be said: Year Zero was about to run out—and I was about to run away from my country.

# AFTER THE BLOC PARTY

*by Stephen E. Deane*

**I**t is easy to wax euphoric over the events that swept Eastern Europe in 1989. The images—flashed across television screens or played upon the pages of newspapers and magazines—still remain fresh in memory: In Hungary, the funeral and reburial of Imre Nagy, leader of the 1956 Revolution; in East Germany, the joyous flood of people streaming through the Berlin Wall, that symbol of division and Cold War; in Poland, the beaming face of Lech Walesa, his Solidarity trade union relegalized; in Bulgaria, unprecedented throngs demanding democracy; in Czechoslovakia, vast crowds shaking their keys for the final curtain of communist rule; in Romania, the bloody end to the hated Ceausescu dictatorship.

As people power toppled the old guard in one country after another, it all seemed deceptively easy. “What were we afraid of all these years?” asked former dissident Rita Klimová, as she scurried about her small Prague apartment in preparation for her new job: Czechoslovakia’s ambassador to Washington.

To be sure, popular upheavals had shaken individual East European states at other times during the postwar era—in East Germany in 1953, in Hungary in 1956, and in Czechoslovakia in 1968. But an uncompromising Soviet Union saw to it that each one of these was crushed. In 1989, however, the Soviet leader himself inspired reform, and this time he made it clear that Soviet troops would not intervene. One by one, the East European satellites broke out of the Soviet orbit.

Poland was the first to go. On April 7, the government and Solidarity reached a round-table agreement, relegalizing Solidarity and providing for partially free elections. Despite election laws designed, with Solidarity’s assent, to assure a majority of communists and their allies, the communists were roundly humiliated at the polls on June 4. The opposition had received a clear mandate to govern, and on August 24 Solidarity’s Tadeusz Mazowiecki became prime minister, thus sealing the first successful transition from communist rule to democracy.

In Hungary, on February 11, the Communist Party Central Committee approved the creation of independent political parties. Three months later, on May 2, Hungary became the first country to dismantle its part of the Iron Curtain, tearing down the barbed wire on the border with Austria. On the seventh of October, the communists—officially the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party—reformed and renamed themselves the Hungarian Socialist Party. Ten days later, the parliament changed the constitution to allow for a multiparty system, and in a November referendum, the people voted to postpone the presidential election until after free parliamentary elections had taken place on March 25.

A certain ripple effect was clearly disturbing the once-solid Soviet bloc. On September 10, Budapest decided to allow visiting East Germans passage from Hungary into Austria. Once the floodgate was opened, thousands of East Germans fled to the West, while thousands more sought refuge—and a first step toward freedom—in

the West German embassies in Prague and Warsaw. The mass exodus, to say the least, put a damper on the German Democratic Republic's 40th anniversary celebration, and nine days later, on October 16, 100,000 East Germans demonstrated for change in Leipzig. On October 18, an ailing Erich Honecker was toppled and replaced by Egon Krenz, who was himself replaced in December by Gregor Gysi, a lawyer who had defended dissidents. Amid all these reshufflings, however, came the event of greatest symbolic resonance: the opening of the Berlin Wall on November 9. The politics of 1989 now had its equivalent of the storming of the Bastille.

But other East Europeans had little time to marvel at the momentousness of the moment. Just one day after the fall of the Wall, Bulgaria's dour leader of 35 years, Todor Zhivkov, was ousted. The foreign minister, Petar Mladenov, took the helm, promising Gorbachev-style reforms.

Czechoslovakia's hard-line leadership—installed by the Soviet tanks that had crushed the Prague Spring—suddenly found itself isolated. Most of the Czech and Slovak citizens, who pride themselves on a rich European cultural heritage, were embarrassed to find themselves lagging behind Bulgaria. Just as humiliating was being lumped together with the Soviet bloc's most Stalinist state—Romania.

But the government made a fatal mistake. On Friday, November 17, the police beat nonviolent student demonstrators with a fury unseen in Prague for two decades. "The massacre," as this event quickly became known, galvanized the opposition. That weekend, Czech students, actors, dissidents, and workers joined in creating the Civic Forum; Slovaks formed a sister organization, the Public Against Violence (PAV). Events accelerated at a breathtaking pace. On November 27, millions of workers staged a two-hour general strike,



*Lech Walesa leading the 1988 strike in the Gdańsk shipyard. Solidarity's popularity forced the government to agree to free elections.*

and less than a month later, on December 10 (International Human Rights Day), Civic Forum leader Václav Havel announced a new coalition government. The opposition gained the key posts, and Havel himself became president on December 29. Parliamentary elections are set for June.

Meanwhile, the Christmas season was proving to be less than kind to Romania's Stalinist dictator, Nicolae Ceaușescu. A mid-December protest on behalf of a pastor in Timișoara sparked the uprising. It took the army, however, to put down Ceaușescu's own private force, the fanatical Securitate. Ceaușescu and his wife, Elena, were executed—in what most observers deemed a grim but necessary spectacle—on Christmas Day.



The National Salvation Front, a loose coalition dominated by anti-Ceausescu communists in cooperation with the army, took over the government. While parliamentary elections are set for May, the political situation continues to be volatile.

Not that stability reigns in the other newly liberated nations. An old East European saw defines communism as "the longest and most arduous path from capitalism to capitalism," but now the witticism sounds less like a joke than a challenge. East European nations, fresh from the victories of 1989, are beginning to see just how difficult it is to move from single-party states and command economies to multi-party political systems and efficient free markets.

Poland, in most respects, is still leading the way. Throughout the 1980s, Solidarity—steered by Lech Walesa, backed by some of Poland's ablest intellects, and supported by the Catholic Church and a Polish pope—pioneered what Timothy Garton Ash has justly described "as a new kind of politics in Eastern Europe . . . a politics of social self-organization aimed at negotiating the transition from communism." But "refolution," to use Garton Ash's neologism, has its costs. Today, Poland's new institutions are encumbered by compromises that opposition leaders were forced to accept in their dealings with the communists.

So, for instance, while Poland was the first state to hold free elections, the opposition was allowed to contest only 35 percent of the seats in the lower house. Similarly, though Poland became the first East European state with a non-communist prime minister, Wojciech Jaruzelski, the general who imposed martial law from December 13, 1981, to July 22, 1983, remains the pres-

ident. And while the Communist Party split up in late January, entrenched functionaries at the local level have so far refused to budge. "The real battle for the future of Poland will happen on the local level," says Jerzy Regulski, the minister for local government reform.

Solidarity faces a difficult dilemma. It must hold together at least as long as the communist apparatus remains. Yet as Poland proceeds toward democracy, the various forces within Solidarity will inevitably split into separate interest groups, even into separate parties. By early 1990, such divisions had already emerged. Most of the government team, led by finance minister Leszek Balcerowicz, favors a big-bang shift to a market economy. The Solidarity delegation in Parliament, headed by Bronislaw Geremek, prefers a gentler social-democratic approach, with guarantees of basic welfare. And then there is the trade-union core of Solidarity—whose strength resides in the very factories, huge and obsolete, that the Solidarity-led government wants to break up for the sake of economic reform.

District elections scheduled for this June (or earlier) are expected to break the communists' stranglehold on local power. But the unifying force of Solidarity may still be needed to carry the nation through wrenching economic changes.

Czechoslovakia may have things a little easier. "In Poland there is exhaustion after eight years of struggle for democracy," observed Miroslaw Jasinski, a Pole who co-founded the Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity group, "but here [in Czechoslovakia] there was a blitzkrieg that has enabled people to conserve their strength." That blitzkrieg resulted in fewer

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compromises with the communists, and as a result, Jasinski believes, "People here have the opportunity to achieve full democracy far more quickly."

The Civic Forum has already placed the people it favors in key posts, beginning with the presidency. Economist Valtr Komarek, one of two first deputy prime ministers, will chart the transition to a market economy. Dissident lawyer Jan Carnogursky, the other first deputy prime minister, will shepherd in legal changes guaranteeing human rights and multiparty democracy. Richard Sacher, Eastern Europe's first non-communist interior minister, ordered the abolition of the STB, or secret police, on February 1. And Jiri Dienstbier, a veteran human-rights activist, left his job as a stoker to become the new foreign minister.

The opposition also has succeeded in balancing the government leadership between Czechs and Slovaks, who form the two nations in this federal state. Marian Calfa (the new prime minister) and Carnogursky are Slovak, as is the new head of the parliament, Alexander Dubček. A recurrence of the tensions that have marred Czech-Slovak relations in the past cannot be ruled out, though I found no evidence of such hostilities during a month-long stay in Czechoslovakia this past winter.

Political fragmentation, not the nationality question, represents Czechoslovakia's most serious challenge. More than 30 political parties have sprung up to compete with the five pre-existing parties. There are several Social Democratic parties or factions, several Christian Democratic parties, at least two rival Green parties, and a left wing that includes the old Communist Party and two reformist parties. Czechoslovakia could find itself adrift without leader-



The Old and the New. *Alexander Dubček, leader of Czechoslovakia's ill-fated Prague Spring (1968), and Václav Havel toast the fall of the communist leadership.*

ship, its freely elected parliament immobilized by fractious quarrels.

The alternative is for the Civic Forum to stay together and for Havel to remain president, uniting both parliament and country after the June elections. Sasha Vondra, a spokesperson for the group, told me that the Forum could not become a political party because it comprises so many different political views, from neo-Trotskyism to neo-conservatism. Yet both the Forum and PAV will endorse a list of candidates—both independents and those running under party banners. This could be the first step in the evolution of the Civic Forum into a "non-party" party, one above politics, similar to Charles de Gaulle's *Rassemblement du Peuple Français* after World War II. The Forum could eschew partisan politics—the left, right, and center—and instead lay claim to a politics of morality. Havel

## THE SPRINGTIME OF NATIONS

*In an essay from his forthcoming book, The Magic Lantern: The Revolution of '89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin, and Prague (Random House), Timothy Garton Ash explores the significance of last year's events in Eastern Europe.*

Eighteen-forty-eight was called the Springtime of Nations or the Springtime of Peoples: the *Völkerfrühling*, *wiosna ludów*. The revolutionaries, in all the lands, spoke in the name of "the people." But the international solidarity of "the people" was broken by conflict between nations, old and new, while the domestic solidarity of "the people" was broken by conflict between social groups—what came to be known as "classes." "Socialism and nationalism, as mass forces, were both the product of 1848," writes A. J. P. Taylor. And for a century after 1848, until the communist deepfreeze, Central Europe was a battlefield of nations and social classes.

Of what, or of whom, was 1989 the springtime? Of "the people?" But in what sense? "*Wir sind das Volk*," shouted the first great crowds in East Germany: The people against the self-styled people's state. But within a few weeks many of them had changed the definite article. "*Wir sind EIN Volk*," they now chanted: that is, we are one nation. In Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, the crowds were a sea of national flags, while the people raised their voice to sing old national hymns. In Hungary and Romania they cut the communist symbols out of the centers of their flags. In East Germany there were, at first, no flags, no hymns. But gradually the flags came out, plain stripes of red, black and gold without the GDR hammer and dividers in the middle: the flag of Western and before that of united Germany. And the chant taken up by a very large part of the crowds was "*Deutschland, Einig Vaterland!*"—the line on whose account the so-called "national" anthem of the GDR had not been sung officially since the early 1970s.

In every Western newspaper commentary on Eastern Europe one now invariably reads that there is a grave danger of something called "nationalism" reviving in this region. But what on earth does this mean? Does it mean that people are again proud to be Czech, Polish, Hungarian, or, for that matter, German? That hearts lift at sight of the flag and throats tighten when they sing the national anthem? In that case I must warn the world against one of the most rabidly "nationalist" countries I know. It

is called the United States of America.

Patriotism is not nationalism. Rediscovered pride in your own nation does not necessarily imply hostility to other nations. These movements were all, without exception, patriotic. They were not all nationalist. Indeed, in their first steps most of the successor regimes were markedly less nationalist than their Communist predecessors. The Mazowiecki government in Poland took a decisively more liberal and enlightened approach to both the Jewish and the German questions than any previous government, indeed drawing criticism, on the German issue, from the communist-nationalists. In his first public statement as president, Václav Havel emphasized that he would be the president of "all Czechs, Slovaks, and members of other nationalities." His earlier remark on television that Czechoslovakia owes the Sudeten Germans an apology for the way they were expelled after World War II was fiercely criticized by—the Communists. In Romania, the revolution began with the ethnic Romanian inhabitants of Timișoara making common cause with their ethnic Hungarian fellow citizens. It would require very notable exertions for the treatment of the German and Hungarian minorities in post-revolutionary Romania to be worse than it was under Nicolae Ceaușescu.

National and ethnic conflicts may grow again among and within these states, as they did in Eastern Europe before the last war, especially if their economic situation deteriorates. Or those national and ethnic conflicts may progressively be alleviated, as were those of Western Europe after the last war, especially if these countries' economic situation improves in a process of integration into a larger European common market and community. We shall see. But the historical record must show that 1989 was not a year of acute national and ethnic conflict in Eastern Europe west of the Soviet frontier. Quite the reverse: It was a year of solidarity both within and among nations. At the end of the year, symbolic and humanitarian support for the people(s) of Romania came from all the self-liberated states of East Central Europe. A springtime of nations is not necessarily a springtime of "nationalism."

seemed to take this approach in his New Year's Day address to the nation: "Now the issue really is not which party, club, or group wins the elections. The issue now is that the elections are won by those who are best in the moral, civic, political, and specialist sense, regardless of which party cards they hold."

At the same time, Havel is competent, even masterful, at behind-the-scenes hard-ball politics, as he demonstrated when he turned Alexander Dubček, a potential rival for the presidency, into an ally by seeing to it that he was made the head of parliament. The question is whether Havel and Civic Forum can continue to find a balance between the politics of morality and the realities of partisan conflict.

In Hungary, unlike Poland and Czechoslovakia, the Communist Party itself led the march away from Marxism-Leninism—first, in the evolutionary changes that characterized János Kádár's 32-year rule (1956–88), and second, in the accelerated reforms that swept away (or at least transformed) the Communist Party during the last couple of years. Imre Pozsgay and his fellow reformers-from-within, now calling themselves radical socialists, have steered both the new Socialist Party and (at least until the March elections) the government itself.

The ruling party having led the way, no Solidarity or Civic Forum emerged in Hungary. But with the opening of the political system, at least 47 parties have rushed in. In the partisan jostle, symbolic differences often seem to outweigh substantial ones. Many in the various opposition groups go without neckties to distinguish themselves from the communists and their heirs. But how do they distinguish their political and economic programs? David Shipler, writing recently in the *New Yorker*, described a "vague opposition whose programs and personalities remain sketchy." But Balint Magyar, a leader of the Alliance of Free

Democrats, disagrees, citing the 160-page program that his party had put out as early as March 1989.

Some observers are troubled less by vagueness than by rumors of virulent nationalism and of anti-Jewish and anti-Gypsy sentiments among some parties. Although its spokesmen deny it, critics allege that the Democratic Forum harbors anti-Semitism. As Shipler noted, there was increasing talk "... about 'real Hungarians,' as opposed to Jewish Hungarians, who are stereotyped negatively as being prominent at each end of the political spectrum—in the Communist hierarchy at one end, or in one of the most radical opposition parties, the Alliance of Free Democrats, at the other."



The dangerous mix of democracy and nationalism is nowhere more evident in Eastern Europe than in Bulgaria. In Hungary, suppressed tensions threaten to rise to the surface; in Bulgaria, the new leadership is seeking to quell hostilities that its hard-line predecessors provoked and encouraged. Last summer 320,000 Bulgarian Turks fled to Turkey—the culmination of a violent campaign that the Zhivkov regime had waged since 1984 to force the Turkish minority to abandon its religion and language and to accept Slavic names. The new communist leadership has moved to restore cultural, religious, and political rights to the country's one million ethnic Turks and other Muslims—only to

face strikes and protests from the Bulgarian majority. At one demonstration in Sofia, the crowd demanded a referendum vote on a constitutional provision that would make Bulgaria one nation with one official language and religion.

Opposition leaders, however, blame hard-line Zhivkov supporters for continuing to whip up antagonisms. "The anti-reformists are trying to fight their last battle over the ethnic issue," Zhelio Zhelev, president of the opposition's rainbow coalition, the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), asserted in January. The UDF, which comprises 15 groups of intellectuals, ecology activists, trade unionists, and others, has been conducting fitful round-table talks with the communist leadership. In late February, the Communist Party agreed in principle to an opposition demand to withdraw Party cells from the workplace. The communists also agreed to postpone elections from May to June. The opposition has demanded that elections be put off until November to give it more time to organize.

Mladenov seems to want reforms aimed at improving communism, not at doing away with it. "It is only socialism that can grant social and economic development in our society," he declared in December. On February 2, Mladenov was removed as head of the Party, but he remained head of the state.

Romania's revolution—the only violent one in Eastern Europe—consisted neither of an organized opposition, as in Poland and Czechoslovakia, nor of reform-minded communist authorities, as in Hungary and Bulgaria. Hatred of Ceaușescu united Romanians during the uprising, but what will bind the nation together now? Some Romanians fear that the Ceaușescu dictatorship will be replaced by a dictatorship of the ruling National Salvation Front (NSF). The organization that originally described itself as a transitional government now says it will

run in the spring elections. In becoming a political party, the NSF could shed elements of its coalition of technocrats, students, and dissidents and be left with two core groups: anti-Ceaușescu communists, led by President Ion Iliescu, and the army. The NSF, backed by the army, could then seek to consolidate its power over an increasingly splintered populace.

There is hope, however, that Romanians, filled with revulsion at the violence they have already suffered, will make democracy work. On February 1, the National Salvation Front agreed to give up its monopoly of power and to enter into a coalition with 29 other parties. And even if the NSF wins the election, it is committed to a formal separation of party and state. This will give the opposition parties in parliament the opportunity to hone their political skills and to build coalitions.

It is worth recalling, too, that Romania's revolution was sparked when the ethnically diverse townspeople of Timișoara united behind a Protestant minister who had spoken out in defense of his fellow ethnic Hungarians. "History does not suggest that the Romanians have a particular gift for democracy," noted Romanian sociologist Pavel Campeanu in the *The New York Review of Books*, "but the price they have just paid offers the hope that they will be particularly protective of any democratic institutions they may create."

**P**oles, Czechs and Slovaks, Hungarians, Bulgarians, and Romanians all carried out revolutions without calling their national identities into question. But the East Germans could not. Erich Honecker used to say that Marxism-Leninism provided the state with its reason for being. Without that enforced ideology, the lure of reunification with economically prosperous and politically stable West Germany proved irresistible.

The communists certainly tried to gain popularity. They disgraced Honecker, opened the Berlin Wall, expelled Krenz, changed the party's name, and brought in a new team—Prime Minister Hans Modrow, a reform communist from Dresden, and Party leader Gregor Gysi, a lawyer who had defended dissidents. But they aroused new suspicions when they clumsily attempted to resurrect the secret police under a new name. And the exaggeration, if not invention, of a serious threat of neo-Nazi activity failed to provide the Party with legitimacy.

The opposition proved just as inept at asserting leadership. As the *Wall Street Journal* observed back in November, "The opposition is fragmenting into a noisy clash of competing factions—none of which seems prepared yet to articulate a clear vision of life after communism." Such chaos should not have been too surprising. The Honecker regime had for years been expelling potential opposition leaders to West Germany. The dissidents who had remained to form such groups as New Forum were mainly artists and non-conformists steeped in idealism, not political realism. Though they created some networks through the Lutheran Church, they developed no ties with workers, unlike the leaders of Solidarity and the Civic Forum.

To make matters worse for themselves, the opposition groups resisted the West German political and economic model. Advocating a fuzzy "third way" between communism and capitalism, these groups became irrelevant to the population. Though they were among the first to press for radical change, they found themselves shoved aside by new political parties that were in turn completely overshadowed by their West German partners.

Even before the elections on March 18, East Germans had been voting with their feet. More than 340,000 emigrated to West Germany last year, and in January 1990

they were leaving at a rate of 2,000 a day. As Pierre Hassner, research director of the National Political Science Foundation in Paris, accurately predicted last fall, "Pretty soon, their 'new form of socialism' will go down the drain, and since they're exposed to West German society, the second phase will be pressure for reunification."

In the new political landscape of Eastern Europe, communist parties and ideology have lost the power to prevent a return to market economies. When they take place, free elections will confer on new governments the legitimacy that they will need to push through painful economic measures. Fledgling democracies have little chance of surviving if they fail to solve the economic problems of shoddy products and consumer shortages, inefficient industries, spiraling inflation, and international debt. If the hopes of 1989 are to be realized, the economic system must be overhauled as thoroughly as the political system.

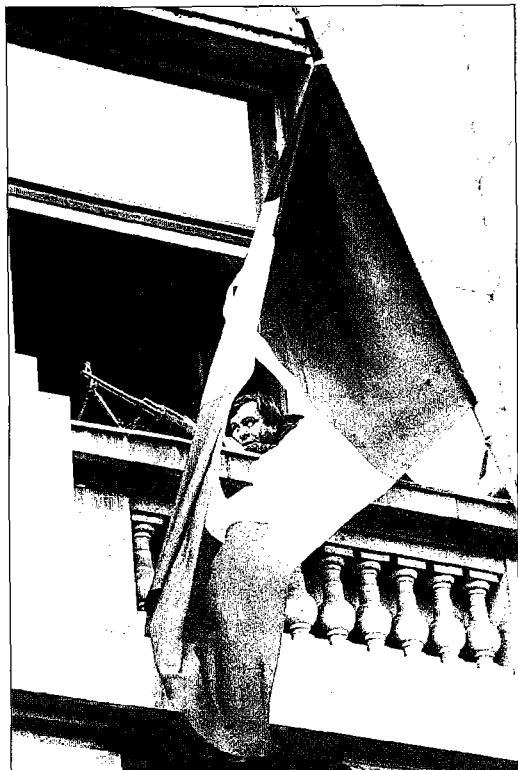
The new governments must also work quickly to clean up one of the world's most polluted regions. The signs of Eastern Europe's disastrous environmental degradation can be seen everywhere from Poland's filthy Vistula River to East Germany's Elbe River, from the dying Bohemian forests to Cracow's corroding medieval statues. The new political freedom will lift the shroud of state secrecy from environmental and related health problems and, for the first time, allow for uncensored discussion.

While political changes should benefit the environment, the effect of the economic changes is harder to predict. On the positive side, services and light industries are scheduled to replace a goodly number of the offending smokestack industries, and those that remain are to be modernized to consume less energy. But market mechanisms alone—with their emphasis on profits, cost-cutting, and reduction of state controls—give enterprises no incentives to

stop polluting. Therefore, the new governments will need to address environmental concerns even while they usher in market forces.

Such ushering will not be easy—not even for Hungary, which during the last two decades of Kádár's rule went farthest on the road to economic reform. Replacing mandatory plan targets with indirect planning and expanding the non-socialist "second economy" were half-measures that led to a dead end: Even before austerity measures were introduced this year, one in five Hungarians was living below the poverty line, inflation was running at about 20 percent a year, and the \$18 billion foreign debt was the highest—on a per capita basis—in Europe.

Paradoxically, the *Economist* noted,



During the popular uprising in Bucharest, citizens cut out the Communist Party symbol from Romanian flags, leaving a hole in the center.

"countries that have attempted the most market-oriented reforms—Hungary, Poland and Yugoslavia—are the very ones now suffering the greatest economic instability." Reforms failed to create real markets. The limited private sector was crushed by high taxes and bureaucracy, and it was forbidden to compete head-on with state enterprises. The latter operated under the luxury of soft budget constraints, knowing the government would always bail them out. "Much of Eastern Europe's \$100 billion or so of Western debt," the *Economist* observed, "started out as loans for enterprise investments, and ended up in the hands of central governments."

The cure, according to Harvard economist Jeffrey Sachs, is to replace halfway reforms with a big-bang return to capitalism. Poland has swallowed the medicine. Its unprecedented experiment, launched January 1, has two simultaneous goals: to break the back of inflation—estimated at 900 percent last year—and to make the institutional changes needed for a true market economy. "Today, when at last we have [political] freedom of choice, we are reaching for models that have been empirically and historically tried, tested, and proven—that is, to the West European model of a market economy," declared Balcerowicz, the Polish finance minister who designed the economic package. The plan includes these elements: slashing subsidies in half to cut the budget deficit and thus reduce inflation; letting enterprises either make it on their own or go bankrupt; freeing most prices; privatizing state enterprises and laying the legal groundwork for a private sector; encouraging foreign trade and making the currency convertible.

The first half of 1990 should provide answers to a host of questions spelling success or failure. Will prices stabilize after the steep initial rise? Will the government stick to its policy of hard budget constraints,

forcing bankruptcies and unemployment and preventing inflationary wage indexing? If so, will bottlenecks develop, production plummet, and shortages of goods grow even more endemic? Or will inefficient enterprises be weeded from the efficient ones, allowing production to pick up? How massive will unemployment be, and how fast can workers retrain and find new jobs? How soon will the private sector, services in particular, create new jobs? How tolerant will the people be when confronted with price increases and unemployment—and for how long?

Sachs argues for clearing the chasm in a single great leap, not in small jumps. The risk is great, but for Poland the alternative—doing nothing, accepting the disastrous status quo and an even more calamitous future—is scarier still. Ironically, then, Poland's economic crisis could prove to be an advantage.

It is an advantage that the other East European nations happily lack, despite their own economic woes. "The time pressure means that we have to go much farther and faster, albeit under more difficult conditions," remarked Jasinski, of Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity. "In Czechoslovakia there is a danger that the seemingly good condition of the economy will make the new authorities afraid to move decisively toward a free market." A successful transition in Poland will greatly encourage the other East European nations, Czechoslovakia and Hungary in particular, to introduce radical and painful economic measures.

Hungary has already laid the groundwork for a return to a market economy. It has a stock exchange and a two-tiered banking system, with commercial banking separate from the central bank, and it treats private, foreign, cooperative, and state ownership as equal under the law. But the Hungarian economy has been crippled by hard-currency debt. Debt servicing eats up



*In 1989, Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki and Solidarity's parliamentary leader Bronislaw Geremek became the first non-communists to head an Eastern-bloc government.*

more than half of its dollar export earnings. Hungary has launched an austerity drive approved by the International Monetary Fund, and further reforms can be expected.

Economic transformation in Czechoslovakia, although coming much later and more suddenly than in Poland and Hungary, offers the best hope of success. The country enjoys low inflation and low debt and can draw on its interwar tradition of democracy and advanced industry. While the leaders of the 1968 Prague Spring sought to create socialism with a human face, Prague's leaders today seek to fashion capitalism with a human face. They seek no "third way" between Western capitalism and the old Soviet-style communism, no Gorbachevian hybrid of socialist ownership and market forces. Prime Minister Calfa, in a speech to parliament, made his position clear: "We must accept the market economy with all of its advantages and all of its disadvantages . . . . [I]t grants to each individual an opportunity to be most beneficial for others by pursuing his own interests."

**W**ill the new leadership remain steadfast when economic changes bring unemployment, higher prices, and, quite possibly, strikes?



Will the people accept the sacrifices—or insist on a social safety net so wide that it will strangle economic efficiency? Success or failure in Poland will exert enormous influence on Czechoslovakia.

The East German economy is, of course, a special case. West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl engineered the victory of his East German allies by proposing monetary union and suggesting that his Christian Democratic Party was uniquely capable of renovating the East German economy. On election day, Kohl's economic minister promised a one-to-one exchange rate between East and West German currencies—an enormous boost to East Germans worried about their pensions and savings. Bonn, by offering capital, know-how, and a trading bridge to the European Community, provides East Germany with the prospect of a swift and smooth transition to a market economy—at least compared to the transitions awaiting the rest of Eastern Europe. When the transition is completed, however, East Germans could find virtually all of their plants owned by West Germans. In economics as well as politics, reunification may lead not to merger but to take-

over. It remains to be seen whether this will breed tensions both among West Germans, who will foot the bill, and among East Germans, who could come to perceive themselves as second-class citizens.

Economic reforms also are needed in Bulgaria, which has worrisome inflation and a high per capita debt (\$7.1 billion in a nation of 8.9 million), as well as in Romania, which paid off most of its foreign debt but at the price of drastic shortages of food, electricity, and heat. Just how far and how fast the economic changes come will depend on the political changes. One can expect that economic changes elsewhere in Eastern Europe will bear as strong an influence on Bulgarians and Romanians as did the political upheavals last year.

Thus, in one decade, we have come full circle. In 1980, Poland broke new ground with an opposition movement that united the nation, eventually toppled the ruling Communist Party, and presaged the collapse of Soviet control over Eastern Europe; in 1990, Poland again leads the way, pioneering an economic transformation that, if successful, will provide a model for all of Eastern Europe.





real and not merely another cyclic “thaw” or “renewal” of the politically oppressive system. That said, the rejection of the Stalinist system and the return to democracy, if they endure, will have a fundamental significance for culture. They will change everything—from how culture supports itself to the ways in which artists deal with “reality” in their work.

Over the past few decades, Western observers have made the common mistake of assuming that culture in countries such as Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, East Germany, or Romania was a noble victim, squirming helplessly under the totalitarian oppressor’s heel. Differences in oppression notwithstanding (obviously, the situation in Poland or Hungary hardly compared with Ceaușescu’s ruthless erasure of any trace of free speech), the perfidy of totalitarianism in its modified, late 20th-century form was that it was by no means bent on completely silencing arts and letters. Rather, it actually sponsored culture that served the regime’s ideological principles while also satisfying at least part of the masses’ need for bread and circus. Writers or artists in whom the motives of ambition or greed were stronger than the pangs of conscience could always count on selling their goods to the state at a fairly high price. If such a writer had been, spiritually speaking, a prisoner, he was kept, as one dissident put it, in a “velvet prison.” The important difference between the last decades and the earlier years was that the pure-and-simple Stalinist principle of “who is not with us, is against us” had been quietly replaced with the dictum “who is not against us, is with us.”

In short, the more lenient regimes tolerated and even encouraged literature and art that were ideologically neutral. The artists’ basic task was simply to stay out of the regime’s way and to provide either mass entertainment (as in countless socialist thrillers praising the virtues of the secret police and in pop songs extolling the charms of military service) or semblances of authentic culture for the benefit of the West (as in just as numerous examples of avant-garde art). The artist was to be nothing more than another employee at that enormous monopolistic enterprise, the post-Stalinist socialist state.

**T**he relative stability of communist rule in Central and Eastern Europe during the 1960s and ’70s can be explained only by the fact that both the rulers and the ruled derived certain advantages from the existing system. On the strength of an unsigned agreement—the Czech émigré economist Anton Liehm called it the “New Social Contract”—the regimes guaranteed their citizens a basic degree of well-being and safety, while the citizens, in exchange, agreed not to rebel against the system’s injustice. This unwritten Social Contract made sure that artists were published and paid and that consumers were supplied with cultural products—as long as nobody demanded creative freedom or genuine artistic works.

What has now happened (over startlingly different lengths of time: “ten years for Poland, ten months for Hungary, ten weeks for East Germany, ten days for Czechoslovakia,” in Timothy Garton Ash’s celebrated dictum) is that one of the par-

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*Stanislaw Baranczak is the Alfred Jurzykowski Professor of Polish Language and Literature at Harvard University. Born in Posnan, Poland, he received an M.A. (1969) and a Ph.D. (1973) from Adam Mickiewicz University in Posnan. He came to the United States in 1981. His books in English include A Fugitive from Utopia: The Poetry of Zbigniew Herbert (1987), Selected Poems: The Weight of the Body (1989), which won the Terence des Pres Prize, and the forthcoming Breathing Under Water, and Other East European Essays (Harvard University Press).*

ties—society—has cancelled the New Social Contract. It did so because, in each of these countries, the other party—the regime—proved incapable of fulfilling even the basic provisions of the Contract.

In culture something similar happened. Beginning in 1976 in Poland, an independent, uncensored publishing network undermined the Contract: At the cost of forfeiting protection, producers of cultural goods freed themselves from state control. The present dismantling of communist rule in Central Europe consists, culturally, of nothing more than removing the last vestiges of such control.

But the ultimate removal of state control will also mean the disappearance of state protection for artists and writers. I am not talking here about those writers and artists who, as outright dissidents, have long been trained in the school of independence and its twin, adversity. Rather, I have in mind the average producer of cultural goods. His changed situation is comparable to that of a clerk in some state office who one morning discovers that his building has been razed and his employment terminated. The building was ugly, the office inefficient, the employment a sham, and the work a crucifying bore; still, it meant a steady income plus fringe benefits. Now the clerk is told all that is gone but he is free to do anything he wants, even to go out and set up his own business. This permission would please him enormously, if not for one minor problem: He has no capital with which to start a business. Even if he did, he doesn't know the first thing about business management. And even if he did, the years spent toiling in the office have effectively killed in him any spirit of free enterprise that might make his future seem enticing rather than threatening.

Since no two Soviet bloc countries have had exactly the same experience, the sacked clerk of our metaphor will vary



*Mirror of Memory (1987) by Lukasz Korolkiewicz. The artist won the Solidarity Cultural Award in 1983.*

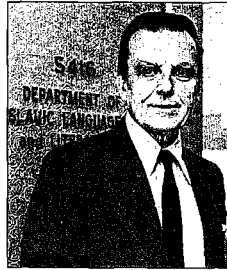
from country to country. Some artists and thinkers are surprised and thrown off balance by the abrupt change, while others, better prepared, are now more or less ready to take their chances in the private sector.

In some cases, notably in Poland, a cultural private sector had already been created. Despite recurring waves of oppression, Poles have since 1976 enjoyed an important alternative to state-controlled culture. Even earlier, the products of émigré publishing houses, smuggled into the country, formed a part of any young intellectual's informal education. Printed by an émigré publisher abroad, Czeslaw Milosz's *The Captive Mind* (1953), for example, was smuggled into Poland beginning in the mid-1950s; its dissection of the argument for the communist regime made it less likely that intellectuals would henceforth accept that regime.

With the emergence of the under-

## THE ÉMIGRÉ POET

*1980 Nobel Prize winner Czesław Miłosz, in Berkeley, California. Miłosz chose themes impossible to depict openly in Poland—but at the sacrifice of living among his countrymen and hearing his mother tongue.*



### *My Faithful Mother Tongue*

Faithful mother tongue  
I have been serving you.  
Every night, I used to set before you little bowls of colors  
so you could have your birch, your cricket, your finch  
as preserved in my memory.

This lasted many years.  
You were my native land; I lacked any other.  
I believed that you would also be a messenger  
between me and some good people  
even if they were few, twenty, ten  
or not born, as yet.

Now, I confess my doubt.  
There are moments when it seems to me I have squandered my life.  
For you are a tongue of the debased,  
of the unreasonable, hating themselves  
even more than they hate other nations,  
a tongue of informers,  
a tongue of the confused,  
ill with their own innocence.

But without you, who am I?  
Only a scholar in a distant country,  
a success, without fears and humiliations.  
Yes, who am I without you?  
Just a philosopher, like everyone else.

I understand, this is meant as my education:  
the glory of individuality is taken away,  
Fortune spreads a red carpet  
before the sinner in a morality play  
while on the linen backdrop a magic lantern throws  
images of human and divine torture.

Faithful mother tongue,  
perhaps after all it's I who must try to save you.  
So I will continue to set before you little bowls of colors  
bright and pure if possible,  
for what is needed in misfortune is a little order and beauty.

*from Poetry: 1981-1987*

ground presses inside Poland in 1976, the ungainly edifice of the official culture truly began to crumble. Thousands of uncensored books and periodicals—from factory newsletters to literary quarterlies, from the forbidden novels of George Orwell to manuals on how to strike—helped Polish society to educate itself. Authors and underground publishers joined scholars and artists, conducted courses in private apartments, and organized exhibits and performances in churches. A largely de-Sovietized consciousness began to emerge—one marked by an increased sense of individual responsibility for the nation's future, respect for human rights, rejection of violence, willingness to “live in truth” regardless of consequences, disillusion with the reformability of communism, and belief in the ultimate triumph of what Václav Havel called “the power of the powerless.” Without this consciousness, the unprecedented events of the 1980s—the birth of a ten-million-strong independent union that substituted for an opposition party and its underground survival throughout the grim experience of martial law—would never have taken place.

Thanks to this underground independence, Poland was prepared culturally

for the situation that it now faces. Writers, artists, and groups such as the critically acclaimed Theater of the Eighth Day have already experienced the unsettling combination of being relieved of state control while also being deprived of state protection.

**T**he case of the Theater of the Eighth Day is particularly revealing. Founded in 1964 as a university acting troupe, the group at first enjoyed protection and support from the official Association of Polish Students. During the early 1970s, however, the theater produced several performances based on contemporary political poetry which challenged sanctioned versions of Poland's recent history. As a result, the authorities attempted to destroy the group by disrupting performances and arresting actors on false charges. Most troupe members began earning their living by taking odd jobs; the theater's performances were staged—strictly speaking, illegally—in private apartments or even in the streets. After the harassment became unbearable, the troupe left Poland for Italy, where it somehow managed to conquer local audiences despite language differences. The theater has now returned to Poland and resumed its activity—its actors all the stronger for their experience. Indeed, to them and to other artists with similar experiences, the future in Poland may be difficult but at least not completely surprising. To a lesser extent, the same can be said about artists and thinkers in Hungary, where dissidents have been preparing the ground for many years.

In Czechoslovakia or East Germany, however, the quantitative difference becomes a qualitative one. In East Germany practically since its inception, and in Czechoslovakia since the suppression of Prague Spring in 1968, cultural dissent came down to a handful of heroic individuals who both withstood the totalitarian ap-

paratus of persecution and resisted the temptation to emigrate. Against the bleak background of cowardice and opportunism, individuals such as Václav Havel shone all the more brightly. Still, neither in Czechoslovakia nor in East Germany did such isolated individuals set the tone for culture as a whole: The overwhelming majority of writers and artists in these countries fit the definition of "state artist," an employee who now faces both the collapse of the ideology he served and the demolition of the professional structures he has been part of for his entire life.

Bulgaria and, in particular, Romania present even more depressing pictures. As the West only now begins to realize, the dictatorship of Ceaușescu, marked as much by hypocrisy as by cruelty, created a culture whose primary task was to sing unending

### THE AESOPIAN POET

*Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert, a master of Aesopian expression, uses metaphors or allegorical situations to portray dangerous subjects—for example, politically compromised behavior.*



#### *Objects*

Inanimate objects are always correct and cannot, unfortunately, be reproached with anything. I have never observed a chair shift from one foot to another, or a bed rear on its hind legs. And tables, even when they are tired, will not dare to bend their knees. I suspect that objects do this from pedagogical considerations, to reprove us constantly for our instability.

—from *Selected Poems* (1968)



*In the Theater of the Eighth Day's performance, Auto da Fé (1985), self-immolation symbolizes life in communist Poland.*

praise to the tyrant whom all the nation hated. This sycophantic chorus drowned out the voices of authentic writers and artists. Even the most timid expression of dissent was a terrible risk in a country where every typewriter had to be registered and every third citizen was a police informer.

The Romanian experience under Ceaușescu demonstrates that while some political oppression can bring out the best in a nation's culture, there is a threshold beyond which resistance breaks down. From then on, fear and apathy prevail. This has nothing to do with national characteristics or local traditions. It is, quite simply, the inevitable result when persecution is sufficiently ruthless. Unbridled terror reigned in Poland and Hungary during the Stalinist period (1945–1956), and their cultures fared little better than Romania's under Ceaușescu. Today it is not enough to allow Romanian writers to own unregistered typewriters and to write what they wish. Entire areas of human thought and expression, strictly forbidden under the dictatorship, must now reenter the Romanian culture. The most basic works of Western literatures must be translated and made available. It will take years to absorb this enormous influx of information.

To be sure, Romania is an extreme case. Poland or Hungary face an easier task. But precisely because Poland possesses a relatively liberated culture, it shows just how much farther most Central European cultures must travel to reach complete freedom. Several major obstacles must be cleared, each more formidable than the other. Let us begin with Poland's most basic ones:

*Economic woes.* Before 1989, culture (at least "official" culture) was still subsidized by the state. Since the regime owned it and needed it for its purposes, the regime had to keep culture alive. Now that the state has practically ceased to own culture, it may stop subsidizing the arts in order to be able to feed the populace.

The new minister of culture, a well-known theater director, Izabella Cywińska, has so far taken no drastic measures. But many formerly state-owned enterprises, including publishing houses and periodicals, now depend on their own income rather than on state subsidies. On the one hand, a supporter of democratic changes can only rejoice: There is no other way for culture to start functioning in a normal, "Western" way. But with no transition, this policy may have dangerous consequences. Fewer and fewer people can afford the increasingly high price of a book. (A volume of Samuel Beckett's collected plays in Polish translation a year ago cost 1,500 zloty, then about one-thirtieth of the average retired person's monthly income; after the recent price hikes, the comparable book will cost several times as much, while pensions and salaries remain basically the same.) Even Solidarity's newspaper, *Gazeta*—the first and most prominent independent newspaper in Eastern Europe—is running into trouble. Forced by rising paper costs to double its price, the newspaper's circulation has dropped by almost half, and copies which used to sell out in early morning languish

on the newsstands throughout the day.

Some publishing houses, to avoid bankruptcy, have started producing shallow entertainment rather than serious literature. The venerated *Wydawnictwo Literackie* (Literary Press) in Cracow, for instance, has almost eliminated books of contemporary poetry while doing huge printings of some of the most kitschy romances written in pre-1939 Poland. What Polish culture at this moment faces is the short-term danger of dependence on a market economy before certain mechanisms (such as tax-exempt donations) mollifying the laws of supply and demand have been developed.

*Institutional difficulties.* After the government imposed martial law in 1981, the opposition to official culture acquired an additional moral dimension. When several actors agreed to appear on TV, they were booed the next evening by audiences in theaters. Similarly, after praising the military regime in the official media, the popular writer Wojciech Zukrowski found a huge pile of his own books dumped on his doorstep by angry readers. From that point on, participation in certain official forms of cultural life was considered—not merely by fellow artists but even more so by the public—as morally reprehensible collaboration. An honest actor was not supposed to perform on television (a state-owned institution which, during martial law, was so militarized that its news anchors wore uniforms). The actors' boycott of television from 1981 to 1983 was one of the most widely applauded acts of protest against martial law.

Now that Poland is no longer ruled by a communist-military clique, black-and-white ethics no longer applies. To preserve the pluralism won during the long struggle against state censorship, while at the same time doing away with the distinctions between "official" and

"unofficial," is the task now facing Polish culture.

But as the underground culture surfaces, its situation changes. First, books published in an unhindered fashion by the erstwhile underground presses have lost the taste of a forbidden fruit; they are no longer so sought after. Second, underground publishers, accustomed to operating within the framework of black-market economy and primitive (but cheap) technology, are now subject to new financial difficulties, paper shortages, production delays, and so forth. The editors of the monthly *Res Publica*, the first underground periodical to come above ground (in 1987), have seen their journal, formerly a sensation, turn into just one of many interesting periodicals.

*Philosophical dilemmas.* After 45 years of communist rule, Polish artists and writers will soon find themselves in a position similar to that of their counterparts in the West: Free to express any view they wish, they may find that such freedom makes words lose their weight. They may discover that amid the multitude of voices an important message will go unheard. Subject to market laws, serious thought and innovative experiment may be elbowed out by cheap entertainment and easy convention. Under the old order, creative writers stepped into the gap left by the suppression of independent historiography, social analysis, and ethical evaluation; now they will have to accept the attenuation of their moral authority and spiritual leadership. All of this is a price that culture has to pay for its return to normality—and, after the initial euphoria fades, there may be quite a few writers or artists who will doubt whether it was really worth the price. And these writers or artists may include not only those who prospered under the old regime but also those whose previous resistance earned them, along with harassment,



a distinct voice and moral authority.

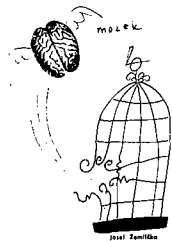
*Aesthetic quandaries.* What happens, aesthetically, when the stifling restrictions and prohibitions are finally gotten rid of: If you had been gagged for several decades, how is your voice going to sound after the gag is removed? It may well happen that someone allowed at last to speak at the top of his voice is unable to do so; he can only produce a hoarse whisper.

This is the problem of those Central European cultures where writers have been trained for too long in the school of "Aesopian language": Aesopian language relies on hints and allegories rather than on unequivocal names and precise depictions; it employs special techniques and genres to deceive the censor. (Using the historical genre, to take a famous example, the Polish writer Jerzy Andrzejewski published in the late 1950s a popular novel about the Spanish Inquisition, which every moderately intelligent reader interpreted as a critique of Stalinism.) Writers and artists may have to struggle before they retrieve, after so many years of racking their brains for ways to fool the censor, the simple ability to name things by their real names.

The harder task, particularly in countries such as Poland where the restraints of Aesopian language have already been overcome, is to overcome the one-sidedness of theme and tone that dominated even the best works of thought and art during the years of oppression. The human condition—as presented in such otherwise bold novels as Tadeusz Konwicki's depiction of

disillusioned intellectuals (*The Polish Complex* and *A Minor Apocalypse*) or Andrzej Wajda's films of rebellious workers (*Man of Marble* and *Man of Iron*)—was seen primarily in political, social, and moral categories. Konwicki's and Wajda's successors must recover the fullness of experience. The focus on the evils of the totalitarian system must be broadened to encompass the much more difficult issue of evil as such, evil that is not a passing and corrigible fault of a system but an ineradicable component of our existence on earth. The cramped style of doloristic complaints and scornful sarcasms must now evolve into a much more flexible and diversified way of speaking of reality.

All of these necessities, from financial to stylistic, are harsh ones. Central European cultures, differently shaped as they are, all face an extremely difficult transition. They may temporarily forfeit some of the characteristic qualities we came to admire in them—their complex use of irony or their union of ethics and aesthetics in a work of art; they may become too Western and not sufficiently Central European. Yet, although nobody can predict, one has every right to believe that the colossal wealth of experience gained by Central European writers and artists in our century cannot possibly be in vain. This is the capital with which they will start, under the new conditions of freedom, their business of portraying the human world and examining the human soul.



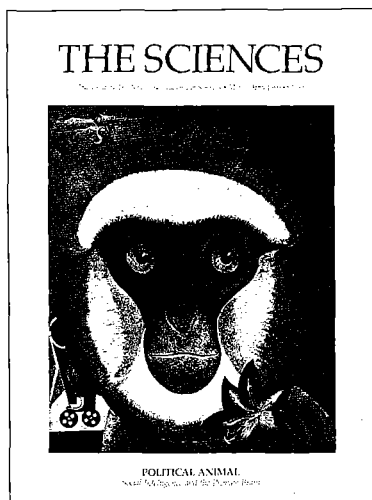
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