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A few days later, Seweryn Blumsztajn did return to Poland. A great party of friends, Solidarity activists and sympathizers saw him off in Paris. At Orly airport he appeared at a press conference chaired by André Glucksmann. Another great party of friends, Solidarity activists and sympathizers awaited him at Warsaw airport. Everyone, in both places, was prepared to launch an instant volley of protest if he was arrested.

When he arrived at Warsaw airport he was immediately taken away by six policemen, who told him that his Polish passport was 'invalid' and had been 'misused', and then marched him straight back onto the Air France plane. The pilot was told that the plane would not be allowed to leave unless it had Blumsztajn on board. It left. He was on board.

I sometimes wonder what happened to that film.

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## Does Central Europe Exist?

### I

Central Europe is back. For three decades after 1945, nobody spoke of Central Europe in the present tense: the thing was one with Nineveh and Tyre. In German-speaking lands, the very word *Mitteluropa* seemed to have died with Adolf Hitler, surviving only as a ghostly *Mitropa* on the dining cars of the Deutsche Reichsbahn. Even in Austria, as ex-Chancellor Fred Sinowatz has remarked, 'until ten years ago one was not permitted so much as to mention the word *Mitteluropa*.' In Prague and Budapest, the idea of Central Europe continued to be cherished between consenting adults in private, but from the public sphere it vanished as completely as it had in 'the West'. The post-Yalta order dictated a strict and single dichotomy. Western Europe implicitly accepted this dichotomy by subsuming under the label Eastern Europe all those parts of historic Central, East Central, and South-eastern Europe that after 1945 came under Soviet domination. The EEC completed the semantic trick by arrogating to itself the unqualified title Europe.

In the last few years we have begun to talk again about Central Europe, and in the present tense. This new discussion originated not in Berlin or Vienna but in Prague and Budapest. The man who more than anyone else has given it currency in the West is a Czech, Milan Kundera, with his now-famous essay 'The Tragedy of Central Europe' (first published in French in 1983 and in English in 1984). Subsequently, the Germans and the Austrians have gingerly begun to rehabilitate, in their different ways, a concept that was once so much their own. The East German leader, Erich Honecker, talks of the danger of nuclear war in *Mitteluropa*. The West German Social Democrat Peter Glotz says the Federal Republic is 'a guarantee-power of the culture of *Mitteluropa*'; whatever that means. And Kurt Waldheim's Vienna recently hosted a symposium with the

electrifying title 'Heimat Mitteleuropa'. A backhanded tribute to the new actuality of the Central European idea came even from the central organ of the Polish United Workers' Party, *Trybuna Ludu*, which published a splenetic attack on what it called 'The Myth of "Central Europe"'.<sup>1</sup>

There is a basic sense in which the term *Central Europe* (or *East Central Europe*) is obviously useful. It merely reminds an American or British newspaper reader that East Berlin, Prague, and Budapest are not quite in the same position as Vladivostok—that Siberia does not begin at Checkpoint Charlie—then it serves a good purpose. So also, if it suggests to American or British students that the academic study of this region could be more than footnotes to Sovietology. But of course the voices from Prague and Budapest that initiated this discussion mean something far larger and deeper when they talk of Central Europe.

The publication in English<sup>1</sup> of the most important political essays of three outstanding writers, Václav Havel, György Konrád, and Adam Michnik, a Czech, a Hungarian, and a Pole, gives us a chance to examine the myth—and the reality. Of course it would be absurd to claim that any one writer is 'representative' of his nation, and anyway, Havel, Michnik and Konrád are different kinds of writers working in quite dissimilar conditions.

Havel comes closest to general recognition as something like an intellectual spokesman for independent Czech intellectuals.

<sup>1</sup> The editions referred to in this essay are: *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens Against the State in Central-Eastern Europe* by Václav Havel et al., introduction by Steven Lukes, edited by John Keane, (London: Hutchinson, 1985).

*The Anatomy of Reticence* by Václav Havel, Voices from Czechoslovakia No. 1, (Stockholm: Charta 77 Foundation, 1985).

*Antipolitics: An Essay*, by György Konrád, translated from the Hungarian by Richard E. Allen, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984).

*Letters from Prison and other Essays* by Adam Michnik, translated by Maya Latynski, foreword by Czesław Miłosz, introduction by Jonathan Schell, (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1985).

*Także czasy . . . Rzecz o kompromisie* by Adam Michnik, (London, Aneks, 1985).

*KOR: A History of the Worker's Defense Committee in Poland, 1976-1981*, by Jan Józef Lipski, translated by Olga Amsterdamska and Gene M. Moore, (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1985).

although there is a great diversity of views even within Charter 77 (as we can see from the other Charterist essays collected under Havel's title *The Power of the Powerless*). His 'political' essays are rich, poetic philosophical meditations, searching for the deeper meaning of experience, 'digging out words with their roots' as Karl Kraus once put it, but rarely deigning to examine the political surface of things.

(He nowhere so much as mentions the name of any of the present communist rulers of Czechoslovakia. Magnificent contempt!) He shows a great consistency, from his seminal essay 'The Power of the Powerless', written in the autumn of 1978, through his 1984 address on being awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Toulouse, to his open letter to Western peace movements, published in 1985 as *The Anatomy of a Reticence*. You hear in his writing the silence of a country cottage or a prison cell—for his part in the Committee for the Defence of the Unjustly Persecuted (VONS), he was himself unjustly persecuted and imprisoned from 1979 to 1983—the quiet voice of a man who has had a long time for solitary reflection, a playwright catapulted by circumstances and the dictates of conscience into the role of 'dissident' but not at all by temperament a political activist. Yet his contempt for politics is also more generally characteristic of Czechoslovakia, where most people find it hard to believe that anything of importance will ever again change on the immobile, frozen surface of Husák's geriatric 'normalized' regime.

Michnik, by contrast, has seen the earth shake in Poland. Though a historian by training, he has spent most of his adult life actively engaged in political opposition. A central figure in the Committee for Social Self-Defence-KOR and then an advisor to Solidarity, he, unlike Havel or Konrád, writes with the knowledge that he will be read for immediate political advice. Activists of underground Solidarity, students involved in *szmizdat* publishing, look to him (among others) for practical answers to the question 'What is to be done?' This gives a sharper political focus to his work, but also makes it more controversial.

Like Havel, he is a hero to many of his compatriots. Unlike Havel, his views are fiercely contested. The KOR tradition, of which he is perhaps the most articulate spokesman (and certainly the most lucid essayist), now vies for popularity in Poland with views that may be characterized, with varying degrees of inaccuracy, as Catholic positivist (in the very special Polish usage of that term), Catholic

nationalist, liberal, libertarian, or even neo-conservative. Astonishingly, the greatest part of his work has been written in prison and smuggled out under the noses of General Januzelski's jailers. (Besides almost three hundred pages of political essays, he has also produced a 285-page book of literary essays.) His style is often polemical, full of rasping irony—the rasp of an iron file cutting at prison bars—but modulated by a fine sense of moral responsibility and a keen political intelligence. Like Havel, he also displays a great consistency in his political thought from his seminal 1976 essay 'The New Evolutionism' to his 1985 'Letter from the Gdansk Prison' and his most recent essay ' . . . On Compromise', which has so far appeared only in Polish.

Konrad is different again. He is writing not in and out of prison but in and out of Vienna or West Berlin. We hear in the background of his long excursive disquisitions not the slamming of prison doors but the clink of coffee cups in the Café Landtmann or the comradely hum of a peace-movement seminar. In his book *Antipolitics* (German subtitle: *Mitteleuropäische Meditationen*) and subsequent articles, Konrad, a distinguished novelist and sociologist, has developed what I might call a late *Jugendstil* literary style: colourful, profuse, expansive, and ornate. *Antipolitics* is a *Sammelsurium*, an omnium *gatherum* of ideas that are picked up one after the other, briefly toyed with, reformulated, then abandoned in favour of other, prettier, younger (but alas, contradictory) ideas, only to be taken up again, petted, and restated a few pages later. This makes Konrad's essayistic work both stimulating and infuriating. Contrary to a widespread impression in the West, one finds few people in Budapest who consider that Konrad is a 'representative' figure even in the limited way that Havel and Michnik are. On the other hand, they find it difficult to point to anyone else who has covered half as much intellectual ground, in a more 'representative' fashion.

So Havel, Michnik and Konrad are different writers, differently placed even in their own countries, neither fully 'representative' nor exact counterparts. Yet all three are particularly well attuned to the questions a Western reader is likely to raise, and concerned to answer them. And all three are equally committed to the dialogue between their countries. Havel's *The Power of the Powerless* was written specifically as the start of a projected dialogue between Charter 77 and KOR. In discussing the richness of Polish *samizdat*, Michnik

singles out the work of 'the extremely popular Václav Havel', and both Havel and the Hungarian Miklós Haraszti have appeared alongside Michnik on the masthead of the Polish independent quarterly *Krytyka*. Konrad refers constantly to Czech and Polish experience, and in one striking passage he apostrophizes a Pole identified only as 'Adam'—but the 'Adam' is clearly Michnik. So if there really is some common Central European ground, we can reasonably expect to discover it in the political essays of these three authors. If we do not find it here, it probably does not exist.

In the work of Havel and Konrad there is an interesting semantic division of labour. Both authors use the terms *Eastern Europe* or *East European* when the context is neutral or negative; when they write *Central* or *East Central*, the statement is invariably positive, affirmative, or downright sentimental. In his *Antipolitics*, Konrad writes of 'a new Central European identity', 'the consciousness of Central Europe', a 'Central European strategy'. 'The demand for self-government', he suggests, 'is the organizing focus of the new Central European ideology.' 'A certain distinctive Central European scepticism', Havel comments in *The Anatomy of a Reticence*,

is inescapably a part of the spiritual, cultural, and intellectual phenomenon that is Central Europe . . . That scepticism has little in common with, say, English scepticism. It is generally rather strange, a bit mysterious, a bit nostalgic, often tragic and even at times heroic.

Later in the same essay, he talks of 'a Central European mind, sceptical, sober, anti-utopian, understated'—in short, everything we think of as quintessentially English. Or Konrad again:

It was East Central Europe's historical misfortune that it was unable to become independent after the collapse of the Eastern Tartar-Turkish hegemony and later the German-Austrian hegemony of the West, and that it once again came under Eastern hegemony, this time of the Soviet Russian type. This is what prevents our area from exercising the Western option taken out a thousand years ago, even though that represents our profoundest historical inclination [my italics].

In this last passage, history has indeed been recast as myth. And

the mythopoetic tendency—the inclination to attribute to the Central European past what you hope will characterize the Central European future, the confusion of what should be with what was—is rather typical of the new Central Europeanism. We are to understand that what was *truly* Central European was always Western, rational, humanistic, democratic, sceptical and tolerant. The rest was East European, Russian or possibly German. Central Europe takes all the *Dichter und Denker*, Eastern Europe is left with the *Richter und Henker*.

The clearest and most extreme articulation of this tendency comes from Milan Kundera. Kundera's Central Europe is a mirror image of Solzhenitsyn's Russia. Solzhenitsyn says that communism is to Russia as a disease is to the man afflicted by it. Kundera says that communism is to Central Europe as the disease is to the man afflicted by it—and *the disease is Russia!* Kundera's Central European myth is in frontal collision with Solzhenitsyn's Russian myth. Kundera's absurd exclusion of Russia from Europe (not endorsed by Havel or Konrád) has been most effectively criticized by Joseph Brodsky. As Brodsky observes, 'The political system that put Mr Kundera out of commission is as much a product of Western rationalism as it is of Eastern emotional radicalism.' But can't we go one step further? Aren't there specifically *Central* European traditions that at least facilitated the establishment of communist regimes in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, and traditions that those regimes signally carry forward to this day?

A superbureaucratic statism and formalistic legalism taken to absurd (and sometimes already inhuman) extremes were, after all, also particularly characteristic of Central Europe before 1914. That is one reason why we find the most exact, profound and chilling anticipations of the totalitarian nightmare precisely in the works of the most distinctively *Central* European authors of the early twentieth century, in Kafka and Musil, Broch and Roth. And then, what was really more characteristic of historic Central Europe: cosmopolitan tolerance, or nationalism and racism? As François Bondy has tellingly observed (in a riposte to Kundera), if Kafka was a child of Central Europe, so too was Adolf Hitler. And then again, I find myself asking: *Since when* has the 'Central European mind' been 'sceptical, sober, anti-utopian, understated?' For a thousand years, as Konrád seems to suggest? In 1948, when, as Kundera vividly recalls in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, the most Central European of

intellectuals joined hands and danced in the streets to welcome the arrival of heaven on earth? Or is it only since 1968?

The myth of the pure Central European past is perhaps a good exaggeration to challenge a prevailing orthodoxy. Like the contemporary West German myth of the 20 July, 1944, bomb plot against Hitler (the myth being that the conspirators were true liberal democrats, proleptic model citizens of the Federal Republic), its effects on a younger generation may be inspiring. So shouldn't we let *good myths lie*? I think not. And in other moments, or when challenged directly, Havel and Konrád, among others, also think not.

In the late 1970s, the Czechoslovak historian J. Mlýnský (writing under the pseudonym Danubius) started a fascinating and highly fruitful discussion in Prague when he argued that the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans by the non-communist Czechoslovak government in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War was itself an inhuman and 'totalitarian' act—a precedent and path-breaker for the communist totalitarianism to come. 'Let us not forget', the Czech writer Jiří Gruša movingly reminded us at the unofficial cultural symposium in Budapest last year, 'that it was we [the writers] who glorified the modern state' and that 'our nationalist odes may be found in all the schoolbooks of Europe.' Havel goes out of his way to underline the lesson of his fellow intellectuals' 'post-war lapse into utopianism'. And Konrád declares bluntly: 'After all, we Central Europeans began the first two world wars.' So if at times they indulge the mythopoetic tendency, there is also, in this new discussion of Central Europe from Prague and Budapest, a developed sense of historical responsibility, an awareness of the deeper ambiguities of the historical reality; in short, an understanding that Central Europe is very, very far from being simply 'the part of the West now in the East.'

Besides these historical ambiguities there are, of course, the geographical ones. Like Europe itself, no one can quite agree where Central Europe begins or ends. Germans naturally locate the centre of Central Europe in Berlin; Austrians, in Vienna. Tomáš Masaryk defined it as 'a peculiar zone of small nations extending from the North Cape to Cape Matapan' and therefore including Laplanders, Swedes, Norwegians and Danes, Finns, Estonians, Letts, Lithuanians, Poles, Lusatians, Czechs and Slovaks, Magyars, Serbo-



Croats and Slovenes, Romanians, Bulgars, Albanians, Turks and Greeks'—but no Germans or Austrians! As with the whole of Europe, the most difficult frontier to locate is the Eastern one. The reader may wonder why I have thus far talked so much of Prague and Budapest but not of Warsaw, of Havel and Konrad but not of Michnik. The reason is simple. Michnik never talks of Central Europe. His essays are full of illuminating references to European history and to the current affairs of other 'East European' countries, but in the whole corpus I have found not a single reference to Central Europe. And in this he is quite typical: the concept hardly surfaces in all the acres of *samizdat* produced in Poland over the last few years.

In the Polish part of old Galicia there is still more than a touch of nostalgia for the elegantly chaotic laxities of Habsburg rule—what Musil called the '*kakanische Zustände*'. (At the offices of the Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny* in Kraków a portrait of the emperor Franz Josef hangs next to a row of popes.) For Michnik, as for most of the democratic opposition, it is self-evident that the small states between Russia and Germany contributed to their own destruction by the nationalistic rivalries of the inter-war years, and therefore that, were they ever to become independent again, they should co-operate as closely as possible—if not actually confederate. (The London-based Polish government-in-exile and the New York-based Council of Liberation of Czechoslovakia recently reaffirmed the 1942 Sikorski-Beneš declaration of intent to form a confederation of the Polish and Czechoslovak states.) But emotionally, culturally, and even geographically, the view eastward is still at least equally important to most Poles: the view across those vast eastern territories that for centuries were part of historic Poland. It is a lost half-mythical Lithuania that Czesław Miłosz celebrates in his poems and prose. And when Pope John Paul II talks of Europe he looks, with the eyes of a visionary and an exile, not just beyond the artificial, synthetic, truncated Europe of the EEC to Prague, Budapest and his beloved Kraków, but far, far beyond historic Central Europe, way across the Pripyet marshes to the historic heartlands of Eastern Europe, to the Ukraine, to White Russia, even to the onion domes of Zagorsk; and when he preaches his European vision in Polish, he rolls an almost Lithuanian 'r'.

To say that Poland is to Central Europe as Russia is to Europe would

be, no doubt, somewhat facile. But perhaps I have already said enough to indicate, however sketchily, just a few of the awesome historical, geographic, and cultural complexities, the rival memories and resentments that surround you, like a crowd of squabbling ghosts, the moment you revive the term Central Europe—let alone *Mittelropa*. If we treat the new Central European idea as an assertion about a common Central European past in the centuries down to 1945, as Konrad and Kundera seem to suggest we should, then we shall at once be lost in a forest of historical complexity—an endlessly intriguing forest to be sure, a territory where peoples, cultures, languages are fantastically intertwined, where every place has several names and men change their citizenship as often as their shoes, an enchanted wood full of wizards and witches, but one that bears over its entrance the words: 'Abandon all hope, ye who enter here, of ever again seeing the wood for the trees.' Every attempt to distil some common 'essence' of Central European history is either absurdly reductionist or invincibly vague. In this forest we find, with Stendahl, that all the truth, and all the pleasure, lies in the details.

Fortunately, the new Central European idea is not only an assertion about the past. It is also, perhaps mainly, an assertion about the present. Put very baldly, the suggestion is that independent intellectuals from this part of the world *today* find themselves sharing a distinctive set of attitudes, ideas, and values, a set of attitudes they have in common but that is also, to a large degree, peculiar to them: just how common and how peculiar, they realize when they encounter Western intellectuals in Paris, New York, or California. This distinctive set of attitudes has, it is suggested, a good deal to do with their specifically Central European history—for example, the experience of small nations subjected to large empires, the associated tradition of civic commitment from the 'intelligentsia', the habit of irony that comes from living in defeat—but above all it has to do with their own direct, common, and unique experience of living under Soviet-type systems since Yalta. They are the Europeans who, so to speak, know what it is really about; and we can learn from them—if only we are prepared to listen. Central Europe is not a region whose boundaries you can trace on the map—like, say, Central America. It is a kingdom of the spirit.

Compared to the geopolitical reality of Eastern Europe and Western Europe, Konrad writes, 'Central Europe exists today only as

a cultural-political anti-hypothesis (*eine kulturpolitische Antihypothese*)... To be a Central European is a *Weltanschauung* not a *Staatsangehörigkeit*.<sup>2</sup> It is 'a challenge to the ruling system of clichés.'<sup>2</sup> (It is in this sense that Czesław Miłosz, too, has declared himself to be a Central European.) The Central European idea not only jolts us out of our post-Yalta mind-set, dynamiting what Germans call the *Mauer im Kopf*—the Berlin Wall in our heads. It also challenges other notions, priorities and values widely accepted in the West. What is more, it has something to offer in their place.

## 2

Such are the large claims for the *new* Central Europe. How far are they borne out by essays of Havel, Michnik and Konrad. How much do these major independent voices from Prague, Budapest and Warsaw really have in common? And where are their most important differences? How might they change the way we look at 'Eastern Europe'? And at ourselves?

On a close comparative reading, I believe we can find important common ground—although we have to dig for it. The main elements of the shared intellectual subsoil are, it seems to me, as follows. First, there are the 'antipolitics' of Konrad's title. Havel also says, 'I favour "antipolitical politics"' (in his 1984 Toulouse lecture),<sup>3</sup> and although Michnik does not use this term any more than he does the term Central Europe, the thing certainly pervades his writing.

The antipolitical rejects what Konrad calls the Jacobin-Leninist tradition and what Havel (following the Czech philosopher Václav Bělohradský) calls 'politics as a rational technology of power.' In *The Power of the Powerless*, Havel delicately criticizes those in Charter 77 who overestimate the importance of direct political work in the traditional sense. This I take to be a reference particularly to those former senior communists in Charter 77 who still conceive their activity primarily as a matter of seeking *power in the state*—and if not

power in the state, then at least a little influence on it. Konrad declares grandly: 'No thinking person should want to drive others from positions of political power in order to occupy them for himself. I would not want to be minister in any government whatever.' Since he is unlikely ever to be asked to be minister in Budapest, this hypothetical sacrifice may not seem too difficult.

But in the case of Poland, the statement 'We do not seek power in the state' has very recently had a real, immediate significance. There were some people in Poland in 1981 who thought that Solidarity *should* go for power in the state. This Solidarity's national leaders consistently refused to do. Of course, their main reason was a pragmatic calculation about what Moscow would tolerate. But there was also a theoretical and ethical underpinning from the dictionary of 'antipolitics'. 'Taught by history,' Michnik writes in his 1985 Letter from the Gdańsk Prison, 'we suspect that by using force to storm the existing Bastilles we shall unwittingly build new ones.' And in his latest essay, he repeats: 'Solidarity does not aspire to take power in the state.' In the Poland of 1986 this is once again a purely hypothetical statement. But the antipolitical hypothesis—characteristic of KOR—still has to compete with other, now widely articulated views, which urge the pursuit of politics (albeit only on paper) in the traditional categories of left and right.

Michnik and Havel regard the categories of left and right as supremely irrelevant. Talking in his Toulouse lecture about the well-intended but uncomprehending questions of Western intellectuals, Havel exclaims:

Or the question about socialism and capitalism! I admit that it gives me a sense of emerging from the depths of the last century. It seems to me that these thoroughly ideological and many times mystified categories have long since been beside the point.

'The very division "Left-Right" emerged in another epoch,' Michnik echoes Havel in his latest essay, 'and it is impossible to make a meaningful reconstruction of it in present-day Poland (and probably also in other countries ruled by communists).' Is the Jaruzelski regime left or right? To the vast majority of Poles "Right" and "Left" are abstract divisions from another epoch.'

In place of the old division between left and right, they offer us the

<sup>2</sup> Quotations in this paragraph are from his essay 'Mein Traum von

Europa,' in *Kursbuch* 81 (September 1985).

<sup>3</sup> Quotations in this essay are from the translation first published in the *Salisbury Review* (January 1985), reissued by the Charter 77 Foundation as No. 2 in their *Voices from Czechoslovakia* series, obtainable from the Charter 77 Foundation, Box 50041, S-10405 Stockholm, Sweden.

even older division between right and wrong. This, they insist, is the truly operative distinction for those living under such a regime. Moral categories figure largely in the writing of all three authors (though less in Konrad than in Havel and Michnik). All three reassert the fundamental premises of Judaeo-Christian individualism. Reversing the traditional priorities of socialism, they begin not with the state or society, but with the individual human being: his conscience, his 'subjectivity', his duty to live in truth, and his right to live in dignity. 'First change thyself' might stand as the common motto of their work. But, they all insist, the attempt to live in truth and dignity does not merely have profound implications for the individual; it can slowly make a substantial impact on the communist state. For, as Havel puts it, 'the main pillar of the system is living a lie.'

Havel illustrates this with the now celebrated example of the greengrocer who puts in his shop window, among the onions and carrots, the slogan 'Workers of the World, Unite!' 'Why does he do it?' Havel asks.

What is he trying to communicate to the world? Is he genuinely enthusiastic about the idea of unity among the workers of the world? Is his enthusiasm so great that he feels an irresistible impulse to acquaint the public with his ideals?

Of course not. He is signalling to the authorities his willingness to conform and obey. That is the meaning of his sign. He is indifferent to its semantic content. But if the greengrocer had been instructed to display the slogan 'I am afraid and therefore unquestioningly obedient', he would not be nearly as indifferent to its semantics, even though the statement would reflect the truth.

The mendacious tissue of ideology partly conceals the true nature of the power in question; more importantly, it enables the individual citizen to conceal from himself the true nature of his submission to that power. It is this canvas of ideologically determined lies that, Havel argues, really holds the system together—and keeps society in thrall to the state. Each of these tiny acts of outward semantic conformity—each in itself so trivial as to seem nugatory—is like one of the minuscule threads with which the Lilliputians bound down Gulliver, except that here, men and women are binding themselves.

By rendering this seemingly meaningless tribute, or even by not protesting against it, people

*live within a lie.* They need not accept the lie. It is enough for them to have accepted their life with it and in it. For by this very fact, individuals confirm the system, fulfill the system, make the system, *are* the system.

The 'line of conflict' does not run simply between victim-people and oppressor-state, as in the conventional image, or just between different social groups, as in a more traditional dictatorship. In the post-totalitarian system, this line runs *de facto* through each person, for everyone in his or her own way is both a victim and a supporter of the system. 'Except, that is, for the few who have decided to 'give in truth'—and in the West are so misleadingly known as dissidents.

Even these few voices have had an impact out of all proportion to their numbers. And if more people try to live in truth, to live in dignity... Well, look at Poland in 1980, at what György Konrad calls, in discussing Solidarity, 'the peaceful power of the plain-spoken truth.' Certainly that is Michnik's interpretation—the politics of truth, he writes, was one of the two principal traits of the democratic opposition to be taken over by Solidarity. (The other was non-violence.) So all three authors express the conviction that moral changes can have a seemingly disproportionate political effect, that consciousness ultimately determines being, and that the key to the future lies not in the external, objective condition of states—political, military, economic, technological—but in the internal, subjective condition of individuals. This is where Central Europe confronts Eastern Europe: in the autonomous sphere of culture, in the kingdom of the spirit.

If not in state or Party power structures then where, if at all, are these individual men and women 'living in truth' to combine? In *civil society*. Both Michnik and Konrad use the term. Havel certainly has the idea. 'In Poland,' Michnik writes in his 1985 'Letter from the Gdańsk Prison,' 'the structures of independent civil society have been functioning for several years—a veritable miracle on the Vistula,' and he entitled his account of Solidarity's first year 'The Promise of a Civil Society.' 'The anti-politician,' says Konrad, 'wants to keep the scope of government policy (especially that of its military

apparatus) under the control of civil society.' To a historian of ideas, these usages of a term with such a long and chequered history might seem unforgivably vague. Yet the reader in Prague, Budapest, or Warsaw will understand exactly what is meant. 'You know, for us the struggle for civil society is a great daily drama,' a Hungarian sociologist recently remarked to me. A sentence that might equally well have been spoken in Prague or Warsaw, but hardly in Paris or London. Indeed, one could write the history of East Central Europe over the last decade as the story of struggles for civil society.

As the Hungarian philosopher and social critic János Kis has observed, from the mid-fifties until the late sixties (the key dates being, of course, 1956 and 1968), the 'general idea of evolution in Eastern Europe was that of reforms generated from above and supported from below.' Meaningful change would be initiated from within a ruling Communist party that had been enlightened by its own so-called revisionists. Socialism would acquire a human face. This idea was crushed in 1968, under the Soviet tanks in Prague and the police batons in Warsaw, but another has since emerged, gaining wide currency in the late seventies. Broadly speaking, this second 'general idea of evolution' is that meaningful change will only come through people's organizing themselves *outside* the structures of the Party-state, in multifarious independent social groupings. The operative goal is not the reform of the Party-state but the *reconstitution of civil society*, although of course, if the strategy is at all successful, the Party-state will be compelled to adapt to the new circumstances, if only by grudgingly accepting an incremental *de facto* reduction in the areas of its total control.

This strategy of 'social self-organization' or 'social self-defence' was outlined by, among others, Adam Michnik in his seminal essay 'The New Evolutionism', and it is, of course, in Poland that it has been most extensively pursued. In 1977, a year after its foundation, the Worker's Defence Committee (Komitet Obrony Robotników—KOR) formally renamed itself the Committee for Social Self-Defence KOR as a signal of this broader goal. In his history of KOR, Jan Józef Lipski gives a comprehensively detailed and scrupulous account of the very diverse kinds of 'social work' in which this involved KOR members—from *samizdat* publishing and journalism to support for private farmers and the first Free Trade Union committees. How much the birth of Solidarity owed directly to KOR and how much to

other causes is a matter for historical debate, but there is no doubt at all that Solidarity was the child of this 'general idea of evolution'.

The biggest child, but not the only one. Strikingly similar ideas were advanced in Prague, for example by Václav Benda in his 1978 essay 'The Parallel Polis', and the family likeness of Charter 77 to KOR is unmistakable. The 'general idea' is the same. In Hungary, the distinction between reforms initiated 'from above' by the Party-state and changes coming from below, from a society aspiring to be 'civil', is much less clear. But here, too, the idea of the 'struggle for civil society' is one widely endorsed by independent intellectuals. It is therefore no accident (as Soviet commentators always remark) that we find the leitmotif of civil society in the essays of Konrád and Havel as well as Michnik.

Another common leitmotif is non-violence. The reasons given for the renunciation of violence are both pragmatic and ethical. Practically, because it has been clear since 1956 that violent revolt has no chance of success in the present geopolitical order. Ethically, because violence—and particularly revolutionary violence—corrupts those who use it. So also does the mental violence of hatred. Violence and hatred, lies, slanders, beatings and murders—these are the methods of the Jacobin-Leninist power holders. 'Let these methods remain theirs alone,' Michnik told me when we talked in his Warsaw flat in the fall of 1984—a few days after the murder of Father Jerzy Popiełuszko by state-sponsored terrorists from the Polish security service. 'We are not fighting for power,' he went on, 'but for the democratic form of our country; any kind of terrorism necessarily leads to moral debasement, to spiritual deformation.' And in his latest essay he repeats the formula so often used by Popiełuszko and by the pope: 'Vanquish evil through good' (*zło dobrem zwyciężaj*).

This is not merely preaching. As Lipski records, Michnik personally helped to save several policemen from being lynched by an angry mob in the small town of Orzów in May 1981. (He won the crowd's confidence by declaring, 'My name is Adam Michnik. I am an anti-socialist force.') Altogether, Solidarity's record of non-violence will more than stand comparison with that of any peace movement in Western Europe—and under incomparably greater provocation. Neither the Czechs nor the Hungarians have recently had the opportunity (or necessity) of putting the preaching into practice on anything like the same scale. But the commitment in



principle is as emphatic with Havel and Konrád as it is with Michnik. As Lipski points out, this is an area where 'the influence of Christian ethics' is most apparent. But, looking sideways at the Western peace movements, Havel and Michnik simultaneously bring forward another ancient and fundamental principle of Christian ethics: the conviction of the *value of sacrifice* ('Greater love hath no man than this . . .') Referring to what he calls 'pacifist movements', Michnik says, 'The ethics of Solidarity are based on an opposite premise: that there are causes worth suffering and dying for.' Havel repeats the almost identical formula of Jan Patočka: 'There are things worth suffering for.'

Indeed, it is in their response to the Western peace movements that we find the most developed common position: In his 'Anatomy of a Reticence', Havel calls it the 'common minimum' of 'independent East Central European thinking about peace.' They begin by expressing an instinctive, 'pre-rational' (Havel) sympathy with people who appear to put the common good before their selfish interests. But they also begin with a healthy suspicion—nourished by Central European experience—of the peace movement's tendency to utopianism and 'the various much too earnest overstatements (which, at the same time and not accidentally, are not bought at a high cost) with which some Western peace-fighters come to us.' (Havel's rather contorted sentence repays a careful second reading.) They insist, against much of the Western peace movement, that

The cause of the danger of war is not weapons as such but political realities . . . No lasting, genuine peace can be achieved simply by opposing this or that weapons system, because such opposition deals only with consequences, not with reasons.

Thus Havel. And from his prison cell, Michnik sent an almost identical message: 'Western public opinion has allowed itself to have imposed on it the Soviet pattern of thinking—arms are more important than people. But this is not true. No weapon kills by itself.'

The main 'political realities' in question are the division of Europe and the continued Soviet domination over half of it. 'It is an unobservant European,' declares Konrád, 'who fails to notice that the Iron Curtain is made of explosive material. Western Europe rests its back against a wall of dynamite, while blithely gazing out over the

Atlantic.' 'What threatens peace in Europe,' Havel agrees, 'is not the prospect of change but the existing situation.' The key to a lasting peace lies not in disarmament or arms control as such but in changing these political realities. In the long term, this must mean overcoming the division of Europe (which we describe in shorthand as Yalta) and moving toward what Havel calls 'the ideal of a democratic Europe as a friendly community of free and independent nations.' Hard to dissent from that; still harder to imagine its achievement. In the short to medium term, however, this means above all understanding the symbiotic connection between 'external peace' (between states) and 'internal peace' (within states)—for

a state that ignores the will and rights of its citizens can offer no guarantee that it will respect the will and the rights of other peoples, nations, and states. A state that refuses its citizens the right of public supervision of the exercise of power cannot be susceptible to international supervision. A state that denies its citizens their basic rights becomes dangerous for its neighbours as well; internal arbitrary rule will be reflected in arbitrary external relations.

Such are the states of Eastern Europe, whose citizens, unlike those of West European states, do *not* enjoy 'internal peace'. Therefore—and this is a message both to the peace movements and to the governments of the West—the key to a lasting, genuine peace between East and West in Europe (as opposed to the present state of 'non-war') must lie in working toward greater respect for human rights and civil liberties in Eastern Europe. The struggles for disarmament and human rights do not merely go hand in hand (as a minority—and still only a minority—in most Western peace movements maintain). The struggle for human rights has an absolute, logical priority. Michnik: 'The condition for reducing the danger of war is full respect for human rights.' Havel: 'Respect for human rights is the fundamental condition and the sole genuine guarantee of true peace.'

So on the one hand, these Central European minds ('sceptical, sober, anti-utopian, understated') come up with a warning about the true nature of Soviet-bloc states that could warn the cockles of President Reagan's heart. Indeed, in his latest essay Michnik quotes with approval some of Reagan's remarks about the difficulty of

reaching arms-control agreements with the Soviet Union. On the other hand they talk about respect for human rights as the *fundamental* condition and the *sole genuine* guarantee of *true* peace—to which a Western peace activist might well reply: And who is being utopian now? The message that combines these two aspects might be rudely summarized thus: The best thing that West European peace activists can do for peace is to support the democratic opposition in Eastern Europe.

This concludes my rudimentary short list of what seem to be important *common* positions, approaches, or leitmotifs in the political essays of Konrád, Havel and Michnik. Beyond this, however, as we move back up toward the surface from the common Central European subsoil, we find differences and inconsistencies that are quite as striking as the underlying similarities and consistencies. The three authors differ greatly in their analysis of the prospects for change in their own countries, in the lessons they draw from the history of Solidarity, and in their prescriptions for immediate political (or antipolitical) action in East Central Europe.

3

How might change come about in Czechoslovakia? In his writings, Havel does not give a clear answer to this question. He suggests that very gradually, indirectly, in convoluted and largely unpredictable ways, the pressure of individuals living in truth and dignity and associating in loose structures of 'social self-organization', the 'fifth column of social consciousness', must eventually change the way the country is governed; but how and when, he cannot foresee. When we talked recently at his country house in northern Bohemia, he gave a slightly more concrete illustration of what he means. After Chernobyl, he said, people in Czechoslovakia were complaining openly and loudly on the streets. True, they did not organize protest demonstrations or sign petitions (that was left to some Austrian students who came to Prague specially for the purpose). But ten years ago most people would not have dared even to complain so openly in public, though of course they would have done so in private. And so perhaps in another ten years they will sign petitions. The evolution is so gradual as to be invisible to a casual visitor or to an angry young man engaged in the opposition. But coming back into society after

four years in prison, he could measure the difference, as between two still photos, and he was favourably surprised.

To be sure, no one can predict how the regime will respond to this pressure from below. In the book he has just completed, a volume of intellectual memoirs taking stock of his first half-century, Havel describes how, in his view, pressure from below was decisive in the prehistory of the Prague Spring. But is there anyone inside the Party now who will respond to this pressure as Party intellectuals and reformers did then? Then there were still genuine, convinced communists and socialists inside the Party. Now there seem to be only cynics and careerists—and the younger, the worse. The 'fifth column of social consciousness' is at work, slowly, oh so slowly, like tree roots gradually undermining a house (my metaphor, not Havel's). But no one can be confident of their impact. They can be cut. The house can be shored up. Fortunately, the roots' main purpose is not to undermine the house. 'Dissident' man is, so to speak, a thinking root. His attempt to live in truth and dignity has a value in itself, irrespective of any long-term social or political effects it may or may not have.

As political analysis and prescription this is, indeed, 'sceptical, sober, anti-utopian, understated'—and present conditions in Czechoslovakia would lead us to distrust any analysis that was not. There are, however, also moments when Havel lifts off into a visionary, almost apocalyptic mode. 'It is . . . becoming evident,' he writes in his Toulouse lecture,

that a single seemingly powerless person who dares to cry out the word of truth and to stand behind it with all his person and all his life, has, surprisingly, greater power, though formally disfranchised, than do thousands of anonymous voters.

Here he is closely following Solzhenitsyn, whose example he cites in the next sentence. Between the lie and violence, Solzhenitsyn wrote in his 1970 Nobel speech ('One word of Truth . . .'), 'there is the most intimate, most natural, fundamental link: Violence can only be concealed by the lie, and the lie can only be maintained by violence.' And he goes on to prophesy: 'Once the lie has been dispersed, the nakedness of violence will be revealed in all its repulsiveness, and then violence, become decrepit, will come crashing down.' The first

part of this prophecy was realized in Poland in December 1981. But, alas, even in Poland, the second part has yet to be confirmed.

In his *Antipolitics*, Konrád draws a simple lesson from the apparent defeat of Solidarity by lie-clad violence. The Hungarians tried it in 1956, the Czechs and Slovaks in 1968, the Poles in 1980-1981: 'three tries, three mistakes,' says Konrád. Lesson: 'The national road to Eastern European liberation has not carried us very far.'

'Be careful,' I said to Adam [i.e. Michnik]. 'The third time around it has to work.' It didn't. Adam is awaiting trial perhaps. 'It's incredible,' he said: incredible that he was able to give a lecture at the Warsaw Polytechnic University on 1956 in Poland and Hungary. The lecture was first-rate: he didn't stammer at all; he was sharp, dialectical, and got to the heart of the matter. Then they said he fell madly in love with a great actress. Then they said he was arrested and beaten half to death. Then they said he was all right. What does it all tell us, Adam? You are thirty-five million, but you couldn't pull it off; now what?

What would you say if I told you: 'Now let the Russians do it'?

Well, I think I can make a pretty good guess what Adam Michnik would say to that: (expletive deleted). But perhaps he will now give us his own answer, since he was unexpectedly released from prison in August. The 'it' the Russians should 'do', incidentally, is *go home*. This certainly seems a good idea, though not perhaps an entirely original one. To reduce Konrád's *Antipolitics* to a coherent argument would be to do some violence to the text. The peculiar (and peculiarly Central European?) quality of this book is, as I have suggested, the coexistence in a relatively small space of a remarkable diversity of formulations and arguments, as rich and multifarious as the nations of the dual monarchy—and as difficult to reconcile. For example, 'The Russians must be afforded tranquillity so they can reform their economy and administrative system,' but on the other hand, 'it would be fitting if credit-worthiness were reduced in proportion to the number of political arrests.' Yet three main pillars of argument may perhaps be discerned behind the ornamental profusion of the late *Jugendstil* façade.

First, there is the proposition already indicated above: national routes to liberation have failed; let us therefore try the international, all-European one: let us propose that American troops should withdraw from Eastern Europe: let us dissolve the blocs! 'To me, personally, that seems just lovely,' Václav Havel nicely comments on this not entirely new proposal, 'though it is not quite clear to me who or what could induce the Soviet Union to dissolve the entire phalanx of its European satellites—especially since it is clear that, with its armies gone from their territory, it would sooner or later have to give up its political domination over them as well.' *Basta!*

For Konrád, the 'who or what' that could induce the Soviet Union is the 'international intellectual aristocracy'. This is his second leitmotif. 'It appears,' he writes, 'that the intelligentsia—not the working class—is the special bearer of internationalism.' 'Dissidents—autonomous intellectuals—are the same the world over, irrespective of their political philosophies.' Therefore we should get together and produce the intellectual framework for going beyond the 'intellectually sterile operations of ideological war'. Incidentally, 'anyone who believes that two systems and two ideologies are pitted against each other today has fallen victim to the secularized metaphysics of our civilization, which looks for a duel between God and Satan in what is, after all, only a game.' (What would Adam say to *that*?) Hence his own 'plan to take down the Iron Curtain', which the intellectuals' International should now place on the agenda of world politics. For it was 'our intellectual failings' that ultimately 'brought about the baleful situation in which our continent is cut in two.' Think right, and we'll walk happily ever after.

However, just in case the dots in the Kremlin and the Pentagon can't see the light that the 'international intellectual aristocracy' is holding under their noses, Konrád has an interim fall-back position. This is the Hungarian way. While he has moments of stern fundamentalism ('The Hungarian nation . . . will not rest until it has won self-determination here in the Carpathian basin'), for the most part he writes in almost glowing terms about the present condition of Hungary, and in particular about János Kádár, whom he compares to the emperor Franz Josef. 'The best we can hope to achieve,' he writes, 'is an enlightened, paternalistic authoritarianism, accompanied by a measured willingness to undertake gradual

liberal reforms. For us, the least of all evils is the liberal-conservative version of communism, of the sort we see around us in Hungary.

In these circumstances, the task of the 'creative' or 'scholarly' intelligentsia is to engage in dialogue with the 'executive' intelligentsia, to help make the enlightened dictatorship still more enlightened. 'The intellectual aristocracy,' he declares, 'is content to push the state administration in the direction of more intelligent, more responsible strategies.' And he muses: 'Is a moderate, authoritarian reform possible on an empire-wide scale—an enlightened Party monarchy, a "Hungarian" style of exercising power?'

Now, these may indeed be realistic assessments and propositions for an independent intellectual wishing to act effectively in the peculiar circumstances of contemporary Hungary. But they find no echo at all in the work of Havel and Michnik. For Havel in Czechoslovakia, such a role for independent intellectuals is inconceivable. Where he lives, the intellectual aristocracy are working as window cleaners, stokers, and labourers. And even if it were conceivable, his conception of anti-politics hardly makes it desirable. For Michnik in Poland, such a role for intellectuals is entirely conceivable—and entirely unacceptable. A Polish Kádárism is his jailers' dream, not his. General Janzelski would sing hallelujahs to the Black Madonna if Poland's creative and scholarly intelligentsia were to accept the role sketched by Konrád. But they won't.

And for Michnik, the fact that Poland does not enjoy a Kádárite dispensation is a measure of success—not failure. Certainly, he would never endorse Konrád's formula of 'three tries, three mistakes'. Solidarity, for him, was hardly a 'mistake'. The fact that Solidarity was defeated by force does not demonstrate that Solidarity's fundamental strategy was wrong; it demonstrates that people without guns (and with a conscious commitment to non-violence) can be driven off the streets by people with guns (and the will to use them). And anyway, this was not simply a defeat. The imposition of martial law on 13 December, 1981, was 'a setback for the independent society' but 'a disaster for the totalitarian state.'

The point now is to sustain a genuinely autonomous, strong,

well-organized civil society. For Michnik, as for Havel, the key ingredient, as it were the basic molecule, of this civil society is the individual living in truth. Moral absolutism is the only certain guide in such times—such is the lesson he draws in his book of literary essays from the example of those like Zbigniew Herbert who were never ever morally 'compromised', even in the darkest times. On the other hand, just because individuals—and particularly intellectuals—do not accept the roles assigned to them in a would-be Kádárite dispensation, just because there is a strong and wholly independent civil society, there is a chance of positive political compromise with the authorities.

Most of Michnik's latest essay, '... On Compromise', is then devoted to exploring, through a vigorous and detailed analysis of the history of KOR and Solidarity, the question of the possible nature of such a compromise. His answers, too, are not always convincing. For example, he says at one point that 'no one among the activists of Solidarity today believes in dialogue and compromise with the authors of the December coup. Nor do I.' But if not with them, then with whom? He cautions that 'Solidarity should reject the philosophy of "all or nothing,"' but a few pages later he suggests that the precondition for any agreement with the authorities must be the recognition of the existence of an 'independent self-governing Solidarity' and that such an agreement must avoid the last vestiges of Newspeak that were present (and controversial) in the agreements negotiated by the Solidarity leadership in 1980 and 1981.

If that is not 'all', it is pretty close to it. Throughout Michnik's book, there is a palpable tension between the moral and the political argument. To discuss these problems in detail would require another essay. All I wish to emphasize here is that Michnik is wrestling with questions that do not even arise for Havel or Konrád and, consequently, that his answers are not answers for them. But if György Konrád is occasionally inclined to suggest, as a true internationalist, that the 'Hungarian way' might after all be the best way forward for neighbouring nations, Adam Michnik is not entirely disinclined to suggest the reverse. Poles should feel national pride, he writes, for

it's the Poles who have showed the world that *something like this* is possible. Sooner or later these deeds will be seen to



have set an example. When other nations begin to follow this example, the Soviet order will be faced with its most serious threat.

In short, as soon as we move up from the common subsoil to ask the political question 'What is to be done?' we find that even these three writers, most keenly interested in the Central European dialogue, most open to other traditions and ideas, offer answers that are widely disparate, and in part contradictory—and their differences largely mirror those of their national circumstances. To say, as Konrád is inclined to, that these are merely different national 'strategies' or paths toward the same goal is to put an attractive icing over the cracks, but hardly to bridge them.

4

Besides these deep differences, moreover, there are some major limitations and omissions that are common to all three authors. In their domestic analysis, perhaps the most striking gap is their neglect of the entire material side of life—their contempt of economics. One may well insist—against Marx—that consciousness ultimately determines being, that ideas are ultimately more important than material forces; this hardly justifies completely ignoring the latter. Without the refinement of KOR's ideas there would have been no Solidarity (or, at least, a very different one)—but the midwife at Solidarity's birth was a vulgar increase in the price of meat. Much the most widespread, indeed the one almost universal, form of independent social activity in Eastern Europe today is work—or 'operating'—in the 'second economy'. Black-marketkeeping is the antipolitics of the common man.

Konrád makes a gesture in this direction when he advocates 'an amalgam of the second economy and the second culture'. But how? Tomáš Masaryk pointed the way forward to Czech independence (from the Habsburg 'Central Europe') with a twin commandment: 'Don't lie, don't steal.' But the qualities required for any kind of success in the second economy under a state socialist system are the precise opposite of those prescribed for the intellectual antipolitics. Don't lie, don't steal? Anyone who engages in any kind of independent economic activity anywhere in Eastern Europe

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will not survive five minutes unless he—well, shall we say, tolerates some terminological inexactitude—and unless—well, countenances unorthodox methods of procurement.<sup>4</sup> (A priest in Poland once told me that when people confess to him—in the secrecy of the confessional—that they have had to, well, use unorthodox methods of procurement, he instructs them that they should not regard this as a sin. In this godless system, it is a necessity. And how else would new churches get built to the greater glory of God?)

Neither Konrád nor Havel addresses this issue at all. Theirs are programmes for intellectuals. Michnik seems to assume that the economic demands of Solidarity-as-trade-union will naturally go hand in hand with the moral and antipolitical demands that mainly concern him. This assumption requires a little closer examination.

In their international analysis, perhaps the most important common weakness is their approach to what is still the most important regional power in Central Europe: Germany. True, they all recognize in a very general way that overcoming (or reducing) the division of Europe requires overcoming (or reducing) the division of Germany. So they're all for it. True, Konrád avers that the intellectual aristocracy should concentrate its mind on the issue of a peace treaty with Germany. But this really is not the significant level of German thought or action today. None of them begins seriously to engage with the real West German policies—the *Deutschlandpolitik* and the *Ostpolitik*—that are such a pivotal factor in contemporary European politics. The architects and executors of these policies, for their part, largely ignore such voices from below in Eastern Europe and see their real partners among the apparently all-powerful, in the ruling Communist parties and in Moscow, not among the apparently powerless, in opposition and in prison.

It is perhaps worth recalling that the original East Central European usage of the term Central Europe was developed and articulated by Tomáš Masaryk during the First World War in programmatic opposition to the German usage of the term *Mitteluropa*, by Friedrich Naumann and others, as a justification for

<sup>4</sup> This applies even to the legal private sector, as Anders Åslund shows in his invaluable book *Private Enterprise in Eastern Europe*, (London: Macmillan/St Antony's, 1985).

imperial Germany's expansionist plans. To compare present German policies and visions to those of 1915 would obviously be quite wrong, and invidious. But it would be neither invidious nor unrevealing to explore the differences between the concept of *Mitteluropa* as used by West German Social Democrats like Peter Clötz (particularly in the context of their 'second *Ostpolitik*') and the concept of Central Europe as it emerges in the work of independent East Central European intellectuals.

Another line of general criticism would be this (and I exaggerate deliberately): Konrad, Havel and Michnik are merely the latest scions of a tradition that has been present in Central and Eastern Europe since the Enlightenment: the Westward-looking, cosmopolitan, secular-humanist and rationalist element, what Thomas Mann contemptuously called the *Zivilisationsliteraten* (before becoming one himself). True, the *Zivilisationsliteraten* are now saying different things from what they were saying half a century ago: indeed, in crucial respects they are saying the opposite. But one thing has not changed: They have always been a tiny minority. They were a tiny minority before the First World War, impotent against the nationalism that tore that Central Europe apart. They were a tiny minority before the Second World War, impotent against the imperialism which tore that Central Europe apart.

And today? Why, even today, in a region largely and terribly purged of its two greatest minorities—the Jews, of course, and, yes, the Germans—nationalism still has a stronger appeal than Konrad's internationalism, even to many independent intellectuals, let alone to the general public. What is the greatest single issue (apart from declining standards of living and growing inequalities) for public and intellectual opinion in Hungary today? Is it human and civil rights? Is it democracy or 'the struggle for civil society'? No. It is the plight of the Hungarian minorities in Transylvania and Slovakia. I raised the idea of Central Europe with a highly intelligent and sophisticated Hungarian friend. 'Ah, yes.' He sighed. 'There could once perhaps have been something like a Central Europe. And you

know, we rather blame you for the fact that it does not exist.' He referred to the Treaty of Trianon.<sup>5</sup>

And then the deepest doubts of all. Isn't all the common ground that I have attempted to describe ultimately no more than a side product of shared powerlessness? Isn't the existence of an imagined Central Europe finally dependent on the existence of a real Eastern Europe? Isn't anti-politics in the end merely a result of the impossibility of politics? Since you cannot practice the art of the possible, you invent the art of the impossible. Western Europe's moralistic criticism of American foreign policy has been characterized as 'the arrogance of impotence': Doesn't that description apply *a fortiori* to the moralism of anti-politics? Anti-politics is a product of living in defeat. How much would survive victory?

If I raise all these doubts and questions, dwell on the differences among the three authors, their inconsistencies and common limitations, I do so not because I regard what they have to say as marginal pie-in-the-sky—a view very widely held among those who shape Western policies toward Eastern Europe—but, on the contrary, because I regard it as relevant and important. Though still vague and half-articulated, the notions of anti-politics and Central Europe are, it seems to me, central both to understanding what *could* happen in Eastern Europe over the next decade and, potentially, to shaping that development.

Of course, we cannot entirely ignore the possibility of some large-scale geopolitical rearrangement with Moscow's agreement: a new Yalta, say, a negotiated Finlandization of Eastern Europe. But that is, to say the least, highly improbable. Nor can we wholly exclude the possibility of far-reaching reforms being encouraged by the Gorbachev leadership and carried forward by a new generation of communist leaders in Eastern Europe—economic reforms, initially, but with political implications recognized and deliberately accepted by those leaders.

<sup>5</sup> It will be recalled that the 1920 Treaty of Trianon, part of the post-war peace settlement whose main architects were Woodrow Wilson, Clemenceau and Lloyd George, stripped Hungary of more than two-thirds of its pre-1914 territory, including the Slovakia, in what then became Czechoslovakia; Transylvania, which went to Romania; and Croatia, to what then became Yugoslavia.

What is definitely probable, however, is the continuation of a slow, messy, piecemeal process of differentiation in which the peoples of Eastern Europe will gradually, in quite diverse and convoluted ways, come in practice to enjoy more and larger areas of *de facto* pluralism and independence—cultural, social, economic—areas partly conceded in a planned and deliberate way by their rulers, but mainly wrested from them by *pressure from below*: not the progress of a 'reformed' and thus revitalized communism, but the regress of a decaying would-be totalitarianism. The Ottomanization rather than the Finlandization of the Soviet empire.

If there is any truth in this prognosis, then it is obviously important to determine what shape the pressure from below will take. Will it be violent or non-violent, individual or collective, organized or disorganized? Now in practice, of course, there is a different and continually changing mix of ingredients in each country: here it is largely the pressure of individual expectations, there it is channelled through the Church, there again, the primitive threat of violent revolt. The formulation of antipolitics, in the broadest sense, is an attempt both to characterize and to shape this pressure from below. It is half description, half prescription. Its territory is the space between the state and the individual, between the power and the powerless. Its focus is the middle distance—beyond the immediate selfish concerns of the family nest maker, but well short of the horizon of full national independence. To an imperial system whose main instruments of domination are lies, violence, the atomization of society, and 'divide and rule', the antipoliticalian responds with the imperatives of living in truth, non-violence, the struggle for civil society—and the idea of Central Europe.

But this new Central Europe is just that: an idea. It does not yet exist. Eastern Europe exists—that part of Europe militarily controlled by the Soviet Union. The new Central Europe has yet to be created. But it will not be created by mere repetition of the words Central Europe as the fashionable slogan from California to Budapest, nor by the cultivation of a new myth. 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 examination both of the real legacy of historic Central Europe—which is as much one of divisions as of

unities—and of the true conditions of present-day East Central Europe—as much one of differences as of similarities. Happily, this process has already begun, in Prague, where the founding of an underground journal called *Střední Evropa* ('Central Europe') has catalysed a sharp debate between Catholic and Protestant intellectuals about the legacy of the Habsburg empire and the First Republic. But it still has a very long way to go.

If we look to the future, one crucial Central European issue, besides the articulation and enrichment of the domestic strategies of antipolitics, is surely that of minority rights. Can Central Europe be put together again, albeit only on paper, at the very point where it has most often, most horribly, and (from the point of view of the neighbouring empires) most successfully been divided—at the point where different nations, races, cultures, religions try (or fail) to coexist? Even today the most open, tolerant, and democratic intellectuals in Czechoslovakia and Hungary cannot agree a common statement on the position and treatment of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. An interesting discussion has begun in the Polish underground press about attitudes to Germany and the German minority in Poland. At the moment the main focus of discussion is the question: Does the German minority exist? (Cardinal Glemp agrees with General Jaruzelski that it does not.) But perhaps the more important question is: Would it be a good thing if a German minority did exist? And what about a Jewish minority? And a Ukrainian minority? And *why not* a Hungarian minority in Slovakia? Provided, always provided, that each minority would enjoy those rights that we regard it as our Central European task to define.

Many of the obstacles to such a Central European dialogue are historical, emotional and intellectual. But others are simply practical. For this is a debate that the communist authorities have done everything in their power to discourage—or to channel in a chauvinistic direction. And a great deal is in their power. When we talk about the division of Europe or the Iron Curtain, we automatically think of the East-West divide, and usually of the Berlin Wall. But perhaps the most impenetrable frontiers in Europe are not those between East and West, and not even (thanks to a decade and a half of *Deutschlandpolitik*) the German-German frontier. For freedom of movement, and hence for genuine cultural exchange, perhaps the most impenetrable frontier in Europe today is that between Poland

and Czechoslovakia. That really is an iron curtain. Leading Polish, Czech, and Hungarian intellectuals meet more often in Paris or New York than they do in Warsaw or Prague. They read one another, if at all, in English, French, or German: with very few exceptions, their work is not translated into one another's languages. It is easier for the author of this essay to meet them than it is for them to meet one another. If they do have common ground, then by and large this has been arrived at independently. In the circumstances, we may be favourably surprised how much of it there is.

This common ground has a great potential importance for the part of Europe in which they live: Eastern Europe *in acta*, Central Europe *in potentia*. But does it have any broader relevance for intellectuals in the West? This, too, is part of the larger claim for the new Central Europe. In a negative sense, as a guide to the nature of totalitarian power and a source of ideological inoculation, it undoubtedly does. For example, no one who has honestly read and digested what Michnik and Havel have to say can continue to believe that there is any real structural symmetry or moral equivalence between American domination over Western Europe and Soviet domination over Eastern Europe. (I fear that danger remains for the casual reader of Konrad.) In this respect, they have undoubtedly had a beneficial impact on parts of the West European peace movement. But most of the *positive* ideas they advance are not strikingly new (though none the worse for being old), and where they are new, they are not obviously relevant to our Western circumstances. Attempts to interpret the activity of Western peace movements as part of the struggle for civil society, for example, are not very convincing; and most of us still think we know what we mean—in Britain or America—by the categories of left and right.

And yet I do believe they have a treasure to offer us all. At their best, they give a personal example such as you will not find in many a long year in London, Washington, or Paris: an example, not of brilliance or wit or originality, but of intellectual responsibility, integrity and courage. They know, and they remind us—vividly, urgently—that ideas matter, words matter, have consequences, are not to be used lightly—Michnik quotes Lampedusa: 'You cannot shout the most important words.' Under the black light of totalitarian power, most ideas—and words—become deformed, appear grotesque, or simply crumble. Only a very few stand the test, remain

rocklike under any pressure, and most of these are not new. There are things worth suffering for. There are moral absolutes. Not everything is open to discussion.

'A life with defeat is destructive,' writes Michnik, 'but it also produces great cultural values that heal. . . . To know how to live with defeat is to know how to stand up to fate, how to express a vote of no confidence in those powers that pretend to be fate.'<sup>6</sup> These qualities and values have emerged from their specific Central European experience—which is the central European experience of our time. But since we can read what they write, perhaps it may even be possible to learn a little from that experience without having to go through it.

The Russian poet Natalya Gorbanevskaya once said to me: 'You know, George Orwell was an East European.' Perhaps we would now say that Orwell was a Central European. If this is what we mean by Central Europe, I would apply for citizenship.

(OCTOBER 1986)

<sup>6</sup>This quotation is from his introduction to a German edition of his essays reprinted in the Winter 1986 issue of the *East European Reporter*.