

## LESSONS OF THE EAST EUROPEAN REVOLUTIONS OF 1989

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There is little doubt what the greatest lesson of 1989 is: communism failed. Recent commentary to the contrary, this failure is not a parochial event limited in its significance to Eastern Europe, to the resolution of the Cold War, or to Western policy initiatives, but rather a moment of global importance in the most important family of events of the last few hundred years. These events do not have a satisfactory name, even though we all know how fundamental they are. Instead of calling them the industrial revolution, modernization, the great transformation, the single transition, or the emergence of capitalism, I would like to call them the energy revolution. This name emphasizes the fundamental innovation that underlies the earthquake of change that humanity has witnessed in the past ten generations or so, the ongoing discovery and elaboration of how to extract energy systematically from non-living things such as gunpowder, coal, oil, uranium, and silicon.<sup>1</sup> This discovery is comparable to only one other in human history, the discovery of how to extract energy systematically from living things, the agricultural revolution. And just like agricultural societies wiped the hunting and gathering peoples off the face of the earth by virtue of the vastly greater power they were able to produce, save, and expend, so the societies in which the energy revolution has proceeded are now in the process of wiping agricultural peoples off the face of the earth.

The unprecedented social forces generated by the energy revolution have pushed every human society to find new ways of organizing itself. I would like to suggest that three basic sorts of solutions to the fundamental challenges of the energy revolution, all first broached in the eighteenth century, have characterized the twentieth century. I would call them the anti-rationalist genre, the hyper-rationalist genre, and the pluralist genre.

By the first of these I mean, of course, those movements of rage and rejection from the first half of the twentieth century that craved the power of the energy revolution--the technology, the military strength, and the standard of living--but rejected the economic calculus of market capitalism and the political calculus of parliamentary democracy. Instead

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<sup>1</sup> Some readers of a draft of this article have suggested that it is reductionist to single out energy in this way, since communications technology and other phenomena are also of fundamental significance in creating the modern world. I agree that the concept is reductionist, but I invite those who think it is too much so to perform what Rousseau might call a thought experiment: attempt to conceive what might happen in Europe and America if it were possible for sixty days to shut down completely all internal combustion engines and turn off all electricity.

they espoused what Thomas Mann called "a highly technical romanticism," adopting Schelling's view that the universe contains "a primal, non-rational force that can be grasped only by the intuitive power of men of imaginative genius."<sup>2</sup> Nazism and fascism repudiated the eighteenth-century bases of middle class culture for what they believed were the superior principles of mass culture, rejecting reason for power, individuality for sacro egoismo, virtue for vainglory, transparency for obscurantism, constitutions for the Führerprinzip, humanitarianism for racial fanaticism, objectivity for prejudice, and, in the end, the guillotine for the gas chamber.

The hyper-rational genre, on the other hand, moved in the opposite direction by routinizing the application of reason into a rigid political formula. Stalinism is the reductio ad absurdum of Descartes' assertion that we humans can "render ourselves the masters and possessors of nature," a dream that found a confident echo as late as 1961 in the statement of the Hungarian author who wrote that socialism was on the verge of "the final maneuvers... for the ultimate conquest of the material world."<sup>3</sup> In the twentieth century the agent for accomplishing this end was first the vanguard party sustained by its scientific (i. e., rational) understanding of human history, then the vanguard of the vanguard, and finally the great leader, who imposed himself as the ultimate source of human rationality that could transform the world.

The third genre is pluralism, which, in contrast to the other two genres, is not so much a system as it is an indeterminate set of political devices for structuring process. Because pluralist institutions are based on the prosaic observation that human beings are fallible and liable to contention, they are designed to prevent any "primal non-rational force" or "vanguard scientific party" from directing the affairs of society for very long. This does not mean they will not err, but it does mean that they will change—not immediately, not easily, and often with a great deal of pain and political struggle, not to mention cant and humbug. Pluralism's balanced and multilayered political configurations and processes, variety of ownership forms, diversity of associational possibilities, and openness of public discourse have proven flexible enough to match the protean developmental surge of the energy revolution.

Without going into any detail, it seems that the experience of the twentieth century has taught us something about social organization that we did not know when the century began, namely that both the anti-rationalist and the hyper-rationalist genres are incapable

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<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey Herf, Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 2; Schelling quoted by Isaiah Berlin, "The Counter-Enlightenment," in his Against the Current, Henry Hardy, ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> René Descartes, "Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason," in Elizabeth S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross, transl. and eds., The Philosophical Works of Descartes (n.p.: Dover Publications, 1955), vol. 1, p. 119; Mihaly Vaci, quoted by Ivan Berend, The Hungarian Economic Reforms, 1953-1988 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 148.

of successfully solving the problems posed by the energy revolution. Nineteen-forty-five showed the bankruptcy of the anti-rationalist genre, and 1989 demonstrated the bankruptcy of the hyper-rationalist genre. The message of the twentieth century is not, as some observers would have us believe, that pluralism is the final answer to the energy revolution and that history is over. Indeed, the paradox of Francis Fukuyama's notorious claim of two years ago is that the end of history has occurred because of the victory of the only genre within which history can occur. Both the anti-rational and hyper-rational systems sought final solutions and found stasis instead. The ease with which pluralism incorporated the information revolution of the past fifteen years compared to the difficulties that socialist systems had with computerization is a recent instance of pluralism's ability to respond to the unexpected challenges of the energy revolution.

But that does not mean that pluralism has adequately solved the modern dilemma. When we observe the misery in which not just most people in the Third World, but a large number of people in the First World, live, we understand that many issues remain on the agenda, not the least of which is the problem of finding a plausible framework for opposition to injustice in societies suffused with self-satisfaction. The great message of the twentieth century is not the positive accomplishments of pluralism, although these are many, but the negative message of the other two genres: we have not learned what works as surely as we have learned what does not work. Pluralism has its problems, but the other two genres are dead ends. History is not over, just the twentieth century.

The most important lesson of 1989, therefore, the reason why that year can be added to the short list of dates that students will learn as the landmarks of the modern era (the others are 1789, 1848, and 1945) is that the second of the twentieth century's two great experiments in coping with the energy revolution failed. "We have made one important contribution," Soviet reformer Yuri Afanasyev said, "we have taught the world what not to do."<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, however, this failure does not present the same kind of unique opportunity for positive reconstruction that the failure of the anti-rationalist genre in 1945 did. In 1945 Europe was devastated not only physically, but psychologically as well. The optimism of the nineteenth century was not only long gone, but the entire civilization that had spawned the disasters of two great wars seemed spent. This was a calamity, but a calamity with a positive side. Moments like 1945 are rarely seen in history: a wiping of the slate, if not clean, then close to it. Of course the wiping was done with blood, not something we would choose, but it was precisely the grotesque and bloody futility of the great thirty years' war from 1914 to 1945 that convinced men like Alcide de Gaspari, Konrad Adenauer, Henri Spaak, Robert Schuman, and Jean Monnet--in a way that conferences, speeches, articles, and diplomacy never could have--that the old obsessions could not form the basis of a stable Europe. They built their new community not on sacro egoismo, but on voluntary association and a politics of accommodation.

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<sup>4</sup> Robert G. Kaiser, Why Gorbachev Happened: His Triumphs and His Failure (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), p. 228.

Surprisingly, given all the ink that has been spilled about the failure of the early dreams of creating a European political union, in a little more than thirty years this new community has become not just a strong economic unit, but also a vertical structure for containing the passions that burst the traditional European system of empires apart. Today, if you live in Florence, for example, you can be a booster of your neighborhood and city, a Tuscan patriot, a citizen of Italy, and an advocate for Europe, all at the same time or singly on the appropriate occasions. One may fear that the increasingly inward-looking preoccupations of the Community will eventually turn Europeans into multinational nationalists, but the absurdity today of Germans shooting Frenchmen or Italians bombing Spaniards, both commonplaces of our fathers' time, is obvious.

One of the greatest costs of Stalinism in Eastern Europe was that it excluded the East Europeans from the unique caesura that made new solutions possible in the West. Eastern Europe had no Stunde null. In 1989 many East Europeans emerged from their own devastating era of grotesque obsessions with no sense of despair over the collapse of civilization, but rather harboring both enthusiastic expectations and a host of ideas from the past that had been suppressed for forty years. François Furet has said that the most striking thing about 1989 was the absence of new ideas.<sup>5</sup> East Europeans are exuberant at their release from lies, but some of them appear anxious to create their own deceptions; other East Europeans are convinced that their particular people has been unjustly treated for forty years, but stand ready to do the same to others; East Europeans elites are frustrated by a long generation of humiliating compromises, but for that very reason find it difficult to practice a politics of compromise. Some authors have suggested that these data show that the East Europeans have reverted to the mentality of the twenties and thirties, to that moment when they left Europe sixty years ago. It would be more accurate to say that, having missed the unique window of opportunity that the bitter tonic of 1945 offered to others, they have not yet had the chance to learn first-hand the futility of some of the old ideas. This does not mean they will find it impossible to create the structures that will contain their passions because, unlike 1918, the existence of the European Community will exert a constant pressure on them to democratize and to marketize. But, feeling that their predicament is not their fault but rather something imposed on them from outside, socialized to the ethic of a paternalistic state, and retaining a sense that some of the bad old ideas are not really all that bad, they will find it more difficult to take advantage of their particular caesura.

A third thought on the revolutions of 1989 came to me when I saw the first pictures of Soviet tanks being loaded on trains in Hungary for their journey east. For the past forty years Western governments have quite naturally focused on the military and economic strengths of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Enormous bureaucracies have been devoted to understanding and countering every military threat, especially at the

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<sup>5</sup> Ralf Dahrendorf, Reflections on the Revolution in Europe in a letter intended to have been sent to a gentleman in Warsaw (New York: Times Books, 1990), p. 27.

technological level, to evaluating relative strengths in the leadership elites, and to analyzing the details of trade, finance, and investment. In the world of power relationships that civil servants and politicians inhabit, only data of that sort have carried the conviction of being realistic. The hard-nosed analyst was immersed in the study of the implications of the nth party congress, charting CMEA statistics to estimate the none-too-good prospects for the next five-year plan, assessing the meaning, or even the existence, of the Sonnenfeldt Doctrine, or analyzing the disposition of Warsaw Pact forces.

The academic community was preoccupied with similar concerns.<sup>6</sup> Studies in conflict resolution, security issues, economic analysis, policy options, and various kinds of modeling focused attention on those areas of public life that are quantifiable, that are consistent with social-science theorizing, or that have implications for policy. Fearing, with good reason, that they might be considered soft or unscientific, academics too gravitated toward "realistic" assessments of East European affairs.

The events of 1989 clearly show how limited a view this was, how, if you like, unrealistic. If anything is clear about the sudden swoon of the hollow East European regimes in November and December 1989 it is that those collapses were the result of moral rot at least as much as economic or political failure. After the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia convinced East European intellectuals that it would be impossible to create socialism with a human face, they turned from debating how to reform the system to a much more devastating device: The total rejection of the regimes' thorough falsity. What is the basis of hope in a hopeless situation? Living an ethical life, Leszek Kołakowski answered in 1971. Hope is not a prognostication about the future, Václav Havel said, but the conviction that something has meaning, which is what permits the undertaking of the hopeless enterprise of living in truth. "Even if people never speak of it," Havel wrote in his open letter to Gustáv Husák in 1975, "they have a very acute appreciation of the price they have paid for outward peace and quiet: the permanent humiliation of their human dignity."<sup>7</sup> This desire, necessity even, to live in truth is what lay behind the creation of KOR, Charter 77, and even Solidarity. "What all of us had in mind were not only bread, butter, and sausage," read the Solidarity program of October 1981, "but also justice, democracy, truth, legality, human dignity, freedom of convictions, and the repair of the republic," which is why Andrzej Gwiazda characterized Solidarity as a "moral revolution."<sup>8</sup> It was not economic deprivation that brought the people onto the streets in Eastern Europe in November and December 1989, when some of them had suffered economic hardship for a long time but in Czechoslovakia or Bulgaria times were not even all that hard. It was

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<sup>6</sup> See W.R. Connor, "Why Were We Surprised?" The American Scholar, Spring 1991, pp. 175-84.

<sup>7</sup> Václav Havel, Living in Truth, Jan Vladislav, ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), p. 31.

<sup>8</sup> Solidarity Program of 1981 in Gale Stokes, ed., From Stalinism to Pluralism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 209; Timothy Garton Ash, The Polish Revolution. Solidarity (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1984), p. 280.

their humiliation, their disgust with the falsity of their regimes, their desire for freedom. That is why when the fall took place it was the uncompromised advocates of living in truth, the musicians, historians, philosophers, sociologists, and playwrights—the cultural leaders—who came to power. At this point, all the studies of strategic balances proved inappropriate and useless. The Soviet troops simply got on their trains and went home.

The events of 1989 have not only shown that strategic studies do not adequately take into account such intangibles as ethical values, religion, and national sentiment, but they have also greatly changed the character of the analysis we need in the future. At least in the era when we faced a power with massive nuclear forces who was competing with us in many parts of the world using an ideology that claimed the ultimate victory, there were excellent justifications for concentrating on the strategic balance. After 1989, however, the situation changed. Without question we must continue our study of policy options, analyzing the economic strengths and weaknesses of our competitors and monitoring the status of military forces around the world. I do not propose that we give up such vitally important work. But as the surprising outcome of the war with Iraq, which unleashed the unexpected outpouring of Kurdish fears, confirms, we need to spend some more time on the intangibles.

For example, it was quite clear in 1975 what we meant by human rights: we believed that oppressive regimes, but particularly communist ones, should permit more freedom of speech, more travel, and so forth. We purposely avoided the obvious fact that human rights also means minority rights, since minority issues occur typically within already established states rather than among them and imply that established borders might have to change. Today, minority rights, which in the Wilsonian era went under the name "self-determination of peoples," are a central issue of East European politics that threatens the stability of the region, and even the existence of two of the states. How are we to deal with the apparent incompatibility of our advocacy of self-determination (minority rights) and stable borders? At this point we do not know. But strategic studies alone will not provide a fully adequate answer because the issues involved are cultural, religious, ethical, and emotional as well as strategic.

Michael Howard has put this point well in his recent book The Lessons of History. The real lessons of history, he writes, are not so much about pride, folly, and stupidity, as about

people, often of masterful intelligence, trained usually in law or economics or perhaps political science who have led their governments into disastrous miscalculations because they have no awareness whatever of the historical background, the cultural universe of the foreign societies with which they have to deal. It is an awareness for which no amount of strategic or economic analysis, no techniques of crisis management or conflict resolution can provide

a substitute.<sup>9</sup>

Professor Howard wrote those words in 1981, but they constitute an elegant way of saying that 1989 made a good case for soft-nosed analysis.

My fourth suggestion is closely connected with the third point. The events of the past two years have shown the importance of leadership.<sup>10</sup> For a historian like myself, there is little question that we all operate within a historically determined and relatively limited range of creative possibilities. But 1989 has shown once again, if it needed showing, and apparently sometimes it does, how important and unpredictable is the ability of individual leaders to stretch that range. Whatever the final assessment will be of Gorbachev, whether he is the Alexander II of our day, beginning a reformer and ending a conservative, or the Kemal Atatürk who completely changed his nation's direction, there seems little doubt that his decision to let Eastern Europe go was original, unexpected (probably even by him), and difficult. If there was one thing we knew for certain about the Soviet relationship with Eastern Europe, it was that whatever else might happen, the Soviet Union would never relinquish its special relationship with the region. To have done so was not a socio-economic imperative or a structural necessity, although arguments in that vein are being made. The loss of Eastern Europe was the outcome of a policy conceived and introduced by a particular individual, representing a significant strain of Soviet thought, who saw, perhaps briefly, a possibility to revivify socialism while at the same time creating a constructive place in Europe for the Soviet Union, one it had never had in the past. If we compare Gorbachev's rhetoric about autonomy of choice and his actions about arms reduction and withdrawal from Afghanistan with what we reasonably might have expected from his Brezhnevian rival in 1985, Viktor Grishin, we can grasp the power and originality of Gorbachev's leadership.

And Gorbachev was not the only original leader of 1989. It was not written that a German chancellor should have moved as single-mindedly as Helmut Kohl did toward unification, nor that he should have done so in such a relatively restrained and un-nationalistic way.

For the next few years leadership will be a key factor in determining whether the individual countries of Eastern Europe are able to make rapid transitions in the aftermath of 1989. One of the striking differences between East Central Europe and Southeast Europe lies precisely in this sphere. Moderate men with great prestige now lead Poland and Czechoslovakia, and even in Hungary József Antall at least understands parliamentary democracy. Unlike many of the politically inexperienced members of their societies, among both the public and the elites, these men recognize the fragility of their current position,

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Howard, *The Lessons of History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), quotation taken from Ronald H. Spector's review, *Washington Post* March 3, 1991.

<sup>10</sup> See Stanley Hoffman, "The Case for Leadership," *Foreign Policy*, 81 (1990), pp. 20-38.

know that it takes time to create the institutions of interest representation, and understand that democracy is a politics of accommodation. This is true even of Lech Walesa. Despite the fears many Poles express about the possibilities of a Pilsudskian resolution in Poland, one of the basic characteristics of Walesa's career has been his ability to seek out solutions rather than confrontations. During the Solidarity period he probably spent as much time advising the workers not to strike as in any other single activity.

In Southeast Europe, by contrast, we have at least one and probably more inward-looking and radically selfish leaders in Yugoslavia, a self-appointed and none too legitimate government in Romania, and a scramble that has not produced any clear leadership in Bulgaria. This contrast can only have a differential impact on the future development of these two regions. Structural analysis is useful and important, particularly when it is turned to past events. But 1989 has reminded us that leaders can make original decisions and shape forces. We hardly notice, however, because these decisions quickly enter the structure of our presuppositions, changing them radically but almost imperceptibly as we go along. The dramatic reversals in our perceptions of Soviet possibilities based on our assessment of Gorbachev's actions--in 1987 still skeptical, by the 1989 Congress of People's Deputies enthusiastic, by the bloody intervention in Lithuania in early 1991 gloomy, in mid-1991 after an apparent agreement with Yeltsin more optimistic, and so forth--illustrate the point.

I stress leadership because it goes against the grain of most current social science theorizing, but in doing so I do not want to give the impression that it was leadership alone that brought 1989 about or that Gorbachev simply called a tune and the East Europeans jumped. Centralized planning failed, regimes lost their moral underpinnings, and Soviet policy changed, but had internal developments in Poland and Hungary not created a strong independent society in the first case and a strong communist reform faction in the second, Gorbachev's initiatives might have had far less effect. When we marvel at Poland's and Hungary's primary role in getting the avalanche of 1989 started, we tend to forget that Honecker, Jakes, Ceausescu, and Zhivkov rejected perestroika. Had Jaruzelski turned out to be a Honecker, and Kádár a Husák, or, to put it another way, had the internal developments in Poland and Hungary been less pluralistic in the eighties, 1989 would most likely not have been 1989 at all.

This point is linked with a much larger theme, the last one I want to raise. Many people understood the weaknesses of centrally planned systems very well. But the actual drama of 1989 was foreseen by no one. The final lesson of 1989 is to remind us of something that in an intellectual sense we already know: the near-term future is unpredictable. And yet laymen and specialists alike seem to harbor a touching hope that we will find just that knowledgeable person who can tell us what the future holds. Anyone who has recently given a public talk about Eastern Europe or the Soviet Union can attest that the first question posed after the talk is certain to be: "What is going to happen next?" One of the things that sustains that hope is that historians find it possible to trace causal strings through past events. We feel that the same kind of linear logic should permit us to



extrapolate events into the future. But linearity only works backwards. Forwards, we live in a non-linear world where surprises lurk. The historian's ability to trace causal strings is an illusion, a sleight of hand granted us by the fact that we already know, in a certain sense at least, what has happened.

The future, by contrast, is subject to what chaos theory calls the butterfly effect, which is the modern version of that old tale of how the empire was lost for want of a nail. Its point is simply that no matter how large the amount of data we accumulate about complex systems, there always remain uncertainties that radically transform outcomes.<sup>11</sup> Václav Havel has a more personal way of expressing the point:

We never know when some inconspicuous spark of knowledge, struck within range of the few brain cells, as it were, specially adapted for the organism's self-awareness, may suddenly light up the road for the whole of society, without society ever realizing, perhaps, how it came to see the road.<sup>12</sup>

Nineteen-eighty-nine has transformed the post-World War II era from current events into history, so that we now can talk about postwar Eastern Europe with a confidence that we did not have in 1985, let alone in 1975 or 1960. We know what happened. But we must resist the temptation of turning our new-found confidence that we understand 1989 into a new-found memory that we understood it, because that will only continue to sustain our already overdeveloped hunger to predict the unpredictable.

To summarize then, the lessons of 1989, and this is of course not an inclusive list, are: (1) the twentieth century is over, with both the anti-rationalist and the hyper-rationalist genres of solutions to the energy revolution having proven to be political, economic, and moral dead ends. This has not provided us with any magic solutions for the future, but it does lessen the likelihood that we will repeat the grossest of errors; (2) East Europeans will probably not profit as much from their deliverance in 1989 as Western Europe did from its deliverance in 1945, although the goal of entering Europe does provide a powerful incentive; (3) strategic assessments not only could benefit from taking moral and cultural factors into account, but in the post-communist world will be forced to do so; (4) leadership counts and will be an important ingredient in the differential development that appears to be the destiny of East Central Europe and Southeast Europe. The reception of Gorbachev's initiatives, however, depended in good measure on internal developments in Eastern Europe; and (5) surprises await us.

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<sup>11</sup> See James Gleick, Chaos: Making a New Science (New York: Penguin, 1987).

<sup>12</sup> Václav Havel, "Letter to Dr. Gustáv Husák," Living in Truth, pp. 21-22.

**FEARS, PHOBIAS, FRUSTRATIONS:  
EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE BETWEEN ETHNOCRACY AND DEMOCRACY**

**Vladimir Tismaneanu**

Over three years ago, I participated in a conference in New York City on the topic "Will the Communist States Survive? The View From Within." That was October 1987, when Gorbachev's reforms had generated a wide state of euphoria. But among us there were also some skeptics. I remember how Alexander Zinoviev, ironic and deeply pessimistic, gave his contribution the title "Crocodiles Cannot Fly." Others, including myself, thought that the new elbow room created by the revisionist tsar in the Kremlin had suppressed the barriers that for decades had prevented the triumph of Eastern Europe's "long rebellion against Yalta" (to use the telling formula proposed by Ferenc Feher and Agnes Heller).

The great rebellion of 1989 shattered many deeply embedded beliefs and forced us to question much of the conventional wisdom about these regimes. In Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, the long-beleaguered underground groups and movements spearheaded the spontaneous outbursts of discontent and provoked the non-violent collapse of the communist autocracies. The roundtable negotiations and the peaceful transitions to proto-pluralist forms of government in these countries were guaranteed by the relative maturity of their civil societies and the disintegration of the communist elites, symbolized by the "hawks" (Stalinist conservatives) and the reform-minded (Gorbachevite) liberals.

Because civil society was underdeveloped or frail in Romania and Bulgaria and the communist elites unable to offer any alternative to their disastrous policies, the transitions were significantly different in these two countries. In Romania, the euphoria of the first days of the post-Ceaușescu period was followed by the bitter realization that the National Salvation Front, instead of identifying itself with anti-totalitarian ideals, had only self-servingly and pragmatically appropriated them. In the Bulgarian case, the opposition managed to organize and overcome internecine strife.

At this moment, the intellectuals from all the post-communist countries are engaged in a soul-searching investigation of the long-concealed social and historical realities. As is known, in spite of their internationalist rhetoric, communists have always encouraged the nationalist autarky. It is therefore vitally important for civic activists and critical intellectuals in all the former communist states to embark on an open and uninhibited

dialogue. Because if it is true that Serbia or Romania lag behind the Czech and Slovak Republic in terms of pluralist development (or, some may argue, Slovakia lags behind Bohemia, and Serbia behind Slovenia), it is nevertheless obvious that all these societies have experienced similar torments provoked by similar causes. They were all victimized in the name of a pseudo-universalistic teleology according to which a classless utopia could and should be constructed, regardless of the people's will. They are all now faced with the enormous challenge of creating the legal framework which would grant the procedural expression to the most important underpinning of democracy: the people's will. All these societies have been deprived to a greater or lesser extent of civic culture. In all of them the individual has been repressed, regimented, and manipulated as a mere pawn by the powers-that-be. These countries are all experiencing today the revival of politics as the liberated space where the most humane features of the individual find natural expression. And, one might add, all have rediscovered the value of the revolutionary experience and, as a corollary, morality as a major source of political behavior. To those who have claimed that no new ideas have emerged during the anti-totalitarian upheavals in East and Central Europe, one is tempted to answer that it was precisely during these uprisings (revolutions, revolts, rebellions?) that concepts such as popular sovereignty, European consciousness, civil rights, and many others re-acquired full semantic justification. During such momentous times people have the great chance to become part and parcel of the dream of the Great Republic, or, to use Hannah Arendt's term, they rehabilitate the "revolutionary tradition and its lost treasury."

Communism is not completely dead. True, from the historical point of view, it has been defeated in its traditional form, as a messianic, militaristic, fanatic movement. With the grotesque exception of the incurably possessed, no one takes the communist ideology seriously anymore. On the other hand, the recent events in Slovakia, as well as the growth of the populist-authoritarian movements in most of these newly liberated countries, have shown that democracy is by no means the inevitable successor to communism. One of the prevailing illusions during the post-communist euphoria was that xenophobia and other outbursts of tribalist, pseudo-communitarian, and mystical-romantic spirit would remain merely a marginal phenomenon. But as the euphoric situation has continued to deteriorate and the new elites have failed to offer persuasive models for a rapid transition, these movements have gained momentum. They find their recruits primarily among the frustrated and disenchanting social groups by stirring a responsive chord among those unable to overcome the traumatic effects of a sudden break with the past. In countries with large national minorities, the demagogic movements play upon the ethnic resentments and phobias. We are at times overwhelmed by the disturbing feeling of a historical déjà vu: histrionics and hysteria commingle in explosions of intolerance and exclusiveness.

We should not, however, exaggerate the dark colors in this picture and the difficulties of the ongoing evolution from totalitarianism to a different political order based on the rule of law. Compared to 1987, now we can certainly assert that the communist states cannot and, in fact, did not survive—at least the countries of the former Soviet "external" empire. Leninist regimes did irreversibly fall apart. But the legacy of the Leninist system, including

its cultural and moral elements, is much more complex than anyone had foreseen. For the transitions to be successful and to lead to the emergence of open societies, some factors are indispensable: first, the creation of a pluralist political space with genuine political parties; second, the redefinition of the relationship between power and opposition by understanding that the existence of a powerful opposition is essential to the healthy functioning of a democracy; and third, the formation of the political elite (class) which, despite all the natural divergences, would be able to agree on the ultimate values characteristic of an open society, including the market, protection of the individual, and guarantees for the rights of minorities.

But while the democratic orientation of the mainstream political discourse seems unquestionable in many of these countries, we should not gloss over the persistence of unavowed fears, phobias, and frustrations, the neurotic syndrome that explains the readiness of many of the individuals to join ethnocentric, nebulously prophetic movements. Democracy is certainly not immune to the attacks of such movements, but it can defend itself against them by ridding itself of its illusions and identifying the social and psychological motivations of the populist extremes. For democracy to deny these motivations and to limit itself to a rhetoric of self-glorification is hardly the way to consolidate or to strengthen the victories of the last two years. As these societies have come out of the communist morass, their alternatives have ranged from real democracy to fundamentalist ethnocracy.

Hence, in addition to the difficulties created by the economic renewal, these societies have inherited the political, social, and cultural crises provoked by communism. To avoid the exploitations of these tensions by movements grounded in resentment and hatred, to prevent the emergence of a combination of extreme right and left "indigenist" radicalism, fledgling democratic institutions need to create a counterbalance at the level of social psychology. Democratic politics is not founded on myths and emotions but on a modest and patient search for those impersonal procedures that foster what totalitarianism wanted to destroy: the accountability of the political power and the existence of an independent judiciary and other institutions that aim to protect and not to humiliate the individual.

## INTELLECTUALS AND POLITICS: A VIEW FROM HUNGARY

Mária M. Kovács

Back in the 1970s two prominent Hungarian intellectuals, George Konrád and Iván Szelényi, wrote a book entitled "The Road of the Intelligentsia to Class Power." A few days after submitting the manuscript to the publisher, they were arrested and expelled from the country without legal proceedings.

Today, one and a half decades later, the communist nomenklatura that arrested Konrád and Szelényi has altogether disappeared from the public eye. Hungary's current president, Arpad Göncz is a writer of fiction; the prime minister is a historian of medicine who has spent most of his life working in a museum. The foreign minister, the minister of defense, and the speaker of the house are all professors of history. It is no exaggeration to say that, for better or worse, today Hungary is being governed by historians.

Most of the leaders of the largest opposition party, the Alliance of Free Democrats, are also professors, though—perhaps significantly—not of history, but of economics, philosophy, and sociology. In any event, it is safe to say that the majority of the current political elite are intellectuals in the classical sense: they are precisely the kind of people whose rise to "class power" Konrád and Szelényi predicted, at the price of imprisonment and expulsion back in the 1970s.

At least one of the authors, George Konrád, sees no reason to congratulate himself for his predictive powers. On the contrary, by today, he has come to rethink his theory. He now considers the rise of the intellectuals to power as no more than a transitory episode in the long process of the transition from communism to a new political structure. These are his revised views from the spring of 1991:

Although in the new democracies the most conspicuous actors on the political stage are writers, professors, actors, and historians, I do not believe that the intellectuals will permanently occupy the places of managers, revolutionaries, secret servicemen, bureaucrats, or priests. True, intellectuals are the kind of people who are quick to learn all these occupations. But these occupations still remain masquerades for the "professionals of understanding." All in all, I do not believe that intellectuals will permanently remain in a position to

aspire to a decisive role either in politics or in the economy.

I could not agree more. Current events suggest that the further the Hungarian transition proceeds, the more it is likely to trigger a massive flight of intellectuals away from the political arena. Let me briefly elaborate on this thesis by providing a short review of the role of the intellectuals in the evolution of Hungary's present party structure.

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In most of the literature on the East European transition, Hungary is picked out for its uniquely balanced party structure: a strong government coalition of the right-of-center parties on the one hand (Hungarian Democratic Forum, Christian Democrats, and Smallholders) and a strong liberal opposition (Free Democrats and Young Democrats) on the other. In the happy absence of a significant residual communist party, the political future depends on the relative strength of the conservatives and liberals, so that a peaceful and orderly rotation of power from the conservatives to the liberals or visa versa becomes at least theoretically possible.

In purely technical terms, this description may be correct. The problem with this ideally balanced party structure is that its constituent parts were solidified behind closed doors, in half-secrecy in the short months preceding the roundtable negotiations in the spring of 1989. Even the desperate fight between the outgoing communists and the incoming opposition took place in the total absence of mass publicity, not to speak of mass mobilization. This was the price—arguably an acceptable one—that Hungary had to pay for its uniquely peaceful, orderly, and smooth transition.

And yet the absence of mass mobilization led to a paradoxical situation. It was precisely this absence of mass politics, of a large social movement, and of unrest that gave the freedom to the various groups inside the intellectual opposition to—literally—dream up a diversified party structure which would in the future comfortably accommodate many shades of political opinion. It gave them, as it were, the freedom to mastermind an exemplary pluralism.

This having been said, let us now go further and look at the other side of the coin. It was the same absence of mass participation that allowed the Hungarian intellectuals to dream up a multi-party system structured alongside the predominant divisions not in the whole of society, but within the intelligentsia. The other side of the coin then is that today's pluralistic party structure is largely an outcome of the pluralism among the intellectuals and so, more than anything else, this pluralism reflects the special concerns of the intellectuals. In order to illustrate, let me draw a few of the dividing lines: anti-communist cosmopolitan intellectuals in one party, anti-communist populists intellectuals in the other. Anti-communist intellectuals with a record of active dissent in one party, anti-communist intellectuals with a record of passive resistance in the other. Jewish intellectuals in one party, non-Jewish intellectuals in the other. And, bordering on the almost comical,

historians in one party, philosophers in the other.

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The party structure dreamed up by this peculiar class of intellectuals has already been put to the test. The first year's balance sheet is, at best, controversial. While, to its credit, the ruling conservative-populist coalition is definitely moving in a pragmatic direction in its economic policies, on the other hand, it is desperately trying to preserve, even augment, the political value of the most divisive intellectual issues to which it owes its very existence. It is consistently trying to augment the symbolic, ideological distance between itself and the liberal opposition. For example, the ritual invocations of controversial prewar symbolism attached to the intellectual traditions of the political right, or the partisan identification of such symbolism as the only legitimate framework of the Hungarian national identity and culture, are just a few of the emotionally overcharged issues that have already, in the course of only one year, made communication and compromise between the two major groups, the Democratic Forum and the Free Democrats virtually impossible. This state of affairs, this deep freeze in communication between the major parties does not bode well for the prospects of Hungary's emerging five- or six-party system.

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And now we come to the most puzzling feature of political life in Hungary. This is the seeming, the seeming, absence of any coherence in the public's sympathies toward the major political figures on the one hand and the major parties on the other. The latest opinion polls rating the twenty most prominent Hungarian politicians and six parliamentary parties yielded the following results. President Göncz has a 72-percent approval rating. But apart from that, the popularity ratings reveal striking inconsistencies. The prime minister has only 46 percent approval, ranking fifteenth. Second on the list with close to a 72-percent rating is a Free Democrat, whose party gets only as little as 18 percent. The third on the list with 71 percent is Miklós Németh, the last communist prime minister turned international banker, whose party gets only 7 percent approval. If we examine the list further, the riddle remains: individual and party approval ratings reveal no apparent connection.

Taking a daring leap forward to look at the twenty prominent figures from the point of view of the discussion about the role of intellectuals, things immediately fall into a pattern. With the exception of President Göncz, there is not a single politician with a high approval rating who can be considered an intellectual, if by an intellectual we mean a person who has spent an extended period of time working in a scholarly or literary field. Whereas the Free Democrat Gábor Demszky, second on the list, has no background of intellectual occupation, the leader of that party, János Kis, a philosopher, is ranked as low as twelfth with a 52 percent approval. In the precious first third of the list (in the first seven places) there is not one politician whom we might term an intellectual in the classical sense of the term.

Before concluding, let me add just one observation from the opinion polls. If elections were held today, the party that would come in first would be the liberal Young Democrats, whose present approval rating is 35 percent. Their leaders currently occupy three of the first seven places on the list of twenty politicians. With them, unlike with the others, there is a further pattern: they enjoy the support of over a third of the population and occupy almost half of the positions on the list of twenty. What accounts for this singular coherence amid all the puzzling inconsistency? Certainly not the Young Democrats' philosophy. The Young Democrats are brilliant politicians, most of them lawyers. They are straightforward free-marketeers of straightforward libertarian principles. They are also intransigent in their style, making no allowances for nationalism or any limitation of personal freedoms.

What makes the Young Democrats unique is that not a single member of their party was involved in the pre-transition infighting among the Hungarian intellectuals. In fact, this party includes not a single intellectual in the classical sense of the term. There can be none. The party grew out of a semi-legal youth group of law graduates in 1989, setting an age ceiling of thirty, later of thirty-five, for its candidates. With this unusual single stroke, they closed their ranks to the bitter, at times tribal, divisions within the intelligentsia. Their concept of politics differs from most of the other politicians', in that it is a pragmatic, everyday affair with very little or no millenarian overtones. Unlike most intellectuals of the old crop, the Young Democrats are not indignant about the banality of the political process or about the Alltag character of democratic politics. What interests them is preserving Hungary in one piece until one day politics will indeed become a routine affair handled by professional managers, professional secret agents, and professional bureaucrats. And until then, to quote Konrád, historians, writers, and philosophers can--or may even be forced to--forget their masquerades and return to their own, divisive, unambiguous, at times even creative, intellectual routines.