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THE USES OF ADVERSITY

*ESSAYS on the FATE of
CENTRAL EUROPE*



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THE POPE IN POLAND

CZĘSTOCHOWA

They have come as pilgrims from all over Poland, marching softly through the night. Now at last they are massed on the meadow before the red-brick fortress walls of Jasna Góra monastery, which is for the Poles at once Westminster Abbey and Windsor Castle. Amidst the religious insignia on the banners that flutter above their heads you see everywhere the unmistakable red jumbly lettering of *Solidarność*—not just the name of the outlawed movement, but a whole anthology of variations on the theme: the papal motto *Totus Tuus* with the Polish flag flying from the T; “You strengthen the students of Gdańsk” (with “students” in Solidarity lettering); “We greet the defender of human rights.” This is a gathering of youth—of the Solidarity generation—yet there is none of the relaxed festive joyfulness of four years ago. Straining against the cold wind, their faces are drawn, tense, nervously expectant.

Suddenly he is with them, high up on the huge white-and-gold dais erected before the monastery battlements. For minutes they drown him in wave after wave of emotional applause. Again and again, now from one corner, now from another, you hear the rhythmic chants: “Long live the pope, long live the pope”; “The

pope with us, the pope with us." The rhythms are those of a political demonstration, not a religious chant, the rhythms we heard on the first evening of the visit, when ten of thousands marched from Warsaw Cathedral past the Communist party headquarters shouting, "So-li-dar-ność, So-li-dar-ność," "Lech-Wa-łę-sa, Lech-Wa-łę-sa," "De-mo-kra-cja, De-mo-kra-cja," "In-de-pen-dence, In-de-pen-dence . . ."

Finally, his voice booms through the loudspeakers: "I want to ask you if a certain person who came today from Rome to Jasna Góra may be allowed to speak." "Go-a-head, go-a-head," they chant; and then, "Clos-er-to-us, clos-er-to-us." . . . "Do you hear me?" he replies above the tumult. "I'm coming closer." And the red figure marches down the white steps toward them. A monk stumbles after the pope, carrying the microphone. "Thank-you, Thank-you," chants the crowd, and then: "Chair for the pope, chair for the pope." Another monk stumbles down the steps behind him. When he stops, he is still fifty yards from the nearest pilgrim. But with this single theatrical gesture he has come closer to them. For the first time on this visit, he has established that almost magical, spontaneous contact with a vast crowd that we saw four years ago. He is talking to them. They are talking to him.

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

Of course there is an instant rally of applause. But it is not the thunderous chanting of an hour before—already it is something gentler, more mature. "It would be difficult," he goes on, "to enumerate here all the forms of solicitude that surrounded those who were interned, imprisoned, dismissed from work, and their families. You know better than I. I just received sporadic news about it. . . ." Finally, speaking as it were directly to the icon of the Black Madonna in the monastery behind him, he appeals, "Mother of Jasna Góra, you who have been given to us by Providence for the defense of the Polish nation, accept this call of Polish youth together with the Polish pope, and help us to *persevere in hope*."

As he walks slowly off the dais, waving to left and to right, they send up a last emotional message, "Stay with us, stay with us, stay with us . . ."

Later in the evening there is a small Solidarity demonstration in the center of town, but virtually all that vast crowd disperses peacefully. He has worked the catharsis, turning thunder into hymns, and at the same time he has perhaps shown them the beginning of a "way out" from circumstances where many of them thought there was no way out.

KRAKÓW

"Stay with us, stay with us," they chant again, these vast, gentle crowds, in an outpouring of love, and the pope's every gesture says, If only I could, if only I could. The airplane that rose above the meadows of his beloved Kraków last Thursday afternoon bore a great and very homesick man back to Rome. But it left a society certain that Karol Wojtyła's second fantastic pilgrimage to his native land, which he described to close friends beforehand as the most difficult of all his journeys (including Nicaragua), has been a triumph.

As much Western news coverage has amply demonstrated, it is impossible to translate into foreign newsprint what he had to say. It is impossible because he speaks to the Poles through a tapestry of symbols and allusions—historical, literary, philosophical, Mariol-

ogical—each of which requires at least a paragraph of explanation. It is impossible because so much depends on a theatrical delivery that John Gielgud once called “perfect.” It is impossible because poetry is what gets lost in translation.

Yet since the Poles have been doing the impossible ever since the pope’s first visit four years ago, we may at least attempt it, beginning with what he did not say. In sharp contrast to his last visit, he said nothing about one leitmotif of his pontificate: the future of the churches elsewhere in Eastern Europe and the special mission of the Slav pope to reassert the unity of Christian Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals. This was the Vatican’s one major concession to Moscow. On the other hand, although he talked a lot about peace, he gave no gifts to the Soviet media. In his only major reference to nuclear disarmament, he recalled a memorandum of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences on the effects of nuclear war, sent to both the Soviet Union and the United States. But this was a cycle of homilies written by a Pole, for the Poles, about Poland.

To the people of Poland he said, first of all, that he shares their disappointment and their suffering since the imposition of martial law. He said this through his bowed head and somber mien from the moment he stepped onto the tarmac at Warsaw airport. “He is sad,” said the old woman standing next to me. “You see, he understands.” He said it in his first homily, in St. John’s Cathedral in Warsaw: “Together with all my compatriots—especially with those who are most acutely tasting the bitterness of disappointment, humiliation, suffering, of being deprived of their freedom, of being wronged, of having their dignity trampled on—I stand beneath the cross of Christ . . .” And again, referring to the late “primate of the millennium,” Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, “Divine Providence spared him the painful events connected with the date 13 December 1981.” A chorus of applause rose from the tens of thousands massed in the streets of the old town around the cathedral. So far the censors have not allowed this sentence to appear anywhere, even in the small-circulation Catholic press. But everyone has heard it.

His theme, however, was victory. Out of this political defeat, he

told them, they are called to win a moral victory. In part this must be an internal, spiritual victory: “Man is called to victory over himself,” the victory of martyrdom, the victory of the cross. “It is the saints and the beatified,” he declared in Kraków, “who show us the path to the victory that God achieves in human history.” As the individual, so also the nation is called to the moral victory.

This moral victory, however, is not to be won merely by patient suffering in faith. No, it demands “living in truth.” “It means,” as he explained at Jasna Góra, “that I make an effort to be a person with a conscience . . . I call good and evil by name. . . .” “It means: love of neighbor; it means: fundamental *solidarity* between human beings.” It means fighting “demoralization”—both in the sense of declining morale and of decaying morals. Effortlessly recapturing the word *renewal* (*odnowa*) from the communist dictionary, he preached the imperative of “moral and social renewal.” The nation must bear witness to the truth as it did in August 1980, “that witness which amazed the whole world, when the Polish worker stood up for himself with the gospel in his hand and a prayer on his lips.” Today, too, the Poles must not cease to stand up for certain fundamental human and civil rights.

And then he told them, with a clarity that thrilled his listeners and dismayed the government, precisely what those rights are. First, Poland has a right to independence, to national sovereignty, to take “her proper place among the nations of Europe, between East and West,” as he put it to General Jaruzelski at the Belweder Palace, in a speech that, unlike most of his homilies, was televised nationwide. At the end of the open-air masses, he intoned the stirring hymn that has long been a second, unofficial national anthem. The original version of “God Who Protects Poland . . .” concludes, “Restore to us, O Lord, a free fatherland.” The Communist authorities, however, have tried to encourage the version introduced when Poland regained its independence in 1918, which concludes, “Bless for us, O Lord, the free fatherland”—thus implying that People’s Poland is in fact a free fatherland. But the pope’s huge congregation did not hesitate

for a moment: It was the original version they sang. What is more, the pope himself quoted it, in the central religious celebration of his pilgrimage: "Yes. Here at Jasna Góra there also rested the hope of the nation and the persevering effort toward independence. . . . 'Restore to us, O Lord, a free fatherland. . . .'"

In Katowice, the industrial capital of Upper Silesia, addressing an audience subdued by temperament, pouring rain, and strict Church discipline, he went on to spell out the specific rights of workers: "The right to a just salary," "the right to security," "the right to a day of rest" (work-free Sundays were only won after a long struggle in the mines here). "Connected with the area of workers' rights is the question of trade unions," and the right of all professional groups, including agricultural and white-collar workers, to form unions as "a mouthpiece for the struggle for social justice." He quoted a speech by Cardinal Wyszyński (which at the time referred specifically to Rural Solidarity) on "a people's right to free association." "The state does not give us this right, it has only the obligation to protect and guard it. This right is given us by the Creator who made man as a social being." "It was in this spirit," the pope continued, "that I spoke in January 1981 during an audience granted to the delegation of Solidarity"—and even the dour Silesians raised a cheer at his first (and only) direct mention of the outlawed movement—"accompanied by"—they nudged each other and whispered, "Lech Wałęsa"—"the representative of the Polish government for permanent working contacts with the Holy See." This problem, he concluded, can only be resolved through "a true dialogue between the authorities and society."

However, in order to revive the dialogue that was severed on December 13, 1981, the Polish people must learn to forgive. Forgiveness should liberate them from "the fetters of hatred—for hatred is a destructive force, and we must neither destroy nor allow ourselves to be destroyed by it." "Forgiveness is love's might, forgiveness is not weakness. To forgive does not mean to resign from truth and justice."

This, in crude summary, was the burden of the pope's message to

the Polish people. To the Polish authorities he spoke no less clearly. He told Jaruzelski at the Belweder that the starting point for "social renewal" must be the "social accords" that concluded the strikes of the summer of 1980—and gave birth to Solidarity. The authorities and society must find "means of dialogue that are truly effective." Addressing more than a million people from the windy heights of a Warsaw soccer stadium, he demanded "an order in which man's fundamental rights will be respected." He went on to say, "Such an order can be simultaneously a victory of the governed and a victory of those who govern. That point must be reached by way of dialogue and agreement, which is the only viable way for the nation to achieve the *fullness of civil rights* and the social structures that correspond to its just requirements and are capable of fostering the consensus needed by the state if it is to fulfill its role. Through this consensus the nation expresses its sovereignty concretely."

At Jasna Góra he returned to the theme of sovereignty: "The state is firmly sovereign when it *governs* society and also *serves* the common good of society and allows the nation to realize its own subjectivity (*podmiotowość*), its own identity." Later, turning again to the icon of the Black Madonna in the monastery behind him: "Queen of Poland, I also wish to entrust you with the difficult task of those who wield authority on Polish soil. . . . The state gains its strength first of all from the support of the people." In short, he said to the authorities: You never tire of proclaiming your sovereignty—okay, then behave like a sovereign power.

His third audience was the Polish Church itself. This Church is now stronger than it has been at any time since the war—spiritually, institutionally, and politically. It is the only institution in Poland to have been strengthened both by the rise of Solidarity and by the state of war. On the one hand, since December 13, 1981, a great charge of frustrated hopes, idealism, and energy has run from Solidarity to the Church. According to surveys, in the last year the percentage of regular churchgoers has soared from an already high 60 to 65 percent to an astonishing 90 to 95 percent—especially in working-class parishes. The badges and banners that one saw every-

where with the papal motto *Totus Tuus* and slogans like "in Solidarity with the Pope" or even "*juventus semper fidelis*," all in the red Solidarność lettering, express this transference symbolically. On the other hand, the Jaruzelski government needs Church cooperation more than any of its predecessors, and has made more concessions to win it. Never before has the Church had so much broadcasting time on TV and radio (a right originally won for it by the workers in the summer of 1980), so many newspapers, seminaries, schools, and permits for church-building. Two hundred churches are being built in the Kraków diocese alone.

In fact, the Church is frankly alarmed at its own strength—and under the uncertain leadership of Cardinal Józef Glemp, it has been divided about how to use that strength. How far should it cooperate with government at the highest level? How far should it help persecuted workers and Solidarity activists at the parish level? In Warsaw, one church in the working-class quarter of Żolibórz (once a Socialist stronghold) has a famous Solidarity altar. In Kraków, the bishop recently instructed a vicar to dismantle his Solidarity altar and stop the worker education groups that were being held in the vestry. Parish priests have been outspoken in their criticism of the primate.

One of the pope's main purposes in this pilgrimage was to give the Polish Church its instructions. Politely ignoring the dumpy figure of Primate Glemp, he spoke, in effect, as the pope-primate. His speech to the Episcopate, largely overlooked in media coverage, may in the long term prove to have been as important as any. In it he singled out for special praise the communiqués of the plenary sessions of the Episcopate, which have spelled out the rights of society and the conditions for dialogue most explicitly: "It seems to me that the communiqués of the Episcopate respond to the need to hear the truth, which is so acute in society. The truth is the first and fundamental condition of social renewal. Without it, one cannot speak of social dialogue, which the Episcopate so justly demands, and which society certainly expects." It is necessary, he went on, "to defend every citizen, to protect every life, to prevent injuries, which

occur so easily in the case of beatings, especially with young and weak organizations"—a characteristic allusion to the recent case of a Warsaw schoolboy who died after police interrogation. Finally, "the Christian doctrine of work demands both the solidarity of workers among themselves and the need for honest solidarity with workers."

Whatever the immediate political effects of the pope's visit, it is a fact of immense significance that thousands of priests all over Poland will be preaching and ministering along the lines he set for years to come. In the Polish Church, as in economics, there is a "multiplier effect."

Meanwhile, the government declares itself broadly satisfied with the visit, which it says both illustrated and facilitated the process of "normalization." Spokesmen for the government hint broadly that perhaps on the Communist anniversary of July 22, it will lift martial law, currently just "suspended." In sharp contrast to 1979, it has made this very much a state event, garlanding the pope with chains of police and security men, which angered and depressed the Poles: "As if we would want to shoot him," they exclaimed as he was whisked away in his bulletproof box. The government tried, rather unsuccessfully, to use the presence of some two thousand Western newsmen to put its political point across. Predictably, when the meadow in front of the Jasna Góra monastery turned into a forest of hands raised in the V-for-victory sign and half a million voices cried, "Restore to us, O Lord, a free fatherland," the state TV cameras were flashing back to the Belweder meeting with General Jaruzelski.

Like so much else in contemporary Poland, the position of the Jaruzelski government is paradoxical: It is both exceptionally strong and very weak. Its strength derives from the simple fact that it has a monopoly of physical force, which it has shown itself prepared to use and use again. (General Jaruzelski is the first Polish Party leader since 1956 to have shot Polish workers, breaking the first unwritten commandment of the Polish national tradition—"Pole shall not kill Pole"—and to have survived.) Its weakness is manifested in its inability to find any political way out of the continuing crisis.

Surprisingly, even people who are active in the opposition concede that General Jaruzelski's personal intentions are different from—and in some senses, better than—those of his predecessors. In his Belweder speech he spoke Polish—not translated Sovietese. His obligatory reference to Soviet-Polish friendship was almost papal in its allusiveness, quoting a famous poem, "To Muscovite Friends," by Adam Mickiewicz, the Polish Byron. He did not once mention the Communist Party, but instead spoke emphatically about the necessity of a strong *state*, a state that implements reforms through the laws. Moreover, he said, "Our law does not punish for views: it only bans antistate *actions* incompatible with the constitution." It is possible, even plausible, that this enigmatic man wishes to be an authoritarian rather than a totalitarian ruler of a state in which, as Frederick the Great used to put it, "the people say what they like and I do what I like." Even now, articles are published in the official press that could not have been published under Gierek or Gomułka.

But if these are his intentions, can he realize them? At the moment, he still seems to be stymied on all sides. Within his own politburo he faces stiff opposition from a faction led by the wily Stefan Olszowski—a faction that opposed the pope's visit all along and will now be saying, after the accompanying Solidarity demonstrations and Western news coverage, "We told you so." Behind that faction is the stubborn conservatism of the whole bureaucratic apparatus of the Party-state, threatened by reforms and pressure from those "Muscovite friends." Against rumors of an imminent deposition of Jaruzelski must be placed the weighty fact that he is backed by the Soviet military, which was, after all, instrumental in the elevation of Mr. Andropov. Nonetheless, pressure from the Polish and Soviet Party apparatuses drastically reduces his room for maneuver.

Moreover, he is stymied by the economic crisis. Although supplies of basic foodstuffs have improved in recent months, Poland has not begun to sort out its basic problems of long-term neglect of agriculture, catastrophic misinvestment, bureaucratic centralism, and foreign debt. By all accounts, the bloated bureaucracy is already "rolling back" the vaunted economic reform, as it has rolled back every at-

tempted economic reform since 1956. Industrial production fell last year by a further 2 percent. The government hopes that the pope's visit will help break its diplomatic quarantine, bringing Western statesmen and credits in his wake. While the primate and his advisers discreetly let it be known that they do not favor the continuance of sanctions, John Paul II made only one—delphic—public utterance on this subject. "I ardently desire," he told Jaruzelski at the Belweder, "the re-creation of conditions of 'good cooperation' with all the Western nations on our continent, as well as the Americas, above all the United States of America, where so many millions of citizens are of Polish origin." Does that mean that Reagan should lift sanctions on Jaruzelski's terms? That Jaruzelski should lift martial law on Reagan's terms? That they should both come halfway, in the spirit of Christian "forgiveness" and "dialogue?" What Jaruzelski and the pope said in their subsequent private meeting, and in its even more extraordinary, unscheduled "continuation" on the pope's last evening in Kraków, we do not know.

Yet one of their themes must have been the regime's crippling lack of popular support. If Jaruzelski is to begin to regain even a measure of popular acceptance, he must, as the pope told him publicly, reinstate a genuine dialogue. But dialogue with whom? The Patriotic Movement for National Salvation (PRON in its Polish acronym), which the government has set up for this purpose, is still an unpopular joke. The new official trade unions do not represent the workers. Independent professional associations like the Polish Journalists' Association and the Polish Writers' Union have been or are being dissolved. The only institution with which there is still something that might be called "dialogue" is the Church. It seems that this is the dialogue that the regime would most like to pursue today.

In return for the lifting of martial law and perhaps a partial amnesty for political prisoners, the Church should move into closer public cooperation with the authorities. In the medium term, Church sources suggest, the regime might be prepared to enter into a kind of "corporatist compromise" with the Church, conceding to it large areas of religious and cultural autonomy and perhaps even sharing

power with it over some areas of social and economic life. From the Solidarity period there still survive two lay Catholic government ministers—though their current lot is to hold responsibility without power. One Catholic intellectual even talks of a “Church PRON.” Between them, these two vast authoritarian corporations would guarantee Poland’s stability and internal peace to Moscow. It would be as on the streets of Katowice last week, where order was kept by three-man patrols: one soldier, one policeman, and one priest.

Arguably, the Church is so strong that it could afford the loss of popularity that such a “corporatist compromise” would entail. There are ecclesiastical politicians close to Glemp who are obviously tempted by the prospect. But last week the pope said an unambiguous public no to this temptation. He spelled out to the people, the authorities, and the Episcopate the conditions for a genuine “dialogue”—and those conditions included the participation of authentic trade unions. Does this mean the outlawed movement Solidarity? Does this mean Lech Wałęsa? Despite the authorities, glosses on a “strictly private meeting,” and despite the strange affair of the *Orservatore Romano* article (which sheds light mainly on tensions within the Vatican), what the Pope meant to say with this meeting is unclear. “There are no private meetings with the pope,” declares his friend the Kraków theologian Father Józef Tischner. Was he indicating that Wałęsa is still a partner for the dialogue, the true representative of the Polish working class, as many Poles believe? Or was he, as it were, elevating Wałęsa to the peerage of Polish martyrs—a symbol of the great ideals of August 1980, but no longer a political actor?

The authorities’ position, by contrast, is already clear. “Lech Wałęsa . . . will never again be a partner of the authorities,” says government spokesman Jerzy Urban. “There will be no dialogue . . . with the former leadership of ‘Solidarity.’” To see the pope’s visit as one great boost for Solidarity, as some Western media have suggested, is at best an oversimplification. The number of active, banner-bearing Solidarity demonstrators was, in fact, relatively small: a hard core of a few thousand, mostly young men, many of whom followed the pope from place to place, like pilgrims. “Come with us, today

they won’t beat you,” they chanted. The surrounding crowds seemed delighted to see them. Children danced along the verges and old women flashed V signs from rusty balconies. On Wednesday they marched five long miles from the Kraków meadows to the model workers’ town of Nowa Huta, where the pope was to dedicate a church in the afternoon. “So-li-dar-ność,” they chanted. “End the war”; “Long live the pope”; “Lech Wałęsa.” Their chants were, however, somewhat indiscriminate: when they passed a van hired by NBC, the cry of “Don’t beat for money” (addressed to the police) suddenly changed to “N-B-C, N-B-C, N-B-C.” I must truthfully report that they also got lost en route to Nowa Huta, but somehow they managed to wind their way back across dusty allotment gardens, making a superb entrance, banners flying, just ten minutes before the pope. The concourse of workers roared its approval. It was pure Polish theater.

But when the chanting was over, many of them made a rather sober assessment of their position. “That was our last day of freedom,” said one standard-bearer, and another: “Many of us feel it was a kind of glorious funeral for Solidarity—as an organization.” Theirs is the traditional, superb Polish theater of defiance—and it has a huge and enthusiastic audience—but they do not see any prospects of converting the moral support into effective political action. They cannot force the authorities to talk to them. I understand that Solidarity’s underground leadership is uncertain whether to call a demonstration at all for the anniversary of the Gdańsk agreement on August 31. For on that day the police will not make a U-turn and speed away from the demonstrations, as I saw them do on the road to Nowa Huta. On that day they will charge with batons raised, even though the crowd chants, as it did last week, “*De-mon-stracja po-ko-jo-wa*,” “Peace demo, peace demo!”

What does have a future, they argue, is the *samizdat* newspapers, magazines, and factory bulletins that are still being produced on a scale unmatched anywhere else in the Soviet bloc. In large factories, too, Solidarity’s clandestine factory commissions continue to collect regular union dues and pay out benefits to the sick and those sacked

for political reasons. Some of them discuss attempting to use the limited pluralism of official unions for which the 1982 trades-union act provided. Solidarity survives not only as a symbol and a myth but as a world of diverse local initiatives, of social self-organization, a habit of behavior, and a set of values that the pope preached and blessed. But Solidarity the nationwide social movement—not even the activists can envisage the conditions in which it could be restored.

As everyone says, we had to wait a year before we saw the effects of the Pope's last visit and we will probably have to wait another year to discern the effects of this one. "The first visit broke through a barrier of fear," a senior Catholic intellectual speculated beforehand. "Perhaps this one can break through the barrier of hopelessness." This time, however, the effects are unlikely to be seen in any single political breakthrough but rather in countless small ways, in the strengthening of habits of solidarity, dignity, and honesty that is already visible. A university lecturer comments that although few of his students are active in the underground, almost all of them are prepared to say exactly what they think, even about the most sensitive political subjects. The students "call good and evil by name," as the pope exhorted. Solidarity, says Father Tischner, "was a forest of awakened consciences." The forest is growing. It is not for the forest to go to the government. The government must come to the forest. In this sense, for all the depression and repression, Poland may be said to be in a better condition than any of its neighbors—including even Hungary. This transformation of consciousness, this moral revolution, is a lasting achievement of the pope and Solidarity.

Whatever develops in Poland over the next few years, it will be different from anything we have seen before. Though the police rule the streets, this country cannot be "normalized"—i.e., returned to Soviet norms. Though the totalitarian Communist system remains in outward form, in reality it is still being dismantled from within.

(June 1983)

CZECHOSLOVAKIA UNDER ICE

Every day last month young Czechs lit candles and laid wreaths with the simple message "We Remember" on the grave of Marie Jedličková, in Prague's main cemetery. Every night the candles and flowers were removed by "persons unknown."

Who was Marie Jedličková? I don't know. None of her mourners could tell me. All they knew was that fifteen years ago, a young man was buried in this same grave. His name was Jan Palach and he set fire to himself to bear witness against the Soviet occupation. To extinguish his memory, the Husák regime subsequently had his remains removed to a country graveyard and put the unknown Marie J. in his place. But Palach's mourners will not be cheated. So every year, on the anniversary of his self-immolation in January 1969, they light candles before the tombstone of the unknown stranger.

Across the road, I made my way through the ivy-covered Jewish cemetery to the tomb of Franz Kafka, whose fiction has become a reality at the grave of Marie J. But the Husák regime tries to forget Kafka, too. His hundredth birthday last year was commemorated only unofficially, by the country's best, and therefore banned, writers. As one of them has observed, Gustav Husák is the "President of Forgetting." And how much he has to forget! Prague cinemagoers

were recently treated to an official film biography of that broken old communist. After skimming lightly over Husák's wartime collaboration with the Nazis, the film leaped at one bound from 1948 to 1968. The appalling Stalinist trials, in which he was one of the accused; his long imprisonment; his rehabilitation and crawl back up the greasy pole: All this had just disappeared down the memory hole.

Forgetting is the key to the so-called normalization of Czechoslovakia. In effect, the regime has said to the people: Forget 1968. Forget your democratic traditions. Forget that you were once citizens with rights and duties. Forget politics. In return we will give you a comfortable, safe life. There'll be plenty of food in the shops and cheap beer in the pubs. You may afford a car and even a little country cottage—and you won't have to work competitively. We don't ask you to believe in us or our fatuous ideology. By all means listen to the Voice of America and watch Austrian television (*sotto voce*: So do we). All we ask is that you will outwardly and publicly conform: join in the ritual "elections," vote the prescribed way in the "trade union" meetings, enroll your children in the "socialist" youth organization. Keep your mind to yourself.

One can describe this unwritten deal in different ways. A Western observer might describe it as a retreat from totalitarianism. An angry young Czech describes it as the perfection of totalitarianism. Czech ex-communists describe it as Husák's social contract. But all agree that in the last decade, the deal has more or less worked for the regime. By comparison with Warsaw, Bucharest, and even East Berlin, the streets of Prague look prosperous. Butchers' windows display a rich variety of sausage and meat. Of course there are shortages, but several housewives told me that supplies slightly improved last year. They had even seen fresh *lettuce* in the greengrocer's. They have been hit by price increases—for example, on petrol, oil, and electricity—without compensatory wage rises. Workers have been officially threatened with wage cuts. Consumer durables are scarce and expensive. But they still have much to lose.

In return for this relative prosperity, most Czechs have watched

passively while the regime has systematically purged the Party and state, the economy, the arts, the universities, and the media of anyone who dares to speak critically, independently, or even intelligently about what the regime defines as politics—an infinitely elastic category. The scale of the purges is breathtaking. Roughly half a million people resigned or were expelled from the Party after 1968: one in every three Party members. If one assumes they each have two dependents, then they make up 10 percent of the whole population. Philosophers, lawyers, journalists became bricklayers, waiters, clerks. They joined an existing circle of the damned: Christians and non-communists whose degradation began with the Communist coup in 1948. And they are still being joined by others. That window cleaner over there: His thesis was on Wittgenstein. Ask your waiter about Kafka: Before his trial, he lectured on *The Trial*. Yes, the night-watchman is reading Aristotle. Your coal will be delivered by an ordained priest of the Czech brethren. Kiss the milkman's ring: He is your bishop.

The Czech nation has been stood on its head. (In Slovakia, conditions are rather different and easier; I confine myself to the Czech lands.) The most independent, intelligent, and best are at the bottom; the worst, stupidest, and most servile, at the top. The Party is little more than a union for self-advancement. A director will tell an ambitious young man, "Well, of course you must join the Party," and many do so quite cynically. The country's politics are frozen into immobility—a fifteen years' winter after one Prague Spring. Husák and his politburo fear that even their timid, tinkering economic reforms could have untoward political consequences. No impulses for reform come from the purged, cowed, and corrupt *apparat*. Younger Party members are devastatingly critical—but cynically and in private; while most Czechs do not look to the Party for anything at all. I have never been in a country where politics, and indeed the whole of public life, is a matter of such supreme indifference.

Czechoslovakia today can be compared to a lake permanently covered by a thick layer of ice. On the surface nothing moves. But under the ice, among the philosopher-laborers, the window-cleaning jour-

nalists, and nightwatchman-monks—here, things are on the move.

In the West this subglacial movement is known, if at all, by the label Charter 77. Charter 77 is often thought of as a dissident political organization. This it is not, and cannot be. The original Charter declaration on January 1, 1977, proclaimed a "free, informal, open community of people of different convictions, different faiths, and different professions" united to work for the respect of human and civil rights. It emphasized that "Charter 77 is not an organization" and "does not form the basis of any oppositional political activity." Of course these disclaimers were partly tactical, since to form *any* independent organization ("political" or not) is a crime in Czechoslovakia's totalitarian law book. But there are more than sufficient reasons why Charter 77 has not in practice built the kind of organization that its Polish cousin, KOR, developed before August 1980. "KOR began where the Charter leaves off," one Chartist told me.

From the start, the Chartists were fiercely and systematically persecuted. Détente did not help protect them as it helped protect leading KOR members until 1980. Czechoslovakia's hard-currency debt had never been so large as to provide a significant "lever" for the West. In autumn 1979 the playwright Václav Havel and four other members of the Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Prosecuted (VONS) were themselves unjustly prosecuted and summarily convicted, despite worldwide protests. Havel was released from prison only last year, seriously ill. He described to me the oppressive police surveillance under which he now lives: the threat of a house search hanging over him whenever he sits down at the typewriter; the knowledge that every visitor is photographed and every conversation bugged; police narks following him wherever he goes—even into the sauna.

In the most recent example of Husák's justice, a thirty-one-year-old worker, Jiří Wolf, was condemned to six years' imprisonment for "subversion." His offense: writing a letter to the Austrian embassy about prison conditions. This is the longest sentence yet given to a Chartist, and follows a previous sentence of three and a half years. As the Good Soldier Schweik once commented: "I never imagined

they'd sentence an innocent man to ten years . . . sentencing an innocent man to five years, that's something I've heard of, but *ten*, that's a bit too much."

Wolf's fellow workers react in a similar vein. "Why bother to make trouble for yourself by saying these things out loud?" the philosopher and former Charter spokesman Ladislav Hejdlánek was asked by his factory workmates. "We all know them anyway." This lack of active support from the industrial working class—not to mention the prosperous agricultural workers—is the second main reason why Charter cannot follow the path of KOR.

A third, grave, disability is the lack of support or protection from the Church. The majority Catholic Church has, since the Stalinist period, been persecuted, broken, and corrupted to an appalling degree. Historically identified with Habsburg domination over the Czech lands, it lacked that massive popularity that alone enabled the Polish Church to resist Communist *Gleichschaltung*. In the early fifties, all its monastic orders were simply dissolved; some 8,000 of the country's 12,000 monks disappeared into labor camps. Bishops, priests, and theologians were imprisoned for up to fifteen years. The minority Protestant churches were coopted or coerced.

Since then, all the clergy in Czechoslovakia have been, in effect, employees of the Communist state. Their salaries are paid by the government, which has a veto on all church appointments. If a priest displeases the state by preaching "political" sermons, or simply by attracting too many young people to church, he is forbidden to practice his vocation. That is why the man the Vatican appointed as bishop of Hradec Králové had to work as a milkman. So whereas in Poland the Catholic Church plays a great, independent role, whereas in East Germany the Protestant hierarchy can do something to shield peace activists, in Czechoslovakia, the official churches are crippled and corrupted and the most courageous priests banned from the pulpit.

In these conditions it is a miracle that Charter has survived at all—like a candle burning under water. It has done so thanks to the extraordinary fortitude of people like Václav Benda, a Catholic in-

tellectual who, emerging from four years' imprisonment, has once again taken up the job of Charter spokesperson (one of three), despite illness and reprisals against himself and his children. (The punishment of children for the conduct of their parents—the Nazis' *Sippenhaft*—is one of the most revolting regular practices of the Communist state.) Benda, a stout, bearded man in his mid-thirties, admits that the ranks of the thousand-odd signatories of the Charter have been depleted by emigration, imprisonment and, sometimes, resignation. Nonetheless, the eight-year-old Charter can claim to be the longest-lived human rights movement in Eastern Europe, and Benda quotes its first spokesman, Jan Patočka: "This is not a battle but a war." The Chartists, he says, have served as the "front line," behind which hundreds of newcomers have quietly joined the ranks of nonconformity.

Who knows how many people are seated at their typewriters every evening typing out a manuscript with ten carbon copies for *samizdat* distribution? Judging by the quantity of *samizdat* I saw in a short visit, it must be hundreds if not thousands. Besides the *samizdat*, there are unofficial seminars and discussion groups. For obvious reasons of secrecy, no one person can know all about this miniature counterculture; but its main concerns are visible. After 1968 the Czech lands became what Louis Aragon called a "literary Biafra." Virtually all the best contemporary Czech writers are published only in *samizdat*.

Secondly, they try to salvage Czech history from the regime of forgetting. In the study of a former professor of literature I noticed a fine bust of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, president of the prewar Czechoslovakian Republic. He explained that the bust was commissioned for his university in 1947. After the Communist takeover in 1948, it could not be exhibited. "So I am keeping it in trust until it can be returned to its proper place." Only recently, he told me, the citizens of Nové Město (in Moravia) woke up one morning to find their statue of Masaryk gone from the main square—"the spot was already half paved over." Another blow for the President of Forgetting. But wherever I went, in private flats I found busts of

Tomáš Masaryk. For the Czechs, as Kundera has written, "the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting."

The Czechs are intensely proud of their interwar democracy, which they justly claim was unique in Central and Eastern Europe. Yet the counterculture is distinguished by a fiercely self-critical approach to the history. "We regard the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans in 1945 as the first act of totalitarianism in our country," one passionate Czech patriot told me. To most British observers, the three national tragedies of Czechoslovakia—1938 (Munich), 1948 (Communist coup), and 1968 (Warsaw Pact invasion)—would seem to have been events beyond the Czechs' control: *our* fault in 1938, the Russians' (and ours) in 1948, the Russians' in 1968. But they ask: What could Masaryk, Beněš, or Dubček have done to prevent it?

Predictably, the closer the event the fiercer the controversy, so 1968 is the subject of fierce polemics among Chartists. Ex-Party members are still the tightest single group within the Charter, and many of them still cherish the hope of 1968: that change will come through the Party. Consequently, these self-styled "Eurocommunists" insist on the necessity of "dialogue" with the Communists in power—their former comrades. I was told that a group of them even addressed a letter to Andropov on his accession, virtually offering their services as an alternative politburo. However, as one ex-Communist wryly remarked, "The only 'dialogue' I have is with my interrogator." "Please don't imagine I have any illusions about the 'dialogue,'" Dr. Jiří Hájek, Dubček's foreign minister in 1968, hastened to assure me. He no longer expects any major political results from talking to the Party; but this "dialogue" would be a stimulus and example to society at large.

Non- and anticommunist Chartists call these residual hopes residual illusions. But they do not yet have any alternative political strategy. Where the Eurocommunists think in terms of power and diplomacy, they think in terms of metaphysics and theology. The difference is nicely illustrated by the underground (or subglacial)

debate about peace. On this issue the range of opinion among Chartists is as wide as in the West. I met passionate Reaganauts and supporters of Western "peace movements." But whereas the Euro-communists, like Western peaceniks, pose direct political questions—What is to be done? Which argument will persuade whom?—the noncommunists argue at a deeper level. Western peace activists who come to Prague seeking allies (or alibis?) are confronted with philosophers like Ladislav Hejdínek, asking, "But what is 'peace?'"—and reaching back to Spinoza and St. Luke for the answer. Václav Havel describes the arms race as merely part of a "worldwide crisis of human responsibility." "Western governments overestimate the power of missiles." However, all the Chartists I spoke to stressed one point: What they have in Eastern Europe is not the peace that we enjoy in Western Europe. Peace is not just the absence of war. A lasting, full peace can only be achieved with and within countries whose governments respect human rights and are democratically controlled.

Do they envisage their philosophical ideas ever being translated into political realities in Czechoslovakia? For Havel there are "two crucial questions: Does the Charter speak the truth? And if it does speak the truth, has this truth reached wider circles of society?"

Of course in a Communist state there cannot be public opinion. But there is something that we might call private opinion. There are issues on which large numbers of people think and speak alike in private, although they dare not in public. The Charter, and its surrounding counterculture, have had a considerable impact on this private opinion, Havel argues. After four years in prison, he finds that the gulf between public life and private opinion has shrunk. People are complaining more openly—in pubs and trams as well as in the privacy of their homes. Compared with what happened in Poland, the change is imperceptible; compared with Czechoslovakia when he went to prison, it is substantial.

Private opinion has been particularly incensed by the deployment of new Soviet missiles, announced last November. What infuriated the Czechs was the absurd *volte-face* of official propaganda. For three

years they were inundated with diatribes against Pershing and Cruise. *Any* new missiles will increase the danger to the country in which they are stationed, said the propagandists. In the town of Pardubice, a mass meeting was held under the banner of "No New Missiles in Europe." Next day, the government announced that new Soviet missiles would be stationed in Czechoslovakia. People returned to photograph the banner, which was hastily removed. The authorities displayed their anxiety by threatening leading Chartists with prosecution for "undermining the national defense capability" if they criticized the deployment. In spite of this, a petition against the missiles has collected some thousand signatures in Prague. In the Moravian capital, Brno, a similar petition was apparently started spontaneously by apprentices and Christian students; it is said to have collected more than a thousand signatures, and baffled the police. An "unofficial peace movement" like that in neighboring East Germany (with Church protection) is not possible here. But the anger of private opinion is unmistakable.

The same is true of one other issue: pollution. "Golden Prague" is a dirty rust-color these days, with accumulated grime from low-grade brown coal, petrol fumes, and industrial smog. A friend drove me through devastated parts of northwestern Bohemia—what was once the Sudetenland. Near the town of Most, we stopped before the huge, belching Chemical Works of Czech-Soviet Friendship. Through choking acid fog we could just read the banner on the façade: "Together with the Soviet Union for Peace and Future Happiness for Our People." In the mountains I saw whole forests destroyed by acid rain—a landscape by a war artist. On our way home we passed another building with a banner proclaiming "The Leninist Way for the Development of Our Country." "Yes, that building is the Leninist way," snorted my companion. It was the prison where the Husák regime incarcerated Václav Benda. The Leninist way . . .

Unlike the Chartists' philosophical, literary, and historical concerns, the issues of peace and pollution have an immediate popular appeal. You do not need to be an intellectual to feel threatened by

missiles and acid rain. Nor can one assume that Czech workers have been wholly pacified by Husák's "social contract." On the wall of one Prague factory there recently appeared a large graffito: "We envy the people of Grenada!" When a Party official tried to collect signatures in support of the new Soviet missiles at an official trade-union meeting, the workers sent him packing. Now and then they like to frighten the managers by muttering: "Solidarność."

Of course the Chartists see that a Czech Solidarity is as likely as fire under ice. But they also see that the development of the *samizdat* counterculture, and the growing alienation of private opinion, combined with economic and political stagnation, have begun at least to make the ice mushy on the underside. If ever a real thaw comes—from above? after change in Moscow?—they will be ready with their busts of Tomáš Masaryk, their editions of Franz Kafka, and their memorials to Jan Palach. They know from their own experience in 1968, and from the Polish experience in 1980–81, how suddenly a society that seems atomized, apathetic, and broken can be transformed into an articulate, united civil society. How private opinion can become public opinion. How a nation can stand on its feet again. And for this they are working and waiting, under the ice.

(February 1984)



THE USES OF ADVERSITY

"I think it very encouraging that it's here that Marx's dream is being fulfilled," Kurt Vonnegut told the leading underground weekly *Tygodnik Mazowsze* on his recent visit to Poland. He meant Marx's "dream of the withering, or rather ignored, state." Vonnegut's nice conceit captures the extraordinary quality of Polish intellectual life today. For here is a Communist state in which the best writers are published by underground publishers, the best journalists write for underground papers, the best teachers work out of school; in which banned theater companies just carry on performing, in monasteries, while sacked professors carry on lecturing as "private guests" at their own seminars; in which churches are also schools, concert halls, and art galleries. An entire world of learning and culture exists quite independent of the state that claims to control it—a real world of consciousness floating high and free, like Mohammed's coffin, above the false world of being.

Of course, every Polish schoolboy knows that since the time of the partitions, the *inteligencja* has had a mission to uphold the spirit and culture of the nation against the political powers that be. This romantic version of noblesse oblige is at the heart of the traditional Polish definition of what it is to be an intellectual or, more broadly,

a member of the educated class—an *intelligent*. It is a subjective, idealistic self-definition in which the idea takes absolute precedence over reality and consciousness determines being. In the condition of unfreedom, it proclaims the principle of As If. Try to live *as if* you live in a free country, it says, though today your study is a prison cell. Or, as the contemporary Polish poet Ryszard Krynicki puts it, in a poem dedicated to Adam Michnik:

living here and now
you must pretend
that you live elsewhere and in other
times
and, at best, fight with the dead
through the iron curtain of clouds.

But when Krynicki wrote these lines, in the mid-1970s, the number of intellectuals who actually tried to live by the principle of As If was still tiny. Indeed, the typical student or academic of the Gierk years was cynical about all ideas and ideals, almost unthinkingly paying lip service to the ruling ideology, inasmuch as this served life's real purpose: the serious pursuit of material betterment and private happiness.

What transformed the "dissident" minority into a "dissident" majority was the Solidarity revolution of 1980 and 1981. The Solidarity revolution was a revolution of consciousness. What it changed, lastingly, was not institutions or property relations or material circumstances, but people's minds and attitudes. "Solidarity," said the Kraków theologian Józef Tischner, "is a huge forest planted by awakened consciences." Behind the front line of confrontation between Solidarity's national leadership and the Communist authorities, millions of people across the country—in factories, offices, universities, schools—suddenly found that they no longer needed to live the double life, that they could say in public what they thought in private. They began to discover the true facts about their country, its history, its economy, the privileges of its governing class, its

relations with the Soviet Union; and they experienced, for the first time, free speech, free assembly, democratic elections, and the taste of self-government. For a few months it really was *as if* they lived in a free country. As a rule the younger you were, the more intense was the experience—students and schoolchildren were among the most active and radical of all. At the same time, in a collapsing economy, the state had fewer and fewer material goods with which to lure the young generation back to outward conformity.

After General Jaruzelski's declaration of the "state of war" in December 1981, this transformed and galvanized young intelligentsia threw itself, passionately, into the business of resistance—conspiratorial and open, passive and active. Many saw themselves as the (nonviolent) heirs of the wartime Home Army (AK), in which the young intelligentsia also predominated. Some went into hiding, "underground," reading books about the AK for practical advice on the organization of conspiracy. Others began to live in "semiconspiracy," slipping away of an evening (check behind you for the telltale white Fiat used by the secret police) to service a carefully hidden offset machine and run off a few hundred copies of the latest unofficial journal, or book about the AK. More still, thousands more, helped distribute and avidly consumed this unofficial literature. Nobody knows how much of it has been produced: In Warsaw I was given an estimate of 1,600 periodical titles, with the important caveat that many titles only lasted for an issue or two.

Today this world of independent culture—culture understood in the broadest sense—is probably the most extensive field of opposition in Poland. For the workers' Solidarity, which originally created the space for this cultural revolution, has itself been ground down and fragmented. Of course the national leadership still exists, underground and aboveground; its statements still have great symbolic importance; but it no longer has the capacity to organize effective nationwide industrial action. For one thing, the government has again been jailing Solidarity leaders. After the amnesty last July, there were probably fewer than forty political prisoners left in Poland's jails; now there are at least 160, and the regime is pushing ahead

with the trial of Adam Michnik, Bogdan Lis, and Władysław Frasyniuk in Gdańsk. Solidarity's basic units, the factory committees, where they exist, cannot operate on a day-to-day basis as trade unions, representing the real interests of the work force—which is, after all, their *raison d'être*. (This is not to suggest that the workers are satisfied or that another round of meat-price rises this summer will not provoke strikes and protests. Far from it. But the strikes are likely to be sporadic, spontaneous, and uncontrolled—more like pre-Solidarity forms of industrial action—and one thing this state certainly can do is break strikes.)

It would obviously be wrong to draw too clear a line between workers and intelligentsia. One of the hallmarks of Solidarity in 1980–1981 was the close links it established between intellectuals and workers, and many of these links have been preserved. They are symbolized at the highest level by the relationship between Wałęsa and his advisers. Moreover, most people involved in producing this independent culture are at pains to make it available to workers as well.

In the steel town of Nowa Huta near Kraków, for example, there is a "Christian University of the Workers" based at the huge new church in Mistrzejowice, which the Pope dedicated on his last visit. Here Father Jancarz, who is to the Nowa Huta steelworkers what Father Popiełuszko was to the steelworkers of Huta Warszawa, has organized regular lecture courses, films, concerts, a permanent exhibition of photographs, and what he grandly calls an "independent television service"—meaning videocassette recordings, mostly of interviews with famous Poles. At the regular weekly "mass for the fatherland" (a tradition begun in Warsaw by Father Popiełuszko), on the evening I attended, the Kraków philharmonic orchestra and choir sang the Hallelujah chorus from Handel's *Messiah*, and a buxom prima donna sang arias from the organ loft. But Mistrzejowice is exceptional. As a rule, the people who benefit most from the world of independent culture are, inevitably, those whose trade is thinking and whose tools are words.

Take a first-year university student from Warsaw, Kraków, Wro-

claw, Poznań, or Gdańsk. (Things may be somewhat different in the smaller towns.) If he is lucky, his schoolteacher will have taught him using syllabuses largely agreed on during the Solidarity period. In addition, he may already have used one or another of the National Education Booklets (known by their Polish acronym as ZEN), giving, for example, a true account of Poland's part in the Second World War. The ZENs are produced by the Committee for Independent Education—one of three linked unofficial committees (the other two are called the Social Committee for Scholarship and the Committee for Independent Culture) whose anonymous members are, besides the Church, responsible for coordinating much of Poland's independent cultural life.

Arriving at the university, he will find almost complete freedom of speech in the classroom. One of his first-term seminars may be on "critics of totalitarianism"—Arendt, Orwell, Hayek. The basic texts—1984, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, *The Constitution of Liberty*, and so forth—are published underground, naturally, and can be purchased from vendors among his fellow students. Indeed, I was told by one lecturer that her students can more easily obtain books produced unofficially than those from state publishers. In addition, he will have on his shelves at home a random selection of underground papers: for hard news, the two closely printed sheets of *Tygodnik Mazowsze* (the *Newsweek* of the underground); for opinions, one of the many "irregular monthlies" (a distinct category)—perhaps the Orwell number of the Kraków-based *Arka*, including Norman Podhoretz's piece in *Harper's*, or *Bez Dekretu*, with a contentious essay about Central America reprinted from the *New York Review*, or the organ of the Catholic nationalist Young Poland movement, *Polityka Polska*, with articles about Poland's need for a new right wing. In the Catholic chaplaincy attached to the university, and in the city's Club of Catholic Intelligentsia, he will be able to hear leading independent intellectuals—former Solidarity advisers like Tadeusz Mazowiecki, for example, or the historian of Solidarity, Jerzy Holzer—giving talks on a very catholic range of topics. If he is lucky, he may get tickets for a play about Osip Mandelstam per-

formed (beautifully) by the Poznań-based Theater of the Eighth Day. The Theater of the Eighth Day has been officially banned—so this performance will take place in a Dominican monastery.

Back on the campus, our first-year student will also find a very active students' self-government committee (its identity proclaimed in the unmistakable *Solidarność* lettering), which represents the students' interests and distributes all the funds for social activities—student clubs, sports, excursions, and so forth. Indeed, one of the most remarkable features of contemporary Polish university life is a degree of internal democracy that at moments recalls the more moderate demands of 1968 in the Sorbonne or even Berkeley. Student representatives are elected (by secret ballot, supervised by the students' self-government committee) onto the university governing bodies. In some faculties at Warsaw University the students not only have a say in their plan of studies but also mark their professor's performance. "I got 4.7," the newly elected rector, Professor Białkowski, told me with a satisfied smile. (In Poland, marks go from 2.0—disgraceful—to 5.0—excellent.) "One of my colleagues got 3.1 last year," Rector Białkowski added. This year his colleague had prepared his lectures better—and jumped to 4.5.

Both the elected rector and the elected students' representatives are warm in praise of each other—"I have learned a lot from them," Białkowski says—and there seems to be excellent cooperation between them. "You see, many of us were interned together in 1982," one student activist explained. "Sharing a prison cell does help bridge the gap between student and professor." And both sides underline what is perhaps the most remarkable fact of all: that the autonomy and internal democracy of the universities is based on the letter of the Higher Education Act, which was passed *during the "state of war"*—in May 1982—a law which, although it did not go quite as far as the draft worked out when *Solidarity* was still a legal organization, is nonetheless the most liberal that Communist Poland has seen.

At this point the Western visitor, if he has any knowledge of the Soviet bloc, and even more the Eastern visitor, will be able to restrain

himself no longer. "How on earth is all this possible in the fourth year of so-called normalization?" he will ask. "If Husák could silence his intellectuals, why can't Jaruzelski?" (That from the Soviet visitor.) Where is the state? Where, indeed, is the Party? Just recently, the state and the Party seem to have been asking themselves these questions as well. One obvious answer is that the Polish regime has had much more to "normalize." Its first aim was to crush the *workers' Solidarity*, and this has absorbed most of its political skills and police energies. So the pessimist could say: "It's just the old familiar salami tactics—when they've finished slicing off the workers, they'll move on to the intellectuals. You wait and see."

A second speculative answer is that in this initial phase of reestablishing a minimum of political control, with on the whole (it must be said) a minimum of physical terror, the cooperation of the Catholic Church was (and is?) a tactical necessity for the Jaruzelski government. And if this greatly expanded world of spiritual, educational, and cultural activity, in which the values of solidarity, with a small *s* (as preached by the pope), are preserved and carried forward—if this is part of the price that Church leaders exact for their cooperation, well, the regime must pay the price, for as long as the tactical necessity exists.

Yet these two reasons together still do not quite suffice to explain why the Jaruzelski government passed such a charter of academic liberties in the first year of martial law and why, while dissolving the writers', artists', actors', and journalists' unions in sound Husák style, it has yet been quirkily tolerant in allowing quite outspoken criticism in the official and (censored) Catholic press and permitting the official publication of books by authors who are otherwise published in *samizdat* or in the West.

Some have plausibly suggested that in the first year of martial law, officials hoped—and may still hope—to win over parts of the intelligentsia to their side by demonstrative tolerance, following the motto of János Kádár in Hungary: "He who is not against us is with us." It is wryly noted that if they did *not* publish some writers who publish unofficially, they would have no writers of repute to

publish at all. There is also what I might call the prosopographical theory. Several of General Jaruzelski's closet political advisers—Deputy Prime Minister Mieczysław Rakowski, for example, and government spokesman Jerzy Urban—themselves come from the Warsaw intellectual milieu. (The general himself, incidentally, must have a fairly good idea of the atmosphere at Warsaw University: his wife lectures and his daughter is a student there.) These advisers are still, at least notionally, on first-name terms with leaders of the intellectual opposition who are their former comrades from the bygone golden days of the "Polish October" of 1956. They cannot (one perhaps sentimentally hopes) altogether enjoy the contempt of former friends. They cannot (one perhaps naïvely feels) entirely have abandoned that commitment to free debate that was so much a part of the Polish October. Somewhere inside them still lurks, perhaps, the shadow of an *intelligent*.¹

Yet the political auguries are bad. Since the autumn of 1984, the pressure on the academic community and the world of Church-protected and underground culture has increased, with threatening articles in the official press and speeches at Party meetings, police action, the sacking of two well-known academics, and proposals for new repressive changes in the law. The emergence of this campaign roughly coincided with the Popiechuszko affair, and many observers at first suggested that the propaganda offensive against the Church was a tactical quid pro quo for holding the unprecedented trial of Father Popiechuszko's secret-police murderers—a quid pro quo "for Moscow." Probably, there is an element of truth in this supposition; and Mr. Gorbachev would surely be as delighted as any predecessors if the Polish Party were to revive itself with a good vicious campaign against the Church.

But the quid has gone on so long now as to become its own quo. The "reformist" weekly *Polityka* has published a direct attack on the

¹ But I remember the precise judgment of a distinguished Polish philosopher on, so to speak, the socio-intellectual status of Deputy Prime Minister Rakowski. "Mietek," he said, for they were former comrades, "is certainly intelligent; but he is no *intelligent*."

pope that could have come from the pages of the Russian or Slovak *Pravda*. A "reader's letter" in the Warsaw evening paper suggests that, as in Polish law the instrument of a crime is confiscated, so the pulpit of Lech Wałęsa's parish church in Gdańsk should be confiscated too. The ministry for culture and arts has collected detailed reports on Church-protected cultural activity from all the provinces. Characteristically, these confidential reports have been "leaked" to the Church, probably by Church sympathizers inside the ministry. Another "leaked" document (the frequency of "leaks" is one small way in which Warsaw has become more like a Western capital since 1980) suggests very strongly that the sustained attack on the entire world of independent spiritual and cultural life springs quite as much from the government's own domestic fears as from the putative concerns of its "Muscovite friends."

This twenty-five-page document, marked "Confidential—material for pt. 2.b. of the meeting of the Council of Ministers, 1985-03-22," is entitled "Threats in the Sociopolitical Sphere in 1985." One's doubts about its authenticity are diminished by the inimitable new-speak in which it warns, for example, against a "lack of feeling for Poland's *raison d'état* among some creative artists" (translation: some artists are rude about the Russians). What is most striking about this document (if it is genuine) is the sheer range of human activities that it categorizes as "threats in the sociopolitical sphere," and the inclusion in this category, point by point, of virtually all the independent cultural activities I have sketched above. Any political scientist who wishes to maintain that the Jaruzelski regime is *by design* authoritarian rather than totalitarian will have a hard task explaining the character of this report.

But of course the performance falls far short of the desire. In practice, intellectual and cultural life is emancipated from the would-be-totalitarian ideological control of the Party to a degree unthinkable anywhere else in the Soviet bloc. Moreover, so decayed is the Polish Party that the Jaruzelski government attempts only, so to speak, *in form* to use the Party as the main instrument for the restoration of order. In practice, the key instruments of control are now

the police and the law. While moving energetically to curb some independent actions by the secret police (like the murder of Father Popiełuszko or the recent attack on a priest connected with Father Jancarz's church in Nowa Huta), it has steadily changed the laws so that, in respect of most forms of Solidarity activity, the legal process has become the continuation of policing by other means.

It is therefore typical of the Jaruzelski regime that the sharpest threat to the academic community should come in the form of proposed "amendments" to the 1982 Higher Education Act. The first project for these amendments became known last autumn, in a (deliberate?) leak from the ministry of higher education. A few quotations give the taste of this "project":

- In art. 35 sect. 1, delete "elected"
- In art. 54 sect. 1, in place of "by election" read "by nomination"
- In art. 97, delete "self-governing"
- In art. 100, delete "students' self-government"

You get the general idea. If implemented in full, this "project" would clearly demolish the legal foundations of the universities' autonomy and internal democracy: Their senior officers would all be appointed by the education minister, not elected; academic staff would have yearly contracts rather than tenure; students could be dismissed by the minister if they "offended against the principles of social coexistence and public order"; and so on and so forth.

The response of the academic community was immediate and immense. At the main universities, the governing bodies not only protested but also organized internal staff referenda on the main points of the proposed changes. At Warsaw University the responses ranged from 74 percent against a reduction in the representation of students and younger academic staff on the governing body (not all older professors are as tolerant as the rector) to 90 percent against giving the minister the right to sack professors for "activities contrary to the interests of the Polish People's Republic."

The students' self-government organized its own referendum, with the results scrupulously tabulated and presented—an average of 98 percent opposed on most points—and copies were sent to the minister, the Sejm (parliament), and the Polish Press Agency. The main council on higher education (consisting of one delegate each from most higher education institutions) more cautiously told the government that it should wait another year or two, until the law had been thoroughly tried out in practice. And most surprisingly, even the government's own favored front organization—the Patriotic Movement for National Salvation (PRON)—took up a similar position.

Faced with this united front, the government seemed for a time to recoil. But the recent plenary session of the Party central committee devoted to the intelligentsia called quite clearly for changes to the law, and it now seems almost certain the repressive amendments will after all be pushed through the Sejm before it is dissolved in July. Perhaps the government will soften its original proposals somewhat, to demonstrate its "liberalism" and attentiveness to public opinion. (Probably, that is one reason why the original proposals were so tough.) No doubt it will accompany them with the sweetener of pay raises—academic salaries are now pitifully low. But there is no mistaking the attempted reassertion of Party-state control.

As I have suggested, the response of the intellectual community to this assault has been to follow the great principle of As If, in what might be called its qualified and its absolute forms. The qualified form consists in saying, in effect, to General Jaruzelski: "You, sir, claim to head a strong but civilized state that is governed under the rule of law. A Polish *Rechtsstaat*. To us and to the West (although not to your own Party and to the East), you claim to derive your legitimacy not from the transvaluated values of Marxism-Leninism but from certain recognizable old European standards of law and order and sovereignty and statehood. All right, we believe you—though millions wouldn't. Here are your proclaimed standards. Here are your own laws. *Now stick to them.*" This may be a pretense, but

in Poland over the last few years it has been a curiously effective pretense. At times it has almost seemed as if some of those in power wanted to pretend too.

The absolute form consists simply in teaching, writing, researching, painting, acting, publishing as far as possible and for as long as possible *as if* the state (to recall Vonnegut's conceit) has withered away; *as if* you live in a free country. Both forms of the As If principle are finely illustrated by the case of Professor Leszek Nowak of Poznań University. Professor Nowak, a philosopher, was suspended from teaching last September and summarily dismissed by the minister in February. This was clearly a political act "*pour encourager les autres*." The response has been twofold. First, the governing body of Poznań University has protested to the minister about the way the dismissal was carried out: The present law required a disciplinary tribunal (of academic colleagues) as a precondition for dismissal. That is qualified As If. Secondly, Professor Nowak has just carried on teaching, as a "private guest" at his own seminar, even though the minister paid a personal visit to Poznań to demand that he should be banned from the campus. When I went to see him, he had to hurry off to teach a seminar on (if I understood him aright) the significance of factions in one-party systems. Instead of his professional salary, he is being paid a roughly equivalent monthly sum by sympathetic colleagues, while he writes a book on captivity and revolution. That is absolute As If.

But how far and how long can Polish intellectuals carry on living As If? The political answer to this question depends on so many unknowns—on the unpredictable response of a barely subordinated working class to a further deterioration in living standards, for example—that speculation is rather fruitless. The only safe prediction is that, since this is Poland, all government measures—whether of repression or reform—are likely to be half-measures, honored mainly in the breach. It is more interesting to ask a less obvious question. Even if they can carry on living As If for years, how will this affect the content and quality of the country's intellectual life?

* * *

The Western intellectual who visits his colleagues in Poland feels admiration, excitement and, yes, envy. Here is a place where people care, passionately, about ideas. Here is a place where intellectuals matter. Here, in a figure like Adam Michnik, is the Intellectual as Hero. Here historians make history. The Western intellectual tourist enjoys the thrill of being in the front line—in the safe certainty that he will not be shot at.² War without tears. And often he returns to view with weary disdain our workaday world of Western culture, with its hypermarket profusion of ideas, for none of which anyone risks anything; a world in which intellectuals don't matter.

But if you stay a little longer and look a little deeper, doubts and questions multiply. In Poznań, I spent an hour talking to an extraordinarily impressive and mature student self-government leader—also an historian. How long would one have to search to find such a student in Oxford, I wondered. Then, just before we parted, I asked what he was going to do with his degree. "I think I'll become a carpenter," he said. With his university record, he explained, the security services would stop him getting a good job in a state enterprise. Working privately as a carpenter, the police couldn't get him; and he'd earn more than he ever would as an historian. He would go on reading and writing in his spare time. In Warsaw I heard many similar stories—the most able and independent-minded students going to work as taxi drivers, postmen, or market vendors. Now, of course, it is possible that these students will sustain their intellectual and cultural engagement. One thinks of the extraordinary catacomb intellectual life of Prague, with its philosophers working as window cleaners, priests as milkmen, historians as gardeners. But how many and for how long?

Beyond this question about the future of individuals there is the

² The distinguished medievalist Bronisław Geremek was recently fired from the Polish Academy of Sciences, where he has worked for thirty years. This was almost certainly punishment for his work as an adviser to Lech Wałęsa, and in particular for taking part in a private meeting—alongside other Solidarity advisers—with the British foreign secretary. When I talked to him shortly after that meeting, he told me he had just finished a paper on "Suffering and Laughter in the Work of François Villon."

larger question about the collective future. How can a country prosper when the best part of its educated class refuses, or feels unable, to collaborate in running it? (Unable, that is, on the terms offered by this state.) The fact that this question is constantly posed by the regime's intellectual apologists does not make it a nonquestion. Indeed, the question is also posed, increasingly, by deeply anticommunist, Catholic, and nationalist intellectuals; and this line of questioning is clearly encouraged by the primate. When Poland is finally free, so the argument goes, it will need a solid "infrastructure" of good roads and factories and technical schools; it will need experienced managers, lawyers, civil servants—and this must mean working, here and now, to some extent with the state. Historians will immediately recognize the argument for "organic work" from the great debate after the crushing of the January Rising of 1863–1864.

There is also a real question about the effect on the country's political culture of this divorce from the state. There is, for instance, something faintly adolescent about the current proliferation of political grouplets with grand titles—the Liberal Democratic party (three students and a dog)—and grander programs ("Our Policy Toward the Ukrainians"), a phenomenon that surely grows in direct proportion to the reduction in possibilities of real political action. (This is not, of course, an argument for collaboration with a state that does not afford such real possibilities.)

Finally, there is what I might call the question of Poland's European future. In the offices of Poland's best weekly paper, the independent Catholic *Tygodnik Powszechny*, someone has pinned up a cartoon that shows an elderly intellectual (he seemed to me to bear a faint resemblance to the paper's venerable editor, Jerzy Turowicz) toiling across a desolate, half-ruined landscape—an unfinished Soviet-style housing development, smashed windows, broken water mains, fallen telegraph wires—with the water soaking through his shoes. He is repeating, through gritted teeth, "We belong to Europe, we belong to Europe, we belong to Europe." The sense of hanging on at the edge of Europe is as acute as the European patriotism is

fierce. For the uses of adversity are also sour. Scientists desperately bemoan the lack of modern equipment, which puts their research years behind that of their Western colleagues. Scholars feel acutely the shortage of foreign books and periodicals—partly the result of the state's shortage of foreign currency. Many are the doctoral students quite demoralized by the lack of the basic literature in their fields. Private and Church support can hardly begin to fill the well of needs.

We may sometimes grow tired in the West of the ways of the literary free market—the ceaseless hype, the sheer superabundance of publications and reviews—but if there is one thing worse than a literary market it is the lack of a literary market. The political division of culture can also distort judgment: Second-rate work may be lauded just because it is officially criticized, first-rate work ignored because it is officially lauded. Yes, it is wonderful to find three thousand young people turning up at a poetry reading. But what questions do they ask the poet? Should we demonstrate on May 1? How should we treat someone who joins the Party? What should we think about the local elections? How should we live? The poet wants to be a poet, not a confessor, political leader, economist, or citizens' advice bureau. He has, so to speak, an abnormal importance. And it is no surprise to find that so many of Poland's best intellectuals, faced with these pressures, limitations, handicaps, and demands, have come West, away from the front line, for a breath (long or short) of, so to speak, European normality (a notion that certainly includes New York and Chicago). Yes, intellectuals in Poland matter—perhaps more than intellectuals ever should.

"Unhappy the land that has no heroes," cries Galileo's angry pupil. But Brecht's Galileo replies: "Unhappy the land that has need of heroes."

(June 1985)

A HUNGARIAN LESSON

Background Reading

Imagine a garden maze, a maze in which mirrors conceal the hedges, giving the illusion of open space and free movement but also distorting wildly, as in a fairground hall of mirrors. At one corner you look impossibly tall, thin, and pale, like the poet Petőfi; at the next, absurdly squat. First you confidently step forward—and hit a mirror. Then you nervously edge around an open space. But sometimes you can walk straight through a mirror (or hedge), only to find yourself in another alley. Here you meet the administrator of the maze, himself lost in it.

This is Hungary.

At a recent meeting of the writers' union, one of Hungary's most respected writers, István Eörsi, delivered a powerful appeal for censorship. Yes, *for* censorship. Give us censorship! he said. Give us one office that is clearly and officially denoted as the censors'. Specify its powers. Give us legal definitions of the boundaries. Prosecute us in the courts if we trespass beyond them. At least we would then know where the hedges are. Eörsi's idea was not new. Solidarity in Poland attacked the censorship in precisely this way, by demanding its self-definition, and partly achieved that goal in the 1981 law "On the Control of Publications and Public Performances." Even today, the

censorship is more explicit and visible in Poland than in any other East European state, which is a kind of progress.

In Hungary, the position is worse and better. Better, because in practice so much can be published officially, including works of Polish writers such as Witold Gombrowicz, that cannot be published officially in Poland. Worse, because since there is no censor, everyone has become a censor: not just the officials in those departments of the central committee and the culture ministry that are, in fact, politically responsible for censorship, but every newspaper editor, publisher's reader, television producer, and worst of all, the writer himself. Because there is not one censorship there are many censorships: collective and individual, political and social, pre- and post-publication, before, after, and during the very act of writing. In this respect, Hungary is more like the Soviet Union—where, as is well known, there is no censorship.

The Hungarian difference consists not in the machinery of censorship but in the way it is used. Pierre Kende¹ has identified three main surviving categories of "outright taboo." You may not question or criticize the Soviet presence in Eastern Europe, Soviet foreign policy in general, and neighboring socialist states insofar as they follow Soviet precepts. (This last is the only major constraint on what *economists* can publish officially.) The basic legitimacy of Communist party rule is also sacrosanct. Finally, you cannot directly attack Marxist-Leninist "socialism" by name.² Yet as Kende points out, there are startling exceptions even in these categories: A historical journal has published an astonishingly frank account of how the Communist party rigged the 1947 election, which formally legitimated its seizure of power, and even the great trauma of 1956 has

¹ *Censorship in Hungary*, pp. 43–54 in Study No. 9 of the Research Project "Crisis in Soviet-Type Systems," based in Vienna and directed by Zdeněk Mlynář.

² "Of course socialism remains a name," a high-placed official intellectual told me after describing his government's further moves toward capitalism. "I mean 'an aim' not 'a name,'" he corrected himself, tittering. But how often had he made this "slip" before, in private conversation with Western visitors?

been treated—with the barest of allegorical disguises—in fiction and drama.

Many Western observers apply the word *liberalism* to this state of affairs. Hungarian writers talk rather of *chaos* or *anarchy* in the cultural dictatorship. Nowadays, they say, you simply can't tell what will get through. There's almost nothing that *might not* be allowed; but what was permitted at eight o'clock may be denounced at noon. The instruments of control are out of sync. A new textbook on Hungarian language and literature (which includes a chapter on the Bible) is officially passed for use in schools; then it is fiercely attacked in the official press. Books that have passed through all the hoops of precensorship are suddenly withdrawn after being on sale for several days. This happened most recently to a biography of Béla Kun by a scholar at the Institute for Party History—following a protest from the Soviet embassy. And so on. Here is the moving maze.

Two main reasons are given for this "anarchy": one contingent, one systemic. The contingent reason is that György Aczél, the inventor of the maze, the Kádár of culture for a quarter of a century, is no longer in command. Aczél it was who in the late fifties and early sixties made the essential "Kádárite" bargain with writers. Its terms were, very roughly, that if they desisted from engaging in politics, as they had done with such spectacular results in 1956, if they observed the political limits, then the state, imposing virtually no stylistic limits, would publish and provide for them, generously, even lavishly. The maze has a deep-pile carpet. The limits were never clearly defined, but on any given borderline book, essay, or film, there was this one overlord who could say: "That is the wrong side of the hedge." But at the last Party congress, Aczél surrendered his overlordship of culture.

The systemic cause—which already began to take effect in the latter years of Aczél's reign—is quite simply that the people who administer the system do not believe in it any more than the people they are censoring do. Marxist-Leninist ideology in Hungary today is as ob-

viously wax as the face of Lenin in the mausoleum on Red Square. "If you write a rabidly anti-Russian article," a friend explains, "the editor or publisher's reader will not try to argue with you. He'll say: 'Marvelous piece. You're so right about 'fifty-six. I couldn't agree more. Have a drink on me.'" As a result, the censors have no objective criteria for deciding where the limits are: They too are lost in the maze. "Accepting the realities" is the slogan. But what are the realities for most editors or publishers? The realities are a judgment of what is acceptable to your superiors. But *their* realities too are mainly a judgment of what is acceptable to *their* superiors, and so on, up to the very top.

And what are the top people's realities? They are, we may surmise, twofold. First, there is the one living piece of Leninist ideology: the question of power. Here is a real criterion: Does this or that strengthen or weaken our power? But the answers to even this question in contemporary Hungary are often far from clear. Is it more strengthening or weakening ("stabilizing" or "destabilizing," in the jargon of Western political science) to allow relatively free debate about economic reform, to publish or to prohibit this book, that play? The second reality for Hungary's top people is the same as everyone else's: a judgment of what will be acceptable to their superiors. As most Hungarian writers are expert at judging what their editors will tolerate, so the top political leadership must be adept at judging just how much the Russians will tolerate. Rulers and ruled are united in self-censorship. The usual effect of these successive levels of self-censorship is to stop the writer or artist well short of the actual limits. But because even Party officials seem to find it increasingly difficult, with the best will in the world, to see things the way the Russians do, they sometimes walk through a hedge (or mirror) themselves. Then the Soviet embassy protests.

The maze has its own language. I call it the Hungarian Periphrastic. It is a language of diabolical circumlocution, of convoluted allegory and serpentine metaphor, all guarded by a crack regiment of sub-Germanic abstract-compound-nouns. Nothing is said directly. Everyone is taken from behind. A spade is never a spade. A crime

is never a crime. Here is central committee secretary Mátyás Szűrös describing how foreign policy was made in the 1950s under the Comintern: "Essentially it was done by a collective and pluralistic decision." Pluralistic! "In certain specific cases this may have been harmful and as a whole perhaps objectionable in principle." This is newspeak turned against its makers.

Yet the great majority of Hungarian writers, intellectuals, and academics also live and work in the maze. They, too, write dialects of the Periphrastic. Their criticisms of the authorities are oblique, implicit, elliptical, or metaphorical. To the initiated and sophisticated reader, their meaning is no doubt entirely clear. The non-maze dweller and non-Hungarian speaker must hesitate to gloss what he does not understand. I am told that the finest contemporary Hungarian poetry and fiction are written and published in the maze. Their artistic quality I cannot judge, because so pitifully little is available in translation. Yet anyone can see that the Periphrastic is not a language to bring you to the barricades. It is the intellectual version of an attitude that prevails in the whole society: that of getting around the system rather than confronting it, of finding loopholes and niches rather than making demands of the state; and the premise of this attitude is, again by contrast with Poland, the essential permanence and immutability of the system.

Not everyone works inside the maze. Since the mid-1970s, Hungary, like Poland and Czechoslovakia, has seen the growth of an intellectual opposition with its own independent *samizdat* publications and a pronounced allergy to the Periphrastic. Today there are two leading *samizdat* reviews, *Beszélő* and *Hirmondó*, and three *samizdat* publishers, AB, ABC, and Hungarian October. The publishers have produced some twenty books in the last year. The reviews probably reach some ten thousand readers. So far, their main strength has been their treatment of social and political problems inside Hungary—poverty, inequality, alcoholism—and of developments in other Soviet-bloc countries. As the publisher's name suggests, the Hungarian October of 1956, that central *negative* reference point of officialdom, is the central *positive* reference point for the opposition.

While officials, and all too many Western analysts, argue that Hungary has got where it has *in spite* of the revolution, the opposition intellectuals maintain that it is only *because* of the revolution, because of the resistance, the refusal to "accept realities," and, yes, the bloodshed then, that Hungary's rulers now exercise their power in a relatively restrained, cautious, and tolerant fashion.

Emphasis falls on the word *relatively*. Generally speaking, those who publish regularly in *samizdat* will not be published officially and will be disbarred from official employment. Even with such an extensive second economy, this can make it very difficult for them to make ends meet. In addition, they may experience difficulties in staying in their state-owned apartments and in the education of their children. In this respect, too, the difference between Hungary and other Soviet-bloc states is one of degree, not of kind.

This is still a modest opposition by Polish standards. Hungary's "democratic opposition" of intellectuals has not yet developed either a distinctive political strategy, such as KOR did in Poland, or those links with other classes—above all, workers—without which Solidarity would never have been born. Its impact has nonetheless been considerable. Probably the main effect so far has been to extend the limits of the possible in official culture. Editors of official journals, who themselves have anyway become bolder since the late 1970s, can now argue that if they do not publish this author or that essay, he or it will "go into *samizdat*."

Moreover, the great social issues that the opposition opened up—the growing inequality, partly as a result of economic reform, the 20 to 30 percent of Hungarians living below the poverty line—have been taken over by the official intellectual establishment. The best empirical studies of inequality are now being made by official and even Party sociologists, who naturally have all the resources to conduct the necessary research. In this sense, some of the opposition's best clothes have been stolen, and it has willy-nilly become part of the official cultural game. Though not in the maze, it is yet *of* the maze.

Coming from Poland, you expect the great divide to lie between

opposition and collaboration, black and white, the craven and the brave. But here the needle on your Polish moral compass swings helplessly to and fro. Other fault lines cut across the canyon. There is, for example, the historic divide between "populist" and "urbanist" writers. The populists have traditionally celebrated the folk virtues of Hungarian village life, *la terre et les morts*; *Kultur* rather than *Zivilisation*. The urbanists were (and are) more cosmopolitan and often Jewish. (There are still as many as 100,000 Jews in Hungary.) Traditionally to be found on the left bank of the Danube, in the cafés of Pest rather than the hills of Buda, politically also "on the left," they have looked outward to Vienna and the West rather than inward to the Transylvanian strongholds of agrarian Hungarianness. They have been drawn to sociology rather than to ethnography, and to socialism rather than to nationalism. Such descriptions are, of course, historical caricatures. Yet it is curious to find that the question Urbanist or populist? is still quite as important as the question Officially favored or dissident? There is even today a distinct group of populist writers, an intellectual party with one recognized "leader." Their great political theme is the fate of the Hungarian minorities in Yugoslavia, Slovakia, and, above all, in Romanian Transylvania. There, systematic cultural discrimination, and outright persecution by the dreaded Romanian security service (the Securitate), has dramatically worsened the position of the two million-strong Hungarian minority in recent years.

In Poland during the 1970s there was a deliberate, difficult, and fruitful coming together of intellectuals from traditions that just twenty years before had been bitterly opposed: Jewish socialists sat down with Christian Democrats, former Stalinists with Home Army veterans, hardened ex-revisionists with inspissated Thomists. In Hungary, this summer saw a first major attempt at such intellectual bridge-building: a secretly organized meeting of some forty-five intellectuals at a camp site in Monor, some thirty miles southeast of Budapest. The participants were carefully chosen to represent different traditions and groups—democratic opposition, populists, urbanists, independent writers, sociologists, reformist economists.

"The idea," one of the organizers told me, "was a kind of popular front." They met for two days to discuss the position of the national minorities, the economy, efficiency vs. equality, the mounting social problems of poverty, alcoholism, welfare deprivation.

What emerged from Monor is not—or not yet—something one could call a united, let alone a popular, front. Thus far, one can detect no distinctive political strategy, no common program for post-Kádár Hungary. But there was at least a common debate: economists explaining the imperatives of further reform to sociologists concerned about the resulting inequalities; populists and urbanists exchanging different views of Transylvania. Perhaps more than anything else it is the direct persecution of Hungarians in Romania that has catalyzed this convergence: the kind of persecution that, as it were, *evades* the Hungarians in Hungary. Nicolae Ceaușescu as the godfather of Hungarian intellectual life—what an irony! Deeply unreliable rumor in Budapest has it that when Kádár went to see Gorbachev in September, the Soviet leader asked him: "What's this I hear about your intellectuals getting together at Monor?"

The Lesson

October 14. Tomorrow, the European Cultural Forum—an official international conference to review part of the Helsinki agreements—will open in the gleaming conference center next to the Novotel, all burnished metal and tinted glass. The airport metal detectors are being maneuvered into place, to prevent any unofficial persons getting through. This is an event without precedent: the first Helsinki follow-up meeting to be held in a Soviet-bloc country, a French suggestion enthusiastically taken up by Hungary at the Madrid review conference that ended earlier this year. Tomorrow, delegates from the thirty-five states that signed the Helsinki Final Act will begin their fine speeches.

But today the talk is not of that. Today the talk is of an "unofficial" or "parallel" forum organized by the International Helsinki Feder-

ation for Human Rights, which links human-rights monitoring groups in ten Western countries. They have invited Western writers like Susan Sontag, Amos Oz, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, and East (or Central!) European writers currently living in the West—the Czech Jiří Gruša, the Hungaro-Yugoslav Danilo Kiš—to come and discuss with their Hungarian colleagues, in a conference room at the Intercontinental Hotel, such modest themes as "Writers and Their Integrity" and "The Future of European Culture."

By the standard of previous Helsinki follow-up meetings, in Madrid, Stockholm, or Ottawa, this is to be a truly inoffensive fringe group: This is no exile organization planning to surround the Novotel with placards demanding "Freedom for Sakharov" or "Independence for the Baltic States." By Soviet standards, it is diabolical. Today, the diplomatic community vibrates to the echo of Czechoslovak and Soviet demands for the Hungarian government to ban it. So tomorrow the diplomatic niceties. Tomorrow the high-flown self-congratulatory Eurorhetoric. But today the struggle.

I ask a senior Hungarian official for his response. The Hungarian government is committed to protecting the personal security of delegates to the (official) forum, he says. Like Western governments, it is very concerned about the threat of terrorism. But can't they be fairly sure that, say, well-known Western writers are not terrorists? "Perhaps," he replies, "perhaps. But *what about the people who come with them?*" Aha.

Returning across the Danube, I find that the Intercontinental Hotel has cancelled the conference room booking. Another room booked in a different hotel has also been hastily withdrawn "because the windows are being repaired." (Some windows are indeed being repaired in this hotel, where I happen to be staying, but these windows are not in that room.) Next day, the Helsinki Federation organizers go to meet an official at the foreign ministry. A small group of us—journalists, participants, unofficial Hungarians—await their return in the near-deserted café of the Intercontinental.

Suddenly, the tables closest to us are occupied by burly, fat-faced men in sheeny jackets, with cheap Japanese watches and fists like

Prague hams. They sip mineral water. Their eyes avoid ours, but their ears rotate in our direction, like radar dishes. František Janouch, an exiled Czech human-rights activist who has just arrived from Stockholm, springs up and starts taking photographs. Our neighbors bury their faces in their hams.

I begin to feel quite at home. We could almost be in Warsaw, or even Prague. It is no surprise to learn later this afternoon of a statement given to the organizers at the foreign ministry, declaring that the unofficial symposium "could disturb the atmosphere and work" of the official forum, and finding it "incomprehensible why there is this private initiative." But incomprehensible to whom? The statement is unsigned.

So have we found the limit after all? At last, a real, palpable limit to Hungarian tolerance, something we can hit our heads against, like a wall, a mirror, or a hedge?

No, we haven't.

For this very evening we all assemble in the spacious flat of István Eörsi (he who demanded censorship), its windows giving a marvelous view of the Danube. Eörsi himself is in West Berlin—the invisible host defies the anonymous statement. Here speaker after speaker gets up on the sofa and says everything that may not be said in the official forum: György Konrád, Susan Sontag, Miklós Haraszti, the Transylvanian philosopher Gáspár Miklós Tamás, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, speaking on censorship, *samizdat*, the persecution of the Hungarians in Transylvania, Solidarity, Charter 77—you name it, we hear about it. And the Hungarian authorities do nothing. For the next two days we meet in another private apartment and discuss those modest themes—writers and their integrity, the future of European culture—very much as planned. Most of the leading figures of the Hungarian opposition are here—including the independent publisher György Krassó, who was under house arrest until a week ago. In practice, no one is prevented from coming.

This is a beautiful loft apartment, with heavy brown-stained wooden beams and large studio windows looking across to the Buda

hills, magical at twilight. The faded rugs, the Transylvanian pottery, the old glass-fronted bookcase (hallmark of Central Europe)—every detail speaks of an individual taste, of private and independent life. What a contrast to the antiseptic public interiors of the Novotel! As with the furniture, so with the speeches. There, the official Romanian delegate, after explaining that in his country "more than 14,000 cultural establishments are used by some 270 million people every year,"³ lauds the rich cultural freedom in which Romania's Hungarian and German minorities can "express themselves in their mother tongue." Here, we learn the true story of increasingly harsh discrimination and persecution: Hungarian-language teaching abolished; Hungarian book and magazine publishing reduced to a trickle; Hungarian priests beaten and even killed by the Romanian Securitate; the Hungarian poet Géza Szócs besieged in Koloszar (Cluj), interrogated almost every day, telephone cut off, manuscripts confiscated and destroyed—"The candle is running low," he writes to his friends in Hungary, "and this is my last candle."

There, at the official forum, the delegate from the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic proclaims—in Russian—the glories of a culture subordinated to the socialist state. Here, we listen to one of the many gifted Czech authors persecuted and expelled by that state. Here, too, we can read the answers of writers still in Prague to a questionnaire that asked them what that state—and the Budapest Cultural Forum—could do for their besieged culture. "It is as if you were to ask what a cow can do for the flowers in a meadow," writes Ludvík Vaculík. "There is a simple answer: It could stop eating them. But can a cow do that? No way! For that reason there is no point in inviting a cow to some conference, seminar, or symposium about meadow flowers. The cow will gladly come, just for show, but anything it might say there is worth . . . a cow-pat."⁴

³ The population of Romania is 22 million.

⁴ *A Besieged Culture: Czechoslovakia Ten Years After Helsinki*. Available from Charta 77 Foundation, Box 50041, S-10405 Stockholm, Sweden, and from the Helsinki Watch Committee, 36 West Forty-fourth Street, New York, NY 10036.

* * *

It is impossible to summarize our debates. Memorable things are said by some of the Western guests—Amos Oz on the writer as smoke detector; Alain Finkielkraut defining both Europe and culture in ten minutes, as only a French intellectual can; François Bondy in praise of old ideas; Hans Magnus Enzensberger in search of a new one—as well as some unmemorable cant of the “literature is freedom and freedom is literature” variety. But the real value lies in the East and Central European contribution. Here is Jiří Gruša, brilliantly skeptical about the writer as “tale salesman” in the West *and* about the writer as disillusioned prophet in the East; Danilo Kiš, with a scintillating anatomy of self-censorship; no Poles, alas (a great lack), but all the more Hungarians. If there is one central point that emerges, it is perhaps the unimaginable *complexity* of censorship and self-censorship—as György Konrád remarks, we need a new science: censorology.

Yet as the second afternoon wears on, I feel a slight unease creep up behind me. A local writer delivers a short spiel. The local audience laughs appreciatively. I wait eagerly for the translation. It comes out something like this: “Only the irrational is real, and Che Guevara, like Mohács, points to the ‘hope’ of hopelessness, which is itself the irrational hopelessness of reason.” Well, ho ho. But surely we are back in the kingdom of the Periphrastic? And then, all the Hungarians are being so damn polite to each other. I know from private conversations that many of them are, for example, strongly critical of some of Konrád’s larger and vaguer ideas. But do we hear this criticism here? We do not. Here it is all “my friend” this and “my friend” that. There is no unseemly controversy. This is the ultimate, the most understandable, and even morally defensible form of intellectual perversion: the *self-censorship of opposition*. And then of course we all know that the fact of this meeting’s taking place will be bruited around the world (and *sotto voce* by Hungarian officials) as further proof of the Hungarian government’s infinite cunning and “liberalism,” whatever happens to the opposition when the limelight has moved on.

No, we are not yet in the maze. But we, too, are somehow *of* the maze.

Comprehension Test

You should now be able to interpret the following scene.

After the symposium, György Konrád invites you to a small evening party at his apartment. When you arrive, you are surprised to find yourself sat down, rather solemnly, between Susan Sontag and Danilo Kiš, in a small circle in front of the leader of the populists, a writer called Sándor Csoóri, and a few of his associates. Konrád stands modestly aside, next to the tiled oven, and says, “I would like my friends to tell you about Transylvania.” This they, or rather he—the leader of the populists—proceeds to do at length, with some chilling stories of Romanian persecution, slowly, almost ceremoniously translated (for, as befits a true populist, the leader speaks only Hungarian) by a member of his court.

What is going on?

Notes

a) The competent student will answer that this scene reflects the common and mounting concern among Hungarian intellectuals about the worsening position of their compatriots in Transylvania. This answer is good as far as it goes. The more advanced student of intellectual politics will suggest that György Konrád, himself so very obviously from the cosmopolitan, urbanist, democratic tradition, is here making a demonstrative gesture of friendship—or at least, common-frontship—to the populists, in the spirit of Monor. The student who is both advanced and cynical may further inquire why the populists seem to be making common front with the opposition. Could it possibly be that by so doing they hope to pressure the authorities into giving them their own literary journal? The really outstanding

student, however, will conclude that if the author of this article had spent one more day in Budapest, met one more intellectual in one more café, he would probably have come up with yet another "true" or "real" reason, spied another distorted reflection in the mirrors, turned another corner in the maze.

b) Only one thing is certain: Nothing is certain. The hedges move daily. The Hungarian Party-state still has all the instruments it needs to punish the few outside the maze, if it wants to. There are no laws that curb its powers of censorship. There are, however, laws that could be used to gag writers, editors, and publishers—for example, the very elastic incitement paragraphs of the criminal code, as György Bence pointed out in an impressive paper prepared for the unofficial forum. During the official Budapest Cultural Forum, all has been sweetness and light—or almost all. But when you read this, the cultural forum will be drawing to a close, or already over. Will our hostess have suffered difficulties because she loaned her beautiful loft apartment for our meeting? We took no risk: She did. Will György Krassó be back under house arrest? An alert Western public opinion *can* make a difference in a state as careful of its Western reputation as Hungary is. It may even help ensure that the reputation is increasingly deserved. In other words, dear and patient reader: Their Country Needs You.

(December 1985)

EAST-WEST DIVAN

Prague

"Karel is out," she says. "You know, he works during the day. I mean, of course"—she blushes—"he does his real work at night." Work: bricklaying. Real work: writing. "You know, if you earn your living by writing, it's regarded as quite suspicious, and, well, almost unworthy."

Now, here is a room full of writers, few of whom do anything so . . . unworthy. They sit around, feet in slippers, drinking wine and swapping jokes about Chernobyl. They have just produced the best journal of new writing in Czechoslovakia. It took about twenty minutes.

This is how it's done. Once a month, they meet for a small "party" at somebody's flat. Instead of flowers or wine, the guests bring twenty copies of their latest text. (Most are carbon copies. It is a recognized fact that twelve is the largest number of legible copies achievable at one typing. Twelve is therefore the *samizdat* unit of reckoning—the writer's dozen.) The editorial meeting, then, has only one task: to decide the order of texts and type the contents page, also in twenty copies. This done, the texts are arranged in order in twenty blank cardboard folders, with the contents page on top, and—presto!—

you have the Czech *Granta*. For the purposes of literary criticism, it is a journal called *Contents*. For the purposes of police search or legal defense, it is a miscellaneous collection of typewritten papers in a blank folder. If students want to sit up half the night typing further copies, that is their own business. (They do.) If Czech exiles in the West want to reissue *Contents* in print (they do), how can the writers prevent them? And if people want to bring these printed copies to Prague, what on earth can the poor writers do?

Early evening. A cellar beneath a ponderous red-brick, nineteenth-century office building, now part of the ministry of culture. The cellar contains a grimy strip of carpet, two easy chairs (one with springs), an old office desk, a camp bed, a tin percolator, a typewriter, and a piano that looks as if it first saw service at the Café Evropa in 1896. On the walls, a newspaper portrait of Stalin surrounded by his adoring subjects, circa 1951, and a black wire silhouette of a girl, circa 1963, with breasts that can only be described as "proud." A dirty T-shirt hangs from one nipple. Through a small skylight I see the rain splashing off the cobbles on the street outside, but in here it is dry and very warm, thanks to the huge coal-fired boiler in the next room.

My host, courteously ushering me to the chair with springs, starts to discuss the philosophy of Hayek. At one point he says: "You know—but this is a *private* conversation, isn't it? You won't tell my friends?"

"No, of course not."

"Well, you know, I have to say that I myself don't entirely reject *all* elements of socialism."

When he left university, he knew there was no chance of pursuing an academic career in his subject and remaining honest. So he decided to become a stoker. It gives him time for his real work—philosophy. Income: small. Prospects: none. Spirit: unbroken.

"Now, would you like to hear my rags?" he asks after two hours' quiet argument. He sits down at the old piano and starts to pound out "The Entertainer." Then "Bohemia," "our national rag." I notice

how, against the white keys, his fingernails are broken and black from shoveling coal. He's not really a good player—wouldn't pass muster in any jazz club in New York City—but endless practice has brought him up to an impressive tempo and his playing, here, is somehow electrifying. It has a kind of defiant ferocity. I see the music leap out of the basement skylight, like an escaping genie, force its way up through the pouring rain, giving a two-finger salute to the ministry of culture as it passes, and then up, up, high above the sodden city, above the smoke from his boiler's chimney, above the rain clouds, the two fingers turn the other way now, proclaiming V for Victory.

When you've spent a few days in this world turned upside down, among the writers-turned-bricklayer or -window cleaner, between the philosopher-stoker and the poet-dustman, you inevitably start playing the If game. Philip Roth does it in his novella *The Prague Orgy*: "I imagine Styron washing glasses in a Penn Station barroom, Susan Sontag wrapping buns at a Broadway bakery, Gore Vidal bicycling salamis to school luncheons in Queens—I look at the filthy floor and see myself sweeping it." Anyone can play. Just insert your own favorite characters; end up with yourself. "Me? Oh, I'd be cleaning lavatories. Sure. I wouldn't last five minutes under a dictatorship. Fascist or communist, they'd never publish *me*." But what makes you so sure? Maybe they would, and maybe you (we, I) wouldn't. Maybe you (we, I) would still be (perish the thought) published writers. And then, what about all these official publishers and literary journals? Their former editors are all working as window cleaners, or in exile. But who edits them now? Somebody must. Window cleaners? It would be more fun if they did. But the answer is: writers, journalists, men of letters. Second- or third-rate, semilit-erate, and corrupt writers, to be sure, but are there none such in our own literary establishments?

Here's the other half of the If game, the half we leave out because it's not so pretty. It would be invidious to name names. Let's be invidious: "I imagine—editing the *New York Review of Books*,—

taking over at the *TLS*,—getting a rave review from—, and—being published after making his self-criticism on television." And why not "I look at this bookshop and see my books adorning its front window"?

What they all resent about Milan Kundera—and how!—is not, I think, his extraordinary success (perhaps that a little, too) but his stylized nightmare vision of a Prague from which, by definition, no good thing can come. No, they say, the Prague in which we live and work is *not* a "Biafra of the spirit"—the Aragon phrase that Kundera takes as his theme. One well-known writer (the gentlest of men) tells me Kundera has to justify to himself "the fact that he ran away" (but immediately adds, "No, these are not the right words—'ran away,' that's too strong"). And the self-justification, as for so many exiles, comes through depicting what you have left behind as hell—and painting how it was before as heaven. It wasn't heaven then. It isn't hell now.

I am determined to visit Václav Havel. It's not easy. He is staying at his remote farmhouse in northern Bohemia. It has no telephone. I am told the police will try to prevent my visit. I set off early in the morning in a hired car. After two hours' driving, as I pass through a small town, there are suddenly three police cars in front of me, lights flashing. I am guided onto the verge. *Damn!* Three cars seems a little excessive. And how on earth did they *know*? Then I notice that other cars are being waved down, too. This has nothing to do with me or Havel. We are all being stopped to make way for a bicycle race. I watch as gaggles of prune-faced youngsters come whizzing by. *A Tour de Bohème*. A banner in the window of the local toy shop says SOCIALISM—IS A CHILD'S SMILE.

Off again, winding up narrow lanes toward the Sudeten mountains, through the damp Bohemian pinewoods; turn a corner, there is the house—and there are the police: a Lada estate parked right across the drive, two uniformed officers, one in plain clothes. Their eyes follow me as I drive past, inwardly cursing. Fortunately, how-

ever, I have about me my W.I.T.S., one of those marvels of Western technology that will confound the secret police and undermine the whole Soviet bloc. Activating my W.I.T.S., I become invisible and rematerialize inside the inner courtyard of the farmhouse.

Havel is a short, stocky man with curly blond hair; his moustache and lower face remind me of a friendly walrus. He is dressed entirely in shades of damask—slippers, cord trousers, and a T-shirt that declares *TEMPTATION IS GREAT*. (His latest play is called *Temptation*.) He is warm, intense, a concentration of nervous energy. He tells me the police turned up yesterday evening and have been there ever since. "When this happens, it's usually because there is a Western visitor in Prague. Genscher or somebody." He has been listening to Radio Free Europe and the BBC, trying to discover who it might be.

He talks about the nervous strain of writing under these conditions, when at any moment the police might walk in and confiscate a year's work. How he has crept out into the woods at night and buried parts of his typescript in the bole of a tree. How as a manuscript piles up, he writes faster and faster: The fear of a house search concentrates the mind far more effectively than any publisher's deadline. Just yesterday he was writing about this nervous tension. Then his wife came in and said, "The police are outside again. I'm afraid they aren't our usual ones." And so he got nervous about writing about the nervous strain of writing when . . .

This is nothing compared with the conditions under which he had to write in prison. There, except for one letter a week to his wife—maximum four sides, and only about "personal matters," as the prison regulations specify—he was not allowed to write at all. The letters were his only opportunity to express himself as a writer, over a period of almost four years. If any part of a letter was unacceptable, the whole letter would be confiscated. The commandant of the prison camp at Hermanice took a sadistic delight in enforcing these instructions. This commandant was an old man, nearing retirement. His great days had been the 1950s, when he had more than a thousand political prisoners—bishops, professors, former government minis-

ters—on whom to exercise his will. Things had never been as good since—worst of all in 1968, a little better after the invasion. But now, at last, he had some famous political prisoners to bully and abuse again: educated men—a writer, a journalist, a philosopher. His particular delight was censoring the writer's letters.

Havel started writing a "cycle" of letters about his philosophical views. He mentioned the "order of being."

"The only order you can write about," declared the commandant, "is the prison order." Then he decided Havel should not write about philosophy at all. "Only about yourself."

So Havel designed another cycle of letters on the subject of his moods: sixteen of them, two to each letter, one good, one bad, and he numbered them.

After eight, the commandant called him in: "Stop numbering your moods!"

"No foreign words!" he ordered one week.

"No underlining!" the next. "No exclamation marks!"

The book written under these conditions—for Havel conceived the series of letters to his wife as a book—is marvelous.¹ Much of it consists of his philosophical reflections, and in Havel's conception these were perhaps the most important part of the book. Yet for me, and I suspect for most of his readers, they are actually the least compelling passages: partly because, since he was not allowed to keep copies of his earlier letters, there is a great deal of repetition and recapitulation; partly because in order to smuggle his *pensées* past the commandant, he had to write in a fearfully convoluted and elliptical way. Instead of writing "the regime," for example, he had to write something like "the social-collective manifestation of the not-I." Havel laughingly tells me that when he rereads some of his deepest passages today, he hardly knows what he is talking about.

What makes this book so compelling is the incidental detail of prison life—the elaborate rituals that surround the drinking of tea, toasting the New Year in with a foaming glass of soluble aspirin—

¹ Now published in English as *Letters to Olga* (New York: Knopf, 1988)

and the intense personal detail of his relationship with his wife: As a present, he makes her a piece of jewelry out of dried bread . . . "I have tried to give it a touch of *Jugendstil*," writes Havel.

Above all, the book is a self-portrait of the writer. There is Havel setting himself tasks for his four years in prison: ". . . Three. To write at least four plays. Four. To improve my English. Five. To learn German at least as well as I currently know English. Six. To study all of the Bible thoroughly . . ." There is Havel fretting about his health, fretting about old friends outside. And sounding through it all, again and again, there is his overmastering determination to remain a *writer*, though he has only four pages a week and each word he chooses can endanger the whole work. "Last week's letter did not come off," he writes—meaning it was confiscated.

Early in his imprisonment, in 1979, Havel writes several times about a "Faust" play that he was mentally reworking. This is the piece that, seven years later, has its premiere in Vienna under the title *Temptation*. As with most of his plays, he has never seen it performed. He reads the reviews. Friends telephone from Vienna. And during rehearsals the actors call him with questions that show they have not *exactly* understood the piece. In this case, they ring up a few days before opening and ask, "Oh, by the way, is there really black magic in Czechoslovakia?" Yet this is what he regards as his real work: writing plays. His political activity, his essays, his letters from prison, his role as a moral and political authority for thousands of Czechs and Slovaks (and by no means only those actively engaged in opposition)—an authority that no writer in the West enjoys—all that is secondary.

Since, unlike Havel, I can travel to Vienna, I go to see *Temptation*. His fears about the limited understanding of the Viennese company are justified. The director of the academic institute in which Havel's Dr. Faustka works, a deeply corrupt Party placeman, is played as if he were the manager of a department store in the Kärntnerstrasse. And yet, and yet . . . however much I make allowances for the Viennese factor, I still cannot avoid a deeper disappointment. The play, even as Havel has written it, is weak. And it is weak, it seems

to me, for reasons directly related to his situation. For a start, the dramaturgy and the visual effects envisaged in his very detailed stage directions are stilted, and if not stilted, dated—all stroboscopes and smoke, circa 1966. Not surprising if you consider that he has been unable to work in a theater for eighteen years. The dénouement is desperately predictable, and predictably political: The Mephisto figure (called *Fistula*) turns out to be working for the secret police. Despite some grimly amusing dialogue, which survives even the Viennese production, most of the action is so carefully plotted, and so obviously pointed, as to be quite schematic. It feels like a plan for a play rather than the play itself. Not surprising, again, when you consider that it was planned and replanned through almost four years in prison.

So what of George Steiner's "muse of censorship?" Here is a rather clear case, it seems to me, of an artist's work not enhanced but deformed and diminished by censorship and persecution. If he were a poet, it might be otherwise. But the playwright needs his theater as a musician needs his instrument. Not merely the artist but the art has suffered. Yet at the same time, through that persecution and that censorship, or rather through his defiance of it, he has produced a volume of letters and a body of essays that will, I think, be read long after *Temptation* is forgotten. And what will then be known as his real work?

Paris

So here she comes, the fat whore, the tart, the harpy, flaunting her fancy clothes and wagging her bum. She has money. She has motor cars. She has sex. She has democracy. But she's lost her soul. She's deaf. She's blind. She doesn't know what she's got or how she's about to lose it. "The West"? Mac West.

Today [writes Kazimierz Brandys in his *Warsaw Diary*], the West is emitting cries of horror; the intellectuals are grumbling;

the consciousness of impotence is everywhere. They know already and are preparing themselves to be raped. All that matters now is that the rape not be a sexual murder but that it happen calmly, in some comfortable French bed. What should this upcoming state of affairs be called? Finlandization? Scandinavization? . . . But what if it's Czechoslovakization? In these preparations the French are, as always, in the intellectual vanguard. No one is able to spread their legs as aesthetically, to lie down for the act with such *esprit*, as the French intellectuals. An old suspicion of mine: How much money flows from the Soviet embassy to editorial offices in Paris?

Ah, there he blows: the Eastern prophet, the sage, the seer, righteous eyes ablaze, arms raised to high heaven as he denounces the whores of the rue de Babylone.

"You see, it's really very simple," says Sławomir Mrożek, looking out from his tranquil studio flat toward the Eiffel Tower. "You are a Pole, an intellectual. You think of yourself as supremely Western and European: If only Poland were free, it would be a Western country; if only it were Western, everything would be all right. Meanwhile, European values are preserved in the West, to which you, unlike the Russians, indubitably belong. Then you come to the West, and the West knows you not. So after a time you get up on your hillock and rage, rage against the blindness of the West. Inwardly, you cry: 'You may have your motor cars, your television, your bestsellers. But you have lost your soul. Your *soul*. If you only knew how great, how profound, how truly European I was, you would print me in a million copies. Since you don't, you will be eaten by the Russians.'"

Part of this misunderstanding arises from what Mrożek calls the "old-fashioned" idea of the moral value of culture and the role of the writer, which still persists in Prague or Warsaw. Eastern Europe, says Mrożek, is a very old-fashioned place, both materially (look at the trams) and socially (respect for the old, religion). This is just one more old-fashioned thing about it.

In the West, there are no more *Dichter*. No writer is regarded as a moral or spiritual leader, as Havel is in Czechoslovakia, or as Miłosz and Herbert are in Poland. Quite a familiar remark, this. It also comes as a question: Who was the last great intellectual authority in Western Europe? And the answer most often given—Kundera's answer, in his essay on "The Kidnapped West"—is . . . Jean-Paul Sartre. Sartre, a moral authority! The author of *Les Mains Sales*. Yes, all right, he changed his mind. But when I was talking to Ivan Klíma in Prague about Western intellectuals' fatuous envy of the persecuted (*Verfolgungsneid*), Klíma exclaimed. "You know, the man responsible for all this nonsense is Sartre." Sartre, he said, had come to Prague in the early sixties, looked around for a day or two, and then given a speech to Czech writers in which he told them how fortunate they were. "You have real subjects," he said. "We in the West no longer have any real subjects"—and so on. Sartre!

Anyway, Mrożek continues, literature in the West has become just another "line of business" (he uses the Polish word *branża*), alongside television, films, video, and windsurfing. A line of business where public relations and promotion are more important than the product itself—"The book of the film"; "Now a Major TV Series"; "Winner of the—Prize."

"I don't regret this," says Mrożek. "I don't like it; I don't dislike it: It's just the way the world has moved on." (Modernity has its advantages: As we talk, the phone rings and he stands up to listen in to the caller speaking to his answering machine; sometimes, he picks up; most often, he just turns down the volume.) But as Mrożek talks on in his dry, sardonic way, it's obvious that he does regret it. He speaks about the television discussion program, with its basic assumption that there are two sides to every question, as the characteristic intellectual form of our time. On my left the murderer, on my right the victim. Two points of view—and of course the murderer is often more *interesting*. Orwell, he says—"Or-vell"—was one of the few people to refute this fallacy. Orwell understood that there are some things that are not open to discussion: Some questions have

only one side. An East European, says Mrozek, knows this from personal experience. Orwell's achievement was to understand it without that experience.

Mrozek's own situation is almost a reverse image of Havel's. Havel is deprived of theatrical experience—can never see his plays rehearsed or performed—but he still has what might be called *vernacular* experience: He lives in his own language. Mrozek has the theatrical experience but not the vernacular. He has lived abroad since 1963, in France since 1968. He can see his plays rehearsed and performed in English, French, German, Italian. But the Polish language of the street—changing slang, politics, contemporary allusions: all the essential stuff of most recent Polish prose—this he can absorb only at second or third hand. When his play *Ambassador* was (exceptionally) performed in Warsaw in the autumn of 1981, shortly before General Jaruzelski imposed martial law, the audience loudly applauded a scene in which the ambassador sits shivering beside a primitive coal stove. The Warsaw audience knew a political allusion when it saw one: Who could not think of the bitter winter ahead, the shortage of heating fuel, for which Solidarity blamed the government, and the government, Solidarity? Were not they, like the ambassador, besieged by a foreign power? Except that Mrozek had never intended any allusion. Sitting in Paris, he had not thought what the Warsaw audience would think.

Yet there are striking similarities between a Havel play and a Mrozek play. Both favor settings that have a Kafka-like nonspecificity: neither Eastern nor Western, not Prague, not Paris. Both cleave to the theme of the individual seeking to defend himself—by heroism, by compromise, or by humor—against the chicanery of impersonal powers. Both are fiercely intellectual: If you do not respond to the ideological argument in the dialogue, you have missed half the point. (As did the Viennese audience for Havel's *Temptation*. As did the audience for Mrozek's *Ambassador* when I saw it in West Berlin. Shift this theater just a couple of miles to the East, I thought, across the Wall into East Berlin, and the play would be understood.) Yet it would be a foolish critic who attributed all these shared qualities to

the common East European background. Another, equally cogent explanation comes in two words: Samuel Beckett.

The exile's dwelling. Two tiny bare rooms up a narrow uncarpeted staircase. A broom closet of a kitchen. Stools for chairs. A camp bed. And then the real essentials: cigarettes, tea, a telephone with a long flex, and books, books, books. Books to prop up the table, book to keep out the cold, books for food, books for drink, books for clothing.

Natalya Gorbanevskaya, whose dwelling I describe, is an extraordinary person. If you sat opposite her on the métro, you would probably take her for a student at the Sorbonne: a small, girlish figure in jeans and a chunky sweater, tousled hair, large spectacles pulling at her cigarette with an air of distracted intensity. At second glance you might notice some hard-etched lines around the mouth and eyes, but you would never, never guess that she is in fact a fifty-year-old Russian poet, let alone that she spent the years 1969 to 1972 in a prison psychiatric hospital in Karzan, being treated for what Soviet psychiatry charmingly calls "sluggish schizophrenia"—which is to say, being persecuted for her courage in political opposition. To enter a conversation with Natalya Gorbanevskaya is to feel yourself being seized by the hand and pulled helter-skelter down a steep, heavily wooded hillside—watch out for the Sinyavsky! jump over the Zinoviev!—screaming with a mixture of excitement and alarm, until you arrive, breathless but laughing, at a lake called Solzhenitsyn.

As we perch on our stools, eating the interesting omelette Natalya has volubly prepared in that tiny kitchen—cracking Kundera with one egg, tossing Brandys with the next—her running commentary rapidly moves on to familiar ground. The trouble with Kundera is that he excludes Russia from his definition of European culture. The trouble with Zinoviev is that he reinforces the false Western identification of the Soviet Union with Russia—which was in fact the Soviets' first victim. Zinoviev simply has no idea about the immortal soul . . . and she talks, very movingly, about the unbroken courage

and decency of some of the women she met in prison, about the faith of persecuted Christians, not only the Orthodox, but the Baptists and the evangelical sects as well.

I ask what was the greatest shock of her arrival in the West (she left Russia in 1975, and has lived in Paris ever since). Natalya's answer is quite surprising: "You know, one of the few things I really looked forward to in coming to the West was having the opportunity to join in a real, authentic Orthodox mass." If Mrożek's cartoon-Pole hoped to find those true European values preserved in the West, she looked forward to finding the true spirit of Russian Orthodoxy, the exaltation and the mystery, preserved in the free world. But she too was bitterly disappointed. She found that Orthodox services here had become social rites: People came less to worship than to meet each other, to see and be seen.

In Paris, Natalya is now deputy editor of *Kontinent*, the Russian literary and political review with which Solzhenitsyn is most closely identified, and her views on the West also have that prophetic ring: "It's such an effort for the West to begin to understand. And it's so important: We may have so little time." A French journalist of her acquaintance recently returned from Afghanistan, and he was so shocked to see what the Western press was writing about: Nicaragua. Nicaragua? "Yes, that is the last battle, as it says in the 'Internationale': the last battle against the evil empire." People here just don't understand, she says, that this "metaphysical evil" is spreading across the world: now in Afghanistan, now in Nicaragua. Yet the picture she draws in conversation is neither so solemn nor so starkly black-and-white as these lines in cold print might suggest.

Doesn't Solzhenitsyn, well, *exaggerate* a little? I ask. And what about his idealization of tsarist Russia? But of course he exaggerates! He has to, after sixty years during which the Russian people have been relentlessly drilled into believing the opposite; has to, if he's to make any impact at all. As for the West, the longer Natalya has been here, the more differentiated her picture has become. Even the French left has improved greatly in the last few years. They are quite stalwart, principled, and outspoken when they are in opposition. But

when they come to power, it's a different story. Look at the French socialists. When they came into office, they granted French citizenship to the exiled Leonid Plyusch, another victim of Soviet "psychiatry"—and immediately stopped listening to what he had to say.

For Natalya, too, the one great exception among Westerners is Orwell. The East European knows some truths instinctively, she says, echoing Mrożek. He is born to them—"like the aristocracy!" An aristocracy of suffering. By comparison Westerners are, well, plebeians. "But the plebeian who has become an aristocrat through his own exertions is the most admirable of all." Thus are rewarded all the Old Etonian Blair's exertions to become a true plebeian—with a Russian patent of nobility.

My lasting impression of Natalya Gorbanevskaya is of a great warmth, a warmth that seems to insulate me even against the bitter January wind howling down the Avenue Gay Lussac as I walked back to the métro. Here is a spirit permanently living at combustion point: exploding now into laughter, now into sympathy, now into anger—but if anger, then always, to adapt Orwell's remark about Dickens, *generous* anger.

Party time. A farewell party for Seweryn Blumsztajn, a veteran from the Polish class of '68 and one of the Solidarity figures best known in the West, who has now decided to return to Poland. An expansive, grand old apartment belonging to an expansive, grand old lady—an Ottoline Morrell of the Russian emigration. Parquet floors, high rooms, tables overflowing with *kanapki*, vodka and wine, Polish and Russian intellectuals mixing as they never could in Warsaw or Moscow. Who's that scintillating in the far corner? Why, of course—Pani Natalya! And scintillating in this corner is the editor of *Aneks*. And there's the editor of *Zeszyty Literackie*, also scintillating. And the editor of *Kontakt*. And someone from *Kultura*. And someone from *Arka*. There must be more editors per square yard in this apartment than there are lawyers in Lincoln's Inn. Plus all the accompanying feuds, rivalries, scandals, and affairs, all raised to boiling point by the pressures of exile.

For the first hour you might possibly recognize this as a literary party, as held in London or New York (or indeed Paris): the factional groups, the gossiping, this reviewer making up to that editor, more gossip, that editor making up to this author's wife, more gossip—except that here the volume, temperature, and gestic range are already several points higher. But two hours later you couldn't possibly. For by now everyone is crowded into one room, and *singing*. The exiled *chansonnier* Jacek Kaczmarski has given an impromptu concert: sharp, contemporary political ballads sung in an angry, rough-edged voice, to his own accompaniment on the guitar—the nearest we get to this in England is a stage performance of Brecht-Weill songs, and it's not very near. Now Sewek Blumsztajn himself is sitting in the middle of the room singing, in quick succession and apparently with equal delight, a Stalinist youth-movement song, violently anti-Church, and then the old religious-patriotic hymn "Rota":

We shall not yield our forebears' land
Nor see our language muted
Poles we are, our nation Polish
By Piasts constituted.

A few, a very few, former comrades join in the first; everyone joins in the second.

Now, play the If game. Imagine, just try to imagine, that at a certain point in your London literary party everyone stops standing around getting quietly drunk in little groups talking about the decline of the *TLS*, forgets about their own private interests, schemes, feuds, and resentments. Instead, all crowd into one room, sitting on the floor, the piano, each other, anywhere, and start singing, very loudly:

Lilli bullero, lilli bullero bullen a la,
Lero lero, lilli bullero, lero lero bullen a la,
Lero lero, lilli bullero, lero lero bullen a la.

The filmmaker Agnieszka Holland tells me that I must interview Blumsztajn about why he's returning to Poland, while she films us. I don't want to interview Blumsztajn. I want to go on enjoying this party. I hate doing interviews with a microphone to put people on their guard. I'm drunk, I have a stinking cold and a fever, and everybody in this room speaks better Polish than me. Why doesn't somebody else do it? No, she says, everyone else knows Sewek too well. They couldn't put the necessary, brutal, uncomprehending questions. That's what journalists are for. Anyway, this film will be used to help win support in the West if, as seems probable, he is arrested and imprisoned on his return to Warsaw.

Impossible to resist the moral half-nelson. So here I am, at two o'clock in the morning, sitting amid the broken glass in the glare of the film lights, with a head like a battered pumpkin, and asking feebly: "Why are you returning to Poland?"

"Well," says Blumsztajn, "I am opposed to emigration." All the crucial developments in Poland since the war have come from *inside* the country. It's still true today. That's why he feels he can be more useful there. And so on, in a well-rehearsed argument. I don't challenge it. I haven't the heart, let alone the head, to challenge it.

But the filmmaker does. This is nonsense, she says. He can be more use here than he can there. And why is he leaving his wife behind? Isn't it simply that he puts being with his friends before his work and his family?

And she said they couldn't ask the brutal questions.

After a bit more of this I begin to feel like an umpire trying to separate two boxers, and taking all the punches to the head. By the end of round three the truth is plain, and indeed admitted with a sad smile. The guy's going back because he thinks he'll be happier there than here.

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.

(August 1986)

THE PRAGUE ADVERTISEMENT

This essay is a contribution to the permanent symposium Czechoslovakia 88.

Symposium

"How will you mark the anniversary?" I asked Václav Havel earlier this year. No need to say which anniversary.

"We shall hold a symposium," he said. It would discuss the significance, not just of the Prague Spring and the Soviet invasion, but of all those "years of eight" which have been turning points for Czechoslovakia and the whole of Europe in the twentieth century: 1918, 1938, 1948, 1968. Interested Western scholars, intellectuals, and writers would be cordially invited. Perhaps I would be kind enough to prepare a paper? They would try to hold the meeting quite openly. They would inform the authorities.

In early November, a few days before the date of the planned meeting, Havel himself went to the prime minister's office and explained the project to an official deputed to receive him. This man said neither yes nor no. But actions speak louder than words. On

November 10, as we, the Western guests, began to assemble in Prague, virtually all our Czechoslovak hosts—scholars and members of the country's main independent groups—were locked up or placed under house arrest. Havel was in hiding.

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A lady with a red flower would meet us at breakfast, we were told. She would lead us to the meeting place. So there we sat, on Friday, November 11, in the faded *Jugendstil* splendor of the Hotel Paříž, a score of academics, writers, human rights activists, and parliamentarians from Western Europe and the United States, waiting for the lady. Several prominent Western guests, including Marion Gräfin Dönhoff of *Die Zeit* and the eminent dean of Copenhagen University, Ove Nathan, had been refused visas on the grounds that the gathering was "illegal"—although by what law the Czechoslovak representatives could not say. Our hosts were in prison. Plainclothes police swarmed around the hotel. I anticipated arrest, expulsion.

Then in through the glass doors came not a lady with a red flower, nor yet a policeman with handcuffs, but . . . Václav Havel. He walked quickly to our table, sat down, and formally declared the meeting open. Within seconds, three plainclothesmen were behind him. "Well, in this moment I am arrested," said Havel. But before they hurried him away he managed to repeat, with quiet emphasis, that he had declared the symposium open.

Sally Laird of *Index on Censorship* photographed the scene. More secret police moved in to confiscate her film. As we argued with them we noticed a large, muscular woman in a tight-fitting leather jacket sitting in the foyer, with not just one flower but a whole bouquet. She moved toward us and theatrically distributed unmarked envelopes. Inside, we found the most extraordinary poison-pen letter it has ever been my privilege to receive. Typed and photocopied, with the text in English, German, French, and Italian, it read as follows:

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I am warning you that the action called symposium CZECHOSLOVAKIA 88 is illegal and its performance would be contrary to the interests of Czechoslovak working people and consequently illegal. In this connection your efforts to take part in this action would be considered as a manifestation of hostility to Czechoslovakia and in virtue of this we should have to draw relevant consequences against your person.

"I am warning you . . ." but the document was unsigned. Kafka! thou shouldst be living at this hour.

Someone asked the lady with the bouquet to identify herself. She said she ensured order in the hotel. In subsequent conversation we tentatively identified her as a secret-police officer who had watched over the Havel family, presenting herself as "Lieutenant Novotná," which is to say something like "Lieutenant Smith." Briefly detained in a police car the next day, three of us were again handed a crumpled copy of this fantastical "Advertisement" (the German text, incidentally, was headed *Achtung*) by another plainclothesman. We asked him whence it came. From the City Council of Prague, he said. But, we insisted, who is this mysterious "I"? He pointed to himself, adding helpfully, "Police!," as if, sitting in a police car, we might not have realized.

By this time we were visiting such few of the Czech and Slovak symposium participants as were still at home—usually under house arrest—and the families of those in prison. Earlier we had attempted to reconvene the meeting in a private flat, as had been done successfully in the case of the independent cultural symposium in Budapest in 1985.¹ But here, police in front of the door had simply prevented any Czechs from getting in.

We had drafted a strong statement of protest against this "blatant violation of the Helsinki Final Act," a statement sent directly to all the delegations at the Vienna Helsinki review conference, but which

¹ See "A Hungarian Lesson," above p. 143.

also came back within hours to most of Czechoslovakia, via the BBC, Radio Free Europe, and the Voice of America. We had briefed our ambassadors. We had laid flowers on the grave of the philosopher and founding father of Charter 77, Jan Patočka. Among our group was Max van der Stoep, who, as Dutch foreign minister in 1977, had been the first visiting Western politician to meet with Patočka in his capacity as leader of the human rights movement. Following that meeting, Patočka had been hauled in for eleven hours of interrogation, at the end of which he collapsed and died. Now, on his first visit to Prague since that time, Van der Stoep spoke movingly at Patočka's grave. Patočka is dead, he said, but we all know that his spirit, and the spirit of freedom, live on in Czechoslovakia. The ceremony was filmed by an independent video team.

Then we had marched up to the headquarters of the Central Committee and delivered a letter of protest addressed to the Party leader, Miloš Jakeš. A clever-looking official at the door assured us—in fluent Russian—that he would pass the letter on to "Comrade Jakeš," but regretted that there was no one to receive us on a Saturday. And who was he? What was his name and position? "I just work here," he replied, *glasnost* glinting from his glasses. Two photographers took pictures of us from across the parking lot. Then we marched down to the main secret-police office in the Old Town, demanding to know why and where our hosts were imprisoned. Once again, the officer at the door explained that no one was working on the weekend—at which point a man in plain clothes pushed through our group to enter the building, somewhat undermining the general contention.

Now, as we paid our individual visits, I was interested to observe the surveillance techniques of the police. Perhaps naïvely, I had not realized before how they use nicely dressed young couples, boy and girl walking arm in arm. And then I was glad to note that they, at least, have no shortage of hard currency. Three of us alone, myself and the Parisian scholars Pierre Hassner and Aleksander Smolar, were honored with the attentions of at least two foreign cars, a blue Ford Sierra and a red Fiat Uno. Spying the latter after one of our

calls, and feeling tired and hungry, we thought to ask our narks for a lift home ("home" in this case being, aptly enough, the Hotel Jalta). As we walked toward the car, the driver started the engine and pulled slowly away. We pursued them down the road.

Amusing for us—but no joke for our Czech friends sitting in prison. In theory, the Czechoslovak authorities' handling of this "action" was relatively sophisticated. Earlier this year they received harsh criticism in the Western press, and a drubbing at the Vienna review conference, for breaking up an East-West peace seminar, and expelling all the foreign participants. Now they would allow the foreigners to stay, but lock up all the Czechs—initially for forty-eight hours and then, in some cases, immediately again for part of another forty-eight-hour period (thus abandoning all but the barest shreds of legality). We, meanwhile, would be allowed to go where we pleased. We would have what the Germans call *Narrenfreiheit*, jester's freedom. All doors would be opened to us, and the police would politely usher us into empty rooms. Better still, we would bring suffering to the innocent. For if we were foolish enough to visit anyone not already well known to the police, those people would surely feel the "consequences" with which we were merely threatened.

In practice, this exercise in damage limitation did not go quite as planned: because of Havel's *coup de théâtre*; because of the black comedy of "Lieutenant Novotná"; because we made our own protest dramatically, *urbi et orbi*; and because West German television managed to film Havel's arrest through the window of the restaurant, and to get the film out. It was shown on the television news in several Western countries. People in Slovakia saw it on Austrian television. At the Vienna review conference, Western ambassadors lined up to deplore the Czechoslovak authorities' action.

It was, indeed, a prime-time "advertisement" for the present regime in Prague.

Commentary

On Monday, November 14, the following commentary, signed "Václav Dolezal," appeared on page 2 of *Rudé Právo*, the central organ of the Czechoslovak Communist party:

ATTEMPT AT PROVOCATION

Fourteen days after the provocative demonstration of anti-socialist forces [i.e., the unofficial Independence Day demonstrations on October 28; see below] the same group of people attempted another form of provocation. It took advantage of cooperation with organizations for psychological warfare of the North Atlantic Pact. Western broadcasting stations took an active part too. What was up?

In the past weekend days, the so-called Charter 77 wanted to organize a "symposium" called Czechoslovakia 88 in Prague. According to the foreign press, some twenty persons representing various official and unofficial Western structures, many of which take extreme anti-Czechoslovak positions, were to come to participate in the action, under the cloak of tourism.

The interest of these "also-tourists" was not devoted to inspecting the cultural glories of our capital, but rather to encouraging the so-called dissidents to develop even more anti-socialist activity. They failed to achieve this goal. They wanted to use materials prepared beforehand to discredit our social system and to blacken our homeland in the countries of our neighbors. According to the foreign press, these materials, often glorifying the pre-1938 political structures, describe our previous political positions from subjectivist positions and sometimes antagonistically. A series of organizers of this provocation have been detained.

A similar action with the same political intentions was organized by émigré and other centers in Vienna on Sunday. The intention behind both the mentioned actions was a single aim: to defame the efforts of our Party and society for reconstruction, but also to complicate the Vienna meeting [i.e., of the CSCE] and, at variance with the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, to interfere in the internal affairs of the CSSR and to infringe Czechoslovak sovereignty.

I fear my translation does scant justice to the full semantic absurdity of the original. As I read it, I remembered the lines that Auden wrote following the Soviet invasion twenty years ago:

The Ogre does what ogres can,
Deeds quite impossible for Man,
But one prize is beyond his reach,
The Ogre cannot master Speech.
About a subjugated plain,
Among its desperate and slain,
The Ogre stalks with hands on hips,
While drivel gushes from his lips.

But the ogre that Auden had in mind was the Soviet Union, and that ogre is changing. He has begun to master speech. So in Prague his dwarfs are left bewildered, lost. The drivel still gushes, or dribbles, from their lips. But it lacks even the force of consistent absurdity. The materials for our symposium "glorified the pre-1938 political structures," splutter the dwarfs, who dare not even sign their own names. Yet they themselves are now making obeisance to the great architect of those "structures," Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, in an attempt to gain some patriotic legitimacy. And the people laugh at them in the streets.

I asked the receptionist in a hotel for a copy of *Rudé Právo*. "Why on earth do you want to read that?" she said. I explained that I had heard there was this commentary about our symposium. "Oh, I must read it," she cried, but when she reached the sentence about "organizations for psychological warfare of the North Atlantic Pact" she could go no further. She was just doubled up laughing.

The Permanent Symposium

On Sunday most of the Western participants departed to Vienna, for the "parallel" symposium organized by a formidable company of

exiled Czech and Slovak intellectuals, and for a widely reported press conference arranged by the International Helsinki Federation. On Monday virtually all our hosts were out of prison, although some of them had to walk several miles home after being released in the early hours when there was no transport of any kind. They swapped tales about their latest prison experiences. How the ordinary prison guards were angry with the secret police for disturbing their settled routines. How the interrogations were perfunctory and absurd.

Havel himself had at one point been interviewed by our charming "Lieutenant Novotná." She marched in and announced, "I have come to debrief you." I suggested to him that after the liberation she should really be sent to work in the theater, what with her looks and her proven aptitude for the theater of the absurd. He said he might write her a part in one of his plays.

Havel and the others were of course exhausted by their days in prison. But they were also buoyed up by the international support. They were moved by news of the ceremony at Patočka's grave, encouraged by the protests they heard via Western radio stations, and delighted with the way in which we had interpreted Havel's opening words. We had understood this as an invitation to continue the meeting as best we could. I think it was Pierre Hassner who first observed that since Havel had formally opened the meeting, it could not end until he formally closed it.

The meeting thus continues. It has become a permanent symposium. As I left, Havel asked that those who write something relevant to the theme should, wherever it appears, mark it as "a contribution to the permanent symposium Czechoslovakia 88." Until, of course, we can all gather again in Prague, to close the meeting.

Czechoslovakia 88

What does this tragicomedy tell us about the subject of our aborted discussion, Czechoslovakia 88? It tells us, obviously, that the present regime in Czechoslovakia is still going backward where Hungary,

Poland, and, most important, the Soviet Union are going forward—although not uniformly so. Indeed, after the removal in October of Lubomir Štrougal as prime minister, the present government looks more reactionary than ever. As one Czech historian commented to me, between interrogations, it is a bitter irony that in 1988, in the age of Gorbachev, they have finally achieved the government that Brezhnev hoped for twenty years ago, after the invasion. Yet this is a Brezhnevite government without Brezhnev, a regime whose time has gone.

For this episode also tells us that the regime that has imposed the grotesque abnormality of "normalization" in Czechoslovakia for two decades is now profoundly unsettled, confused, and wavering. It is unsettled from the East, for if Gorbachev is behaving like Dubček, and Poland and Hungary almost like free countries, then how on earth do they justify their continued immobility? By reference to the great socialist model of the German Democratic Republic? Or perhaps Bulgaria? It was interesting to note that both the Polish and the Hungarian press reported Dubček's speech in Bologna on November 13 reaffirming the continued relevance of the Prague Spring. There have been signs that senior Gorbachev advisers, at least, can barely restrain their desire to reassess the Prague Spring in the direction of Dubček's plea. Gorbachev's close political ally Aleksandr Yakovlev was in Prague the day after our meeting, and *Rudé Právo* carried a front-page photograph of him looking pensive between the beaming figures of Jakeš, Vasil Bil'ak, the veteran reactionary, and their ideological watchman, Jan Fojtik. It might have been captioned: "*Que diable allait-il faire dans cette galère?*"

Secondly, the regime is unsettled from below—by the new flowering of independent initiative and civil courage inside Czechoslovakia. This is of course partly inspired by the impact of Gorbachev, the examples of neighboring Hungary and Poland, and the new East-West détente. But it is also the result of internal processes of political and economic decay, on the one hand, and intellectual and social emancipation on the other. The political leadership is now of Brezhnevite biological antiquity, while, on the other side, a new generation

is thrusting forward, a generation impatient with the compromises and evasions of their parents. I heard of one girl who took part in the largely spontaneous demonstration in Wenceslaus Square on Independence Day, October 28. On August 21, 1968, she had confronted the Soviet tanks in the same square—as a three-week-old baby in a pram.

The authorities now face opposition and protest not merely from the old front line of Charter 77, not only from intellectual *samizdat*, but from thousands of young people who have found the courage to speak out, and from the no less than six hundred thousand people who have now signed the petition for religious freedom initiated by a simple Moravian farmer earlier this year. On the twentieth anniversary of the Soviet invasion, thousands of young people demonstrated in the center of Prague, chanting "Dubček!" and "Freedom!"

Then, in mid-October, the authorities suddenly found themselves confronted with a serious, explicitly political opposition platform: the manifesto of a Movement for Civil Liberties, entitled "Democracy for All." Although many of the first signers of the manifesto are Chartists, it differs fundamentally from the original Charter 77 program by attempting to spell out a concrete program for systemic, political change. This program goes far beyond that "socialism with a human face" which Dubček nostalgically recalled in his Bologna speech. Dubček summoned Machiavelli and Gramsci as his intellectual ancestors. But the patron saints of this manifesto are rather Montesquieu and Keynes. It is a somewhat baggy document, as you would expect from a coalition of independent persons and groups with widely differing political views. But the central common ground is plainly stated: liberal democracy, the rule of law, a mixed economy.

Then, in another attempt to gain some patriotic credibility, the authorities suddenly declared that the seventieth anniversary of Czechoslovakia's independence on October 28, 1918, could be celebrated as a national holiday. (Canny shopkeepers hedged their bets by putting in their windows the slogan "Long live October!"—which could refer either to Russia's revolution in 1917 or to Czechoslovakia's independence in 1918. Only a few risked putting out a picture

of Masaryk.) Then the authorities locked up virtually all the front-line opposition leaders, to ensure that there would be no genuinely patriotic manifestation. Yet that is what they got nonetheless, with a largely spontaneous and mainly young crowd, again chanting "freedom," and being pursued down the narrow streets by rather ineffectual water-cannon.

The new interior minister, František Kincl, is a professional policeman, and police tactics have toughened. The roundups of oppositionists in connection with October 28, and again in connection with this symposium, are the worst in years. As I write, many people have been, or are about to be, hauled in for interrogation about the "Democracy for All" manifesto. An attempt is clearly being made to deter others from joining them. Worst of all, the prime mover of the petition for religious freedom, Augustin Navrátil, has been confined to a mental hospital with a diagnosis of "paranoia querulans"—and this at a time when even the Soviet Union seems to be desisting from the abuse of psychiatry for political purposes.

Yet at the same time the regime is making halfhearted gestures of reform and relaxation. Extraordinarily frank accounts of the country's economic stagnation have appeared in the official press. The Slovak Minister of Culture had an article in *Rudé Právo* saying that it was an unhealthy condition for there to be two cultures in the country, and they should seriously consider what were the reasons behind the emergence of Charter 77. Official theater groups can take slightly more license. Confronted with the formation of an independent Helsinki group, and anticipating another unofficial demonstration on Human Rights Day, December 10, the authorities have proposed the formation of an official human rights committee on the same date.

As Tocqueville taught us long ago, this inconsistency, this wavering between increased repression and half-baked reform, is characteristic of an *ancien régime* in its last years. How long the twilight period will last, and how the transition will come about—whether fast or slowly, peacefully or less so—is of course very hard to say.

It is rumored that younger men such as the Prague Party secretary, Miroslav Štepan, will shortly step up into more prominent positions. They too have had a part, albeit a junior one, in the grimy business of "normalization." By most accounts, Štepan's political generation is composed largely of opportunists, careerists, and cynics. But this is not necessarily a disqualification. In Hungary, Károly Grósz and his contemporaries are hardly the world's purest idealists. Yet they are making what are, with all due caveats, really striking attempts at political and economic reform, out of insight into necessity. One man's cynic may be another man's realist. Nor is it entirely clear that what Czechoslovakia needs above all at this moment is another decent, limited idealist like Alexander Dubček.

What is more, it is possible to argue that when the moment of change comes, Czechoslovakia might actually be better placed than Poland and Hungary, because its once powerful economy, although seriously run-down, is still in a less catastrophic state, and relatively free of the crippling burden of hard-currency debt. Yet this cuts both ways. For without their deep economic crisis, and concomitant dependency on the West, would the Polish and Hungarian leaderships ever have felt compelled to launch such radical reforms? Here is a crux of the East European dilemma. You can have economic crisis and political reform (Poland, Hungary). You can have no economic crisis and no political reform (GDR, Czechoslovakia). You can even have economic crisis and no political reform (Romania). But can you have political reform without economic crisis? Maybe Czechoslovakia will yet be the first to achieve that feat, as Milan Šimečka optimistically suggests in a paper prepared for our symposium. Maybe.

The World

What happens will depend mainly on developments inside Czechoslovakia, in the Soviet Union, and elsewhere in Eastern Europe—in that order. But it will also depend on us. "The world sees you!"

the crowd chanted at the police during the October 28 demonstration. But does it really?

In 1988, as at all these turning points which were the subject of our symposium—1918, when Britain, France, and the United States gave Masaryk the international license to create an independent Czechoslovak state; 1938, when, at Munich, Britain and France sold that independent state down the river; 1948, with the Communist coup; and 1968, with the Soviet invasion—in this “year of eight,” too, the fate of this small country in the center of Europe still crucially depends on the attitude of the Western as well as the Eastern world.

Now the current line being peddled to the West by the Jakeš crew goes roughly like this: “We really want to press ahead with our own *perestroika* [*prestavba*], with economic restructuring above all. But for this we need order and stability at home. *Ordnung muss sein*. Therefore you must give us credits and technology while understanding why we have to lock up dangerous criminal elements” . . . such as the country’s most famous playwright, Václav Havel. A feeble line, you might think. Yet strangely enough there are signs that some Western governments are half-prepared to swallow it. This applies to Austria and to some extent to West Germany, both of which have a particular interest in a stable setting for their own national rapprochements, with Hungary and the GDR respectively, and a history (even a philosophy) of promoting economic ties irrespective of political circumstances.

More surprising is the case of France, whose foreign minister earlier this year made the extraordinary statement that Czechoslovakia’s human rights performance was improving (an assertion he subsequently modified), and whose president, François Mitterrand, has chosen Prague of all places, and this of all times, to pay a state visit—scheduled for early December. One might understand his regal reluctance to follow in Mrs. Thatcher’s wake to Poland or Hungary, but this is carrying the personal competition a bit far.

To offer such high-level political recognition or economic support to the present regime in Czechoslovakia is not just morally questionable. It is also politically short-sighted. It ignores a prime lesson

of recent East European (and not just East European) history: The longer fundamental reforms are delayed, the more difficult they are to implement, and the less likely they are to occur peacefully. Such an approach is thus likely, in the longer term, to achieve the opposite of the desired effect.

There is a time to praise and a time to scold; a time to finance and a time to refrain from financing; a time to travel and a time to wait. With the Czechoslovak regime in its present repressive yet unsettled state, this is the latter time. It is a time for watchful waiting and for strictly conditional encouragement. Encouraging the old guard to depart. Encouraging the new guard, when it comes, to try to behave as befits a deeply civilized country, in the heart of Europe, in the late twentieth century.

To Be Concluded

There are now reasons to believe that, for once in the history of Czechoslovakia, this sea-change may occur before the calendar turns up another “year of eight.” It almost seems a pity to spoil the pattern. But they have waited long enough.

So I look forward to hearing Václav Havel formally close our permanent symposium, in the Slovanský Dům, Na Příkopě 22 (first floor), Prague 1—and well before 1998.

(November 1988)

Poland

Clearly, the preconditions are worse in Poland, given the depth of the economic crisis, the inconsistency of the economic reform program and its implementation, the mixture of popular apathy and desperation, and above all, the continued gulf between the authorities and the most active and organized parts of society. National product per capita is still 13 percent lower than in 1978, and real wages are one fifth lower than in 1980. Inflation has been estimated at 20 percent for August alone and will probably exceed 100 percent for the year. Increasingly, the dollar has supplanted the zloty as the Polish currency. Consumer supplies have got worse rather than better. And these are seen by the population to be the fruits of the much vaunted "second stage of the economic reform," launched in the autumn of 1987.

This is, of course, less than wholly fair. Fault can certainly be found with the technical conception of the reform. Its chief architect, Zdzisław Sadowski, is both an able and reputable reform economist. In the tradition of Oskar Lange and Włodzimierz Brus, he has produced a design for a "socialist market economy." Radical as this is by the standards of most previous reform plans, one might well argue, on the basis of Hungarian experience over the last twenty years, that even in conception it is not radical enough. Sadowski talks in general terms about "equal treatment of the public and private sectors and . . . market resource allocation,"⁵⁴ but the detail of the plan, let alone the bureaucratic practice, does not begin to amount to equal treatment for the private sector. The neoliberals would say that just because there is a strong, authentic Polish tradition of design for "market socialism," the importance of purely private enterprise—of capitalism blue in tooth and claw—is consistently underrated, not just by Sadowski and his team but also by some economic advisers to Solidarity who come from the same tradition.

⁵⁴ The quotation is from a speech delivered by Sadowski to the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) in London on June 21, 1988.

Of more immediate importance than these faults in design, however, is the failure to execute even the existing design. The official "Realization Program of the Second Stage of Economic Reform" of October 1987 is a hastily prepared and cumbersome document, containing a theoretical timetable of 130 "tasks" to be performed over the four years to December 1991, when, it says, all manner of things will be well. The definition of the tasks is often vague, but almost a year later one can go down the list and see what has not been done that ought to have been done.

The failure is the result of external and internal obstacles. The external obstacles are of two kinds. First, there are the Western obstacles, having to do particularly with the country's desperate hard-currency shortage, the dependence of much of Polish industry and agriculture on components or materials that can only be bought for hard currency, the \$39 billion debt, and the conditions imposed by Western banks, governments, and the IMF for continuing at least to "turn over" this debt. According to Sadowski, the government considers balancing the current account with the West to be one of its "main policy objectives" and aims to achieve it by 1991.⁵⁵ Most independent economists consider this to be quite unrealistic. Secondly, there are the "Eastern" obstacles, having to do with the need to improve trade balances with the Soviet Union, the direct involvement of the Soviet Union in parts of Polish industry, and the problem of existing commitments inside Comecon.

The internal obstacles are also of two general kinds. First, there is the passive or active resistance of large parts of the ruling class: the Party apparatus, the industry ministries, the political bureaucracy at provincial and local levels, many managers. Secondly, there is the passive or active resistance of large parts of the working class. The attempt to restore a degree of domestic market equilibrium by sharply increasing the prices of consumer goods while holding down wages can be criticized on purely technical grounds. But the plain fact is that this strategy has also been vitiated by the active resistance of

⁵⁵ From Sadowski's speech to the Royal Institute of International Affairs.

workers who, particularly in the very large factories, which were Solidarity strongholds, have easily won large compensatory wage raises by striking or merely threatening to strike.

Besides this active resistance, moreover, there is a deep and almost universal popular disbelief in the possibility of Jaruzelski's leadership's realizing any reform program. If anyone was prepared to give the Jaruzelski team the benefit of the doubt after December 13, 1981—and not many were—it has squandered that confidence by the self-confessed failure of what is now called the "first stage of economic reform," which was supposed to be pushed through under the protective carapace of martial law. These two internal obstacles, the popular and the political-bureaucratic, are, moreover, mutually reinforcing. As two leading Solidarity advisers soberly observe, political leaders who do not enjoy social support "become prisoners of their own conservative apparatus, and cannot therefore be consistent promoters of reform."⁵⁶

For eight years now, Solidarity, the Church, and Western politicians have said that the only way to secure popular support for such painful but indispensable economic reform is a dialogue leading to a historic compromise between the self-organized workers and a self-limiting Communist power. Society might be represented in different ways, but somehow, in some form, Solidarity must be included in the compromise. For nearly seven years now, the Communist authorities have done almost everything *except* talk to Solidarity. Any number of consultative bodies, extraordinary concessions to the Church, remarkably liberal censorship, almost free travel to the West,

⁵⁶ This quotation comes from a penetrating critique of the authorities' reform program and practice by Ryszard Bugaj and Andrzej Wielowiejski, whose arguments were discussed at a meeting of the "Group of Sixty" intellectual counselors of Solidarity in the crypt of a Warsaw church during the strikes last May. (The same group was summoned by Wałęsa to Gdańsk in September, along with old and new workers' leaders, to help prepare his negotiating strategy.) The Bugaj and Wielowiejski text was subsequently published, after complicated negotiations, in *Tygodnik Powszechny* of June 19, 1988, but with no less than eighteen censor's cuts. The quotation was among the victims.

private enterprise, wage raises—anything, everything, except Solidarity. And after nearly seven years, the workers in the country's great industrial strongholds stand up and say: Solidarity! So the authorities do what they have so often said they would never do: They start talking to Lech Wałęsa. Wałęsa in return manages, with difficulty, to end the last strikes.

A landscape that has seemed increasingly complex and obscure suddenly looks very simple and very familiar. There is an iron gate. On one side there are police; behind the police, the army; behind the army, Jaruzelski; behind Jaruzelski, Moscow. On the other side, there are workers; behind the workers, Wałęsa; behind Wałęsa, the pope. It looks simple and familiar, but it is not. Two crucial differences between the situation now and that in 1980 were neatly expressed by a worker in the Lenin Shipyard during the strike in May. Today, he said, the external conditions are better but the internal conditions are worse. In 1980 there was a real fear of Soviet invasion. With Gorbachev, that has greatly diminished. On the other hand, in 1980 there was still some real trust in the capacity of those in power to keep their word, to speak "as a Pole talks to a Pole." Where is that trust today?

The impossible keeps happening in Poland. It would therefore be more than foolish to make any firm prediction about the outcome of the promised round-table talks between the authorities and independent representatives of "society," including Lech Wałęsa. Mieczysław F. Rakowski, the new prime minister, is both a realist and a Party reformist, as the memorandum quoted above makes clear. He continues to enjoy a certain reputation as a "liberal" in the West. But in Poland he is seen as the man who deceived and abused Solidarity while negotiating with it as a deputy minister in 1981 and who has passionately, even obsessively, defended the imposition of martial law. His appointment is thus turning over an old rather than a new leaf. In any case, the general prognosis can hardly be optimistic. There is a deep mistrust of the authorities on the Solidarity side, and a perhaps even deeper fear among those in power of a restored

Solidarity. Moreover, it is very difficult to imagine what a restored—or new—Solidarity would look like and how it could be married to the common goal of economic reform.

If Solidarity were allowed back only on the shop floor in individual factories, then it would have to work as a trade union, fighting for the workers' jobs and wages. As a democratic organization, and competing with the official trade unions for members, it would be almost bound to oppose factory closings and wage squeezes that its own national economic advisers regard as essential. Moreover, no one can seriously believe that it would remain without a national network for long. The alternative is that Solidarity should return in different guise: as the independent watchdog and guarantor of the whole society's interests at the highest levels of the state.

Thus Solidarity might be represented in parliament, together with Catholic and other independent groups. Its experts might participate in a body empowered to oversee the implementation of economic reform. Its representatives or associates might even hold government office. As an independent, legal, national institution, it could then "sell" the painful economic reform program to society as a genuine program for national recovery, supporting measures that as a local trade union it would be bound to oppose. Like Churchill in 1940, Wałęsa would say, "I have nothing to offer but blood, sweat and tears . . ." and the nation would rally round. In effect, this is what Lech Wałęsa and his senior advisers have been proposing to the authorities ever since July 1981.⁵⁷

If it was not possible then, why should it be possible now? Because Gorbachev is not Brezhnev? Because the West wants it, and Poland more than ever needs economic help from the West? But the internal

⁵⁷ See chapter 6 in my *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity* (New York: Scribners, 1984; Vintage, 1985), where I describe their abortive negotiations with Rakowski. According to the sociological survey "Poles '88," no less than 84.3 percent of those asked were of the opinion that "fundamental change for the better can be introduced only when the authorities come to an understanding with society." Quoted in a brief report by the team who conducted the survey (Władysław Adamski, et al.) in *Polityka*, July 23, 1988.

obstacles remain formidable. There is absolutely no blueprint for such an arrangement of power sharing. The coalitions of 1945–1948 in East Central Europe are hardly an encouraging example. One could just conceivably imagine its working if there were to be a clear, simple, legally defined division of powers between the parties, enforceable by an independent judiciary. But that is out of the question. One might just imagine its working if there were a large amount of mutual confidence between the parties, as in an all-party wartime cabinet. But there is not.

What remains is the compromise of two boxers who recognize that neither can knock the other out and that the ring is collapsing around them. But whence comes the boxers' staying power? Jaruzelski's staying power still derives from the military and the police (more than the Party apparatus), and ultimately from the Soviet leadership's continuing to back him, as Gorbachev did demonstratively during his visit to Poland in July. Wałęsa's power rests to some extent (as the government spokesman Jerzy Urban claims) on support from the West and to some extent on his symbolic importance to the whole of Polish society. But his real muscle still comes, as it has all along, from the workers in a score of giant enterprises: from the miners of Silesia, the shipyard workers of Gdańsk, Gdynia, and Szczecin, the steelworkers of Kraków and Warsaw, the engineering workers of Poznań and Wrocław. If you ask, Why is Wałęsa back at the table? the basic answer is: because those workers put him there.

Now, the corollary of this is that Solidarity leaders simply cannot afford to risk losing the confidence of these, their grenadiers, unless they have cast-iron guarantees of a permanent independent role in the country's national political life. Even this time around, it was only with difficulty that Wałęsa persuaded the angry young men in the Lenin Shipyard and the slow stubborn miners of Jastrzębie to return to work. But the interests of the workers in these industrial strongholds are by no means identical with those of the economy as a whole. During the May strike at the Lenin Shipyard, the workers chanted, "There is no freedom without Solidarity," while loudspeakers broadcast a message from the management saying that the yard

would have to be closed altogether. In the pure interest of national economic recovery, however, the Solidarity troops should probably have chanted, "Close the yards! Open a stock exchange!" But no one can seriously expect Solidarity to cut off the branch upon which it sits unless it has another very solid branch to go to.

One might speculate that for Poland now to break through the immense barriers of alienation and decay, the authorities would have to take not one but two radical steps: restore Solidarity and restore capitalism. An expanded private sector and new mixed forms of ownership in the public sector might generate economic dynamism and harness the energies of the skilled, the young, and the rich, but it would also exacerbate social tensions, and the private sector could never be guaranteed a stable future without political representation (or at least protection) at the highest level. Solidarity, restored as a national political force, might just conceivably mediate (or at least alleviate) that social conflict and provide that guarantee, but it could hardly leap over its own Christian-social trade-union shadow to become the cutting edge of radical economic change. One might say half in jest (and half in mourning) that when a Solidarity branch declares a legal strike against a private employer, Poland will be on the right course.⁵⁸

The most probable outcome, however, remains a continued muddling through; or, rather, a muddling down. On all Polish precedents, the result is likely, sooner or later, to be another explosion of popular protest. The result of that explosion would, in turn, depend crucially on the circumstances in the Soviet Union, but if present trends in the Soviet Union continue (and if developments elsewhere in Eastern Europe do not contribute to reversing those trends), it is not completely inconceivable that the historic compromise that could not be achieved by reform might yet be achieved by revolution. In an extraordinary passage of his memorandum, Mieczysław F.

⁵⁸ An alternative approach, still quite popular in Poland, is that of promoting workers' self-management. But the Yugoslav experience suggests that this would be economically disastrous in present Polish circumstances.

Rakowski writes that some people in power in Poland may still be thinking that if it comes to another revolt, "we call in aid our *raison d'état* and remind people that after all somebody might intervene in our internal affairs. But what," Rakowski goes on, "if that *somebody*, bearing in mind his own interests, does not *want* to intervene?"⁵⁹ A thought to concentrate the functionary's mind wonderfully. Of course, it would be morally indefensible for anyone in the West to encourage such a terrible gamble, yet equally, no one in the West can prevent it. And in the long run of Ottomanization, even a failed revolution is not the last word.

Hungary

In Hungary, the preconditions are somewhat better. The economic crisis is still not as deep and, although individual alienation is profound, there is no comparable gulf between "society" and "the authorities." One of the many reform manifestos to bloom in the Budapest spring was that of a group describing itself as the March Front. Its twenty signers ranged from Rezső Nyers, who in May became a member of the politburo, to Miklós Vásárhelyi, who was Imre Nagy's press secretary in 1956 and might now be described as the Nestor of the democratic opposition. The March Front has not actually done anything, but in Poland it would not even be possible to get the names on the same piece of paper.

The continuum between critical intelligentsia and reformists-in-government is more substantially exemplified by the present economic-reform project. In 1986 a group of reform economists working under the auspices of Imre Pozsgay's Patriotic People's Front produced a radical reform document entitled "Turning Point and Reform." In January 1988, several authors of this document moved into cramped offices in the parliament building, as part of an economic kitchen cabinet working for the deputy prime minister,

⁵⁹ Rakowski, "Reflections . . ." p. 18.

Péter Medgyessy. In mid-July, the new central committee was offered two variants of economic reform, the radical Plan A and the more cautious Plan B. Plan A, for which the central committee voted, was essentially based on the kitchen cabinet's design, which in turn was based on the original document.

Miklós Németh, the central committee secretary for economic affairs, had defined the goal of Plan A as "a genuine market economy, without any qualifying adjectives."⁶⁰ It has been officially stated that the private sector could account for as much as 30 percent of this mixed economy. There is to be a real stock exchange. Western majority shareholding should be equally possible in firms from the private, cooperative, and state sectors. The change in forms of ownership inside the socialized sector, vaguely discussed in Poland, is here a detailed plan. The Hungarian reform economists (than whom no one on earth is more ingenious) have worked out a scheme whereby the net worth of a state enterprise would be converted into stocks, which would be given by the state to local councils, pension funds, and the like. These councils or pension funds would then have to live (in part, at least) off the dividends from these stocks rather than the direct state subsidies they currently receive. They would thus acquire at least a quasi-shareholder's interest in the profitability of the enterprise. Irredeemable loss-makers should go bankrupt, with estimated unemployment of 100,000 over the next two to three years. A sharp devaluation should bring at least partial convertibility of the forint within sight. "What is socialism?" asks the joke of the year. Answer: "The longest and most painful road from capitalism to capitalism."

Political reform is seen as indispensable for two reasons. First, to ensure that the political bureaucracy does not continue to vitiate the theoretical autonomy of enterprises, as it has for the last twenty years. What a leading member of the economic think tank laughingly calls the "invisible hand" of the center should be reduced to an invisible

⁶⁰ In a radio interview quoted in SWB-EE (June 3, 1988), B/3-4.

finger. The Party "should be removed from economic life." Economic policy should be the province of the government, supervised and controlled by the parliament. The new company law should provide precise, legally binding definitions of previously political "negotiable" relationships.

Secondly, political reform must sugar the bitter pill of austerity and win popular support. New courts and new laws delimiting the freedoms of association and speech are one path to this end. An increased role for parliament and local councils, with liberalized election laws, is another. At present the Hungarian parliament meets for just eight days a year. "We want to abolish the Party-state," a leading reformist politburo member said to me. "We want to reintroduce the principles of Montesquieu in modern form." This is interesting talk from a politburo member, albeit in a private, background conversation. But as we have seen, words are cheap in the new deideologized climate. The deeds have yet to follow. The main economic measures are supposed to be in place by the end of 1988; the constitutional changes, perhaps by 1990.

What are the chances? Even if there were no political, bureaucratic, or social hindrances whatsoever to implementing radical economic reform in its purest form, Hungary would still be running to keep up with an increasingly dynamic European Community, and with the "newly industrialized countries." In purely technical terms, it is not easy to turn a Lada into a Mercedes while continuing to drive down the motorway. Ingenious as the proposals for new forms of ownership are, one cannot imagine their having half the impact of the pure, raw, brutal reprivatization by Thatcherism (so eloquently advocated by the *Towarzystwo Gospodarcze* in Kraków). Radical as the reintroduction of market forces is meant to be, even in design it seem unlikely to reproduce the Schumpeterian "creative gale of destruction." Two percent unemployment is a lot for a socialist country, but Thatcherism in Britain brought—and perhaps required—12 percent unemployment to revitalize a much less decrepit economy.

The hard-currency debt is a goad to reform, but if the debt-service ratio becomes too steep, it can be a major impediment to further

reform (witness Poland). The Hungarians reckon they have a breathing space until 1991, when loan repayments to Western banks are due to increase sharply. This is not long. Moreover, while their putative West European competitors have the opportunity of the Common Market, they still have the burden of Comecon. To adjust your domestic market to Western markets is one thing. To adjust Comecon to your own needs is quite another. So far as I can gather, Hungary's economic-policy makers have more or less given up any hope of turning Comecon into a common market and are merely looking for more realistic bilateral trade with individual countries, including the Soviet Union.⁶¹

Yet for political reasons, the reform package is most unlikely to be fully implemented. For a start, Károly Grósz is not, by all accounts, comparable to Gorbachev, let alone to Mrs. Thatcher. He is a clever, forceful, opportunistic politician, but there is no evidence that his present endorsement of radical reform flows from any deep conviction. His politburo contains only three people who one could clearly categorize as reformists (Nyers, Pozsgay, and Németh), and in János Berecz he has (*mutatis mutandis*) his Ligachev. The higher ranks of the Party apparatus contain some intelligent, realistic, reform-minded men. But no one really has the first idea how the new separation of powers, or division of roles, between Party and state, central committee, parliament, and courts is going to work. If the Party is not to make economic policy, then what on earth is it to do? Men cling to power: surely here, too. I asked an energetic, realistic, and reform-minded new member of the central committee secretariat what he was actually going to do there. "Well," he replied, "we work out the broad strategic lines of policy, and then we pass them on to Party members in the state apparatus." This sounded vaguely familiar.

Then there are the corrupt local oligarchies that flourished under late Kádárism. Can their grip really be broken? On a much smaller

⁶¹ According to a report in the *Financial Times* (August 9, 1988), "Hungary's iron and steel producers have threatened to consider halting unprofitable exports to other Comecon countries after the Government's withdrawal of subsidies for metal exports." A nice illustration in miniature.

sale, Grósz has the problem that Gorbachev faces in the Soviet Union. In theory, he wants to decentralize. But before decentralizing, he has to reestablish central control. And then there is the great unknown of social reaction. The leadership has stated clearly that in the short run, reform means that most Hungarians will get poorer. The responsible politburo member, Miklós Németh, told the central committee that Plan A would initially mean lower or even negative growth and "a lower level of consumption by the population,"⁶² not to mention the 100,000 unemployed. Hungarian society is too divided for a Polish-style Solidarity movement to seem at all likely, but there has already been one strike in the mines. Repeated local strikes—as in Yugoslavia—and even the founding of independent unions seem possible. Any one of these levels of resistance is probably enough to preempt economic take-off in a highly competitive world. Together, they seem almost insuperable.

Except, perhaps, by democracy. But democracy is not on offer. Hungary's Communist rulers quite understandably want to enjoy the benefits of democracy without paying the price of sharing or being obliged to compete for power. Legal definitions of rights can also be ways of restricting rights. "An up-to-date practice of jurisprudence can be an even more efficient means of political regulation than direct administrative instructions," the new head of the central committee's agitprop department rather revealingly observed.⁶³ What Mr. Grósz calls opposition is not what we would call opposition, and what we call opposition Mr. Grósz still calls the enemy—a nasty verbal throwback to darker days. While the authorities allowed the populist demonstration for Transylvania, the police broke up a much smaller democratic-opposition demonstration on the anniversary of the judicial execution of Imre Nagy, with some brutality.

The liveliest, but also in a way the saddest, meeting I had in Budapest this June was with a group of law students in their early twenties

⁶² SWB-EE (July 15, 1988), C1/1-5.

⁶³ *Magyar Hírlap*, June 24, 1988.

who have been instrumental in setting up the new democratic youth union (FIDESZ). They have a brilliant program. It can be summed up in two words: liberal democracy. As we talked, I felt, as I have done so often before, a simple anger. Why should they, who are every bit as civilized, deserving, brave, and clever as their exact contemporaries up the river in Vienna, have to put up with any more half-measures and half-truths? For God's sake, let them have it—*now!* After all, we know that liberal democracy works: not perfectly, of course, nothing ever does, but in all its West European variants better than any of the East European variants of anything else. If Spain can pass peacefully from dictatorship to democracy, why should not Hungary? In morality and ideology, the ruling party has no answer. Yet no one, not even as a joke, told me that socialism is the longest and most painful road from autocracy to democracy.

The sad fact is that socialism has created in all the East European states an array of *domestic* barriers against the transformation to liberal-democracy-cum-mixed-economy quite as formidable as those that existed in recent West or south European dictatorships, such as Spain, Portugal, or Greece. These barriers lie not only in the system of politbureaucratic dictatorship (to use Rudolf Bahro's apt term) and not merely in the character and interests of the *nomenklatura* ruling class, but also in the interests, attitudes, and fears of many of the ruled. Of course, in conditions of full external sovereignty, with liberal democracies on all frontiers, these obstacles would simply be swept aside as they were, gloriously, in Spain, Portugal, and Greece. But those are not the conditions. The Polish revisionist Władysław Bieńkowski once wrote a famous text called "The Engines Had Brakes of Socialism." We have been discussing the engines and brakes of the transition from socialism. The conclusion is, alas, that even in Hungary, even in the Gorbachev era, the brakes look more powerful than the engines.

One is bound to hope against hope. The Hungarian reformists enter this experiment with that cheerful pessimism that is one of the more attractive features of Hungarian intellectual life. One of the very architects of the entire reform project told me he gives it only

a 30–40 percent chance of success. It seems reasonable to suggest that the reform has a rather higher chance of *minimal* success—that is, of averting revolution—if only because of the further diversification of social interests that it will promote. The freeing of the private sector, in particular, means that Hungary might yet have an entrepreneurial bourgeoisie that will go to the barricades—against the revolting workers. Capitalists and communists shoulder to shoulder against the proletariat: a suitably Central European outcome to socialism. To estimate the percentage chance of peaceful transformation, by contrast, requires only the fingers of one hand.

Back to Central Europe?

"To Generalize is to be an Idiot. To Particularize is the alone Distinction of Merit." We may not go quite so far as William Blake, but virtually all general writing about "Eastern Europe" is either a catalog or, if analytically more ambitious, extrapolates from the one or two countries the author knows best. The above has something of both faults. To concentrate on Poland and Hungary is, in the autumn of 1988, justified by the fact that these are the two countries of East Central Europe in which fundamental reform experiments are under way. Even here, what has been said is fragmentary and tentative. Yet there are many common features as well as differences. I would venture to predict that when the fundamental reform experiment does get under way in Czechoslovakia, there, too, one will recognize many of the features that I have singled out in Poland and Hungary.

In the case of East Germany, the differences will perhaps be greater than the similarities. A state whose annual transfers of hard currency from West Germany cover the total interest burden on its hard-currency debt—but a state, also, whose citizens learn about their own country every night from West German television—is in a different position from its East Central European neighbors, a position

both better and worse. I have not attempted to include Romania or Bulgaria in my analysis.

For the heartlands of contemporary East Central Europe, however, for the more than 60 million Europeans living in the present territories of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland, there are certainly the contours of a common fate. The oldest of Central European tales has a German general saying to his Austrian ally: "The situation is serious but not tragic," to which the Austrian general replies: "No, mein Lieber, the situation is tragic but not serious." One might say that the situation of East Central Europe today is tragic but not hopeless.

It is tragic because a half-century of immense struggle, upheaval, work, and suffering has produced so little lasting progress. It is fashionable to talk, as Zbigniew Brzezinski does in the title of his 1988 Seton-Watson Memorial Lecture, of Eastern Europe's being on its way "back to Central Europe." Polite reference is made to the positive ideal of Central Europe revived by Milan Kundera, Czesław Miłosz, Václav Havel, György Konrád, and many others.⁶⁴ But there can be a "return to Central Europe" in a negative as well as a positive sense. The dream of emancipatory modernization, by no means only the property of communists in 1945, may yet end in a reality, all too familiar from Central European history, of growing relative backwardness vis-à-vis Western, "modern" Europe. It may end in a new version of Giselher Wirsing's *Zwischeneuropa* or the intermediate zone identified by Hungarian writers and historians, its economies exporting tin saucepans, bottled fruit, cheap shoes, and cheap labor, importing German tourists and Japanese capital. A zone, that is, of weak states, national prejudice, inequality, poverty and *Schlamassel*. It is almost already true to talk, in the case of Hungary and Poland, of a double dependency—on the great powers to the West as well as to the East.

This situation is tragic because of its toll in avoidable human

⁶⁴ See my essay "Does Central Europe Exist?" above, p. 179.

suffering. At times it seems tragic, too, in the sense of classical tragedy: that is, having a relentless logic quite beyond and in spite of the will of the participants. For the petty functionaries defending their privileges are not really evil; and far less are the unskilled workers defending their jobs in factories that should long since have been shut. The more enlightened leaders in Hungary and Poland today are personally little worse than most politicians in the West. Some genuinely care about their countries as well as themselves. But good or evil, they can no more avoid entanglement in the web of internal contradictions that socialism has created than Oedipus could avoid marrying his mother.

So, entirely hopeless the situation is not. It is not hopeless, because, within the setting of overall decay, there are possibilities of individual and group emancipation, of free speech, learning, worship, travel, productive work, and self-help that simply did not exist when I first traveled to Eastern Europe ten years ago. It is not hopeless because these states do, in theory, possess room for maneuver in which they might restore a larger degree of internal sovereignty. It is not hopeless, because the great power to the East is itself convulsed with change whose outcome no one can predict. It is not hopeless, finally, because the great powers to the West form a more open, successful, attractive, and benign constellation for East Central Europe than at any time in modern history. This is true of the United States, of Western Europe as a whole, and particularly of West Germany, on whose approach the future shape of this region once again significantly depends.

To discuss what we in the West can do directly to encourage desirable change in East Central Europe would require another essay, indeed a book.⁶⁵ But if present trends continue, it is not unreasonable

⁶⁵ Two excellent multiauthor volumes are Lincoln Gordon, ed., *Eroding Empire: Western Relations with Eastern Europe* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute, 1987) and William E. Griffith, ed., *Central and Eastern Europe and the West* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1989). I am working on a book about the contemporary German role in this region.

to look ahead to a time when the West will be not, as since Yalta, a tertiary actor in East Central Europe (after the Soviet Union and the countries themselves) but a secondary actor—as important as the Soviet Union, though in different ways. If we are to play this role wisely, however, the first imperative is to see East Central Europe as it really is and not as a projection of our own fantasies or as a subcategory of Soviet politics. The metaphor of Finlandization and the terms *glasnost* and *perestroika* are of limited use in analyzing recent developments in East Central Europe. The impact of Gorbachev and the “new détente” in East-West relations has been great but also complex, indirect, and ambiguous. Terms like “crisis,” “reform,” or “stability” are useless without closer definition.

I have offered the crude metaphor of Ottomanization as at least marginally more illuminating than that of Finlandization. The two faces of Ottomanization, emancipation and decay, both have many dimensions: imperial, regional, and domestic; economic, social, ideological, and political; the emancipation of states from the imperial center; the emancipation of societies from states, in the overlapping spheres of religion, national articulation, civil society, and private enterprise, and the more or less consciously oppositional variants of each. Revolution, ending in partial failure, is as likely as reform, ending in partial success (i.e., averting revolution). On balance, the former seems more likely in Poland, the latter in Hungary. A maximal success for reform seems scarcely more probable than a maximal success for revolution. Each national case must be studied historically, and for itself. “Every thing is what it is and not another thing,” as the great Bishop Butler unshallowly remarked.

As these countries are rediscovering their own histories, so also is history the discipline most urgently called for, if we in the West are to understand their present and peer into their future. History, calling in aid economics, sociology, political science, and even security studies, but above all: history. Czechs, Hungarians, and Poles are rediscovering their own history; and they are making it again. To adapt a German philosopher, whose influence on East Central Eu-

rope future historians will record as baneful but transient, confined only to a few decades in the second half of the twentieth century: The peoples of East Central Europe make their own history, although they do not make it just as they please.

(September 1988)

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The Baltic Revolution:

*Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania
and the Path to Independence*

Anatol Lieven
"

Yale University Press
New Haven and London

3

Independence Won and Lost, 1918-40

*'O rose, take an axe in your hand,
And smash your way through the dunghill,
Through fate, hardened fate,
Before it is too late.'*

Jānis Rokpelnis,
a Latvian poet under Soviet rule

The period of the first Baltic struggles for independence, from 1917 to 1920, has been so intensively mythologised in subsequent Baltic culture that it came as a shock to realise that, as a minor participant in the events of 1990 to 1991, I was myself living through a period to which Balts are already according the same mythology. In the struggle to achieve Baltic independence and Baltic national identities, memory, and memory re-worked as myth, have always been as important as economics or diplomacy, let alone tanks or guns. For Lithuanians in particular, a mythologised history has taken the place of a national myth, encapsulated in Latvia and Estonia within the recreated national poetic epics. Dealing with Lithuanian nationalist politicians during the second independence struggle, I was repeatedly made aware that they were operating only partly in the present; underlying everything that they did was a consideration of how their actions would look before a pagrant of Lithuanian history beginning with the Grand Duchy and extending into the history books of the future. The events of 1990 and 1991 were turned into myth even as they occurred, and seized upon by different political forces – above all by Professor Landsbergis and his supporters – as part of their claim to supreme national legitimacy. There have of course been Western examples of this syndrome (Churchill and de Gaulle being the most famous) but they are difficult to find in Western Europe today. This is perhaps another sign of the fact, often repeated by Balts, that for them, the Second World War ended only with the recovery of independence in the early 1990s. Soviet rule in the previous decades, like the partition of

Independence Won and Lost, 1918-40

Germany, had been in a sense a continuation of the Second World War and its aftermath.

The history of the first independence struggle and the first period of independence is thus a force in shaping the politics of the present. Not merely are some politicians casting themselves in the role of their childhood heroes, but for lack of any other tradition the new Baltic States are modelling not just their political symbolism, but their political ideologies, parties and state institutions, on those of the period of independence between 1918 and 1940. This alone makes that period an essential object of study for anyone interested in understanding the contemporary Baltic scene. The Europe of the 1920s and 1930s was of course very different; like other European states, the politics of the Baltic in those years incorporated strong anti-democratic trends. Thanks to Soviet rule, the Baltic States have been isolated from subsequent European liberal and democratic influence and there has never been a real debate (except to a limited extent among Baltic émigrés) about the positive and negative aspects of pre-1940 Baltic political traditions.

The effect of too much unanalysed nostalgia has been to distance the Balts from modern Western Europe and to contribute to worrying political tendencies at home. The drawing of lessons from the experience of those years can also lead to serious misjudgements about the international position of the Baltic States today. During the recent independence struggle the recalling of myths of the earlier struggle occasionally led to decisions which at the time looked barely rational – though they may look good in the history books. A historian must therefore be cautious about making too many comparisons between the first struggle for Baltic independence and that of our time. The first was above all an armed struggle; the second, so far at least, has been conducted by peaceful means. In 1917 there had never been Estonian or Latvian states, and the nationalist leaders were aiming at autonomy within a democratic Russian Federation, if only because they regarded such a link as their only protection against conquest by the Germans; they declared full independence only after Russia itself had collapsed into the hands of the Bolsheviks.

It is possible to imagine that a 'bourgeois' government in Russia, had it survived the First World War, could have made sufficient compromises with the Balts to have kept them within such a federation. Despite the Baltic blood shed by the Russian Empire, the last decades of Russian imperial rule had been years of great prosperity and social progress for the Baltic provinces, progress which had indeed spawned the Baltic national intelligentsias. By contrast the nationalist leaders of 1987-91 had always before their eyes an image of the full independence enjoyed by the Baltic States between 1918 and 1940, and the utter failure of Soviet rule to produce stable economic progress. They could not in the long run have



The Baltic Provinces of the Russian Empire in 1914

settled for anything less than full independence, and this in turn would have been bound to undermine Moscow's rule elsewhere in the Soviet Union.

The First Struggle for Independence

As in our own time, the initial chance for Baltic freedom during the First World War was given by events in Russia. The February Revolution of 1917 brought the immediate replacement of imperial governors in Estonia and Livonia by commissioners of the Russian Provisional Government – the Latvian and Estonian Mayors of Riga and Tallinn. Representatives of Latvian organisations met and chose provisional councils to replace the governing institutions of the Baltic German nobility.² The Council in Latgale called for union with the other Latvian provinces, but this was opposed by the large local Russian population. Lithuania was not directly affected by the revolution because it was under German occupation, having been overrun in 1915. The position of the Latvians was complicated by the fact that half their area was also under German control. Both Latvians and Estonians were still thinking in terms of autonomy within a Russian federation, and there was general surprise when on 7 September 1917 the Estonian politician, Jaan Tõnisson, argued for independence from Russia and the creation of a federation of Scandinavia and the Baltic lands. A majority however continued to advocate union with Russia.

The Bolsheviks meanwhile were strengthening their position on local soldiers' and workers' councils, and in Riga, in municipal elections in August gained 41 per cent of the vote. In Estonia their position was weaker, and based partly on the local Russian working class. After the coup of October 1917, the Bolsheviks took over the administration of much of the Baltic. Bolshevik terror ensued, targeted partly at the politicians and partly at the Baltic German nobility. In both Latvia and Estonia, non-communist leaders were now aiming at complete independence, if only to escape from the Bolsheviks, and were hoping for support from the West.

The Baltic Germans were of course hoping for German conquest, and this came soon enough; by April 1918, the whole area was in German hands. For many Balts it seemed, at the time, a catastrophe as bad or worse than Bolshevik rule.³ In fact, however, German occupation was to give the Balts a crucial breathing space. Without it there is little reason to doubt that Latvia and Estonia would simply have remained part of Bolshevik Russia.

In November 1918, German defeat in the West led to the armistice with

the Western allies and withdrawal from most of the Baltic States. The Soviet commander-in-chief at the time was a Latvian, Jakums Vācietis, a colonel from the Latvian Rifle Regiments. Formed by the Russian Imperial government to fight the Germans, several of these units subsequently joined the Bolsheviks and played a key part in their victory in the Russian Civil War, while others fought for the Latvian national government. The British envoy, Bruce Lockhart, commented on the Riflemen's mixture of dour discipline and savagery. The German ambassador in Moscow described them as 'a corset holding together the friable body of the Red Army'. Latvians also provided some of the most ruthless leaders of the *Cheka*, Lenin's secret police and of Stalin's N.K.V.D. During the struggle for Latvian independence in 1990, a Russian colonel in the republic, protesting his affection for the Latvian people and wanting to pay a national compliment, said that the Latvian 'Chekists' had been his childhood heroes! After the Soviet conquests of 1940 and 1944 these Latvians from Russia were to provide many of the Soviet cadres for the government of Latvia.⁴ The tradition continued in our time with men like Colonel Viktors Alksnis, whose grandfather, Jēkabs Alksnis, was one of the founders of the Soviet Air Force before being shot by Stalin in 1937. Whereas in Estonia and Lithuania, the native defenders of Soviet rule between 1988 and 1991 were tiny in number and pathetic in intellect, the Soviet loyalist leadership in Latvia contained a number of significant Latvian figures.

In November 1918 Soviet troops, drawn partly from the Riflemen, marched into the Baltic States immediately behind the retreating Germans, and by 2 January 1919 were within 35 kilometres of Tallinn. Thereafter Estonian troops, superbly led by a former Tsarist colonel, Johannes Laidoner, turned the tide and, within a few weeks, had pushed them back into Russia. Weapons and supplies were provided by a British squadron, which also prevented any landing on the northern coast by the Soviet Baltic fleet, and several hundred volunteers arrived from Finland and Scandinavia.⁵

Encouraged by the British, the Estonians subsequently gave support to the White Russian forces in their attempt to capture Petrograd; it was however half-hearted support, because of the refusal of the commander, General Yudenich, to guarantee Estonian independence. In support of the Whites, the Estonians advanced into Russia itself, and by the final armistice with Soviet Russia had occupied two strips of territory which, although partly inhabited by Finnic-speaking people, had been a part of

⁴ On 18 August 1919, in a striking but strangely uncelebrated victory, British torpedo boats penetrated the heart of the Kronstadt naval base, one of the most heavily defended in the world, and sank two Bolshevik battleships at their moorings.

Russia and had large Russian majorities: the town of Ivangorod opposite Narva and the area of Petseri (Pechori), near Pskov. These areas were then incorporated into independent Estonia by the Treaty of Tartu signed with Soviet Russia on 2 February 1920. In 1945, after the Soviet reconquest, they were returned to Russia by Stalin. Estonia is now asking for their restitution.

Latvia meanwhile had been largely overrun by the Bolsheviks, and the Latvian national government of Kārlis Ulmanis was forced to flee to the port of Liepāja, where it survived under the protection of the German army and the British fleet. A Bolshevik government was instituted in Riga under Pēteris Stučka, and instituted a brutal reign of terror. Famine broke out and thousands starved to death. However, while the invasion of Estonia by the Bolsheviks was a fairly straightforward attempt at conquest, the war in Latvia had far more aspects of a civil war between Latvians themselves.

The anti-Bolshevik forces were deeply divided between the Latvians and the Germans, including the 'Baltische Landeswehr', made up of local Baltic Germans and determined to avoid Latvian rule. On 16 April this force staged a coup against Ulmanis's government and forced it to take refuge on a British warship. Heavy British pressure on Germany compelled the Germans to back down and on 22 May, a combined offensive of German, Latvian and White Russian troops captured Riga from the Bolsheviks, while the Estonians advanced south to liberate northern Latvia. This and the Estonian victories of January were the first military checks to the eastwards advance of Soviet communism into Europe.⁶ On 22 June, the Estonians and Latvians also defeated the Baltic German Landeswehr and German 'Freikorps' volunteer units, and avenged themselves for seven-hundred years of rule by the German nobility. The result of the final Latvian-Estonian victory over the Germans in October was a complete German withdrawal from Latvia. In December the Latvians in alliance with Poland, conquered Latgale from the Bolsheviks, and it was incorporated into independent Latvia by the Riga Treaty of 1 August 1920 with Russia.

The Lithuanian national government meanwhile had been facing a double threat from both Soviet Russia and Poland. The Bolsheviks also invaded in November 1918, but by the summer of 1919 had been driven from Lithuanian territory. Vilnius meanwhile had been changing hands (and its official name) with bewildering speed, part 'sacred national symbol', part bargaining-chip.

In January 1919, after a Lithuanian rule of two months following the German collapse, Vilnius fell into the hands of the Bolsheviks. On April 15 it was captured by the Poles, who later made it an autonomous region in the hope of using it to tempt Lithuania to restore the old confederation

with Poland. At the time Vilnius was a mainly Polish-Jewish city with a Lithuanian minority variously estimated at between 2 and 20 per cent. A year later, the Poles launched an offensive against Soviet Russia, were initially defeated, and handed Vilnius to the Lithuanians – after they had already lost it to the Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks themselves gave it to the Lithuanians on 25 August in return for permission to cross Lithuanian territory on their way to attack the Poles. The Poles then counter-attacked and defeated the Bolsheviks. At this time Poles and Lithuanians were also fighting each other, in a desultory way.

On 7 October 1920 a Polish-Lithuanian armistice tacitly left Vilnius in Lithuanian hands but immediately afterwards, the Polish general Lucijan Zeligowski staged a 'revolt' – with the compliance and later open approval of the Polish leader, Marshal Pilsudski – and seized the city. Lithuanians have bemoaned this 'Polish aggression' ever since, and it continues to bedevil Lithuanian-Polish relations and Lithuanian policies towards the Polish minority in Lithuania. For an ironical descant on the competing choirs of Polish and Lithuanian apologists, one can turn to a memoir by a Jewish inhabitant of Vilna, Joseph Buloff, who describes one of the many 'liberations' as follows:

At the end of the third day, a Polish flag with a white eagle flew from the still-smouldering town hall. A new parade was announced – this time for Poles only. There were no more greens, whites or reds. All and everybody became Poles overnight, except for the Jews. The Jews took it in their stride. They had served, in their life, under many flags. . . .⁶

In January 1923, Lithuania, in order to give itself a port but also to compensate itself for the loss of Vilnius, seized the German town of Memel (now Klaipėda), held since 1919 by the League of Nations, and retained it until Hitler forced its return in 1939. Another effect of the loss of Vilnius was to force the Lithuanians to make their 'provisional' capital in Kaunas (Kovno), a city divided between Lithuanians and Jews, with small Polish and German communities. This move to a smaller and less cosmopolitan city has been responsible for encouraging some of the narrower and more depressing features of subsequent Lithuanian nationalism. During the struggle for independence from Soviet rule, the radical nationalist wing of the Lithuanian national movement was long known simply as 'the Kaunas Faction'. These forces continue to harbour a deep distrust of Vilnius for its 'cosmopolitan' past, still reflected in a more varied and liberal culture. Some would even like to move the capital back to Kaunas, which they term 'the pure home of the race'.

Economic and Social Consolidation

The history of the Baltic States between 1920 and 1940 was characterised by great economic success, internal political failure, and foreign policy frustration followed by catastrophe: in 1940 they were annexed by Stalin's Soviet Union. This catastrophe was however a product of events and forces far beyond the Balt's own control, though controversy rages still as to whether their fate could have been averted or at least altered.

At the end of their wars of independence, the Baltic States were in a state of economic chaos which, on the surface, makes their present situation look almost benign by comparison, although in fact they were better placed than they are today. Latvia had suffered particularly badly because, for most of the war, the front line had run across what was to become Latvian territory. In 1915, much of the population had either fled or been evacuated by the Russian government, along with the major industries, many of which were removed or destroyed.⁷ The total population dropped from 2.55 million in 1913 to only 1.84 million in 1925. By 1950, with the effects of the Second World War and Stalinism added, Latvia had become the only European country whose population had declined in absolute terms since 1900, and Estonia was not far behind. The 1915–17 losses, however, helped stabilise independent Latvia, both by sharply reducing the Russian minority and by reducing the number of urban workers, who would otherwise have simply been unemployed. It can be said that, unlike 1991, when the Russian Empire retreated from the Baltic in 1915–17 it took much of the 'imperial' industries (those dependent on the Russian hinterland) and their workforces with it.

During the War and Civil War, all the Baltic provinces suffered from massive requisitions of food, material and animals, and from the transfer of their principal industries to Russia. As today, those industries remaining were severely affected by the loss of their pre-1914 markets and sources of supply in Russia. Monetary confusion was exacerbated by chaos in the banking system, the headquarters of which, in St Petersburg, had been seized by the Bolsheviks. A basic banking infrastructure and personnel however remained in the Baltic states. This was perhaps the greatest advantage of the Baltic States in 1920 as compared with today: then, the Baltic area had long been part of capitalist Europe, and had many people, officials and private businessmen, Balts and members of other communities, with a tradition of experience in the workings of capitalism. Baltic industry was also equipped to Western standards, and the Balts had longstanding markets in the West. Today, these markets have to be created from scratch. Experience of capitalism is present only in the Baltic emigrations in the West, while Balts brought up under Soviet rule have not merely to be trained, but often retrained, and cured of everything they learned under Soviet rule. Moreover, decades of

The Baltic Revolution

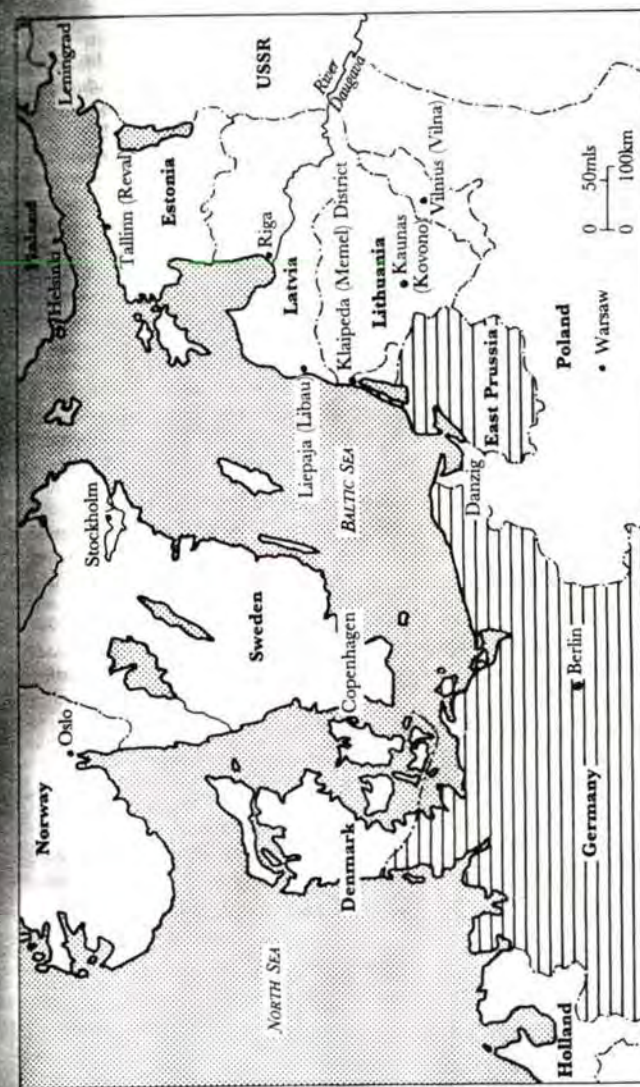
communist influence have strengthened certain traditional peasant suspicions of capitalism, especially in Lithuania.

Lithuania between the Wars was still an overwhelmingly peasant economy, with, in 1920, 79 per cent of the population engaged in agriculture. The Latvian and Estonian economies were more mixed, but in these republics too, 66 and 58 per cent respectively were farmers. This meant that unemployed urban workers could always be absorbed back onto family farms. It also made the land reforms of 1920 of critical importance. These reforms were the rock on which the Baltic republics were founded, and which contributed greatly to their relative social and political stability, until destroyed by outside intervention. The 1920s saw a major swing from radical politics in all three Baltic States, the richer peasants later becoming the mainstay of the nationalist dictatorships. Today this link between the peasantry and the Right has been broken. In Lithuania, most of the peasantry is more strongly attached to the former Communists of Algirdas Brazauskas.

Because in Latvia and Estonia more than half the land had been held by the great landlords, mostly Baltic Germans, the scope of the land reforms of 1920 was enormous. Compensation was minimal, though in conservative Lithuania, landlords succeeded in retaining more than in the other two republics.⁸ Before 1914 one third all Russia's European trade had passed through Latvian ports, and Riga, Tallinn and Narva had huge industries (the Kreenholm cotton mill in Narva was the biggest in the Empire) relying on Russian raw materials. Initially both Balts and Western investors assumed, as they do today, that the main economic role of the Baltic States would continue to be that of a bridge to and from Russia. As the 1920s progressed, however, it became clear that Soviet Russia's external trade would never return to its pre-1914 levels, and that opportunities for western investment would remain almost non-existent. 25 per cent of Estonia's trade was still with Russia in 1922, but by 1935 it had fallen to only 3 per cent, and Latvia's was no higher – an extraordinary testimony to the hermetic seal placed by Stalin between the Soviet Union and the rest of the world.⁹

This situation is however very unlikely to replicate itself in the 1990s. Unless Russia were to collapse completely, the Balts, thanks to the way they were integrated into the Soviet economy, will go on trading heavily with Russia, and this is bound to have repercussions on their political situation. Before 1914, Riga and Tallinn were exporting very large quantities of both manufactured and agricultural produce to Western Europe. On the recovery of independence in 1991, due to Soviet rule, their exports to the West were miniscule, although those of Estonia at least have increased greatly since then.

Following the loss of the Russian connection, Baltic trade and industry in the 1920s and 1930s had of necessity to be based chiefly on local



The Baltic Lands between the two World Wars

resources, above all agriculture, while many of the great factories remained idle or were largely dismantled. Agricultural exports however largely compensated for the decline. These rose steadily through the 1920s, before dipping sharply after the Slump of 1929. In the 1930s they recovered, and by 1939 had almost reached their pre-slump level. The Latvian and Estonian economies were in general among the most successful in Europe in their recovery from the depression; this was perhaps the most important achievement of the authoritarian regimes of Kārlis Ulmanis and Konstantin Päts.

The Estonian standard of living in 1939 was roughly equivalent to that of Finland, with Latvia not far behind. Lithuania however was much poorer and more agricultural. Of course even Estonia was considerably poorer than West European countries, but this was not obvious because, like the other Baltic States, Estonia lacked the West's extremes of wealth and poverty. Although in the early 1920s many visitors had commented on the misery left behind by the war and revolution, by the 1930s Western visitors to Latvia and Estonia were greatly impressed by the apparent well-being of ordinary people.¹⁰ The first period of independence saw a great expansion in educational provision within the three republics, and some notable achievements in the field of culture. Lithuania started from a much weaker position, with almost one third of the population illiterate when the republic was established; but by the 1930s it had increased its proportion of pupils almost seven-fold – though its schools remained of a poorer quality than those of the other republics.

When therefore the Balts look back to their first period of independence as an idyllic time, there is a good deal of truth to their view. It makes all the more bitter the contrast between their economic position relative to Scandinavia in those years, and the vast gulf that separates them today. This in itself would have been enough completely to undermine Soviet claims to have brought 'progress' to the Baltic, and to destroy the entire moral basis of Soviet rule.

The Failure of Parliamentary Democracy, 1920–34

After 1918, all three Baltic States adopted democratic constitutions as a matter of course. With the victory of the Western Allies over the Kaiser's Germany, democratic ideals were predominant, strengthened by the almost messianic hopes attached to the League of Nations and to the philosophy of President Woodrow Wilson. By the mid-1930s, all three Baltic democracies had collapsed and been replaced by authoritarian regimes, albeit of a mild kind. One of the problems of all three Baltic constitutions was that they were too democratic for their own good. Parliaments, elected by universal suffrage and full proportional

representation, were given almost complete control over the governments. In the words of V. Stanley Vardys, 'the executive branch was completely dependent on unqualified decisions, better described as whims. The Estonian constitution so magnified the powers of the parliament ... that the institution itself formed the government and accepted its resignation'.¹¹

Today the Soviet system and the movements which overthrew it have also, paradoxically, left parliaments in the Baltic with excessive powers. From 1990 to 1992 (and in the case of Latvia, even beyond that), the Baltic States functioned under slightly modified versions of their Soviet constitutions. It made the distribution of power under the constitution extremely unclear, because the real fulcrum, the Communist Party had disappeared. The Supreme Councils or 'parliaments' found themselves issuing administrative decrees and controlling details of government policy. They were able to do this precisely because they and their chairmen had previously been rubber-stamps and their powers had never been defined. This problem of excessive parliamentary powers surfaced all over the former Soviet Union, most dangerously of all in Russia.

The new Estonian and Lithuanian constitutions, adopted in the autumn of 1992, were intended to eliminate these faults (see Chapter 8). However, both undermine collective responsibility and the authority of the prime minister by allowing parliament to dismiss individual ministers, and both allow too many parties into parliament. There is therefore a risk that, as in the 1920s and 1930s, constitutional weaknesses will conspire with political ones – especially the lack of party discipline – to undermine the fledgling parliamentary democracies of the Baltic.

Before democracy was overthrown in Latvia and Estonia in 1934, they experienced sixteen and seventeen governments respectively. In Lithuania, democracy lasted only seven years, but produced eleven governments.* The plethora of governments did not greatly hinder the implementation of major reforms, the stabilisation of the economies, or advances in education and culture – but then these were European bourgeois societies, long accustomed to living in an atmosphere of economic free enterprise, and of considerable freedom of thought.

In recent years too, at least in Lithuania and Estonia, reforms have also proceeded at a fair rate despite frequent parliamentary chaos. However, the underlying cultural situation today is different from that in the first period of independence. After decades of Communist rule, most people instinctively expect the government to provide a lead, and do not

* This time, in the 34 months between the Lithuanian declaration of independence on 11 March 1990 and Christmas 1992, Lithuania has had five prime ministers.

take kindly to being led in conflicting directions. Moreover, after 1918, the former republics of Latvia and Estonia possessed at least small but competent civil services, which took over the government after the coups. No such cadres exist today, and their creation is one of the most urgent tasks of Western aid and training in the region.

The coups of Latvia and Estonia came as the result of long political and economic crises resulting in part from the world economic depression. They appear to have been grudgingly accepted by the great majority of the populations. The coup of 1926 in Lithuania, by contrast, appears to have had far more to do with political opportunism and a gut dislike of democracy on the part of Right-wing and military forces in Lithuania. One factor was the way that Antanas Smetona and Augustinas Voldemaras, the main leaders of Lithuania during its struggle for independence between 1918 and 1920, and their party, the Nationalists (*Tautininkai*) had been subsequently excluded from office by other political forces, rooted in Catholicism or socialism (this exclusion from power of the forces which see themselves as the true heroes of the independence struggle could be a major problem in Lithuania today). The Nationalists, with limited public support (except among officers, students and intellectuals), appear to have despaired of ever returning to power by democratic means. By 1926, Mussolini had seized power in Italy and Pilsudski in Poland: the hegemony of democratic ideology in European political thought was already compromised.

In 1926, a Populist-Social Democrat coalition took power, dependent for support on the ethnic minorities, including the Poles. Concessions to the Poles in the field of education, at a time when Poland was closing Lithuanian schools in the Vilnius area, allowed the Right to allege treason. The government was blamed by the public for unpopular economic measures, and by the army for plans to cut costs by reducing the officer corps. In December 1926, therefore, the army, supported by Catholic political forces, overthrew the elected government, imposing Smetona as President and Voldemaras as Prime Minister.¹² Initially Smetona ruled in coalition with the Christian Democrats, but in 1927 dissolved parliament and promulgated a new constitution providing for a strong presidency. Two years later he dismissed Voldemaras, who had turned to fascism, supported by the overtly fascist 'Iron Wolf' paramilitary organisation (today, once again in the process of revival) which subsequently staged repeated coup attempts to bring Voldemaras to power. The last was in 1934, after which Voldemaras was arrested and imprisoned until 1938. This was one of a series of no fewer than thirteen attempted coups (or movements dubbed as such by the Lithuanian government) by different forces in the first period of Lithuanian independence.

From 1930, Smetona's regime developed certain fascist characteristics.

Smetona was addressed as Leader of the Nation. The *Tautininkai* Party was reorganised on the 'Leader-Principle' and given extensive state powers, and its linked 'Veterans' Association' expanded to become a state paramilitary volunteer force, on the model of those of Germany or Italy. All other party youth organisations were ultimately incorporated into the *Tautininkai*'s 'Young Lithuania' organisation, with the official motto of 'Lithuania for the Lithuanians'. Both 'Young Lithuania' and the *Tautininkai* have now been revived, with their pre-1940 ideology and symbolism (which in the case of 'Young Lithuania', initially included the fascist salute).

Under Smetona, a leader of Young Lithuania declared that,

Young Lithuania operates on an authoritarian basis. It knows only one leader – the Nation's Leader, Antanas Smetona. . . . Young Lithuania steadfastly believes that the nation can only be united when the will of one leader prevails.

Harsh punishments were envisaged for crimes against the state, though the death penalty was rarely imposed. In the opinion of the historian Georg von Rauch, 'as a result of these measures Lithuania had virtually become an authoritarian one-party state', to a much greater extent than in Latvia or Estonia during their period of authoritarian rule in the 1930s. All the elements of Smetona's regime professed a public ideology of intolerant nationalism.

The Lithuanian emigré historian Leonas Sabaliunas quotes Nationalist ideologues of the period on the need for 'total pedagogics in a young nation-state, seeking a monolithic national body and a collective soul', and such regimented aphorisms as 'a national-state, as a matter of course, presupposes a national orientation in art' and 'the nation-state is essentially a totalitarian state'.¹³ However Sabaliunas observes correctly that Smetona and his regime were far less radical and above all, less brutal than these ideologues would have wished, and that 'there is reason to assume that Lithuanian politics was modified to a considerable extent by fidelity to ethical norms'. The universities and even the courts retained a real measure of independence.

Although a strong nationalist, Smetona shunned racial ideology. Despite deep conflicts with the Catholic Church over its social and political role, and its relations with Poland, he remained a practising Catholic, unlike Hitler, Mussolini and other fascist leaders. In general, he did not have either the violence or the revolutionary streak of a true fascist. There is about Smetona's regime the air of some Third World countries in recent decades, those which have donned one or other Western ideology and used it for their own ends without participating in it or putting it fully into practice; in Smetona's time, the dominant

European ideology was fascism, and some surprising people in Western Europe were also prepared to admire some of its characteristics.

Although Smetona's regime sometimes used anti-semitic language, this was not its official ideology, and there were no officially sponsored pogroms. Smetona spoke on occasions of the religious tolerance of ancient Lithuania, and the contemporary Jewish-Lithuanian poet, Mark Zingeris, has praised Smetona as a man of the enlightenment who had many Jewish friends and did not share the crude chauvinism of many of his supporters.

There is little doubt that Professor Landsbergis, the Lithuanian leader between 1990 and 1992, regards himself as in some ways the political heir of Smetona. He has referred to him admiringly in speeches, and adopted some of his symbolism, though not the most extreme; Landsbergis also uses more Catholic symbolism, and has a much closer alliance with the Church than did Smetona. Landsbergis certainly has authoritarian tendencies, but he cannot be described as a fascist. His unsuccessful drive to become the 'Father of the Nation' is described in Chapter 8. It has led him into a tactical alliance with some very dubious Right-wing forces, as well as with the Catholic Church, and to demagogic and vicious verbal attacks on his opponents, including old allies. However, Landsbergis sees himself as a force for controlling and moderating the extreme Right; and a number of liberal and objective Lithuanian emigré scholars of my acquaintance were also prepared for a long time to see him in that light. Following the victory of the former Communists in the elections of October 1992, it was widely believed that the extreme Right might be tempted to carry out a coup, but that they would be restrained by Landsbergis, if only for the sake of his reputation in the West. This of course recalls Smetona, for whatever the disquieting sides of his regime, he at least averted a victory by Voldemaras, who it seems safe to say would have introduced fascism in the fullest sense. V. Stanley Vardys's description of Smetona as 'mild-mannered but clever and stubborn' strongly recalls the character of Landsbergis as well; but unfortunately with one difference.¹⁴ Smetona was a fairly able administrator with a long experience of practical affairs. Landsbergis, though a shrewd political tactician, is according to members of his own staff fundamentally uninterested in questions of administration, finance, and legislation, far preferring the worlds of foreign visits, symbolism and rhetoric, and the Lithuanian culture he so deeply loves. This is a common feature among intellectual politicians who have risen to prominence in several former Communist states, for under the Communists they were excluded from any administrative role. These are qualities which would make Landsbergis an excellent symbolic Head of State; unfortunately, the Smetona tradition dictates an executive presidency, which is also possibly what Lithuania needs today. It was Landsbergis's ambition to

fill this role – but in February 1993, it was his arch-rival, former Communist leader Algirdas Brazauskas, who was actually to achieve it.

The Roots of Authoritarianism

In Estonia and Latvia, democracy outlived that of Lithuania by seven years, and collapsed only after these societies had suffered several years of economic recession. In both cases, the coups were carried out by men who, like Smetona, had helped to found the new nations, and part of their motivation was to head off a seizure of power by the extreme Right.*

Before 1934, Estonia did not even have a formal head of state, but only a prime minister, wholly dependent upon parliament. The average life of an Estonian government in the 1920s was eight months, and with as many as fourteen parties represented in parliament, forming a government could take weeks. However, the same parties and individuals were represented in many of the governments, so the picture was not much more unstable than that of France at that time. By the world slump of the early 1930s, economic fears, especially on the part of the middle classes, encouraged the growth of a fascistic movement, the League of Veterans (or 'Freedom Fighters') of the War of Independence. The founders of this organisation were in fact veterans, but it expanded to become a general political movement with a uniformed paramilitary wing.

The League's ideology was strongly nationalist, anti-communist, anti-parliamentary, anti-semitic, and opposed to ethnic minorities in general. It was influenced by European fascism, and more immediately by the Lapua movement in neighbouring Finland. In the municipal elections of January 1934 the League won absolute majorities in Estonia's three main cities, and seemed on its way to the presidency. To head off the League's rise, and citing plots for a coup d'état (which has never been proved), the prime minister, Konstantin Päts, on 12 March 1934 proclaimed martial law, banned the League, arrested 400 of its leading members, and banished others from the civil service and army. The action was supported by the Socialists, who saw all too clearly what would happen if the League took power. Later that year, after parliament began to oppose Päts' government, he suspended it and, in March 1935, banned all

* Estonia had faced one serious coup attempt on 1 December 1924, but this was the work of a few hundred communists, supported by Moscow. Twenty-one people, including the Communications Minister, were killed during the attempt, and forty or so executed afterwards by the Estonian authorities. There was no general rising of the working class, and thereafter the Communists in Estonia remained largely quiescent until 1939.

political parties. The newly formed 'Fatherland League' was the only permitted political force, though without most of the fascist trimmings of the Tautininkai in Lithuania.

No-one was executed under Pāts' rule, though the Veterans' leader, Artur Sirk, may have been murdered by the President's secret service. After the uncovering of a further plot, other leading Veterans were given heavy prison sentences, though almost all, together with the Communists, were released under an amnesty in 1938. The press was strictly controlled, though there was no attempt to restrain intellectual life: the period is known to Estonians as 'the Era of Silence'. Until the end of the republic in 1940, Pāts refused to allow the restoration of political parties. In 1937 he called an assembly to rubber-stamp a presidential constitution, with parliament enjoying greatly reduced powers, and appointed local officials to play an important role. Pāts' prime minister termed this system 'guided democracy'. It is a matter of debate whether by 1940 Pāts was planning a return to the genuine article; in any case, Stalin pre-empted matters.

Events in Latvia followed a similar course, though anti-democratic politics began sooner, under the influence of Germany and neighbouring Lithuania. Latvia had a variety of fascist groups, of which the most notable was the 'Fire Cross', later renamed the 'Thunder Cross'. As in Germany, pagan revivalist thought played a part in the cultural background to fascism (see Chapter 5). All these groups were bitterly hostile to Latvia's Russian, German and Jewish minorities, together making up almost a quarter of the population. The extreme Right also called for the proscription of all Left-wing parties.

Faced with what many saw as impending civil war, the premier, Kārlis Ulmanis (like Pāts in Estonia, the chief founder of Latvian independence) declared a state of emergency on the night of 15 March 1934, suspended parliament and banned party activities. He ruled by decree until the end of the republic, but did not introduce a one-party state, although the 'Aizsargi' (Home Guards) functioned in some ways like a nationalist paramilitary force (and have been revived as an unofficial radical nationalist force in the Latvia of today). Ulmanis did not face great opposition to his rule, and was even able to recruit Social Democrats into his government. Although Ulmanis' government was virtually a 'dictatorship of consensus', it made life increasingly uncomfortable for Latvia's minorities, and indeed adopted the Right-wing slogan of 'Latvia for the Latvians' – hardly surprisingly since, in the 1920s, even the 'liberal' Democratic Centre bloc had adopted this phrase. In the 1920s Baltic Germans had played a role in several governments, but in the 1930s they were completely excluded, and the educational autonomy of the minorities was reduced. There was however no severe ethnic persecution in either Estonia or Latvia.

Both Ulmanis and Pāts carried out steps to introduce 'corporatist' economic bodies, following a trend present not just in Nazism, but in Christian Democracy and other political forces of the time (and which indeed, in another guise, played a major part in German economic success after 1950). This did not, however, impede a very successful economic recovery in the 1930s, which by the end of the republic had raised the value of Latvian exports to more than five times the level of 1922.

Compared to the first period of independence, democracy in the Baltic States today has certain notable strengths but also certain weaknesses. Imperial Russia before 1917 provided more opportunities for constitutional politics than did the Soviet Union before Gorbachov, and the new national elites had much more experience of constitutionalism and administration. Furthermore, democracy today is strong largely because it is equated with capitalist prosperity (as a placard in East Germany in 1990 had it, 'Helmut [Kohl], Lead Us Into The Land of the Economic Miracle!'). In Russia, for obvious reasons, the 'Far Eastern Model' of authoritarian capitalist development already enjoys great prestige, and such thinking is bound to spread to the Baltic as well, albeit moderated by the history of Baltic emigration to North America, many representatives of which now advise the present Baltic governments. These add to the major strength of present Baltic democracy, which is the hegemony of democratic ideas in contemporary Europe, reinforced by European economic power and the lure of Western lifestyles and culture. This is affected of course by the awareness that the creation of authoritarian regimes would probably, though not necessarily, cost the Balts western aid and support. I have myself spent an inordinate amount of time in the Baltic States arguing with members of the extreme Right-wing parties about some of their ideas, and my knock-out blow (wrapped in less direct language) has always been: 'what you are saying is not European; it will separate you from the modern West'.

There are a good many radical nationalist ideologists in the contemporary Baltic who cordially despise the modern West, a contempt increased by what they see as the West's 'cowardice' and 'treachery' in failing to do more to save the Balts from Soviet conquest in the 1940s, and to support them after 1989, while the Balts were sacrificing themselves to save Europe from a new Soviet attack. In the words of Višvaldis Brinkmanis, a leader of the Latvian Citizens Congress: 'Don't you think that it is just as Oswald Spengler predicted? The Western nations have lost their pride and their morale and are mixing themselves with inferior races. . . .'¹⁵

At present this is very much a marginal view, compared with the general desire for the Baltic States to forge closer connections with the

West. There remains however another possibility: that Europe itself could swing towards the extreme Right. All the extreme nationalist parties in Latvia and Lithuania have taken great encouragement from the rise of Jean Marie Le Pen and the Front Nationale in France.⁸ However, except to an extent in Lithuania, the mainstream Right-wing forces in the Baltic appear at present to be committed to democracy. The leaders of the 'Fatherland' (*Isamaa*) alliance in Estonia are both entirely sincere and very knowledgeable in their attempts to introduce Western conservative democratic ideas into Estonian politics. Even the far Right, the 'Estonian Citizen' group or the Citizens Committees in Latvia, have declared themselves for democracy in principle, even if some of their behaviour appears to belie this.

A further factor today is that this time, the Balts did not have to fight wars of independence. It follows that the various national paramilitary forces, and the new national armies, lack the prestige which comes from being seen as the 'saviours of the nation'. The importance of this is evident both in the history of Central and Eastern Europe in the 1920s, and in developments in the Soviet Caucasus today. Some of today's paramilitary groups would like to portray themselves in this light, but the reality is that it was crowds of ordinary, unarmed Baltic civilians who saved their countries in January 1991 by placing their bodies in the path of the Soviet tanks.

Although in the Baltic states of today there are far fewer people than in the 1920's who reject parliamentary democracy *per se*, there are considerable forces which deny the legitimacy of the existing constitutions. This stems from the rejection, during the struggle for independence, of the legitimacy of the Supreme Councils by former dissidents and more radical nationalist forces in general. This was partly on legalistic grounds, but chiefly because they were elected by all Soviet citizens in the republics, including all those Russian-speakers who moved there under Soviet rule. The radical forces rallied behind the Estonian and Latvian 'Congresses', organised by these forces and elected by pre-1940 citizens and their descendants only.

In Estonia, the problem of constitutional legitimacy appeared to be resolved by the constitutional assembly of 1991-92, which bridged the Congress and the Supreme Council, and adopted a constitution acceptable to both. This in turn was ratified by a referendum on 28 June. Only a small and seemingly insignificant group continued to reject the new order in favour of a return to the 'legitimate' (but authoritarian) constitution of 1938.

Unfortunately, in the elections of September 1992, the 'Estonian Citizen' group, representing this opinion, and led by a retired US colonel of Estonian origin, Juri Toomepuu, won 8 per cent of the parliamentary

seats. The group was backed by a small armed volunteer force which rejected the authority of the Estonian government in favour of a self-appointed 'government in exile' of which Toomepuu was the 'Defence Minister'. These elements are also of course bitterly hostile to the Russian minority, much of which they hope to pressure into leaving.

In Lithuania, a referendum accompanying the October 1992 elections ratified the acceptance of the draft parliamentary constitution drawn up by parliament. In Latvia, with the future constitution still wholly unsettled by the end of 1992, much larger forces continued to reject the authority of the Supreme Council, especially when it came to deciding constitutional matters and those of 'national importance' such as the issue of citizenship to the Russian 'immigrant' population. The paper of the Latvian Congress, *Pilsonis*, even on one occasion called for armed revolt against the 'crypto-communist regime', and for this was banned by a Latvian court.

In early 1993 the influence of such rejectionist forces was still limited. The risk for democracy is that the mainstream political forces might find themselves forced to make a compromise with the Russian minorities which would be rejected not only by the radical nationalists but by many ordinary Balts as well. If this came in the context of potential or actual conflict between Balts and local Russians, then the extremist groups could grow rapidly. The prestige of these groups is strengthened by the fact that they are largely led by men and women who resisted Soviet rule, and in some cases paid the price with years of imprisonment. Some of their friends paid with their lives. Even those who find some of their ideas disastrous cannot but respect their personal honour, courage and patriotism. So far, this has not been reflected in strong political support (see Chapter 4), but it remains a reservoir of historical prestige which may be drawn on if the mainstream forces discredit themselves.

By contrast, among the mainstream national leaders, even Landsbergis has no record of anti-Soviet resistance, while several of the leading figures in Latvia and Estonia were communist officials. In the 1920s, the extreme Right regularly raised the cry of 'national treachery' and of 'communist plots', but this cry is far stronger and more effective today. And since – for better or worse – former Communist leaders like Anatolijs Gorbunovs and Arnold Rüütel remain very popular with large sections of the population in their republics (not just local Russians, but Balts as well), the Far Right's denial of their legitimacy extends into a denial of the will of the electorate and anti-democratic feeling in general. To the extreme Right, any senior former Communist is automatically an agent of Moscow (in Lithuania, anyone who opposes the Right is labelled in this way). Since the great majority of the civil services and establishments of the three states are still made up of former Communists, this leads some radicals to a feeling that they have an

absolute national duty to watch and control their own governments. In the words of one of the leaders of the *Sauliai*, a Lithuanian nationalist paramilitary force, asked if his force would allow a Left-wing government to take power: 'Of course, if they were properly elected they would be allowed to take power. But we would watch them very carefully; and if we saw that they were betraying Lithuania, we would have to act to save the nation.'¹⁷

This attitude led to fears – fortunately unfulfilled – that a victory of the former Communists in the 1992 elections would be undermined or even reversed by the paramilitaries, forces strengthened by an element in the dissident tradition which the paramilitary shares with that of the *Freikorps*. Both have involved small bodies of activists sacrificing themselves on behalf of populations which were basically passive, and which could well be seen as cowardly or lazy. Like the Leninist tradition of a small party of activists acting on behalf of the revolutionary masses, this does not encourage respect for the will of the electorate.

All adult Balts studied Leninism at school, and their model for the role of the activist party is in many ways a Leninist one. Asked about Latvian public support for Gorbunovs, National Independence Party activists in Latvia replied with contempt that this was made up of 'the uneducated, stupid women, ex-Communists and Communist dupes'. After Sajūdis's defeat in 1992, one of its workers snarled that 'the illiterate peasants have been duped by the Communists', and a leader of the radical Liberty League told me that, 'This shows that many Lithuanians want to be slaves. We must teach them to change this mentality' – classically Leninist words, which help explain why such groups are not very good at winning the votes of the 'illiterate peasants' in question.¹⁸

Another potential problem emerges from the experience of Eastern Europe between the wars. A key weakness of parliamentary government in many states was that it had to be built on coalitions, and the number of 'coalitionable' democratic parties in the centre (parties willing to make coalitions with each other and to support the existing state) was always liable to erosion from Left and Right, until in the end the band of centrist parties was so narrow that it became impossible to govern at all. Moreover, the necessity of repeatedly constructing governments from the same parties was a tremendous spur to political irresponsibility, since none of them could be dispensed with, however disruptive its behaviour.

In independent Latvia and Lithuania, the problem was made worse by the general mood of nationalism which made it impossible to bring the parties representing the minorities into government. In 1926, the Lithuanian government's reliance on the Polish deputies helped provoke the military coup. In contemporary Latvia and Estonia, unless local Russians are to be permanently excluded from citizenship, or even expelled, parliaments will presumably contain a growing number of their representatives.

In Estonia in January 1992, the government of Dr Edgar Savisaar won a parliamentary vote giving it emergency economic powers, but only with the support of Russian deputies, with a majority of Estonian deputies against the move. As the realisation dawned, public outrage was such that Dr Savisaar's own Estonian supporters abandoned him and he was forced to resign.

On the other hand, one reason why in Latvia between the wars the extreme Right could not be brought into government was because its policies towards the minorities, if implemented, would have caused extremely grave problems with Germany. Today the National Independence Movement and Latvian Congress are calling openly for measures against the local Russian population which, if put into effect, could very well provoke revolt and Russian military intervention. But if minorities cannot be brought into government because it would outrage the nationalists, and the extreme Right cannot be brought in because it would drive the minorities to revolt, how long can parliamentary governments survive? It may therefore, at some stage, be replaced by a form of presidential government. The risk is that, as in 1934, this transition would only be possible through a period of authoritarian or at least Gaullist-style rule. This might, as before, take the form of a 'coup from the centre', to prevent the extreme Right, if elected, from taking power.

Such an 'authoritarian transition' would risk severe problems both with the Russian minorities and with Russia. The former are far more numerous than they were before 1940. Moreover, Stalin's Russia was not particularly interested in the internal politics of the Baltic states; due to ferocious Soviet restrictions on contacts with the outside world, economic links between the Soviet Union and the Balts were very limited, and social contacts non-existent. In the 1930s, in any case, the Russian minorities were largely led by White Russian émigrés, hardly likely to appeal to Stalin for protection against the Balts.

The differences today hardly need to be emphasised. They are, however, missed by many Balts, especially returning emigrants. With their eyes firmly fixed on the picture of the independent Baltic states they learned from their émigré history books, and without personal experience of dealing with Russians, they instinctively think in terms of a return to the insulated situation of the first republics.

Orphans of Versailles: Baltic Diplomacy, 1918–40

Between 1918 and 1921 the Balts liberated themselves. Western protection was, however, vital in forcing the German government to withdraw its troops from Latvia, and in stressing to the Soviet government that a

renewed offensive against the Balts after 1920 would destroy any possibility of a diplomatic opening to the West. (The contrast with the Caucasus, where the West made clear its lack of interest, was stark.) Baltic independence was consolidated under an implicit British and French umbrella. When it was destroyed, the Russian and Germans once again divided the Baltic between them.

In July 1921, following the withdrawal of its Baltic squadron, the British government informed the Baltic States that it could not promise them military assistance in the event of a Soviet attack. Between then and 1933, militarily speaking, the Balts were at the mercy of Soviet invasion, and indeed the consensus in British diplomacy for much of the 1920s was that they would in fact return to Russian control. Many Balts continued to believe that in a crisis, the British would save them, but British interest in the region was in fact primarily commercial.

At this stage, however, Stalin's Russia was withdrawing from the cause of world revolution in favour of 'socialism in one country'. Moreover, a disarmed Germany diminished the strategic importance of the Baltic States for Moscow. And finally, it must have been clear to the Soviet government that while an invasion of the Baltic region might not lead to war with Britain and France, it could well lead to conflict with Poland, especially after the Warsaw Accord of 1922 between Poland, Finland, Estonia and Latvia. It would also have completely disrupted the Soviet Union's international policies, made future co-operation with the Western powers extremely difficult, and raised a host of unforeseen dangers.

This last point is also the essential international factor protecting the Baltic States in the 1990s. It is in the highest degree unlikely that if Russia were to invade, NATO troops would come to their aid; but Moscow could certainly face international isolation, probably a United Nations blockade, and a complete cut-off of Western economic co-operation and assistance. Given Russia's economic weakness, a Russian leader would need to be crazy indeed to bring such consequences on his country. The only possible pretext might be a conflict between the Baltic States and their own Russian minorities, and even then, after having seen what an indigestible morsel the Balts can be, it is difficult to see anything but a fascist government in Moscow wishing to annex them outright. The Balts today would probably co-operate more closely in the face of a Russian threat than they did in the 1920s and 1930s. Their failure then has been made a standing reproach by historians, although it is not clear that in 1939 anything they could have done, singly or collectively, could have saved them. As it was, collective action was almost wholly lacking, one reason being the dispute between Poland and Lithuania over Vilnius. Any meaningful Baltic or East European military bloc had to include Poland. Until 1938, however, Poland and Lithuania did not have

diplomatic relations and Lithuania resisted any pact that might seem to legitimise Poland's rule over Vilnius, or to bring Lithuania under Polish hegemony. Sweden, the only other significant military power in the region, understandably shunned by military involvement on the Eastern shores of the Baltic, and Jaan Tõnisson's dream of a great Northern Union remained stillborn.

Baltic co-operation, however, also suffered from an underlying lack of interest and liking between the three Baltic States themselves. The Estonians regarded the Lithuanians as hopelessly unreliable, and after a single experiment, Estonians and Latvians also ceased to hold joint military exercises or to co-ordinate their military strategy.¹⁹ Between 1919 (when they co-operated closely over the Versailles Peace Conference) and 1934 the Balts did not even try seriously to co-ordinate their approaches to the League of Nations. The Baltic Entente of 1934, created by the three states in response to the rise of Nazi Germany, provided for regular diplomatic consultation. However, it contained no military clauses, and co-operation remained only on paper.

Today the situation seems, on the surface, much better. The three national movements co-operated in their struggle with Moscow, and Baltic deputies tried to work together in the Soviet parliament although, according to the leading Latvian deputy (and later deputy prime minister), Ilmārs Bišers, 'we, the Baltic republics, which seemingly advanced the same proposals, each went on its own road, and that hurt us'.²⁰

The Baltic Council, set up on 12 May 1990, revived the tradition of the Baltic Entente of 1934, and led to regular meetings between Baltic leaders and parliamentarians. The 'Baltic Common Market' initiated in April 1990, aimed to co-ordinate economic policy and guarantee free trade between the three states. In fact, it does nothing of the kind. The Balts basically produce the same kind of goods, and none have the raw materials they so desperately need. The opportunities for worthwhile trade between them are therefore limited. After a particularly fruitless meeting of Baltic prime ministers on 11 September 1992 Latvian Prime Minister Ivars Godmanis criticised 'a lack of co-operation' and 'a certain rivalry' on 'the Soviet-imposed parallel economic development' of the three states. In September 1992, Estonian Prime Minister Tiit Vähi said simply, 'there is no Baltic co-operation. We have to start from scratch'.²¹

Economic desperation, in the context of the collapsing Soviet economy, also leads each state to look out for itself. Thus in autumn 1991 the Lithuanians reacted immediately to Russian cuts in oil shipments to their refinery at Mažeikiai by passing on the bulk of the reduction to consumers in Latvia, rather than attempting any equitable distribution. In summer 1992, the Estonians demanded world market prices for electricity supplies to Latvia, and relented only when (as should have

been obvious from their own experience) the Latvians proved unable to pay. In the beggar-my-neighbour game of post-Soviet economics, the Balts have been only slightly less ruthless to each other than they have been to Russia, or Russia to them. There has been no real co-ordination of price reforms or moves towards the introduction of independent currencies, with the result that each state tends to be undermined by the other two, as well as by Russia. Lithuania has suggested a much closer common market, but its own policies have been as self-regarding as those of Latvia and Estonia who, for their part, fear that in any really close alliance, the Lithuanians would always insist on taking the lead. The Estonians for their part are opposed to any closer union because of the conviction that, with their links to Scandinavia, they are better off alone. Lithuania's reckless (in the Estonian view) policies during the independence struggle have increased the traditional Estonian distrust of Lithuania, and leading Lithuanians have not improved matters by publicly accusing Estonia of cowardice because of its more cautious approach. On numerous occasions during the independence struggle the governments did not even inform each other what they were doing, even on crucial questions.²²

A particularly striking piece of opportunism, recalling the failure to co-ordinate security policy in the 1920s and 1930s, was Lithuania's move in September 1992 to seek a separate agreement with Russia on military withdrawal, thereby undermining the united Baltic front. The Latvian and Estonian governments put on a brave face, but the action was severely criticised in the press and by emigré groups (indeed, including Lithuanians) in North America. Another move recalling the 1930s was the Latvian-Polish signature to a military co-operation agreement of 17 September 1992 which worried the more paranoid elements of the Lithuanian Right.

With the rise of Nazi Germany after 1933, Baltic diplomacy became an increasingly desperate balancing act. The three states signed non-aggression pacts with the Soviet Union, but evaded proposals for guarantees of closer protection, fearing this would lead to the stationing of troops and to the events which did indeed occur in 1939–40. Following the restoration of German sea and air power, Britain could no longer intervene militarily in the Baltic even had it wished to. Moscow, for its part, showed increasing sign of strategic interest in the region, issuing stern warnings to the Balts not to draw closer to Germany. The signals were disregarded by the Estonian and Latvian governments, which thought to continue balancing between Germany and the Soviet Union, and did not foresee a pact between them. On 7 June 1939 Estonia and Latvia agreed to non-aggression pacts with Germany, and in the succeeding months, most unwisely, received visits from high-ranking

German officers and the German warship *Hipper*. To the very end of the Estonian republic in July 1940, Konstantin Päts apparently continued to expect the speedy outbreak of a German-Russian war which would deliver the Balts from Soviet hands. He was wrong by only a few months, but those months were crucial. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, signed on 23 August 1939, contained the infamous 'secret protocol', detailing the division of Poland and the Baltic States. Latvia and Estonia were initially to go to the Soviet Union, and Lithuania to Germany, but on 28 September, following the fall of Poland, a second secret protocol allocated Lithuania to the Soviet Union in return for German concessions in Poland and the equivalent of \$7.5 million in gold.

Moscow acted swiftly. On 23 September Estonia was confronted with an ultimatum demanding a military alliance and acquiescence in the establishment of Soviet military bases in the republic. The Estonian government consulted the Latvians about the possibility of joint military resistance, but received no encouragement and capitulated on 2 October. Latvia was forced to agree to the same terms.* In Lithuania, Moscow used a mixture of pressure and bribery. In return for an alliance and military bases, it ceded the Vilnius region, seized from Poland under the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. This was the basis of later threats from Gorbachov, and from Communist hardliners in neighbouring Byelorussia, to 'take back' Vilnius (and Memel-Klaipeda, ceded to Germany in March 1939) if Lithuania left the Soviet Union. This was a source of some embarrassment in relation to Lithuania's negotiations with Moscow and the creation of a joint Baltic negotiating position since, unlike Latvia and Estonia, Lithuania could not very well ask for a return to the *status quo ante* Molotov-Ribbentrop. It has also of course been a source of lasting anger in Poland, although it was hardly more immoral than Poland's own non-aggression pact with Hitler in 1934 or participation, in November 1938, in Hitler's carve-up of Czechoslovakia. The fact that most of the states in this region have always behaved with sublime egotism adds a certain piquancy to their eternal demands that the West should sacrifice its own interests, and those of Europe as a whole, for the sake of 'justice' and 'morality'.

For several months the situation appeared to stabilise. In December Moscow issued a similar ultimatum to the Finns, provoking the bitterly fought three-month 'winter war' in which the Finns resisted with brilliance and heroism before being forced to yield on terms. From bases

* Today, Russian negotiators seeking to perpetuate or at least regularise the presence of Russian troops in the Baltic occasionally claim that since the independent Baltic governments have been restored, the 1939 'mutual assistance treaties' must still be in force, since they were never abrogated – an argument rejected with scorn by most Balts.

in Estonia, Soviet bombers took part in the campaign. Then, with Hitler's victory over France in May-June 1940, the last possible Western obstacle to Soviet conquest disappeared, while the need to strengthen the Soviet Union's defences against Germany grew even stronger. In mid-June, Moscow issued ultimatums to all three Baltic States requiring full military occupation and the reconstruction of the Baltic governments under Soviet supervision. All three gave in. President Smetona urged resistance, but his government refused. He fled Lithuania, dying in a fire in America four years later.

After the governments of Latvia and Estonia had been taken over, at Moscow's instruction and backed by Soviet troops, by local Communists, elections with a single list of permitted candidates produced parliaments which on 21 and 22 July requested 'admission' to the Soviet Union. Pāts, Ulmanis, Voldemaras and a number of other leading figures were arrested and deported to the interior of the Soviet Union, where most of them died.

Should the Balts have resisted? At the time the argument against it looked conclusive. In September 1939, military resistance was already hopeless, and the three states could still hope, by agreeing to the bases, to preserve the remainder of their sovereignty. By June 1940, with tens of thousands of Soviet troops within the Soviet borders, the military situation became even more desperate. The analogy with Finland's long resistance is false, since Finland was helped by the winter as well as the terrain. The argument for resistance, often still heard in the Baltic States, is twofold. In the first place, whatever death, destruction and suffering resulted, it could not easily have exceeded what actually happened to the Baltic States between 1940 and 1954. It is possible that if the Balts had resisted in 1940, especially if they had been united, they might have persuaded Stalin against outright annexation and become Communist satellites, like the later ones of Eastern Europe. The Balts would then have escaped the worst features of Stalinist rule and, most importantly, been spared 'Russification' and the arrival of hundreds of thousands of Russian immigrants.

In Lithuania during the sixteen months following the declaration of independence on 11 March 1990, I often heard people say, 'this time, we must not repeat 1940; we must not give in without a fight', when refusing to bow to Moscow's pressure and seek a compromise with Gorbachov. Humiliation in 1940 contrasted sharply with the rhetoric of national defence and last-ditch resistance used by all three Baltic regimes in the 1930s.

In the course of 1992, Landsbergis tried to use the threat of a 'return to 1940' as a pretext for the creation of a presidential constitution and the exclusion of the former Communist Party and its allies from Lithuanian politics as potential 'Quislings'. The memory of 1940 can thus have very

questionable political uses. In terms of more general attitudes, it has led to a strong feeling that even a seemingly hopeless resistance may be the most rational, as well as the most honourable course. In the words of the Latvian poet Augusts Sings, in an anguished analysis of why he himself did not revolt against Stalinist rule:

And albeit that it would have been
a completely hopeless enterprise –
for senselessness perhaps is sometimes
the only thing that makes sense.

The Troglodyte International: The Soviet Impact on the Baltic

'Great advances have been made in teaching cats how to sing, although mainly in the quantitative sense; nevertheless not to be left unacknowledged is the unselfish work of these heroic roof-ploughmen during the night-hours.'

Jānis Rokpelis (a Soviet-Latvian poet)
Annual Report on the Nation's Economy

It is difficult to exaggerate the amount of damage done to the Baltic States by Soviet rule. Hundreds of thousands of Balts preserve the memory of Stalinist savagery in the 1940s, which left few families untouched. Population losses in the Baltic States as a result of execution, killings in the war, deaths in Siberia and flight to the West, were enormous.¹ The Estonian population declined by some 25 per cent between 1939 and 1945. Given the low Estonian birth-rate, it means that the number of ethnic Estonians alive today is barely higher than it was in 1939.

An Estonian friend, Eva Tarm, summed up her Soviet experience, and that of most Estonians, in a memorable interview:

I was born in 1958, and for most of my life I saw my country being degraded before my eyes by Soviet rule. My grandmother showed me mementos of the period of independence, and told me how good life had been. Meanwhile outside I saw Russians, who had been brought here to kill Estonians, being given the flats of their victims, and Estonians living in poverty. The country was changing as we looked, and there was nothing we could do to stop it. We no longer even felt that it was our country. Our district was increasingly inhabited by Russian immigrants. Russian was spoken in the trams and shops; the shop windows were decorated in a Russian style which was alien to us and which I utterly detested. In the shops, if I spoke in my native language, the shop assistants yelled at me, and if I sent my son to shop he came back empty-handed because he spoke no Russian.

Most terrible was that fear was the central element. Even when it was subdued, it was all-pervading. When I was growing up, it wasn't like Stalin's time – no-one was seized at night, and there were no mass arrests; but this had happened to both my father's and my mother's family, and of course the memory coloured everything . . . my grandfather was arrested one night in 1941 and simply disappeared completely. Nothing was heard from him or about him again, so my grandmother went on hoping that he might turn up. Finally, when she was dying in the 1970s, she said one day, 'Now at last I think my Auguste is not coming back'.

My mother always warned us to be careful, that they [the Soviet secret police] were as powerful and ruthless as ever; and we didn't believe her; but later we found that they really could hurt you, though in a more sophisticated way. . . .

Our generation is permanently depressed, disillusioned with everybody and everything, because under Soviet rule, the only way to improve your life was by compromising yourself completely. Soviet life was like a saw which cut everything down to one level, or a tailor who forced everyone to wear a grey overcoat. If you compromised yourself, you were allowed to wear coloured clothes in private, under the overcoat. It was like being in prison – either people found underhand ways of evading the system, or they developed hobbies which were really just substitutes for real life outside the walls.²

Apart from repression, the dreadful effects of Soviet rule on the Baltic economies, Baltic culture and customs confronts anyone who enters a shop or an office, or picks up a telephone in the Baltic States. It strikes Balts especially cruelly when they travel abroad and contrast the living standards they had in 1939 with the ones they possess today.

By the 1980s, the failure of the Soviet economy and the backwardness of Soviet life compared to that of the West was apparent to everyone. A particularly stark example was that of average life expectancy in Estonia which, in 1939, was roughly the same as that of Finland. Today it is several years shorter. A consciousness of the damage done to Baltic culture by Soviet rule, particularly among those intellectuals who came from educated families, has contributed to a desire to restore the forms of the pre-1940 republics as far as possible. The need to defend the Baltic cultures and traditions against Soviet influence prevented Baltic intellectuals, both within and outside the states themselves, from engaging critically with those traditions, as this would have seemed to give help to the enemy. The consequence was a conformism and unreflecting nationalism which characterises so much of Baltic intellectual life today.³

Much has been written about former Communist leaders, such as Leonid Kravchuk in the Ukraine and Vladimir Mečiar in Slovakia, who

now adopt nationalism in order to remain in power. Arnold Rüütel in Estonia is a further example. These have been contrasted, at least implicitly, with the 'real nationalists' who are seen as 'anti-soviet' but are in fact often all too Soviet in their attitudes and political behaviour. How could they not be, after five decades of Communist rule?

With isolation came tyranny, the loss of large and irreplaceable sections of the national élites and, above all, impoverishment. With the return, under Gorbachov, of press and intellectual freedom, the truth about the annexation of the Baltic States and Stalin's atrocities emerged. Thereafter the chances of the Soviet Union legitimising and stabilising its rule in the region – at least to the degree achieved by Russia before 1914 – vanished. Indeed the survival of Soviet rule in the Baltic after 1987 was always an impossibility and with the Balts demanding independence, could the rest of the Union have been far behind? Given the Soviet legacy of the 1940s, Gorbachov was trying to save the unsavable.

Conquest and 'Revolution'

Impoverishment came with the very first months of Soviet rule in 1940. The sessions of the 'People's Assemblies' (chosen in elections which were a farce even by Stalinist standards) which 'requested' annexation to the Soviet Union in July 1940 also passed measures nationalising industry and the banks. Many managers were sacked and replaced by local Communists, officials brought in from Russia, or even ordinary workers. The result was a steep fall in productivity. By the time of the German invasion of June 1941, 90 per cent of shops had also been expropriated.

There was neither the time nor the structures to establish full control over local culture. Similarly, full collectivisation of agriculture did not follow annexation. However, all farms over 30 hectares (75 acres) were confiscated and distributed to smaller farmers. This led to a sharp reduction in production. Early in 1941 high requisition quotas were set, partly to compensate for this fall, and partly to put pressure on farmers to join the collectives. The new rulers announced salary increases for poorer workers, but these were soon negated by price rises, and by demands for longer hours and harder work, backed by ferocious sanctions. When, in late 1940, the independent currencies were abolished and replaced by the rouble, the exchange rate was confiscatory and had the effect of destroying Baltic savings.⁴

In forming the new Baltic governments, Stalin and his henchmen adopted a tactic, later to become familiar, of creating 'left fronts' led by leading non-Communist Left-wingers.⁵ Some were later dispensed with, others forced to become Communist. A few, like the Lithuanian Prime Minister and left-wing writer, Vincas Kreve-Mickevičius, broke with the

regime and survived. Kreve-Mickevičius resigned after failing to persuade Stalin to grant Lithuania a status similar to that of Mongolia, a Communist satellite of the Soviet Union with at least the trappings of independence. This was the hope too of Justas Paleckis, Acting President of Lithuania and Left-wing but non-Communist intellectual. Paleckis's son described his father's initial hope of replacing Smetona with a government led by the socialist-populist President Grinius, overthrown by Smetona's coup in 1926. Eduards Berkļavs, a Communist activist in the 1930s, told me that in 1940 he and his comrades wanted to create a Communist state in Latvia, but 'even we didn't think of joining the Soviet Union'.⁶

Justas Paleckis junior evoked for me the hatred of Smetona which existed in Lithuania during the 1930s but which seems inexplicable today when this authoritarian but generally civilised figure is contrasted with Hitler and Stalin. He pointed out that while on the Left people such as his father and Kreve-Mickevičius were intriguing with Moscow against Smetona's regime, on the Right the supporters of Voldemaras were intriguing with Berlin to the same end. He warned that this kind of unpatriotic irresponsibility could recur today if political conflict within Lithuania intensified and a dictatorship were established. Another Lithuanian observer has, however, noticed that in the 1930s, Lithuanians took their independence for granted, and felt safe carrying out these foolish manoeuvres, whereas today everyone is alive to the dangers. The record of Lithuanian politicians in January 1991, however, does not suggest any great improvement.

Real power in 1940–41 was in any case exercised by leaders of the local Communist parties, Stalin's satraps from Moscow close behind them. The existing Communist parties were tiny (fewer than seven hundred identified members in Estonia) but they were rapidly expanded by local recruits, and above all by the transfer of cadres from Russia. These were mainly Russians, but in the case of Estonia and Latvia included large numbers of Latvians and Estonians, the children of Communist parents exiled from the Baltic after 1920, or simply of those who had moved to Russia under Tsarist rule. In many cases they barely spoke the local languages. Those in Estonia were satirised as '*Jeestlased*' (instead of *Eestlased*) for their Russian mispronunciation of the letter 'e'.

Those political and military leaders of the independent states who did not succeed in fleeing during June or July 1940 were, in the main, deported soon after the annexation, along with several thousand others. President Kārlis Ulmanis of Latvia died in prison in Russia two years later. President Konstantin Pāts of Estonia lived on until 1956, finally dying in an NKVD 'psychiatric clinic'. Their fates remained unknown to their fellow countrymen until the Gorbachov era. An NKVD photograph of Pāts, taken in prison, shows a grim, emaciated, defeated face. This was

the end of a man who, whatever the controversy had claims to be regarded as the father of modern Estonia. In 1990 his bones were identified and returned to Tallinn for burial. It was one of the most moving events in recent Baltic history – all the more so for the modest atmosphere of the funeral and the check which as ever the Estonians kept over their emotions. Looking at the photograph of Päts, it was easy to understand the determination of Balts to wipe out every trace of Soviet rule in their countries.

By the end of 1940, arrests and deportations ran at some 200 to 300 per month. The great wave of deportations however came only on 13–14 June, barely a week before the German invasion, when tens of thousands were herded into cattle trucks. A considerable number returned from Siberia after Stalin's death, but many were shot by the NKVD, either immediately after their arrest, or as the secret police 'cleared their stocks' before retreating in the face of the advancing Germans. The discovery of their bodies, often bearing marks of torture, was well publicised by the Germans, and contributed to the level of mass support for them during the first months of their occupation, and to atrocities against the Jews, accused of backing Soviet rule.⁷

The German Occupation

In all three republics, German invasion was accompanied by Baltic revolt. The Lithuanian partisans launched heavy attacks in battles against the retreating Soviet forces which cost thousands of lives. A smaller revolt also took place in Latvia, while in Estonia fighting went on for more than two months, until the capture of Tallinn by the Germans on 28 August. The town of Tartu was held for a week by Estonian rebels.⁸

Provisional governments were set up in all three states, but were soon closed by the Germans; (Landsbergis's father was a minister in the Lithuanian provisional government of 1941). Until German defeat became imminent, in 1944, the Germans played a cat-and-mouse game with the Baltic political leaders, seeking to win their co-operation in the recruiting of soldiers and labourers without sharing real power or making promises on the status of the republics after the war. The real postwar plans of the Nazis were not of course revealed to the Balts. These involved, over a period of several decades, the expansion of the Baltic States eastward into Russia, the bulk of the Baltic populations being deported into the new areas and replaced by German settlers. To these were to be added 'suitably Aryan' elements from among the Balts, and especially the Estonians, while the rest were to be subjected to intense Germanisation.

In Latvia and Estonia the Germans formed SS Legions and police

units which subsequently fought bravely in the Russian front line but also carried out numerous atrocities against Jews, Russians, Poles and Byelorussians. In Lithuania the attempt to create Lithuanian military units failed initially in the face of local resistance, but in all three states, thousands were recruited into police battalions. An old Lithuanian priest from the Polish area of Nemencine described an episode in the brutal, many-sided partisan war of 1943; in which Lithuanian forces in the German service fought Polish guerillas:

A Lithuanian woman came to the priest and told him that [Polish] Home Army men had taken her cow and pig, and the priest wrote down their names . . . the Home Army arrested him after Easter, took him to a nearby village and shot him. . . . Simple Polish people hated the Bolsheviks, like all of us, and were afraid, like all of us . . . Life was complicated. The Home Army fought the Germans, the Lithuanians and the Soviet partisans simultaneously. . . . They burned the houses of German informers and killed their families. Later, in the same villages, Lithuanian partisans did the same to Soviet informers.⁹

In 1944, with the Soviet threat, the Estonian national leadership called for mass mobilisation to defend Estonia. Some 38,000 answered the call, and were joined in the summer by several thousand Estonians who had crossed the Gulf of Finland to join the Finnish army and now returned. Between January and June 1944, Estonian units played a major part in holding the line of the Narva River against the advancing Red Army.* As the German forces retreated in the summer of 1944, the Balts attempted to restore their national governments. By then the Red Army was pouring into the Baltic States, and these provisional governments lasted for only a few days. The Germans held out in the 'Courland Pocket' (western Latvia) to the very end of the war, but resisted until the last the establishment of a Latvian national government.

Resistance: The 'Forest Brothers'

Mr Višvaldis Brinkmanis, now a leader of the radical nationalist Citizens Congress, was a Latvian soldier in the Courland Pocket. As the German surrender approached, he, like many others, left his unit and set out towards the coast, intending to try and find a boat to take him to Sweden to join the tens of thousands of Balts who had already fled. On his way he

* A distinction must be drawn between these late recruits and the men of the SS Legions and Police Battalions, although in many cases these too joined to defend their countries from the Soviet army, or were simply conscripted from among Soviet units which surrendered.

passed a German airfield. Soldiers there said they had been listening to the radio, that war was about to break out between the Soviet Union and the Western allies, and that British torpedo boats were already on their way to Courland.¹⁰

Believing this, Brinkmanis decided not to risk crossing the Baltic, but to stay in Latvia and await its deliverance. Soon afterwards he was arrested by Soviet troops. Though he himself was released after a few months, his father, a Latvian intellectual, committed suicide several years later when threatened with arrest and deportation.

The hope of Western deliverance came through desperation, but also through the memory of what had actually happened in 1919. Its absence is one reason for an enduring suspicion of the West held by some Balts. The hope, and hence the bitterness, was nurtured throughout the eight years of partisan warfare against Soviet rule which followed the Soviet reconquest in 1944. The original resistance movement was made up of soldiers serving in the German forces, others who had collaborated with the Germans and had reason to fear the Soviet authorities, and of course patriotic Balts in general. In Lithuania, priests played a leading part. In due course, and as Soviet deportations gathered pace, the ranks of the resistance were swollen by others who preferred to die fighting than be deported to an unknown fate in Siberia, and by peasants facing collectivisation.¹¹

In the countryside, the Soviet authorities did everything in their power to give the conflict the feel of a class war, confiscating the land of suspected partisans and giving it to poorer peasants, many of whom were recruited into Soviet auxiliary battalions. (In Lithuania, these were nicknamed *Stribai*, from *Istrebitelny*, meaning 'Destroyers', the name for the demolition units during the Soviet retreat in 1941.) Memories of this continue to divide many Baltic villages.

The resistance was at its fiercest in Lithuania, where the 'Forest Brothers' had a general staff, printed newspapers, and ran training courses for officers. Surviving photographs show members in the uniforms of the pre-war Lithuanian army, bearing a mixture of Soviet and German weapons. An incongruous touch was that many had very long hair. In a strangely medieval gesture, they had vowed not to cut their hair until Lithuania was free again. More practically, it meant that they were sometimes able to pretend to be women in order to avoid arrest. Something of the tragic spirit of the struggle was expressed by Viktoras Petkus, then an adolescent, later a dissident:

I was not tempted to join the partisans myself, because a Lithuanian army captain and partisan commander came to my father and advised him not to let his children go to the forest. He said that he knew that the West had betrayed them, and that the movement had no future, but he himself had no choice but to go on to the end.¹²

Rimvydas Šilbajoris, a Lithuanian literary scholar in exile, writes of the partisan war that 'Lithuanians remember it [the war] in every agonising detail, and can no more stop talking and writing about it than can the Russians stop talking about their great struggle against the Nazis. In Lithuanian prose, the guerrilla war is often understood and depicted as a conflict between 'the city' and 'the forest' ... the partisans were fighting to defend the traditional way of life'.

In Latvia and Estonia, the partisans were no less brave, but a good deal less organised. In all three republics, after the initial battles, the strategy of the partisans was to avoid engagement with the Soviet army. This tactic seems to have been matched by an unwillingness on the Soviet side to use the Red Army in anti-partisan operations, possibly for fear that the mainly peasant troops might find themselves in sympathy with the peasant partisans. Employed instead were the NKVD and *Stribai*. Viktoras Snuolis, a former partisan officer in the Lithuanian district of Šiauliai recalled that 'The Red Army was not generally used. Often, Russian soldiers used to let us pass, or simply ignore us. I even talked to one once, and he said that in action against us, he was careful not to take aim'. Mr Snuolis told me of the hunted life of the partisans in the forest, and how his group was once able to evade an NKVD ambush because it heard the sound of the rain pattering on their enemies' capes. He said that the partisans were helped by the fact that the NKVD forces did not know the countryside, while the *Stribai* auxiliaries were 'gutless and undisciplined'.¹³

In the bitter cold of a Lithuanian winter, I once visited the remains of some of the primitive partisan bunkers in the forests of northern Lithuania, and admired the courage and endurance of the men who held out for so long in such dreadful conditions (the wounded often dying for lack of medical care, unless they could be secretly helped by local Lithuanian doctors). One of the bunkers, now a caved-in hollow by a stream of clear water, in the depths of the forest of Mažuolis, held eight men. Thanks to the loyalty of local people, it was never found by the Soviet police, but simply abandoned when the last partisans after Stalin's death in 1953 gave up the struggle, after which the forest gradually reclaimed it.

The partisans concentrated on maintaining their positions, reducing local Communist control in the countryside, and punishing collaborators and informers: in other words, holding out for as long as possible in the hope of outside intervention. It was not an irrational strategy, nor the product of mere obstinacy. If war between the West and the Soviet Union had broken out, the existence of Baltic forces in the field could have been of crucial importance in regaining Baltic independence. The strong partisan resistance in Lithuania also helped discourage Russian settlers from moving to that republic.

The struggle in all three republics was attended by the brutalities common enough in guerrilla wars in our own time. The NKVD and local auxiliaries tortured suspects, executed the families of partisans and burnt their farms, leaving the bodies lying in the streets and fields as a warning. Other skeletons are still sometimes being found where bodies were buried or simply tossed into unused wells. A woman from Utena described how,

a neighbour of ours was shot, and was dumped in the street; and even his mother did not dare to come and look at him, because if the *Stribas* or NKVD saw people weeping over the dead partisans, they would say, 'So you are crying for the enemies of the Soviet Union?', and sometimes they would simply arrest them on the spot, and they would too disappear.

The partisans themselves carried out atrocities against local communists and auxiliaries and their families. In Joniškis District I was told how in the village of Vainiune, partisans gang-raped the local Komsomol Secretary, a woman called Tūnaitė. It is difficult however to say with confidence who was responsible for what, because the Soviet side formed *provocateur* units to kill people and then blame the partisans.¹⁴ Caught between the two sides, much of the population of northern Lithuania seems to have ended by regarding both as a plague. This was one factor in the eventual collapse of the partisan movement, though more critical was military attrition by the Soviet security forces: Mr Snuolis reported that a partisan in the late 1940s could realistically expect to live for some two years before being killed or captured. In Lithuania, up to 13,000 collaborators were executed by the partisans, and Soviet sources put the total Soviet losses at 20,000 and the partisans losses at about the same. Lithuanian sources have estimated Soviet casualties at 80,000 and Lithuanian at 50,000, though this is probably too high. Today, all over Lithuania, and to a lesser extent the other two republics as well, local monuments are springing up to honour the partisans who died. Often these adjoin monuments to local Communist leaders and Soviet security forces, some killed by those same partisans.

Exhaustion and, with the end of the Korean War, abandonment of any hope of Western intervention, helped destroy the movements. The collectivisation of agriculture in 1949, and the mass deportations which accompanied it, produced a new flood of recruits for the partisans but, in the longer run, drained the pool in which they hid (to use Mao's phrase).

Mrs Genovaitė Dubauskienė, a Lithuanian woman deported as the daughter of 'kulaks' in May 1948, described her experience. Although she had a NKVD file of her own for helping the partisans, the NKVD group which finally arrested her in Vilnius did so because they mistook her for her younger sister, who was to be deported together with her parents:

They took me to the cellars of the NKVD, and there they beat me with a

whip, telling me to confess and I was my sister. Finally, they accepted that I was telling the truth, and then they didn't know what to do with me. They asked their chief, and he replied, 'Paleckis's signature is on the list, and I have to fulfil it, so I need people'. So I was deported to Krasnoyarsk in Siberia. At that time I didn't know what had happened to my parents. They were also deported to Krasnoyarsk, but I only discovered that months later, when I wrote back to Lithuania. I did not see them again until eight years later. ... There were about seventy of us in our cattle-truck. We were all students, and were treated a bit better than the people in the other trucks; there were planks to lie on. The other people in the train were mainly farmers from Vilnius region. When we crossed the Urals, we passed seven other trains full of Lithuanian deportees, and we talked to them through the slots in the sides of the truck. One girl even spoke to her parents, but she was not allowed to join them. We thought then that the whole Lithuanian nation had been deported. ...

After we passed Minsk, we were let out of the trucks once a day to go to the toilet in the fields. Everyone had been allowed to take some food from home, and we shared it. We were fed salt fish and bread, and after we passed Moscow, some watery soup. When we reached Siberia, we could buy milk from Russians who brought it to the train. The guards did not steal from us or maltreat us. Some people got sick – I heard later that my mother on her journey had caught pneumonia – and three old people died on the way. Their companions wanted to keep the bodies to give them a Christian burial, but the guards did not allow it.

When we got to Kamarchaga in Krasnoyarsk province, we had to march for three days through the forest. Then we were pulled on a trailer by a tractor, because it was Spring and the mud was too thick to walk through. We were sent to the village of Khabaidak. It seemed to us that we had reached the end of the world, and would never return. On one side there were huge mountains, on the other, a big, fast river, and everywhere was the forest. We were set to work to cut down trees in the forest, and then they were floated away down the river. There were several accidents at first, because people did not know the work. We got on well with the Finnish exiles there. The Kalmuk exiles were of a lower culture, but they taught us how to survive. ... On Sundays, the Lithuanians would put on suits and dresses, and meet to sing Lithuanian songs and recite poetry.

After a year, my file caught up with me from Lithuania, and they decided that Khabaidak was too good for me, and I was sent North, to the mining town of Rasdolinsk, where I worked in the hospital. That was where I met my second husband, who had been exiled there after five years in prison. I was divorced from my first husband because he did not want to join me in Siberia ... my son was born there. Rasdolinsk had every nationality you can imagine, all exiles: among the doctors in my hospital were Russians, Poles, Jews, a Georgian, an Armenian. ...

In Rasdolinsk, there were many more accidents from the work, but the exiles did not live too badly, because the pay was better and there was more in the shops. The Lithuanians grew potatoes, and bought pigs and chickens, and later cows. In summer, the animals wandered freely, and sometimes the cows would be killed by bears, and we would find their skeletons in the forest. In winter, the temperature would go down sometimes to minus 60 degrees, and we had to bring the chickens and pigs into our houses, even though most had only one room. The animals lived under the bed. That could be a problem, depending on the character of the pig. We had one pig which would not let us sleep. It used to pull the blankets off the bed and try to eat them. . . .

The Lithuanians worked hard, and in the end even the local Russians were buying food from us. I lived there for eleven years, and by the end we were able to live normally. When we were allowed to, a few years after Stalin's death, of course almost all of us went home; but two Lithuanian families are still living there. My parents also came back at that time, but my father had cancer, and died along the way. He is buried in Lithuania. . . .

Stalinism, Normalisation, Stagnation

Soviet pressure on the reconquered Baltic societies grew steadily after 1945. One aspect was the Baltic wing of the 'Zhdanovschina', the campaign directed by Andrei Zhdanov to reassert control over the various cultures of the Soviet Union by terroristic means. Baltic culture had already been harmed by the flight of so many intellectuals to the West. After flight, deportation and murder, it has been estimated for example that, by 1945, no more than 22 per cent of the prewar staff of Tartu University remained in Estonia. The postwar years saw many more writers silenced, killed, deported, or forced into shameful compromise with the system. In the Stalinist jungle, even loyal Communists were not safe – indeed, some of the Baltic Communists from Moscow who had survived Stalin's purges of the 1930s were now eradicated. With the advent of officially sanctioned Russian nationalism, history was rewritten to give the Russian Empire a 'progressive' colouring, and the Russification of language and culture began. A Latvian poet wrote that,

The Russian language seems to me like a huge bridge of sunbeams
Over which the Latvian heart will climb to high horizons.¹⁶

Particularly hard hit were the churches. By 1948, only one bishop was left in Lithuania, all the others having fled, been deported or murdered. Protestant bishops in Latvia and Estonia met a similar fate, while the Estonian Orthodox Church, which in 1920 had declared its independence

from the Moscow patriarchate, was forcibly reintegrated into the Russian Orthodox Church. Repression was resumed under Khrushchev, and it was only under Brezhnev that state pressure was somewhat relaxed. Even so, Archbishop Steponavičius of Vilnius remained in internal exile until 1988.

After the death of Stalin, many native Communist officials extended a measure of protection to cultural figures, and indeed justified their own collaboration in terms of preserving the nation's cultural heritage. The writer Arvo Valton (a strong anti-communist) has said of one literary collaborator under Stalin that, 'One cannot condemn him or completely deny his function; it was the means of preserving the national language and identity'. It allowed periodic flourishes of national culture, and the 1960s have even been called a time of 'cultural renaissance' for Estonia.¹⁷

The smallness of the Baltic populations meant that the educated classes were commensurately tiny. As the process of 'nativisation' of the Baltic Communist Parties proceeded, leading Communists inevitably had close links with the intelligentsias, the majority of whom, even if they did not brave outright dissent, were nationalist in spirit and, above all, committed to preserving their national cultures. An example is Ingrid Rüütel, wife of the Communist Chairman of the Estonian SSR Supreme Council. As the daughter of Neeme Rüüs, Ideology Secretary of the Estonian Communist Party in 1940–41, who was executed by the Nazis, Ingrid Rüütel came from the very heart of the Communist establishment. Yet by profession she was an ethnographer, a branch of academia full, throughout the Soviet years, of crypto-nationalists.

The influence of the intellectuals can hardly have failed to have some effect. In Latvia, Mr Rüütel's equivalent, Anatolijs Gorbunovs, is said to have been persuaded in a patriotic direction by the poet Jānis Peters, whom he met while he was Party Secretary of Central Riga. Such associations helped modify Communist beliefs and loyalty even at the core of the Party. Justas Paleckis junior, born into the very heart of the Lithuanian Communist establishment, commented that for him and for many young Party members, the invasion of Czechoslovakia and the destruction of Dubček's 'socialism with a human face' marked the moment at which the Soviet Communist system forfeited their emotional loyalty. For a number of dissidents, 1968 was the point at which they were forced out of the system and into open opposition. This was true of the future Estonian Congress leader Tunne Kelam who, as a lecturer in International Regulations, had tried to tell the truth within the Soviet academic framework. His support for Dubček led to his dismissal, after which he worked underground within the dissident movement.¹⁸

Taagepera and Misiunas have suggested that thanks in part to defensive action by local Communist élites, the Soviet period, while it marked a step backwards for the Baltic cultures, left them more secure



Territorial transfer within the Baltic Republics, 1939-45

in 1914: that 'in the eighty year perspective, the overall picture was one of a massive shift from Russian to the national languages', and that even compared to 1940, there had been 'an increase in socio-cultural growth'.¹⁹

By 1940, use of the Baltic languages in education and higher culture was still new and fragile. Despite Russification, the fact of official status for their languages, and the opportunities afforded by Soviet republican institutions (such as schools and universities in the Baltic languages, Writers' Unions, and so on) put the Balts in a better position to defend their language and identity than several other small linguistic groups in modern Europe: the Gaelic Irish in the last century, or the Basques, Bretons and Welsh in this one, for example.

It is instructive in this context to compare the relative strength of Azeri language and culture in Soviet Azerbaijan, where they had some defense from Soviet republican institutions, to their almost complete public suppression in neighbouring Iran – where most ethnic Azeris naturally live. Compared to these (or those of the autonomous republics of Russia), the overwhelming majority of Balts used their own languages as their primary tongue, and use of Russian by Estonians actually declined sharply after 1970. This was, however, only because a sufficient number of 'Communist' cultural, academic and even Party figures were prepared to use these institutions discreetly to defend their national cultures; and, of course, because Soviet rule and Russification ended when they did. If it had continued for another generation the Baltic languages and cultures might have been damaged beyond repair.

No equivalent renaissance took place in Baltic agriculture, which never recovered from the devastating blow of collectivisation.* Industrialisation, however, proceeded at breakneck speed, accompanied by what most Balts would see as the most malign of all the Soviet legacies – a massive influx of Russian labour. Only Lithuania avoided this fate, thanks to the Forest Brothers and its higher birth rate but also, until his death in 1974, to its Communist ruler Party First Secretary Antanas Sniečkus. Sniečkus, unlike the rulers of Estonia and Latvia, who had been born and brought up in Russian and introduced to their satrapies only in 1940 was a native-born Communist. Through a mixture of

* The effects of collectivisation in the Estonian countryside are vividly evoked in Heino Kii's novel, *Where Hobgoblins Spend the Night*. Amidst a general picture of peasant despair, incompetent leadership by jumped-up Communist flunkies without farming experience, and crazy orders from above, one famous passage describes how the collective's cows became so weak that they could be blown down by the wind, and a man had to be specially detailed to help them to their feet. These cows were themselves the survivors of repeated slaughters of animals by the peasants in the face of requisitions and collectivisation.

unquestioned loyalty to Moscow and tough, clever manoeuvres and negotiations, Sniečkus succeeded in warding off the worse effects of the rule of Stalin and his successors. Many Lithuanian intellectuals today consider that, in his own brutal and compromised fashion, he did in fact serve his country.

Sniečkus's last successor as First Secretary of the Lithuanian Communist Party, Algirdas Brazauskas, today of course uses such arguments to defend himself against charges of 'collaboration' and treason. In his words, as a Lithuanian State Plan official and a senior Party functionary,

People don't know what we went through. We had to go twenty times a year to Moscow to beg for extra investment or to try to ward off something that they wanted to impose on Lithuania. I would have to spend the whole summer there, sitting in antechambers. Most of us in our hearts were unhappy about Lithuania's subjugation to the Soviet Union... and all of us were angry that they in Moscow were trying to dictate to us exactly how many kindergartens we were supposed to build in every Lithuanian town. We had no choice but to obey, but we did extract advantages. If Lithuania today has a good base of infrastructure, energy and education, and a good prospect for developing a strong economy, it is thanks to us.²⁰

Brazauskas stressed that state officials such as himself used to be able to celebrate Christmas and other traditional Christian holidays at home (though not of course in Church) without fear of denunciation by their Lithuanian colleagues, although in the Party structures supervision was tighter.

Despite considerable special pleading, there is a certain amount of truth in this picture. Certainly the Lithuanian Communist élite was not as venal and incompetent as those across most of Russia, let alone in the Muslim republics. If to call them covert patriots is too flattering, at least men like Brazauskas never had any positive enthusiasm for Soviet rule. They were merely a familiar species of collaborator, not particularly brave, not particularly wicked, doing the best for themselves and for their country 'under the circumstances' (see Chapter 8).

In Estonia, the ability of the local party to resist Moscow's policies was largely broken in a purge of 1950-51 which led to the replacement of all native Estonians by Russians or at least Estonians brought up in Russia. The first secretary between 1950 to 1978, Ivan Kābin, also, however, came to be seen as a qualified defender of Estonian interests. Kābin Estonianised his name to Johannes, and sought to improve his knowledge of the Estonian language. In Latvia, a similar purge took place nine years later. The thaw in the first years of Khrushchev's rule allowed a backlash within the Latvian party against Russification and immigration. This is

usually taken as having been centred around the figure of Deputy Prime Minister Eduards Berkļavs. He sought to Latvianise the party and establish greater Latvian control over local industries through the use of local raw materials. Officially, this was justified by the desire to contribute more efficiently to the All-Union economy. Unofficially, the main aim was to check the heavy industrial development which was pulling Russian workers into the republic. The ploy was only crushed after interventions by Khrushchev himself. Eduards Berkļavs has described how, after the Latvian government had tried to halt further Russian immigration, Russians in Latvia sent a letter to the Kremlin denouncing the rebirth of 'bourgeois nationalism'. The reaction led to the dismissal of numerous party officials at every level. Mr Berkļavs himself was sent to mainland Russia as a film-distribution official – a very much milder destiny, of course, than would have been the case under Stalin.²¹

Mr Berkļavs (now a leader of the radical National Independence Party) is today widely honoured in Latvia for his attempts to protect his country against Russification; the crushing of his movement, however, placed Latvia in an even worse position than before. Immigration continued, and the Party was effectively broken as an instrument for defending Latvian interests. Many Latvians attribute the caution of Latvian moves to independence, and the poor quality of much of the Latvian establishment in our own time, to the lingering effects of the purge of 1959-60. The cultural reaction which occurred during those years also retarded Latvian attempts to recover from the cultural effects of Stalinism.

Industrial expansion under Soviet rule in the Baltic States, as under the Tsars and the first republics, consisted above all of light industry, consumer goods and food-processing, although Latvia also has some steel-making capacity. Shipbuilding and ship-repair are important in Riga and Tallinn. Here, and in Liepāja, are large trawling fleets, manned almost entirely by Russians, since Moscow did not trust the Balts to go to sea for fear of defection.²²

Soviet industrial revolution in the Baltic, together with the flight from the land resulting from collectivisation and rural despair, produced the highest rate of urbanisation that the region had ever known. By 1980, 70 per cent of Estonians and Latvians, and 62 per cent of Lithuanians, lived in towns. Forty years earlier, only about a quarter of Lithuanians, and a third of the other Balts, did so. The influx led to severe housing shortages and increased bitterness between Balts and Russian immigrants. These shortages, and the high proportion of working women in the Baltic, contributed to keeping native birth rates among the lowest in Europe, as they had been since the 1890s, although every Balt was aware of the need to produce babies for the sake of national survival. As elsewhere in the Soviet Union, the level of abortion was appallingly high; it caused

particular cultural trauma among traditionalists in Catholic Lithuania. Today it is declining as contraceptives become more freely available from the West.

The endemic grey depression of Soviet life also had its effects. One Latvian girl told a friend: 'You know, I never in my life really ever expected to be happy'. Reflecting this mood was the very high rate of alcoholism, among the highest in the world. Anyone who has visited the Baltic will know of sad middle-aged people, whose families excuse their drinking by pointing to the hopelessness and the endless petty humiliations of Soviet rule, as well as to the lack of sanctions against drinking in an economy where jobs were guaranteed in any case. One old Polish woman in Lithuania once told me that she still reveres Gorbachov, no matter what, because 'he tried to stop my old man from drinking' – a reference to the anti-alcohol campaign of Gorbachov's first year in power. Suicide rates were also high, Lithuania having the highest in Europe after Hungary.²³

However, for what it was worth, relatively high food production, mass demand in the Soviet Union for the products of their industries, together with their more prosperous and hard-working traditions, helped to give the Baltic States the highest quality of life in the Soviet Union; they were indeed known as 'the Soviet West'. Living standards rose steadily during the 1960s and early 1970s, before tailing off and beginning to decline in the later years of Brezhnev, and going into free fall under Gorbachov and his successors. In the analysis of the Soviet revolution, there is plenty of room for application of the 'J-curve theory', whereby revolutions tend to occur when steadily rising economic expectations find themselves frustrated. As elsewhere in the Union, the later Brezhnev period in the Baltic Republics was era of stagnation, in which faceless bureaucrats played an endless game of musical chairs. The population at large was not subjected to repression, and a considerable amount of cultural freedom was allowed, within strict limits. Those courageous people who overstepped the limits were of course often hit very hard (though the savagery of Latin-American and other regimes was lacking). But most people simply got on with their own lives.

By the 1980s, Communist Party membership in Estonia and Lithuania was made up chiefly of people from the native populations. In Latvia, a majority was still Russian. The role of Estonians and Latvians from Russia had naturally declined with the years – most of the suitable cadres had been brought back from Russia after the reconquest in 1944. However, some of these and their descendants were to play a leading role in opposition to the independence movements of Latvia and Estonia, and gave a spurious impression that this opposition was not wholly Russian but had some 'indigenous' roots.

In all three republics (as elsewhere throughout the Union Republics),

the post of second secretary of the Party was effectively reserved for Russians. Unseating these figures became one of the first tasks of the national movements and the national Communists. Similarly, throughout the republics, the deputy commander of the KGB was also a Russian, keeping check on his 'native' boss. Russians were also of course entrenched in positions throughout the Party, though not sufficiently to prevent all three parties from swinging towards support for independence in the late 1980s.²⁴ Ironically, one state institution in which 'natives' had always been allowed to predominate, even under Stalin, was that of the 'Supreme Councils', or parliaments, precisely because their functions were almost entirely symbolic. As the independence movements gathered pace, however, the parliaments became of key legal significance.

In the last years of Soviet rule, the predominance of 'natives' was secured not simply by selection but also by gerrymandering: thus Russian-dominated urban constituencies in Tallinn often had considerably more voters than 'native'-dominated rural ones. Such manipulation is a small example of the kind of discreet localised nationalist activity which occurred even within the Soviet system.

The Soviet Establishment: Past, Present and Future?

As elsewhere in the former Communist bloc, the future of the former Communist establishments is central to the politics of the Baltic States. The term 'de-Sovietisation', adopted by the Right in all three states, refers mainly to a desire to purge members of the old establishments from the leading roles they continue to hold in the states and economies of the region – except, of course, where they have themselves become Right-wing leaders ('decolonisation' tends to refer to the desire to remove the Soviet Army and the Russian populations of Latvia and Estonia).

Landsbergis and others have spoken of the need for a 'Nuremberg Trial of Bolshevism'. Few Balts would have any objection to putting on trial those chiefly responsible for the repression of Stalin's time, if any were still alive; and there is massive support in Latvia for the trial of Alfrēds Rubiks, the hardline Communist leader charged with planning the Soviet military intervention in the Baltic in January 1991 and implicated in the August coup. What makes many people deeply uneasy however is when it seems, as in Lithuania, that talk of a 'Nuremberg Trial' is simply a Right-wing political campaign against the ex-Communist section of the political opposition, part of which is still widely popular and respected for its role in achieving independence. (The role of denunciations in Lithuania is discussed in Chapter 8.) The overall intention of replacing the former establishment reaches into every corner

of economic and agrarian reform and especially, of course, the issue of privatisation.

The Right-wing throughout the Baltic, and especially in Lithuania, condemns the former establishment not just for past collaboration with Soviet rule, but with present involvement and potential future treachery, should Russia again try to take over the Baltic States. The Right sometimes quotes the views of the French scholar Françoise Thom, who alleges the existence of a 'second echelon' of communist leaders which has manipulated the course of events in the Soviet Union in recent years so as to take power itself.²⁵

As the Lithuanian Foreign Minister, Algirdas Saudargas, has warned, 'even if these people do not wish to be traitors, Moscow has plenty of information to blackmail them into collaboration'. This is doubtless true, but Moscow has information on most politicians. A close ally of Mr Saudargas was the leader of the Right-wing Independence Party in Lithuania, Dr Virgilijus Čepaitis, who was largely responsible for the practice of denouncing political opponents as KGB agents. Dr Čepaitis himself, however, later proved to have been a KGB informer for many years. Yet none of its extensive net of agents did the KGB any good in the end when it came to controlling the Soviet Revolution. There is no reason to believe that a reduced and battered KGB will be more effective in the future.

As to the 'second echelon', an identifiable stratum of this description certainly exists in the Baltic States and throughout the former Soviet Union, but the suggestion that it constitutes an organised united political force aiming at the restoration of the Soviet Union reflects a mixture of paranoia – understandable in view of past experience – and ambition, whether conscious or unconscious: underlying much of current politics in the Baltic, as in the rest of the former Soviet Union, is a struggle by new social groups to displace the old establishment in order to occupy its jobs.

The leading feature today of the former Communist establishment is political and above all economic opportunism. Indeed, it was the leading feature of the vast majority of Communist Party recruits from the 1960s. In the words of Jānis Āboltiņš, a Komsomol official and state manager who later became economics minister in the pro-independence government of 1990–91, 'I was asked to become a full-time Komsomol leader. ... After a few days hesitation I agreed. I wanted to get a flat in Riga.'²⁶ From the beginning Āboltiņš appears to have felt little but contempt for the entire Communist system he served – a contempt which he now extends to the more radical Latvian nationalists. Whether this makes him more attractive is doubtful. What is obvious is that he was not someone who was ever going to defend Soviet rule if the going got rough; the nationalists for their part suspect with reason that he could also not be relied on to serve the cause of independence to the bitter end, or to

remain loyal in the event of a Soviet repression. While such former Communist officials are gradually being edged out of state offices, their takeover of the emerging private sector is proceeding at full swing. It occurs largely through the phenomenon of 'spontaneous privatisation', the taking over of state companies by their managers as their own property, a practice which is advancing rapidly in all three republics, and in Latvia seems to be almost out of control. There have been frequent reports in the press but, as of October 1992, not a single prosecution.

A typical tactic is to rent or sell part of the enterprise you manage to a private company controlled either by yourself or by close associates. This, it may be argued, at least allows in principle for the continuation of production under private ownership. More destructive is the virtual theft which takes place when managers sell their produce to private companies (often, again, controlled by themselves) for Baltic state prices, which in turn sell it to the West and pocket the huge difference. This has been especially prevalent in firms controlling 'coloured metals'.

In Estonia, four 'families' (including connections and clients of various kinds) are often said to dominate much of the state's private capital, especially in terms of banking, real estate and hotel development. Three are led by members of the old establishment. Bruno Saul was the hardline Communist Prime Minister of Estonia until he was replaced in 1988. He is now a director of the Tartu Commercial Bank and an owner or part-owner of several companies. Olari Taal was manager of a major state construction enterprise until 1991. He then became Industry Minister in the government of Edgar Savisaar, and Economics Minister in the government of Tiit Vähi (also a former state manager in the very lucrative field of transport). Uno Veering, leader of another wealthy and powerful family, was another Communist manager, and Deputy Premier under Vähi. The fourth family mentioned, that of Toomas and Lembit Sõts, is led by a returned Canadian businessman and his brother. Much of the wealth of such families is founded in their having had an early opportunity to buy up prime pieces of real estate for sums in roubles which, although a fortune to Soviet inhabitants, were derisory by Western standards. As Tallinn land prices move upwards, buyers can make astronomical profits on their investments.

The successor parties which have emerged from the pro-independence wings of the Communist parties have to an extent been providing cover for this process, but so indeed have establishment members in the national movements. It leads to some splendidly ironic situations. Thus, in Lithuania, it has been the former Communists, the Lithuanian Democratic Labour Party of Brazauskas that argued for speedy privatisation, large-scale private investment and, in general, a version of 'management's right to manage'. It is of course because the managements themselves, and many of the 'new rich' from the former

black market belong to or are close to the old political establishment. Even new entrepreneurs who emerged after 1988 are in many cases from the Komsomol, which was given special rights to start co-operative business in the final years of Communist rule, precisely because Komsomol leaders were in a position to anticipate the future and wanted to get into business.

The Lithuanian Right, however, motivated by a desire to eliminate the former establishment but also by a populist and anti-capitalist tradition, has introduced a strongly egalitarian programme, with shares being distributed to the whole population, and shops being sold to their workers, not to entrepreneurs. So in Western economic terms, Left is often Right and Right is Left, a feature Western, and particularly American visitors, find difficult to comprehend.

In all three republics, other than Soviet loyalist figures who sank with Soviet rule, members of the old establishment and managerial classes are spread across several different parties. In some cases they have even adopted extreme Right-wing positions.

While many local Communist officials are being replaced through local elections, it might be assumed that, as in Eastern Europe, industrial managers would retain their posts. However, this class too risks being buried, along with Baltic industry, a collapse which would itself have partly nationalist roots. In the Baltic States, arguments for the replacement of the managerial élite are national as well as practical and moral. Practically, it is urged that such men simply cannot adapt to a free market economy, and must be replaced. Morally, it is said the 'collaborationist' managerial class does not deserve to profit from privatisation, nor increase its wealth.

Neither of these points is proven. Very few people in the Baltic have practical experience of Western business, and the old managers are often no worse than anyone else at adapting. More to the point, Western business lessons may not in any case be appropriate to the situation in Baltic industry for some time to come. As to the art of survival in a post-Communist economy, the old managers are often geniuses (see Chapter 9).

Morally, the manager of a factory cannot simply be equated with a KGB officer or Communist Party boss, or his position deemed intrinsically more reprehensible than that of a manager anywhere else in the world. To this, however, Latvians and Estonians respond that managers helped to bring Russian workers into their republics; for this reason many would be happy enough if much of industry were wholly to disappear. From their point of view, 'the worse, the better'.

Industrial managers in the Baltic States during the last years of Soviet rule divide into Soviet loyalists, adherents of independence and a larger group which simply kept its collective head down and balanced the

conflicting demands of Moscow and the local government. The first group was made up primarily of Russian managers of the great 'All-Union' factories of Latvia and Estonia, controlled from Moscow and supplied with Russian workforces: the factories were organised as Soviet-loyalist island fortresses. In Lithuania, where Russian workers are fewer and most of the All-Union managers were Lithuanian, this phenomenon is less marked. In Estonia, during 1989, Estonian managers, mainly of republican enterprises, joined in a 'League of Work Collectives' to support independence. They were led by Ülo Nugis (later speaker of parliament and a leader of the Right-wing Republican Coalition Party) who, as director of the 'Estoplast' firm, had gained some renown within Estonia for his long struggle to remove his factory from 'All-Union' control. The League claimed to be 'the largest political party in Estonia', with 400,000 members; with blithe seigniorial arrogance, like Soviet loyalist managers, they had simply enrolled their entire workforces under their own political banner.

The attempt did not last long, and the managers soon began to seek protection for their interests through a variety of political forces, even as Estonian workers joined different Estonian parties. For the managers, as for the former Communist establishment in general, the story today is one of political fragmentation. In Latvia during 1992, the government of Ivars Godmanis was often described as being in the hands of the former Soviet establishment; but was opposed by the former Communists, who had now swung to a radical nationalist position.

The Dissidents

In the Soviet Baltic Republics dissent never really went away, even during the depths of Soviet rule. As we have seen, a few gallant partisans rejected the amnesty offered after Stalin's death and continued hiding in the forests, occasionally attacking the police, in some cases well into the 1960s. A proportion of the peaceful dissent of the early 1960s took an open and 'loyalist' form, confining itself to protests by academics and local citizens about the establishment of new industries. The ostensible ground for such protests was often fear of ecological damage, but the real reason was often fear of new Russian settlement.

Spontaneous outbreaks of popular anger also revealed that the people at large had not forgotten their lost independence or their hatred of Soviet rule. The first major Lithuanian demonstration took place in 1956. Sports victories and rock concerts precipitated several of these outbreaks, if only because they had provided legal reasons for large numbers of young people to assemble in the first place. Victories of East European or local teams against Soviet or Russian ones led to mass demonstrations against

the occupiers. The largest Baltic demonstration before Gorbachov took place however in Kaunas, in Lithuania, in May 1972, after a student, Romas Kalanta, burnt himself to death in protest against Soviet rule. Thousands of youths rioted for several days; some 500 were arrested.

Eight years later, in October 1980, Estonia saw both widespread student protests and the first major strike under Soviet rule, at a Tartu repair factory. The slogans were economic, and reflected a general downturn in the economy, but the workers were also clearly influenced by a prevailing atmosphere of political anger. At no stage in the seemingly unchanging, strictly controlled years of Soviet rule could the Soviets in fact be completely confident of the security of their rule in the Baltic.

Organised political dissent was very much the work of the intelligentsia, except in Lithuania where Catholicism provided both a mass impulse and a number of martyrs. Christianity was also an inspiration to some Estonian and Latvian dissidents. For much of the 1970s, the 'Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church', initiated in 1972 and regularly smuggled to the West, was the heart of Lithuanian resistance. Later it was joined by the 'Catholic Committee for the Defence of Believers' Rights', and the Helsinki Group, the survivors of which were to give birth to the extreme nationalist Lithuanian Liberty League in 1988. Several of the Chronicle's distributors were arrested and imprisoned. The speech of one of them, Nijolė Sadūnaitė, at her trial in June 1975, deserves to be included in any anthology of Catholic resistance:

The Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church, like a mirror, reflects the acts that atheists perpetrate against believers. Evil is not pleased by its own foul image, it hates its own reflection. The mirror however does not lose its value because of this. . . .

And you rejoice in your triumph? What remains after your victory? Moral ruin, millions of unborn foetuses, defiled values, weak debased people overcome by fear and with no passion for life. This is the fruit of your labours. Jesus Christ was correct when he said, 'By your fruits shall ye know them'. Your crimes are propelling you onto the garbage heap of history at an ever-increasing speed.

Sadūnaitė's book, *A Radiance in the Gulag*, also gives the flavour of the naïve, incantatory quality of Lithuanian popular Catholicism:

Going against Goliath in God's name, we shall always be the victor! Trusting in God, let us do everything that we must; without his permission, not even a hair from our heads will fall. God is our refuge and our strength!²⁷

After the victory of Brazauskas in the first round of the October 1992

elections, Sadūnaitė told a meeting outside parliament that 'God and the Virgin have turned their faces from Lithuania', and that Communist rule would usher in a wave of abortions.

The events of 1968 in Czechoslovakia were a major stimulus to dissent in all three republics, and the 1960s and 1970s saw a series of political trials. In October 1980, forty leading Estonian intellectuals sent an open letter to *Pravda* denouncing Russification and Russian settlements in Estonia. The letter was of course not published. Presumably because they did not openly challenge Communist rule, and because they included some of the most famous names in Soviet Estonian culture, the authors of the protest were not officially punished, though they were penalised in various informal ways.²⁸

A joint document by dissidents of all three republics first appeared in 1969. In 1974, seventeen Latvian communists, including Eduards Berkļavs, signed a protest against Russification. Several more protests were composed during the 1970s, leading to arrests and long prison sentences. The most important Baltic documents of the struggle for independence appeared in 1979 and 1980. The appeal of 23 August 1979, on the anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, was signed by forty-five Balts, of whom thirty-six were Lithuanian. It denounced the pact and its consequences, and appealed to the United Nations to denounce the illegal Soviet occupation of the Baltic States. Similar appeals appeared in December 1979 and January 1980.

Two names, those of the Estonian dissidents Mart Niklus and Jüri Kukk – a chemistry lecturer at Tartu University – were on both documents. Kukk was arrested shortly afterwards and died in prison in Russia, as a result of brutal force-feeding during a hunger strike in 1981. By the 1980s, however, dissent in all three Baltic States could almost be said to have achieved the status of 'movements', although few signs of these appeared on the surface of national life, and many Balts lived with only the haziest knowledge of their existence.

To anyone knowledgeable about the contemporary Baltic, one thing about the appeals of 1979–80 is immediately noticeable: of all the names on them, few play a role in politics today and none has yet become a major national leader. This is in sharp contrast to the situation in the Caucasus, where leading nationalist dissidents like Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Abulfaz Elchibey have consistently played leading and even dominant political roles. Dissidents have been most honoured in Lithuania, though even there not to the extent one might have expected. One obvious reason is that the main political leaders in all three republics were not themselves dissidents, so may well feel embarrassment when confronted with the heroism of others. This feature does not, however, damage the leaders in the eyes of the mass of the people, for the equally

obvious reason that the mass of the people were not dissidents either. In any case many Balts dislike nonconformists of any kind. In the words of Mihkel Tarm, writing of Estonian attitudes to the dissidents: 'The Estonians are different from the Lithuanians, who revere martyrs. Estonians feel that if you landed in prison, you must have been a bit crazy. You obviously just weren't smart enough to manoeuvre properly in the face of the system'. An Estonian deputy from the Centre-Right *Isamaa* ('Fatherland') alliance in September 1992 fiercely attacked the ex-dissident leadership of the more radical National Independence Party (ERSP), saying that,

Unlike these people, most Estonian conservatives are not exhibitionists, and are not trying to be tragic heroes. We do not think that the best way of approaching a wall is to run against it with your head. In the ERSP there are many mentally unbalanced people. This party never had any brains, it only borrowed them from the emigration in America. . . .

It is true that they were willing to risk anything in the struggle against the Soviets; but for the sake of Estonia, I would not ask my country to take such risks. . . . Ironically enough, although they are so anti-Communist, their thinking is quite Bolshevik. They are obsessed with conspiracies, and see spies everywhere. They ask 'Are you a real patriot? If so, why aren't you in our party? Are you with us or against us?'

All three states, in creating traditions, have concentrated mainly on heroes and symbols from the first period of (often authoritarian) statehood in the 1920s and 1930s. One aspect of extreme-Right movements in the Baltic today could be seen as an attempt by old dissident movements to gain the prestige and power they feel they have deserved, and to exclude forever the Communist establishment which persecuted them. It is easy enough to understand their rage. Alfonsas Svarinskas, for example, is a Lithuanian priest and dissident. In 1992 he was a radical nationalist member of parliament. One of the prosecutors at his trial was Egidijus Bičkauskas. Bičkauskas in 1990 became Lithuanian ambassador to Moscow, and a more powerful and better-paid figure than Svarinskas, let alone all the other dissidents like Sadūnaitė. There is only one problem with the seemingly entirely moral and justified demand that people like Bičkauskas be displaced to make way for the former dissidents: Bičkauskas has proved an efficient diplomat who has done much to keep Lithuanian relations with Russia from deteriorating too sharply, and for most of 1992 appeared in public opinion polls as Lithuania's most popular public figure. Svarinskas is a Lithuanian *Torquemada-in-waiting*, a vehement clerical nationalist extremist who has called, amongst other things, for the mass execution of former Communists, on the pattern of the execution of Nazi collaborators in France 1944.

Some dissidents in the Baltic have thus to a great extent excluded themselves from the political mainstream. In some cases they were simply worn out by their sufferings in Soviet prisons and camps. In others, like Sadūnaitė, they were simple, brave people not fitted for leadership. Some are too honourable for political life which, in the Baltic, is increasingly dirty. Others like Mart Niklus, who do have political ambitions, have excluded themselves by their extremism and even personal neuroticism, whether by their calls for mass revolution in the dangerous years of the struggle for independence, or by their attitudes to Russian immigrants and former Communists, or both.

This of course is one of the saddest features of the dissident heritage: that of the tiny minority that found the courage to protest against Soviet rule, so many found it only in nationalism, and often of a basically chauvinist and backward-looking kind. This is however not always the case. Some of the dissidents who are most bitter in their denunciations of the former Communist establishment appear genuine in their lack of bitterness against Russians as a people. It may well be, as several former dissidents maintain, because they co-operated with Russians in the dissident movement and shared the sufferings of Russians in the camps. Lagle Parek, for example, now Chairwoman of the Estonian National Independence Party, speaks with understandable affection and admiration of Irina Ratushinskaya, with whom she was imprisoned. Former dissidents like Parek stress that their opposition is only to the presence of the Russian 'immigrant' or 'colonist' population in Estonia.²⁹ Parek herself admitted, on the other hand, that former dissidents in Estonia have done almost nothing since the achievement of independence to maintain relations with Russian former dissidents or the Russian democratic movement. She attributed this to 'lack of time', owing to the demands of the consolidation of independence. Since one of the key issues in this consolidation is relations with Russia and Russians, the excuse is, however, not a very strong one.

One interesting case is the Lithuanian radical nationalist, and Leader of the Liberty League, Antanas Terleckas. He, in fact, is anti-Russian as well as anti-Communist but remarkably for a Lithuanian nationalist, produced in 1989 one of the strongest and most moving denunciations of Lithuanian anti-semitism and of the Lithuanian role in the Holocaust; nor does he seem particularly worried by 'the Polish menace'.³⁰

The forces behind the Estonian and Latvian Congress movements (see Chapter 8) also came from the dissident tradition, and have been successful in shifting the political debate and consensus in a radical nationalist and 'restitutionist' direction – in the sense of a return to the forms of the pre-1940 republics. So far, however, they have failed to draw much political advantage from this for themselves. One reason is precisely their obstinate legitimism, which repels many fellow members

of their sober and pragmatic nations. Another could simply be the dissidents, by their very nature, are often not very good at practical politics.

Some dissidents, not surprisingly, are bitter at the lack of help shown them and their exclusion from power in the countries they helped to liberate. Their bitterness is of course greatly increased by the fact that their former KGB persecutors not merely unpunished by the courts are drawing state pensions but, in many cases, having gone very successfully into private business on the strength of hidden funds and old underworld connections.* What makes it worse is that conspicuous new opportunities to spend money means that the wealth of the former Communist establishment is becoming more and more visible.

On 23 August 1991, immediately after the failed counter-revolution in Moscow, I stood outside the KGB headquarters in Vilnius with an old Catholic dissident, Viktoras Petkus, who had served a total of twenty-five years in Siberia for his patriotism. Three times he was released, and three times he resumed his patriotic activity, and was again arrested and sentenced. Over our heads drifted smoke from the burning archives of the KGB, before pulling out, destroyed its history, (this time, unlike June 1941, the stock being cleared was only paper, not humans). In Petkus's words,

My happiness today should be greater. But you see, there are people in this crowd who have been imprisoned in the cellars of this building. I myself was taken to Siberia from here. They say that an official from Moscow has arrived today to negotiate with the Lithuanian government over the level of pensions KGB staff should receive, proportionate to their income. Today, they are getting salaries of 700 roubles a month, and my pension is 150 roubles. It is as if they had done that much more than me for Lithuania.³¹

How much of a political role former dissidents will play in the future is not clear. What is certain is that their moral prestige is very considerable and may grow as the mainstream political forces are seen to make a corrupt mess of things. The dissidents' exclusion from wealth and power, and their resentment at the continued growing wealth of the old communist élites, could also make them rallying points for popular discontent. For, with economic change, the number of excluded and dispossessed Balts could well become legion.

* For example, the former KGB commander in Tartu, who is now running both an import-export business and a personal and business security service. Former KGB men are involved in such businesses all across the Baltic (and the former Union in general), often using their links with both the bureaucracy and with the underworld to good purpose.

Imagined Nations: Cycles of Cultural Rebirth

*I was born singing, I grew up singing,
I lived my life singing.
My soul will go singing
from the garden of God's sons.*

from a traditional Latvian
folksong, or *daina*, translated by
Pauls Raudseps

The opening of the Third Congress of the Sąjūdis movement in the Sports Palace, Vilnius, on 14 December 1991 was truly dramatic. An unfamiliar figure stepped up to the microphone and, in a gesture from the Victorian stage, set one foot forward, placed a hand to his breast and extended the other towards the audience. After holding the pose for a second, he began to declaim: 'Today we have come back to our Lithuania, our conscience, our blood; My God, my God, how have we come back to our dear Lithuania.... Never did we forget this sacred fire when we were sacrificing our lives for it. Through all the years of the empire of hell we never faltered....' My interpreter fell silent, her mouth half open, and foreign journalists boggled.

The melodrama, however, was intentional and indeed professional, for the speaker, as we later discovered, was no politician but Kestutis Genys, an actor from the Kaunas Drama Theatre. Sąjūdis, the ruling party in Lithuania, had chosen to open its national congress with a poetic monologue, performed with maximum effect. Indeed not simply the opening, but the whole introductory section of the Congress was basically national-religious theatre. We rose for the national anthem, and to honour the dead of January 1991, and then again to hear a beautiful memorial lament. Throughout the first morning of the Congress, a choir in national dress stood at the back of the platform. In between the speeches, they advanced and delivered patriotic anthems.* All rose

* When it comes to patriotic music, the apotheosis is surely attained in a Lithuanian record of the country's national anthem, presented by the Lithuanian government

for these, and for the prayers which also interrupted the speeches. The audience again rose for Dr Landsbergis's entry into the hall, for his ascension of the platform, for his presentation with a ceremonial sash and state medal for courage (acknowledging his leadership in January 1991), again at the end of his speech, and when he left the hall. In all, there were at least nineteen standing ovations that morning. The whole business was irresistibly reminiscent not only of the rituals of past Communist Party Congresses, but of the rhythms of the Catholic mass, which has had a deep effect on Lithuanian culture.

Folklore and Nationalism

The ceremonies of the Latvian Popular Front have echoes of such ritualism, as did those of the radical nationalist Latvian and Estonian Congresses. These however do not approach the intensity of Lithuanian nationalist ritual, which Estonians indeed find perfectly ridiculous.

In the reborn Lithuania, supreme national rituals are closely associated with the Church, which now plays a part in all major national events and commemorations. In Latvia and Estonia, the supreme national occasion is by contrast, a secular one (though sometimes with neo-pagan overtones): the great national song festivals. The political importance of song in the Baltic States has been noted many times. In the one hundred-and-fifty-year-old process of the creation of national-cultural symbols, the 'invention' of Baltic tradition, they are probably the most powerful symbols of all. Baltic national revolutions, and especially that in Estonia, have been dubbed 'the singing revolutions', a description akin to that applied to Baltic national movements before 1917 which are said to have 'sung their way to freedom'. In Estonia, at least, the use of song as a sort of weapon is of immense antiquity; both Estonian and Finnish folklore record traditions of 'singing matches', a kind of peaceful single combat between rivals.²

The first Estonian and Latvian national song festivals, in 1869 and 1873 respectively, were political as well as cultural events of the first importance, the culmination of a decades-long process of national-cultural development influenced by contemporary German nationalist folk festivals. To understand why, one must remember that, until the

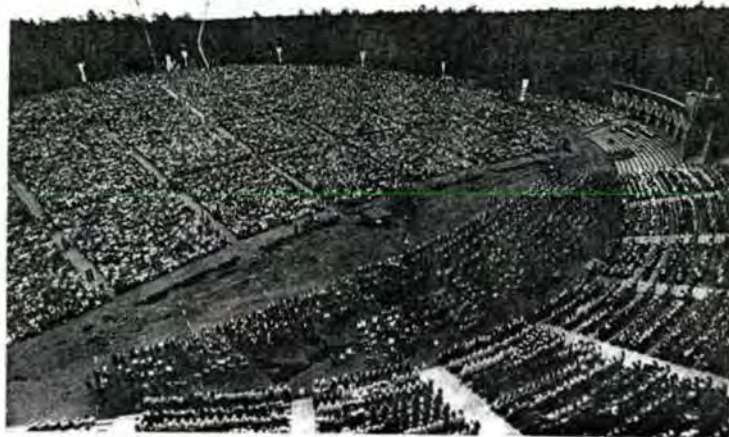
to foreign guests. The first band consists of the Lithuanian national anthem, performed by choir and orchestra; the second band, of the same anthem sung by a different choir, and more slowly; the third band, the same anthem played by the orchestra alone; and the last band, the national anthem played and sung by all three, *fortissimo*. On each band all three verses are sung, so that by the end the listener has heard the melody repeated twelve times, and the words, nine times.

early nineteenth century, peasant folk-songs and legends were, to all intents and purposes, the essence of Latvian and Estonian culture. Literature in these languages consisted otherwise solely of religious tracts, prayers, hymns and translations, even though literacy was already well advanced and, in Estonia by the end of the century, perhaps at a higher level than in Britain. There was of course also a folk-tradition in the visual arts, but whereas this was rather limited, Baltic folk-songs were and remain unparalleled in Europe for their richness and beauty. Their influence runs like a thread through all subsequent cultural developments and schools of Estonian and Latvian literature from the mid-nineteenth century. Hence great reverence is paid in Latvia to the memory of Krišjānis Barons (1835–1923) who assembled and codified the *dainas*, or Latvian folksongs, 217,996 items in the published edition, and some 1.5 million in all. With a song for every living Latvian, it is said to be the world's largest collection of oral folklore. In Lithuania and Estonia, men like Jonas Basanavičius, Friedrich Reinhold Kreuzwald and Jakob Hurt were engaged in similar tasks.³

Nor was focus on folklore for the want of any other medium. Singing had always been immensely important for the Baltic peoples, and undoubtedly played a major role in their ancient pagan religions and magical practices.⁴ The earliest written records of traditional Estonian songs were in the form of evidence in seventeenth-century witch-trials. For this reason, Christian pastors devoted much energy to stamping out these 'satanic songs' and replacing them with German Christian hymns. Today, every village has its choir, which often sings to professional standard and children are strongly encouraged to participate. In the words of the Latvian poet, Imants Ziedonis:

My child, we are a nation of eaters, but put your spoon down in your bowl while a song is being sung. Don't look at that man eating, don't learn from him. He has eaten all his songs. He can't tell the difference between songs and lettuce.⁵

Localised festivals of folk song and dance take place regularly at every level of society, and are major social and public events. They find their apotheosis of course in the great national song festivals, which take place every few years. When they began, under Russian imperial rule in the nineteenth century, they symbolised not only the unity and aspirations but the very existence of the Baltic nations, which the Baltic Germans in particular were disposed to deny. Before 1917, each national festival was seen as a further step in the consolidation and mobilisation of the spirit of Baltic nations. Under Russian, as later under Soviet, rule the festivals were also the only legal opportunity for large numbers of people to gather and show their national allegiance, albeit in a veiled way. In recent years,



6 General view of the Latvian National Song Festival, Riga, July 1990.

of course, they were also vital symbols of the struggle for independence against Soviet rule. It was at the 'Baltika' festival of 1988 that the three national flags were first raised together under Soviet rule.

In recent years the presence at the festivals of groups of Baltic exiles has also symbolised at an international level the unity of the Baltic nations, overcoming the Soviet forces which drove them into exile and separated them from their families and homeland. It also celebrates the way that these communities, or some of them, have preserved their national cultures in exile.

With independence now achieved, the festivals will presumably once again play the role they possessed under the first Baltic republics, when they symbolised the survival of a higher, unbreakable national unity and purpose in the face of all political conflicts and disputes. As such, of course, they proved useful symbols for the authoritarian regimes which eventually took power in the three states. It is interesting to note that although today the song festivals are always performed by choirs in traditional peasant dress, which bestows an air of immemorial antiquity, in fact this only became the practice in Estonia after the 1934 coup of Konstantin Päts. Before that, people turned up in their 'best' clothes. The rules as to what constituted the correct costume for each region were

laid down by experts from the Estonian National Museum; a typical episode in the 'invention of tradition'.

The national festivals are indeed vastly impressive occasions. The choirs number in the thousands and the participants, in the cases of Latvia and Estonia, make up a very large proportion of the ethnic Latvian and Estonian populations. The sound of hundreds of thousands of voices symbolise national harmony in every sense, like Rousseau's 'General Will' set to music.⁶

The stress on the connection between folklore and national identity in Baltic thought stems naturally from Baltic history, but it was also a central element in the philosophy of the first great European thinker (possibly indeed the only one) to take a close interest in the Balts and their traditions. Johann Gottfried Herder was a pastor and teacher in Riga between 1764 and 1769 and developed a keen interest in Latvian and Estonian folklore, examples of which he included in his collection, *Stimmen der Voelker in Lieder* ('Voices of the Peoples in Song' – a significant title). Herder was strongly influenced by this folklore, and by the manner in which it had kept some form of Baltic identity alive even in the absence of a 'higher' culture. Largely on the basis of his Baltic experience, Herder enunciated the theory that every nation had its own special and incommunicable national spirit and culture, the highest expression of which was their folksong and poetry. These he called 'the imprints of a nation's soul'. For nations which had been suppressed by other nations, politically or culturally (as he saw his own Germany having been colonised by French culture) the only route to the recovery of a national cultural and hence political identity was through the rediscovery of folklore.⁷

Herder's thought had a great influence on local German scholars who, after him, began to collect Baltic folklore and, through them, on emerging Baltic scholars and nationalists. To this day, Herder exerts a vast influence on Baltic philosophy. His stress on national individuality, and denunciations of internationalism and cosmopolitanism, have become even more popular as a result of opposition to the grim Soviet version of 'internationalism' which threatened to destroy Baltic culture. In the case of the Baltic cultures which have emerged since the mid-nineteenth century, the vision of Herder has been to some extent fulfilled, particularly in terms of poetry (in Latvia and Lithuania, the dominant literary form) which has been vastly influenced by folklore and folk-song. An Estonian emigré poet, writing in 1973, considered that '... the Baltic writer rebels against, or falls back on and interacts with, his folklore heritage, just as contemporary English authors, whether knowingly or not, draw on a literary tradition which goes all the way back to Chaucer in an unbroken line'.⁸

This rural and folkloric imagery is what gives much of Baltic literature

its beauty, power and distinctiveness in the context of European culture today. A Latvian emigré scholar, Vaira Vīķis-Freibergs, adopting a concept from Marshall McLuhan, has said that the *dainas* have an essential 'coolness' of style, reflected in 'a strong reserve and reticence towards the direct expression of deep emotions', which has been passed on to Latvian literature. She contrasts this with Russian folk-style and culture, which she says are at the extreme 'hot' end of the scale.⁹

Natural and animal imagery, often taken originally from folksong, is very common in Baltic literature, and especially poetry, to this day and, for that matter, in Baltic languages and popular idioms in general. This has often been linked to a sort of 'neo-pagan', animistic, holistic belief in the divinity of all living things. Many Balts are fascinated by questions relating to shamanism and the idea of a world in which the spirits of men and animals interact. In Estonia it is to be found strongly represented in the poems of Jaan Kaplinski, for example. Kaplinski's own holistic philosophy is formulated in Neo-Buddhist terms, but in his approach to nature he undoubtedly owes much to this specifically Baltic tradition, as does the strong ecological consciousness of so many Baltic writers. A typical, though unusually beautiful and powerful, example of such an approach in Lithuania is the poet Sigitas Geda, of whom a critic has written that he 'talked in a friendly way to a grasshopper, whom he held to be of the gods' and that 'Geda draws no clear-cut boundaries between people, animals and nature – they all seem extensions of each other in a landscape where "The brown reeds smell of the forefathers' bodies" and "Icebergs, stones, birds and humans have walked across Lithuania"'.¹⁰

Animal images, and birds in particular, can get in almost anywhere in Lithuania. Soon after the Lithuanian declaration of independence, the philosopher Arvydas Šliogeris told me that, 'the Lithuanians see independence as a big green bird with a red beak. Of course they will feel disappointed, because such a bird has not in fact landed on the Lithuanian parliament'. By the bird, he later explained, he meant to symbolise 'anything miraculous and wonderful'. During a discussion on economic reform with the Lithuanian government, a Lithuanian-American academic suddenly exclaimed: 'Take a good look at this powerful bird, free enterprise; do you want to shoot it, or will you follow where it leads?'

The presence of neo-pagan elements and motifs in contemporary Baltic culture has strong organic roots in Baltic peasant cultures as these continued and evolved from the pre-Christian period, though of course they became thoroughly mixed with Christian elements. In this sense, while these modern pagan elements are obviously very different from the original paganism, most are also quite distinct from the neo-paganisms of modern Western Europe, so often either profoundly foolish or deeply sinister.¹¹

However, in the course of the past century, there have also been strong attempts by Baltic nationalist elements (and, between 1920 and 1940, the national states) to reshape these traditions to their own purposes. Thus the authoritarian Latvian regime of President Ulmanis made quite extensive use of neo-pagan, 'ethnic-religious' motifs during the 1930s. A neo-pagan religious group, the *Dievturi* (*Dievs* means 'God' in Latvian), was formed, closely linked with Latvian fascist groups to the Right of Ulmanis. *Dievturība* has now been revived. Its membership is extremely small, though it enjoys considerable prestige on the far Right of politics. Even Latvians who disapprove of its ideology accord it a certain respect because of the unusual purity and beauty of its rendering of Latvian folksongs, and the memory of the repeated imprisonment of its members under Soviet rule. There are also neo-pagan groups in Lithuania, where however the dominance of Catholicism in national imagery means that their direct political impact has been even more limited.¹² The relationship between the neo-pagan and Catholic strands of modern Lithuanian culture is intensely complicated.

Several of the nineteenth-century Lithuanian national poets and writers, like Maironis and Baranauškas, were Catholic priests. However, later in the century there also emerged a strong streak of liberal nationalism which blamed Catholic conservatism for Lithuanian backwardness, supineness, Polonisation and reliance on outside authority.

In the context of a Baltic 'time-lag' in terms of the adoption of Western ideas, so strongly re-inforced by Soviet rule, it is interesting to note that liberal positivist thought gained the ascendancy in Lithuania only in the 1890s – at the precise moment when, in Western Europe, thinkers were beginning to abandon it in favour of other approaches and ideologies, often with romantic roots. This may help account for the relatively shallow roots struck by positivism within Lithuanian culture.

From the 1880s, liberal writers like Kudirka explicitly recalled Lithuania's great medieval pagan past in opposition to the negative features of contemporary Catholic Lithuania. Since the Catholic element could not be omitted in any full conception of Lithuanian national identity, it is significant that, for example, the words of the Lithuanian national anthem, written by Kudirka, are a rather uneasy mixture of Catholic and neo-pagan imagery.

The official culture of Smetona's authoritarian regime was largely derived from this liberal tradition – an apparent paradox paralleled, for example, in Italy where the tradition of nineteenth-century activist anticlerical liberal nationalism passed in the twentieth into Mussolini's fascism. Smetona's relations with the Church were also frequently strained, though because of its power, the need to consolidate Lithuania's young national culture, and the lack of real radicalism in Smetona's party, the rift never went as deep as in Italy.

Images of an imagined pagan past are widespread in Latvian and Lithuanian political rhetoric today, and pictures of that past are used to support one or other national and ideological orientation. Thus in the nineteenth century, authors made their pagan heroes argue for democracy as well as for independence. Soviet writers, and many Baltic patriots as well, portrayed ancient Baltic society as strongly egalitarian (this of course being the common currency of most imagined 'golden ages' worldwide). Today, the idea that ancient Baltic society was matricentral has been used both by proto-feminists, and by politicians arguing that the ancient Balts were a peaceful, unaggressive people, vulnerable to aggressive nomadic proto-communist Slavs. The implication is that this is also true of the Balts today. Often, especially in Lithuanian rhetoric, this pacific image co-exists uneasily with images of glorious Lithuanian victory and conquest.¹³

One aspect of the neo-pagan and historical revival which has become completely generalised and internalised is that of first names. Until the end of the nineteenth century, Lithuanians and Latvians used either local versions of general Christian names, like Jānis or Jonas, or bore traditional peasant names, possibly derived initially from pagan roots but with no clear connection with the tradition (as, for example, the names of the peasants in Donelaitis). The 'rediscovery' of national history in Lithuania, and the 'recreation' of national myth in Latvia meant a tremendous vogue among the intelligentsia for historical and mythological names, a vogue which is now common in Latvian society. Today, Vytautas, Mindaugas, and Kestutis (all medieval grand dukes) are among the most common Lithuanian names; a century and a half ago they were largely unknown (though Vytautas survived in Slavonic as 'Vitold'). Supporters of Landsbergis sometimes make play in their propaganda of the identification of his name with that of Vytautas the Great. The giving of such names was a quiet protest against Soviet rule when the regime was encouraging the use of 'Vladimir', or weird revolutionary hybrids. One Lithuanian friend reported that her younger brother had been named Mindaugas, 'as a very small way of showing that we were still attached to Lithuania and the Lithuanian tradition'. On 6 July 1992, the anniversary of Mindaugas's coronation (the 739th anniversary in fact, the choice of which shows a certain impatience on the part of the Lithuanian government) was celebrated with great pseudo-medieval ceremonies in Kaunas. According to a Swedish observer, 'whether this will become a regular national holiday depends on which side wins the next elections'. The sweeping victory of the former Communists therefore means that the anniversary will almost certainly not be institutionalised. The Lithuanian Right wing loves such ceremonies, while the Left and Centre have sometimes deliberately associated themselves with pop concerts as a way of showing their 'youthfulness' and 'modernity'.

In Estonia, such historical re-enactments have little resonance, a sign of Estonia's greater closeness to the modern West. There, use of folklore in party politics is restricted to the more extreme Right. Even the Centre-Right 'Fatherland' (*Isamaa*) alliance in the elections of September 1992 made much greater use of pop and rock concerts. The Isamaa Prime Minister, Mart Laar, explained that this was partly for cultural reasons, and partly because so many pop and rock singers were Isamaa supporters. In Estonia, folklore already plays a national role much closer to that of Scandinavia. For while even the limited Estonian stress on folklore is unusual by Anglo-Saxon standards, in the Scandinavian and other democracies, displays of folklore are used to bolster both national and local identities. As these identities come under threat from modern mass culture, the official use of folklore in many areas has perhaps become even more marked.

The Creation of Language

Alongside the political creation of the Baltic nations, the codification of their folklore, and the first indigenous literary creativity came the forging of the modern Baltic languages out of numerous peasant dialects. German linguists assisted the process by developing a keen interest in the roots of the Indo-European language group, of which Lithuanian is one of the most antique examples.

In Lithuania and Estonia, the process of linguistic harmonisation and standardisation was more or less complete by 1914, and in Latvia by the 1920s. The process was greatly intensified under the independent republics, through school systems and official media, and was finally completed under Soviet rule. The creation of the standard languages brought fierce polemics in the press and struggles between linguists championing different dialects.¹⁴ In Estonia, the result was a conclusive victory for North Estonian over South Estonian, which had hitherto been virtually a separate language, but today, under intensive state pressure, has almost entirely faded. A form of it is still spoken by some of the Setu people in Estonia and the Pskov region of Russian, and the poet Jaan Kaplinski has used it in some of his work. The 'unification' of Latvian has not proceeded as far, in that the Latgalian language is still recognisably distinct from 'standard' Latvian.¹⁵

In Latvia and Estonia, the movement for 'purification' of the language was most often directed against German words, and in Lithuania against Polish words and orthography. Today, of course, the stress is on removing Russian borrowings, though fears have also been expressed that the Baltic languages may be swamped by a wave of Americanisms. Articles on the subject have appeared in the Right-wing press in all three

republics, and Lithuanian television has a weekly programme devoted to encouraging people to speak correct Lithuanian. At the Third Sąjūdis Congress the radical nationalist, Antanas Terleckas, in the middle of someone else's speech, suddenly grabbed the microphone and roared at the unfortunate speaker, 'Why do you use this filthy Soviet term "organ", when you could use the proper Lithuanian word "institution" (*institucija*)!'

The hereditary prestige of Vytautas Landsbergis for the Lithuanian intelligentsia stems in part from a family connection with the creation of the modern Lithuanian language. His maternal great-grandfather, Professor Jonas Jablonskis, was chiefly responsible for drawing up and codifying Lithuanian grammar and vocabulary in the later nineteenth century. At the same time, Dr Landsbergis's paternal grandfather was in a sense putting Jablonskis's work into practice by writing the first plays to appear in Lithuanian, as well as developing Lithuanian journalism.¹⁶

The activity of the Landsbergis family can indeed be said to span almost the whole history of Lithuanian culture from its creation in the mid-nineteenth century to the present. Landsbergis's father was a distinguished architect under the first republic, who also fought for Lithuanian independence in 1918–20 and who served in the Lithuanian administration under the German occupation of 1941. At the time of writing, he was still alive and was regularly hailed at Sąjūdis gatherings as the 'Patriarch of National Independence'. Landsbergis himself is the most distinguished critic and analyst of Lithuania's national artist and composer, M. K. Čiurlionis, and by keeping knowledge of his work alive under a Soviet system hostile to it, helped defend Lithuanian culture; however, his suggestions that this constituted a form of active resistance are exaggerated.¹⁷

Myth as History and History as Myth

In developing their national languages and literatures, the Balts were not only concerned to provide themselves with the tools of modern cultural nationhood. They had also to prove to the world that they possessed a full cultural identity, and to overcome the sense of inferiority produced by many centuries of foreign rule during which any educated Balt automatically became a German or a Pole. They had to throw back in his teeth the words of the Baltic German pastor who declared in the mid-nineteenth century that,

Those who know our 'nationals' have long since lost all hope for the Latvian people. It is a stillborn nation. The Latvians have no national past and no history, they cannot have a future. The only character traits

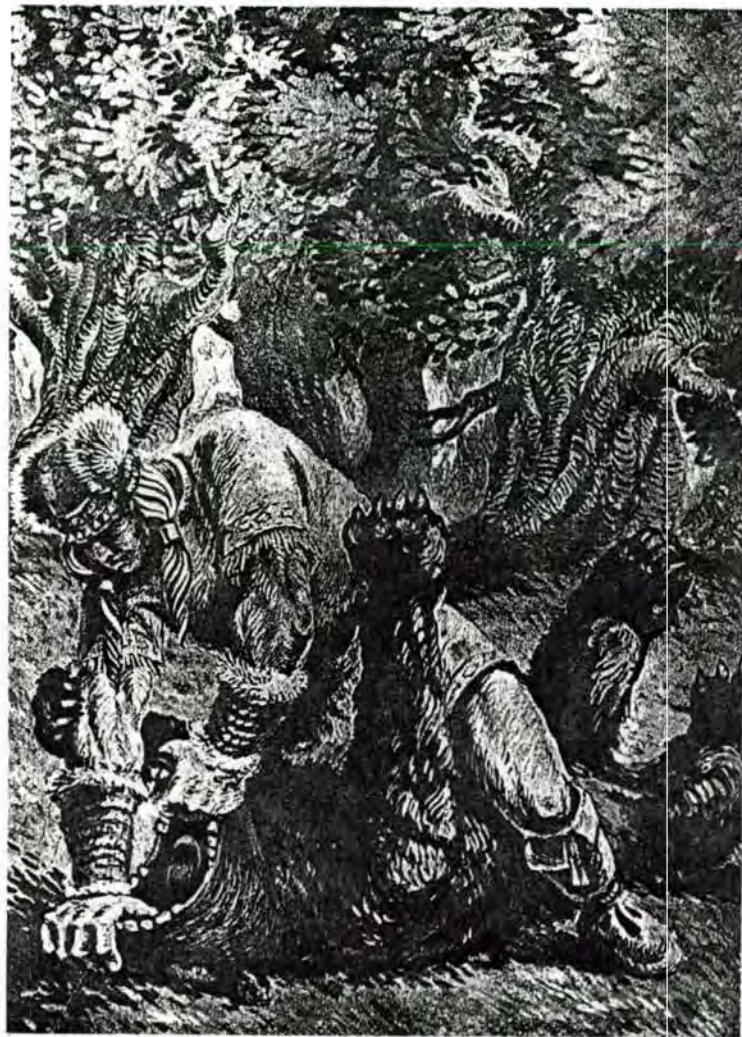
which distinguish them are their totally backward and crippled language ... and their blinding hatred for the Germans.¹⁸

In both the ancient classical and the Herderian traditions of the nineteenth-century, the highest form of folk creation was the epic. This in turn, in the classification of the German writer Wilhelm Jordan, could only be produced by an 'epic people' which was, at the same time, a *Kulturvolk*. The enterprise was pushed forward by the creation of *Ossian*.¹⁹ A vital impetus for the Balts was given by the publication in Finland between 1835 and 1849 of the *Kalevala*, compiled by Elias Lönnrot from fragments of ancient Karelian folk-poems. In its basic material, the *Kalevala* is a good deal more authentic as a folk-epic than *Ossian*, but stands nonetheless in the *Ossian* tradition.²⁰ The result of these influences in the Baltic provinces was the publication in 1861 of the Estonian epic poem *Kalevipoeg* ('The Son of Kalev'), by Friedrich Kreuzwald and in 1888 (in Latvian) of *Lāčplēšis* ('The Bear-Tearer') by Andrejs Pumpurs. *Lāčplēšis* followed unsuccessful attempts by other Latvian authors to create such an epic.

Both the giant *Kalevipoeg* and *Lāčplēšis* were central figures in ancient Estonian and Latvian prose folk-tales; the reworking of the material into patriotic verse epics was therefore an 'organic' development in Baltic culture. It however required a transformation which went considerably beyond that of Lönnrot with his *Kalevala* material, because an epic poetic tradition simply did not exist in Estonian and Latvian folklore. It must also be said that neither *Kalevipoeg* nor *Lāčplēšis* were aggressive heroes as heroes go, and are portrayed as defending their nations, not leading them into conquest. The transformation of the stories into legends also involved the modification of archaic peasant tastes by aspiring Victorian ones: thus Kreuzwald left out several aspects of the *Kalevipoeg* tradition in Estonian folklore, one of which had Christ catching *Kalevipoeg* by the testicles and throwing him into a marsh as punishment for his sexual licence – an episode which also presumably symbolised the victory of Christianity over the old gods.*

The impulse to create an Estonian epic came from Kreuzwald's friend, Friedrich Robert Facklmann (1798–1850), who first proposed 'building a national epic' around the figure of *Kalevipoeg*. Facklmann himself had already published (in German) a series of 'Estonian' myths based on Finnish legendary characters (with classical Greek trappings) which became Estonian cultural symbols. In the words of an Estonian critic, 'Such universal acceptance of a largely fictional creation must be a rare occurrence in the history of literature.'²¹ More major epics were explicit in

* Lithuanian editors in the past also changed some of the scatological terminology in Donelaitis' *The Seasons*.



7 Lāčplēsis, the 'Bear-Tearer'. His original name was Lāčausis, 'Bear's Ears'.

their intention to serve as national inspirations and rallying-cries, and both end with invocations to their nations suggesting that the heroes will return to lead them and restore their past glory.²² The impact of each on their nations was tremendous, equivalent to that of the song festivals, the assemblers of folklore and the creators of the standard languages.

In the Estonian case, the importance of *Kalevipoeg* has faded over the years, possibly because of Estonian access to the more 'authentic' and artistically superior Kalevala, and because of the more modern, Western tone of Estonian culture in general. The writer Jaan Puhvel argues that although bits of *Kalevipoeg* 'have been brandished as a theatrical prop', it has mainly served as a roadblock. But in Latvia, Pumpurs's work has been a source of inspiration for successive generations of writers and artists to the present day. As such it also helped to perpetuate the influence of Romanticism in Latvian literature long after it had vanished elsewhere in Europe.²³ In the plainly Herderian words of a contemporary Lithuanian writer,

As the nation enters history, the word of the poet must acquire the properties of a narrative discourse, must grow to become a myth that could in some ways function like those of epic Greek antiquity, when they gave the people a soul, an identity liberated by time. . . . The present situation of the Baltic States requires a new approach to the myth of nationhood, one that would cut through the bourgeois sentimentalism of a small country and the reveries of the romantic era to reach back to the roots which were there at the dawn of history and before.²⁴

Thus the authors of the national epics, and in Lithuania, the recreators of Lithuanian history and folklore, did indeed 'invent a tradition' which stretched back into an imaginary past and influenced a real national future.²⁵ This is deliberately symbolised in the episode in *Lāčplēsis* in which the hero overcomes monsters which guard the scrolls containing the ancient wisdom of the Latvians in a castle sunk beneath the lake.²⁶

The epics therefore served three national needs. They were, in the view of the intelligentsia, true 'folk-epics', emerging from genuine, ancient folk-traditions and 'mirroring the nation's soul'; they were proof that the Baltic languages could produce great modern writers; and they gave a history, and a sense of history, to peoples who had possessed neither. Both Kreuzwald and Pumpurs re-worked their material so that the enemies of their heroes became the Teutonic Knights. Real historical characters and events from the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, like the Livonian chieftain Kaupo and his visit to Rome, were inserted into the *Lāčplēsis* story. The pagan demi-gods of folklore were also extracted from pagan legend and inserted into an actual national past, at the same time as, in *Lāčplēsis*, Latvian paganism was endowed with a partly real, partly imaginary 'Olympus' of classical-type gods.²⁷

Looking to the Latvian future, Pumpurs made Lāčplēsis argue for a Latvian democratic tradition. The Communists, for their part, portrayed the Lāčplēsis of *Fire and Night*, a play on the theme by the Latvian poet Jānis Rainis, as a symbol of the shackled, sometimes misled force of the proletariat, and the play itself as a staging of the materialist view of history. In this interpretation, Laimdota, the hero's rather colourless beloved, stood for an 'anaemic, backward-looking romantic nationalism', while the spirited witch Spīdola stood for 'progress'. It seems this was indeed Rainis's intention to an extent; the play was completed in 1911, when he was still a strong social democrat.

These epics became rallying cries for successive generations of Balts, whenever the nation and its culture seemed in danger of destruction by foreign oppressors; and they provided an imaginative link between modern Balts and their ancestors of the 'golden age', before conquest by the Germans. According to the Latvian-American critic, Valda Melngailis, 'for many Latvian poets, song stands for history'.²⁸ In the first Latvian Republic, the 'Order of Lāčplēsis' was the premier state decoration for courage and service, and it is now being revived in the second republic. A Latvian-Russian friend told me that she had grown up in Riga feeling 'surrounded by Lāčplēsis'. Apart from the sculpture on the Freedom Monument and frequent performances of Rainis's play at school and university, there is in Riga a Lāčplēsis Street and a Lāčplēsis Cinema. Many hairdressers and boutiques are named 'Laimdota'. Spīdola, the witch, is a favourite name for Latvian ships and boats; 'Kangars', the traitor in the epic, has become a generic term for the treacherous. The beginnings of the national movement in 1988 were accompanied by the rock-opera *Lāčplēsis*, by Māra Zālīte, in which the hero's unusual ears symbolise his willingness to hear the call of his people. (Lithuanians for their part are renaming whole blocks of Soviet-named streets after their ancient gods.) In the verse of the Latvian contemporary poet, Māris Čaklais:

Pumpurs is a voice
sewing up the space:
'There is a long, long way
to be danced.
You will require a voice
clear and bright.
There is a far, far future
to be sung.'²⁹

The attempt to answer all these national and cultural needs simultaneously involved the Balts, however, in a set of contradictory beliefs about the epics which, for a long time, they dared not analyse for fear of breaking their spell. Thus the very people who spoke of the epics

as stemming directly from the folk-tradition also praised the authors not as 'compilers' but as original creative geniuses. Moreover while the folktales themselves are always referred to as ancient manifestations of pagan religious culture, the heroes have also been portrayed as historical figures.

So far as the presentation of Lāčplēsis in the Latvian visual arts is concerned, this landed the Latvians not on the horns of a dilemma but rather on the ears of one. According to legend, Lāčplēsis was the child of a male human and a female bear, which suggested relations deeply embarrassing to a Victorian like Pumpurs. This aspect was hence underplayed in his epic, so most Latvians mistakenly believe that Lāčplēsis was merely the bear's foster son. In any event, his mother left him with an unavoidable feature – the ears of a bear: his original name indeed was 'Lāčausis', or 'Bear-Ear'.³⁰ This is where 'myth as history' posed a problem. A Latvian mythical demi-god with bear's ears would have presented no particular difficulty; there have been far stranger figures, mythologically speaking. But for the leader of the thirteenth-century Latvian national resistance movement to be depicted in art with bear's ears was obviously unthinkable – the Germans, Russians and Estonians would have laughed for the rest of historical time.

The way in which Latvian artists overcame this difficulty provides one of the more curious episodes in the history of national iconography. The approach has been basically twofold: to conceal, and to transfigure. Thus on the Freedom Monument in Riga the sculpture of Lāčplēsis is given long hair, so that it is impossible to see his ears. Other artists, feeling that the ears have to be represented somehow, have detached them from his head and stuck them onto his helmet, like furry ear-muffs on a Russian hat. Even then however, knowing that spectators might still look under the helmet, they had to cover the ear-spaces with long hair. Despite the unequivocal attachment of Lāčplēsis to his ears in both Pumpurs' and Rainis' epic accounts I have yet to find a single Latvian artistic representation, out of dozens investigated, which presents them in their proper location.³¹

What makes the artists' dilemma especially painful however was summed up by a Latvian guide, to whom I pointed out this anomaly. She looked at me coldly: 'The ears are to be understood as a sign of moral authority', she said, 'Of course they were not physical ears'. While she was wrong about the physicality, it is quite correct that in both the ancient myths and the modern narratives, the ears gave their owner not merely authority but also physical strength. They were the equivalent of Samson's hair, and the 'Black Knight' only succeeds in fighting Lāčplēsis to a draw at the end of the epic by lopping them off.³² So by taking away his ears, what the Latvian artists have done is symbolically castrate their own national hero!



8 The Latvian mythical hero, Lāčplēsis, of the eponymous epic by Pumpurs, fighting the Black Knight. Note the bear's ears on Lāčplēsis' helmet.

Cultural Politics in the Reborn States

In today's reborn Baltic States, the connection between culture and politics is particularly explicit in the case of Lithuania. There Dr Landsbergis represents a form of 'cultural politics' not simply through his ancestry and image for the Lithuanian intelligentsia but also through his own central political motivation.³³

The response of leading cultural figures within the Baltics to the political scene after independence has of course been varied. The overwhelming majority supported the struggle for independence, some playing a leading public role. Of these, a few, like the Lithuanian poet Sigitas Geda, have withdrawn from public life, disgusted with the corruption and infighting. Others, like his fellow poet Kazys Saja or the Estonian poet Paul-Erik Rummo, became parliamentary deputies on the Right. Others again, like the Estonian Jaan Kaplinski and the Lithuanian exile Tomas Venclova, have become strong critics of what they see as the narrow and chauvinist nationalism of some sections of their countries. Jānis Peters, the former Secretary of the Latvian Writers Union who played a key part in founding the Popular Front, as of early 1993, still occupied a key post as Latvian ambassador to Moscow. A few, like the Estonian poet and novelist Jaan Kross, have succeeded in remaining public figures admired by all for their integrity and impartiality. Kross, Rummo and Kaplinski were all elected as deputies in 1992, leading an observer to comment that whatever its other faults, the Estonian parliament was probably the only one in the world to contain three potential Nobel prizewinners.

While Baltic poets may with time become unpolitical however, very few can become apolitical. Since the beginnings of modern Baltic culture it has been the duty of Baltic artists to provide an example in terms of symbols and ideology. In the words of a post-1944 Baltic emigré writer, 'The task of Latvian literature in exile is to create symbols for the experience of the Latvian at this time, symbols which would include answers for the future: how the Latvian nation shall survive in the shadow of death and how it shall indeed achieve a future'.³⁴

Baltic exile literature, and especially verse, was overwhelmingly coloured by nostalgia for the lost homeland, by themes of yearning and separation, and by the search for eternal symbols which would transcend the miserable and possibly hopeless circumstances of the present. But this was also true for the Soviet Baltic authors – indeed even more poignantly so – because they were often 'internal emigrés', spiritual exiles within their own countries and, because in conditions of censorship, their search for national symbols had to be a hidden endeavour. Censorship, as always, encouraged allegory; and allegory in turn pointed to the use of either folklore or history, the natural, traditional source of nationalist

imagery. Meanwhile, not merely were most artists seeking in some way to express the national spirit and resist Soviet culture, but they were impelled by the sheer dreariness, the moral and physical squalor of Soviet life, to seek refuge in questions of private existence and in folklore and nature. This tendency was also a reaction against the brutal shock of collectivisation, which not only ruined agriculture, but ruined the traditional rural society which was the basis of the national tradition itself. There was a tremendous impetus therefore to save what could be saved, and use or at least record it before it disappeared. The words of the Lithuanian exile critic, Rimvydas Šilbajoris, link the nineteenth-century search for national myths with the twentieth century search for national cultural regeneration:

The Lithuanians, a people with possibly the greatest stories to tell from medieval times, never could find even the basic outlines of the myth that their nation must have been, judging by its historical deeds. The alternative chosen by some Lithuanian poets was to turn inward, towards the human mystery of their own selves, as if to some spacious world from which a mythological perception of existence may rise like some sort of 'memory inside the blood' to nourish and shape the poet's imagination, so that a given moment in the course of history would also become suffused with this mythological presence and transform itself into poetry. . . .³⁵

As a result, after Stalin's death, and Khrushchev's 'thaw' in the 1950s, there was a tangible literary move, especially in Lithuania and Latvia, towards folkloric themes and imagery. It was accompanied by a great, if covert, internal philosophical reaction against positivism as exemplified in its most grim, coarse, and ultimately discredited form by Soviet Marxism-Leninism. Today this is reflected not only in straightforward uses of traditional forms and motifs, but in sophisticated post-modern reworkings of them.

The anti-modernist tendency, present in any case in the Baltic peasant and folkloric-romantic tradition, was considerably strengthened by the fact that everything ugly in modern society could now be seen not as the consequence of general economic and social trends, but as yet another evil consequence of alien rule. The effect was that, in much of the Soviet Baltic literature that Balts really loved and admired, the countryside, and rural values, tended to receive an overwhelmingly positive shade, and the towns an overwhelmingly negative one. One Lithuanian author is said by Dr Šilbajoris to 'describe the moral depravity of his urban characters as if it were the very essence of their souls'.³⁶ Numerous works bathed the 'lost paradise' of rural childhood in a golden glow. Even in relatively unromantic Estonia, the urban novels and short stories of Arvo Valton, Mati Unt and others are dominated by themes of coldness, alienation and falsity. In the 1920s and 30s, the greatest classic in the tradition of the

Estonian realist novel, the series 'Truth and Justice' by Anton Hansen Tammsaare, was indeed dominated in its first and last volumes by a grim, unrelenting struggle with a harsh and unyielding land. Nonetheless, it is only when the protagonist, Indrek Paar, returns to the land and the struggle from the falsity and even insanity of his urban life that he 'finds himself' again, and discovers a purpose to existence.³⁷

This celebration of traditional values certainly helped prevent Soviet rule from achieving legitimacy. However, this rejectionist aspect of Baltic and other Soviet national cultures was disguised and indeed warped by another factor of great contemporary importance, which I term (after the semi-official national culture of the German Empire before 1914) the 'Wilhelmine' nature of Soviet official culture. This was characterised *inter alia* by a slavish adulation of power, industry, 'Progress' in its most brutal and domineering form, but simultaneously by an endless harping on the value of conservative, rural, homely, familial, traditional, folkloric and religious values, all presented in a general glow of kitsch and nauseating roseate sentimentality, much of it by authors who were themselves already thoroughly urbanised.

The 'Wilhelmine' sensibility came in reaction to modernisation, but was also of course directly sponsored in the name of social order by a threatened authoritarian state. If you omit the religious element, this is a pretty fair picture of much of officially generated Soviet culture in the last decades of the Union. In Russia itself the nationalist aspects could be more or less open, and even in the other republics a certain amount was allowed. The numbingly boring uses by the Soviet state of sanitised and 'safe' national folk-cultures are all too familiar to visitors to the former Union, and fitted in as perfectly with Soviet rituals as they do with the new national ones. Thus too, the high official status of Soviet authors who celebrated rural and traditional values (of the most ossified kind) was not compromised by the fact that much of what they were writing could as well have come from the Baltic emigrés in America. Similarly, the very popular Soviet Lithuanian author, Justinas Marcinkevičius, opened his play *Mažvydas* (1977) with a Lithuanian pastor teaching children to spell their first word, 'Lithuania':

As you say this word, upon your lips,
You'll feel the taste of blood and honey,
You'll hear the Oriole call before the rain,
You'll catch the smell of hay. . . .

and so on. This stomach-turning stuff is not, it must be said, characteristic of Marcinkevičius's work as a whole, let alone of Baltic poetry at its best. On the contrary, one of the great values of folkloric imagery in Baltic literature is precisely that it avoids triteness and kitsch, providing instead motifs of universal lyricism and power. Nonetheless,

these lines are fairly representative of both at their worst, and certainly of the kind of poetry which is now being written by amateur bards for political and patriotic occasions. As a patriotic Latvian McGonnigal in the radical nationalist paper *Pilsonis* had it, presumably referring to the Russians in Latvia:

While white souls are trying to fly
High in the sky,
Black souls are dragging them down and trying to doom them to
extinction.
Wolves are invading our sacred places,
And our gardens where seeds of the Latvian tricolour are
growing. . . .³⁸

However, the field of culture also symbolises and embodies the most positive sides of Baltic nationalism: its capacity to inspire and move; its intense love for old, precious and unique traditions; and its basically peaceful and unaggressive character. Today, Baltic writers and artists are addressing the question of how the national concerns of Baltic culture should be expressed in this new age. In this context, they face two main problems. The first is the danger of remaining patriotic bards, expressing 'national values' and articulating the 'national spirit', though now with the support of the dominant political forces.³⁹ Those who do are likely to lose touch with the transformation of their societies and find themselves perpetuating a tradition which is 'Soviet in form and national in content'. This is now probably the dominant cultural form in all the former republics of the Soviet Union, as nationalism is the dominant political form. This is not only because nationalism is the only force which can replace communism in the structure of state, society, culture and academia. It is also because, following the 'Wilhelmine' argument, some aspects of Soviet and patriotic culture had a good deal in common, making the transition between them an easy one.

Similarity between the Soviet and the nationalist style is even more marked in the area of public monuments. It is amusing to note how intellectuals of the various republics, though contemptuous of the ugly, brutalist style of Soviet monuments, are full of praise for Soviet monuments to their own national heroes, even when constructed in exactly the same style. The most famous surviving national monument from the period of the first republics in the Baltic is the Freedom Monument in Riga, constructed in the 1930s. This is not of course Soviet in style, but it is certainly disturbingly brutalist, showing all too clearly the influence of the prevailing official styles of contemporary Germany and Italy. The elaborate statuary is however more reminiscent of pre-1914 Germany, suggesting (as so often) a certain lag in the transmission of Western cultural influences to the Baltic. Today, Latvian

newly-weds often go to the Freedom Monument to lay flowers, as those in Soviet Russia used to go to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.⁴⁰

The second danger of course is that Baltic culture will simply open itself to Western mass culture, as so many Balts themselves are doing, and vanish into the Western sea. The danger seems particularly acute because of the poverty of the Baltic States, as well as their small size. The specific features of Baltic culture described in this chapter are indeed already becoming less followed by the newest generation of Baltic creative artists, while most young people in general are thoroughly attached to Western popular forms.

After so many years of guarding their national cultures against destruction, this prospect is naturally viewed with particular horror by many Baltic intellectuals. The entire cultural, economic and political transition is for many highly disturbing in personal terms, even given the exaggerated hope and subsequent disillusion common to all revolutionary processes. The explanation has something to do with emerging from the 'internal emigration', identified in this chapter, which was in its way a comforting place to live, as well as being relatively secure economically and socially for most writers and artists.

Max Weber spoke of the 'disenchantment of the world' through modernisation. This is what threatens Baltic culture, now that the possibility has gone of blaming Soviet rule for everything bad and ugly. Jaan Kaplinski personifies this dilemma in some ways. On one hand, he has strongly denounced the narrow and chauvinist aspects of contemporary Estonian culture, and the hatred of the Russians:

The Citizens Committees [an Estonian radical nationalist force] represent a new religion and know what a true Estonian is. Anyone who doesn't agree is a heretic and not a true Estonian . . . [for example] if someone says that the Russian language could be a second state language in Estonia, he is not a true Estonian. There is an opinion here that 'an Estonian is always closer to another Estonian', but for me, Boris Yeltsin for example is much more sympathetic than some of our Super-Estonian politicians. . . . Because Estonians are a small nation, they tend to put pressure on their compatriots, so that every Estonian should 'think as an Estonian' and think like the majority. But I have my own convictions and will never give them up, whatever the majority may say.⁴¹

On the other hand, Kaplinski loves the rural and folklore tradition (albeit transfigured in his verse by universal values and influences from widely different cultures) and so dislikes urban life that he can hardly bear to live even in the small university town of Tartu. He has denounced the influence of mass Western culture as 'Barbification', after the popular doll:

Barbie is a model introducing us to the brave new world that we are entering. Regrettably, this brave new world is totalitarian, it has no place for a different life, for different people. . . . I'm deeply worried by the fact that practically no new children's books have been printed in Estonia in the last couple of years, and that instead, children are fed with the so-called Barbie-culture. The continuation of this trend is a serious threat to Estonian culture and the Estonian identity. Barbie-ism is potentially even more deadly than Bolshevism because we do not see it as a danger. No normal person wants to be engulfed by a swamp and fights desperately for survival, but . . . is it more pleasant to suffocate in rose petals than mud?⁴²

It is difficult not to sympathise with Kaplinski, when Western mass culture is indeed so crass and Western 'higher' culture often so vacuous. The effect of the former is encapsulated in the availability on cable TV in the Baltic of bland West German soft-core pornography, now achieving the miracle, beyond the power even of the Soviet State, of making sex boring. Similarly, at a street exhibition of modern Western art in Riga during the summer of 1991, the upended metal grills, the monster cardboard cut-out of one of the artists, and the rest of the shallow, narcissistic masquerade – as ritual and empty in its way as anything produced by Soviet culture – made one yearn for Baltic folkloric symbols, which, if not completely true, at least have meaning and beauty.

The issue is expressed in another form in William Wilson's book, *Folklore and Nationalism in Finland*. After tracing what he clearly sees as a generally unhealthy Finnish obsession with national folklore for the past century-and-a-half, the author ends with an optimistic picture of Finnish students turning from this to the study of contemporary popular culture, for example, 'narrative formulas in comic strips'. I cannot really share his enthusiasm. There are hundreds of thousands of comic strips, and hundreds of academic theses about them; but there is only one *Kalevala*. Similarly, while Lithuanian nationalist intellectuals are often mad, they are at least uniquely mad, or madly unique. The highest ambition of many Estonians, by contrast, is merely to become a sub-species of slightly spoiled Swede. A deeper question is whether the heroic Finnish resistance of 1940 and 1944, to which Wilson gives due credit, would have been possible without the kind of pride in Finnish national culture so assiduously fostered by the nationalist folklorists and cultural figures of whom he so disapproves. This is a key problem in the Baltic States, and one to which no conclusive answer can ever be given.

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*The body of this people is like a fat cocoon,
Inside which sleeps a caterpillar soul,
While shaping its breast for flight
Unfolding its wings, flexing and adorning –
But when the sun of freedom shall rise,
What kind of insect will fly out of that shroud?*

Adam Mickiewicz
(translated by Czesław Miłosz)

The concern expressed in this chapter for the status of the Baltic Russians, and of Russians outside Russia in general, comes not from affliction for them, or from a sense that the circumstance of their location is in any way justified. It comes from a strong belief that they are dangerous.

A Latvian, reading an early draft of this book, observed that while it attacked Baltic 'racism' towards the Russians, it was itself guilty of racist comments about the Baltic Russians. The point, however, is not that I regard Baltic attitudes to the Russians as especially pernicious in comparison with those of Western nations; they are often perfectly understandable and justified. The point is that they remain dangerous. In practice, strong pressure on the Russians to leave will endanger the peace of the region and of Europe.

There is also one exception to the general moral justification for Baltic behaviour: the position of Russian and Russian-Jewish intellectuals and businessmen in Riga is rather different, for several reasons. First, because the Russian community in Riga (even if not in its present dimensions) is of historic standing; secondly, because it broadly supported Latvian independence; thirdly, because it is essential to Latvian prosperity; and fourthly, because Riga has always been a multinational city, neither purely Latvian nor purely anything else. Seen in the long historical term, the attempt to turn Riga into a city with a purely Latvian face and identity is at odds with its traditions.

In my discussions with Balts over the question of guaranteed rights for the Russian minority, the argument has usually been at cross purposes.

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They have argued in terms of international law, historical justice, and specific Baltic interests. I have replied on the basis of pragmatism, practical risks, and the interests of Europe and of the former Soviet region as a whole. In the light of experience of ethnic conflict elsewhere, I am concerned about the appalling consequences which could result, throughout the former Soviet Union, from attempts to dismantle the demographic legacy of Soviet rule. This concern may be exaggerated. Since living in the Baltic, my instinct both as a journalist and a historian has told me that, to go by the past, Baltic policies towards the Baltic Russians will, sooner or later, lead to an explosion. It may well be, however, that, for reasons set out in this chapter, these 'ancestral voices prophesying war' are mistaken in the case of the Baltic States.

It is in any case bitterly unfair that the Balts should be asked to modify their behaviour for fear of its effect on chauvinist nationalism in Russia, or the ethnic harmony of Kazakhstan. But history, like geography, is often unfair, and I argue that if Russia does swing in the direction of fascism, the result in part of the position of Russians living outside Russia, then the Balts themselves may suffer acutely. A Scandinavian diplomat explained his country's policy:

We hope for peace and ethnic harmony in this region, which would itself make it more likely that the Baltic States can carry out economic reforms and move towards Western Europe; but I don't see this desire as directed against the Balts – after all, this is also very much in their own interests.

Although to the Balts it may well seem unfair, I do not regard it as immoral that Western Balts should talk in terms of the general interests of Europe, or of the former Soviet peoples. Moreover, while the Balts have a strong case in international law for regarding most of the Russians as illegal immigrants, a moral argument can also be made for the rights of the Russians, and has been made, by Helsinki Watch amongst others.

A Question of Identity

A common charge against the Russian-speaking minorities in the Baltic is that they have no real national identity: they are pure examples of *Homo Sovieticus*. An aspect of this has been the Baltic Russian attachment to the symbols of Communism. Thus in the Russian-populated Estonian town of Narva, the statue of Lenin once stood, not because of positive enthusiasm even among former Communist authorities, but purely as a visible sign of opposition to the 'nationalist' government in Tallinn. A Russian factory worker in Tallinn, asked in spring 1991 about a huge painting of Lenin on the wall of his plant, shrugged his shoulders sadly:

I know that today it does not look as if Lenin achieved very much, and that even in Russia he is charged with crimes; but you see, we need some sort of national symbol. In England too, you have national symbols, don't you? Like Churchill, for example?¹

The loss of national culture is of course not a problem for the Baltic Russians alone. It has been suggested, by Paul Goble among others, that under Stalin a kind of implicit contract was created, by which the Russian nation as a whole agreed to surrender its national culture to that of the Soviet Union, in return for a supposedly trans-national Union guaranteeing Russian pre-eminence in what was in effect a continuation of the Russian empire. It meant that both national and traditional imperial symbols were destroyed or devalued by association with Soviet propaganda, and are therefore more difficult to recover than the symbols of the Balts or the Georgians.² It is also important to note that despite the view of many Balts, such an 'implicit contract' does not denote collective guilt for the crimes of Stalin or his successors: the Russians were never consulted, in free elections, as to their support for Communism. Traditional Russian culture, and the Russian educated classes, bore the full brunt of Communism. Russians do not view themselves as beneficiaries of the Soviet system, but as its chief victims. Russian workers in the Baltic, too, are incapable of comprehending why the Balts should view them as privileged exploiters, since their income and living standards are on average lower than those of the Balts themselves.

A formal Russian apology for Soviet crimes therefore appears inappropriate, and will certainly not be forthcoming. What can be asked, of course, is that Russians, and Russian intellectuals in particular, should be more aware of the relationship between Russian nationalism and Soviet imperialism, and show some commitment to a conclusive break with the past.

Russian self-confidence today is undermined by the traditional Russian tendency to bitter and even hysterical self-criticism, mixed with quasi-messianic beliefs that Russia was destined to save the world, a combination familiar in Third World countries exposed to First World modernisation, precisely the fate of Russia since Peter the Great. Communism fed on the second conviction, and Communism's fall is leading to a striking revival of the first. It is very common in Russia today to hear the expression, 'in the civilised world', implying that Russia is not civilised and perhaps never will be. Such abject despair is worrying, both because it can lead to paralysis of the will and because it suggests that in due course, as a reaction, there may be a reversion to the messianic variant, signalled, perhaps, by the rise of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy.

The humiliation of grinding poverty and a dispossession of ideals would be dangerous enough on its own: an opinion poll, for example, has

suggested that a majority of Muscovite girls would like to become hard currency prostitutes. The effects of this on the Russian male psyche, and the possible implications for politics, can be imagined.

A common analysis of support for fascism has been in terms of *declassé* social groups, or those threatened with social upheaval. In the context of the replacement of a Communist society with an impoverished, Third World version of a free market, this fate threatens the entire population. Even the minority who stand to do well from the new order are being shaken out of long established patterns; for most, the effect is not dissimilar to the strains placed on the German petty bourgeoisie between 1918 and 1933. For the moment, however, the Baltic Russians' self-image as an imperial people has been greatly undermined. Unlike most imperial peoples, the Russians have generally been poorer (and often, it must be said, dirtier and more drunken) than many of the peoples over whom they were ruling. Most Russian immigrants to the Baltic came from the working class or the peasantry, whereas the local populations comprised a substantial middle class and intelligentsia, damaged but not destroyed by Stalinism. The discrediting of Communism led many Baltic Russians, especially younger ones, to look towards the West. This in turn led to support for independence, and hopes of a move towards Western standards. In the words of Nikolai Slinsky, a Russian technician at the 'Communard' plant in Vilnius, shortly after the Lithuanian Declaration of Independence,

I have been abroad several times, and seen how people live there. I would like Vilnius to be like the towns I saw in Finland. And as long as Lithuania is democratic, like the West, there will be no problem for Russians here.³

An opinion poll in Latvia in December 1991 showed that while, as expected, more local Russians than Latvians favoured a connection with the former Soviet Union (though only 33.2 per cent of Russians to 23.4 per cent of Latvians), the proportion of those favouring an orientation to the West and to Japan was extremely close: 36.9 per cent Russians to 39.2 per cent Latvians.⁴ Economic hopes have so far been disappointed, resulting in a great wave of disillusionment among Balts as well as Russians. Any resulting Baltic Russian reaction against independence has however been diminished by the fact that, across the border, Russia itself is even worse off.

On the other hand, the fear of Russian workers (and of many Balts), that if the Baltic Republics left the Union, Russian raw material and oil supplies would decrease, damaging the Baltic economies, has proved entirely accurate. Its impact has, however, been deadened, because the decline has come in the context of a general collapse in the Soviet trading system, harming all the former republics alike.

In the Baltic Republics, therefore, it was difficult indeed for Russians to see themselves – as did British and French colonists in their empires – as bearers of civilisation and prosperity. The Baltic Russians became increasingly aware of the failure of the Soviet system, and of their association with it. In the words of Goethe, 'to be hated hurts no-one; it is contempt that drags men down'.

A large proportion of Baltic Russians have been prepared to acknowledge that the Balts have a superior civic culture, are cleaner, more orderly, and harder-working. They may qualify this by saying that Russian life is 'friendlier', or 'more humane', but this is the *exact* reverse of the usual coloniser: colonised self-images. In marriages between Balts and Russians, the tendency has been for Russians to become Baltified rather than vice versa, a check on the 'Russification' of the region; in Latvia in 1990, 36 per cent of marriages were across nationalities (including marriages between Russians and Ukrainians and so on). Growing ethnic tension, however, may account for the increase in divorce within inter-ethnic marriages, from 37 per cent in 1987 to 40 per cent in 1990. Marriages between Estonians and non-Estonians have been much rarer.⁵

Of pre-eminent importance in avoiding the development of strong Baltic Russian resistance to independence *au pied noir*, has been the peaceful strategy of all three Baltic national movements, and the natural restraint of the Baltic populations in the face of every provocation to violence. This feature has been central to the prestige of the Baltic movements, not only in the West but also in Russia, and among Baltic Russian intellectuals. These claim it has also influenced the character and behaviour of the Russians in the region. In words that have been echoed by many Baltic Russians, Boris Yulegin, Deputy Mayor of Tallinn, said that:

The Russians who have lived here all their lives have changed a lot. They have taken on something of the Estonian coolness, restraint and habit of hard work – whether they like it or not! They do not feel at home when they go to Russia. The Russians who come here also sometimes do not understand our character, and ask us, 'Why don't you protest? Why don't you go on the streets?'⁶

In view of the size of the Baltic populations, the local Russian response to calls for rallies, strikes, and political resistance before the summer of 1992 was pitifully small, and even the response to referenda and elections was deeply divided.

Despite this, it is still useful to analyse the position of Russia as a whole, and of the Baltic Russians in particular, within the context of the European experience of decolonisation. It is important to remember that

just as many of the uncertain features of contemporary Baltic ideology result from the 'time-lag' of Soviet isolation, so Russian attitudes and dilemmas are sometimes reminiscent of those of Western Europeans a couple of generations ago. In the autumn of 1992 Russia stood in a position not wholly dissimilar from that of France in the mid-1950s, between the end of the war in Indo-China and the full intensification of the war in Algeria.

Losses suffered during the Second World War and in Indo-China destroyed the will of the French people to hold on to their colonial empire, just as Britain's exhaustion after 1945 made it impossible to think of holding on to India.

Even before de Gaulle, the French had begun an orderly, negotiated withdrawal from most of their colonies and protectorates. Except Algeria; but Algeria was not presented to the French people as a conventional imperial, colonial conflict: after Dien Bien Phu, such a war would have been bitterly unpopular. Instead, it was fought precisely on the grounds that *ici, c'est la France*, that the presence of one million Frenchmen (or, like the 'Russians' in the other former Soviet republics, a mixture of nationalities but predominantly French-speaking) made Algeria part of the soil of France itself.

It was through this argument that the alliance of *Pieds Noirs* and embittered military veterans of Indo-China cajoled the French nation into an extended, bitter struggle. It was backed by the assumption that since Frenchmen could not possibly live under Muslim majority rule, the only alternative was 'the suitcase or the coffin' – emigration or death. After several years of savage warfare, of course, it became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Today, defeat in Afghanistan, economic collapse, the total discrediting of Communism, national revolt (albeit mainly peaceful) and the end of the Communist Party – the iron frame of the Soviet empire – have led to the disintegration of the Soviet Union and of much of the old Russian empire. Sheer exhaustion, as much as anything else, saw the Russian people accept, at least before 1993, the loss of empire with extraordinary equanimity (when compared to Britain and France), despite the fact that some of the abandoned territories had been part of Russia for longer than the entire national history of the United States of America.

After the First World War, Russia was also in a state of exhaustion, but the empire was rebuilt by Lenin with the help, in part, of 'national Bolsheviks', Russian Imperialists like General Brusilov (and even Marshal Tukhachevsky) who saw Communism as the only means to unite Russia and reconquer the lost territories. (That, however, was in the context of an age of European empires. The world cultural atmosphere today is of course different.)

Sections of the former Communist and radical nationalist press continue

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to demand that the Baltic States should remain within a sphere of influence amounting in effect to imperial control. Thus a *Pravda* article in June 1992 argued that,

Withdrawal of Russia from the Baltic States would mean not just closing our window on the West, which has already been done, but also boarding it up, which is going on at present. Russia simply cannot exist without the Baltic ports. . . . Therefore Estonian politicians will have to consider the renewal and development of links with Russia . . . [and] the Russian nation, which once saved the Estonians from Nazi genocide, has no choice but to re-open its European window. How this might be done is another question. . . .⁷

The article's strongest language is, however, reserved for the question of rights for Russian residents of Estonia. Liberal Moscow papers like *Izvestia*, *Moscow News* and *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* also often express the hope that the Balts will retain close economic links with Russia, but they do not use the neo-imperialist language of *Pravda*. All, however, are becoming increasingly concerned about the treatment of Russians living in the Baltic.

Even among those who oppose independence for the Balts and others, there is little real enthusiasm for force. Most of the supporters of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, for example, tend to retreat when confronted with the reality of war on a massive scale.⁸ The hope in much of Russian government is to retain the Baltic States within a sphere of influence. But were it not for the existence of substantial Russian minorities, it is doubtful even this effort would be made, given Russian weakness.⁹ An opinion poll published in *Izvestia* in January 1993 suggested that while a majority of Russians wanted their country to regain its status as a great power, only some four per cent thought it should be through military force and aggressive foreign policy; the great majority sought it through a strong economy.

The protection of the minorities is a theme which both the old Soviet and new Russian imperialists have a strong interest in exploiting. But the situation in Moldavia, Ossetia or the Baltic States is not being presented by Russian television as a struggle for empire;¹⁰ nor is it seen as such by most Russians. For them, the duty of the Russian government to protect the position of Russians (and pro-Russian minorities) in neighbouring states is seen not as an imperial but as a *national* duty.

Some Russian intellectuals (Professor Yuri Afanassyev is a leading example) feel differently, regarding most of these populations as legacies of imperialism. The dissident Russian poet, Boris Chichabain, has written,

We are all answerable to God. During the stagnation years I used to visit the Baltic States and often encountered the unfriendliness of the local

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population. I always felt like crying out: 'Friends, your attitude is misplaced! I am different!' But the words stuck in my mouth, because I too am to blame for the occupation and enslavement of the Baltic States.

But to expect the majority of the Russian people to be decisively influenced by feelings of post-colonial guilt would be to require more of them than the peoples of the other former Soviet republics and indeed of the former Western imperial nations as well.

The issue of responsibility for the former imperial territories is of course a heaven-sent weapon for all those in opposition in Russia to use against whichever government is in power – the tactics of Ruslan Khasboulatov against Yeltsin being a flagrant example – and a way of distracting public attention from failures at home. In the words of a Russian diplomat, 'the Russian politicians are trying to solve the problems of Russians in Riga because they don't know how to solve the problems of Russians in Moscow'.

To retain mass support, Russian liberals cannot be seen to be too soft on the question of Russian rights. With some twenty-five million Russians living outside national borders, there are of course also practical reasons for any Russian government to ensure that they are secure, and do not return to burden an impoverished Russia and worsen the attitude of Russia's population to its own internal ethnic minorities.¹¹

The Baltic Russians through History

Some sort of Russian presence has existed in the lands that are now Estonia and Latvia since the Dark Ages, though numerically small. After expulsion by German crusaders of the Russian princes that had dominated parts of the region, the Russian population in the Middle Ages consisted of small groups of merchants from Novgorod and Pskov, together with a number of Slavic (or Slavified Balt) communities in what is now Eastern Latvia. This is excepting the enormous Slavic Orthodox community which came under Lithuanian rule between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, but was later incorporated into what are now Russia, Byelorussia and the Ukraine.

From the sixteenth century, the small Russian communities in the ethnic Baltic heartlands were joined by Russian political refugees and religious dissidents fleeing persecution by Ivan the Terrible and his descendants. The largest group was made up of 'Old Believers', the Russian Orthodox who refused to accept liturgical reforms introduced by the seventeenth century Tsars, culminating in those of Peter the Great, still remembered by these communities as Antichrist. A few Old Believer villages survive in Latgale, on the northern shores of Lake Peipus

(Peipsi), and in Lithuania. They were subjected to Soviet persecution and, partly as a consequence, tended to support Baltic independence.¹²

After the conquest of Livonia and Estonia by Peter the Great, the population was gradually expanded by increasing numbers of Russian officials, soldiers, and merchants. Most were transients, but some put down roots and remained. At the same time, branches of the Baltic German nobility intermarried with Russian noble families. Until the later nineteenth century the number of Russians in the Baltic provinces was never large. At this point the Russian government, in pursuit of its Russification policy, attempted to settle Russian peasants on the land. This archaic colonial idea failed but, unplanned by the imperial government, the workings of imperial capitalism (as in Malaya, the West Indies, Fiji and so on) were drawing tens of thousands of impoverished Russian peasants to new factories and docks springing up on the Baltic coast. According to an American scholar, 'Riga became in these decades one of the most ethnically, linguistically and religiously diverse of the major cities of Europe'. According to a census in 1913, Riga was 39.8 per cent Latvian (an increase from 23.6 per cent in 1867), 20 per cent Russian, 13.9 per cent German, 9.5 per cent Polish, 7 per cent Jewish and 6.9 per cent Lithuanian.¹³

Since both Russian workers and Balts saw the local German élites and the imperial government as their common enemies, there was little tension between them. In 1915, the Russian retreat and the consequent evacuation of the factories and their workforces led to a drastic reduction in the size of the Russian population. The resulting labour shortage, especially on the farms of independent Latvia, was compensated by Polish and Lithuanian migrant labour. The pejorative image of the Lithuanian as a dirty, shiftless, landless labourer lingers in Latvia to this day.

After the Bolshevik revolution and the achievement of Baltic independence, the pattern of the Old Believers was repeated, with Russian refugees seeking refuge in the Baltic States. Some were explicitly religious, as in the case of the Mikniškes Orthodox community in South-Eastern Lithuania. The educated sections of this new Russian emigration were a heterogeneous mixture, including both former White officers and their families, and (in Latvia) large numbers of Russian-speaking Jews. Between the wars Riga was the largest Russian emigré centre after Paris.

Russian immigrants complained of Baltic 'coldness' towards them, of anti-Russian rhetoric from the press and politicians, and of state discrimination (especially in education), but most were very grateful to have found in the Baltic States a refuge from Communist savagery. The nostalgic, mournful verses about their lost homeland anticipated those of Baltic exiles when their homes too were ravaged by the Communists.

On the 'Day of Russian Culture' held in Narva, Estonia (which then

had a Russian minority of some 30 per cent, but now has a majority of 94 per cent) on 18–19 June 1938, the Archpriest Alexander Sakharov thanked the Estonian government for allowing the Russians to live 'in peace and prosperity'. According to the Russian emigré scholar Temira Pachmuss, all the speakers, including the Estonian ministers, spoke in Russian. The Festival of Russian Song, also in Narva, attracted thousands of singers from all over Estonia.¹⁴

As in Eastern Europe and Manchuria after 1944–45, Stalin's determination to wipe out the Russian opposition forces in exile meant that the Russian communities in the Baltic suffered early, and particularly badly, after the conquest of 1940. Of those prominent Russian intellectuals who failed to escape to the West or to Finland, the great majority were executed or died in camps. The Russian community in Tallinn in particular has never recovered from the loss, which eliminated a group which might later have built bridges between the Russian and Balt communities.

Soviet partisan activity among Russian workers in the Baltic occurred during the German occupation, and was ruthlessly suppressed. The scars it left were exploited by Soviet loyalists in recent years, but with limited success.¹⁵ The Russian population in the Baltic after the war was overwhelmingly new and had no direct acquaintance with past atrocities – or, indeed, of life in a free society.

New Russian settlement began almost immediately the fighting ceased in 1945, beginning with officials and demobilised soldiers given jobs in the region. These in many cases moved straight into flats abandoned by the refugees who had fled to the West, or belonging to Balts deported to Siberia. Baltic claims for the return of their property are a factor causing tension in the region now.

Within only a few years the influx made up for the colossal losses of the war years, and was responsible for an absolute rise in the population of both Latvia and Estonia. The Estonian population had fallen from 1.13 million in 1939 to some 850,000 in 1945; by 1955 the population had risen again to 1.15 million, chiefly through the arrival of some 230,000 non-Estonian immigrants. By 1959, ethnic Russians, 8.2 per cent of the pre-war population, amounted to 20 per cent of the total.¹⁶

In Latvia the population was swollen by 535,000 non-Latvian immigrants, rising from around 1.4 million at the war's end to 2 million by 1955. The Soviet pretext was that these workers were necessary to develop the economy and compensate for wartime losses. Lithuania, with its higher birthrate and bigger reserve of rural labour, had more grounds to resist the influx, and only some 160,000 non-Lithuanians arrived during the post-war years.

Thereafter immigration continued more slowly. In Latvia and Estonia, it diminished steeply in the 1970s as Russia's own birthrate and labour

pool fell sharply. In Lithuania, where industrial expansion persisted after the native labour pool had been exhausted and the death of Snieckus had removed a covert defender of national interests, immigration increased sharply. In 1965-69, the figure was only 29,000, but by 1980-85, it had grown to 59,000. Lithuania's larger native population however meant this still left the Russian minority at less than ten per cent of the total. In Estonia, by contrast, the native proportion of the population fell from 88.2 per cent in 1938 to 74.6 per cent in 1959, and is only around 61 per cent today. In Latvia, the figure fell from 75.5 per cent before the War to 62 per cent in 1959, and some 52 per cent today. By 1990, according to the Latvian census, the process had ceased, and a net emigration had begun: 3,989 more people left Riga than arrived that year. By 1992, emigration by Russian speakers was more than 20,000.

The clear intention of the Soviet government was to dilute the Baltic populations and bolster pro-Soviet loyalties. The attraction, however, as it had been before 1914, was principally the higher living standards of the Baltic States ('the Soviet West'), which sucked in workers, especially those young and unmarried, from all over the Union. As an incentive, many (though by no means all) were offered flats on the grounds of being needed 'specialists', while Balts frequently spent years in the housing queue. As one Latvian put it:

The Russians take the apartments in a house, and leave us the attic and the cellar. Then they say that we are discriminating against them because they have nowhere to hang their washing or store their wood!

In the principal cities the population change was even more to the Balts' disadvantage. Even in 1940, Riga had been only 63 per cent Latvian, the balance made up of Russians, Germans, Jews and some Western merchants. The Latvian percentage rose sharply as a result of the deportation, evacuation or murder of many of the minorities, but fell steeply again after 1945. Today Latvians make up only 36.5 per cent of Riga's population. They are also in a minority in each of Latvia's six main towns, ranging from 49 per cent in Jelgava to only 13 per cent in the eastern city of Daugavpils. In Tallinn, Estonians had formed 85.6 per cent of the population in 1940, but today represent only around 49 per cent. But whereas in Latvia, Russians live in towns across the country, in Estonia they are concentrated in Tallinn and the north-east. Other Estonian towns, like Tartu, Parnu and Kuresaare (formerly Kingisepp) have solid Estonian majorities. In Vilnius the trend was entirely the other way. Lithuanians, a small minority before the war, are today in a majority, although some 45 per cent of the city's population remains Polish, Russian or Byelorussian.

In Latvia and Estonia, the great majority of the present 'immigrant' population entered the republics before 1970, or was born to parents who

had done so. The residence requirement for citizenship, on which much Western attention has been focused, is therefore largely irrelevant for the purpose of excluding the bulk of the Russians. The really important factor is the language test, quotas (in Latvia), and, in terms of the Russian political élites, the proposed Latvian requirement excluding military veterans, past-Communists and opponents of Latvian independence.

Ethnic Russians make up the large majority of the non-Balt populations. In Latvia they represent 34 per cent of the population, with Byelorussians 4.5 per cent, and Ukrainians 3.5 per cent. These latter groups tend to be classed generically but loosely as 'Russian-speakers', and this is probably fair. As a result of being made to study in Russian schools and work in Russian-speaking workplaces, and of intermarriage, most have lost any close connection with their original nationality. Russia has offered citizenship to all those who declare themselves to be Russian.

The Baltic governments have tried to drive wedges between non-Balt communities by means of regional cultural societies and other tactics, but this has been undermined by the lack of education among the communities concerned, as well as by the tendency of the Baltic populations to regard all non-Balts as 'Russians' and to treat them accordingly. This of course tends to solidify non-Balts within a sort of quasi-Russian, quasi-Soviet identity, and has led to some strange identifications. In Riga, I listened for months to my Latvian landlady abusing the 'noisy, dirty Russians' next door - before discovering they were in fact Georgians.

In February 1990, soon after the bloody Soviet suppression of the Baku revolt, I met an Azeri foreman in a Lithuanian factory whose allegiance to the Soviet Union seemed indistinguishable from that of his Russian mates - because, he claimed, he was afraid of the 'Lithuanian fascists'. Despite this, the mixture of nationalities among the workforces of Russian-speaking factories in Latvia has been one factor working against collective political action.

The very real threat, under Soviet rule, of being reduced to a minority within their own homeland and eventually swamped altogether has left deep scars upon the Latvian and Estonian psyches. Everyone agrees that further immigration must cease. Russian immigrants of any description would have attracted hostility from the Balts (or any other indigenous nation in the same position, those in the West most emphatically included), given their huge numbers and association with foreign conquest, political tyranny, debasement of culture and public manners, and economic decline. It has been precisely the proletarian nature of the Russian immigration that has contributed to the resistance to it, especially among Estonians, so very different in temperament and culture. I have seen Estonians, normally so very calm, twitching and

shaking with repressed physical hatred as they speak of the 'Asiatic, Mongolian barbarians' who have settled among them, and of their foul habits.

This kind of gut racial hatred is less of a problem in more easy-going (and Slavified) Latvia. There too, however, one can very often hear mothers chastising their children that 'you're behaving like a Russian ... you're eating like a Russian'. This cultural difference threatens to become even more marked if the Balts take advantage of economic change to rise into a new middle class, while Russian workers decline relatively or even absolutely in prosperity.

Latvians blame the dirt and decay of Riga and the other cities upon their Russian majorities – and they are often right. There is indeed about some of the Russian workers in the Baltic an air of the 'Dark People', the sullen, suspicious, unknowable, potentially terrible peasants of the Russian tradition. This in turn evokes Pushkin's words about the revolts of those same peasants, 'senseless and merciless'. More often, however, I have found the people perfectly friendly, but ignorant, as much bewildered as angry. Their deception by the Communists, their lack of knowledge of history, and their social isolation from the Balts has meant that they simply, for a long time, had no idea what the Baltic national movements were all about, or why local people disliked them.

Only a small proportion of Russian-speakers in the Baltic have learned to speak Baltic languages adequately. Until recently a majority did not speak them at all: according to a 1988 poll in Estonia, only 38 per cent could speak even minimal Estonian, though the picture has doubtless improved since then. This, and the general Russian indifference to local culture, has been a major source of Baltic anger. As a bitter joke has it:

'In the Soviet Union, if you know four languages, what are you?'

'A Zionist.'

'And if you know two languages?'

'A Nationalist.'

'And if you know one language?' [i.e. Russian]

'An Internationalist!'¹⁷

Today, this failure constitutes a major threat to the position of the Baltic Russians, as all three republics demand knowledge of the language as a qualification for continuing to hold many state jobs, not merely as doctors, teachers, and officials, but even as waiters.

Living amidst Russians, working in Russian-majority factories, watching Russian television and with all necessary documents translated into Russian, most simply had no reason to learn the local languages. Nor did the generally very inadequate level of Estonian and Latvian teaching in Russian schools encourage learning. In a newspaper interview in 1990,

a half-Russian, half-Latvian woman explained why she had never learned Latvian:

You see, Latvian didn't seem to us like a real language. The good books and films were all in Russian. In our house in Riga the most notable resident was a Russian colonel. ... I have to admit that there was a period in my life [at school] when I was ashamed of my half-Latvian roots. ... We made fun of Latvians, skipped our Latvian language classes, and sent our teacher out of the classroom crying. To be Russian was more glamorous, more glorious, more true-to-life ... Latvia didn't even exist in Russian schools here.¹⁸

Knowledge of Latvian among Russians is higher than that of Estonian, partly because the communities in Latvia are closer, but mainly because Latvian, like Russian, is an Indo-European language, whereas Estonian is a Finno-Ugric tongue of exceptional complexity. Even so, in 1989, only 23 per cent of non-Latvians could speak Latvian with any degree of fluency.

Today, a willingness to learn certainly exists, and Russian bookstores are full of 'teach yourself Latvian' manuals. Much depends on factors such as class, education, and location: Russians in cities with a high proportion of Balts are much more likely to learn than those living in towns such as Daugavpils. But most depends on individual motivation. Some ordinary workers seem to be making honest efforts to learn; some officials and businessmen are still arrogantly refusing to do so, believing themselves to be indispensable.

The image of the Baltic Russians as made up overwhelmingly of proletarians is true for Lithuania and for Tallinn. In north-east Estonia (where about half the Russian-speakers of Estonia are concentrated), the huge Russian majority has produced a Russian educated-class of teachers, doctors, and managers and scientists at factories and power stations. In Latvia, the picture is different. Riga, as the capital of the Soviet Baltic, attracted a higher proportion of educated Russians, just as it had under the Russian Empire. According to a 1989 census, 13.4 per cent of non-Latvians in the republic had received a higher education, compared with only 11.5 per cent of Latvians. It is quite true that Russians make up the majority (62 per cent) of the industrial workforce, but together with Russian Jews they also dominate the managerial class, the technological establishment (58 per cent of scientific jobs and 51 per cent of information and computer services), and – of great significance for the future – the great majority of positions within the new, private business sector.¹⁹

Other than this, whether the existence of a Russian-speaking educated class proves a boon or a curse for Latvia depends very much on who succeeds in Latvian politics and what their intentions are towards the

Russians. If, eventually, a compromise is sought with the Russians, then this middle class will provide valuable intermediaries. Whereas, hitherto, the general breakdown in communication between even moderate Russian politicians and intellectuals and the Latvian nationalist forces is worrying, the determination of the business class to maintain good contact with the government and to show support for the new state is one positive feature.

So long as the Latvian government remains friendly to business, some sort of basic ethnic co-existence is probably assured. The real danger would follow any future national populist government with a programme targeted against 'foreign speculators', Russian professionals ignorant of the language, and unemployed industrial workers. In this eventuality, Russian resistance in Latvia would be more formidable than in Estonia, not simply because they are more numerous, but because they would be better and more articulately led.

The Last Stand of the Soviet Union

The Communist Party, among all its other functions, was the institution designed to bind together the élites of the different Soviet nationalities under Russian hegemonic leadership, bridging national differences and suppressing rivalries in the name of 'Internationalism'. After mid-1988, however, the Baltic Communist Parties began to unravel in the face of the newly-formed Popular Fronts, until finally, between December 1989 and May 1990, all three parties, and the press that supported them, split along essentially ethnic lines.²⁰

The three Popular Fronts all developed Russian language newspapers, edited by pro-independence Russian intellectuals. While the local television stations broadcast Russian programmes, most local Russians preferred to watch the central Russian station, if only because of its superior quality. This preference explains why the rise of Boris Yeltsin, as reported by Russian television, was of great importance in influencing opinion among the Baltic Russians.

As reformist (and covertly pro-independence) interests gained control of the three parties, local Russian Communists and hardliners in Moscow joined to create Soviet loyalist movements, under Communist and retired military leadership, and looking directly to Moscow for support. In Estonia the movement was called 'The International Movement of Workers in the Estonian SSR'; in Latvia, it was known as the 'International Front', and in Lithuania as 'Unity' (*Yedinstvo*). The 'Intermovement' in Estonia held its founding Congress on 14 March 1989, accompanied by a demonstration numbering an estimated thirty to forty thousand. Oddly, although the three movements had precisely

similar objectives, there was relatively little co-operation between them, and leaders in Latvia, for example, were often surprisingly ignorant of developments in the other two republics – probably because they all looked first to Moscow for help and instruction.

What the forces opposing Baltic independence had principally in common was their 'reactionary' position; as Soviet 'loyalists', they all favoured the survival of the Soviet Union in some form or another. Beyond this, they varied from mainstream Communist and military hardliners to the leaders of the 'Equal Rights' Faction in Latvia, (Sergejs Dīmanis and Tatjana Zhdanoka, for example) who in Russia would probably have been supporters of Boris Yeltsin. These claim to have sought initially to join the Popular Fronts, but to have been repelled by their 'chauvinist atmosphere'.

The key problem for the loyalist moderates was that their absolute opposition to Baltic independence left them with no choice but to ally with the hardliners. This in turn led them into justifying a whole series of shameful actions (beginning with the annexations of 1940), which discredited them utterly in the eyes not only of Balts but of most Western observers as well. Most have now been swept away, along with the Soviet Union, except where they created a solid local base of support, like Vladimir Chuikin, the charismatic former Communist mayor of the Russian-majority town of Narva, in north-east Estonia. Chuikin, unlike many of the hardliners in Lithuania and Estonia, but like the parliamentary leaders of the pro-Soviet opposition in Latvia, was a 'new man', or relatively so, who owed his rise to Gorbachov's accession to power.

The leadership of the pro-Soviet wings of the Baltic Communist Parties contained not simply Russians, but a good many native Balts, as well as Balts brought up in Russia, who could or would not make the transition of Brazauskas, Gorbunovs and Rüütel to a support for independence. This was in some cases because their past made it impossible for them to portray themselves as nationalists; in others, they seem to have remained loyal to the hand that raised them; in all cases, there seem to have persisted some sort of belief in Soviet ideology. During the Soviet referendum of 17 March 1991, which he helped organise, Algirdas Kondruška, a Lithuanian Professor of Marxism-Leninism, explained why he had remained a loyal Soviet Communist:

Yes, my wife asks me that: 'why are you still a Communist when everyone is asking for independence?' Even the former Director of the Party School is now writing in the papers that I am a traitor. But you see, the Soviet Union helped me to study at Moscow University, and I am grateful. . . . It is true that there I learned to have much in common with Russians, but my first motive is professional. I have always taught in the Party School,



10 Demonstrators at a meeting of Interfront, a Soviet loyalist organisation, in Riga, January 1991.

and to change my views overnight is impossible for me. It is a question of honour; I must go on with the Party to the very end.²¹

Kondruška, however, spoiled this not unsympathetic picture by adding, with the grotesque exaggeration – sometimes hysterical, sometimes deliberate – characteristic of Soviet loyalists, ‘of course, if the Soviet Army were not here we would all be hanging from trees’.

In this category were also serving and retired officers and managers of Moscow-controlled, ‘All-Union’ factories in the Baltic. Some were of long service in the Baltic, and some, like Colonel Igor Lopatin in Latvia and Vladimir Yarovoi, manager of the Dvigatel plant in Tallinn, seem to have been deliberately inserted by Moscow, after the launch of the national movements, to help shore up Soviet loyalism.

Behind such men stood the senior hardliners of the KGB, Interior Ministry and Military Command in Moscow who were ultimately to attempt the counter-revolution of August 1991. Associated with them were some (though not all) of the local military commanders in the Baltic, men like the regional commander, Colonel General Fyodr Kuzmin, and the Vilnius garrison chief, Major General Uskhopchik. The relationship of other local commanders (such as Admiral Belov in Estonia) to the hardliners was more ambiguous; what exactly went on within the military during those months may never be known.

Many left for Russia in the aftermath of the August coup. Rubiks in Latvia and Valery Ivanov, a Soviet loyalist leader in Lithuania, were arrested; but a number of hardline retired officers remain, especially in Latvia, such as Colonel Gennady Romashov, a leader of the ‘Russian Society of Latvia’, formed after the achievement of independence. The more formidable Colonel Viktors Alksnis, an ethnic Latvian brought up in Russia (see Chapter 3), remains a figure on the imperialist Right in Moscow. Two of the hardline Interfront leaders in Estonia, Yevgeny Kogan and Mikhail Lysenko, have also become active in reactionary politics within Russia.²²

Unlike Alksnis, most members of this category revealed themselves to be incapable of responding imaginatively to changing political circumstances; they were rigid intellectual products of Soviet education and Soviet establishment. Others, especially in Lithuania, were simply deeply stupid or incompetent, the scrag-end of the Communist Party.²³

The attempt by hardline Soviet loyalists to ‘manipulate’ the Russian-speaking populations of the Baltic into opposition to independence provides an interesting case-study for which there are historical precedents. In pre-1914 Germany, it has been argued, much of German nationalism was the product of deliberate manipulation by landed élites, and the imperial government they controlled, to defend their own political interests. In pre-independence India, similarly, Muslim separatist politics has been seen as the product of manipulation by the British and by endangered Muslim feudal élites, rather than of a genuine mass fear of Hindu rule.

Such claims need to be examined closely; in their crudest form they represent no more than the standard line that unrest arises not out of genuine grievance but is the work of ‘outside agitators’. Thus the denial of spontaneity to pre-1947 Muslim politics excuses the Indian Congress of failing to do more for Muslims. In the Baltic too, charges that local Russian fears were externally fomented relieved the nationalist movements of the obligation to reassure the Russian population.

Manipulation through misinformation by the Soviet state media, the local pro-Soviet press and local Russian officials was of course blatant and continuous.²⁴ It was accompanied by instances of deliberate provocation to provide an excuse for intervention. In the context of the ‘historiography’ of manipulation, however, the striking point is that very little was achieved. Only a small minority of local Russian-speakers were persuaded actively to oppose independence. In South Ossetia and Moldavia, by contrast, Communist attempts to stimulate rebellion among local minorities were strikingly successful.

What this indicates is the obvious but often forgotten point that while manipulation can play a part in sparking conflicts, it can only do so if the

appropriate historical, social and cultural climate already exists. Where it does, as in Ossetia for example, it becomes extremely difficult in practice to distinguish between manipulation and the real fears of the Ossetes, derived from history and Georgian behaviour.

What is clear, however, is that thanks to local conditions and Baltic qualities, such a climate did not exist in the Baltic during the years between 1988 and 1993. A section of the Russian-speaking population was indeed worried by symbolic actions such as the restoration of the old national flags, and by the anti-Russian (as opposed to anti-Soviet) tone of some Baltic newspaper articles, bits of which were assiduously reprinted by Soviet loyalists as part of their propaganda. A key factor in generating support for the Interfronts was the passage by the Baltic Supreme Councils in 1988–89 of laws establishing the official status of the Baltic languages and requiring a residence qualification (if only a short one: two years in Estonia) for those wishing to stand for elected office.

The residence clause affected only migrant workers and equally migrant Soviet officers. But the language law, with its requirement that a whole range of state officials, medical workers and even waiters should learn the local language or lose their jobs, affected a large part of the Russian-speaking population.

The Baltic Russians have complained that the period provided for the learning of the languages was too short, and that Baltic language teaching in Russian schools was in any case highly deficient, and remains so, especially in Russian-majority towns like Narva. The excuse given is lack of money and the unwillingness of Estonian teachers to work in Russian schools and Russian-majority areas. In 1992, both Latvia and Estonia extended by a further two years the time limit for Russians in towns, like Narva and Daugavpils, with overwhelmingly Russian populations and, consequently, particular learning difficulties.²⁵ Russians, however, suspect that the Balts do not wish them to succeed, in order to exclude them permanently from public life and avoid a 'dilution' of Baltic language and culture. In general, the appeal to Russian workers' prejudices against the 'bourgeois intellectual' Baltic leaderships was one of the most effective weapons in the Kremlin's armoury, not simply for cultural reasons but because it was backed up by a very real (and justified) fear of economic reform and unemployment.

Associated with the Interfronts was the plan to mobilise Russian-speaking workers of the 'All-Union' factories, and indeed the factories themselves, in the struggle against independence. In all three republics, Communist officials, especially from the 'official' trades unions, were active on the shop floor, rousing the workers. In Estonia and Latvia, the attempt went further, with the creation of the 'United Council of Work Collectives' (OSTK). The movements were linked by the factory directors, Yarovoi and Shepelevitch. A further Interfront leader in

Estonia was Yevgeny Kogan, whose extremist speeches even caused friction with the rest of the Soviet loyalist organisation. A later recruit was the thuggish Mikhail Lysenko, a former policeman who had been dismissed on charges of corruption.

In the first instance the OSTK was directed against Estonian attempts to remove factories from the control of Moscow. Later the trend was to establish the factories as Soviet-Russian fortress islands in the Estonian Sea. Thus the 'Integral Commission', a formal association of factories and OSTK, was established in July 1990 with powers akin to those of a fully operational local government, uniting social services, insurance schemes and housing projects as well as representing the interests of the factories and their workforces in dealings with both Moscow and the Estonian government.

In August 1989, the OSTK and Interfront called a general strike, ostensibly in protest against the electoral residence requirement. More a lockout than a strike, since it was supported by the Soviet managers and the workers continued to be paid, it was supported by only something between 18,000 and 30,000 workers, or 5–8 per cent of the workforce. It did, however, succeed in disrupting public transport and supplies within Estonia.²⁶

Throughout the next two years, governments and observers in the Baltic expected a repetition of the strike on a much larger scale, possibly involving violence. However those strikes which were organised during May 1990 and on subsequent occasions were in fact miserable damp squibs. They affected only All-Union factories, and then not all of them. Public transport workers, though overwhelmingly Russian, refused to join the action.²⁷

Aside from the pervading Baltic air of calm, there were two main reasons for the failure. The first was the simple threat of unemployment. Russians working for Estonian state enterprises in particular had good reason to fear retaliatory dismissal. The second reason involves the paradox of managers and official trades unions calling a strike at all – a paradox of which the workers were quite aware. During the Tallinn strike of May 1991, I asked a Russian worker what he thought of Yarovoi and the other leaders of the Soviet loyalist forces. 'Those Communist bastards!' he said. 'Do you think I don't know they've been stealing from us all these years? Of course I know it, and I know about their cars and their dachas and their mistresses. But what other leaders do we have here in Estonia?'

Thus the Soviet Communist Party's support among Russians in the Baltic was weakened by exactly those factors which were weakening it in Russia itself. Only a few leaders, like Chuikin in Narva, were able to distance themselves from the Communist past. Chuikin was rewarded by a high anti-independence vote in the referendum of 3 March 1991,

whereas Daugavpils in Latvia, with an old-style, hardline Communist municipal council and a majority Russian population, produced – most surprisingly – a pro-independence vote, albeit by a small majority and on a low turnout.

The Baltic elections of February–March 1990 led to Soviet loyalist forces winning most of the seats in Russian-speaking areas. In Latvia, however, the Popular Front gained many Russian votes in the first round of voting on 18 March. By the second round in April, the storm of hostile Soviet propaganda which followed the Lithuanian declaration of independence had alarmed the Russian-speaking population, and the PF vote dropped sharply. The final results were: Popular Front candidates: 139 (including 6 Russian speakers, 2 Poles and 2 Jews); 'Equal Rights' candidates (backed by the Soviet Communist Party and/or Interfront): 62 (including 8 ethnic Latvians).²⁸

Even allowing for a certain element of gerrymandering, and for the greater apathy of the Russian-speaking population (it is to be presumed, on the basis of the turnout figures in Daugavpils and other solidly Russian towns, that the majority of those not turning up to vote were Russian-speakers) this would still suggest a large minority of Russians voting for the Latvian PF, with smaller – though still substantial – minorities doing so in Lithuania and Estonia. Thus in the port town of Liepāja, with a 67 per cent Russian majority, the PF won 5 out of 9 seats, and in Riga, with a 63 per cent Russian-speaking population, it won 31 out of 69. On the other hand, it did not win a single seat in the overwhelmingly Russian eastern city of Daugavpils.

In Latvia, Soviet loyalist deputies grouped behind the 'Equal Rights' Faction of the parliament. Most had also been sponsored by Interfront and the pro-Soviet wing of the Latvian Communist Party. In Estonia, the Soviet loyalist deputies were formally divided between Interfront and the Communists, although they shared the same platform. In Lithuania, the Soviet loyalists (two Russians and six Poles), sat as members of the Soviet Communist Party until, during the military intervention of January 1991, the Poles joined the united Polish Faction, declaring its support for independence.

The parliamentary strategy of Soviet loyalists in the face of declarations of legal independence in all three republics was the same. Comprehending that they would in any case be defeated, they abstained, attempting to deny the legitimacy of the process. During the fifteen months before the August coup, while consistently opposing further moves towards independence, the loyalist blocs began to divide into more, and less, intransigent groups. In both Latvia and Estonia, the latter began to support the government in several areas of economic policy.

Further moves towards reconciliation in Estonia, however, were

interrupted by the passage of a new Estonian citizenship law, defining most Russians as 'immigrants', and a new constitution leading to elections in September 1992. In both Estonia and Latvia, the Soviet loyalist forces were eliminated from parliament as a result of the disenfranchisement of the bulk of the Russian population in the elections of 1992 and 1993.

Alongside the Soviet loyalist parliamentary campaign went resistance by local authorities in Communist-dominated minority areas. In all three republics such councils declared that they would not follow laws passed by the new national parliaments which were in violation of the Soviet constitution.

After the seizure of the Lithuanian Procuracy by Soviet troops in April 1990 and the establishment of an alternative 'Procuracy of the Lithuanian SSR', attempts were made in several areas to detach the police (largely Russian and Polish) from the control of the Lithuanian Interior Ministry, and create islands of Soviet authority. Due in part to the small size and scattered nature of the Russian community in Lithuania, however, and in part to an effective mixture of bribes, diplomacy, and personal appeals by the Lithuanian Interior Minister, veteran Police General Marijonas Misiukonis, these attempts were frustrated. Defections were limited to some 150 in all, including those who had joined OMON in January 1991.

In Latvia, Soviet loyalist influence led to two near-mutinies – in May 1990 and January 1991 – among the overwhelmingly Russian police force of Riga when it rejected the Latvian Supreme Council's choice of Interior Minister, shouted down the Latvian leadership and loudly applauded hardline Soviet representatives. Several police districts declared they would ignore the orders of the Latvian Procuracy, but follow those of the Soviet Procuracy which had broken away from the Latvian institution. In ordinary police work, however, effective co-operation was in fact maintained.²⁹

Now, after independence, considerable tension remains between these police forces and the new police battalion and Home Guard, recruited from Latvian volunteers alone and established by the Latvian government during the independence struggle; it is feared that, in the event of ethnic conflict, these units would be among the chief protagonists on either side (see Chapter 9).

In Estonia, a determined effort was made in summer 1990 to create alternative representative and administrative structures, based on Russian-dominated local councils and big factories. In the north-eastern town of Kohtla-Järve, a congress of Soviet loyalist deputies voted on 26 May to set up a two-tier 'Inter-regional Council' with authority over local government and industry. If it had worked, the Council might have posed a serious threat to Estonian stability. But failure seemed likely from the start: the opening meeting could not even achieve a quorum,



11 Arnolds Klausens, the Latvian Communist leader and (behind) Alfrēds Rubiks, at a Soviet loyalist meeting at the Second World War Victory Monument in Riga, October 1990.

while deputies known to oppose the scheme were barred entry by Soviet paratroopers guarding the event. Several months later the whole scheme collapsed, and Soviet strategy in Estonia reverted to the 'Integral Commission' already described. It marked a retreat from an attempt at representative authority to the 'fortresses' of the All-Union factories.

In Lithuania, meanwhile, the four months following the declaration of independence on 11 March 1990 had seen both a partial economic blockade by the Kremlin, and the occupation of buildings belonging to the Communist Party (purportedly to prevent their being unilaterally held by its pro-independence wing) and to the DOSAAF Soviet reserve military training organisation. The occupations were carried out mainly by Soviet Interior Ministry (MVD) troops, which exercised considerable restraint and appeared anxious to avoid harm to civilians.

Strikingly enough, there was during this period not a single instance of mass violence by the pro-Soviet Russian and Polish populations of Lithuania because, for all their efforts, the Soviet side simply could not rally sufficient local Soviet loyalists to provide the necessary cover. The only pro-Soviet demonstration involving more than 5,000 people was immediately after the declaration of independence; then there were approximately 30,000 demonstrators. Most demonstrations were not merely small, but also attended largely by the elderly. The sight of badly dressed, misshapen Russian women shrieking hysterically at these meetings was one with which every observer became familiar. It is not the stuff of which successful counter-revolutions are made. Demonstrations in Riga and Tallinn were equally small, despite the hundreds of thousands of Russians in those cities.

In fact, since the launch of the national movements, there have been only three demonstrations which showed any sign of turning seriously nasty. The first two occurred in Tallinn and Riga on 15 May 1990, eleven days after the Latvian parliament's declaration of legal independence.

I myself witnessed the demonstration outside the parliament building in Riga, attended largely by cadets from the Soviet Aviation Academy and soldiers in civilian dress. These were demanding a meeting with the government and the revocation of the declaration of *de jure* independence. The cadets clearly enjoyed pushing and shoving as they tried to break through the Latvian crowd and the police line guarding the building; but it was far from (as the Latvian government reported) 'an organised attempt by paratroopers to storm the parliament'. If it had been, the building would have been stormed, or the Latvian police would have had to open fire to prevent it.

The Tallinn demonstration was led by Mikhail Lysenko, and was rather more serious. Some of the ethnic Russian police guarding the parliament seem to have pulled back and allowed the demonstrators into the courtyard. But even they seemed bewildered about what to do next.

and left quietly enough when masses of Estonians turned up in response to a government appeal over the radio.³⁰

The third instance of mass violence, one with much more serious implications, was the Soviet loyalist demonstration in Vilnius in January 1991, which briefly broke into the parliament. Although the declared pretext was a protest against newly announced price rises, the incident was clearly part of a co-ordinated plan to destabilise Lithuania.

The irony of the 15 May demonstration in Riga was, in retrospect, that the military demonstrators were driven back by the Latvian OMON, or 'Black Berets', later to gain an infamous reputation. OMON, whose initials in Russian stand for the Special Purpose Militia Units, was set up throughout the Soviet Union during the summer of 1988 as riot squads in case of public disturbance.³¹ The different OMON groups were placed under the command of the Republican interior ministries. In autumn 1990, however, as hardliners gained the ascendancy in the Soviet government, OMON in Latvia was placed under the Soviet Interior Ministry. Almost all the ethnic Latvians in the force soon quit. By autumn 1990 the Latvian OMON was in the forefront of Soviet pressure on the republic, and in January 1991 the Lithuanian OMON followed suit.

Soviet hardliners meanwhile, presumably by means of the KGB, had been escalating tension in the Baltic through a series of small and harmless bombings in the region, incidents which were then blamed on 'the Baltic nationalists', a lie so transparent that few Soviet loyalists even believed it. Immediately after the failed Moscow coup, there was a more serious bomb attack on the headquarters of the Estonian Home Guard in Tallinn, in which one man was seriously wounded. There has been no continuation of this strategy so far.

In Vilnius, military seizures during the period leading to the attacks on the television station and tower on 13 January 1991 were accompanied by the defection of the Lithuanian OMON, under its commander, Boleslaw Makutinowicz, to the Soviet side. Over the following months, Makutinowicz was joined by several dozen more local Russian and Polish police. If the Soviet plan to create a Communist-ruled Polish Autonomous Region in Lithuania had succeeded, Makutinowicz would presumably have been its Commander-in-Chief, its 'Napoleon of Soleczniki'.³²

On 20 January 1991, after a series of attacks on other targets, the Latvian OMON stormed the Latvian Interior Ministry, killing two policemen. Two Latvian cameramen and a bystander were killed in the indiscriminate OMON firing that followed. While the exact motive for the attack is unclear, it is safe to assume that orders came from above. Various Soviet explanations, ranging from the rape by Latvian nationalists of an OMON officer's wife to OMON's being fired upon

from the Interior Ministry were thin and contradictory. There have also been suggestions, on the Latvian side, that a 'third force' may have been involved, firing on OMON to provoke the attack, but that seems unlikely. According to the survivors of the Latvian camera crew, the shots that killed their colleagues clearly came from OMON.³³

Mlynik and the Latvian OMON are also held by the Lithuanian Procurator's office to have been responsible for the cold-blooded murder of Lithuanian police and border guards at Medininkai on 30 July 1991.³⁴ The incident followed several months of OMON attacks on Baltic border posts in an attempt to destroy an obvious symbol of Baltic independence. Medininkai, however, was on a quite different scale. The earlier attacks had involved beatings and humiliations, but no-one had been killed. The Medininkai killings gave reason to fear that the hardline Soviet campaign of 'provocation' was moving on to a new level. Barely a fortnight later, however, the failure of the August counter-revolution ruined their schemes. The thought, however, that those responsible may still be present in the Baltic, waiting for an opportunity to restart the campaign, is obviously of deep concern to many Balts.

The failure of even moderate Soviet deputies in Latvia and Estonia to condemn the January killings (in contrast to the Polish Communist deputies in Lithuania) drove a deeper wedge between them and the national majorities; and so far as the Russian-speaking populations in general were concerned, Soviet violence seems indeed to have encouraged support for independence, or at least generated disgust at Soviet Communist rule. Soon afterwards, referenda on independence were held in all three Baltic governments. Whereas the great majority of Russians and Poles in Lithuania voted against the plan, in Estonia and still more in Latvia a very large minority of Russian-speakers voted in favour. As a Ukrainian woman engineer in Riga said:

I am completely opposed to what happened in Vilnius and Riga in January, and I am going to vote for independence. I think that our lives will be better. The Soviet Union is backward and cannot join Europe. . . . Yes, I am a little worried about my status in a future Latvia, and I may be making a mistake to vote 'yes' . . . but I know that in democratic countries people are not divided into first and second class citizens. Besides, if we all had better living conditions, we would understand each other better.

Another Ukrainian, a worker, said she would vote against independence:

No, I don't like what they did in January, but I think that Latvia should remain in the Soviet Union. Latvia cannot live without Soviet raw materials, and how are we going to buy them in the West? Or is the West going to give them to us for free? . . . Many different people live here and after the war we rebuilt Latvia together. My husband has been a factory

worker here for 30 years. My son is a sailor based here – he works in a crew with many nationalities. There are Latvians in the crew, but they are the minority, so naturally they must take account of the feelings of the others. . . . All these problems are caused by politicians and journalists, in the past all nationalities used to get on together and there were none of these problems.³⁵

Both the Lithuanian and Latvian governments claimed that a majority of Russians had voted in favour of independence. This was also widely reported in the West, but an analysis of the results shows that the real figure in Latvia was between a quarter and a third of Russians voting. There is, on the other hand, good reason to believe opinion polls which throughout 1991 showed Chairman Anatolijs Gorbunovs, Prime Minister Ivars Godmanis, and Foreign Minister Jānis Jūrkaņš to be the three most popular political figures among Russians as well as Latvians far outstripping the Soviet loyalist leaders.

The failure of the Moscow counter-revolution led to a general collapse in the Soviet position throughout the Baltic, and to commensurate Soviet as well as international support for Baltic independence. The effect on the local Soviet loyalist forces was shattering: the loss of overt support from Moscow and the Soviet armed forces; the destruction of much of their structural base, the banning of the Communist Parties and allied organisations, the confiscation of their property, and the nationalisation of the 'All-Union' factories. For months afterwards, nothing was heard of these forces; and with the exception of north-east Estonia, their prestige has never recovered. Indeed, it is precisely because the Russian communities were so tied to the Communist and Soviet loyalist banner that, in Lithuania and Latvia at least, they now find themselves so divided and leaderless. At the same time the attitude of the Baltic nationalist parties to the Russians has hardened, and the debate over the rights of the Russian community has entered its most critical phase (see Chapter 8).

Apart from the remnants of the 'Equal Rights' group, Latvia contains several other Russian political formations, all at odds with one another. The largest is the 'Democratic Initiative' group, made up chiefly of former Soviet loyalists trying to reconstitute themselves as loyal would-be Latvian citizens. On the Right is the 'Russian Society of Latvia', headed by Colonel Romashov and other former hardliners, increasingly presenting themselves as traditional Russian nationalists. This body includes a good many military veterans. To the Right even of this, and a considerable embarrassment to most of the Russian representatives, are the Cossack Circle, which expresses open sympathy with the Cossacks fighting in Moldova. And finally, on the outer fringe, is the anti-semitic

Monarchist Club, the 'Russian Historical Society', and assorted crazies.³⁶

Even in north-east Estonia, I sensed the mood of demoralisation and cowardice gripping the Communists when I travelled to Narva to interview the mayor, Vladimir Chuikin. At the last minute Chuikin evaded me, providing instead via one of his stooges a post-dated document 'proving' that he had been on leave during the coup, and giving a series of embarrassed excuses for the Narva Council's previous defiance of the Estonian constitution, destruction of Estonian border posts and creation of a pro-Soviet para-military force, the 'Workers' Detachments'. However, in October 1992, Chuikin and the former communists won convincing victories in local elections called by the Estonian government in an effort to unseat them.

This would obviously have been the moment for the Balts to appeal to moderation, and permanently split the Russian-speaking leadership. Indeed the Estonian Prime Minister, Edgar Savisaar, helped create a new force, the Russian Democratic Movement, with precisely that end in mind. The problem however was that the general swing of Estonian politics towards more radical nationalism did not permit Savisaar and his allies to make the concessions needed for an alliance with these groups.

The threat of north-east Estonia to secede from the republic seems now to have gone into abeyance. Vladimir Chuikin has become something of an expert at brinkmanship, threatening the Estonian government, yet never going too far. His hesitation may be based on fear of the consequences of secession, continued hope of Western aid for Narva, or doubt that a referendum on the subject would in fact gain the necessary support. In my own visits to Narva up to the summer of 1992, I found the overwhelming majority of local Russians opposed to secession, including those very critical of Estonian behaviour. 'After all, this is Estonian land', one elderly woman told me.

Defending the Legacy of Peter: The Soviet and Russian Military Presence

Although the Soviet military was deeply involved in the campaign to keep the Baltic republics within the Union, military action was in the end rather slight – principally because the Balts presented no legitimate excuse for an escalation. The killings of January and August 1991 were perpetrated by OMON or by only one military branch, the paratroopers.

The lack of common purpose among the military was especially evident during the August counter-revolution. Despite the fact that the Soviet officer corps in the Baltic was probably the most hardline and

imperialist of the entire Union, by the second day of the coup it became clear that the plotters in Moscow had not taken even a fraction of the Baltic senior officers into their confidence. Military coups succeed in general when a substantial section of the officer corps is involved, and every regional commander has been carefully briefed on what to do, which buildings to occupy, and whom to arrest. In the Baltic, few garrison commanders were party to the plot, even if they sympathised with its goals: while they made formal declarations of states of emergency, they did nothing whatever to implement them during the three days the coup lasted.³⁷

The military intervention of January 1991 also suggested a conspiracy in which too few people had been consulted, too few were fully committed, and too many were afraid of being left holding the buck. The picture that emerges from a report by the Democratic Officers' Movement, 'Shield', based largely on monitored radio exchanges, is one of considerable confusion, with junior officers requesting clear orders, and their superiors not giving them. Such orders as were given by radio were in some cases to open fire, in others to show restraint. (As for the Soviet procuracy report alleging that Lithuanians had attacked the soldiers, this was one of the most disgraceful single episodes of Gorbachov's presidency.) 'Shield' alleged that orders must have come directly from Gorbachov, but their only evidence was that according to the Soviet command structure, this was the procedure. As the attempted coup made apparent, however, the Soviet command structure had already begun to disintegrate.³⁸

Paradoxically enough, the lack of cohesion may not necessarily prove, in the longer term, a positive factor. The greatest danger for Russia, the region, and even the Balts themselves could prove the disintegration of central command, and warlordism by Russian local commanders. There are already ample signs in Moldova of 'prancing proconsuls', dreaming of making a political name by 'defending' local Russians, and of returning in triumph to Moscow.

By late 1992, Russia had reached agreement with Lithuania on a military withdrawal by August 1993. Yeltsin, in September 1992, declared that no agreement can be made with Latvia and Estonia while they discriminate against local Russians, but Russian officials have indicated that they mean in any case to withdraw by the end of 1994. Indeed Yeltsin's suspension of withdrawal was described by Major-General Ziauddin Abdurrahmanov, the air-defence commander in Estonia, as 'incomprehensible', since it had already proceeded too far to be stopped. He observed that the bulk of the remaining military personnel were officers' families for whom no housing could be found in Russia.

Withdrawal from Estonia is in fact proceeding fast, and by September 1992, as I discovered during an unscheduled visit, much of the naval base

at Paldiski had already been cleared. Western diplomats estimated that fewer than 15,000 Russian troops remained in the republic. As one officer admitted, after the introduction of the Estonian currency the army could simply no longer afford to feed itself.

The military in Latvia may present a tougher problem. Liepāja is one of the most important bases on the Baltic, and the nearby Skrunda space-radar station is both an expensive and important part of Russia's anti-ballistic missile defences – or so the Russians insist. If the Latvians were amenable, however, it should be possible to arrange joint control during a phased withdrawal period, but they have opposed it.

Russia favours a policy of gradual withdrawal in part because of the acute accommodation crisis within Russia itself. The line is supported by the 'Officers' Association' which has threatened to disobey the order to withdraw if the social needs of officers and their families are not guaranteed.³⁹ Since the grotesque promotion structure of the Soviet armed forces resulted in 22,000 of the 56,000 troops in Latvia being officers and NCOs, a considerable rump of disaffected soldiers may remain even if the conscripts disappear altogether.⁴⁰

In recent years, the Soviet officer corps has had a special attitude to the Baltic for two reasons (apart from the fact of so many officers having settled there): firstly, the Balts were rightly seen as the cutting edge of the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Among some officers, this has led to a particular hatred of the Balts, which could pose a threat in future.

Secondly, Latvia and Estonia (or rather, the former state of Livonia) was the continuous object of Russian strategic ambitions since the fifteenth century. Older officers still see them as strategically vital. At the start of 1994, the armed forces and Russian government were still determined to keep the Skrunda radar station for at least 10 years. For the navy, the Baltic States cover by far the greater part of the former Soviet Baltic coastline, and include three naval bases, at Paldiski (Estonia), Liepāja (formerly Libau, Latvia) and Klaipeda (formerly Memel, Lithuania).

However, the naval bases are being abandoned. Many younger naval officers with whom I have spoken have attached no strategic significance to these bases, and say that their emotional significance is also much less than that of Sevastopol. A Lieutenant Commander (Captain Third Rank) in St Petersburg told me that,

If we simply give Sevastopol and the Black Sea Fleet to the Ukraine, Russia ceases to be a Black Sea and Mediterranean power, and we lose much of our influence; but in the Baltic, even if we lose Paldiski and Liepāja, we still have St Petersburg and Kaliningrad. . . . Besides, the whole concept of the need for Baltic bases is outdated. They don't really defend Russia, and even if they did, it would be against NATO. Does anyone seriously still think we are going to go to war with NATO, or NATO with us?⁴¹

The specific naval identity within the former Soviet (and now Russian) armed forces is of some interest in view of the likely future role of the military in Russia's government. Throughout the Soviet period, the navy maintained the strongest traditions of the old Russian imperial service. Its officers tended to be better educated than those in the army, and more likely to hold covertly anti-Soviet views. This led, in the early 1980s, to the formation of a dissident group within the Baltic fleet, eliminated by the KGB, and is the spirit which may have contributed to the attempted defection of a Soviet frigate to Sweden. The navy indeed was the first Soviet service to fly the 'Andreyevsky flag'.

While the symbolic transition from Soviet to Russian allegiance is easier for the navy than for the army, the fall of the Soviet Union has in reality been even more painful for the navy, for two reasons. The first is the threatened loss of historic bases at Sevastopol and, to a lesser extent, in the Baltic. The second is the pervasive loss of a sense of purpose. There are good reasons to fear that the Russian army will have a function in the future; the navy's strategic forces by contrast look completely pointless. Paradoxically, but not unnaturally, the navy, despite its past liberalism, may therefore be the most chauvinist and belligerent of the services in the years to come.

The naval command's desire to keep Liepāja was also fuelled by the astonishing degree of 'spontaneous privatisation' now occurring within the Baltic fleet – the diversion of naval equipment and facilities for the private profit of individual officers or of the officer corps as a whole. The Latvians, seeking the return of the port of Liepāja, handed by Moscow to the fleet in 1965, have been blandly referred to as a shadowy 'private corporation' called 'Russo-Balt-West', apparently directed by the fleet command in Kaliningrad. The navy claims simply to have 'rented' the port to the 'corporation' – an act worthy of Captain Kidd. Profits are being used 'for the social needs of the servicemen'. In Tallinn, a 'private company' called 'Fonon', using naval vehicles leased by three logistics officers to themselves, is prospering. On 27 July 1992, a clash occurred when Estonian troops attempted to recover a military building which had been sold to Fonon, and were driven out by Russian marines.⁴²

In December 1991 I spoke with two young naval lieutenants in St Petersburg, identified only as Alexander and Oleg. Both were leaving the service shortly. Alexander explained that,

The best professionals are leaving the fleet, and the ones who are staying are the older officers and those who are not so bright. This is not good for Russia or the world in general, [because] the former Zampolits (political officers), though the more intelligent and modern officers laugh at them, do have a certain influence, and they are encouraging the spread of extreme, even fascistic ideas.

They differed on the issue of the Baltic bases. Oleg declared that,

We must keep those bases, because if the Baltic States separate completely, we would be almost cut off from the Baltic Sea. We would lose everything that Russia has gained since the time of Peter the Great.

Western pressure to leave would, he added, be 'interference in our internal affairs', and would encounter a furious response from the officer corps. With a grin, Alexander observed, 'This is the imperial point of view. I don't think that these bases are important'; but he added that:

The duty of the armed forces will be to defend Russians wherever they live ... the proposal to disenfranchise Russians living in the Baltic is particularly bad and dangerous. ... The Balts should remember that at the moment, Russians are still looking for a national identity. If, due to attacks on Russians by other nationalities, this identity turns out to be an extreme Great Russian one, then the Balts could be wiped from the face of the earth.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, and its reversal of the approach of the final Gorbachov years, Yeltsin's government has been more friendly towards Lithuania than towards the other two Baltic States. Lithuania seems sometimes to respond, as in the case of the agreement on withdrawal between Yeltsin and Landsbergis in January 1992. The difference in the Russian approach seems based on both contemporary and historical factors. The principal reason for Russian hostility towards Latvia and Estonia today is their treatment of Russian minorities; in Lithuania there are far fewer and they have received full access to citizenship. Historically Russia was more interested in access to the Baltic through the former Livonia, while the ethnic Lithuanian lands were not incorporated into Russia until the end of the eighteenth century. Today, the main Soviet strategic interest in Lithuania is as a corridor to the Kaliningrad (Koenigsberg) enclave.⁴³

More important in the long run than the strategic and historical dreams of the older officers is the fact that, under Soviet rule, the Baltic States, and especially Latvia, have been a favourite retirement spot for officers, often given jobs within the local administration – especially in the housing departments, which facilitated the settlement of yet more officers. Retired military personnel became part of the backbone of the Soviet loyalist movement in Latvia. Naturally it provoked furious resentment among the Latvians: in the Latvian citizenship law Soviet veterans are explicitly excluded from citizenship. The Latvian radical nationalists advocate the denial of residence permits to officers and calls for their expulsion; a good deal of administrative harassment is allegedly already occurring in respect of the allocation of accommodation and

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of residence permits to Russians returning to Latvia from military service in Russia.

This in turn angers not only the veterans but Russians in general, because in Liepāja, for example, veterans and their families are said to constitute almost a sixth of the population. General Fyodr Melnichuk has said that in its negotiations on withdrawal, the army insisted on citizenship for veterans: 'for us it is a matter of honour and duty to look after the interests of former soldiers'. The demand was echoed by the Chairman of the Officers' Association, Colonel Vladimir Kandalovsky.⁴⁴ If the military adheres to this condition for withdrawal, they could be there forever. By October 1992, Yeltsin was including the rights of veterans among the conditions demanded from the Balts for military withdrawal.

The great fear of the Balts is that military activity is continuing in the form of the covert provision of arms to former Soviet hardliners in the region, in preparation for a revolt along the lines of that in Transnistria. While there is no proof, it is plausible enough; General Melnichuk admitted to me that theft and illegal sales of arms are occurring, although limited to thirty-six cases during the previous year, and those the work of criminals. A Russian manager in Narva reported in June 1992 that he was concerned about the quantity of guns available in the town. These were in the hands of security guards and private individuals, but could in a crisis be put to political use.

This fear lay at the core of the campaign of the Baltic governments to remove Russian armed forces from their territory. It gained considerable Western support which, in turn, seems to have edged Moscow towards withdrawal. By early summer 1992, the Balts appeared to have successfully blocked attempts to bring in large numbers of new conscripts, an important element in the rapid diminution of the military presence. Succeding months saw a series of incidents in both Lithuania and Estonia in which nationalist forces tried to stop 'unlicensed' movement within the republics and, in Estonia, to seize military buildings by force. Both sides however exercised restraint, with the Balts firing at the tyres of vehicles and the Russians into the air. General Melnichuk observed (whether sincere or not):

We have experience of this process in Germany and Hungary; we know that the withdrawal of the troops is unavoidable. But during this withdrawal period, we must have an internationally recognised status of forces agreement to avoid the possibility of clashes. . . . We have officers here who are veterans of Afghanistan. How do you think they feel when some eighteen-year-old Lithuanian kid sticks a loaded pistol in their face and tells them to stop when they leave the base to go shopping? There is a real danger of our officers' patience breaking, though we believe that we



12 Soviet veterans of the Second World War at a commemorative meeting near the junction of the Russian, Byelorussian and Latvian borders, July 1990.

have persuaded them that they are now in a foreign country and that it is their duty to keep calm.⁴⁵

By autumn 1992, it seemed as if such talk was already bluff, just as the Russian government was deliberately exaggerating the numbers of Russian troops in the Baltic, presumably for bargaining purposes. On the ground, in Estonia and Lithuania at least, the whole military position was crumbling. Morale was very low, with officers embittered by low pay and the atrocious living conditions of their families, anxious either to leave (if accommodation were available in Russia) or to resign from the army altogether and seek work in the Baltic – if permitted to do so.

In September 1992, led by some Estonian Greens, I entered the Soviet military base at Paldiski by driving through a large hole in the fence. While the whole peninsular was technically off-limits, it was obvious that the navy had neither the men nor the will to guard it. (They were, however, still guarding the two nuclear reactors, shut off but not yet dismantled.) This is land from which Estonian farmers were expelled when the navy took over, now covered with thick, uncut young forests.

Surreal monuments to military wastefulness occur at random, like a field covered with large mooring buoys, inspected by grazing cows.

The former submarine harbour was guarded by a middle-aged Russian woman in jeans. She turned us away – so we found another gap. The submarine facilities had been abandoned and wrecked. Several of the large repair sheds had been burnt, and around them lay piles of smashed equipment and pools of diesel. Rain beat through holes in the roof and windows, soaking the shreds of military documents scattered over the floor and washing down Communist slogans painted on the walls.

Amidst the desolation, a single building was operating – a small power station serving the town. It appeared to be manned by three Russian grandmothers in black dresses, like the final chorus of a tragedy. Snaking through the land were curious thin trenches, where pipes and communication cables had been ripped up to be sold for scrap. Civilian fishermen lined the harbour wall. 'Some are fishing for fish, and some for copper,' declared our guide.

Not all the ruination however was the product of withdrawal; much of it, like a half-finished pier of crumbling concrete blocks, had obviously been there for years, a symbol of the long decay of the Soviet armed forces, so curiously unobserved by Western military intelligence.

It took an hour for a marine patrol to find us. Its composition was representative of the closing days of the Soviet military in the Baltic: two Commanders (Captains Second Rank), one Lieutenant Commander, two Lieutenants – and seven privates. They took us to the school for submarine officers which, though closed for several months, still housed the office of the admiral commanding the base, a spot of light approached down endless dark and abandoned corridors.

Rear Admiral Alexander Olkhovikov was a pioneer of the Soviet nuclear submarine forces, and a former student at Paldiski. His mood during our interrogation – for having 'violated military property' – was curious. On one hand, he was clearly powerless, the interview having a purely ritual character of which he was fully aware. At the same time, he was clearly suffused with an almost ungovernable rage. His subordinate officers by contrast seemed merely depressed and resigned, complaining about their living standards, their pay, and above all their uncertain future: 'We are all living on our suitcases, waiting for withdrawal, but we don't know where to'. I asked one about the picture of Lenin still hanging above the Admiral's desk. 'It's a work of art,' he replied sardonically.

Standing in front of a crumbling marble plaque honouring the school's prizewinning students – which would be taken to Petersburg in the final withdrawal – an elderly commander with a grey moustache told me he had spent his entire life in the navy, and now probably faced early retirement. He was going to have to survive on a pension, 'or rather, a joke,' as he said. The only home for him, his wife and their fourteen-year-

old son would be the tiny flat of his mother, in Kazan in the Tartar Autonomous Republic; 'but they have separatists there too, don't they?'

Kaliningrad and the Kaliningrad Question

The future of the 21,000 square kilometre Kaliningrad enclave (or rather exclave) is beginning to worry Western chancelleries. A fantasy writer might indeed think of using its fate as the origin of the Third World War; enough countries have claims to the former East Prussia, although most seem happier to preserve the *status quo* than risk the enclave going to their rivals.

Marion Countess Doenhoff, the former Editor of *Die Zeit* and member of an old East Prussian landowning family, has suggested a Russian-Polish-German condominium, though her colleagues reportedly rejected the idea as too dangerously redolent of German expansionism, and very difficult to administer. This would indeed be so, given the ethnic composition of the 960,000-strong population. It is drawn from all over the former Soviet Union, but is completely Russified. The entire German population fled or was massacred during the Soviet advance of 1944–45.

During my first visit, in 1991, the Chairman of the Executive Committee was called Anatoly Yusuf, and had a Tartar father and a Russian mother. A Russian intellectual with German historic interests said disdainfully that 'here, you find the pure form of Soviet Man – a mixture of people from different areas, with no cultures of their own. They even speak pure Soviet Russian'. Ida Zhurba, formerly head of the cultural section of the regional administration, told me that the first task in the region was to establish some kind of Russian culture. She pointed out that, until 1988, there was not a single Russian Orthodox Church in the whole region, and theatre and music were conspicuously underdeveloped.

I asked Alexander Khmurchik, a former seaman turned jovial *apparachik*, and editor of *Kaliningradskaya Pravda*, whether there was a strong local loyalty in the population. He replied,

There are very nice girls here. They dress better than in the rest of Russia, because the seamen bring them back Western clothes. But a local patriotism? If there is such a thing, it is concentrated on the desire to gain local prosperity by making this a Free Trade Zone.

Ida Zhurba remarked,

What is special about us? The rain! And that there is always fish to eat. Also, that we are a very naval town, strongly marked by the military. But beyond that, I wouldn't say that ordinary people here feel especially like 'Kaliningraders'.

Things have moved on since then, and rather artificial attempts are in progress to 'rediscover' a local identity by exploring the pre-1945 history of the area. Various shops and publications have appeared using the name 'Koenigsberg'. Some local intellectuals call themselves 'neo-Prussians' and stress their distance from Russia. For the name of the city, some have suggested Kantgrad, after its most famous son, though it is hard to believe that he would have approved. The monument to Kant, on the wall of the ruined Cathedral, together with that to Schiller, are the only two German monuments left standing in the centre of the city.

The name Kaliningrad, after the vile Soviet President under Stalin, Mikhail Kalinin, is indeed a severe embarrassment. The Russian city of Kalinin has reverted to its ancient name of Tver. Changing Kaliningrad back to Koenigsberg however is hardly possible. It would almost imply a German claim, and besides, as Yusuf said,

Koenigsberg was completely destroyed. For better or worse, this is a new city, with a new population. . . . If it were proved that Kalinin was a criminal, we might be forced to change the name, but then we should find a neutral one, like Pribaltiisk ['City on the Baltic'].

One ingenious proposal has been to go back to the name Koenigsberg (the King's fortress) but in a Russian form: Korolgrad, just as the Lithuanians call it Karaliauskas, and the Poles, Krolewiec. The military presence, already strong, grew greatly after 1990 as a result of Soviet-Russian military withdrawal, first from Eastern Germany and Poland, then from the Baltic States. This led to severe housing problems, as well as fears in Poland and especially Lithuania about the presence of such massive forces on their borders. These forces, however, appeared in 1993 to be in full decay.

The military presence also does not necessarily make Kaliningrad politically conservative. Alexander Ostakhov, editor of the reformist *Prospekt Mira*, said that the naval officers on the local council are often more liberal than the former Communist officials, 'because they have travelled and seen the West', and because of their high technical education. Many officers, especially from the fleet, have moved successfully into private business. The Kaliningrad area as a whole voted strongly for Boris Yeltsin in the presidential elections of June 1991, and reformist candidates looked set to do relatively well in the parliamentary elections of December 1993.

The Russian military, and Russian nationalists in general are, however, certainly determined to retain Kaliningrad as their last military base on the southern Baltic, and as Russia's last prize from the Second World War (apart from the Kuriles, of course). As Yusuf put it, 'we are holding Russia's Western gate'. Unless therefore Russia were to disintegrate completely – and this does not seem likely – Kaliningrad will

not be up for grabs. Both Russian and local leaders have stressed repeatedly that it is inalienable Russian territory.

Germany, from which East Prussia was taken in 1945 and its German population driven out, renounced territorial claims in the East as part of the treaty on German reunification in 1990. For a long time to come, therefore, the German state cannot hope to recover the territory, and will have no interest in doing so. Quite apart from the question of what to do with the Russian inhabitants, a move by Germany over Kaliningrad would raise suspicions of German expansionism all over Eastern Europe. In particular it would cause the deepest alarm in Poland.

For that very reason, Poland itself could hardly make a claim, for fear of raising the spectre of German claims to its own previously German lands. Agitation in Poland for the annexation of the territory has been restricted to the extreme Right, although centrist politicians and even government officials have spoken of the possibility of its future becoming moot.

Lithuanians would dearly like to claim the territory, which they call 'Lesser Lithuania'. It used to have a largely Lithuanian-speaking population (see Chapter 6, n. 26), and still contains between 18,000 and 30,000 Lithuanians; but Vilnius fears both the Germans and the Poles, and certainly does not wish to put itself in the position of Estonia and Latvia by annexing another 960,000 ethnic Russians. The destabilising factor in this scenario may therefore be not so much international as internal: on the one hand, the uncertain future of Russian democracy and government, raising fears of dictatorship and disintegration; on the other, the economic state of the territory itself.

Although by 1993 Kaliningrad's economy was beginning to undergo a slow and painful transformation, its people were still dependent to a dangerous extent on military bases and a crumbling military industrial complex precariously supplied from Russia, and now in full decline. Although the local fishing and cellulose industries remain dynamic, and there were some 75,000 German tourists in 1992, it is not clear that they can fill this gap. As Ostakhov declared, with a touch of pride, in June 1991,

There is much talk of converting the military industries, but at present we are still trying to find out what they are actually making Conversion will also certainly mean fewer jobs, and less work for our highly-trained engineers. After all, these were not cheap handicraft industries for tourists – we have a factory here which makes engines for ballistic missiles.

The local authorities, whose leaders seem intelligent and active, are trying to create a 'free trade zone', but are facing huge obstacles, quite

apart from the long delay in ratification by Moscow which was imposed by the political struggle. St Petersburg, Belarus and indeed the Baltic States themselves are all drawing up inept plans of this kind ('too many bridges and not enough traffic', as a Riga banker told me). Despite the proposed incentives in terms of tariffs and taxes, the isolated position of Kaliningrad and the political turmoil in Russia has so far discouraged large-scale Western investment.

Moreover, because Kaliningrad was a closed military area, the first Western ship since 1945 docked in the port only in June 1991, so until then local people lacked even those limited direct contacts with Western traders common to other Soviet ports. Mr Yusuf told me in June 1990 that the local council had never even been informed by the Defence Ministry how much freight was passing through their territory. The main road across Lithuania to Belarus and Russia is very attractive, still lined with trees dating back to Prussian days – and has been neither widened nor repaired since then. The old German Autobahn to Berlin had however, by the end of 1993, been largely restored with German help.

After 1991, small-scale private trade grew enormously, above all with Poland. By the end of 1993, 615 joint ventures had been founded, most of them with Polish and German firms and connected with small-scale import-export enterprise. Large numbers of local people had entered the trade, soaking up the unemployed not only from the factories but also from the armed forces. Very slowly the appearance of the city began to change, and by December 1993 the main avenue featured both an excellent pizza restaurant and a seedy sex shop. On the other hand it was still called Leninsky Prospekt: as with the city itself, reverting street names to their German originals, or finding new ones, had so far proved politically and emotionally too difficult.

The idea has been raised of resettling in Kaliningrad the 'Volga Germans', deported to Central Asia by Stalin during the Second World War. It has been supported by some right-wing German groups, but not by the German government. Fearful of the growing nationalism of the Central Asian populations, the two or so million Germans remaining in Kazakhstan and elsewhere are leaving in increasing numbers, and by the end of 1993 some seven thousand had settled in Kaliningrad. They have been tolerated by the local population partly because most are now far more Russian than German in culture – few speak German, and most have intermarried with other nationalities. Some local Russians speak far better German than the Russian-Germans, having learned it through business, study in Germany or by acting as tourist guides. None fears German re-annexation.

Having sold their property in Central Asia for a pittance, most of the Russian-Germans in Kaliningrad are dreadfully poor, generating pity rather than fear. Local people hope that they may draw German aid to

the region, but so far this has proved illusory, precisely because Bonn has been extremely anxious not to raise Russian fears. A few private German aid workers have taken an interest in the enclave. Representatives of the German neo-Nazi groups have also unobtrusively scouted out the enclave, but they are very much on the fringe of German politics.

Whether sufficient Soviet Germans would move to make the enclave into a German territory, and whether the local Russian population would tolerate it, however, seems extremely doubtful. With the idea of recreating their old territory on the Volga effectively still-born in the face of local Russian resistance, most Germans leaving Kazakhstan head straight for the flesh-pots of Germany.

Tourism from Germany is increasing, but is hindered by the very assiduity with which the new Soviet rulers flattened the remains of the city after 1945. The new concrete city centre presents an appearance which is bleak and ugly even by Soviet standards, in tragic contrast to the beauties of Königsberg before Hitler's War.

Germans who lived in Königsberg before 1945 sometimes burst into tears at the sight of it now, from shock rather than from nostalgia. They wander the streets, pursued by child-beggars, their eyes fixed on remembered buildings that no-one else can see, their minds full of the appalling sufferings of their flight from East Prussia in 1945, which even other Germans have long forgotten. For the Russians the tourists symbolise the isolation and alienation of exile in a particularly painful form. A more cheerful sight are the fine beaches and small spa towns along the coast. These were not so badly damaged in the War, and like the surviving suburbs of Königsberg, retain a German bourgeois charm, with their quaint neo-Gothic villas.

One potential danger stems from the fact that local agriculture cannot sustain the local population. Much of the rural population looks diseased, drunken, elderly and hopeless. Until the end of 1993, imports from Poland and the West had stabilised the food situation. If supplies to the enclave were to break down altogether, the West may have to bear the responsibility, which in turn might one day awaken German ambitions, unlikely though this seems today. One hope for the region, on the other hand, might be that Western and especially German and Scandinavian aid will flow to Kaliningrad precisely to prevent the area becoming a source of destabilisation.*

* *The New York Review of Books* of 13 May 1993 contains an article by Amos Elon on Kaliningrad entitled 'The Nowhere City'; it contains an evocative description but, in my view, exaggerates the geopolitical instability of the enclave's future, and the possibility of a German claim. The most thorough German discussion of the enclave is *Königsberg morgen: Luxemburg an der Ostsee*, by Wilfried Boehm and Ansgar Graw (Blau Aktuelle Reihe, 1993). It concedes that the area will have to stay under Russian sovereignty, but suggests sponsorship by the Council of Europe and other Western organisations.

The Independence Movements and their Successors, 1987–92

*'We shall endure. All overlords will go.
Away the stranger, who has seized your land.
Time has decided, time has decreed it so.'*

— Imants Auziņš

A Confusion of Terms

In the looking-glass world of post-Communist politics, few parties or institutions are quite what they seem, and few politicians say quite what they mean. This is not always intentional; one of the most difficult though fascinating aspects of writing about the Soviet region results from the almost complete lack of conceptual landmarks. Nothing quite like these events has ever occurred before, so there are no analytical models to fall back upon, and few of the usual terms and descriptions really fit. Until new models and descriptions are developed, however, we have to continue using the old ones. The problem is that local politicians and journalists, wishing to imitate the West – or simply for want of anything better – use these false models to describe themselves and then play them back to us, thus confirming naïve Western observers in their own misconceptions. The result is a real mirror-game, a copulation of illusions.

Thus the 'conservative' (his own description) Latvian politician, Valdis Šteins, published in a Riga-based English-language newspaper in July 1992 a portrait of the Latvian political spectrum based on a comparison with that of the European Parliament. He described the range of parties, from communists through socialists, liberals, conservatives and so on, concluding that 'we can see . . . that the political spectrum in Latvia is very wide, and that it corresponds to the situation in other European countries. . . .'¹

Few Western observers, without a detailed knowledge of the region,

would distrust this apparently factual, objective and soberly-written account. Yet it gives a completely (though quite possibly unconsciously) false picture of the real state of Latvian party politics in the summer of 1992. In the first place, Šteins creates this neat picture by virtue of leaving out all the Russian deputies, thereby ignoring the central national tension in Latvian politics as a whole. By doing so he is also able to categorise most of the Latvian nationalist parties as 'Centre-Right', whereas in terms of their attitudes to the Russians, most can only be called 'Extreme-Right' or 'radical nationalist'. Moreover the Latvian 'parties' are by-and-large no such thing, but simply groups of individuals gathered around particular leaders, slogans or interests. Up to the time of writing, they have no party organisation, no structure, no registered membership, no policy-making bodies, and most emphatically no party discipline. The 'parties' in the country and 'factions' of the same name within the parliaments are usually only tenuously connected, and sometimes completely at odds. In the opaque primeval soup of Baltic politics, these political amoebas split, form new transient unions, and split again.

Some of the formations which have arisen in all three republics over the past two years have barely had the lifespan of mayflies. (The 'conservative' Šteins, for example, began as a social democrat.) They have also been as numerous as mayflies. There are, in Latvia today, four 'political parties' each of which claims exclusive representation of the interests of farmers. Interest-group politics of the most crass kind is mitigated only by the divisions in the respective interest groups.

One could perhaps speak of two fundamental interest groups: those who belonged to the former Communist establishment (or who believe they stand to lose from certain kinds of reform), and the 'new men'. Parliamentary debates on privatisation have certainly provided ample examples of the way ex-Communist deputies from widely differing parties have tended to pull together to defend establishment interests. But as we have seen in Chapter 4, this does not mean at all that the former establishment opposes reform as such, let alone that it necessarily represents a 'Left-wing' position in the Western sense. The 'Secure Home' Party in Estonia, founded by former Communist state managers and officials, describes itself as 'Right-wing', and so, in most respects, it is. It just wants privatisation to be as far as possible to its own supporters' advantage.

An analysis of contemporary politics in terms of standard Western 'Left-Right' ideological pattern makes little sense in the Baltic. In the West, national questions of course play a part, but the real distinguishing and opposing policies are in the area of economic and social policy. Within the Baltic, no clear comparable Left-Right division is visible. There, and in much of the former Communist world, the great defining

The Baltic Revolution

features are attitudes to history, nationality and (particularly in Lithuania), culture.

Apart from questions of personal history – such as membership of the Communist Party (or the KGB) on one side, or the dissident movement on the other – ideological division focuses on attitudes to the pre-1940 republics. The commitment of most within the 'Right' to the restoration of private agriculture is as much connected with this view, as with a desire for efficiency. Indeed some are committed to restoring to each family precisely the land that belonged to it before 1940, irrespective of the effect on current farming practice (see Chapter 9). The most accurate description of this mindset would be 'radical restitutionist'.

Congress movements in Latvia and Estonia were founded on the explicit premise that the forms of the 'First Republics', in particular in relation to citizenship, had remained unbroken by Soviet rule and should be restored as before and in their entirety. For their part, most of the leaders of the Popular Fronts, while they stressed the legal continuity of independence, also tended to believe that the new states should be based on 'existing realities', particularly as regards the position of the new Russian populations in the region. The gradual shift on this issue of large sections of the Popular Front towards a position closer to that of the Congress was a central political theme between 1990 and 1992.

In Lithuania, attitudes towards the dictatorship of Smetona and its legacy of authoritarian nationalism represent a major demarcation. It is connected to the essentially cultural question of whether Lithuania should move closer to the West or, as the more nationalist tradition would have it, seek a uniquely Lithuanian way of its own.² For the Lithuanian 'Right', nationalist attitudes are linked to their obsession with the history of Lithuanian-Polish relations, a factor which is of much less concern to the Centre or 'Left'.

In Latvia and Estonia, the Right's desire to restore the pre-1940 republics and their citizenships is closely linked to the desire to exclude – or even expel – the Russian-speakers who moved into the republics under Soviet rule, or at least make them undergo a rigorous naturalisation procedure, whereas proponents of the 'Second Republic' have taken a more compromising stand. The best means of describing the political scene in Latvia and Estonia is through a grid, rather than a spectrum, the centre point of which represents moderation in policy:

The Independence Movements and their Successors

(for Estonia):

<i>Left</i>		<i>First Republic</i>
		Est. Citizen
		Nat. Ind. Party
	Moderates	Fatherland
	Popular Front	
	Est. Communist Party	Secure Home
	Russian Dem. Movement	
<i>Second Republic</i>		<i>Right</i>

Thus in Estonia, the Fatherland (*Isamaa*) block, with its commitment both to the First Republic and to free market economics, stands squarely on the horizontal line on the right of the grid, and fairly close to the centre. Edgar Savisaar's Popular Front stands in the same position on the Left side. Marju Lauristin's Social Democrats began with Savisaar but subsequently moved to occupy a position close to the vertical line within the top, 'First Republic-Left' half of the grid, but also close to the Centre.

The 'Secure Home' (*Kindel Kodu*) alliance stands in a curious position. In terms of its current policies, it supports both the First Republic and free-market policies (as it ought, given so many of its members have become capitalist proprietors). Because of the Communist background of its members, however, it is identified by all the other parties as behind a 'New Republic'. *Kindel Kodu* also opposes restitution of pre-1940 property and wants to preserve collective farms as co-operatives under their existing management. Placing a party like this within any spectrum would be problematic.

The extreme nationalist 'Estonian Citizen' group of Colonel Juri Toompeuu stood, in 1992, somewhere beyond the fringe and in the top right-hand corner. Given its members' propensity for populism, the group might in future move sharply to the Left on economic policy, even

though it will always remain within the 'First Republic' section. This is true of all the parties now called 'Right-Wing'; in the Baltic. Their commitment to the 'First Republic' is unshakeable, so great in fact that by comparison it completely dwarfs economic policy. Their commitment to the economic policy of the Right-hand corner is modest, and relatively liable to be drowned within a 'First Republic' tradition of anti-capitalist populism.

For an extreme example of a 'Left-wing' (or rather populist-opportunist) party now strongly committed to a 'First Republic' position, one has the former Latvian Communist Party, now called the Democratic Labour Party. This would be well out along the vertical line of the top half of the grid. Its leader, Juris Bojars, illustrates the wonderful opportunities for populism and the changing of position within a system in which clear economic policies seem not to be required.

Bojars is an ex-KGB Major and 'international lawyer' who emerged from the Popular Front. By switching to a strongly nationalistic position, he has ingratiated himself with the now-dominant nationalist element without losing his ability to appeal to the workers with Left-wing attacks on the government's free-market reform. Whether this will succeed in propelling him into a future Latvian government seems doubtful, however, for he is widely mistrusted, and may be barred from standing for parliament because of his KGB past. In both Latvia and Estonia, though not in Lithuania, the phenomenon of former Communists trying to engineer a comeback through an appeal to nationalism has been manifest.

Analysing the political scene is made still more difficult by the fact that the mass of the population is so extremely indifferent to it. In these circumstances public opinion polls, and even elections, tend to give a false picture. When, in July 1992, I conducted my own limited 'vox pop' survey on thirty individuals in Riga, not a single one expressed support for any particular political party or indeed any political leader. Even general political views seemed unfocused and not very strongly held.

Moreover, this was the case not simply after the achievement of independence but, to a surprising degree, during the independence struggle. It indicates that although the vast bulk of the indigenous populations was deeply committed to independence, cynicism about and detachment from the independence movements themselves was far greater than the rallies and demonstrations suggested.

This was demonstrated too by the huge vote for the former Communists, and against Landsbergis and his rump Sajūdis, in the Lithuanian elections of October 1992. To a far greater degree than most observers realised – and this is no doubt true of many revolutions – nationalist struggle in the former Soviet Union has been largely a function of small groups of activists, working upon much vaguer feelings held by the population as a whole.

Under Landsbergis, between 1990 and 1992, nationalist activists attempted to stamp Lithuania with their own neo-traditionalist vision, a product partly of genuine religious and cultural values, and partly of a paranoid fear of Poland, Russia, of internal traitors, and indeed of the cultural influence of the West. The story of these years is the story of the failure of this vision, though it would be unwise to predict that it has failed forever.

Lithuania, like many Communist countries, was profoundly changed by Communist rule, far more so than Landsbergis realised. One crucial difference was that peasant conservatism, largely (though by no means entirely) attached, during the First Republic, to clerical nationalism, tended this time to be aligned with the former Communists, so long as these had taken a stand against Moscow.

The nationalists also suffered from the fact that decades of Communist Party rule had discredited the very term 'party'. Many politicians attempt to dissociate themselves from allegiance to a particular party, presenting themselves as somehow standing above party politics, and ironically enough the most successful practitioners of this approach – Rūtel and Gorbunovs in the Baltic, and Edvard Shevardnadze in Georgia, all emerged from the womb of the Party of Parties.

The Rise of the National Movements, 1987–90

No-one, Balt or non-Balt, who witnessed the great pro-independence demonstrations of 1988–91 will forget them or the tremendous emotional impact they had: the songs, the tears, the sense of relief as people were able to say in public things which for fifty years they had been scared even to whisper in private; 'For ye shall know the truth, and the truth will make you free'.³

The speed of the independence process was due partly to the sheer size of the nationalist demonstrations and their cumulative effect in undermining the will of the Communist rulers. Most striking of all was the 'Baltic Way' of 23 August 1989, when two million Balts (two-fifths of the entire native population of the region) formed a continuous 370 mile human chain from Vilnius through Riga to Tallinn to demand independence. Between the first demand, in April 1988, for an Estonian Popular Front, to the Lithuanian declaration of independence on 11 March 1990 was a period of only twenty-three months. During the final months, in the autumn of 1989, the East European revolutions provided an added impetus; prior to that the Baltic independence process had been mainly self-generating, and had itself stimulated similar movements elsewhere in the Soviet empire.

To many Western observers (and indeed to Gorbachov himself), the

Baltic independence movements appeared to spring from nowhere. They were, however, preceded and accompanied by pro-independence groups stemming from the Baltic dissident movements, which took, and still take, a more radical line than the 'Popular Fronts' and their successors.

The first autonomous political action in the Baltic States during Gorbachov's presidency came from the tradition of ecological protest which had long had a partially tolerated place in the Soviet (and especially Russian) scene, and which was therefore difficult to suppress. In all three republics, however, national concerns were either close to the surface or completely open. In Estonia, opposition to state plans for phosphate mining was motivated by a genuine fear of further wastelands like the oil-shale mining areas of north-east Estonia, but also because the plan involved bringing in thousands of Russian workers. There was opposition to similar industrial development in Latvia and Lithuania, and in all three republics the Communist leadership itself gradually usurped such popular demands in an effort to regain popularity.

In Lithuania, plans by Moscow to expand the republic's ecologically-dangerous chemicals industry was one factor leading to the formation of Sajūdis in June 1988. The core of ecological protest, however, involved the building of a fourth reactor at the Ignalina nuclear power plant, already the biggest in the Western Soviet Union, opposition to which swelled of course following the disaster at Chernobyl in April 1986. Baltic servicemen were among the soldiers and workers, often completely unprotected, used in the Chernobyl clean-up operation. Subsequent rumours played a major part in stimulating Baltic anger, as did the appalling treatment often meted out to Baltic (and other) soldiers in the Soviet army.

Several leading contemporary Baltic politicians cut their political teeth in the ecological protests during the first three years of Gorbachov's rule. The term 'Green' is however one of those Western words which needs to be treated with caution when applied to the Baltic States. In all three countries, the Green parties stand on the nationalist Right, and their current main activity is agitation for the removal of the Russian armed forces. The connection of the Greens with the Right is partly to do with the fact that both stemmed originally from the nationalist dissident cause. It has also deep cultural roots in the centrality of nature to Baltic national culture, extending in the case of some nationalists to something like a 'blood and soil' ideology identifying the Baltic nations with the land.

In Estonia, another very important proto-political force was the National Heritage Society, ostensibly devoted to the restoration of artistic monuments. In April 1988, the society was the first to fly the old national flag, and in January 1989 it issued the first call for the creation of a Congress. The Estonian Christian Democrat parties stem largely from this body.

One of the curious features of the struggle for independence in the Baltic has been that while the three republics have usually moved at different speeds, they have not moved in the same order. The question of who was really 'first' has been a focus of many jealous national claims. Between 11 March 1990 and the achievement of real independence in August 1991, Lithuania led the confrontation with the Kremlin. But from 1988 to 1989, Estonia was the leader, by several months, on the road to independence.

In 1987-88, however, Latvia, supposedly the most cautious of the three, was definitely the pathbreaker in patriotic demonstrations and revelations. The first step was taken by the 'Helsinki-86' group, founded in Liepāja by a mixture of long-standing dissidents and new recruits. It called a demonstration at the Freedom Monument in Riga on 14 June 1987 to mark the anniversary of the Stalinist deportations of 1941. Such 'calendar demonstrations', marking vital anniversaries of the first independence struggle or the 1940s, were to become regular occurrences over the next three years.⁴ The Helsinki-86 group was harassed and scrutinised by the KGB, and there was good reason to think that, as in all previous instances, fear would discourage all but a handful from attending, and the demonstration would be quickly dispersed by the police. Instead Gorbachov's own impact made it a success: the Latvians had gained in self-confidence, and the police had lost it. Moreover, this first demonstration, ostensibly against a Stalinist crime rather than Soviet rule as such, was calculated to confuse the Soviet authorities: Gorbachov and the central press had for some time been engaged in denunciations of Stalin.

For days after the 14 June demonstration, protestors returned to the monument to lay flowers – a practice which would itself have guaranteed arrest a few years before. It was followed by demonstrations on 23 August, the anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, and 18 November, the anniversary of Latvia's first declaration of independence. This last occasion proved too much for the authorities, and police attacked the demonstrators, injuring several of them. Some Helsinki-86 members were also expelled to the West. It did not, however, stop demonstrations spreading to the other two republics. The 23 August 1987 demonstration in Tallinn was attended by some two thousand people and addressed mainly by former political prisoners. A year later, crowds numbering hundreds of thousands were common in all three states.

An early sign of Estonia's lead in economic reform was the 'four-man' proposal of economic autonomy made on 26 September 1987. Its signatories were all soon to play leading roles, most notably Edgar Savisaar as Prime Minister and Siim Kallas former leader of the official Communist Trades Unions and, from 1991, chairman of the State Bank.

As protest mounted, the Communist Party in the Baltic began to

fragment. History, or rather historiography, was the major unraveller. The Baltic experience demonstrates the central dilemma of Gorbachov's entire effort, a dilemma he appears still not to understand. Glasnost was inevitably going to bring a new honesty about the past; but since the entire Communist claim to legitimacy and to positive achievements was based on lies, this honesty would sooner or later bring down the whole system.

The key role in undermining the Communist will to power was the Soviet Union's manifest economic failure in comparison with the West, and a keen awareness among younger Communist officials that they would have better lives under a capitalist economy. However, the discrediting of the Communist past was also a crucial, if secondary, factor.

From this point of view the Soviet Empire was in a worse position than the old Russian or other European empires, which based their claim to legitimacy on a simple right of conquest. Soviet rule was based on lies, and when these were exposed, that rule collapsed. Similarly, when autocratic control was removed, Soviet 'democratic' institutions proved surprisingly capable of expressing the people's will, and in the Baltic and elsewhere, this will was directed at the destruction of the Soviet Union.

In the Baltic the revelation of the full extent of the deportations and executions of the 1940s played a part in undermining Soviet rule, but the key factor was of course the publication of the truth about the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the way the Balts came to be annexed in 1940. The main Estonian radical nationalist party, the National Independence Party, emerged out of a body calling itself 'The Group for the Disclosure of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact'. When the Supreme Soviet in Moscow admitted, as it did in summer 1989, to the existence of the secret protocols of the Pact and to their illegitimacy, it had in effect admitted the illegitimacy of Soviet rule; any subsequent Soviet political activity in the region could now be only a rearguard action or an attempt at the reimposition of military rule, without any democratic or legal justification.

While the dissidents organised demonstrations and appeals to the West, revelations about the past emerged from the previously docile, Communist-controlled institutes of history and Writers' Unions, as their younger or more patriotic members contested the power of the Party hacks, and forced them out of office. On 1-2 June 1988, an 'extended plenum' of the Latvian Writers' Union heard the Party veteran, Mavriks Vulfsons, reveal that no revolution had taken place in Latvia in 1940, and there had been no popular movement for Soviet rule. Vulfsons pointed out that he had himself at the time been a Party activist in Riga: 'I was there; I know'. Though he was fiercely attacked by Communist hardliners, public discussion of historical questions now became

unstoppable. At this stage, the old national flags, still technically illegal, were being openly carried during demonstrations. Protests were, however, still heavily scrutinised by the police, and sometimes attacked. The Party, although fast losing control over the creative unions, the universities and much of the press, was still in charge both of the 'forces of order' and of most of its own membership, especially in Latvia and Estonia where the membership was largely Russian.

Appeals for help to Yegor Ligachov and other key Moscow conservatives came from the Baltic Communist leaderships. These heralded a counter-attack against Gorbachov's reforms on 13 March 1988, while he was in Yugoslavia, with the publication of the famous 'letter of Nina Andreyevna' in the paper *Sovietskaya Rossiya*, denouncing indiscipline, ideological confusion and attacks on the Soviet past. Gorbachov defeated this move, but it had important consequences in the Baltic. The toleration, or even perhaps active encouragement, extended to the Popular Fronts and Sąjūdis by the reformist sections of the Moscow leadership and the KGB in 1988 resulted from their being viewed as allies against the hardliners within the Communist Party.

This was made explicit during the visit of Gorbachov's leading liberal Lieutenant, Alexander Yakovlev, to the Baltic in August 1988. Yakovlev's meetings with Popular Front leaders led to the dismissal of the hardline Latvian and Lithuanian Party leaders over the next months, in advance of the founding congresses of the Popular Front and Sąjūdis in the autumn of 1988. Yakovlev's visit led to a drastic reduction in state pressure against the national movements, such that Sąjūdis members were to distinguish between the periods 'before' and 'after' Yakovlev.

Yakovlev himself later described his discussions with Baltic nationalists in terms which emphasise the collapse of self-confidence and will to rule among the more intelligent and liberal Communist leaders:

I had to admit to them that we had an empire, that there really was a centre which dictated to the republics. I had to agree with them. Anything else would have been blasphemy. So I supported them, and I still think I was right.⁵

The question of whether or how far the KGB may have contributed to the formation of the Popular Fronts in 1988 cannot be answered until its archives are opened – if they have survived. Certain KGB elements may well at the time have thought they were simultaneously strengthening Gorbachov against the Party conservatives, and moderate Baltic reformers against the ex-dissident nationalist radicals. It has since been established that there were certainly several KGB informers, and possible agents, among the original founders of Sąjūdis in Lithuania. Speculation on this theme, however, has been influenced by post-Soviet Paranoia, Baltic emigré attitudes to 'former Communists', and by the

propaganda needs of Right-wing forces opposed to the Fronts and their successors, as well as by better-based arguments.

For their part, Soviet loyalists have always argued that the CIA was behind the national movements, via agents from the Baltic emigrations. There can be no question that the CIA did have close links with the emigrés, and some have been rumoured to be agents. There is however no evidence that they played a key role and, in any case, the policy of the Bush administration after 1989 was to retard Baltic independence, not encourage it. If any sections of the CIA were pursuing a different course, then like the KGB, they are unlikely to advertise the fact to historians.⁶

On 23 August 1987, only a few hundred people had dared attend a meeting in Lithuania. The meeting was organised by dissidents and former political prisoners, mainly members of the Catholic group which had, over the previous twelve years, published the *Chronicle of the Catholic Church in Lithuania*: Antanas Terleckas, Viktoras Petkus, Vytautas Bogušis, Nijole Sadūnaite and others. None of the future leaders of Sąjūdis were present. In May the following year, the dissidents announced the existence of the 'Lithuanian Liberty League' (*Lietuvos Laisvės Lyga*, or LLL), saying that it had existed secretly since 1978. They too were subjected to police harassment, though at the same time Gorbachov, under pressure from the West, was ordering the release of Baltic political prisoners – like Lagle Parek in Estonia, released in 1988 after serving five years of a seven-year sentence. These promptly returned to the Baltic to swell the ranks of the nationalist parties.

On 14 November 1987, the Lithuanian Artists' Union threw out its entire leadership. Petras Griškevičius, the First Secretary of the Lithuanian Party since 1973, was present at the meeting and died of a heart attack that night. He was succeeded by Ringaudas Songaila, a more circumspect but still entirely loyal Communist. Songaila's leadership, however, lasted a bare eleven months. On 20 October 1988, he was replaced by a reformist Party Secretary, Algirdas Brazauskas. The appointment was largely the result of the growing strength of Sąjūdis, formed in Vilnius on 3 June 1988.

Sąjūdis formation had every appearance of spontaneity, and if there was a KGB hand, it was not blatant. The context, however, was that of the Nineteenth Soviet Communist Party Congress, which Gorbachov had called as a spur to reform. In each Baltic republic, institutions and groups were invited to submit nominations of delegates. The previous day, at a congress of the 'Creative Unions' in Riga, Viktors Avotipš had also proposed the creation of a Latvian Popular Front.

In Lithuania, the Academy of Sciences formed a commission under its Secretary, Professor Eduardas Vilkas, to propose changes to the Lithuanian constitution. At this point a Popular Front had already been

formed in Estonia, and Estonian representatives came to encourage the Lithuanians to follow suit.⁷ On 3 June, a public meeting was held under Vilkas's chairmanship in the hall of the Academy in Vilnius. What happened next can be interpreted more or less according to taste. Vilkas appeared rapidly to lose control of the meeting, as demands were made for the formation of a new political body. Representatives of the Liberty League claim not merely that the whole affair was planned by the KGB, but that even Vilkas's resistance was part of the plan, in order to contribute to the credibility of the process. Vilkas himself has said that, with the President of the Academy absent, he was anxious only to find an 'alibi' which would prevent the authorities from throwing blame on to his shoulders.

The result of the meeting was the formation of an 'Initiative Group' of thirty-six which, in turn, produced the 'Movement (Sąjūdis) for Lithuania's Restructuring'. According to a Western participant, Dr Alfred Erich Senn, ten of the names had been decided in advance, the rest appearing to emerge spontaneously. It is amusing, in retrospect, but also very difficult, to imagine some of these people as having once worked closely together. The three most easily identifiable elements in the group, which for the next two years was to provide the leadership of Sąjūdis, were intellectuals from the arts and humanities, intellectuals from technical and scientific fields, and junior members of the Communist establishment. The elements overlapped of course, and membership did not necessarily determine subsequent political behaviour, although certain trends are visible.

The intelligentsia drawn from the humanities included a professor of musicology, Vytautas Landsbergis, not at this stage notably different from his colleagues; two young philosophers, Dr Arvydas Juozaitis (also an Olympic champion swimmer), later to become a leading liberal and bitter opponent of Landsbergis, and Vytautas Radžvilas, leader of the Liberal Party; Vytautas Petkevičius, another philosopher and advocate of a Soviet confederation, who later left the leadership after Sąjūdis swung in a more radical direction (and he himself was shown to have been a Soviet auxiliary in the partisan war of the 1940s), only to return to parliament in 1992 as a deputy for the Labour Party of Algirdas Brazauskas; Dr Virgilijus Čepaitis, who was to become a radical nationalist leader and Landsbergis's right-hand man before he too was ruined politically by revelations that he had been a KGB informer; and the poet Sigitas Geda.

The technical and scientific intelligentsia was numerically under-represented by the physicist Zigmantas Vaišvila; Arturas Skučas, an architect and later a radical and Commander of Landsbergis's bodyguard; and Kazimieras Antanavičius, a non-Communist economist and later leader of the Social Democrat Party. Among the junior

members of the Communist establishment were Kazimiera Prunskiene, an economist (from July 1989 Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Reform in the Communist government, and from March 1990 to 1991, Sajūdis Prime Minister); Romualdas Ozolas, a lawyer and advisor to the Central Committee (later Deputy Prime Minister under Prunskiene); another 'lawyer', Kazimieras Motieka (later Deputy Chairman of Parliament and rival to Landsbergis); and Professor Bronius Kuznickas, yet another philosopher (later a Landsbergisite and another Deputy Chairman). In all, 17 of the 36 founders of the Initiative Group were Communist Party members. This does not necessarily mean that they were part of the 'nomenclatura' of privileged senior Communists, though they could be called part of the wider Soviet 'establishment'.

A plethora of philosophers is one of the striking features of the group. Another is that the overwhelming majority of members were from Vilnius. A former bulldozer-driver, Kazimieras Uoka was the only worker present.

The fate of Sajūdis over the next three years was to be its gradual takeover and radicalisation by representatives from Kaunas who were often also members of the technical or scientific intelligentsia: men like Audrius Butkevičius, a doctor and later Defence Minister, Algirdas Saudargas, a physicist and later Foreign Minister, and Aleksandras Abišala, a former Komsomol official and engineer, and later Prime Minister. An important marker was the appointment of Virgilijus Čepaitis (a radical, though not from Kaunas) as the head of the Sajūdis Committee for the selection of candidates for the February 1990 elections – an appointment which had obvious consequences for their political colouring.

The typical profile of the Right-wingers and radical nationalists who later entered parliament or occupied one of innumerable government offices was that of a technically trained white-collar worker from Kaunas or the provinces: they were engineers, small managers, schoolteachers, lawyers, agronomists and the like. The difference between them and the Vilnius intelligentsia mirrored the old cultural tension, noted in Chapter 3, between relatively pluralist Vilnius and the more ethnically pure Kaunas. It also reflected a certain class difference, as far as this term can be used in post-Communist society. The 'Kaunas Faction', as it was later known, represented the 'intellectual petty bourgeoisie': hating Communism, but without access to Western culture, they had steeped themselves in the traditional culture of Lithuania in 1939, or whatever of it had survived. They were passionately ambitious to drive the existing establishment and bureaucracy from their places.

At the start, of course, none of this was apparent. The Liberty League, and some Lithuanian emigrés, accused Sajūdis of being a Communist front organisation, set up by the KGB, and continued to do so at

intervals right up to the declaration of Lithuanian independence. By the Sajūdis Congress of 22–24 October 1988, however, the rise of the Kaunas faction and of pro-independence feeling within Sajūdis was very apparent. On 24 October, Rolandas Paulauskas, a popular composer from Kaunas, made the first public call for complete independence. Brazauskas continued trying to buy both time and popularity, announcing during the Congress, for example, the return of the cathedral to the Catholic Church: since the 1950s it had been an art gallery. In Moscow, however, not only hardliners but also men like Alexander Yakovlev now began to speak sharply against the movements he had encouraged only a few months earlier.

In November 1988, Brazauskas and Lionginas Šepetys, the Speaker of the Supreme Council, under intense pressure from Moscow, blocked a sovereignty declaration similar to that already passed by Estonia. Such a declaration was not to be passed until 18 May 1989, seven months later; Latvia followed on 28 July. It was accompanied by a law on economic self-management, accepted by the USSR Supreme Soviet on 27 July 1989, but thereafter resisted by the Soviet government.

November 1988 represented a failure of nerve from which Brazauskas's prestige among Lithuanian patriots has never fully recovered. It contributed to the crushing Sajūdis victory in the elections to the Congress of People's Deputies in Moscow in March 1989 (36 out of 42 seats) and to the support of even moderate Sajūdis deputies in March 1990 for a motion to replace Brazauskas by Landsbergis as Chairman of the Supreme Council. This step separated Lithuania from Latvia and Estonia, where the Communist Chairmen were retained as a symbol of compromise.

One reason for this was the greater speed with which pro-independence ideas progressed within the Estonian Communist Party. Five out of seven members of the executive committee of the Popular Front, founded in April 1988, were Party members; two were even prominent: Edgar Savisaar as former head of the State Planning Commission (Gosplan), and Marju Lauristin as a mildly dissident journalist, but above all as the daughter of one of the founders of Soviet Estonia, Johannes Lauristin, killed by the Germans in 1941. The leading role of such figures is a reminder that the Popular Fronts were essentially founded by the liberal wing of the Communist establishments.

In June 1988, Karl Vaino, First Secretary of the Estonian Communist Party, was sacked by Moscow on the advice of his own Ideology Secretary, Indrek Toome.⁸ Vaino had provoked furious protests from Moscow when he tried to nominate (rather than elect) delegates to the nineteenth Soviet Party Congress – an action rejected by Gorbachov as he fought his own battle with the Moscow hardliners. Vaino was replaced

by Vaino Väljas, formerly Soviet ambassador to Nicaragua. Väljas was to move closer to the Popular Front position on most issues, including that of republican sovereignty: not until autumn 1989 did the Popular Front make full independence its official platform, even though radical groups within the Front had long been demanding it.

Väljas and Toome (who from 1989–90 was Prime Minister and leader of negotiations with Moscow) threw the weight of the Party behind a plan for Estonian economic sovereignty, the acronym for which, IME, means 'miracle' in Estonian. The Communist chairman of the Supreme Council, Arnold Rüütel, was also labouring to build personal bridges to the Popular Front, an effort which later helped ensure his survival in office long after many of his colleagues.

Väljas criticised the Popular Front for not itself constructing more effective links with the increasingly restive Russian minority in the republic. At the same time he himself moved to increase the proportion of Estonians within the Party and the Supreme Council (to about two-thirds of the total), vital in securing the passage of the legal steps on the road to independence.

The struggle of the Communist and Reform Communist elements to survive as parties in the Baltic lasted four years, and in Lithuania is continuing with renewed force. On 16 November 1988, the Estonian Party appeared to take on a new lease of life when the Supreme Council voted a declaration of sovereignty, giving Estonian laws precedence over Soviet ones and itself the right to veto the jurisdiction of All-Union legislation in Estonia. Although the action was declared unconstitutional by the Praesidium of the Supreme Council in Moscow, the Estonian Communists refused to back down, going on to pass laws which affirmed Estonian as the only official language, and restricted the voting rights of recent immigrants.

In Latvia events moved more cautiously, primarily because there, more than half the Party members were Russians. Thus while the Lithuanian and Estonian Parties were, by majority vote, to separate from the Soviet Communist Party in December 1989 and March 1990 respectively, the Latvian Party split down the middle. In April 1990, a majority remained loyal to Moscow and elected as its First Secretary the hardline former Mayor of Riga, Alfrēds Rubiks. Rubiks replaced the lacklustre Jānis Vagris, appointed in October 1988 by Gorbachov in an effort to keep the Latvian Party together. Vagris's predecessor had been Boris Pugo, the former KGB official appointed Soviet Interior Minister by Gorbachov in the autumn of 1990 who then betrayed him during the attempted coup of August 1991.

The Latvian Popular Front, founded – like Sajūdis – in June 1988, was always the victim of a tug-of-war between the Communist and ex-

Communist moderates and the more radical nationalists. On 31 May 1989, with the moderate leadership absent at the Congress of People's Deputies in Moscow, the radicals engineered a declaration by the Popular Front Board that it was necessary to discuss the question of complete independence.

The National Independence Movement bridged the gap between the dissident forces and the Popular Front (and later between the 'Latvian Congress', their 'alternative parliament', and the Supreme Council) just as Gorbunovs in turn sought to mediate between the Popular Front, the different wings of the Communist Party, the Russian minority, and the Kremlin, and with some success.⁹

This then was the situation in which the three republics entered 1990, preparing for the Supreme Council elections that spring. Under pressure from the Popular Fronts – in turn pressured by more radical forces – all three Supreme Councils had passed declarations of sovereignty, new language laws, assertions of control over national resources and industry and, above all, refutations of the legitimacy of the Soviet annexations in 1940 – stopping short, however, of full declarations of independence.

The Communist leaders had committed themselves in principle to the restoration of independence, but couched in vague terms. The Popular Fronts and Sajūdis were actively demanding independence, but they too were vague about the stages through which it might be achieved. During these years the words 'independence', and still more 'sovereignty', acquired a whole spectrum of meaning unknown in the West.

Indeed between the Kremlin, the national movements and the local Communist Parties there was a virtual conspiracy that 'independence' did not really mean independence, that 'sovereignty' meant something less than the full right to self-determination, and that both could somehow be accommodated within the Soviet system. It was a convenient self-deception, since no-one wanted a stand-up fight, but it had a thoroughly bewildering effect on the local Russian population: it was not unusual at this time to hear exchanges like this:

'Are you in favour of independence?'

'Yes, of course. Every country should be independent.'

'So you are in favour of leaving the Soviet Union?'

'No, no! I am for independence *within* the Soviet Union.'

By the end of 1989, Communist rule, the iron frame holding the Empire together, had been thoroughly undermined, both within the Baltic and by events in Eastern Europe. Gorbachov's dramatic visit to Vilnius in January 1990, in an attempt to prevent the Lithuanian Communist Party from proceeding with its decision to separate from the Soviet Communist Party, was merely another example of his failure to comprehend what was happening to the Soviet Union. At that stage simply keeping the



13 A protest meeting in Riga, Latvia, to demand the withdrawal of the Soviet army from the Baltic States, 17 June 1990. The main banner reads, 'End the Occupation', the small placard in the centre calls for a 'Nuremberg Trial' for Communists, while the one on the extreme left is a parody of the famous Soviet Second World War propaganda poster 'The Motherland Calls You'. It reads 'The Motherland Calls You - Home'. In the background is the Freedom Monument (see Chapter 5).

Communist Party united was irrelevant in terms of preventing further moves towards independence. Gorbachov would have needed to cancel the Supreme Council elections due the following month and impose central rule by military means. Such action would seem to have gone against his own instincts, as well as his need for Western support. When, a year later, he did authorise the military to attempt such a solution in the Baltic, it was both half-hearted and already far too late.

'Be Realistic: Ask the Impossible': The Declarations of Independence, 1990

By the Lithuanian elections of February 1990, Landsbergis had been chairman of the Sąjūdis Council for fifteen months. He was elected in November 1988, in a contest with Romualdas Ozolas and Arvydas Juozaitis. Ozolas and Prunskiene had received more votes in the contest

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for membership of the Executive Committee, but Landsbergis was elected chairman for six months. Later he was able to beat off challengers and make his position permanent, partly through superior tactical skill and toughness, but above all as a compromise candidate uniting the different elements in the movement: the Vilnius liberal intellectuals who had founded it; the Kaunas nationalists who had penetrated it; and the reform Communists who continued to build a bridge between it and its main rival, the Communist Party.

Neither Juozaitis, the archetypal liberal intellectual, nor Ozolas, the liberal Communist, would have been acceptable to the 'Kaunas Faction'; yet neither then nor later was this faction able simply to take over Sąjūdis as a whole; when the Right finally did so with Landsbergis' encouragement, the result was to split the movement and reduce it to a rump. Even then, the Kaunasite core itself split, and much of it turned against Landsbergis.

In his initial role as consensual leader, Landsbergis was helped both by his apparently mild and diplomatic character and by his ancestry and background, which spanned the high Vilnius intelligentsia and the Kaunas nationalist tradition. Right up to 11 March 1990, however Landsbergis remained only a first among equals. During the elections he had made less impression on the Lithuanian public than had Brazauskas, or the feisty Kazimiera Prunskiene who, as Deputy Prime Minister, had gained popularity through tough negotiation with the Kremlin over economic autonomy.

The general public preference for Brazauskas over Landsbergis reflects a general pattern in the former Soviet republics: while the Communist Party itself had become highly unpopular, ordinary people continued, in many cases, to prefer individual Communist leaders over the leaders of the opposition. In Lithuania, even as his party shrank, Brazauskas remained consistently ahead of Landsbergis in most opinion polls, except for the year or so following the events of January 1991.¹⁰ It reflects partly the instinctive conservatism of those, especially older voters, raised under Soviet rule, and partly simple anti-intellectualism. There is even an element of racism (assiduously stoked by Soviet misinformation) which accused Landsbergis, wrongly, of being a German or a 'half-Jew'.¹¹

Landsbergis has always had a grander image of himself than has Brazauskas who, when leader of the Communist Party, used to walk in public without guards – unlike the old Party leaders in Moscow, but very much in the Gorbachov spirit. Landsbergis, however, was soon so surrounded by hulking bodyguards that even when he did appear, few could see him. Other Sąjūdis leaders imitated him until their retinues began to take on a rather menacing appearance.

There is a good deal of simple dislike for Landsbergis's style and character among ordinary Lithuanians. In the words of a farmer's wife,

Landsbergis speaks in such a complicated way, as if he's talking down to us. And I also don't think he's honest. He doesn't say what he really means and wants, even when we all know it. All this moderation and reasonableness is just a big pretence.

A combination of slyness and sanctimoniousness has also been particularly infuriating to former colleagues of Landsbergis, many of whom feel betrayed by him. Indeed Landsbergis puts one in mind of Disraeli's remark about Gladstone, that he did not mind Gladstone's keeping the Ace of Trumps up his sleeve, if only he would not claim that it was the Lord God that put it there. The view of a student, in contrast, was that,

One of the reasons I like Landsbergis is that he speaks so beautifully. It's not just that he is always so rational, but he uses the Lithuanian language beautifully, and he knows Lithuanian literature and culture so well. He always makes me feel better. . . .

The physical appearance of Landsbergis and Brazauskas also affected attitudes: to see them together is to be reminded of some fairy-tale about a mole and a bull. Brazauskas is a populist figure, enormous, red-faced and loud-voiced, very like something from a cattle-fair. Landsbergis by contrast is short, plump and balding, with a little academic beard. In the old days, 'before Landsbergis became Landsbergis' (as someone put it), his preference for a crumpled brown-corduroy jacket made the resemblance to a mole positively uncanny. His habitual tone of voice is nasal and low, and often halting – perhaps an affectation intended to give the impression of hesitancy, modesty and moderation. He has a tendency towards academic jokes and sarcastic remarks, after which he titters gently to himself. But of the two men it is probably Landsbergis who has the stronger nerves. Although not a naturally brave man (according to an old associate) he has, through a sheer effort of will and patriotism, made himself extremely courageous: in standing up to Moscow, especially in January 1991, he showed the most steely determination. Brazauskas, on the other hand, has on occasion seemed badly rattled. He has persistently over-estimated the threat from Moscow, doubtless very often for political reasons, to boost his own value as a mediator. In the words of a Lithuanian-American journalist,

Brazauskas is not a traitor. He is genuinely loyal to Lithuania. His problem is that he is a defeatist. From the beginning of the independence struggle, he has always been saying, 'We can't do that, it's too dangerous; we can't do this, it's too difficult'. If we had all thought that way, we would never have achieved anything.

One example came on the first day of the attempted Soviet counter-

revolution of August 1991. Brazauskas evidently expected the coup to succeed, and told me that democracy in the Soviet Union and Lithuania would be put back by a decade. Landsbergis sometimes underestimated short-term threats, but his long-term view of the Soviet Union's decline proved much more accurate. The British journalist Edward Lucas has summed up this nice combination of extremism and judgement as 'barking up the right tree'.

It may seem curious, in view of the undoubted support of the vast majority of Lithuanians for the idea of independence, but the 11 March 1990 declaration of *de facto* independence came very much as a surprise, and an unwelcome one at that. In the elections of February 1990, Sąjūdis stood on a platform of complete independence, and won on it; but the general expectation was that independence would come in stages, beginning with a declaration *de jure*, the course that Latvia and Estonia in fact pursued. In practice the independence process as it actually occurred was a response to objective factors, but also to the determination of the radical nationalist minority in Sąjūdis, who succeeded in galvanising the more cautious majority. Speaking on 3 February 1990 to the movement's pre-election conference in the Sports Palace in Vilnius (the slightly incongruous setting for so many national celebrations and funerals over the following two years), Landsbergis set out the possible courses of action. He began with a long disquisition on Lithuanian resistance against Communism, and on the damage wrought by Communism on the Lithuanian spirit, and denounced 'toadyism and [a] spirit of subservience and compromise', evidently to discredit the Brazauskas Communists whom he warned might reform and 'continue their negative activities'. He declared clearly that 'we are an illegally annexed country, the sovereignty of which must be fully re-established', then stated that there could be two paths towards this goal, both of which would begin with the election of a new Supreme Council and the appointment of a delegation for negotiations with Moscow:

The first . . . is the model of decolonisation; an agreement on moving step-by-step, re-establishing equal state relations [with the Soviet Union] without causing an upheaval on either side, preparing and establishing economic, military, and transit agreements, and co-ordinating the final handover of power to the legal Lithuanian government. . . . The other way would be to regain sovereignty ourselves, expressed by unilateral political action. This would be done prior to any negotiations, and in the face of sharp political confrontation. . . . It would involve the formal re-establishment of independence and [an assertion of] the continuity of the Lithuanian Republic. Independence from the jurisdiction of the Soviet Union could be proclaimed, but it would have various possible

consequences. We would become dependent on circumstances and on our society's capacity for resistance, which has not yet been tested, on a [national] unity which seems real and yet unreal, and on civic consciousness. We would have to foresee the risk of chaos, yet without knowing the views of foreign countries or the extent of their support. . . .¹²

Though couched in Landsbergis's usual circuitous style, this is clearly advocacy of the first (later Estonian and Latvian) variant, and an argument against the Kaunas radicals who, in internal discussions, were pressing for an immediate declaration of full independence. Most voters with whom I spoke expected a continuation by stages of the legal declarations (on sovereignty and the illegality of the annexations, for example) of the previous eighteen months.

During the February 1990 election campaign, I visited the rural constituency of Jurbarkas, accompanying the Sajūdis candidate, Laima Andrikiene, an agronomist who had studied at Manchester University. Her opponent was one Zairys, head of the local council and a long-standing Communist boss, who revealed his unreconstructed nature by refusing to see me. The voters seemed thoroughly sick of his rule and that of the 'apparat' in general, and showed it by giving Andrikiene, and the idea of independence, a large majority. But election meetings were small and not especially enthusiastic; questions were not about paths to independence, but about food prices, taxes, and the provision of machinery. At one meeting a plump, elderly woman in a fake fur coat – like a turnip-eating herbivore swallowed whole by a rather mangy leopard – hammered away at the problem of collective farm debt, and the responsibility of the state. The contrast between this woman and the other collective farmers, with their Soviet clothes and dirt ingrained into the very skin of their faces on the one side, and the candidate in her smart English overcoat on the other, was acute.

Seeming to respond to the public mood, Andrikiene spent very little time on flights of nationalist rhetoric, and concentrated on arguing that independence was necessary for economic renewal; she presented herself as the kind of Westernised technocrat who could help in this process. What were not presented were the plans for the rapid decollectivisation of agriculture by parliamentary decree, and for the return of land to pre-1940 owners. Had these been revealed, it is probable the Sajūdis vote in the Lithuanian countryside would have been drastically reduced. Decollectivisation was a central factor in the crushing Sajūdis defeat two years later when, in the October 1992 election, Andrikiene lost Jurbarkas and retained her seat only through being second on the Sajūdis proportional vote list.

The 1990 elections, held on 24 February (with run-offs between 4 and 10

March), produced 99 Sajūdis deputies, 25 pro-independence Communists, 7 Communists loyal to Moscow, and 5 independents. The result, however, was not quite so clear cut, because 12 of the 'Sajūdis deputies' were also Communist Party members. A gentleman's agreement meant that leading pro-independence Communists and leading Sajūdis representatives did not run against each other – something the Communists later had cause to regret: it cost them the possibility of defeating several leading Sajūdis Right-wingers, none of whom was especially popular.¹³

In the days preceding the first meeting of the new Supreme Council on 11 March, the Sajūdis assembly (Seimas) and Deputies' Caucus met to discuss strategy. At the Seimas on the 8 March, the dominant mood appeared initially to be one of caution: the Liberty League leader, Antanas Terleckas, in a characteristic intervention, accused the deputies of having not blood but water in their veins. Terleckas, at this stage, was opposed to Landsbergis' becoming chairman of the Supreme Council.¹⁴ Landsbergis himself first asked that the declaration question not even be discussed, warning that he might need to hold international consultations. In the words of a radical deputy, Landsbergis, at this stage, 'obviously could not make up his mind. It was impossible to say how he was going to act. He kept calling America, trying to get advice.' The calls were made to Stasys Lozoraitis, Ambassador to the US of the pre-1940 Lithuanian republic and, in 1993, rival to Brazauskas for the office of president. Lozoraitis advised Landsbergis to declare immediate *de facto* independence. He reported, over optimistically, that ex-president Reagan had been urging Lithuania's case with Bush, his successor.

When, on 8 March, Ozolas led a Sajūdis delegation to meet the US Ambassador in Moscow, they were told there was no possibility of immediate recognition; but as Ozolas later admitted, they simply refused to believe it, apparently thinking that a declaration would force America to respond. Andrikiene and other radical deputies clearly also believed that recognition was imminent. When I tried to suggest otherwise, they refused to accept it, declaring that the West, having never recognised Soviet annexation, was morally bound to recognise independence.

The Seimas concluded by authorising the deputies to declare independence, but without stating what form the declaration should take. A Sajūdis spokesman announced on television that independence would be declared, further compromising the deputies. An additional question was the nature of the constitution an independent Lithuania should adopt: some radicals, backed by Algimantas Gureckas, leader of the émigré 'Lithuanian World Community', urged a return to the 1938 constitution, with amendments, but this was rejected on Landsbergis's advice.

Even as the Seimas was taking place in the hall of the Trades Union

headquarters, adjacent to the Supreme Council, the deputies were gathering in a lecture room downstairs. It was much too small for the ninety or so members, and in the resulting confusion I was able to slip in, and sit among them.

The deputies' decision can be interpreted at three levels. First, and fundamental to everything, was that every Sajūdis deputy was committed to independence: it was only a question of when; but in the words of Professor Vilkas, by then himself a Sajūdis deputy,

To have voted against an immediate declaration would have been seen as voting against the declaration itself, not against the date, and no-one wanted to be recorded as against the declaration.¹⁵

During the debates in the caucus I had the clear impression that a majority of deputies were very concerned and hesitant about an immediate declaration of full independence. Indeed several voiced their disquiet, but when it came to the final vote on the evening of 10 March, only three opposed the motion (though others, like Vilkas, absented themselves from the later stages of the discussion). The following day, although all the Brazauskas Communists would have opposed an early declaration given the power, they too voted in favour when the declaration came before the Supreme Council.¹⁶

The failure of moderate Sajūdis deputies to oppose the vote was not simply a selfish fear of the effect it might have on their later careers; it was also because they could not bear to appear before history, and possibly before their own consciences, as having taken such a stand. At the time I was reminded of Kamenev and Zinoviev, the only two members of the Bolshevik central committee to vote against the October 1917 coup, a fact used against them in every subsequent party struggle. As in all revolutions, once the principle of independence had triumphed in Lithuania, then as long as the independence struggle lasted, whoever could articulate that position most boldly would have the moral edge. This was the cultural hegemony of nationalism with a vengeance.

The deputies' decision was also influenced by certain specific arguments and developments. Chief among these was the argument that Lithuania had to act quickly to secure its legal position before the new Congress of People's Deputies convened in Moscow, gave Gorbachov new presidential powers, and approved a planned 'law on secession', establishing a ten-year qualification period for a republic to leave the Soviet Union. This danger was repeatedly mentioned in speeches. Vilkas, Professor Kazimieras Antanavičius and Egidijus Bičkauskas (later envoy to Moscow) however argued that it was irrelevant, that Lithuania's legal right to independence would be unaffected by the Moscow Congress, and that to declare independence during the session would give hardline Soviet deputies the chance to pass punitive resolutions against Lithuania,

making it difficult for Gorbachov to take a moderate line, even if he wished. Bičkauskas asked:

Why should we give a card to the hardliners? I don't understand this hysterical hurry. Moscow is sure not to introduce any authoritarian regime at this stage, but ... this Congress in Moscow is a 'black Congress'. If we do something rash now, Gorbachov may be forced by the reactionaries to act against us, despite his own wishes. ... Instead, we should work quietly and have the four basic documents ready to hand.

Vaišvila countered that,

Going on and on negotiating with Moscow on the present basis is not going to get us any further. Do any of you really believe that it will be possible to force Moscow to recognise the illegality of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact? [Declaring independence now] may seem drastic and illogical, but it is the only thing that will move things forward.

The third element in the decision was, of course, personal interest. According to former Sajūdis deputies (but now in opposition to Landsbergis, and hence perhaps unreliable as a source), negotiations went on throughout the week between Landsbergis, Prunskienė and Kaunas Faction leaders, the latter promising to support Landsbergis as chairman of the Supreme Council and Prunskienė as prime minister in return for their support for an immediate declaration. Prunskienė's surprising advocacy of immediate independence may well have owed a good deal to this offer (though the other prime ministerial candidates were Vilkas and Antanavičius, scarcely more welcome to the Right, which lacked any convincing candidates of its own). It may also have helped Landsbergis to make up his mind. Other figures angled for other minorities and positions. In Latvia and Estonia, the national movements were to take control of the government (in Estonia, under Edgar Savisaar, a reform Communist figure comparable to Prunskienė), leaving the chairmanship, for the sake of compromise, in the hands of Communist leaders. In other republics the national movements took the chair while allowing Communists to continue running the government.

In Lithuania, the national movement took control of both the chairmanship and the government. The deputies expected that Ozolas would be one of the deputy chairmen, but during the caucus discussions he attempted to put forward his candidacy against Landsbergis for the chairmanship. The following day, Landsbergis made sure Ozolas was excluded (the vote for Landsbergis against Brazauskas was 91 to 38). Vaišvila (by Prunskienė's account) begged her for the deputy premiership, but she slapped him down: 'Oh, stop jumping about, Zigmas!' Vaišvila was to have more than ample revenge over the

following nine months as a Rightist critic of Prunskienė's government, and on her fall indeed became deputy premier.

One deputy to Landsbergis, Česlovas Stankevičius, came from the Kaunas Faction; the other two, Bronius Kuzmickas and Kazimieras Motieka, were from Vilnius, but Right of Centre. With Brazauskas and Ozolas as deputy premiers, the stage was set for the confrontation between the Praesidium of the Supreme Council – led by Landsbergis and supported (at this stage) by most deputies – on one side, and Prunskienė's government on the other.

When the Supreme Council declared *de facto* independence, and the deputies rose to sing the national anthem on the evening of 11 March, a crowd gathered outside in the freezing rain and surged forward to tear down the Soviet insignia over the door. But it was a very small crowd – between three and six hundred – in strange contrast to the huge gatherings earlier in the struggle.

For the following week or so, the prevailing mood in Vilnius was one of doubt and uncertainty. In the words of a student, Edita Urmonaitė:

The mood among my friends was not very cheerful. We were surprised by how fast it had happened, at night and without any public discussion; and then there had been so many declarations. Many people didn't take in the significance of this one at first. When an American-Lithuanian student came and told us how she had burst into tears of joy when the declaration was made, we all looked at her as if she was mad.

The replacement of Brazauskas by Landsbergis as chairman of the Supreme Council undoubtedly added to the mood of insecurity. The great majority of ordinary Lithuanians I interviewed in the succeeding weeks said they would have preferred Brazauskas as chairman, largely because of his governmental experience and good personal relations with Gorbachov. The Soviet leader apparently harboured a deep personal loathing for Landsbergis. The need to keep open lines of communication to Moscow was a major reason for the inclusion of Brazauskas and other Communist officials in the government. In the words of Algimantas Cekuolis, a Communist journalist, founder of Sąjūdis and strong supporter of independence, in February 1990:

The Lithuanian Communist Party today has only one purpose – to maintain ties with Moscow, so as to be on the safe side until Moscow agrees to normal interstate relations. If Moscow refuses to negotiate, then there is no point in keeping the LCP.

Cekuolis and many others – such as the Ideology Secretary, Justas Paleckis – left the LCP (or the Lithuanian Democratic Labour Party as it was later renamed) in the conviction that it had no future. The result was

that by the elections of 1992 it had only seven deputies in the Supreme Council. Bitter faces were to be seen among the defectors when that number multiplied tenfold after the elections.

In March 1990, the Lithuanian Communist Party collected tens of thousands of signatures for a petition asking for Brazauskas's re-election. This made no impression on the Sąjūdis deputies, but increased the hostility of the Right to the independent Communists, whom they now accused of 'splitting the nation' just as pressure from Moscow was beginning.

Within days of the 11 March declaration of independence, demands came from the Congress of People's Deputies and from Gorbachov for its cancellation. Direct pressure followed through the seizure by Soviet paratroops of Lithuanian deserters from the Soviet army, housed in a psychiatric clinic near Vilnius under the 'protection' of the Red Cross flag. Lithuanian and other Baltic soldiers continued to desert in large numbers but, after this, had the sense to hide quietly with relatives and friends. The Soviet military captured some, but the great majority escaped. The Spring draft was a total failure in the Baltic, as in the Caucasus and much of the Western Ukraine. The High Command made periodic threats, but these became increasingly ritualistic as the entire local conscription machinery either collapsed or was taken over by local Baltic authorities as they set out to create their own armed forces.¹⁷

After the initial capture of deserters, the seizure began, initially by Soviet Interior Ministry troops, then in some cases by paratroops, of buildings in Vilnius owned by the Communist Party but now under the control of the majority Brazauskas party. The buildings were however of no governmental significance, and in several cases the independent LCP had agreed to pass them to academic institutions. Their seizure therefore served no useful purpose, and the unobtrusive military presence in them did not impinge on the life of the city, in whose heart they remained like lumps of cold, dark, invisible matter.

It is difficult to know whether Gorbachov's strategy was a further case of barking up the Communist tree, thinking the Party still identical with the State; or whether he was attempting to make the Soviet Communist Party the protector of 'extra-territorial rights' for Soviet citizens in an independent Lithuania; or whether he was simply completely baffled about what course to take.

The measures, however, only increased the determination and morale of ordinary Lithuanians. Those who, immediately after the declaration, had been critical of Landsbergis and Sąjūdis, became increasingly supportive, and popular demonstrations returned to their pre-independence dimensions. The West also became alarmed, and opinion grew in support

of Lithuania. By late spring, however, it had become clear that a continued oil blockade (the only sanction which really worked) would play havoc with the Lithuanian harvest and lead to severe food shortages. The blockade was, however, partly undermined by the Soviet military: individual soldiers sold military petrol on the black market, and on at least one occasion, an entire Soviet unit, with its transport, joined the harvest in return for a share of the crop (a throwback to the last decades of the Empire!)

The fuel shortage, and strong advice from Western leaders during her trips abroad, convinced Kazimiera Prunskienė to seek a compromise with Moscow through a 'moratorium' on the implementation of the declaration of independence, if not the declaration itself. Much of the Lithuanian Right continues to allege that Prunskienė's move resulted from orders from Moscow, or that she was blackmailed because of her alleged earlier connections with the KGB. But past KGB informers included the main leader of the Right, Virgilijus Čepaitis and (apparently) several other prominent deputies. There is no evidence that it led any of them to work against Lithuania in this period.

Prunskienė's advocacy of a moratorium marked the beginning of the split between her government and Landsbergis' parliamentary majority. The split was far from clear cut, because majorities in parliament were continually shifting, while the government itself included such leading radicals as Foreign Minister Algirdas Saudargas. Tension, however, resulted not simply from Prunskienė's 'compromising' policies, but also from uncertainties about the rights and powers of government and parliament respectively. Similar tensions have emerged elsewhere in the former Soviet Union. The split was long hidden from the public, in part to avoid direct confrontation, but also because Landsbergis finally, and with great reluctance, came round to the moratorium idea, even though he continued to throw responsibility for it on to Prunskienė.¹⁶

Despite its complicated and even murky genesis, the declaration of Lithuanian independence became a national talisman, if more for the politicians than for the mass of the population. Even moderate Sąjūdis deputies declared that 'we were not elected in February so as to suspend independence', or 'the people would not understand us if we were to do this': the declaration had become a Golden Calf, a god which they had made and to which they were now wholeheartedly devoted. This was true of course above all for Landsbergis, whose entire personality seems to have become bound up with the declaration.

The moratorium was accepted by the Supreme Council on 23 June, and Soviet oil shipments to the Lithuanian oil refinery at Mažeikiai were resumed immediately. The harvest was safe, and mass unemployment had been avoided, if temporarily. But the moratorium was approved only

with the proviso that it should follow full interstate negotiations between Lithuania and Moscow. The Praesidium and Parliament demonstrated their lack of confidence in Prunskienė by ordering that they, not the government, should form the negotiating commission. Since they also demanded that Moscow should agree to the Lithuanian agenda – in effect recognise the independence process – the talks never happened, nor did the moratorium. By mid-autumn in any case, Gorbachov had lost whatever interest he had in negotiation.

Prunskienė continues to insist that a great chance was lost by failing to open negotiations at a time when Moscow may have been conciliatory, but this is very questionable. The experience of Latvia and Estonia suggests that the Soviet government would have tried to stall serious negotiations indefinitely. The Balts in any case could have done nothing to prevent the ascendancy of the Soviet conservatives in autumn 1990, or the military intervention that followed, short of freezing the entire independence process in an attempt to help Gorbachov stabilise his position. This was the hope of many Baltic moderates, but formed no part of the radicals' agenda. These argued that the Soviet Union was bound to collapse anyway, and that the Baltic should simply stake an absolute legal position and wait for developments elsewhere to destroy the power of the Kremlin. In this the radicals were entirely correct, and their analysis sharper than that of many moderates and Western analysts. By contrast the policy of Prunskienė, by the winter of 1991, was manifestly bankrupt: in her position, a Western prime minister would have been forced to resign. It was the manner and timing of the move to bring her down, not the move itself, which left deep scars in Lithuanian political life.

The Lithuanian declaration of independence placed the Latvians and Estonians in a difficult position. Honour suggested similar declarations of full independence: it will be many years before the Lithuanians forgive their Baltic neighbours for their failure to issue these. Prudence, the plans already made, and above all the presence of the large Russian minorities, dictated a more gradual approach. As it was, the Lithuanian declaration and Moscow's response to it, resulted in a drastic reduction in local Russian support for the Latvian Popular Front, demonstrated by a declining vote between the first and second rounds of the election.

It had been feared that neither in Latvia nor Estonia would the Popular Front gain the necessary two-thirds majority to enact constitutional changes under their own (Soviet) statutes. In this eventuality, the plan of the radicals, and indeed the moderates, was for the Estonian and Latvian Congresses to declare independence. This would obviously have had grave consequences, undermining the

legitimacy of the independence process among local Russians, democrats in Russia, and Western governments.

In fact, thanks to Russian support (put by Dainis Ivāns at 30 per cent of the Russian vote in Latvia) and Russian apathy, the elections in both Latvia and Estonia led to two-thirds majorities for the Popular Fronts and associated pro-independence candidates. In Latvia, 68.2 per cent voted for the Popular Front and only 21.5 per cent for opponents of independence, with 10.3 per cent for 'neutrals' (most of whose representatives voted for independence).

The new Estonian Supreme Council adopted the most cautious of the three declarations – so much so that many Estonians have forgotten it was made. It simply cancelled the Soviet annexation, and declared that Estonia was in a period of transition to full independence. Much more important was the formation of a Popular Front government by Edgar Savisaar, with a cabinet made up largely of pro-independence former Communists. In the words of Professor Endel Lippmaa, chief Estonian negotiator with Moscow, in April 1990:

We have in fact done what Lithuania did, but by a long series of such small steps that it was difficult for Moscow to tell when exactly we got really nasty. What Lithuania did was take a big step, as if Moscow didn't exist.¹⁹

The limited nature of the Estonian declaration was in part the work of the national radicals. Loyal to the Congress, and denying in principle the legitimacy of the Supreme Council, they wished to preserve the 'sacred' symbols of the pre-1940 republic for a 'real' declaration of independence. On the eve of the new session of the Estonian Supreme Council, the council of the Estonian Congress passed a resolution declaring that in the 'transition period' Estonia could not be a real state, but supporting it in any case. Trivimi Velliste explained that,

We don't want to legitimise anything phoney as a cover for continued Soviet rule. We cannot declare independence twice, and there is no point in following the Lithuanians and declaring full *de facto* independence now when we have even less chance than the Lithuanians of actually controlling the country.

In a shrewdly prophetic comment, he added that,

We don't want to devalue the concept of independence. What will people feel and say the next morning if independence has been declared and nothing has changed? The achievement of real independence could last a year, more or less. The crucial thing is political developments in Russia. We don't know when or how the collapse of Communist rule in Russia will come, but it is already obvious that it is bound to happen.²⁰

A fortnight later, the Estonian Supreme Council upgraded its initial declaration to match that of the Latvians; in the name of Baltic solidarity, the Estonian Congress did not protest. On 29 April, the Kremlin had made a final attempt to head off the Latvian declaration: Soviet representatives in Moscow persuaded a Latvian negotiating delegation comprising representatives of both the Communist government and the Popular Front to agree to talks on joining a Soviet confederation. Gorbachov also offered Latvia the status of the Grand Duchy of Finland under the Tsars – full internal autonomy excluding defence and foreign affairs.²¹ Both offers were rejected by the Latvian Popular Front. While its leaders did not rule out a future confederation, they declared that negotiations would need to follow the achievement of real independence. Over the next fifteen months, negotiations on practical steps towards independence took place at regular intervals. There is little point, however, in detailing them, since most were mere formalities, the two parties setting out their positions again and again; the Soviet government had no interest in making significant concessions.

On 4 May the Latvian Supreme Council, in a law on 'The Renewal of the Independence of the Republic of Latvia', declared null and void the Soviet annexation, restored (but, as in Lithuania, immediately suspended) the constitution of 1922, and established a transition period leading to *de facto* independence, to be concluded by the convening of a Latvian parliament. Since by late 1992 this parliament had still not been convened, many Right-wing Latvians argue that the transition period was not terminated by the declaration of independence that accompanied the attempted Moscow coup on 21 August 1991, but is in fact still in force.

As in Lithuania and Estonia, the Latvian Supreme Council followed its main declaration with a subsidiary pronouncement on Latvia's accession to the human rights conventions of the UN and the CSCE, and with an appeal to the governments of the world to,

support the endeavours of the people of Latvia to achieve the complete renewal of the independence of Latvia and to give the new government full moral, diplomatic and possibly material assistance. In particular, we ask you to use all your international authority to persuade the government of the USSR to begin negotiations on an equal basis. . . . The Baltic question is an international issue. If Europe is to be reunified the Baltic question must be resolved.

Following the declaration, the leaders adjourned to the Daugava embankment, where – in sharp contrast to Lithuania – a huge crowd, tens of thousands strong, gathered to celebrate. Leaving the meeting, Popular Front Chairman Dainis Ivāns, then the most popular figure among Latvians, was bombarded with greetings and almost buried in flowers.

The declaration was accompanied by the election of a fresh Praesidium and government by the new majority. The Praesidium was headed as before by Anatolijs Gorbunovs, chosen for his popularity and ability to negotiate with the Kremlin, but above all because of the need to reassure the local Russian population. Gorbunovs was joined as vice-chairmen by Īvāns (who stepped down from his PF post) and by Andrejs Krastiņš, leader of the radical National Independence Party. The new government was headed by Popular Front vice-chairman Ivars Godmanis, a physicist who had newly joined the Party from the Centrist forces in the Front.

Many Balts remain bitterly disappointed by the absence of Western diplomatic recognition in 1990–91, and by the subsequent failure to put economic pressure on the Russian government to withdraw its troops from the Baltic states. Landsbergis repeatedly warned of the threat of 'another Munich' and, according to Prunskienė, 'suspicion that ... the Western states would betray Lithuania ran like a red thread through his policies and statements'.

Western concern with the fate of the Balts, and pressure on the Soviet government, was, however, unquestionably a key factor in deterring serious military action – against the Lithuanians in particular – in 1990, and in frustrating the plans of the Russian hardliners in January 1991. If the West had stood back, Gorbachov could not have crushed the Baltic nationalist movements, but the struggle for independence would have been much more difficult.

The 'Bloody Events': January to August 1991

Matters between the Baltic States and the Kremlin were therefore at an impasse when, in the autumn of 1990, Gorbachov swung towards the Soviet hardliners, rejecting the Shatalin economic reform plan and appointing Valentin Pavlov as Prime Minister and Boris Yeltsin as Interior Minister. How far he approved the detail of their actions in the Baltic States remains unknowable. As suggested in Chapter 7, one reason why both the January 1991 military intervention in the Baltic and the August counter-revolution failed was precisely that so few Soviet leaders were willing to take full responsibility.

In September 1990 a series of minor bomb attacks hit Soviet and military targets in Latvia. There seems little doubt these were in fact the work of Soviet hardliners, *provokatsii*, to create an excuse for military intervention and presidential rule from Moscow. From December, the Soviet High Command issued statements insisting that conscription would be implemented in the Baltic, using force if necessary.

At this point Edgar Savisaar's Estonian government demonstrated its

recreate a backward-looking, religiously-coloured nationalism seems a mere piece of baroque theatre, brilliant but brief. It is, however, too early to say if it is gone for ever, or whether a long period of grinding national poverty and political turmoil might resurrect it, as a national blanket against the intolerable cold of the modern age.

There were beautiful sides to Landsbergis' nationalism, but others which were profoundly ugly. The greatest charge against him is perhaps that unlike the national leaders with whom he would like to be compared – Churchill and de Gaulle – he left the nation more divided than when he became its leader, and Lithuanian democracy badly scarred. There is, moreover, no sign that he has learnt from his mistakes: up to March 1993 his central tactic remained that of suggesting that Brazauskas and his government are working for Moscow. His wider historical importance lies in the push he and Sajūdis gave to the disintegrating Soviet Union, and in the resistance he and many ordinary Lithuanians offered the Soviet backlash in January 1991. In neither case was Landsbergis' or Lithuania's contribution decisive: Soviet decline was prescribed by wider factors. But without him, and the Lithuanians, the course of events might have been quite considerably different.

It is for this contribution that Balts will always remember Landsbergis with a certain gratitude, however great their criticism. As to whether the disintegration of the Soviet Union – as opposed to the end of Communism – was a good thing for the Soviet peoples or humanity as a whole, this question will be decided by history.

Ethnic Estonian Politics, 1990–92

According to the schema in the introduction to this chapter, Estonian and Latvian politics in 1990–92 represented a protracted duel between the proponents of the First and Second Republics, ending in victory for the former.²⁹ The formal protagonists in this struggle were on one hand the Supreme Councils (in Russia, *Soviets*), the 'parliaments' of the Soviet Baltic republics which, after the spring elections of 1990, were dominated by pro-independence Popular Fronts; and on the other, the Congresses, set up by radical nationalist groups and elected only by pre-1940 citizens and their descendants.

In the course of 1989 and early 1990, the radicals carried out voluntary registration of the potential Congress electorates. Elections were held in the winter of 1990 and the Congresses met in March and May in Estonia and Latvia respectively. In each republic, an absolute majority of ethnic Latvians and Estonians (almost 700,000 of the latter) voted in the

Congress elections. A very few pre-1940 Russians participated or were elected as observers.

The Congresses called the Supreme Soviets 'institutions of foreign occupation', and denied their legitimacy, at least in constitutional questions and 'matters of key national importance', such as citizenship for the Russians. Supporters of the Supreme Councils denounced the Congresses as revolutionary forces which would bring disorder and Soviet intervention.

Membership of these two bodies, however, overlapped. In Estonia, while the National Independence Party, led by former dissidents, refused any part in the Supreme Council, several more moderate nationalist parties, like the Christian Democrats, while they identified with the Congress principles, came under the Popular Front umbrella and entered the Supreme Councils in the 1990 elections. Around 40 Congress members also sat in the Supreme Council.

In Latvia, the 'Citizens Committees' (which organised the Congress elections), remained aloof from the Supreme Council, but the National Independence Movement (LNNK) was initially in alliance with the Popular Front and entered the Supreme Council where its leader, Andrejs Krastiņš, became deputy chairman. On the other side, even many Centrist supporters of the Popular Fronts and the Supreme Councils nonetheless welcomed the creation of the Congresses, and participated in elections to them, out of fear that because of the Russian populations, the Supreme Councils might not achieve a two-thirds majority in favour of independence; or that Moscow would impose central rule and pack these bodies with Soviet stooges.

In this case, it was felt, it was essential that the nations should have some legitimate elected body to fall back on. In Lithuania, the preponderance of ethnic Lithuanians in the population meant that there was no need for an institution like the Congresses. In 1990, the governments of both Edgar Savisaar and Ivars Godmanis sought compromises with the Congresses. Savisaar addressed the first session of the Congress in Tallinn, though he broke an agreement to share power with it. His government, formed when the Supreme Council met in April 1990, however, contained no representatives of the radical nationalists, being formed above all from men who like himself had been senior members of the former Soviet establishment.

Three of Savisaar's ministers were still Communist Party members when the government was formed. Savisaar himself, like Social Democrat leader Marju Lauristin, had resigned from the Party a short while before. Lauristin, who for a long time was Savisaar's close ally, was professor of journalism at Tartu University and had signed mildly dissident statements during Brezhnev's rule (see Chapter 4). She was also the daughter of the first prime minister of Soviet Estonia, Johannes

Lauristin, and step-sister of Jaak Allik, previously Communist Ideology Secretary. That she ended up as an ally of the Congress says something for both their and her own flexibility.

From 1990-91, the Congresses appeared to be losing the struggle with the Supreme Councils. Balts who were content with them as a fall-back were alarmed at their radicalism and the possibility of conflict with Moscow, and their support waned. Their endless criticism of the Popular Front governments came to seem divisive and negative at a time when the nations were in danger. They were also deeply divided internally, not least in their attitude to co-operation with the Supreme Councils. An Estonian emigré analyst, Riina Kionka, wrote in January 1991 that by the third Estonian Congress session the previous October, 'most observers pronounced the Congress more-or-less dead as a politically influential movement'.

Congress denunciation of the Supreme Councils as 'occupation bodies' was undermined when the Supreme Council in Lithuania proclaimed independence. The Supreme Councils in Latvia and Estonia declared *de jure* independence in 1990, and *de facto* independence in August 1991. It was the Supreme Council that the Estonian people rallied to defend when attacked by Soviet loyalist demonstrators on 15 May 1990. Thereafter support for the Congresses among ethnic Estonians and Latvians never rose above 25 per cent.

Ultimately, however, a large number of former Popular Front deputies in both Latvia and Estonia came to accept the Congress position on restitution of the First Republics and especially on the refusal of automatic citizenship to Russian 'immigrants'. There are various secondary reasons for this, including the intellectual and financial influence of large parts of the Baltic emigrations in the West, many of whom took a hardline restitutionist and anti-Russian position. There are also two central reasons. First, the restitutionists had at least a clear image of what they sought, backed by the golden glow which time and Soviet rule had cast over the First Republics. Their opponents spoke of liberalism, democracy and a modern society, but their own understanding of these terms was often too deficient for them to argue effectively for them.

Even more important, however, was the Russian question. The restitutionists, in arguing openly for strict limits on Russian citizenship and more covertly for encouraging or even driving them to leave, tapped an almost universal vein of anti-Russian feeling within the Baltic populations. In contrast, the moderate Popular Fronts' politicians who argued in favour of granting citizenship automatically to the Russians (the 'Zero Option'), did so, with rare exceptions, not out of commitment to a multicultural liberal democracy, or to civic values, but simply out of fear: fear of local Russian revolt or at least obstruction of the

independence process, invasion by Moscow, or diplomatic isolation from a critical West.

When none of these things happened not merely did the moderates lose their public arguments, but much of their internal support for Russian rights vanished, and their public position shifted rapidly. Thus the swing of Marju Lauristin to an anti-Russian position after the achievement of independence in August 1991 can be explained partly by political 'necessity'. Her long negotiations, as head of the Citizenship Commission, to construct a more generous citizenship law, were finally ended by a wrecking motion on 16 October 1991, after which she told me that,

I now support going back to the naturalisation law of 1938. We have no other choice, given the deep conflicts that exist over this issue. We have to go back to the only law that is there, that has legitimacy.

Thereafter, however, Lauristin's remarks about Russians and Russia took on a new, more hostile tinge, perhaps the result of her own long-suppressed feelings of hostility, or perhaps a more complicated process of justifying to herself her change of position.

Only a very few Balts, like the Estonian poet Jaan Kaplinski, the Latvian Foreign Minister Jānis Jurkāns, or the Latvian emigré Nils Muiznieks, continued supporting Russian rights because they felt that it was right to do so, or because they disliked the idea of a narrow, stuffy, ethnic-based state; and their arguments cut increasingly less ice with the bulk of their compatriots.

Savisaar has also been a consistent advocate of compromise with the Russians, though his enemies have claimed this is only because of a calculation that when or if large numbers of Russians do in fact become citizens, they will vote for him out of gratitude. His supporters say that his position is based on an enlightened assessment of the need for ethnic harmony.

What his friends argue is difficult to say, because he has so few. Even by post-Soviet standards, Edgar Savisaar is an abrasive figure whose political problems have been partly due to his having alienated so many former allies. He was known as 'Piggy' by some Estonian officials, and not only because of his weight. Savisaar's crude manners are a feature of all too many post-Soviet politicians, and led to much unnecessary strife. His arrogance and abnormal sensitivity to criticism are also doubtless due to his origins, as the illegitimate son of a woman whom his enemies allege was Russian.

Although almost 70 per cent of the deputies elected to the Estonian Supreme Council in March 1990 belonged to the Popular Front, and continued to do so until after the achievement of independence in August

1991, it would be more accurate to say that the parliament was divided into four loose groups, only one of them wholly outside the Front. This group was made up of Soviet loyalists, and was overwhelmingly Russian, just as the others were overwhelmingly Estonian; it has been discussed earlier and can be discounted here because it played almost no part in the political disputes of the Estonians themselves. Savisaar's attempts to build bridges with moderate members of this group were frustrated by opposition from other Estonian politicians and the hardline attitudes of the Soviet loyalists themselves.

Of the three Estonian groups in parliament, the largest was the 'core' Popular Front, made up of the sort of people who had created the original party in 1988: junior Communist Party members and reformist but non-dissident intellectuals. In 1992, after numerous defections, this group transformed itself into a Front party under Savisaar's leadership, was defeated in the election, and went into opposition.

The second group was made up of the forty or so radical nationalist deputies who also sat in the Congress. In 1992 these were to form the *Isamaa* (Fatherland) moderate nationalist alliance, and the focus of the government of Mart Laar. They also were mainly intellectuals, though generally younger and more dynamic than the 'core' Popular Frontists, with fewer connections to the old Communist system. Unlike the more radical National Independence Party, however, their leaders were not ex-dissidents.

The third group consisted of senior Communists who had held power before the March 1990 elections, led by former Prime Minister Indrek Toome. At the end of 1989, with the Party already clearly doomed, they formed the *Vaba Eesti* (Free Estonia) group; most left the Communist Party, which by now had split between Russians and an Estonian rump under Enn-Arno Sillari. The rump diminished steadily, and failed to win any seats in the October 1992 election. Free Estonia continued to play a prominent role, and after many twists and turns, eventually gave birth to the *Kindel Kodu* (Secure Home) party, which came second in the 1992 elections.

Leading members of Secure Home tended to have been very much more senior in the State (and sometimes the Party) apparatus than the Popular Frontists. They harboured considerable resentment against Savisaar for having excluded them from power, even though there were in fact several leading former Communists in his cabinet. Arnold Rüütel, chairman of the Supreme Council before and after the 1990 election, was close to this group, though by keeping his associations discreet this silver fox of the Baltic political scene preserved a wholly unearned reputation for being 'above politics'. His anodyne phraseology expertly serviced the Estonian need for calm and reassurance, and concealed his lack of intelligence.

Rüütel, like Gorbunovs and even Brazauskas (in his Minotaurian fashion) is a handsome man in the Soviet understanding of the word. His manner is pleasant and unassuming, and he was described as 'hopelessly likeable' by one journalist who strongly disapproved of him and his retinue of sleazy ex-apparatchiks. Meanwhile, Rüütel covered himself with the nationalists by moving steadily to a hardline position on the question of Russian citizenship – although, in contrast to his counterpart Anatolijs Gorbunovs in Latvia, this probably also corresponded to his own deeper feelings. Other Free Estonia figures, such as Toome, also moved towards an increasingly nationalist position.

Although Rüütel was involved in autumn 1990 in the first concerted attack on Savisaar's government – by an unholy alliance of the Free Estonia group and the Congress supporters – he never showed his hand, throughout the period of Savisaar's government, in the attempts to undermine the Premier. The first attack took the curious form of an accusation that the government, and specifically the Foreign Minister (and later President) Lennart Meri, had betrayed Estonian interests in collusion with the Bush administration by failing to secure a guarantee of Baltic legal independence in the 'Two plus Four' agreement on German Unity. It turned into a general attack on Savisaar, with the Congress supporters and Free Estonia jointly demanding his resignation and the formation of a government of national unity.

Leader of the attack on Meri was another minister, Professor Endel Lippmaa. A former senior member of the Soviet scientific establishment, Professor Lippmaa was closest to Free Estonia (later to Secure Home) and to Rüütel, although he posed as an independent. He showed no loyalty to the Savisaar government, although he remained in it until July 1991 as Minister without Portfolio for relations with Moscow.³⁰

Though, before August 1991, Savisaar was repeatedly attacked by Lippmaa and others for his conciliatory policy towards Moscow, there is no evidence this lost him popularity with the cautious and pragmatic Estonians. On the contrary, he gained through being seen to have averted in Estonia the sort of Soviet attack which occurred in the other Baltic States in January 1991.

Throughout this period Savisaar held regular meetings with Soviet commanders in Estonia, to resolve any local sources of strife. In this way he also secured tacit Soviet agreement to a large part of the Estonian economic reform programme. The reforms failed to halt a steep decline in the Estonian economy, but provided a much better base for Western investment than elsewhere in the Baltic. This did not of course stop ordinary Estonians grumbling; while the educated classes were growing critical of Savisaar's dictatorial style. Much of the opposition was directed at his attempts to turn the Popular Front from a broad umbrella movement into a disciplined party – just as Landsbergis and Čepaitis



19 Anatolijs Gorbunovs, Arnold Rüütel and Vytautas Landsbergis, 12 May 1990.

sought to do in Lithuania, albeit from a very different political standpoint. Savisaar, however, could not count on the support of many politicians who were otherwise still his allies: Marju Lauristin, for example, had no intention of seeing her own power and the Social Democratic Party vanish into a Popular Front party under Savisaar's dictatorial leadership.

Like Landsbergis, Savisaar could not decide what he most wanted. On one hand, for the Popular Front to become *his* party, it would inevitably have to become much smaller and relinquish its claim to represent the whole nation. On the other, Savisaar wanted to preserve the Front as *the* national movement, and continue denouncing political parties in general as 'little groups which splinter society and bicker amongst themselves'.³¹

The critical damage to Savisaar's popularity and prestige came in June–July 1991, and was above all the work of Lippmaa. Unlike the obscure 'Two plus Four' controversy, which bewildered most Estonians, Lippmaa's second attack orchestrated a national consensus – on the issue of Russian rights and Estonian territorial integrity.

In early summer 1991, it seemed as if Soviet attempts to separate Russian-speaking north-eastern Estonia were moving towards a critical point (see Chapter 7). Savisaar decided to try to divide the Russians, and win over the moderate elements, by offering the status of a free-trade zone

to the town of Narva. This was very much less than the full autonomy the hardline Soviet loyalists had demanded, but it provoked a furious response among Estonian nationalists, who accused Savisaar of preparing to surrender Estonian territory. The campaign was led by Lippmaa who – finally – resigned in protest, and engineered the rejection of the proposal during its second reading in the Supreme Council. In the course of the debate, Lippmaa, speaking of Savisaar, asked how a man with a Russian mother could defend Estonian interests. Shortly afterwards, the failure of the August counter-revolution rendered Savisaar's offer obsolete.

The achievement of independence, without bloodshed, boosted Savisaar's popularity. His power, however, never really recovered from the defeat of his Narva policy, and there were increasing calls from all sides for a government of national unity. Allies such as Lauristin distanced themselves and, in the autumn, Savisaar was strongly attacked for refusing to implement a voucher scheme for mass participation in privatisation which had been agreed by parliament. His position was further damaged by his covert attempts to help create a moderate Russian political force in Estonia, the Russian Democratic Movement, formed soon after the coup. If most Estonians had been prepared to compromise with the Russians over citizenship and language questions, this moderate movement might have developed into a valuable group of *interlocuteurs valables*. As it was, it was soon forced into opposition and by the following year had formed an alliance with the old hardline Communists forming together the 'Estonian Assembly of Russian Speakers'. As the Estonian position hardened, even Savisaar's Minister for Ethnic Relations, Dr Artur Kuznetsov, was dismissed and forced into opposition. There was then no Russian on the Estonian side of politics for whom local Russians felt any trust. When the new Centre-Right government of Mart Laar took power a year later, no non-Estonians were included, and the Ministry for Ethnic Relations was abolished, although in other ways this government has sought good relations with the local Russians.

After the Moscow coup, loyalist Russian town councils in the north-east were dismissed, and fresh elections called for 20 October. The Communists were returned to power in Narva and Sillamae, while in Kohtla-Järve a democratic alliance of Estonians and Russians was returned, splitting the anti-Estonian position in the region. Since then, the threat of a secession of the North East appears to have receded, and local demonstrations in favour of autonomy have received very little support. In general, local Russian groups in Estonia now stressed their loyalty to Estonia and tried to distance themselves from their pro-Soviet pasts. The Russian Assembly stressed that it was not trying to become an alternative power-structure along the lines of previous Soviet attempts.

In September, a compromise between the Supreme Council and the Congress, which Savisaar had long resisted, was formalised with the creation of a Constitutional Assembly made up equally of representatives of both bodies. Given the numbers of radical nationalists in the Supreme Council, this inevitably led to a new constitution drawn up on the basis of that of 1922. Seven of the thirty representatives elected by the Supreme Council were Russians, but they were hopelessly outnumbered and had little influence.

The new constitution provided for a parliamentary government with a largely symbolic presidency. Parliament was to be elected by a complicated voting system, half proportional representation and half constituency. The failings of the 1922 constitution, which had helped destroy democracy during the 1920s and 1930s were to be avoided by strengthening the power of the prime minister and by creating a four per cent hurdle for parties wishing to enter parliament – though this was undermined by allowing members of parties which failed to secure this minimum support to get in by winning their constituencies.

The new voting rules encouraged the formation of a number of large electoral blocks, which contested the election in September 1992. Thus Lauristin and the Social Democrats, together with various other former Centrist Popular Front leaders (like Ignar Fjuk, who had split with Savisaar), came together to form the Moderate Alliance; the Christian Democrats and various other Rightist groups formed the Fatherland block, and parties representing the former Communist establishment made up the curiously named 'Safe Homes' movement – an attempt to play on Estonian fears of rising rates of crime. By the end of 1992, these blocks had cohered fairly well, and the Estonian political scene was more disciplined than in the great majority of post-Communist countries.

On 6 November, in a separate decision on the advice of the Constitutional Assembly, the Supreme Council decided to revert to the Citizenship Law of 1938, restoring citizenship automatically to pre-1940 citizens and their descendants (this was ultimately extended to emigrés as well), and stripping the existing Russian 'immigrant' population of its existing citizenship and forcing it through a rigorous naturalisation process. This was another defeat for Savisaar, a long-time proponent of the 'Zero Option' on citizenship.

The death-blow for Savisaar as Prime Minister came in January 1992, ostensibly the result of a severe energy crisis provoked by cuts in fuel supplies from Russia. Heating of homes and food supplies had plummeted at the coldest time of year. Emergency plans were drawn up to evacuate hundreds of thousands from Tallinn to the countryside, though in the event the evacuation was staved off by Western aid. Savisaar was accused of failing to prepare for the cuts by seeking supplies on the free market.

By this point, however, a majority of Estonian deputies were opposed to Savisaar, and the measure succeeded only with the support of the Russian and Soviet loyalist deputies, including three Soviet officers. These deputies actually outnumbered Savisaar's Estonian supporters. When the realisation dawned on Estonians that their government was dependent upon Russian votes, the anger was such that many of Savisaar's remaining supporters abandoned him, the attempt to form a commission to draw up the emergency powers was defeated, and Savisaar himself resigned. He devoted the following months to transforming what was left of the Popular Front into a party of the Centre-Left under his strict control, and to consolidating its role as the chief Left-wing, or rather populist critic of the effects of free market reform on ordinary people.

Given the suffering imposed by that reform, Savisaar is bound to play an important future political role as a spokesman for its victims. On the other hand, under the parliamentary constitution, Estonian governments for the foreseeable future will be coalitions, and since Savisaar had made himself so unpopular, the other parties are unlikely to enter a coalition with the Popular Front so long as he was leader of it.

To succeed Savisaar, a caretaker government was appointed to hold office until the introduction of the constitution and new elections. The new Prime Minister was the former Transport Minister, Tiit Vähi, a colourless former state manager from Southern Estonia who was close to Rüütel and the former Free Estonia (now Secure Home) group. The great triumph of his nine months in office was the successful introduction in June of the long-awaited Estonian currency, the Kroon (see Chapter 9). Otherwise, Vähi's government worked competently, although there were accusations that corruption and 'spontaneous privatisation' had flourished among his friends from the state managerial class. His controversial appointment of another member of that class, Ulo Uluots, as Defence Minister (over a force naturally largely composed of radical nationalists) led almost to a loss of state control over the Home Guard, which in the summer engaged in a series of clashes with the Russian army against the orders of the government.

On 28 June 1992, the constitution was adopted by an overwhelming majority – not surprisingly, given that all the main parties from both Supreme Council and Congress supported it. The Congress announced that it would dissolve itself as soon as the new parliament (*Riikikogu*) met after the election. A second proposal included in the referendum – to extend citizenship automatically to the five thousand or so non-citizens who had applied for it – was defeated by 53 per cent to 46 per cent. The introduction of a constitution by national consensus distinguishes Estonia from all other former Soviet republics but Lithuania, and is a further element in its international prestige – despite the exclusion of the great majority of its Russian population.

The emergence in May–June 1992 of opposition to the new constitution from a position even more radical than that of the National Independence Party and the Congress was, however, a surprise. Initially called 'Restitution', it emerged originally from the self-styled 'Government in Exile', an émigré group based in Sweden. Endel Lippmaa was among its leaders. 'Restitution' argued that the new constitution was illegal and redundant, since the constitution of 1938 remained in force. However, given that constitution incorporated an authoritarian presidency, and had been introduced during the dictatorship of Konstantin Päts, even the Congress found it unacceptable. Inconsistently enough, the 'Government in Exile' and the 'Estonian Citizen' also party to which it gave birth, rejected the 1938 Citizenship law as too liberal and called for it to be amended to restrict naturalisation still further.

Estonian Citizen was led by Jüri Toomepuu, a bald, whiskery, extremely volatile retired Lieutenant-Colonel of the US Army who, according to one of his own leading supporters, favours cut-outs of Rambo with his own head super-imposed upon them. In the election of 20 September, Toomepuu won twice as many personal votes as any other candidate, helping his party to an 8 per cent of the total vote and 8 seats in parliament. His supporters are bitterly anti-Russian, and have formed a 'Decolonisation Committee' to draw up plans to facilitate the Russian leaving. Not surprisingly in view of Toomepuu's past, they are also passionately interested in the armed forces.

The Royalist Party – an Estonian equivalent to Poland's 'Orange Alternative' – established as a sort of joke by a group of actors, television personalities and intellectuals, also polled 8 per cent of votes and the same number of seats. Some of the party's leaders are genuine monarchists who believe that a monarchy under a Swedish prince would help to restore Estonian traditional society and avoid vulgar competition for the top state post, but most simply want to liven the Estonian scene.

The Royalists, and the Estonian Citizen group, evidently benefitted from the protest votes of an electorate weakened by economic suffering and disaffected by the main political parties. I asked a Royalist voter if she really wanted a King: 'Oh no,' she replied, 'I'm a very moderate Royalist'. Few Royalist supporters had heard the widespread rumours that they were not a joke after all, but a group deliberately and secretly created by Savisaar to split the Right-wing vote.

The turn-out at the September 1992 election was 67 per cent, markedly lower than in the years of the independence struggle, but still high by some Western standards. Public attendance at election rallies had been minimal, and on polling day many voters did not know the difference between the parties: indeed many claimed the same platform. None – not even the Popular Front – advocated improved rights for the Russians:

with so few Russians in the electorate, there was no advantage in doing so. All the main parties now paid at least lip service to the free market and the restoration of the forms of the First Republic, while differing in emphasis. Even Secure Home claimed to be a 'Centre-Right' party, which as a party of former Communists turned private businessmen and 'proprietors of state industry, it indeed was. What characterised Fatherland and the National Independence Party in particular was 'desovietisation', the purging of the state and even of industry of the sort of people represented by Secure Home. Whether it would work was not clear.

The full results of the election to the 100-seat chamber were: Fatherland (*Isamaa*), 29 seats; Secure Home (*Kindel Kodu*), 17; Popular Front (Savisaar), 15; Moderates (Lauristin), 12; National Independence Party, 10; Estonian Citizen (*Eesti Kodanik*), 8; Royalists, 8; Greens, 1; and Entrepreneurs Party, 1. The Fatherland and Moderate alliances and the National Independence Party formed a coalition government, as they had indicated they would, under Fatherland leader Mart Laar, a cheerful and apparently able 32-year-old former historian. After two defections, from the Estonian Citizen and Secure Home groups, the government's majority rose to three, but remained precarious.

Fatherland had stood on a mixture of free-market economics, restitutionalism, and moderate nationalism, under the overall slogan 'cleaning house', represented by an election poster depicting a man with a broom.³²² The symbolism was widely taken as a reference to the unpopularity and corruption of the former Soviet rule, but Russians in the republic inevitably took it as a reference to them.

While the election results by no means represented an unequivocal endorsement of plans for the restitution of property or free market economics, Fatherland certainly presented a more modern image than its rivals. Secure Home did best among rural voters who supported the old Collective Farm leadership mainly out of anger at the worsening economic climate and at the manner in which decollectivisation had been implemented.

The membership of the new government was evenly balanced between its three constituent parties, and included several non-party experts and three Estonian émigrés. It had a strongly intellectual cast, and was seen by foreign observers as highly honest, potentially able, and relatively free from links with the Communist bureaucracy or the new 'business' circles. The most unexpected appointment was that of Lagle Parek as Interior Minister. The choice of a woman ex-political prisoner, without administrative experience, as head of an overwhelmingly male, and still largely Russian security force seemed provocative. Parek was also soon being accused of failure to get to grips with the job.

During the election campaign party differences were evident not

simply in terms of ideology, but also in physical appearance. Secure Home's leadership, as might have been expected, consisted of solid-looking middle-aged men in business suits, very much on the old Soviet leadership pattern. The suits were now often of excellent Western design, but like the haircuts, very conservative. Fatherland's image was decidedly younger and more stylish. Its leaders wore up-to-date Western suits – but good ones, not the flashy variety favoured by most post-Soviet businessmen – and wore them with a certain air. Beards were much in evidence. The party's support among Estonian youth was greatly helped by the endorsement of the country's leading rock and pop bands.

The activists of the Popular Front and the Moderates, by contrast, looked like people who had just missed the bus: 1970s-style sideburns, clothes stylish a decade ago; indeed a very Soviet time-lag. Its supporters too tended to be about ten years older than those of the Fatherland, who were in general those whose adult lives had coincided with Gorbachov. The Popular Frontists, by contrast, were people whose formative years had been spent under Brezhnev, and who already had a place in society.

The former dissident leadership of the National Independence party evidently thinks the issue of clothes and image to be frivolous, although some of its leaders have a tweedy, musty respectability probably derived from pre-1940 family traditions. Its election poster portrayed a man in a top hat, like an advertisement for a Fred Astaire movie, meant to demonstrate a desire for a return to the pre-1940 status quo. The Royalists have appeared in public wearing everything from shamanistic headdresses to dustbin-liners.

In the first round of voting for the presidency, simultaneous with the parliamentary election, there were four candidates. By far the most popular was the existing chairman, Arnold Rüütel. So strongly was the intellectual tide now running against former leading Communists, however, that only Secure Home supported him. Throughout the campaign he was plagued by questions about his Communist past, and especially about his official links with the KGB. Fatherland fielded former Foreign Minister (then Ambassador to Finland) Lennart Meri; the Popular Front put up the leading Estonian-Canadian academic, Rein Taagepera, and the National Independence Party, Lagle Parek. The last three candidates declared they were standing against Arnold Rüütel rather than against each other. The Silver Fox was finally cornered: he could not win outright on the first, popular, ballot, and when the vote went to parliament, a majority of deputies were already pledged to reject him.

The popular vote for Rüütel was 41.8 per cent, as against 29.5 per cent for Meri, 23.3 per cent for Taagepera, and 4.2 per cent for Parek. To the considerable anger of ordinary Estonians, parliament blithely

disregarded the near certainty that Rüütel would win a second-round popular vote, and selected Meri. Rüütel did not trouble to hide his chagrin, rejecting parliament's thanks for his services to Estonian independence with the words that they were like 'a waiter who has spilt wine over your coat and then clumsily tries to mop it up'.

The new President, Lennart Meri, is one of the most vivid and interesting characters in Baltic politics; but as a headline in the *Baltic Independent* had it, 'Charm and Ability Leave Questions Unanswered'. He is the nearest thing Estonia has to a 'cultural politician', like Landsbergis, and was chosen as a symbol of the substitution of Estonian for Soviet culture. Like Landsbergis, however, he had defended that culture from within the Soviet system, not outside it.

Like Landsbergis too, Meri's image stems partly from his family: his father was a senior diplomat during the First Republic, and as a youth Meri was deported with his father to Siberia. He made play with this pedigree during his campaign, though it rebounded on him when his father was accused of co-operating with the NKVD: how otherwise, it was asked, could he have been allowed to leave Siberia in 1945, just as tens of thousands of Estonians were heading in the opposite direction.

Meri's past, like that of many now attacking the old Communist establishment, was indeed not spotless. As a senior official of the Estonian-Soviet Writers' Union he collaborated with the Communist system in order to defend Estonian culture. In this role he was naturally compelled to make many speeches in praise of Marxism-Leninism, which his enemies now gleefully quote against him. This was also true of Landsbergis.

There was little wrong in this: it was the basic position of most of the intellectuals now supporting Meri's Fatherland government, as well as those behind the Moderates and the Popular Front, all of whom criticised the 'foolhardy courage' of the dissidents who later formed the National Independence Party. It was very probably the best policy for Estonia, let alone for Meri, though it sits uneasily with the favoured image of national resistance. As the *Baltic Independent* commented,

Perhaps the biggest question mark over Meri's presidency is his association with Fatherland's election slogan, 'Cleaning House'. That someone who, as much as any other Estonian, showed how working inside the system could benefit his country, has now joined the anti-nomenclatura campaign in earnest, casts some doubt on his integrity and sincerity.³³³

As an adult Meri returned to Siberia to make films and write books with a certain nationalist agenda on the various Finno-Ugric tribes of the region, cousins to the Estonians. His most famous work is *Silver-Grey*, an imaginative reconstruction of Estonian prehistory. In appearance, Meri

has the air of an inquisitive tortoise which has extended its head too far out of its shell and become stuck. In manner, and in breadth of culture, he is a European gentleman of the old school. His personal charm is very great, and his intellectual enthusiasm infectious. In a Baltic panorama in which former Communists and members of the new Right (often of course one and the same) often vie with each other in the [Soviet] crude and provincial narrowness of their attitudes, he represents an older and nobler past. Like Landsbergis, though, this sometimes leads him to patronise ordinary Estonians.

Meri is, however, not without his eccentricities. During my first interview with him – as Foreign Minister – in June 1991, he quickly overran the fifteen minute appointment allocated by his staff. An hour later, the Minister was cheerfully recounting the story of an expedition to Yakutia in which he ended up eating his own horse. He then whisked me off in his official car to an exhibition of Russian culture in Estonia under the First Republic, a subject in which he is conspicuously knowledgeable. His affection for Russian classical culture is deep.

Lennart Meri's charming but unpredictable behaviour often infuriates and exhausts his staff. His downfall as Foreign Minister came after he told a press conference in March 1992 that Estonia should act as a *cordon sanitaire* between the West and Russia, where 'massive hunger and cannibalism' was emerging.³⁴ The Estonian government was forced to distance itself from the statement, indicating it sought to act as a bridge, not a barrier. And Meri's plain talking is both splendid and dangerous. At the Helsinki summit of the CSCE in July 1992, Meri, though at that stage only the Estonian Ambassador to Finland, marched into a meeting of the Baltic leaders with George Bush and, addressing him as 'George', informed him his administration possessed neither a Russian nor a Baltic policy. In the words of an American diplomat, 'before that, Bush hardly remembered that the Balts existed. Now, thanks to Meri, he is furious with them'.

A few weeks after taking office, Meri was already embroiled in a dispute with the government over his attempts to run aspects of Estonian foreign policy. Under the constitution, the powers of the President are very strictly limited and do not include any role in government – but no-one who knows Meri ever thought that he would be able to keep within such limits.

As Estonia set out as a full-fledged state, the question of whether its politicians general would respect the rules and conventions of government was central to the country's future. At the beginning of 1993 there were two main problems facing the new coalition government. The first, that of the Russian minority, was a quiescent but continuing threat. The government's approach seemed a sensible mixture of firmness in

principle and conciliation in practice. The National Independence Party, however, came under pressure from its radical supporters, and began to demand that non-citizens should even be barred from standing for local office. One of the permanent dangers of coalition government in Estonia is that policy towards the Russians may become more severe simply through the need to keep unstable coalitions together. The other is that majority government itself will prove impossible, leading to weak minority administrations.

The dangers are exacerbated by the fragility of the economy: for the foreseeable future much of the population is going to suffer great economic hardship. This, after only a few months in power, had contributed to a steep drop in the popularity of the coalition parties, and the government was coming under intense pressure from pensioners and workers to spend more on social welfare and subsidies. The sacking of officials in the name of 'desovietisation' led to accusations of party favouritism and incompetence in the appointments system.

Most worrying was the way in which the extreme nationalists of Estonian Citizen appeared to benefit from these problems. Their support grew sharply at the start of 1993, as nationalist voters became angry with the pragmatism of the Laar government. Estonian citizens also of course gained because of economic suffering. At the beginning of 1993, the signs for Estonia, however, looked generally bright. In comparison not simply with the other former Soviet republics, but with much of Eastern Europe as well, this former colony had already gone a long way towards creating the fabric of a prosperous, modern, independent and constitutional state.

Ethnic Latvian Politics, 1990–92

Latvia moved more slowly than the other Baltic States towards a new constitution and party political system, in part because of the larger Russian minority.

Their numerous representatives in the Supreme Council made it more difficult than in the other republics to create stable alliances of deputies behind particular reforms. A key cause of the delay in creating a new Latvian constitution was the fact that the Latvian deputies could not decide on the question of citizenship for the 'immigrants'.³⁵

The power of Russian Soviet loyalist elements in Latvia was indicated, upon the declaration of *de jure* independence and the formation of the Godmanis government on 4 May 1990, by demonstrations of pro-Soviet forces, and Soviet officers, outside the parliament building, and a flood of threats from Rubiks and the Soviet Communist Party. In addition the (mainly Russian) Riga police refused to accept the new Interior Minister, insisting on the re-appointment of the previous minister, Šteinbriks, a

many Russians within Latvia. The Russian business community in Latvia was relieved that the threat of a national-populist economic policy had greatly lessened. However, the citizenship law proposed in November 1993 by the coalition government was still tough enough to draw international criticism and worry many Russians, while not being nearly tough enough for the radical nationalist opposition. The continuing economic hardship of large numbers of both ethnic Latvians and ethnic Russians made a swing to radical nationalism an enduring threat, while the rise of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy increased the risk that violent protest might be exported from Russia to Latvia.

The Baltic Independence Movements and the Baltic Russians

Viewed with hindsight, much of the Latvian and Estonian propaganda directed towards both the Baltic Russians and the West during the years 1988–91 has a rather ironic ring. One of the principal charges against Latvia and Estonia is that their national leaderships have broken their word on Russian rights. The question of the legal and moral justification for it is a separate issue, discussed in the Conclusion.

In March 1990, I wrote in *The Times* that,

The Popular Front in Latvia emphasises that its struggle is for 'popular rule, economic prosperity and social justice' for *all* nationalities. . . . The Front's approach represents the triumph of enlightenment and common sense over the personal feelings of its leaders towards the Russian community, which are rarely amicable. . . .³⁸

Jānis Jurkāns, then the International Relations chief of the Popular Front of Latvia, told me in February 1990 that,

We are trying to persuade the local Russians that we are going to build a multi-ethnic democracy in Latvia, with equal rights for all; but they have been fed so many Soviet lies that it is difficult to persuade them. . . .³⁹

The second Congress of the Popular Front, held two months previously, had stressed that the goal of the PF was independence, but also 'the guarantee of the equality of all people living in Latvia, irrespective of their social status, nationality, religious or party affiliation'.⁴⁰

At this stage Popular Front leaders lost no opportunity to stress, at least to an international audience, that the Front was supported by many local Russians – 30 per cent of them, according to Ivars Godmanis, then the Popular Front's Prime Minister-designate. Shortly before assuming office in May, he stressed that 'independence can only be achieved if the different national groups go down the road together. . . . Sovereignty and

independence are not questions of nationality. . . . Every ethnic group in Latvia is guaranteed equal rights'.⁴¹

The rhetoric of a trans-national, Latvian and Russian struggle for democracy was employed strongly in Latvia during the events of January and August 1991. The slogan of the 1863 Polish rebellion against the Tsar, 'For Our Freedom and Yours', was widely used and painted on barricades outside the parliament in Riga.

Godmanis's government went on favouring a policy of compromise with the local Russians up to the elections of 1993; but the ground was cut from under its feet by a general shift to a more hardline position. Thus by its Fourth Congress, in November 1991, the Latvian Popular Front was referring to the Russians that had entered the republic under Soviet rule as 'illegal immigrants', while the PF chairman, Romualdas Ražukas, stressed that 'The PF supports the concepts basic to the Citizens Congress' – the radical nationalist body with which much of the Popular Front had always been at odds.⁴²

Jurkāns, by now Foreign Minister, found himself progressively isolated by his abrasive arguments on behalf of the Russians, and in October 1992 was abandoned by Prime Minister Godmanis and forced to resign.

One aspect of the shift in opinion was the increasing emphasis on the fact that a majority of Russians had opposed independence, which contrasts oddly with the public claims by Latvian leaders, in March 1991, that a majority of Russians had voted for independence in the Latvian referendum that month.⁴³ Most of the moderates and every leading member of a national minority had left the PF by its Fourth Congress; indeed not one Russian spoke at it. The Congress adopted a programme, widely at variance with those of its first three Congresses, which called for a return to the Constitution of 1922, and the restriction of citizenship to pre-1940 citizens and their descendants. According to this programme, the extension of citizenship to others should only be considered after the withdrawal of Soviet troops, and by a parliament elected by the pre-1940 electorate. The Popular Front in the country and the majority Popular Front deputies in parliament split on the issue.⁴⁴

The shift to an anti-Russian position is partly due to a general hegemony of nationalist over liberal pluralist ideas, and emigré liberals have linked defence of Russian rights to defence of liberal democracy in general. Thus the Latvian emigré academic Nils Muižnieks, in an article for *Atmoda*, posed the question: 'Independent Latvia: Latvian or Democratic?'. Talk at later Latvian Popular Front Congresses, of the need for 'Latvian-thinking people', and of how 'specific groups of people' (in other words, Russians, Jews and former Communists) were 'plundering our national wealth' was deeply jarring for any emigré liberal, however patriotic.

At the conference of the Association for the Advancement of Baltic

Studies in Toronto in June 1992, Dr Toivo Miljan of Wilfred Laurier University warned of the possibility of the development of parallels with South Africa and said that Estonians 'must recognise the civic rights of those living amongst you [but] ... the Latvians, Lithuanians and Estonians weren't tolerant in the 1930s, so where are they supposed to get it from now?' This highlights the fact that extreme nationalist hostility to the Russians in Latvia and Estonia is not simply the result of the massive immigration under Soviet rule; it is also due to a direct and explicit revival, by some of today's radical nationalist groups, of the extreme nationalist ideas and stifling cultural atmosphere of the Baltic States of the 1930s. According to one Latvian liberal: 'the question isn't just the Russians. The question is whether there will still be oxygen to breathe in Riga.'

In February 1990, a Jewish friend in Tallinn (and a strong supporter of independence), Eugenie Loov, told me simply that:

The greatest mistake of the leaders of our independence movement was not to make a substantial appeal to the Russians in Estonia at the very beginning. The reason they did not do this is because they hate them.⁴⁵

In many cases this appears to have been true: Popular Front representatives in both Latvia and Estonia simply disguised their real feelings in order not to play into the hands of the Soviet government and loyalists. In other cases, the commitment to national compromise was real enough, but was not based on any real belief in multi-ethnic democracy, but on a fear of a mass Russian reaction. As this did not happen, Baltic leaders began a move to harder positions on national questions, trying to appeal to what appeared to be the national consensus of ethnic Latvians and Estonians.

This has been true of Latvian Supreme Council chairman Anatolijs Gorbunovs. Until the autumn of 1991, he was still publicly committed to the Zero Option, to grant citizenship to all Latvian residents irrespective of length of residence or knowledge of the language. Gorbunovs delivered some powerful speeches in support of national compromise, arguing in the immediate aftermath of independence that 'one half of a population cannot successfully build an independent state without the other'.⁴⁶ On 6 May 1990, two days after the Latvian declaration of sovereignty, he spoke in Russian on Latvian television, addressing the Russian-speaking inhabitants of Latvia and promising them that,

All those who want to be citizens of Latvia can be. There is also a special note guaranteeing the rights of non-Latvian citizens in Latvia. It is not serious to talk about 'second class citizens'.

By summer 1992, however, Gorbunovs was advocating a referendum on citizenship restricted to pre-1940 citizens and their descendants alone.

The speed of the shift from an anti-Soviet to an anti-Russian position in 1991-92 is explicable partly in terms of Russian government policy and concern over military withdrawal, fuel supplies and the citizenship question. But in the view of former Estonian Prime Minister, Edgar Savisaar, and others, the Balts themselves played a role in the deterioration of relations. This was especially true of the decision by both the Estonian and Latvian Supreme Councils to demand the return of minor territories annexed by Stalin in 1945: in the case of Latvia, Pytalovo (Abrene); and of Estonia, Pechori (Petseri) and Ivangorod (Jaanilinn). The claim was in defiance of the spirit (if not the letter) of the Helsinki Conference and of the treaties signed between Latvia, Estonia and Boris Yeltsin in January 1991, when the Balts desperately needed Russian help. At the time, even radical nationalist deputies supported the signature of the treaties, which also spoke in vague terms of the peoples of both countries having the right to a 'free choice of citizenship'.

The disputed territories, though inhabited originally by Finnic and Latgalian peoples, even before their military conquest by Latvia and Estonia in 1920, had Russian majorities even then, and now have enormous ones. An Estonian nationalist once told me that 'In my view, the wishes of 1,200 hardworking Setus (an Estonian-related people living in Petseri and Southern Estonia) should count against the wishes of 26,000 good-for-nothing Russians any day', a view the Russian majority can hardly be expected to share. The more rational view, put forward by men like Velliste, was in favour of compromise settlement, but only in the context of a new international conference and Russian recognition of Estonia's legal rights. Even this, however, was foolishly legalistic, since there was nothing the Estonians could gain except an unnecessarily irritated Russia.

The Estonian emigré academic, Rein Taagepera, also criticised the Estonian Right, saying they behaved 'as if the earth swallowed up Russia when Estonia achieved independence'. His view was that, 'Estonian politicians should remember without fail that Russia has always been our great neighbour, and that we should treat it with greater respect than we are now doing'.⁴⁸

Baltic politicians seemed, by 1992, to have almost completely forgotten the very substantial help given them by Boris Yeltsin during the military intervention of January 1991, when he appealed publicly to Russian soldiers not to obey orders to attack Baltic civilian targets or become 'pawns in the hands of dark reactionary forces'. At the time, the statement was given the widest possible publicity by the Baltic governments. Yeltsin himself, at considerable personal risk, visited Tallinn to sign the Estonian-Russian Treaty, and narrowly escaped kidnap by local Soviet loyalist forces. He, together with the Russian

democrats who supported the Balts, have good reason to feel aggrieved not simply by the subsequent Latvian and Estonian position on Russian rights, but also by the barrage of anti-Russian propaganda, coming even from figures like Marju Lauristin, alleging that the Russian people are 'inherently imperialist'.

It was the habit in the Baltic, under Soviet rule, to blame every misfortune on the fact of that rule. The mentality is not easily shaken off and the fear is that, when the Russian army has gone, the resentment will simply be transferred to the local 'immigrant' populations. The characteristic is already manifest: some Balts have in any case long been accustomed to blaming local Russians for much of the crime, prostitution and disorder in their countries. Withdrawal of the army will of itself do little to improve ethnic relations. Already, most Balts falsely equate 'Russian' with 'Soviet', even though Latvians themselves, like Dzerzhinsky's two Chief Lieutenants, Jakovs Peters and Martins Lācis, provided some of the most ferocious exponents of Communist terror.⁴⁸

'A return to the Latvia of 18 November 1918' (the date of the first declaration of independence) – the slogan of the Fourth Popular Front Congress and the Constitution Faction – was always a code for exclusion of Russian 'immigrants', even though it also had a wider emotional resonance. Moreover, in circumstances of complete legislative and indeed intellectual confusion, a return to pre-1940 forms came to seem not only the most legitimate but also the simplest solution. In the words of Mart Laar, leader of the Right-wing Estonian Christian Democratic Union and the Fatherland alliance, and from October 1992, Prime Minister,

Our approach should be honest. If we say something, we should keep our word. Maybe what we needed to say to the Russians from the beginning would not have been pleasant, but it would have been the truth and on it we could have built an honest relationship; but until recently, we have not been honest with them.⁴⁹

The radical nationalist Citizens' Congresses in Latvia and Estonia had indeed always said the same thing, with varying degrees of incisiveness. So far as those that had entered Estonia under Soviet rule were concerned, Trivimi Velliste said, at our first meeting in February 1990, that,

The Russian colonist population here is effectively a military garrison in civilian clothes, and there can be no question of giving them citizenship until they have satisfied some important requirements. ... If you give these people, who by international law are illegal immigrants, false hopes, you will only create confusion in their minds. It is much better to tell the truth: 'Who annexed Estonia in 1940? Stalin and Zhdanov. You will have

to understand the consequences of that.' Having told them that, we can build an honest and legal relationship, and those who do not want to accept it, can leave.⁵⁰

This indeed has been the approach of the Centre-Right Estonian government which won power in the September 1992 election, and in which Velliste himself was Foreign Minister. In his view it is wrong to speak of the Russians in Estonia as a 'minority': 'Legally, the word 'minority' applies only to those Russians who were settled in Estonia before 1940. The rest are colonists.'

The language of the Latvian Congress has been more extreme, partly because of the difference in national style, partly because of the even more acute demographic situation. The Congress also refers to most of the Russians in Latvia as 'colonists', and increasingly argues that under the clauses of the Geneva Convention governing occupied countries, they have no right to be in Latvia at all and should depart with the Russian troops. In August 1992, the Committee of the Latvian Congress issued a warning 'to the colonists from the USSR in Latvia' [in its own translation]:

You are living illegally on the Latvian territory. ... That's why the Congress of Latvian Republic Citizens as an authorised representative of Latvian republic offers you to leave Latvian territory. You will be forced to leave sooner or later. Delaying your departure, you provoke the activities of those forces which are ready to solve the question of the decolonisation of Latvia by means of force, in which neither you nor we have any interests.⁵¹

The sentiment is widespread, even if some phrase it less harshly. In July 1992 the Latvian Supreme Council passed a law establishing stiff requirements for the issue of residence permits to those wishing to settle in the country. The 'Constitution' group and LNNK then announced that they understood this to apply also to those non-citizens already living in the republic – which would have meant the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of the population. The parliamentary majority rejected this interpretation, but the radicals continue to assert it, and if it came to power, would presumably make at least symbolic gestures to put it into effect. One of the Congress leaders, Višvaldis Lācis (also of the Latvian National Independence Movement, or LNNK), told me that,

In my party, we want the Russians to leave, because otherwise, how will we be able to live in an independent Latvia where only 50 per cent of the population are Latvians? We would be subjected to a permanent biological war, and if their birthrate is higher, then we would be threatened with extinction.⁵²

In 1989, public articulation of this view was confined to the Congresses, even if it was commonly said in private conversation. By May 1992, it was even proposed by Arnold Rüütel in a speech to participants at the Bergedorfer Gesprächskreis.⁵³ Politically speaking, the dangerous erosion of Russian *interlocuteurs valables* which has occurred in Estonia, and to a lesser extent in Latvia, since the achievement of independence has had as much to do with perceptions of the general mood and fears for the future as it has with concrete steps taken by the Baltic governments and parliaments. In the words of Katya Borschova, formerly a Latvian Russian journalist for the Popular Front Russian-language newspaper, in July 1992,

We feel under constant pressure because of the continual barrage in the Latvian press and on television; the constant talk of 'colonists', 'aliens', 'fifth columns', 'illegal immigrants'; the constant stress on a Latvian Latvia, the exaltation of everything Latvian, the denigration of everything Russian. This is especially irritating when it comes from individuals who only a year ago were stressing that this was not a national struggle. It is having the effect that Russians who had been strongly committed to learning Latvian are now giving it up, simply because they can't stand to be bullied into learning. . . . All this is especially depressing for those who, like me, worked for independence and stood on the barricades in January and August. We feel betrayed and made fools of. . . . Russians here are now saying to us, 'you see, Interfront was right after all in its warnings, and you, you deceived us'. . . . Among Russian intellectuals, the tendency now is to look down on the Latvians, 'little children pretending to be a nation - we have to understand their mistakes'; but yes, a certain mood of hatred for the Latvians is also growing, because of the pressure, even among Russians who are ashamed of this feeling.⁵⁴

This exemplifies a central flaw in the Latvian and Estonian approach to the question of Russian citizenship. Strict procedures for acquiring citizenship are often justified in terms of the need for local Russians to 'prove' their loyalty and commitment. At the same time, however, these nations are increasingly expressing themselves and defining their national identities in ways that can only repel other nationalities. A realistic appeal to the loyalty of national minorities can only be made in terms of institutions and universal values - and it was indeed in these terms that appeals by the Baltic national movements both to local Russians and to the West were couched between 1988 and 1991. The present appeal to support purely ethnically based ideas of the state is, in contrast, illogical and bound to fail. Although in Estonia, at the beginning of 1993, most Russians were eligible to apply for citizenship, very few had done so.

A good deal of mutual resentment has resulted from the coarse style of

the post-Soviet press on both sides. The patronising tone of much of the local Russian press has infuriated Latvians: indeed Katya Borschova's own paper, *Baltiskoe Vremya*, was guilty of this. The result was that the Popular Front dismissed the paper's editor and appointed a sycophant and opportunist more amenable to the Latvian interest.⁵⁵

Under the new editor *Baltiskoe Vremya* collapsed. A subsequent attempt by the dissident journalists to set up a new Russian democratic paper then also failed, amidst feuding between the Russian journalists and a general collapse of will. This characteristic Russian divisiveness is true of Russian politics in Latvia in general, and is an explanation for the deep political apathy among the Russian-speaking population during the eighteen months after August 1991.

By summer 1992, the Russian Democratic Movement in Estonia, founded eleven months earlier, after the achievement of independence, had moved into close alliance with the Russian Trades Unions and the Russian-dominated municipalities of the north-east. This 'Co-ordinating Committee' was supported, openly or tacitly, by a considerable number of Russian intellectuals and managers who previously backed independence and opposed the actions of the local Communist municipalities. These were alienated by what they feel to be the anti-industrial policy of the Estonian government and by the threat to their jobs posed by the language and citizenship laws. One known to have been a supporter of independence is Valery Myachin, Director of the big 'Narova' furniture factory in Narva. In July 1991 he denounced the policies of the local Communist leadership before the Narva city council. By May 1992 he was deeply worried, both because the trade barriers between Estonia and Russia were likely to bankrupt his enterprise, and because of his own position:

I have taken two courses in Estonian, and at one point even spoke it quite well; but here in Narva it is impossible to keep it up, because there is no one to speak it with. And when I go to hold talks with the ministry in Tallinn, of course we speak Russian together - anything else would be impracticable. So it's very unlikely I'll be able to pass their language test. My children, yes, perhaps - anyway, they're young, they learn more easily. . . . Now I've been told privately by Estonian officials not to worry, that they know my worth and that my job is not at risk. But the point is that if in future things change, and someone comes along who wants my job, all they have to do is use the language test or the citizenship law to have me chucked out.⁵⁶

This goes to the heart of the matter. The citizenship laws and language tests, or proposed ones, are not in themselves unreasonable by West European standards - though they may well seem so in the particular context of East European history in the twentieth century. They include,

for example, the provision that non-citizens may vote in municipal elections – though the example of Latvia and Lithuania suggests that since the parliament retains the right to suspend such bodies more or less at will, the concession may be less meaningful than it seems.

The Lithuanian citizenship law is indeed extremely liberal, and has never been criticised. It grants citizenship to all permanent residents who registered before November 1991, and can do so without inhibition since the Lithuanian minorities are so much smaller than those of the other two republics. This brings out the essential falsity of the argument that the Estonian and Latvian approach is simply based on strict legality and the legal imperative of a return to the pre-1940 state order. No-one could have exceeded Landsbergis and the Sąjūdis radicals in their nostalgia for the pre-1940 republic; but because this demographic aspect was lacking, they felt quite able to compromise even on such a key issue as citizenship.

The Estonian citizenship law, passed in November 1991, grants automatic citizenship to pre-1940 nationals and their descendants. Others have to satisfy a two-year residence qualification, pass a fairly severe language test which includes a test on Estonian history, and swear an oath of loyalty. The result in effect is that the vast majority of Russian-speakers were excluded from voting in the September 1992 election.

The draft naturalisation law finally put forward by the Latvian government in November 1993 was a good deal tougher than that passed in Estonia. It provided for a ten-year residential qualification, conversational knowledge of Latvian, and a 'legal income'. Former Soviet military servicemen from outside Latvia, and people who worked against Latvian independence through 'anti-constitutional methods', were excluded. The draft law's most worrying aspect was its provision for an annual quota, set by government and 'taking into consideration the demographic and economic situation in order to ensure the development of Latvia as a single-nation state'. It has been calculated that if some of the proposed quotas were adopted, it would take over five hundred years for all the Russians in Latvia to acquire citizenship, even if they passed all other requirements. However, the Latvian government submitted the draft law for scrutiny and approval by the Council of Europe, provoking Russian lobbying in opposition to it.

The US-based human rights body, Helsinki Watch, – which always strongly supported the Baltic right to independence – wrote to the Latvian Supreme Council deploring the draft law:

The draft law effectively denies citizenship to people who until August 21st 1991 were considered citizens in Latvia and enjoyed the full rights and privileges that citizenship confers. . . . Many of the draft law's proposals violate the spirit of CSCE documents, the Universal Declaration of

Human Rights and the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights. By joining the CSCE, Latvia committed itself to upholding the human rights standard set out in these documents. . . .

Particularly objectionable are [the specific exclusions]. . . . Such political and medical categories are vague, subject to wide and arbitrary interpretation. . . .

Helsinki Watch maintains that the 16 year residence requirement is excessive and unnecessarily interrupts the lives of people who (in good faith) settled in Latvia without ever expecting to be rendered a foreigner in an independent country. The language requirement is an extra hardship. If a test is set, then the law must provide for extra gratis language training.⁵⁷

Even this law, however, was rejected by the Latvian Right as too mild. In any case, they denied the right of the 'Soviet' Supreme Council to decide this matter at all, declaring that the decision belonged to a future parliament elected by pre-1940 citizens and their descendants alone.

Given time, the emergence of a generation of Baltic Russians educated in the local languages, and the fast progress of spontaneous language-learning among their elders, would in the natural course of things lead to a majority of local Russians gaining citizenship. The expressed hope of moderate Balts is that, in the meantime, the Russians would have learned also to think of themselves as Balts and not as an imperial nation. But will the moderates remain in power? Will it be them administering the language tests? Or, in the words of Jānis Jurkāns, 'Are we going to go on raising the hurdles against getting citizenship higher and higher, using the excuse that international law says nothing on the subject, and secretly rejoicing that the Russians won't be able to make it?'⁵⁸

Several few weeks after making this statement, Jurkāns was forced to resign under radical nationalist pressure. As he told me bitterly a few weeks earlier,

These idiots [the Latvian radical nationalists] attack Kozyrev [Russian Foreign Minister] as a 'Russian imperialist', and me for being 'soft on the Russians'. They haven't even noticed that Kozyrev is on the extreme liberal end of Yeltsin's government, and is under continual criticism from his own chauvinists and reactionaries for being 'soft on the Balts'.

At present, with ethnic relations within the Baltic relatively quiet, the chief danger lies in the probability of a future more nationalist government in Moscow and of a new and harsher Russian strategy. On the Baltic side, the danger also lies in the possibility of more radical nationalist governments taking power, and the risk that the language and

citizenship laws may be used by them to exclude as many local Russians as possible.

In a reasoned exposition of the Latvian case on citizenship, Viesturs Karnups, the Latvian-Australian chief of the newly created and recruited Citizenship and Naturalisation Department, told me that,

Latvians have nowhere else to go. There is no other Latvia. If this Latvia is not truly Latvia, then the Latvian culture, tradition and language will disappear from the face of the earth. So Latvians want to see a Latvian Latvia. They would wish a multicultural Latvia only in the sense of a multicultural Australia, in which other cultures and languages are free to develop to a limited extent, but state support for them is seen as a privilege, not a right.⁵⁹

However, he continued that, 'The intention of this department is not to find excuses for excluding people, but to create opportunities for people to become citizens who fulfil the requirements, and who wish to integrate into Latvia.' He also let slip the phrase, 'my officials are known throughout the government for their enthusiasm and incorruptibility'.

This in a way sums up the moral ambiguity of nationalism: its power to inspire, and its power to harm. No-one doubts that Karnups's officials, amidst a post-Soviet civil service riddled with laziness and corruption, are indeed hard-working and honest. But where does their motivation come from? Their patriotism. And what is their patriotism telling them to do? Most local Russians believe that it is telling them to exclude Russians whenever possible.

A form of harassment to emerge during 1992 related to the refusal of residence permits to people rejoining their families after working abroad, and to ex-servicemen. Those who had worked briefly for the military in menial jobs were sometimes given residence registration dating only from the end of their employment, even if they had been born in Latvia. There is also evidence that the application of the language law is sometimes skewed even against Russians who speak good Latvian. It also gives radicals and busybodies plenty of opportunity for interference, bringing prosecutions against shops for displaying signs in Russian but not Latvian, and other minor misdemeanours. Public symbolism is being made exclusively Latvian: the Moscow District of Riga has been renamed 'Latgale', despite the fact that Moscow Suburb (*Moskauer Vorstadt*) is its historic name. All over central Riga, street signs in Russian have been removed. None of this amounts to 'human rights abuses', but it naturally causes resentment; Russian-speakers make up, after all, 63 per cent of Riga's population.

Apart from administrative harassment, the exclusion of 'immigrant' Russians from political power makes them vulnerable to two main dangers. The first is that future radical governments might use economic

pressure to force them to leave. In the words of Višvaldis Brinkmanis of the Latvian Citizens Congress, asked how the Congress would persuade local Russians to return to an even more impoverished Russia:

The big factories here will inevitably collapse, and it is out of the question that Latvia should pay unemployment benefit to their workers who come from among the colonists, so they will have no choice but to return to Russia. ... As far as workers in the military industrial factories are concerned, they are simply part of the occupation army, and like that army, they should not receive legal permission to stay in Latvia.⁶⁰

Some Russian-speakers are in fact leaving, if they are pensioners and can sell or exchange their flats, if they have jobs to go to in other republics, or if they still have close family elsewhere. According to Estonian government statistics, 17,000 Russian-speakers left Estonia during 1992; a similar number left Latvia. If the trend continues, it would greatly reduce the number of Russians in the Baltic. But as a Ukrainian worker at the 'Radiotekhnika' plant in Riga put it,

If we are to have no rights here, it would be better to leave; but how? The government is offering us 100,000 roubles compensation, but a flat in the Ukraine now costs more than ten times that. Even if we are allowed to sell our flats here, if only citizens are allowed to buy them then supply will be far greater than demand. ... Besides, where am I to go? I was born in Riga more than forty years ago, my children were born here. I have relatives in the Ukraine, but not close ones, and anyway, can they give me a job? Are there more jobs in the Ukraine than there are here?⁶¹

Marju Lauristin has claimed that when the Estonian government sent negotiating teams to talk with the Russians of the north-east, they had failed to present a concrete demand. But it was not so. The Russians had indeed put forward at least one very important demand, but the Estonians had refused it, despite their repeated promises to the West that full and equal social and economic rights for the Russians would be maintained, regardless of citizenship. As a Popular Front spokesman declared in July 1989: 'We consider unfair the participation in the fate of the region of all the inhabitants of the republic, [but] citizenship does not infringe on the social rights of other residents. The restriction only affects participation in the adoption of laws.'⁶²

The Russians' demand was that the Estonian constitution should explicitly rule out future discrimination between citizens and non-citizens in the fields of property ownership, choice of occupation, government (including local government) employment, social welfare, unemployment benefits, pensions and health care. Instead, clauses 28, 29, 31 and 32 of the Estonian constitution explicitly leave this possibility open, as in clause 28:

Everyone shall have the right to health care. Estonian citizens shall be entitled to state assistance in the case of old age, inability to work, loss of provider, and need . . . *unless otherwise determined by law* [my italics], this right shall exist equally for Estonian citizens, and citizens of foreign states and stateless persons who are present in Estonia.

Article 30 likewise states that:

positions in state and local government shall be filled by Estonian citizens. In accordance with the law, such positions may in exceptional cases be filled by foreign citizens or stateless persons.

If strictly administered, this clause would destroy most of the benefits coming to non-citizens. Will it be strictly administered? That depends on future Estonian governments, which the Russians will have little say in electing. The programme of the main Right-wing force in the new Estonian government, the Fatherland alliance, does, however, guarantee social and economic equality, and has been emphasised in conciliatory moves by the new Prime Minister, Mart Laar, so that for the moment such discrimination will probably not occur.

The second long-term danger, however, remains that exclusion from political representation will leave the economic interests of Russian workers and Russian businessmen largely unprotected. Latvian law already explicitly excludes non-citizens from owning real estate or setting up joint-stock companies, though they can lease land and invest in Latvia. Businessmen are vulnerable to (often justified) populist attacks on 'foreign money-launderers'; workers, of course, to the whole free-market transition. In other countries, including Poland and Russia, economic reform and de-industrialisation have been retarded by an awareness that the human, but especially the political costs, are too high to bear. The Russians in the Baltic will have no such protection, and will not be wrong to see their resulting misery as in part the result of their political disenfranchisement.

In a post-Communist society in which patronage and influence over the state are critical, the Russians, in spite of all guarantees, could find themselves disadvantaged in a range of other fields as well, and most notably in education. The Baltic universities increasingly operate only in the Baltic languages, and quietly discriminate against Russian applicants.

Višvaldis Lācis, the Latvian Congress leader, told the Popular Front Russian newspaper that, 'Certainly we will not drive Russians out of Latvia by force; but your status here will be that of the Turks in West Germany. . . . You are not second class citizens here; you are nothing.'⁶³

Some such economic, political and social status is in fact precisely what awaits a great many Russians in the region. Economic and social

discrimination, more than the loss of citizenship, is what most Baltic Russians fear: Soviet citizenship was never a very meaningful concept in any case, and relatively few sought it. All, however, are worried by the threat of economic pressure. And both the fear and the reality of such pressure will be increased by their lack of political representation.

One of the more curious sub-genres to have emerged from the teeming womb of Soviet humour is that of the Pooh Bear and Piglet jokes – or rather *Vinni Pukh* and *Pyatachok*. As the following exchange makes clear, their characters have suffered as a result of life in the former Union:

Pooh and Piglet are walking down a road;

Piglet: 'Where are we going, Pooh?'

Pooh: 'We're going to the forest to eat a pig.'

Piglet (indignant): 'And if the pig doesn't agree?'

Pooh (in official tones): 'The pig is not to be consulted!'

In the case of the Baltic States and the Russians, the roles are of course reversed; it is the three little piglets who are trying to take the bear to the forest – which may turn out to be not quite such a good joke after all.⁶⁴

strange cries. This was of course mainly a joke, but, albeit to a lesser extent than other Balts, Estonians too hanker after their 'own' religion, and after a feeling of closeness to natural forces which Christianity cannot give them.

The Lutheran churches of Latvia and Estonia, having always been closely associated with the Baltic German rulers, started from a weaker position, and were weakened still further by the general decline in Protestant belief throughout Northern Europe and, after 1940, by the inevitable compromises under the Soviet regime. As in Russia, this has encouraged the mushrooming of evangelical churches and sects. Some have local roots, others have been founded and funded by American missionaries. In Estonia, the former Leningrad television channel has been turned over, for several afternoons a week, to dubbed American 'televangelist' programmes. The mystical element in the Baltic traditions also naturally inclines some people to various holistic Estonian religions. Hare Krishna is frequently in evidence, and the Moonies have been propagandising intensively.

The appearance of such groups is acutely worrying to the traditional churches, especially in Lithuania where, in 1992, the Catholic hierarchy prevailed upon the Sąjūdis government to block a proposal for an American-backed ecumenical college in the town of Panevėžys. On this occasion the American backer was at least a respectable and charitable Mennonite businessman. However, the acting administrator of Vilnius archdiocese, Auxiliary Bishop Juozas Tunaitis, declared that, 'We have many strange sects here and don't want another one. It's time to consolidate the nation and not to split it. The example of Yugoslavia shows the danger of more than one religion.'

Peoples Divided

Pauls Raudseps, deputy editor of the Latvian paper *Diena*, once sketched what he saw as the likely general development of the three Baltic societies. He thought that, in Estonia, wild capitalism, extreme social differentiation and conspicuous consumption would ultimately be modified by the Estonian national ethic and style; in Lithuania, something similar would occur if only because of an underlying peasant hostility towards capitalism. Lithuania would therefore remain poorer and less developed than Latvia, but without such extremes of wealth and poverty. In Latvia, in his view, an atmosphere of *laissez-faire* encouraged by legal and political anarchy would accelerate the development of certain sectors, and would lead to an ostentatiously rich capitalist class,

an impoverished underclass and considerable social and economic resentment.

By 1993, however, there were already much more positive aspects to the Baltic scene, especially in Estonia. Although private investment from the West had so far been very much less than the Balts had hoped, it remained proportionately far greater than in Russia and parts of Eastern Europe. In countries with smaller populations than some Western cities, even a small number of new factories can make a substantial impact. Thus in Latvia, Pirmaden, a new American shoe-making venture, absorbed much of the unemployment from the crumbling state electronics giant Elektrotehnika. In Estonia, Finnish business was heavily engaged in several fields. A Swedish-Swiss company, ABB, was investing \$10 million in a new plant to produce insulated pipes for energy saving in Lithuania – though the fact that up to the end of 1992 this was the largest external investment in Lithuanian manufacturing was discouraging.

Scandinavian investment suffered from domestic economic difficulties, but Swedish and Finnish aid had already contributed greatly to improving telephone connections between the Baltic States and the West. The whole Estonian telephone network was rapidly being transformed.

A few Baltic-owned firms were also beginning to penetrate Western or Central European markets. This involved some surprising success stories, like the military-industrial Dvigatel plant in Tallinn, using its sophisticated equipment and skilled workforce to produce a variety of high-value technological products. At a less skilled level, the Lithuanian company Kendra began successfully exporting bathtubs to Poland. With the end of the political tensions between Vilnius and Warsaw and, one hopes, the end of the absurd blockages on the Polish-Lithuanian frontier and in the minds of Lithuanians, Poland could become a major Baltic trading partner, and the Zloty a more readily available hard currency.

Most encouragingly, the Balts were clearly beginning to capitalise on one of their great advantages, a labour force which is highly educated and extraordinarily cheap by Western standards. In each of the states Western computer firms invested in the assembly, programming and marketing of computers for the Soviet market, and in some cases have begun to sell to the West as well. In several cases, firms have grown out of co-operation between the old Academies of Sciences and new private businesses. A small number of recognisably European businessmen have appeared, well-educated and with a real understanding of the rules by which Western capitalism works. Most are very young, like the budding Estonian media magnate Hans Luik, a huge, piratical figure with a red beard, somehow appropriate to the new Estonia. In Latvia, a great success was Software House, run by Latvians though with Russian financial backing. Originally a computer firm, it came to control Latvia's main oil pipeline.

These developments may help check the loss of interest in education, and the discernible 'fast-buck' mentality which, since the 1970s has been a saddening characteristic of Baltic youth. This variety of sleaziness is harmful even for the free market: the tendency to 'bandit economics' common to so many post-Soviet businessmen, frequently alienates their Western partners.

Baltic schools do, however, exhibit commitment and enthusiasm. By 1993, the teaching of literacy, mathematics and scientific subjects was excellent, geography was at least better taught than in the USA, and above all there was a passionate interest in learning foreign languages.⁹⁶ The humanities, however, were finding great difficulty in climbing out of the Marxist-Leninist mire without falling straight into a nationalist one. Some of the new history text-books do not simply read as if they had been written in the 1930s – they *were* written in the 1930s! Difficulties may arise among Russian teachers and pupils required to use works which denigrate their nation.

Even though education in all three states is still wholly state-controlled, a division along class lines is already very apparent. Thus the director of a prestigious Russian-language Gymnasium in Riga, with a high proportion of Jewish pupils, reported that,

We have no real problem with books, stationery or food because many of the parents of our pupils are well off, and they help the school. One has even given us several computers so that the children can learn early how to use them. But I know of course that other schools do not have such advantages.⁹⁷

So far as the better-educated and well-motivated young people are concerned, the fall of Communism has led to an immeasurable lightening of their lives and widening of their horizons, especially of course in terms of ability to travel and study abroad. However, the arrival of MTV is not an unqualified step forward for civilisation. By far the most popular television programme in all three countries is a Mexican soap opera entitled 'The Rich Also Cry' – a comforting thought, presumably – which is atrociously dubbed into Russian and rebroadcast by Moscow TV. Indeed, it might even be termed a force for ethnic harmony within the Baltic, since the most nationalist Balts and the most resentful Russians are united in their love for the heroine, Marianna.

The press has become far livelier than under Soviet rule – it could hardly have been less – although there are still very few good papers, and quite a number of pornographic rags. As so often in the former Communist world, literary and cultural publications have actually lost readership because their *raison d'être* as a focus for dissent has vanished, and people are in any case too busy playing politics or making money. The arts in general have suffered as a result.

Poverty, however, is the stark reality of life for many, especially the elderly. The signs are everywhere: the beggars outside churches, the ragged street-kids washing cars in Riga, or the increasingly ruthless attitude of Baltic hospitals, badly short of staff, fuel and medicines, to 'useless' elderly people. The *Baltic Observer* of 17 September 1992 carried an article describing how an elderly woman who had broken her arm in a fall had it set without an anaesthetic and was then dumped by hospital orderlies at a bus stop and told to make her own way home. No element of ethnic hostility was involved, but it is easy to see how, if relations deteriorate, incidents such as this might be given an ethnic colour and used to stir up hatred.

While public fear has focused on the 'mafia' and crimes of violence, more dangerous for the future fabric and morale of the Baltic States may be the almost universal habit of pilfering, fostered under Communism and entrenched by poverty. The practice is encouraged by the fact that even many educated people, let alone the masses, simply cannot understand why former criminals and criminal activities are now respectable, or the difference between making money from semi-legal commercial activities and stealing outright from the office, shop or factory where you work.⁹⁸

The section of the population which is suffering the most is, perhaps inevitably, the one which is most politically apathetic. This has been lamented by those that regret the mass engagement of the independence struggle, but it is fortunate for the governments: only a politically anaesthetised population could accept what is being done to it without massive protest.

The physical appearance of the towns is changing rapidly, stimulated by Western investment. Tourism is booming, hotels and restaurants are opening, and well-dressed visitors speaking foreign languages are commonplace. In the streets of the main cities, attractive privately owned boutiques display an array of Western goods. Some of the fashions are now Baltic-made, as by Bruno Birmanis's fashion house in Riga, beginning now to achieve a European reputation.

On the other hand, the trams and buses that run past these shops to the grim concrete suburbs seem increasingly dirty, run-down, and infrequent, and the streets are rarely cleaned. Window-displays and street-lights are often blacked-out for lack of electricity, and walking at night is becoming increasingly dangerous, as well as eerie.

While for educated younger people the world has become brighter and more sophisticated, other sections of the population feel the coarser, colder side of the changes. Few people have time or resources for charity outside their own families, and even the Churches often seem more concerned to rebuild their monuments than to help the poor or the elderly. There are frequent complaints that the traditional morale and

solidarity of the Baltic peoples – if it ever existed – are being lost to the harsh competitive ethic of primitive capitalism.

For several years at least, the sufferers from the free market may include a majority of the Baltic populations, especially the local Russians. The purchasing power of the average family dropped 44 per cent during the first months of 1992, and by the end of that year, most people were spending by far the greater part of their incomes on food. Consumption of meat and milk fell sharply, and that of bread and turnips rose. Total impoverishment has often only been avoided through the low – and virtually uncollectable – rents and electricity charges. Facing mass evasion of payment, the electricity authorities resorted to collective punishment by disconnecting entire apartment blocks.

In Latvia, the Save the Children Fund reported in mid-1992 that 87 per cent of the population was below the poverty line, though the statistic needs to be treated with reserve.⁹⁹ In all three Baltic States citizens have developed techniques of survival, including cultivating their own food and having several jobs. The colossal differential between the buying-power of Western and local currencies has led to those with a source of hard currency supporting many relatives; but while Latvians and Jews have relatives in the West, Russians do not.

By late 1992, all three governments were coming under intense pressure to support industries and social groups threatened by the changes, and there were signs of the kind of anti-IMF resentment well-known in the Third World. In Latvia, an Economics Ministry official, Dr Inna Steinbuka, argued that the demand-damping measures called for by the IMF were useless. The impoverishment of the population, in her view, itself brought a fall in demand, but within Latvia's monopolised market, closely linked with the former Soviet Union, this did not and could not have any effect in reducing inflation. Dr Steinbuka argued that to press ahead with strict money policy would lead to bankruptcies, massive unemployment, a catastrophic decline in GDP and state revenues, and finally a social explosion. Clearly representing the views of many in the Economics Ministry, she called for a gradualist policy to protect output.¹⁰⁰

At the end of 1992, even the new Rightist government in Estonia was under intense pressure, while the Lithuanian government was busy promising higher prices to the farmers, lower prices to consumers, and a crusade against the food-processing plants, heavily flavoured with traditional prejudice against 'profiteering middlemen'. Prime Minister Bronislovas Lubys, in theory a liberal, was beginning to talk of the need for rationing, illustrating the natural tendency in all three Baltic states to revert to authoritarian thinking when things deteriorate seriously. Such action would however be an obvious option for any government facing a crisis of this scale.¹⁰¹

The only way out of this trap is through Western aid, which has indeed already been forthcoming in disproportionate amounts, and has helped stave off complete economic collapse. Much more however will be needed fully to stabilise the economic and political situation. This is in the West's interest, for, as argued in the Conclusion, a crisis in the Baltic could have a disproportionate impact on the West itself.

In one sense, however, the connection between the Balts and Russia does work to the Balts's advantage; for the Baltic States are in the position of the swift explorer, relative to the slow explorer and the lion. The story is well known:

Two explorers in Africa are attacked by a lion. One of them turns to run.

The other exclaims, 'What's the point? You can't outrun a lion!' 'I don't have to outrun the lion. I only have to outrun you.'

So long as through aid and their own efforts the Baltic States can remain visibly better off than Russia, and so long as the Russians in the Baltic are not excluded from this relative advantage, the danger of conflict will greatly diminish. For good or ill, this will also bolster the national morale of the Balts themselves by showing that, even if among the poor relations of the West, they are still superior to Somebody.

Conclusion: The West and the Baltic States

*'The snows still fall like silent sifting sand,
Thrown up by gravediggers in some lost hour.
Old Europe, who shall stir a strengthless hand,
When imminent night draws down in mindlessness of power?'*
Pēteris Aigars (Herberts Termanis), Latvian poet of
the First Republic: 'Elegy of the Snows', written in
the late 1930s, translated by William K. Matthews

A keynote of Baltic national feeling since its rebirth in the 1980s has been the desire to 'return to Europe'. Balts feel also – and rightly – that the rest of Europe has a duty to help them do so. The problem is that the Europe many Baltic politicians seek to return to is not the Europe of today, but that of the 1920s and 1930s, when the Baltic was first independent.

Compared to life under Soviet rule, and indeed to much of Europe at the time, these really were idyllic years for the Balts; but they were not safe ones. Like the rest of Eastern Europe, the Balts were beneficiaries but also ultimately victims of the Versailles Peace Settlement, which was based on the *status quo* at the end of the First World War, when both Germany and Russia were prostrate. The central flaw of Versailles was that the situation in 1919 did not reflect the true underlying balance of power in Eastern Europe; and that in the long run, the settlement could only be maintained by a level of Western commitment which did not materialise until it was too late. This is the spectre which today haunts the Balts and the other former Soviet republics as they contemplate the threat of a renaissance Russian nationalism.

Given the Russian (as Baltic) manner for harking back to old models, it would be surprising if some Russian generals were not today studying the words of General Denikin, the White commander in the Russian Civil War, written after the White defeat and the partial restoration by the Bolsheviks of the Russian Empire:

The state link of Russia with her borderlands was ordained by history. . . .
This link would sooner or later be restored, either voluntarily or through

Conclusion: The West and the Baltic States

compulsion – economic war or an army offensive. And that would have been done by *any* Russia – Red, Pink, White or Black – which did not want to suffocate inside the limits of those artificial boundaries to which the World War and internal chaos had confined her.¹

As argued in Chapter 7, imperialists in the strict sense are now relatively rare among ordinary Russians; but crude nationalists are legion, and large sections of the Russian population now lie outside Russia's present borders, some 2.3 million of them in the Baltic. This is what ties the old Soviet imperialists and the new nationalists together. This is the link which needs to be broken if disaster is to be avoided.

It is therefore of great importance that the West should think clearly about its interests and obligations towards the former Soviet Union. It must do so in relation to the Baltic States in particular, where it is already committed, emotionally and politically – to a far greater degree than in Kazakhstan, Moldova or even the Ukraine. But emotional commitment needs to be backed both by real support and good advice – or it can be positively dangerous.

There is much current debate about the 'frontiers of Europe', and where they lie: on the Oder? The Bug? Or, as both Gorbachov and Yeltsin would have it, at Vladivostok? The Balts are clear that the frontier should be seen as following their eastern borders with Russia, and that the Baltic States should be seen as bulwarks against an essentially non-European, 'Asiatic' Russia.²

When it comes to frontiers, however, there is a clear bottom line. One can talk about cultural frontiers or economic frontiers, but historically speaking there is only one good definition of a frontier: it is something a state or alliance of states is prepared to fight to defend. The West today is quite clear, not surprisingly, that it is not prepared to fight to defend the Baltic States, any more than it was between 1920 and 1940. Nor is the 'bulwark' image, with its military implications, an appropriate one. If there were an active Russian military threat to the West, the Balts could not halt it. They do not represent a bulwark: they are not even a fence. There is at present, however, no such threat to the West, nor will there be in the foreseeable future, given Russia's acute weakness and the lack of an ideological basis for such an offensive.

The possibility of Russian military aggression in the future is very real, but if it occurs it will be confined to the borders of the former Soviet Union, and justified by a rhetoric of 'restoring' order and 'protecting' Russian or allied minorities. To some extent, therefore, the degree of Western involvement will be a matter of Western choice – though only to some extent, because a major war in the Soviet region, or even the rise of an ultra-nationalist regime in Moscow, would have of course a disturbing effect on Europe as a whole.

The West is involved in the attempt to extract the Baltic States from Russia's sphere of influence, by putting pressure on Moscow to withdraw its troops and by aiding the Balts to strengthen their economies and escape dependence on those of Russia and the rest of the former Union. More intangibly, every official Western visitor, or indeed tourist, to the Baltic reinforces the attachment to Europe, holds out another incentive to the local Russians, and goes some way to discourage any Muscovite desire for reconquest.

Escaping from Russia's sphere is, however, in its way an even more difficult and delicate business than was the extraction of the Baltic States from the Soviet Union; for it goes against powerful strands of history and economics and, above all, because it could in some circumstances involve ethnic conflict between Balts and local Russians. It is nonetheless a praiseworthy enterprise. The Balts do have ancient links with Western and Central European culture, even if they have weakened under Soviet rule. The Balts moreover will never live happily within the Russian sphere. Leaving them there risks driving them to violence, and provoking the sort of regional crisis which it must be the duty of the West to avert. However the enterprise is only praiseworthy if the West embarks upon it fully aware of what it is doing, and ready to face any unpleasant or unforeseen results. An unwillingness to make such a deep, considered (and expensive) commitment may, paradoxically, be one reason why the West has not been firmer with the Balts on the question of Russian rights. To take a direct role in ordering the internal affairs of these states would imply taking on a measure of responsibility for their security – a responsibility which, for all their rhetoric, Western chancelleries are wholly unwilling to assume.³

In my view, real commitment should involve three aspects. The first is continued pressure on Russia fully to withdraw its troops – a withdrawal which does in fact seem to be proceeding rapidly. This would lessen tension, encourage local Russians to integrate into Baltic society, and hopefully inspire the Balts to look more kindly upon them. It would also of course reduce (though not altogether remove, given the porousness of the Baltic frontiers) the passage of weapons from hardliners in the Russian military to hardliners in the local Russian communities.

Secondly, the West must put pressure on the Baltic governments to guarantee the rights of the local Russian population, irrespective of citizenship, especially in the social and economic sphere. Western aid should be conditional upon the Latvians and Estonians honouring their repeated past promises. Apart from the dangers of locally generated conflict, nothing could be more damaging to Western prestige and influence not only in the Kremlin but throughout Russian society than for the West to take sides exclusively with the Balts in a case in which the overwhelming majority even of pro-Western Russians think that the complaints of the Baltic Russian minorities are justified.

Thirdly, the West should provide more substantial, and properly co-ordinated aid, with the deliberate aim not simply of helping the transition to a market economy, but of minimising unemployment and reducing food prices during that transition. This would do much to reduce the danger of socio-ethnic discontent among the Baltic Russian workers, especially since they would then see even more clearly that they were better off in the Baltic than in Russia.

The conditions imposed in 1992 in return for IMF aid were indeed necessary for the long-term stabilisation and reform of the Baltic economies. But in the short run their effect was to help drive parts of Baltic industry to the wall and increase the risk of socio-ethnic conflict and a political or even military crisis. The hiatus between the short and long runs should be bridged by increased Western aid. Compared to the huge sums being poured into the bottomless pit of Russia, let alone thrown away on frivolities in the West, there need not even be very much of it. By 1994 relatively small sums of Western aid had already had a major impact.

As opinion polls show, many Baltic Russians already look more to the West than to imperial protection from Moscow. They will not continue to do so however if they see themselves cut out of the benefits of the move towards the West. This is of course the nub so far as many Latvian and Estonian nationalists are concerned, because they want the Russians to leave, and know they will not do if they become prosperous where they are. In the words of Trivimi Velliste, 'We hope that a third or so will become Estonian citizens, a third may remain here with Russian citizenship, and a third at least will leave'.⁴ Balts further to the Right of Velliste do not wish to extend citizenship to *any* of the 'illegal immigrants'.

While many Russians are in fact leaving the Baltic, it is difficult to imagine a process which would persuade as many as a third to return to an impoverished Russia without leaving the remaining two-thirds in a state of dangerous discontent, and the Baltic States in a condition of serious instability. Furthermore, however understandable the Latvian and Estonian desire to reduce the Russian population, the use of even subtle economic and administrative pressure to this end seems incompatible with the spirit of the CSCE, which in effect stresses that neither frontiers nor populations should be altered unilaterally, regardless of their provenance.

The West is not bound to support the radical Balts in this aim. A moral commitment to the restoration and maintenance of Baltic independence – as recognised originally by the League of Nations and now by the UN – certainly stands. This in turn implies support for the basic national character of the Baltic states. It does not, however, imply support for the exclusive political authority of the native ethnic communities in these

states, any more than recognition of Fiji or Malaysia amounts to support for programmes of 'Fiji for the Fijians' or 'Malaysia for the Malays'.

As the Swedish Prime Minister, Carl Bildt, pointed out to the Swedish parliament on 2 April 1992, Scandinavian and United Nations recognition was granted to the Baltic States as they existed in August 1991, with the borders and populations of the time, and not to the republics of 1939. It would be different if the Balts were, as they so often claim, threatened with extinction by the Russian presence; but they are not. So long as they can prevent further mass immigration their demographic position should remain stable or even improve, as it is indeed already doing. The greatest danger for the Balts, and especially the Latvians, lies in ethnic conflict.

Enlightened self-interest in the West would suggest assisting a reasonable (though not, admittedly, altogether just) balance, recognising the need for a secure predominance of Balts while guaranteeing the Russians a collective position which would not be vulnerable to amendment by any future radical Baltic governments. This should involve granting rights in the social, economic and educational spheres, and official status for the Russian language. Citizenship in itself is of lesser importance, and indeed is not the most pressing concern of many ordinary Russians; after all, the Soviet citizenship of which many Baltic Russians have now been deprived was not, itself, very meaningful.

Western diplomacy was very slow to get to grips with the dangers of the ethnic situation in the Baltic. When it finally began to do so, during the summer of 1992, it was only under pressure from increasingly bitter complaints from Moscow – complaints which, under Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, were directed through the proper channels of the CSCE, UN and Council of Europe. (The CSCE response came under the so-called 'Moscow Mechanism', which allows one country to complain about another's application of CSCE principles.) The advent of civil war in Yugoslavia also began to drum into even the thickest skulls the need for preventive diplomacy.

As a result, and following a Swedish and British initiative, senior Western diplomats instituted periodic meetings in Stockholm, after August 1992, to discuss questions relating to the Baltic States. At the beginning of 1993 the CSCE, after two preliminary visits, dispatched a six-month mission to Estonia to examine the position of the 'immigrant' Russian population. This was the first occasion on which the CSCE had done anything of this kind and, as with all CSCE operations, the Estonian investigation was funded on a shoestring. It had, however, the very important effect of giving local Russian leaders a voice in the West, and of reassuring them they had not been forgotten.

Signs of interest of this kind, and visits by American diplomats to

Russian-majority areas, are also tremendously important because they suggest that if the local Russians keep quiet, Western aid will flow their way. This is indeed what American diplomats have been telling them. But promises must be followed by real money, or the incipient Western influence will disappear.

Western attitudes are slowly changing. A Western diplomat described to me a 'sea-change' in US State Department attitudes between August and October 1992. The attitude had been that this was not an important question for the US; that it was the Balts' own business. Thereafter the US became much more active, both through the CSCE and in steering its aid; thus cheap US cotton credits for the Kreenholm mill in Narva were deliberately intended to help avert a social crisis in this Russian-speaking area.

Western diplomacy in the region is still plagued by a number of problems. Apart from the informal Stockholm Working Group, which had no executive function, it remained largely unco-ordinated. Not even the beginnings of a general Western crisis-prevention plan were evident, and different Western diplomats told the Baltic governments different things.

In general, Western policy remains obstinately reactive, not proactive. In 1992 a diplomat informed me that the CSCE representatives had not visited Latvia, 'because Latvia has not passed its citizenship law yet, and the Russians haven't complained as much about Latvia yet'.

At that stage Russian propaganda was directed more against Estonia, so the situation there seemed to be more acute. Diplomacy tends to be led by events; it is difficult to drum up support to deal with a problem that hasn't yet happened.

The UN dispatched a mission to Latvia, but found nothing legally wrong. This was in part perhaps because the UN, as a body representing nation-states, has never found it easy to discuss minority rights or external interference, except where the case is desperate – in other words, when it is too late. American diplomacy has also suffered from the familiar problem of domestic political pressure from the Baltic-American emigrations. In the course of 1992 a succession of US Senators – pre-pickled in Baltic propaganda and inadequately briefed – made flying visits to the Baltic. Most called for Russian military withdrawal without even mentioning Russian rights.⁵

A more fundamental problem is that contemporary Western diplomacy finds it difficult to deal with forms of oppression if they do not involve outright 'human rights abuses'. Three years ago, for example, one of the factors exacerbating the fears of the Serbian minority in Croatia was a Croat government decision to change a majority of the police chiefs in the Serbian areas. Given the power of the police in such

societies, the Serbian reaction is understandable. It seems highly likely that few diplomats in the region bothered even to report this minor administrative alteration to their superiors. The consequences are appallingly clear.

Delegations visiting the Baltic States during 1992 certified – accurately – that no human rights abuses existed. But with ‘human rights’ as the bottom line, there is a tendency to underrate the dangerous potential of quieter and less conspicuous factors. There is a tendency also to miss the point which is, for the West, not whether the Baltic States do or do not match up to some abstract standard of human rights, but how a regional crisis can be averted. Diplomacy should certainly be inspired by morality, but its chief moral duty lies in the avoidance of evil consequences, not in the celebration of fine ideals.

Scandinavians, with their tendency to see everything in moral terms and their lack of experience of the problems of dismantling multinational empires, have been particularly at sea over the Baltic Russian issue. The British and French do have experience of decolonisation, but have not used it. The French, for example, have not cared to draw any very close comparison between their rather different attitudes towards settlers’ rights in the Baltic States and in New Caledonia.

The Swedes in particular have also suffered from a guilty conscience, as one of the few Western states formally to have recognised the Soviet annexation of the Baltic States. They now evidently feel they have to compensate through unconditional support. However, if the central argument against automatic Russian rights in the Baltic is that their arrival under Soviet occupation was illegal according to international law, it may be asked why they should be expected to have had a better understanding of that law than past Swedish governments.

From a point of view of international law, the Estonian and Latvian argument, though strong, is not in any case beyond question. A strict reading of the Geneva Convention would seem to allow for mass deportation; but there is in fact no clause in international law that governs a situation – like that of the Baltic today – in which countries have been ruled by another state for two generations, and the situation recognised either *de facto* or *de jure* by the international community.

Western diplomats may argue that the different Western approach to Russian rights in the Baltic and in Kazakhstan, for example, is governed by the fact that both were independent between 1920 and 1940, but I suspect that cultural prejudice has more to do with it; and though it is entirely true that Estonian and Latvian policies towards the Russians have so far taken purely legal and non-violent forms, it still forms part of a pattern of exclusivist nationalism which risks tearing apart the entire fabric of Eastern Europe and of the former Soviet Union.

The Western press has also played a fundamentally dismal role. When,

in 1990, I was one of the very few Western journalists to criticise some Baltic policies, I warned my Baltic friends that the uncritical support of the rest of the press could not be relied on; that for a hundred years and more, Western journalists had swung between two contradictory stereotypes of Eastern European nations, and would surely do so in their case. The first stereotype is of gallant little freedom-loving peoples, fighting against wicked empires for the sake of independence and liberal democracy. The second is horrid little anti-semitic peasants, trying to involve us in their vicious tribal squabbles. In relation to the Baltic States, much of the American press in particular has swung between these two poles with almost nothing in between. Where they have criticised the Balts (especially over anti-semitism), the criticisms have often been so extreme, biased, and badly supported that they have merely infuriated even reasonable Balts, and discredited Western advice in general.

In the course of 1992, there was a welcome shift in Western diplomatic thinking from pure emphasis on human rights to a stress on the economic position of the Russians. Even this, however, was inadequate, since it ignored the fact – set out in Chapter 8 – that in post-Communist societies, communities often need a share of political power to ensure a share of state patronage and economic advantage.

The give-away line among Western diplomats during 1991–92 was, ‘but it is not our business how the Balts arrange their naturalisation process and so on’. This is also the line of many Balts themselves. And it would be fine if it were consistent; if, in the event of an ethnic crisis and resultant Russian intervention, offers of Western support would also be waved away by the Balts: ‘No, thank you all the same – as we said, this is our business. . . .’

Instead, thanks to the moral and emotional commitment of the West, and the assiduous efforts of Baltic lobbyists, ethnic conflict in the Baltic States would almost certainly lead to a major crisis in relations between the West and Russia. This in turn could deal a death-blow to Westernisation and democratisation in Russia, and encourage the growth of an ultra-nationalism which would affect the lives of tens of millions in Russia, the Ukraine and Kazakhstan. Latvian and Estonian policies towards the Russian minorities have already had an appreciable effect in strengthening the hand of reactionaries in Moscow and weakening those of Yeltsin, Kozyrev and the Democrats. Was this well done? Is this a process that the West should be subsidising?

In any case, the ‘not your business’ line – if, after Yugoslavia, it needed any further criticism – was refuted more than eighty years ago when, during the Versailles Conference, Clemenceau urged Poland to sign the League of Nations ‘Minorities Treaty’:

Nothing, I venture to say, is more likely to disturb the peace of the world

than the treatment which might in certain circumstances be meted out to the minorities. And therefore, if the Great Powers are to guarantee the peace of the world in any sense, is it unjust that they should be satisfied that the proper and necessary guarantees have been given?⁶

The responsibility of the West after the collapse of the Soviet empire is fully comparable in scope to that facing the West after the defeat and collapse of the German, Austrian and Russian empires during the First World War. The West's difficulty in evolving a coherent strategy also dates back to the central dilemma of Versailles: the conflict between Wilsonian ideas of national self-determination and the linked requirement for general stability and minority rights. Thus Brian Beedham, in a postmortem on the West's failure in Yugoslavia, wrote that immediately after the Croat and Slovene declarations of independence, Western troops should have been stationed on the border of Croatia to deter Serb aggression. But that since this would have left unsolved the question of the Serb minority within Croatia,

... The protection given to Croatia would therefore have had to be accompanied by a promise that an agreement would be reached within, say, six months on how to protect the rights of Croatia's minorities. ...⁷

What Beedham does not say is what kind of agreement the West should have insisted upon, given the probable failure of the parties concerned to reach agreement on their own. His proposal involves casting the West in a virtually imperial role – but without a clear imperial policy, or indeed an imperial army. After the West's miserable failure in Yugoslavia, the belief that it could intervene successfully to resolve conflicts in the former Soviet Union once they have begun, or deter consequent aggression by a future hardline Russian government, is naive; it can, however, play some part in preventing such conflicts from breaking out.

In the case of the Russian minorities, it is inadequate to say, as does Paul Goble, that because most of the Russians were not old minorities but 'simply representatives of the imperial centre, dispatched to promote Soviet power',

... The international community, including the United States, must make every effort to try to ensure that Russians in the new states enjoy equal rights as individuals, regardless of minority status. ...⁸

This comes dangerously close to the radical Baltic line that the Russians as illegal immigrants are not a 'minority', and therefore must be treated simply on a case-by-case basis. It is also out of touch with reality. Clearly, where Russians constitute 94 per cent of a town's population, as in Narva, or a huge proportion of a republic's population, they are going to behave as a political unity and demand collective rights.

Finally, once again, this approach completely ignores the dangers of administrative harassment of, and discrimination against, a community without either legally guaranteed rights or some hold on political power. The case of Northern Ireland under Protestant rule between 1922 and 1969 is an example of this, and there are many others. Such harassment is of course unwritten and unspoken, but it can be extremely effective and lead ultimately to disaster. I believe that on balance such an explosion is unlikely in the Baltic States; but the danger is certainly there.

The sad thing is that by taking this line towards the local Russians, the Latvians and Estonians may in fact be diminishing, not increasing, their chances of reaching safety in the arms of the European Union. So long as there is some insulation against the Russian economy and Russian immigration, the fact of the Baltic States possessing large Russian minorities would not of itself prevent them joining the EU. Nor would a sensible Russian government object to this. What every Western diplomat accepts as out of the question is that the EU should admit states which risk conflict with their internal minorities and with Russia. Once within the European Union, co-existence should be possible. As long as Latvians and Estonians control their own television and radio, their own schools and universities and their own frontiers, they need not fear being overcome by the local Russians, especially if these Russians increasingly look to the same goals and values as they do, and if, as at present, many are actually leaving. One might hope to return to older traditions in which several distinct communities lived separate lives within the same frontier, with one community in a hegemonic position but others having a guaranteed place and rights, and the whole being supervised by a general European order.

Despite the economic crisis that seems set to continue wracking the Baltic States for a considerable time to come, and the threat of a general criminalisation of the economy and state, there are also encouraging signs of political stability. The Centre-Right governments in Estonia and Latvia are committed to Western values and free-market reform. The commitment to reform of Brazauskas's party in Lithuania is much more doubtful, but at least its victory means that a majority of Lithuanians have rejected chauvinist nationalism. In general, the anti-Western nationalist attitudes examined in parts of this book will probably decrease as new generations come to the fore – but only so long as ethnic tensions do not lead to the appalling primitivism seen in so many other places. It is the West's duty to help push and pull the Balts in the required direction.

No-one should reckon on the permanence of Western liberal capitalist values within circumstances in which they have become associated with economic misery for ordinary people, of every nationality; and even prosperity will not of itself bring safety or stability unless the Russians in

The Baltic Revolution

the Baltic learn to live without empire, and the Balts learn to live with the Russians. Until that day comes, the Baltic States will remain – as they have been for the past eight centuries – a debatable territory.

Tallinn-Riga-Vilnius-Kaliningrad-Moscow,
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The Empire in Decay

Timothy Carton Ash

Eight years after the birth of Solidarity, occupation strikes once again spread across Poland. The workers' first demand is: Solidarity. On the twentieth anniversary of the Soviet invasion, ten thousand Czechs march through the streets of Prague, chanting "Dubcek!" and "Freedom!" With official permission, some forty thousand people demonstrate in Budapest—against the policies of a neighboring socialist state. Without official permission, half a million Czechs and Slovaks sign a petition for religious freedom. The Protestant churches in East Germany try to praise the recent policies of the Soviet Union, but are censored by the state. The Polish government spokesman invites himself to visit Radio Free Europe. A Hungarian Politburo member says he has "no arguments in principle for the one-party system."

These days one is mildly disappointed if, on opening a Polish or Soviet journal, one finds that some great, immovable, forty-year-old taboo has not been casually broken. It would be amusing, although perhaps a little cruel, to compile a small anthology of statements from Soviet and East European experts of the form "what is unthinkable is..." or "one thing is certain..."

It is not just individual taboos that fall like ninjutsu. Whole concepts have crumbled. "Normalization," for example. After the imposition of martial law in Poland, most serious Western analysts concentrated on the "prospects for normalization" in Poland, where "normalization" might be defined as the attempt to return an East Central European country, initially by the use of force, to Soviet norms. The comparison was with Hungary after 1956 and Czechoslovakia after 1968. This line of analysis was entirely reasonable at the time. But what relevance has the concept today? Not only has the Jaruzelski team's original vision of "normalization"—Kádárism à la Polonaise—failed, as the best analysts predicted it would. The very idea of what is normal seems to have changed.

¹Inna Potzay, quoted in BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts—Eastern Europe* (hereafter SWB-EE), May 24, 1988, C/14. The exact wording of the translation transcript is "I have no principled arguments on the side of the one-party system."

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²See, for example, Włodzimierz Brus, "The Prospect of 'Normalization' in Poland," in W. Brus, P. Kende, Z. Mlynár, "Normalization Processes in Soviet-Dominated Central Europe" (1982), Study No. 1 of the Research Project on "Crises in Soviet-type Systems" directed by Zdzisław Mlynár; Jacques Rupnik, "The Military and 'Normalization' in Poland," reprinted in Paul Lewis, ed., *Eastern Europe: Legitimation and Political Crisis* (St. Martin's, 1984); and pp. 299-303 in my own *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity* (Scribners, 1984; Vintage, 1985). Two interesting references to the Polish authorities' dream of Kádárization are to be found in Adam Bronski, *Eastern Europe in the Aftermath of Solidarity* (East European Monographs, Boulder, Colorado, distributed by Columbia University Press, 1985) p. 41.

Old concepts crumble, but where are the new? Beside the novelty, intricacy, and fragility of internal developments in each country, and the central uncertainty about the nature, pace and durability of change in the Soviet Union, there is the problem of divergence. To generalize about "Eastern Europe" was always a difficult and questionable exercise—even at the height of Stalinist *Gleichschaltung*—but it becomes ever more difficult and questionable as individual countries become increasingly different, not just from the Soviet Union but from each

something altogether more modern and luxurious. And who is that man in a black soutane being ushered obsequiously across the terrace? And since when have blockhouses had spires?

1.

Let us start with Mr. Gorbachev—which is not, however, to start at the beginning. Faced with this bewildering East European vista, most Western news commentators have taken refuge in a formula as simple as it is facile. Every new development in Eastern Europe is treated as a



other. The historian Joseph Rybczyk calls his new political history of East Central Europe since World War II *Return to Diversity*. A knowledge of each country's prewar, or pre-"Yalta" history is now quite as necessary as a general understanding of Soviet-type systems.

Eastern Europe today resembles a landscape on whose commanding heights vast uniform concrete blockhouses were built some forty years ago. There they stand, still inhabited, still hideous, from the wooded hills of Thuringia to the Great Hungarian Plain, and on their terraces the familiar fat-jowled proprietors still sit at lugubrious leisure, with their black, curtained cars and their prefabricated lies. But look again: strange things have happened. Here, a whole wing has fallen to the ground, rusty steel rods jutting out of crumbled concrete. There, the blockhouse has incongruously acquired a baroque frontage or a romantic interior, repainted in the prewar national colors, while the strains of a patriotic march sound from the hall. There again, cottages in half-remembered versions of traditional styles shoulder up the hill toward it, while around the corner a private entrepreneur has built himself

function of, or alternatively as a challenge to, Soviet glasnost and perestroika. Yet in truth, a serious analysis of Hungary or Poland's present dilemmas could almost as well begin in the Middle East¹ as in Moscow. Of course Gorbachev's impact has been large: it has also been complex, ambiguous, more indirect than direct, and the "Gorbachev factor" has played into political scenes that, at least in Hungary and Poland, already had powerful dynamics of their own.

The most radical and basic speculative question about Moscow's approach to its "external empire" might be called the TITO question: Troops In, Troops Out? In what circumstances might Soviet troops once again march into an East European country? Under what conditions might they march out?

²The Middle East—which produced the oil, which earned the petrodollars, which Poland and Hungary borrowed, which created the debt, which precipitated the crisis, which compelled the reform.

"External empire" meaning the six member states of the Warsaw Pact, as opposed to the "internal empire" of the non-Russian republics of the Soviet Union.

Is the so-called "Brezhnev doctrine" of limited sovereignty within the socialist commonwealth, so eloquently presented by Mr. S. Kovalev in *Pravda* of September 26, 1968, still valid twenty years after the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia? At least two senior Gorbachev advisers have told Western journalists, on the record, that they regard invasion as unthinkable in present circumstances.³ In purely theoretical terms, the "new thinking" in Soviet foreign policy would at least demand a different ideological justification of such an action, in terms of "all human" rather than class interests. (The Soviets could say the ozone layer is threatened by pollution from Czech industry.) Two leading Soviet legal scholars argued in a recent article that the principle of "peaceful coexistence" must, in the context of the "new thinking," be extended to relations between states with the same political and social systems.⁴ Gorbachev himself has emphasized the right of socialist states to find their own paths to socialism, notably during his visit to Belgrade.

On the other hand, in discussing the "priority area of relations with the socialist countries" the theses for the extraordinary Party conference in Moscow in May declared: "Our internationalist links are built on the basis of mutual benefit, a balance of interests and common responsibility for the fate and prestige of socialism and the enhancement of its role in world development." Official Soviet commentaries on the twentieth anniversary of the invasion of Czechoslovakia (August 20-21) were largely unrepentant, although this can be explained by their concern not to embarrass the Husák-Jakes regime in Prague. During his visit to Warsaw in June, Gorbachev declined to renounce the "Brezhnev doctrine," despite a direct public challenge to do so from a Polish intellectual.⁵

These statements are important, not least for their direct impact—simply as statements—on Eastern Europe. But they do not get us (or Soviet leaders) much further in determining what they would actually do were an East European country to blow up in their faces. Nobody can know that: not even Mr. Gorbachev. This question can only be answered in practice. All we can say is that, in response to the three major postwar East European challenges, the Soviet Union has each time hesitated longer—days with Hungary in 1956, months with Czechoslovakia

³Oleg Bogomolov, quoted in the *Financial Times*, June 27, 1988, p. 17; Viatcheslav Dushichev in *Der Spiegel*, Number 27, 1988, p. 126.

⁴The article from the March 1988 number of *Soviet State and Law* is summarized and analyzed by Theodor Schweisfurth in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (May 13, 1988), pp. 9-10.

⁵The question was posed by Marcin Król, editor of the independent monthly *Rés Publica*, at Gorbachev's meeting with selected intellectuals in the Royal Palace on July 14. In his speech on the seventieth anniversary of the October Revolution, Gorbachev also spoke of the damage that could be done to relations between socialist countries "by a neglect of the common interests of socialism on the international scene" (quoted from the official translation appended to *Soviet Weekly*, November 7, 1987, p. xvi).

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In 1968, more than a year with Poland in 1980-1981. It has gone to increasing pains to disguise its intervention—unilateral in 1956, multilateral (Warsaw Pact) in 1968, Polish "internal" in 1981. It now has stronger reasons than ever for hesitating and fudging, since an invasion would be a blow to reform inside the Soviet Union as well, and since relations with the West are so important for that reform. The nature of the East European challenge has in each case been a matter of definition: What is "reform" and what "revolution"? What helps "the fate and prestige of socialism" and what harms it? What—to use the favored Western policy terms—is "stability" and what "dangerous instability"?

All Soviet leaders since Stalin (except the transitional figures of Andropov and Chernenko) have faced a major East European challenge. There are strong reasons for believing that this challenge will come sooner rather than later to this Soviet leader. Politically, it is therefore of the first importance that the West should prepare itself for such a crisis: analytically, psychologically, and by planning possible responses. One part of the response is precisely the matter of definition. In the past, major Western powers—and particularly West Germany—have too often adopted a restrictive, indeed almost a Soviet definition of "stability," treating as symptoms of "dangerous instability" phenomena such as strikes and street demonstrations, which are an entirely normal part of political and public life in our own countries. Of course a strike in a socialist state self-evidently is a more important thing than a strike in a liberal democracy. But there is a strong tactical case for the West now to say (without firmly warning the Soviet Union of the disastrous consequences of the use of force, whether direct or camouflaged): "So [name of country] has fifty thousand people on the streets? There are strikes every week? They have independent political parties? So what? This is normal. This is fine. It's reform, not dangerous instability. We call it glasnost and perestroika." But that is a political argument. Analytically, there is little more of interest to be said on this subject, beyond registering the Soviet statements and signs.

It is more pleasant to speculate about troop movements in the other direction. In mid-July the Hungarian Party foreign affairs spokesman said on television that Soviet troops could be withdrawn from

"In his stimulating Hugh Seton-Watson Memorial Lecture at the Center for Policy Studies in London in January of this year, Zbigniew Brzezinski suggested that 1988 might just be another 1848. "It is not an exaggeration," he said, "to affirm that there are five countries now in Eastern Europe all of which are ripe for revolutionary explosion. Nor is it an exaggeration to say that this could happen in more than one simultaneously" (quoted from *A Year in the Life of Glasnost*, Center for Policy Studies, Study No. 94, p. 12). This seems to me precisely—an exaggeration. Romania, in its desperate misery, is unquestionably "ripe" for explosion. In Poland there is both the desperation and the necessary dash of hope, as the latest wave of strikes amply demonstrates. In Hungary an explosion seems a real possibility, but no more than that. In Czechoslovakia and the GDR the time of maximum risk will surely be when a new leadership starts making changes from above, in line with the time-worn Tocquevillean adage that the most dangerous moment for a dictatorship is when it starts trying to

Hungary "in the foreseeable future." This is a possible development to which immense attention has been paid in the West—mainly because of that "militarization of thought" about East-West relations which is the common weakness of American "cold war" thinking since the 1950s and European "peace movement" thinking in the 1980s. Plainly, any quantitative reduction or qualitative transformation of the military confrontation in Central Europe is bound to have an impact on the East European politics. Plainly, a physical withdrawal of Soviet troops—the very bearers and symbols of domination—would have more political impact than any changes in the structure of force, armaments, or military doctrine, although some of these might actually be more important for the military balance. But what exactly this political impact would be it is exceedingly difficult to say.

Any implicit argument suggesting, "Soviet troops brought communism to Eastern Europe forty-five years ago, so if Soviet troops go, communism will go," contains an obvious, childish fallacy in its conclusion, as well as a small oversimplification in its premise. Yet it is far from obvious that such a half-articulated hope would not be raised in many a patriotic breast were the invaders to depart. In the short term, the new Hungarian Party leader, Mr. Károly Grósz, might well gain some popular credit for such a move. But in the medium to longer term, would not expectations be raised that he could not satisfy?

In general, the domestic effect of any Soviet military reductions will probably be to put the emphasis more nakedly, and even harshly, on the question of changing the political, economic, and social system that came with, or was at least partially restored by, those troops. Increased military "stability" can mean reduced political "stability." This is patently not an argument against careful disarmament. It is just an argument for keeping our eyes open. The two halves of the TITO question are intimately related: Troops Out now can increase the danger of Troops In later. But any real political change in Eastern Europe is bound to be accompanied by some reduction in political "stability"—otherwise it will not be real.

'Ozsa Kótal, quoted in SWB-EE, July 14, 1988, B/6. According to this transcript his actual words were: "There is understanding on the plane of Soviet policy, vis-à-vis the Hungarian endeavors, that we should be affected in the first stage, according to the schedule, meaning we, Hungary, would be affected by this in the foreseeable future. This is our objective, this is our endeavor...." However, the Warsaw Pact summit in Budapest a few days later offered no further hints in this direction. Károly Grósz, the new Hungarian Party leader, reportedly denied the story on his visit to the United States in late July. In effect, Mr. Kótal's remarks may therefore be little more than a verbal flirt, mainly for domestic consumption.

"An oversimplification, above all, in the case of Czechoslovakia, although at the time of the February 1948 coup, Stalin's emissary to Klement Gottwald 'pointedly suggested that Gottwald should ask the Soviet government for military assistance: Soviet troops were already massed on the Hungarian border.' See Karel Kaplan, *The Short March: The Communist Takeover in Czechoslovakia 1945-1948* (C. Hurst and Co., London, 1967), p. 175 and passim. An equally differentiated account of the Communist takeover in Hungary is to be found in Charles Gati, *Hungary and the Soviet Bloc* (Duk

The countries of East Central Europe¹ at present divide into two categories: those whose regimes are rhetorically embracing the Gorbachev example, for their own purposes, and those whose regimes are still resisting, while their peoples waitfully embrace, the Gorbachev example. The Jaruzelski team in Poland and the new leaders in Hungary are not simply taking leaves out of Mr. Gorbachev's book. Rather, they are taking his license to pursue national strategies that are deeply different and highly specific, but in some respects also more radical or "advanced" than those currently being debated in Moscow. The Jakes-Husák regime (mutton dressed as lamb) in Czechoslovakia and the Honecker gerontocracy in the GDR are not simply resisting glasnost and perestroika. They are also defending national strategies that have kept them in power, and their societies in relative quiescence (or "stability") for nearly twenty years.²

It is probably wrong to suggest that Mr. Gorbachev wholly deplores these latter regimes. Although, like Mrs. Thatcher, he cannot always resist the personal itch to preach his own solutions, his general message has been: "You must solve your own problems in your own way." The last thing he wants is a new Prague spring to complicate his own. It is also wrong to imply that he is an entirely comfortable patron for Hungary and Poland. Economically, Brezhnev's Soviet

¹Meaning Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and the GDR. In what follows I shall only touch incidentally on Romania and Bulgaria.

²One should also note that the GDR has enthusiastically supported Soviet "new thinking" in foreign policy.

Union was in many ways a "softer" partner. Gorbachev's hard-nosed approach to Soviet-East European trade, his insistence on the delivery of better-quality goods, his desire to revitalize Comecon integration, his penchant for Soviet-East European joint ventures (favorably mentioned in his book *Perestroika*): none of this necessarily helps economic reform programs whose success or failure is measured in hard currency.

The general position is, however, as clear as it is extraordinary. For the first time in decades the primary limits to political change in Eastern Europe are not external but internal. The ultimate limits are of course still external, even if no one knows exactly where they lie. But the barriers up against which the enterprise of economic and political liberalization in Poland and Hungary is currently pushing are internal, Polish and Hungarian barriers. Comparisons with Yugoslavia, a socialist state without the external Soviet limits, are increasingly apt.

Moreover, even if the Soviet Union is not directly pressing recalcitrant regimes to change, the indirect effect of the Gorbachev example is to increase the pressure from their own populations for change. This is demonstrably the case in the GDR and Czechoslovakia. There is a partial parallel here between the impact of Gorbachev's "second de-Stalinization" and that of Khrushchev's first de-Stalinization. But whereas the lessons of Khrushchev's de-Stalinization were first articulated inside the ruling parties of Eastern Europe, now we find that independent social movements, the churches, non-Party intellectuals, young people, and just the crowds welcoming Mr. Gorbachev are the first to spell out the lessons—and not afraid to

do so—leaving the ruling parties embarrassed and straggling behind.

There is a swelling conviction in both Czechoslovakia and the GDR that their old, weary, wooden Brezhnevite leaders cannot last for more than another year or two. People looked with keen interest at Hungary's palace revolution in May, when an extraordinary Party conference kicked János Kádár upstairs (to the newly created post of Party chairman) and expelled his whole inner circle, not merely from the Politburo but from the Central Committee as well.³ But when the change in Party leadership comes in Czechoslovakia and the GDR there will not simply be a populace eager to follow the Party's new "Gorbachevite" line. Here too, albeit on a smaller scale than in Poland or Hungary, there will be non-Party intellectuals, the churches, independent social groups, the oppositional rainbow coalition of Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, ecological, peace, and human rights activists, and the refuseniks in the GDR, all advancing their own programs for change. Each case will be different: Czechoslovakia because of the legacy of 1968, East Germany because of West Germany. But in both, the real trial is still to come. In Poland and Hungary, by contrast, the trial is already on.

2.

"Finlandization" is the crude metaphor that has been used in the West—but also by independent East European intellectu-

³With one exception: György Aczél. How far this expulsion of the old guard was spontaneous and how far "rigged" is an interesting question. A leaked list of the voting shows that the former trades

als—to describe the direction and outer limit of desirable and conceivable change for East European countries. "Finlandization," or "self-Finlandization," is held up as a nightmare for Western Europe but a dream for Eastern Europe. The metaphor is not wholly useless to describe a condition in which an East European state would, like Finland, enjoy almost complete autonomy in its domestic social, economic, and political life, while perforce remaining compliant to the Soviet Union in military and foreign affairs.⁴

The term is, however, almost wholly useless to describe the process by which an East European country might get from here to there. Does it mean that the East Europeans should first give the Russians a bloody nose in a winter war? Obviously it cannot mean that; but would the Finns enjoy even their present measure of autonomy had it not been for their brave military resistance in 1939-1940? Does it mean achieving a new status in the context of an international settlement, a unions head, Sándor Gáspár, got the lowest vote of all, a mere 249 out of a possible 985. Most of those returned, however, received votes in the high nine-hundreds.

⁴Note, however, that Finland itself seems to be edging as close to Western Europe as it can; see the article by Daniel Vernet in *Le Monde* (July 9, 1988). A fairly representative East European usage of the term "self-Finlandization" can be found in Ferenc Fehér, "Eastern Europe's Long Revolution Against Yalta," in *East European Politics and Societies* (an excellent new journal), Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 34. A useful reminder of how the Finns actually resisted Finlandization is the chapter by James H. Billington in Cyril E. Black, ed., *Communism and Revolution* (Princeton, 1964), pp. 117-144.

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"new Yalta"? In all the Soviet "new thinking" about foreign policy—a fundamental reexamination of Soviet positions in many parts of the world—there has been no hint of Soviet interest in such a basic renegotiation of the status quo in Europe. The vagueness of the metaphor is amply illustrated by the fact that when applied to Western Europe it means the precise opposite of its putative meaning for Eastern Europe. For Western Europe it means a process of increasing dependence on the Soviet Union, for Eastern Europe, a process of diminishing dependence.

I have in the past offered an alternative metaphor, almost equally crude, but slightly better in indicating the nature of the process, though not the end result. This is the metaphor of the "Ottomanization" of the Soviet empire. I mean by this, in a very loose analogy to the decline of the Ottoman Empire, a long, slow process of imperial decline in the course of which one would see an unplanned, piecemeal, and discontinuous emancipation, both of the constituent states from the imperial center and of societies from states. This would occur not by planned reform from the imperial center, in the context of sustained growth and comprehensive modernization, but mainly by uncoordinated independent action, whether individual, collective, or national, by pressure from below or from outside, in an overall context of growing relative backwardness in relation to much of the developed world, and specifically to Western Europe. In a phrase, "Ottomanization" means *emancipation in decay*.

It is tempting to pursue the historical analogy. The Ottoman Empire, after all, also started out as an ideological empire: "the divinely protected well-flourishing absolute domain of the House of Osman." It liquidated much of the old ruling class in several of the territories it conquered, and replaced them with a new and initially functional ruling class drawn mainly from lower social strata. These Ottomans had their own language, the Osmanli; the Communist *Nomenklatura* has its newspeak. There was one great sociopolitical divide: between the Ottomans and the "reaya" or flock. Like communism, the Ottoman system assumed its functionaries to be angels: selfless servants of the cause, with no need for petty human checks and balances. As a result, they could behave like devils. This new class degenerated into what the historian Peter Sugar calls "ossified functionalism," with the growth of corruption, the assertion of local and selfish interests, and the decay of an entrenched bureaucracy.¹ The Ottoman Empire was imprisoned in a rigid, archaic economic and fiscal system, incompatible with the demands of the modern industrial economy emerging around it, and incapable of competing with the West. And then there is the parallel originally suggested by Hugh Seton-Watson: that the final collapse of the empire might result from the rise of a power in the East. Let China be to the Russian empire what Russia was to the Ottoman Empire!

All this is tempting; but the temptation must be resisted. For a thousand historians will at once reach for their pens to point out the numerous respects in which the decline of the Ottoman Empire cannot possibly be compared with that of the Soviet empire. Someone else will add, for good measure, that the Ottoman Empire

finally fell apart in war, not in peace: "Is it war you want?" they will indignantly ask. So let me stress again that this is not a detailed historical analogy, just a crude metaphor, "good enough for government work" as I believe they say in the State Department.²

The metaphor of "Ottomanization" stresses, in very general terms, the overall context of imperial decline, and the unplanned, piecemeal, and discontinuous nature of that process. It allows both for attempts at reform from the center (Gorbachev as Selim III) and for attempts at revolution from the periphery, for the partial success and partial failure of each, and it recognizes, in the long run, the dialectical relationship between reform

historical process—whose final outcome is, to be sure, almost impossible to conceive, since most previous empires ended in wars, but this empire has nuclear weapons.

Beyond this, we have to look in detail at individual countries that are, as you would expect in the course of "Ottomanization," increasingly different. In what follows I shall look briefly at some symptoms of decay. In a second article, I shall survey some contours of emancipation, taking most of my examples from Poland and Hungary, and then pose the question of reform or transformation: that is, whether in either of these pioneer countries there seems any chance that the disparate elements of emancipation in decay can be combined, partly at the wish of

Károly Grósz



and revolution. Indeed, even in the mere forty-five years of the Soviet external empire we have already seen several turns of that dialectic: the reforms introduced by János Kádár were an attempted response to the Hungarian revolution of 1956, just as the Jaruzelski reforms have all been an attempted response to the Polish revolution of 1980-1981. This metaphor therefore invites us not to think of revolution as the end of reform, or of reform as the definitive alternative to revolution, but rather of both as part of a very long-term

"Recent events in Transcaucasia and the Baltic republics could lead one to ask how far the metaphor of 'Ottomanization' might also be applied to the internal empire. A reasonable answer is probably 'not yet.' But how would the growth of inter-national tensions inside the Soviet Union directly affect the East European process? One can imagine it cutting both ways: negatively, by prompting a backlash against Gorbachev's reform program, or by underscoring the need for tighter imperial control (lest, say, Poland become an example for Lithuania); positively, by giving Soviet leaders more than enough to handle at home, thus increasing the temptation to let East European states work out their own problems in their own ways.

the present political leadership and ruling class, into a new socio-political system: either into some "viable" system short of liberal democracy as we know it, in Western, northern, and southern Europe, or simply into a Central European variant of liberal democracy.

3.

Why should anyone in Eastern Europe ever support a socialist state tied to the Soviet Union? Forty years ago there were perhaps three main reasons for doing such a curious thing. First, there was the reason of force. Secondly, there was what presented itself as the force of reason: that is, ideology. Thirdly, there was the hope of emancipatory modernization. The reason of force had two sides. In Eastern Europe it was Soviet armies that defeated Nazi Germany; Soviet power could subsequently be said to protect the new territories of Poland and the restored

"I use the term 'viable' in the sense very usefully explored by Włodzimierz Brus in his 'Socialism—Feasible and Viable?', *New Left Review*, No. 153 (September/October, 1985), pp. 43-62 (a review essay on Alec Nove's *Economics of Feasible Socialism*).

¹See Peter F. Sugar, *Southeastern Europe Under Ottoman Rule, 1354-1804* (University of Washington Press, 1977), passim.

territory of Czechoslovakia against a revanchist Germany. For that, some felt they had reason to be grateful. On the other side of this coin there was simply *force majeure*. The Soviet Union was self-evidently the single dominant power in the region. It, or its fraternal Communist parties, had the guns, the ammunition, the soldiers, the police, and the will to use them. If you resisted, they would crush you. There was no alternative. Not a noble reason for supporting a state, but a powerful one.

Soviet power came as "the wheel of history." It brought a future that was both inevitable and sublime. Many reasons led sensitive and educated men and women to embrace those incredible, utopian claims of ideology: from the experience of social injustice, racial prejudice, and bigotry under prewar regimes to the indescribably terrible Central European experience of war, occupation, and holocaust. These reasons cannot be summarized or synthesized, for they are not only reasons but motives, drives, compounds of fear and longing, "of eros and of dust"; hunger for power, lust for destruction, vulgar ambition, but also desperate responses to such suffering as the human spirit simply will not acknowledge to be senseless. Literature and biography, rather than philosophy or history, are here the only ladders to *Verstehen*.

The more rational part was the hope of emancipatory modernization. In, say, 1948 it was by no means wholly irrational

"Czeslaw Milosz's classic account, *The Captive Mind*, should be supplemented by the earlier observations of the other greatest living Polish poet, Zbigniew Herbert, in Jacek Trznadel, *Herbert Domowa* (Paris, 1986).

to believe that some version of a Soviet-socialist planned economy could pull most of Eastern Europe out of its historic backwardness and dependency, and, particularly in the case of its developed parts such as the Czech lands or Silesia, even outperform the capitalist economies. Nor was it entirely absurd to imagine that a socialist state could achieve a standard of social justice and "social rights"—universal equal provision of employment, housing, health care, education, and so forth—far superior to the miserable standards of much of prewar Eastern Europe, and perhaps even superior to those achieved in capitalist states.

Up to the mid-1960s it remained possible to believe that something of this was actually happening. Growth rates were high, even allowing for statistical exaggeration. Western scholars wrote seriously about "convergence." Khrushchev talked publicly of "burying" the West. The Czechoslovak leader Antonin Novotny worried privately about Czechoslovakia's economic problems of success. As for "social rights," there was already

"Thus, for example, Zbigniew Brzezinski's book of 1965, *Alternative to Partition*, contains a section on 'the ideological neutrality of industrial development,' and statistical tables to show that Poland and Italy, Hungary and Austria, Czechoslovakia and Sweden were all developing pretty much in the same way. For 'convergence' see also Zbigniew Brzezinski and Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Power: USA, USSR* (Greenwood, 1964). The reference to Novotny comes in a reminiscence by Vasil Bilak, published in the Slovak paper *Nedelná Pravda*, March 4, 1988.

one great, structural inequality—automatically privileged status for the *Nomenklatura*—but it nonetheless really looked as if there could be jobs, housing, basic health care, and basic schooling for all. A certain rudimentary social security was an indisputable fact. So was the social advancement of a whole generation of workers and particularly peasant children, who found themselves, for the first time, in a modern apartment with running water and inside lavatory, or even in a lace-curtained office, with a potted plant and a plastic Lenin.

But what is there today? Growth rates have slumped since the mid-1970s, with an absolute decline in national product in some years, not only in Poland but also in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Eastern Europe's total share of world trade is shrinking. Poland, Hungary, and the GDR are among the world leaders in per capita hard currency debt. The model plants of Stalinist modernization—those Lenin steelworks, Lenin mines, and Lenin shipyards—are now mostly sheer liabilities. Even the most advanced and West German-subsidized GDR has fallen dangerously behind with essential investment, not merely in industrial plant, but in basic infrastructure: roads, railways, waterways, telephone lines, and so forth.

The Soviet Union offers less than before in hidden or open subsidy, and next to nothing in providing a model for economic reform, management tech-

"A very useful overview is the Economist Intelligence Unit's *Eastern Europe and the USSR: Economic Structure and Analysis* (London, 1988), especially the chapter by László Székely, pp. 7-14.

niques, or technology." Only by dint of their ties with Western Europe are some of these countries just barely clinging to the coattails of the revolution of high technology that is transforming the industrial West and Far East. The historical reckoning is drastic: "we have lost four decades," "we are returning to the starting point of 1945-1946." These are not the judgments of dissidents but almost casual asides from senior members of the government economic reform teams in, respectively, Hungary and Poland. If one considers the added dynamism that West European economies may acquire in the mid-1990s through the completion of the EC internal market, it seems fair to say that—barring radical change—Eastern Europe once again faces the prospect of growing relative backwardness vis-à-vis Western Europe.

If this is the objective reality, the subjective reality for the individual citizen is even grimmer. The economists tell us that material standards of living have stagnated or declined, with open inflation in Poland and Hungary. But the quality of life is felt to have sunk still further, because of pollution, because of the shortfall in basic investment—painfully visible in housing, hospitals, and schools—and because the members of the younger generation compare their situation not with their own countries' recent past, but

"Even the highly conformist editor of the East German communist youth movement (FDJ) paper *Junge Welt* observed recently that although the Soviet Union deserves great historical respect for having defeated Hitler, 'as far as technology and progress are concerned, it is no model for us' (quoted in *Die Zeit*, June 27, 1986).

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with the situation of their contemporaries in Western Europe, whither they travel in growing numbers.¹²

In international forums, and notably at the Vienna Helsinki review conference, Soviet and East European governments still advance their notion of "social rights," with the clear implication that whereas people in the West may enjoy more individual or civil rights, people in the East enjoy more social rights. But in much of Eastern Europe those very "social rights" (to adopt the questionable terminology) have been eroded to an unprecedented degree, in both quality of things provided by the state and equality of access to them. Poland, where hospitals lack the simplest medicines, where children go to school in three shifts, for want of classroom space, and where a young couple can now expect to wait twenty years for an apartment, is obviously an extreme case. But even a good hospital in central Prague resembles an English hospital in, say, the early 1960s.

In addition, there is the injustice: not just the formal injustice of separate, better-supplied hospitals for the *Nomenklatura* and the police, but the informal injustice of corruption and graft, when in practice you have to pay illicitly (preferably in hard currency) for the surgeon to perform an operation, for the nurses to look after you in hospital, for extra tuition to remedy your child's inadequate schooling, and even for the apartment that is theoretically yours by right.

Current projects of economic reform will certainly result in a further erosion of these "social rights," including violation of the ultimate taboo of full employment, as loss-making factories are closed. Unemployment of about one hundred thousand people (some 2.5 percent of the working population) is now officially projected for Hungary. Even for those in employment, there is the frustration of senseless work, and a real sense of exploitation. For the younger generation of worker and peasant children, moreover, there is little prospect of the kind of social advancement that their parents' generation enjoyed. Solidarity, it has been well observed, was to some extent a product of blocked social mobility. Not only social but actual physical life expectancy has declined in some countries. In Hungary, average male life expectancy has reportedly declined from sixty-seven to sixty-three over the last eight years. The statistics for suicide, alcoholism, and drug abuse also show change for the worse.¹³

Of course the picture is not uniformly grim. Of course many young people in Eastern Europe have a rose-tinted picture of the West. But that itself is a reality that their governments have to confront.

¹²One should also mention the impact of radio and television—not only the West German television received in most of East Germany, but also the Austrian television received in parts of Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

¹³The context of the Hungarian official estimate for unemployment will be explained in the second part of this essay. The Pope and Father Józef Tischner have both written eloquently about the problem of "senseless work." The reference to Solidarity as a product of blocked social mobility comes from an unpublished paper by Aleksander Smolár; the statistic for Hungarian life expectancy I owe to George Schöpflin. For some telling detail on suicide, sickness, pollution, poverty, and inequality in Poland see George Kolankiewicz and Paul G. Lewis, *Poland: Politics, Economics and Society* (Frances Pinter, 1988), pp. 30, 33, 43–45.

The general feeling is, I think, nicely captured in an exchange between Teresa Torafaska, a Polish journalist of the younger generation, and Julia Minc, one of the old Stalinists she interviewed for her splendid book, *Oni*. Julia Minc has been defending the Afghan government, "which is trying to build socialism":

Torafaska: What is socialism?

Minc: A higher standard of living for everyone, free education and social security.

Torafaska: Like in the West?

Ah yes, socialism! The end of ideology and the bankruptcy of socialism in Eastern Europe have been proclaimed so often that one has to say more precisely what one means. In what senses is ideology more dead and socialism more bankrupt in Eastern Europe in the 1980s than it was in the 1970s? By then, of course, no one believed that heaven would be built on earth. Regimes sought their

But this is light relief. There are three serious ways in which ideology has further decayed in the 1980s. It remained generally true in the 1970s that, although virtually no one had any use for official Marxism-Leninism, most people in Eastern Europe would probably endorse some variant of something called "socialism," or, even if they reacted against the term (because it was poisoned by official usage), they had internalized some of what might be regarded as core values of socialism: egalitarianism, belief in full employment, social ownership of the means of production, a large welfare role for the state. Evidence for this assertion came from sociological research, opinion surveys, and, not least, from the demands made by the worker-activists and leaders of Solidarity in Poland. Yet there are now signs that even this is beginning to erode, under the impact of the economic and social crisis indicated above. At least

Secondly, socialism has virtually disappeared from the language of opposition. Of course KOR and Charter 77 had already, in the late 1970s, taken a decisive step beyond the revisionist hope of "socialism with a human face." Yet Adam Michnik ended his seminal essay on the "New Evolutionism" in 1976 with a sentence beginning "every act of resistance permits and allows us to build the foundations for a structure of democratic socialism..." and much of the vocabulary of the opposition in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia was unmistakably of the left.

This is no longer true. The small re-founded Polish Socialist Party (PPS) and the dwindling "Eurocommunist" faction of Charter 77 are the exceptions that prove the rule. If asked "how do you recognize a leftist opposition intellectual in East Central Europe today?" the unkind answer might be: "The leftist intellectual is the one who says that the cate-



Czechoslovakia, 1968

popular "legitimation" in nationalism or consumerism as much as or more than in socialism. Popular ignorance of and indifference to the ideology had already attained impressive dimensions. Generally, one would rather people learned things than not; yet there is something glorious in the capacity of millions of human beings to spend billions of hours being inculcated with Marxism-Leninism, and to emerge knowing nothing, but *absolutely nothing*, about it. In 1965 Radio Budapest sent two of its reporters to Marx Square to ask passers-by who Karl Marx was. The transcript notes:

Another voice: He was a Soviet philosopher; Engels was his friend. Well, what else can I say? He died at an old age.

A female voice: Of course, a politician. And he was, you know, he was what's his name?—Lenin's, Lenin, Lenin's works—well, he translated them into Hungarian.

The reporters then went to Engels Square.

Q: Who was Engels?

A: He was an Englishman, and he screwed around with communism.¹⁴

¹⁴Teresa Torafaska, *Oni* (London, 1987), p. 24.

¹⁵Quoted from Radio Free Europe Research, *Magazine*, 60 (1988), p. 100.

among younger and better educated people (students as well as skilled workers) in Poland and Hungary, not just the Soviet-type system but some basic core values of socialism, such as equality or social ownership, are increasingly questioned. It is still unlikely that in a free and secret ballot you would find a majority for returning heavy industry to private ownership. (Apart from any theoretical preferences, this would involve many people voting themselves or their relatives out of a job. There is still widespread passive attachment to the old habits of "they pretend to pay us, and we pretend to work.") But it may soon be right to talk, in this more fundamental sense, of a popular rejection of socialism *tout court*.¹⁵

Byron once said that while the English do not have the word "longueur," they have the *thing* in great profusion. One might say the same about Solidarity and socialism. The word did not appear in the Solidarity program of autumn 1981; but the thing was there in some profusion. Clearly, in all of East Central Europe there is still a strong current of egalitarianism and a deeply ingrained habit of looking to the state as provider. But the trend is away from this. For evidence see, for example, the article by Lena Kolarska-Bobinska in the special Central and East European issue of *Social Research*, Vol. 55, No. 1, Spring/Summer 1988. Accord-

gories left and right no longer have any significance in East Central Europe." The right does not say that; and by now it is certainly possible to talk of a "right" opposition. Indeed, for good or ill, the fashion in oppositional thinking, whether in Poland, Hungary, or Czechoslovakia, is now for liberal, libertarian, conservative, or revived prewar nationalist/national-democratic/populist argument and/or rhetoric.

Thirdly, there is the change in official ideology. It has been customary to observe that although the leaders of socialist states might not privately believe a word of their own official doctrine, they cannot publicly abandon it, since this is the only fundamental legitimation they possess for their continued monopoly of power. Historical necessity must stand in

"Poles '88," 30 to 40 percent of respondents were in favor of permitting private ownership *without any limitation* in the retail trade, restaurants, services, agrarian wholesale, and housing construction. A majority was still against the reprivatization of hospitals, social security, banks, and heavy industry. But would an opinion survey even in Mrs. Thatcher's Britain show a majority for the reprivatization of hospitals, social security, or even of heavy industry? (see Wladyslaw

for charisma, divine right, or the ballot box. Yet in Poland and Hungary the ideological pretense has been dropped to an extraordinary degree. The new Hungarian leader, Károly Grósz, has said that it is only because of "bad luck" (pech) that Hungary has ended up with a one-party system.²² I cited at the beginning of this essay the remark of the most outspoken reformist in his Politburo, Imre Pozsgay, that he had no argument in principle for a one-party system. He went on to say that he had only a practical argument: the need for political stability.

In Poland, the Jaruzelski regime has not entirely abandoned ideological self-justification, and the most vaunted "reformist" in the Politburo, Mieczysław F. Rakowski, believes in the leading role of the Communist party more fervently than many a "hard-liner."²³ Yet the defense of martial law—still an obsession with this group—was conducted in almost entirely nonideological terms. The government adopted what might be called a neobrutalist tone: "If we had not done it, the Russians would have. In any case, we have the guns and you do not: so what

are you going to do about it? Come and get us! We know we're a minority government. We know we're hated. But we're going to pull this nation up by its bootstraps whether it likes it or not. History will prove us right." That, in effect, was the message of the likes of Rakowski, the government spokesman Jerzy Urban, and the *Polityka* columnist Daniel Pasent. As for economics: in both countries the superiority of capitalism is more or less openly acknowledged.

Threadbare as the ideological legitimization had already become, its nearly total abandonment in favor of arguments of *raison d'état*, expediency, or efficiency is a significant development. In the short term this redounds to the popular credit of the leadership: "at least they are calling a spade a spade." But in the longer term, one wonders. If Václav Havel is correct when he writes that the quotidian canvas of ideologically determined lies plays an important role in preserving the system, then the very public rending of this canvas cannot be without consequences.

The hope of emancipatory modernization has faded. Ideology is not only dead but officially buried. This leaves the reason of force—and only in its coercive aspect. For while Soviet leaders may still believe that Eastern Europe owes the Soviet Union a "blood debt" for liberation from Nazi occupation, I doubt if there is now a single human being anywhere in Eastern Europe who does not feel that this "debt," insofar as it ever ex-

²²For Soviet claims of the "blood debt" at the time of the invasion of Czechoslovakia see Karen Dawisha, *The Kremlin and the Prague Spring* (University of California Press, 1984).

isted, has long ago been paid, with multiple compound interest. General Jaruzelski may still wheel out the old line about the Soviet Union protecting the Polish frontiers against German revanchism, but most young Poles have an increasingly positive view of the Federal Republic and certainly do not believe for an instant that the Red Army is there to protect them against the West Germans.

The fear of Soviet invasion and internal repression remains. It was reinforced

²³According to the series of sociological surveys entitled "Poles, '80, '81, '84," and, most recently "'88," the percentage of respondents who saw a threat to the independence of the Polish state from the Federal Republic fell from a mere 10.7 percent in 1980 (when the figure for the Soviet Union was 49.6 percent!) to 4.7 percent in 1984 (USSR: 23 percent), although a further 4 percent in 1980, and 2.9 percent in 1984, saw a threat from "Germans"—without specifying which German (See Jan Powłowski, "Polacy '84..." in *Krytyka* Warsaw, No. 27, 1988, p. 63.) I do not yet have the figures from "Poles '88." Matthias Rust is probably the first German since World War II to be a popular hero in Poland. One of the surrealist "Orange Alternative" groups in Poznań calls itself the "Matthias Rust Commando." On March 8 this particular Matthias Rust landed outside a bar in Piłsudskiego Street, in the form of a group of women displaying banners proclaiming "We, Polish women, support the government." "Life is getting better all the time," and the like. The group... quickly swelled to some one hundred people and proceeded down the road shouting, "Thank you for the price rises" and "Long live the government" (*Obserwator Wielkopolski*, No. 119, March 1988. Quoted in *Uncensored Poland News Bulletin*, No. 12, 1988).

throughout East Central Europe by the example of Poland's "wise of war." Yet at the time of writing, in the summer of 1988, even these fears have diminished. For reasons outlined above, it is rational to assume that the danger of Soviet invasion has at least temporarily receded. But it is also broadly true to say that the level of internal repression has decreased, even in Czechoslovakia and the GDR.

Very nasty things still happen. In May "anti-terrorist" forces broke up a peaceful strike at the Nowa Huta steelworks in Kraków with gratuitous violence. Also with gratuitous brutality, Hungarian riot police dispersed a small, peaceful demonstration in Budapest on the thirtieth anniversary of the judicial execution of the leader of the 1956 revolutionary government, Imre Nagy. The prime mover of the petition for religious freedom in Czechoslovakia, a splendid Moravian yeoman called Augustin Navrátil, has been committed to a psychiatric hospital. Germans are still imprisoned or shot just for trying to walk from Germany to Germany.²⁴ But in general the risks of speaking your mind have become more calculable, and less extreme, although they still differ greatly from country to country. Adam Michnik says that this is not "socialism with a human face" but "totalitarianism with the teeth knocked out." The metaphor is only half apt. Yes, this is a further symptom of the decay of a

²⁴However, it does appear that at the moment, thanks to consistent West German pressure, the East German border troops do not, as a rule, "shoot to kill." For Augustin Navrátil see the article by Edward Marston in *The Spectator* (April 16, 1988). His confinement to a mental hospital was reported in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* of July 2, 1988.

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once-totalitarian system. But the teeth—the instruments of coercion—are still there, and indeed, in the case of Poland, more numerous and sharper than ten years ago. What is different is that the present heads either have to use them, or more desire not to use them, or indeed—for reality is complex and messy—a bit of both.

Yet this is surely the least irreversible of the trends of decay. One can hardly imagine a successful revival of ideology. A recovery of state-directed emancipatory modernization seems scarcely more probable. But one can all too easily imagine

the recovery of force in states that still possess formidable apparatuses of repression. This might take new forms: the murder of Father Popieluszko in Poland four years ago was more reminiscent of El Salvador than of "classical" totalitarian repression. It might be an autonomous response to domestic unrest, or unwilling compliance with a conservative backlash in Moscow. As this goes to press it appears that the Polish authorities, having contained the latest wave of strikes by a mixture of cajolery, threats, and direct police intervention, now hope to end them by reopening a dialogue. What kind

of dialogue, and with what prospects, I shall consider in the second part of this essay. Yet even if there were to be a reversal in Poland to the systematic use of force, one can already say, with confidence, that this would not stem but rather hasten other processes of decay.

At the time of writing, the net result of all these different sorts of decay—imperial, regional and national, economic and social, ideological and political—is that, in Hungary and Poland at least, there are more and larger spheres in which the state does not in practice intervene, or intervenes ineffectually, more opportunities

for the individual citizen to speak and act for him or herself (but also more need to fend for yourself), more *de facto* pluralism, than at almost any time in the last forty years.² How, then, do people speak or act in these expanded spheres? What are the contours of emancipation? What are the prospects for reform—or revolution?

—August 31, 1988

This is the first of two articles.

²Excepting, of course, a few weeks in 1956, and for Poland, sixteen months in 1980-1981.

Call of the Wild

My Weeds: A Gardener's Botany
by Sara B. Stein,
illustrations by Ippy Patterson.
Harper and Row, 229 pp. \$19.95

Essays by Percy

There is a sense in which the average gardener is like the motorist who tools along year after year in blissful ignorance of what goes on under the hood of his car. If the mechanism works, well and good. If it doesn't, consult an expert. Don't try to understand it. That, at any rate, has been my way. Incurious, for the most part, about the private lives of plants except as they impinge on my plans for them, I haven't often asked myself why milkweed attracts butterflies or whether garlic is immortal; and still less have I been concerned with the larger matter of the environment that surrounds me. All I know is that my soil is on the acid side, and full of rocks. I have, to be sure, had my occasional suspicions that more is happening out there than meets the eye—going so far as to speculate that a vine reaching out horizontally toward a holdfast might have eyes or even a brain, and that those who claim to have witnessed the power of prayer on beans may have something. But these wanderings have more to do with superstitious magic than with an interest in science, which I am not, as they say, good at.

For all these reasons, a book apparently devoted to weeds didn't promise to exert a spell. In my view, weeds have been something to get rid of, not study. Weeds, the catchall term that Stein has chosen to describe all plants not currently under cultivation, are fascinating—far more various and full of quirks and disguises than their domesticated counterparts. Or at least they become so under the scrutiny of an insatiably curious mind.

Here I should say that this isn't a how-to book. Though it describes some of the innumerable uses to which so-called weeds have been put over the centuries, it isn't a guide to connecting dyes or wild salads. Nor does it disclose any secret for eliminating weeds from the garden. Sara Stein bores and hacks and curses like the rest of us, with no more and no less success. The difference is that she asks questions as she goes along, and having asked them goes to books and neighbors and old records to find the answers. She wants to know her enemies: where they came from, how long they plan to stay, and what their personal habits are.

Though we all know how quickly an untended garden will return to what is called a state of nature, few of us, I think, realize that the state of nature is

no more permanent than the garden itself. A garden is an interregnum, an artificially imposed pause in the inexorable march of occupying armies. But so, too, is the landscape beyond it unless by some remarkable chance it happens to be a forest primeval or a virgin prairie. These are stable plant communities that have reached what is termed the "climax," meaning that they will undergo no further transformation without outside interference, and no weeds grow in them. Weeds appear in the wake of disasters,

Stein, who lives about a hundred miles down the road from me in country very like this, has explored it like an archaeologist, noting the stages of growth as though they were the strata of a lost city. Here she is on a bank of the Mianus River:

The stages of succession are palpable in a place like that, where the forest-to-be is barely shoulder high, and the meadow-that-was is dying. The dominant trees will never amount to much. They are fast-growing but short-lived, and lack the stature of



fire and flood that sweep clean, or that most persistent of all disturbances to the natural order: agriculture. It is the plow (and by extension the gardener's hoe) that by clearing the land restarts the process of colonization. Weeds are therefore and very largely our creatures, our very own monster children.

Were I as well-informed as Stein, I would have realized that I have a perfect example of how it all works right here in the scraggy, ill-conditioned woods of shoreline Connecticut. I knew that most of this land had been farms and orchards only a few generations ago (broken stone walls, strangling in wild grape and poison ivy, are everywhere in the undergrowth), but failed to make the connection. The inferiority of our woods must, I thought, be due to some deficiency in the environment, or simply human failure to clear the brush, as was regularly done by the peasantry where I used to live in Eastern Europe. It isn't so. Our woods are weed woods, in a transitory stage, and if left alone will, in another hundred years, give way to a noble forest like the one the early settlers cut down.

trunk or wealth of crown valued in specimen and shade trees. Such species as poplar, sassafras, and wild cherry are considered weed trees, and I would cut down every one of them as so much woody ragweed were it not for the part they play in plant succession. In every stage, from bare earth to beech grove, weeds both cull the old and nurse the new.

Grasses are the earliest arrivals on cleared land, as everyone knows who has let a vegetable garden lie fallow for a season; and they in turn are invaded by goldenrod, milkweed, daisies—plants whose roots are strong enough to penetrate turf and make a meadow. But not for long. All these are sun-lovers, and soon they will be shaded out by the advancing thickets and weed trees whose seeds do not need sun to germinate. But these, too, are doomed. Mining the soil with their roots, depositing their annual mulch of leaves, they unwittingly prepare the conditions in which the forest giants can take their stand at last—terminating the cycle.

Weeds are the proletariat of the vegetable world. Teeming in their ghettos, thriving on neglect and adversity, they are a continuous threat to the cultivated plants that like a spoiled and passive aristocracy wait for their needs to be met. Because the traits we desire are precisely those that nature discriminates against, cultivars depend on us for their very existence. Wild yams, for instance, are poisonous, wild beans purgative, wild carrots bitter and tough. Thousands of years of cultivation have bred out these protective characteristics in favor of sweetness, tenderness—edibility, in short, which insects, too, prefer. Natural selection, moreover, culls the weaklings from the wild population, leaving the survivors more resistant to plagues. What gardener hasn't noticed the spectacular health of weeds as opposed to his rusted beans and mildewed phlox?

All this is bad enough. Most serious of all is the loss among many cultivated plants of the ability to disperse their seeds, delay their germination, or in some cases to make seed at all. The domestic pea is a prisoner in its pod, which no longer splits to release it. The cultivated tomato, unlike its little wild cousin, is too big to be swallowed by birds, who spread seed far and wide. Wild grains have heads that shatter easily, releasing seed that is barbed to catch at passing animals. Domesticated cereals have shatter-proof heads and the seed, ripening all at the same time, stays on the stalk. In each case, a plant has been deprived of its capacity to multiply and must depend on us for its propagation and ultimate survival.

Some cultivated plants do, in fact, seed themselves, but only in their own immediate vicinity. Few are independent travelers. Weeds, on the other hand, are invincible wanderers. They may be powered by their own fiendish devices: burrs that float or grab; winged seed that flies before the wind. Tumbleweeds roll themselves into a ball and cover vast distances like miniature tornadoes. But most weed seed is moved, unwittingly, by men and animals. In cattle guts and packing materials, attached to hoofs and wheels, weeds have crossed oceans and continents. A few have even spread by invitation. *Rosa multiflora*, a pervasive nuisance, was imported to control erosion and fence highways. But one way or another weeds move. They move and they flourish, often by means that are close to unbelievable.

One of these is mimicry, whereby a weed changes its shape and size as circumstance requires. In alternate stands of winter and spring barley, a weed form of the genus *Arena* is a rosette among the routines of winter barley, grows tall

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Reform or Revolution?

Timothy Carton Ash

1.

The word "reform" has been devalued by overuse, both in the writing of Western journalists and scholars and in the rhetoric of Communist leaders. In Lenin's day, "reformism" was the ultimate transgression for Communists: now it is their saving grace. In Western usage, the term has been pressed into service to describe everything from a mere adjustment of economic policy to a fundamental transformation of the system, political as well as economic.

What are the reformers in Poland and Hungary today trying to reform, and why are they trying to reform it? A rather clear answer is given in a remarkable private memorandum leaked earlier this year. It is the work of Mieczysław F.

to the development of the mass media, the societies of our countries can 'peer into' the everyday life of the masses under capitalism." The conclusion is drawn a few pages later. If the socialist "formation" does not find the strength to reform itself, Rakowski writes, "the further history of our formation will be marked by shocks and revolutionary explosions, initiated by an increasingly enlightened people."

Well, exactly. Allowing for some slight differences of terminology, this could almost be an academic analysis for the CIA. Yet this is a text by a man who is not only a Politburo member, but who, according to informed rumor, became a Politburo member on the strength of this text. Private statements by Hungarian Politburo members reflect an equally

What the reformers want to reform is thus, in the first place, the economy. Now there is, of course, a more than thirty-year history of attempts at economic reform in Eastern Europe. But as Włodzimierz Brus, the *doyen* of this subject, wrote recently, "with a single exception" these attempts "have failed even in the sense of institutionalizing a new system, let alone in exercising a real impact on performance."¹ The single exception is Hungary, yet virtually all Hungarian economists now agree that twenty years on, the New Economic Mechanism have not effected a real transformation from the command economy to market socialism. Interference by the central political bureaucracy has remained all-pervasive, with loss-making

making losses and devouring subsidies as huge as their façades. They should have been closed long ago: they must be closed now. Subsidizing the production of basic commodities is a great burden on the state budget. Many official prices are wholly unrealistic, in relation to domestic, let alone Western, markets. The subsidies must therefore come down and the prices—up. People will only work better if they can earn more money by doing so. Some people must therefore earn more than others.

What does this perspective of reform imply for a socialist state? Socialism's proudest boast has been full employment. Reform requires unemployment. Socialism promised equality. Reform means more inequality: a second pyramid of inequality, superimposed on the existing pyramid which has the *nomenklatura* sprawled across its peak. Socialism said "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need." It is precisely the unskilled workers, the old, the weak, and the needy who will do worst out of a radical market reform. What is more, according to the sociologists in Poland at least, those who are likely to do badly out of the reform are precisely those who are at present more inclined to give the government their confidence, whereas those who support the idea of reform are least likely to support the government. And anyway, why should anyone believe that this agonizing wrench will actually produce the goods? How many times already has the regime promised jam tomorrow! Where are the guarantees?

See both the social cost of economic reform and the political credibility gap, the reformers in both Hungary and Poland are now saying that political reform is the indispensable concomitant of economic reform. Indeed, the new leadership in Hungary declares that political reform is the most important side of the equation. This is in diametric contrast to reforms carried out under János Kádár, whose attraction to neighboring rulers was precisely that they seemed to demonstrate the possibility of successful economic reform without political reform. What is more, the political reforms are at least partly conceived of as what the Polish Politburo member Marian Orzechowski recently called "conscious self-limitation of the Party's power."² The more usual euphemistic terminology is "redefining the leading role of the Party." The "strategy of retreat" is the oldest trick in the book of Communist attempts at economic reform. It dates back to Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP). But as a conscious political strategy, an NPP so to speak, it is more novel. Gorbachev's example has, of course, greatly facilitated this part of the discussion.

What would be "success" for these reforms? A minimal definition of success is easily given: to have averted revolution. A maximal definition is more difficult. For Communist reformers like Rakowski or Grósz it is a fair assumption that maximal success means fulfilling the

¹For the image of the intersecting pyramids see George Kolankiewicz and Paul Lewis, *Poland: Politics, Economics and Society* (Frances Pinter, 1988), figure 2.1, p. 64, drawing on the work of Iván Székely.

²See *Trybuna Ludu* (September 6, 1988).



Rakowski, who has just become Poland's new prime minister.³ Poland, he says, has been living through an economic, social, and political "crisis" (another devalued word) since 1980, and arguably since 1976. The Polish crisis is sui generis, but "we should not forget that basically symptoms of crisis are becoming apparent in all socialist countries." "Not only Poland," he writes,

but most socialist countries are threatened with relegation to the position of countries incapable of keeping up with the revolution of technological development in capitalism.

And again,

If one could transport a capitalist society into our everyday reality, it would very soon rise up in a revolutionary struggle.

But not only a capitalist society. For "due

³The leaked document is entitled (in Polish) "Reflections on some aspects of the political and economic situation in the Polish People's Republic in the second half of the 1980s" (hereafter Rakowski, "Reflections..."). The sixty-page typescript is signed and dated "Warsaw, 8.6-10.10 1987." Rakowski has privately confirmed that it is genuine. All translations are my own.

striking realism in the diagnosis of the disease—although neither they nor Rakowski are half so realistic in prescribing the cure. In other words, some men in power see the reality of decay, and the prospect of growing relative backwardness, which I sketched in the first of these articles.⁴ They also see that if they do not do something drastic to modernize their economies, their own people will unkindly invite them to leave the stage. A younger generation, better educated, better informed, relatively unafraid, looking to Gorbachev in the East and the European Community in the West, will just not be kidded by fatuous ideology, paper patriotism, or more promises of jam tomorrow.

⁴See "The Empire in Decay" (*The New York Review*, September 29), where I also developed the metaphor of "Ottomanization" for the long, slow decline of the Soviet empire, and the unplanned, piecemeal, and discontinuous emancipation, both of the constituent states from the imperial center, and of societies from states.

Besides those already thanked in a footnote to that article, I would further express my gratitude to Ivo Banac, Archie Brown, Włodzimierz Brus, Elemér Hankiss, Tony Judt, Leszek Kolakowski, and Jacques Rupnik for their comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

state enterprises consistently bailed out by huge arbitrary tax breaks or subsidies, and with a vast gray area of managerial-bureaucratic "bargaining" instead of the free play of market forces.⁵

The task of economic reform becomes more difficult with every passing year. The gap with the West grows wider. The list of the deferred tasks of modernization grows ever longer—not only closing outdated plants and opening modern ones, but also all that neglected investment in infrastructure, not to mention such luxuries as elementary environmental protection. The inevitable social cost of reform therefore continues to grow, while the regimes' popular credit continues to dwindle. They recognize that a "radical" economic reform is necessary. Those great model enterprises of the heroic phase of Stalinist modernization—the Lenin shipyards, the Lenin steelworks, the Lenin mines—have been

⁵Quoted from W. Brus, "The Experience of Economic Reforms: 1956-1987," typescript, p. 3. See also his contribution to Volume 2 of the *Economic History of Eastern Europe*, edited by M.C. Kaser (Oxford University Press, 1987).

⁶See János Kornai, "The Hungarian Reform Process: Visions, Hopes, and Reality," in the *Journal of Economic Literature*, Vol. XXIV (December 1986), pp. 1687-1737.

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forty-year-old promise of modernization, making their states respected, competitive members of a larger European community (small c), while at the same time retaining the maximum possible amount of power in their own hands. They want, in other words, to have their cake and eat it. The Party's retreat, if retreat there must be, is tactical or at best strategic. There is a strong element of *reculer pour mieux sauter*. Lower down the Party apparatus, the selfish motive of preserving your own power and privileges may easily outweigh any larger concern about the future of the country. (This is not to imply that those at the top are any less selfish; just that they are less immediately threatened.) All this is human, all too human. There are very few universally valid laws of history, but one of them is: men cling to power.

Yet many of those outside the Party who support the reforms, and whose active participation is essential to their success—economists, journalists, academics, lawyers, some managers, entrepreneurs, private or cooperative farmers, skilled workers—have a different maximal definition of success. This is that reform should become transformation. The Party's retreat should be permanent. The courts really should be courts. Parliament really should be parliament. Unions really should be unions. Reform begun at the behest of Party leaders (out of insight into necessity) would march ineluctably beyond those leaders' maximal goals. The forces of change from above, change from below, and what I have called "change from the side" would somehow combine in the process of transformation: in part willingly, in part unwillingly, but nonetheless combine. The energies of social emancipation would somehow be harnessed to halt, or even reverse, the awful progress of economic and social decay. Reform would indeed avert violent revolution. But it would effect a peaceful revolution instead.

The state would re-acquire what one might call "internal sovereignty," in the sense well described by an outstanding Polish political scientist, currently living in Rome. "The state is firmly sovereign when it governs society and also serves society, and allows the nation to realize its own subjectivity," writes this author. "Queen of Poland!" he continues, "Queen of Poland, I also wish to entrust you with the difficult task of those who wield authority on Polish soil. The state gains its strength first of all from the support of society." This may not be the language we usually expect from political science, but the words of Pope John Paul II, addressed as it were directly to the icon of the Black Madonna in the monastery of Jasna Góra, nonetheless express an analytical truth.¹

Now it is obviously germane to ask how the recovery of "internal sovereignty" might relate to the expansion of "external sovereignty," or, to revert to the central metaphor of Ottomanization, how the emancipation of societies

I discussed some forms of social emancipation in "The Opposition" (*The New York Review*, October 13), the second part of this three-part essay. By "change from the side" I mean the strategy of building an extensive autonomous social sphere based on private enterprise, while ignoring rather than directly challenging the socialist state.

¹This was on his 1983 visit. For the quotation see *Włecz*, Nos. 8-10 (August-October, 1983), p. 52.

from states relates to the emancipation of states from the imperial center. Western analysts have paid considerable attention to the cautious manifestation of verbal autonomy in foreign policy by Hungary, the ODR, and, to some extent, Bulgaria, in the years 1963-1965. This might fairly be described as a positive assertion of these states' "limited sovereignty." Under Gorbachev, such daring has not been necessary in foreign policy. At the same time, the external limits on sovereignty for East European states have widened, at least in practice and for the time being. This should facilitate the task of recovering a larger measure of "internal sovereignty," but there is absolutely no guarantee that individual states, or states and societies together, will be able to take the opportunity. The widening of the external bounds is a necessary but by no means a sufficient condition.

The causal connections in the other direction are even less clear. One might argue, theoretically, that a state which can stand on its own two feet, by its own achievements, will have less need of the threat of force and the imperial center. The more a state can depend on its own people the less it need depend on Moscow. But does it follow that the imperial center will have less need of, or hold over it? The peaceful transformation, so fervently desired by most supporters of reform outside the inner power elites, might indeed reasonably be expected to increase the external autonomy and the "strength" of the state, as the Pope suggests. But that is very far from being the primary goal of the political leaders who are currently initiating "reform." Yet before dwelling any more on these putative "problems of success," one is bound to ask what chance, in practice, the Polish or Hungarian reform experiments have of achieving even minimal success, let alone maximal success or peaceful transformation.

2.

Clearly the preconditions are worse in Poland, given the depth of the economic crisis, the inconsistency of the economic reform program and its implementation, the mixture of popular apathy and desperation, and, above all, the continued gulf between the authorities and the most active and organized parts of society. National product per capita is still 13 percent lower than in 1978, and real wages are one fifth lower than in 1980. Inflation has been estimated at 20 percent for August alone, and will probably exceed 100 percent for the year. Increasingly, the dollar has supplanted the zloty as the Polish currency. Consumer supplies have got worse rather than better. And these are seen by the population to be the fruits of the much vaunted "second stage of the economic reform," launched last autumn.

This is, of course, less than wholly fair. Fault can certainly be found with the technical conception of the reform. Its chief architect, Zdzisław Sadowski, is both an able and a reputable reform economist. In the tradition of Oskar Lange and Włodzimierz Brzus, he has produced a design for a "socialist market economy." Radical as this is by the standards of most previous reform plans, one might well argue, on the basis of Hungarian experience over the last twenty years, that even in conception it is not radical enough. Sadowski talks in general terms about "equal treatment of the public and private sectors

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and . . . market resource allocation," but the detail of the plan, let alone the bureaucratic practice, does not begin to amount to equal treatment for the private sector. The neo-liberals would say that just because there is a strong, authentic Polish tradition of designs for "market socialism," the importance of purely private enterprise—of capitalism blue in tooth and claw—is consistently underrated, not just by Sadowski and his team, but also by some economic advisers to Solidarity who come from the same tradition.

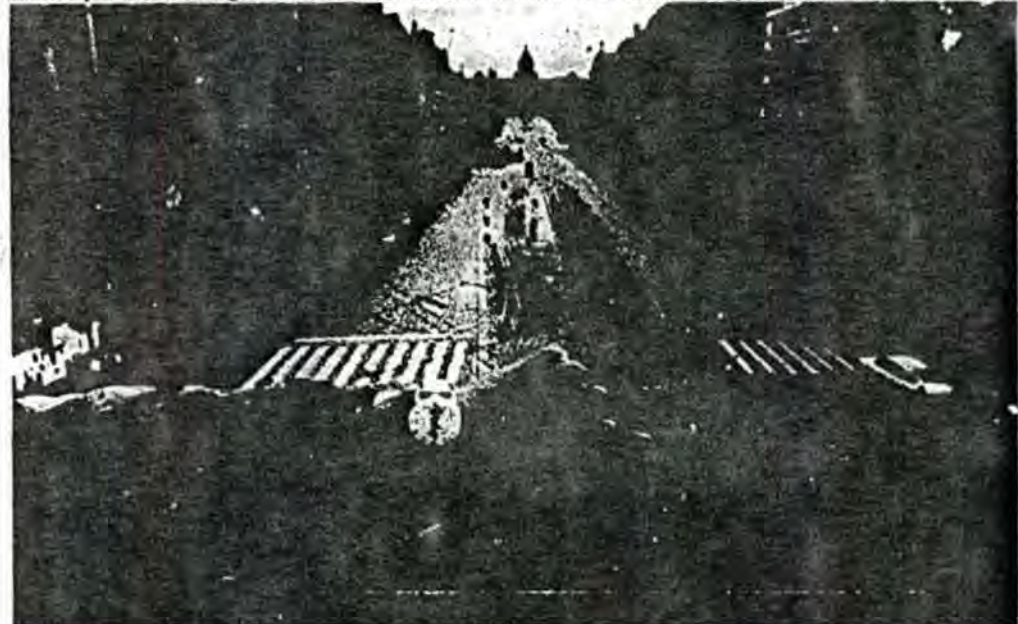
Of more immediate importance than these faults in design, however, is the failure to execute even the existing design. The official "Realization Program of the Second Stage of Economic Reform" of October 1987 is a hastily prepared and cumbersome document, containing a theoretical timetable of 130 "tasks" to be performed over the four years to December 1991, when, it says, all manner of things will be well. The definition of the "tasks" is often vague, but almost a year later one can go down the

The internal obstacles are also of two general kinds. First, there is the passive or active resistance of large parts of the ruling class: the Party apparatus, the industry ministries, the political bureaucracy at provincial and local levels, many managers. Secondly, there is the passive or active resistance of large parts of the working class. The attempt to restore a degree of domestic market equilibrium by sharply increasing the prices of consumer goods while holding down wages can be criticized on purely technical grounds. But the plain fact is that this strategy has also been vitiated by the active resistance of workers who, particularly in the very large factories which were Solidarity strongholds, have easily won large compensatory wage rises by striking, or merely threatening to strike.

Besides this active resistance, moreover, there is a deep and almost universal popular disbelief in the possibility of Jaruzelski's leadership realizing any reform program. If anyone was prepared to give the Jaruzelski team the benefit of the doubt

the self-organized and self-limiting "society" and the self-limiting Communist power. "Society" might be represented in different ways, but somehow, in some form, Solidarity must be included in the compromise. For nearly seven years now, the Communist authorities have done almost everything except talk to Solidarity. Any number of consultative bodies, extraordinary concessions to the Church, remarkably liberal censorship, almost free travel to the West, private enterprise, wage rises—anything, everything, except Solidarity. And after nearly seven years the workers in the country's great industrial strongholds stand up and say: Solidarity! So the authorities do what they have so often said they would never do: they start talking to Lech Walesa. Walesa in return manages, with difficulty, to end the last strikes.

A landscape which has seemed increasingly complex and obscure suddenly looks very simple and very familiar. There is an iron gate. On one side there are police; behind the police, the army;



Czechoslovakia, 1968

list and see what has not been done that ought to have been done.

This failure is the result of external and internal obstacles. The external obstacles are of two kinds. First, there are the Western obstacles, having to do particularly with the country's desperate hard currency shortage, the dependence of much of Polish industry and agriculture on components or materials that can only be bought for hard currency, the \$39 billion debt and the conditions imposed by Western banks, governments, and the IMF for continuing at least to "turn over" this debt. According to Sadowski, the government considers balancing the current account with the West to be one of its "main policy objectives," and aims to achieve it by 1991. Most independent economists consider this to be quite unrealistic. Secondly, there are the "Eastern" obstacles, having to do with the need to improve trade balances with the Soviet Union, the direct involvement of the Soviet Union in parts of Polish industry, and the problem of existing commitments inside Comecon.

*The quotation is from a speech delivered by Sadowski to the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) in London on June 21, 1988.

From Sadowski's speech to the Royal Institute of International Affairs.

after December 13, 1981—and not many were—it has squandered that confidence by the self-confessed failure of what is now called the "first stage of economic reform," which was supposed to be pushed through under the protective carapace of martial law. These two internal obstacles, the popular and the political-bureaucratic, are, moreover, mutually reinforcing. As two leading Solidarity advisers soberly observe, political leaders who do not enjoy social support "become prisoners of their own conservative apparatus, and cannot therefore be consistent promoters of reform."

For eight years now, Solidarity, the Church, and Western politicians have said that the only way to secure popular support for such painful but indispensable economic reform is a dialogue leading to a historic compromise between

"This quotation comes from a penetrating critique of the authorities' reform program and practice by Ryszard Bugaj and Andrzej Wielowieyski, whose arguments were discussed at a meeting of the "Group of Sixty" intellectual counselors of Solidarity in the crypt of a Warsaw church during the strikes last May. (The same group was summoned by Walesa to Gdansk in September, along with old and new workers' leaders, to help prepare his negotiating strategy.) The Bugaj and Wielowieyski text was subsequently published, after complicated

behind the army, Jaruzelski; behind Jaruzelski, Moscow. On the other side there are workers; behind the workers, Walesa; behind Walesa, the Pope. It looks simple and familiar, but it is not. Two crucial differences between the situation now and that in 1980 were neatly expressed by a worker in the Lenin Shipyard during the strike in May of this year. Today, he said, the external conditions are better, but the internal conditions are worse. In 1980 there was a real fear of Soviet invasion. With Gorbachev, that has greatly diminished. On the other hand, in 1980 there was still some real trust in the capacity of those in power to keep their word, to speak "as Pole talks to Pole." Where is that trust today?

The impossible keeps happening in Poland. It would therefore be more than foolish to make any firm prediction about the outcome of the promised "round table" talks between the authorities and independent representatives of "society," including Lech Walesa. Mieczysław F. Rakowski, the new prime minister, is both a realist and a Party reformist, as the memorandum quoted above makes clear. He continues to enjoy a certain reputation as a

negotiations, in *Tygodnik Powszechny* of June 19, 1988, but with no less than eighteen censor's cuts. The quotation was among the victims.

"liberal" in the West. But in Poland he is seen as the man who deceived and abused Solidarity while negotiating with it as a deputy prime minister in 1981, and who has passionately even obsessively, defended the imposition of martial law. His appointment is thus turning over an old rather than a new leaf. In any case, the general prognosis can hardly be optimistic. There is deep mistrust of the authorities on the Solidarity side, and a perhaps even deeper fear among those in power of a restored Solidarity. Moreover, it is very difficult to imagine what a restored—or new—Solidarity would look like, and how it could be married to the common goal of economic reform.

If Solidarity was allowed back only on the shop floor in individual factories, then it would have to work as a trade union, fighting for the workers' jobs and wages. As a democratic organization, and competing with the official trade unions for members, it would be almost bound to oppose factory closings and wage squeezes that its own national economic advisers regard as essential. Moreover, no one can seriously believe that it would remain without a national network for long. The alternative is that Solidarity should return in different guise: as the independent watchdog and guarantor of the whole society's interests at the highest levels of the state.

Thus Solidarity might be represented in parliament, together with Catholic and other independent groups. Its experts might participate in a body empowered to oversee the implementation of economic reform. Its representatives or associates might even hold government office. As an independent, legal, national institution, it could then "sell" the painful economic reform program to society as a genuine program for national recovery, supporting measures which as a local trade union it would be bound to oppose. Like Churchill in 1940, Walesa would say, "I have nothing to offer but blood, sweat and tears..." and the nation would rally round. In effect, this is what Lech Walesa and his senior advisers have been proposing to the authorities ever since July 1981.¹²

If it was not possible then, why should it be possible now? Because Gorbachev is not Brezhnev? Because the West wants it, and Poland more than ever needs economic help from the West? But the internal obstacles remain formidable. There is absolutely no blueprint for such an arrangement of power-sharing. The coalitions of 1945-1948 in East Central Europe are hardly an encouraging example. One could just conceivably imagine it working if there were to be a clear, simple, legally defined division of powers between the parties, enforceable by an independent judiciary. But that is out of the question. One might just imagine it working if there was a large amount of mutual confidence between the parties: as in an all-party wartime cabinet. But there is not.

What remains is the compromise of two boxers who recognize that neither can knock the other out, and that the ring is collapsing around them. But whence comes the boxers' staying power? Jaruzelski's staying power still derives from the military and the police (more than the Party apparatus), and ultimately from the Soviet leadership continuing to back him, as Gorbachev did demonstratively during his visit to Poland in July. Walesa's

power rests to some extent (as the government spokesman Jerzy Urban claims) on support from the West, and to some extent on his symbolic importance to the whole of Polish society. But his real muscle still comes, as it has all along, from the workers in a score of giant enterprises: from the miners of Silesia, the shipyard workers of Gdańsk, Gdynia, and Szczecin, the steelworkers of Kraków and Warsaw, the engineering workers of Poznań and Wrocław. If you ask, "Why is Walesa back at the table?" the basic answer is: because those workers put him there.

Now the corollary of this is that Solidarity leaders simply cannot afford to risk losing the confidence of these, their

the opinion that "fundamental change for the better can be introduced only when the authorities come to an understanding with society." Quoted in a brief report by the team who conducted the survey (Władysław Adamski, et al.) in *Polityka* (July 23, 1988).

grenadiers, unless they have cast-iron guarantees of a permanent independent role in the country's national political life. Even this time around, it was only with difficulty that Walesa persuaded the angry young men in the Lenin Shipyard and the slow stubborn miners of Jastrzębie to return to work. But the interests of the workers in these industrial strongholds are by no means identical with those of the economy as a whole. During the May strike at the Lenin Shipyard, the workers chanted, "There is no freedom without Solidarity," while loudspeakers broadcast a message from the management saying that the yard would have to be closed altogether. In the pure interest of national economic recovery, however, the Solidarity troops should probably have chanted, "Close the yards! Open a stock exchange!" But no one can seriously expect Solidarity to cut off the branch upon which it sits, unless it has another very solid branch to go to.

One might speculate that for Poland now to break through the immense barriers of alienation and decay, the authorities would have to take not one but two radical steps: restore Solidarity and restore capitalism. An expanded private sector and new mixed forms of ownership in the public sector might generate economic dynamism and harness the energies of the skilled, the young, and the rich, but it would also exacerbate social tensions, and the private sector could never be guaranteed a stable future without political representation (or at least protection) at the highest level. Solidarity, restored as a national, political force, might just conceivably mediate (or at least alleviate) that social conflict, and provide that guarantee, but it could hardly leap over its own Christian-social trade union shadow to become the cutting edge of radical economic

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¹²See chapter 6 in my *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity* (Scribners, 1984; Vintage, 1985) where I describe their abortive negotiations with... Rakowski. According to the latest in a remarkable series of sociological surveys, "Poles '88," no less

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change. One might say half in jest (and half in mourning) that when a Solidarity branch declares a legal strike against a private employer, Poland will be on the right course."

The most probable outcome, however, remains a continued muddling-through; or, rather, a muddling-down. On all Polish precedents, the result is likely, sooner or later, to be another explosion of popular protest. The result of that explosion would, in turn, depend crucially on the circumstances in the Soviet Union, but if present trends in the Soviet Union continue (and if developments elsewhere in Eastern Europe do not contribute to reversing those trends) it is not completely inconceivable that the historic compromise that could not be achieved by reform might yet be achieved by revolution. In an extraordinary passage of his memorandum, Mieczysław F. Rakowski writes that some people in power in Poland may still be thinking that if it comes to another revolt, "we call in aid our *raison d'être* and remind people that after all somebody might intervene in our internal affairs. But what," Rakowski goes on, "if that somebody, bearing in mind his own interests, does not want to intervene?" A thought to concentrate the functionary's mind wonderfully. Of course it would be morally indefensible for anyone in the West to encourage such a terrible gamble, yet equally no one in the West can prevent it. And in the long run of Ottomanization, even a failed revolution is not the last word.

3.

In Hungary, the preconditions are somewhat better. The economic crisis is still not as deep, and, although individual alienation is profound, there is no comparable gulf between "society" and "the authorities." One of the many reform manifestoes to bloom in the Budapest spring was that of a group describing itself as the "March Front." Its twenty signers ranged from Rezső Nyer, who in May became a member of the Politburo, to Miklós Vásárhelyi, who was Imre Nagy's press secretary in 1956 and might now be described as the Nestor of the democratic opposition. The March Front has not actually done anything, but in Poland it would not even be possible to get the names on the same piece of paper.

The continuum between critical intelligentsia and reformists-in-government is more substantially exemplified by the present economic reform project. In 1986 a group of reform economists working under the auspices of Imre Pozsgay's Patriotic People's Front produced a radical reform document entitled "Turning Point and Reform." In January 1988, several authors of this document moved into cramped offices in the parliament building, as part of an economic kitchen cabinet working for the deputy prime minister, Péter Medgyessy. In mid-July, the new Central Committee was offered two variants of economic reform, the radical "Plan A" and the more cautious "Plan B." "Plan A," for which the Central Committee voted, was essentially based on the kitchen cabinet's design, which in turn was based on the original document.

Miklós Németh, the Central Committee secretary for economic affairs, has

"An alternative approach, still quite popular in Poland, is that of promoting workers' self-management. But the Yugoslav experience suggests that this would be economically disastrous in present Polish circumstances."

"Rakowski, 'Reflections...' p. 18.

defined the goal of Plan A as "a genuine market economy, without any qualifying adjectives." It has been officially stated that the private sector could account for as much as 30 percent of this mixed economy. There is to be a real stock exchange. Western majority shareholding should be equally possible in firms from the private, cooperative, and state sectors. The change in forms of ownership inside the socialized sector, vaguely discussed in Poland, is here a detailed plan. The Hungarian reform economists (than whom no one on earth is more ingenious) have worked out a scheme whereby the net worth of a state enterprise would be converted into stocks, which would be given by the state to local councils, pension funds and the like. These councils or pension funds would then have to live (in part at least) off the dividends from these stocks rather than the direct state subsidies they currently receive. They would thus acquire at least a quasi-shareholder's interest in the profitability of the enterprise. Irredeemable loss-makers should go bankrupt, with estimated unemployment of one hundred thousand over the next two to three years. A sharp devaluation should bring at least partial convertibility of the forint within sight. "What is socialism?" asks the joke of the year. Answer: "the longest and most painful road from capitalism to capitalism."

Political reform is seen as indispensable for two reasons. First, to ensure that the political bureaucracy does not continue to violate the theoretical autonomy of enterprises, as it has for the last twenty years. What a leading member of the economic think tank laughingly calls the "invisible hand" of the center, should be reduced to an invisible finger. The Party "should be removed from economic life." Economic policy should be the province of the government, supervised and controlled by the parliament. The new company law should provide precise, legally binding definitions of previously political, "negotiable" relationships.

Secondly, political reform must sugar the bitter pill of austerity and win popular support. New courts and new laws delimiting the freedoms of association and speech are one path to this end. An increased role for parliament and local councils, with liberalized election laws, is another. At present the Hungarian parliament meets for just eight days a year. "We want to abolish the Party-state," a leading reformist Politburo member said to me. "We want to reintroduce the principles of Montesquieu in modern form." This is interesting talk from a Politburo member, albeit in a private, background conversation. But as we have seen, words are cheap in the new de-ideologized climate. The deeds have yet to follow. The main economic measures are supposed to be in place by the end of 1988, the constitutional changes perhaps by 1990.

What are the chances? Even if there were no political, bureaucratic, or social hindrances whatsoever to implementing radical economic reform in its purest form, Hungary would still be running to keep up with an increasingly dynamic European Community, and with the "newly industrializing countries." In purely technical terms it is not easy to turn a Lada into a Mercedes while continuing to drive down the motorway. Ingenious as the proposals for new forms of ownership are, one cannot imagine

"In a radio interview quoted in the BBC Summary of World Broadcasts—Eastern Europe (SWB:EE) (June 3, 1988), B/3-4.

them having half the impact of the pure, raw, brutal reprivatization of Thatcherism (so eloquently advocated by the *Towarzystwo Gospodarcze* in Kraków). Radical as the reintroduction of market forces is meant to be, even in design it seems unlikely to reproduce the Schumpeterian "creative gale of destruction." Two percent unemployment is a lot for a socialist country, but "Thatcherism" in Britain brought—and perhaps required—12 percent unemployment to revitalize a much less decrepit economy.

The hard currency debt is a good to reform, but if the debt-service ratio becomes too steep it can be a major impediment to further reform (witness Poland). The Hungarians reckon they have a breathing space until 1991, when loan repayments to Western banks are due to increase sharply. This is not long. Moreover, while their putative West European competitors have the opportunity of the common market, they still have the burden of Comecon. To adjust your domestic market to Western markets is one thing; to adjust Comecon to your own needs is quite another. So far as I can gather, Hungary's economic policymakers have more or less given up any hope of turning Comecon into a common market, and are merely looking for more realistic bilateral trade with individual countries, including the Soviet Union.

Yet for political reasons, the reform package is most unlikely to be fully implemented. For a start, Károly Grósz is not, by all accounts, comparable to Gorbachev, let alone to Mrs. Thatcher. He is a clever, forceful opportunistic politician, but there is no evidence that his present endorsement of radical reform flows from any deep conviction. His Politburo contains only three people whom one could clearly categorize as reformists (Nyers, Pozsgay, and Németh), and in János Berecz he has (*mutatis mutandis*) his Ligachev. The higher ranks of the Party apparatus contain some intelligent, realistic, reform-minded men. But no one really has the first idea how the new separation of powers, or division of roles, between Party and State, Central Committee, parliament and courts is going to work. If the Party is not to make economic policy then what on earth is it to do? Men cling to power: surely here too. I asked an energetic, realistic, and reform-minded new member of the Central Committee secretariat what he was actually going to do there. Well, he replied, we work out the broad strategic lines of policy, and then we pass them on to Party members in the state apparatus. This sounded vaguely familiar.

Then there are the corrupt local oligarchies that flourished under late Kádárism. Can their grip really be broken? On a much smaller scale, Grósz has the problem that Gorbachev faces in the Soviet Union. In theory, he wants to decentralize. But before decentralizing, he has to reestablish central control. And then there is the great unknown of social reaction. The leadership has stated clearly that in the short run reform means that most Hungarians will get poorer. The responsible Politburo member, Miklós Németh, told the Central Committee that "Plan A" would initially mean lower or

"According to a report in the *Financial Times* (August 9, 1988), Hungary's iron and steel producers have threatened to consider halting unprofitable exports to other Comecon countries after the Government's withdrawal of subsidies for metal exports." A nice illustration in

even negative growth and "a lower level of consumption by the population," not to mention the one hundred thousand unemployed. Hungarian society is too divided for a Polish-style Solidarity movement to seem at all likely, but there has already been one strike in the mines. Repeated local strikes—as in Yugoslavia—and even the founding of independent unions seems possible. Any one of these levels of resistance is probably enough to preempt economic "take-off" in a highly competitive world. Together, they seem almost insuperable.

Except, perhaps, by democracy. But democracy is not on offer. Hungary's Communist rulers quite understandably want to enjoy the benefits of democracy without paying the price of sharing or being obliged to compete for power. Legal definitions of rights can also be ways of

"SWB-EE (July 15, 1988), C1/1-5.

restricting rights. "An up-to-date practice of jurisdiction can be an even more efficient means of political regulation than direct administrative instructions," the new head of the Central Committee Agri-Prop department rather revealingly observed. "What Mr. Grósz calls 'opposition' is not what we would call opposition, and what we call opposition Mr. Grósz still calls 'the enemy'—a nasty verbal throwback to darker days. While the authorities allowed the populist demonstration for Transylvania, the police broke up a much smaller democratic opposition demonstration on the anniversary of the judicial execution of Imre Nagy, with some brutality.

The liveliest, but also in a way the saddest, meeting I had in Budapest this June was with a group of law students in their

"*Magyar Hírlap* (June 24, 1988).

early twenties who have been instrumental in setting up the new democratic youth union (FIDESZ). They have a brilliant program. It can be summed up in two words: liberal democracy. As we talked I felt, as I have done so often before, a simple anger. Why should they, who are every bit as civilized, deserving, brave, and clever as their exact contemporaries up the river in Vienna, have to put up with any more half-measures and half-truths. For God's sake, let them have it—now! After all, we know, and they know, and their authorities know, that liberal democracy works: not perfectly of course, nothing ever does, but in all its West European variants better than any of the East European variants of anything else. If Spain can pass peacefully from dictatorship to democracy, why should not Hungary? In morality and ideology, the ruling Party has no answer. Yet no one, not even as a joke, told me

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that socialism is the longest and most painful road from autocracy to democracy.

The sad fact is that socialism has created in all the East European states an array of domestic barriers against the transformation to liberal democracy cum mixed economy quite as formidable as those that existed in recent West or South European dictatorships, such as Spain, Portugal, or Greece. These barriers lie not only in the system of political-bureaucratic dictatorship (to use Rudolf Bahro's apt term), and not merely in the character and interests of the *nomenklatura* ruling class, but also in the interests, attitudes, and fears of many of the ruled. Of course, in conditions of full external sovereignty, with liberal democracies on all frontiers, these obstacles would simply be swept aside, as they were, gloriously, in Spain, Portugal, and Greece. But those are not the conditions. The Polish revisionist Wladyslaw Bienkowski once wrote a famous text called "The Engines and Brakes of Socialism." We have been discussing the engines and brakes of the transition from socialism. The conclusion is, alas, that even in Hungary, even in the Gorbachev era, the brakes look more powerful than the engines.

One is bound to hope against hope. The Hungarian reformists enter this experiment with that cheerful pessimism which is one of the more attractive features of Hungarian intellectual life. One of the very architects of the entire reform project told me he gives it only a 30-40 percent chance of success. It seems reasonable to suggest that the reform has a rather higher chance of *minimal* success—that is, of averting revolution—if only because of the further diversification of social interests which it will promote. The freeing of the private sector, in particular, means that Hungary might yet have an entrepreneurial bourgeoisie that will go to the barricades—against the revolting workers. Capitalists and Communists, shoulder to shoulder against the proletariat: a suitably Central European outcome for socialism. To estimate the percentage chance of peaceful transformation, by contrast, requires only the fingers of one hand.

4.

"To Generalize is to be an Idiot. To Particularize is the alone Distinction of Merit." We may not go quite so far as William Blake, but virtually all general writing about "Eastern Europe" is either a catalog or, if analytically more ambitious, extrapolates from the one or two countries the author knows best. The above has something of both faults. To concentrate on Poland and Hungary is, in the autumn of 1988, justified by the fact that these are the two countries of East Central Europe in which fundamental reform experiments are underway. Even here, what has been said is fragmentary and tentative. Yet there are many common features as well as differences. I would venture to predict that when the fundamental reform experiment does get underway in Czechoslovakia, there, too, one will recognize many of the features that I have singled out in Poland and Hungary.

In the case of East Germany, the differences will perhaps be greater than the similarities. A state whose annual transfers of hard currency from West Germany cover the total interest burden on its hard currency debt, but a state also whose citizens learn about their own country every night from West German television, is in a different position from its East Central European neighbors—a

position both better and worse. I have not attempted to include Romania or Bulgaria in my analysis.

For the heartlands of contemporary East Central Europe, however, for the more than sixty million Europeans living in the present territories of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland, there are certainly the contours of a common fate. The oldest of Central European tales has a German general saying to his Austrian ally: "The situation is serious but not tragic," to which the Austrian general replies: "No, Mein Lieber, the situation is tragic but not serious." One might say that the situation of East Central Europe today is tragic but not hopeless.

It is tragic, because a half-century of immense struggle, upheaval, work, and suffering has produced so little lasting progress. It is fashionable to talk, as Zbigniew Brzezinski does in the title of his Seton-Watson memorial lecture, of Eastern Europe being on its way "back to Central Europe." Polite reference is made to the positive ideal of Central Europe revived by Milan Kundera, Czeslaw Milosz, Václav Havel, György Konrad, and many others. But there can be "return to Central Europe" in a negative as well as a positive sense. The dream of emancipatory modernization, by no means only the property of Communists in 1945, may yet end in a reality, all too familiar from Central European history, of growing relative backwardness vis-à-vis Western, "modern" Europe. It may end in a new version of Giselher Wirsing's "Zwischen-europa" or the intermediate zone identified by Hungarian writers and historians, its economies exporting tin saucepans, bottled fruit, cheap shoes, and cheap labor, importing German tourists and Japanese capital. A zone, that is, of weak states, national prejudice, inequality, poverty, and *shlammasel*. It is almost already true to talk, in the case of Hungary and Poland, of a double dependency—on the great powers to the West as well as to the East.

This situation is tragic because of its toll in avoidable human suffering. At times it seems tragic, too, in the sense of classical tragedy: that is, having a relentless logic quite beyond and in spite of the will of the participants. For the petty functionaries defending their privileges are not really evil; and far less are the unskilled workers defending their jobs in factories that should long since have been shut. The more enlightened leaders in Hungary and Poland today are personally little worse than most politicians in the West. Some genuinely care about their countries as well as themselves. But, good or evil, they can no more avoid entanglement in the web of internal contradictions that socialism has created than Oedipus could avoid marrying his mother.

So entirely hopeless it is not. It is not hopeless, because, within the setting of overall decay, there are possibilities of individual and group emancipation, of free speech, learning, worship, travel, productive work, and self-help, which did not exist even ten years ago. It is not hopeless, because these states do, in theory, possess room for maneuver in which they might restore a larger degree of internal sovereignty. It is not hopeless because the great power to the East is itself convulsed with change, whose outcome no one can predict. It is not hopeless; finally, because the great powers to

"See my essay, "Does Central Europe Exist?" in *The New York Review* (October 9, 1986).

the West form a more open, successful, attractive, and benign constellation for East Central Europe than at any time in modern history. This is true of the United States, of Western Europe as a whole, and particularly of (West) Germany, on whose approach the future shape of this region once again significantly depends.

To discuss what we in the West can do directly to encourage desirable change in East Central Europe would require another essay, indeed a book. But if present trends continue, it is not unreasonable to look ahead to a time when the West will be not, as since Yalta, a tertiary actor in East Central Europe (after the Soviet Union and the countries themselves), but a secondary actor, as important as the Soviet Union, though in different ways. If we are to play this role wisely, however, the first imperative is to see East Central Europe as it really is, and not as a projection of our own fantasies or as a subcategory of Soviet politics. The metaphor of Finlandization, and the terms *glasnost* and *perestroika*, are of limited use in analyzing recent developments in East Central Europe. The impact of Gorbachev and the "new détente" in East-West relations has been great, but also complex, indirect, and ambiguous. Terms like "crisis," "reform," or "stability" are useless without closer definition.

In the first article in this series, I offered the crude metaphor of "Ottomanization" as at least marginally more illuminating than that of "Finlandization." The two faces of Ottomanization, emancipation and decay, each have many dimensions: imperial, regional, and domestic; economic, social, ideological, and political; the emancipation of states from the imperial center; the emancipation of societies from states, in the overlapping spheres of religion, national articulation, "civil society," and private enterprise, and the more or less consciously oppositional variants of each. Revolution, ending in partial failure, is as likely as reform, ending in partial success (i.e., averting revolution). On balance, the former seems more likely in Poland, the latter in Hungary. A maximal success for reform seems scarcely more probable than a maximal success for revolution. Each national case must be studied historically, and for itself. "Every thing is what it is and not another thing," as the great Bishop Butler unshakably remarked.

As these countries are rediscovering their own histories, so also is history the discipline most urgently called for, if we in the West are to understand their present and peer into their future. History, calling in aid economics, sociology, political science, and even security studies, but above all: history. Czechs, Hungarians, and Poles are rediscovering their own history; and they are making it again. To adapt a German philosopher, whose influence on East Central Europe future historians will record as baneful but transient, confined only to a few decades in the second half of the twentieth century: the peoples of East Central Europe make their own history, although they do not make it just as they please.

—September 27, 1988

This is the last of three articles.

*Two excellent multiauthor volumes are Lincoln Gordon, ed., *Eroding Empire: Western Relations with Eastern Europe* (Brookings, 1987) and William E. Griffith, ed., *Central and Eastern Europe and the West* (Westview Press, forthcoming). I am working on a book about the contemporary German role in this region.

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The Opposition

Timothy Garton Ash

A comprehensive map of the opposition in East Central Europe today would resemble nothing so much as one of those kaleidoscopic multicolored maps of ethnic groups in this region before the war. In both Poland and Hungary, groups or grouplets whose identities or programs arise from specific postwar realities overlap or combine with groups raising almost every flag, slogan, aspiration, or prejudice of the prewar political spectrum (except communism): populists, reform economists, radical sociologists, Smallholders, Lutherans, Catholic "base groups," evangelical sects, democratic opposition, democratic youth, democratic academics, Solidarity, Fighting Solidarity, national democrats, liberal democrats, Christian democrats, social democrats, liberal Catholics and conservative Catholics, Christian socialists, Jews, anti-Semites, advocates of workers' self-government, apostles of free enterprise, syndicalists and monetarists, self-styled "crazy liberals," "neorealists," "neopositivists": you name it, we have it. And this is merely the surface of explicit opposition. One could produce another rich catalog of official or semi-official projects for "reform." Hungarian political scientists have coined the delightful term "paradigm ecstasy."¹

Here I shall merely indicate four dimensions that every cartographer of emancipation must bear in mind.² The first might be called a popular rediscovery of the national past: a widespread and passionate interest in history, pre-war national traditions, forgotten authors, ethnic minorities past and present (Jews, Germans, Ukrainians, Hungarians in Transylvania and Slovakia), and regional ties ("Central Europe," Germany, Lithuania, and the Ukraine). To subsume all this under the label "nationalism" would be crass oversimplification. Much of it is simply the quest for what is regarded in the West as a "normal" cultural continuity: an identification with national symbols, traditions, and even myths, as benign in moderation as it is dangerous in excess. The lack of "normal" access to the national past was a form of deprivation; the recovery of it is a form of emancipation. Tradition, said G.K. Chesterton, is the democracy of the dead. But does the recultivation of tradition necessarily conduce to the democracy of the living? What about the authentic, national or antidemocratic traditions? And cannot nationalism act—or be used—as a substitute for democracy?

This fear is particularly acute among the "democratic opposition" in Hungary. Why, they ask, did the new Party leader-

ship, as one of its first acts, permit an independent mass demonstration against the Ceausescu regime's persecution of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania? Partly, of course, to give vent to a burning popular concern, and gain social credit for so doing. But also, perhaps, because if you let people shout about national rights in Transylvania they may be less inclined to think about civil rights in Hungary. Certainly it was a strange affair, this torchlit demonstration on Heroes' Square in Budapest. The speeches were an uneasy mixture of somewhat stilted liberal sentiments (universal rights, the poor Romanians suffer too) and purple patriotic rhetoric.³ My overwhelming impression was of a lonely crowd: men and women with slightly bewildered faces mouthing half-forgotten hymns, and just beginning to rediscover, for good or ill, what it means to be a nation; a spectacle at once pathetic, moving, and disturbing. "All we want is freedom and democracy for the Hungarians in Transylvania," said

A second dimension is the revival of religion, not just in Poland, but also in Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and even, on a very small scale, in Hungary. This, too, is exceedingly complex, whether one considers social roots, confessional forms, or political implications. Why do so many young people in Eastern Europe, often brought up in a wholly atheistic environment, at home as well as at school, turn to religion, or at least to the churches? Is it simply because nature abhors a value vacuum, such as the collapse of socialist ideology has left? Is it the search for comfort amid material decay, misery, and hopelessness?

Change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou, who changest not, abide with me.

Part of the larger rediscovery of the past? The impact of the Polish Pope? Divine intervention? All of the above? Religious

tion of "civil society" in East Central Europe. There is already a substantial literature on this subject,⁴ yet the concept remains woefully imprecise, partly because of the variety of earlier uses (notably by Hegel), but mainly because it is currently used to describe two different things: (A) the entire range of social associations, ties, and activities independent of the state, from glee clubs to Charter 77, from *samizdat* to brevities and from private farmers to homosexuals;⁵ (B) more narrowly, and more politically, the products of that strategy of "social self-organization" which was, broadly speaking, adopted by the democratic oppositions in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia in the mid to late 1970s. For them, the reconstitution of "civil society" was both an end in itself and a means to political change, including, eventually, change in the nature of the state.

(B) is a subcategory of (A). The growth of (A) will generally be unplanned, or at least not part of an overall political strategy, yet the emergence of non-political social associations and bonds has been facilitated by, and is deliberately included in, the strategy of (B). It might just be possible to call (A) simply "society," except that in Poland the term "society" (*społeczeństwo*) has come to be used precisely for those organized or civilly active parts of society (whether workers, farmers, or intellectuals) which, since August 1980, can meaningfully be talked of in opposition to the powers that be (*władza*). So while elsewhere people say "civil society" but mean society, here people say "society" but mean civil society.

In Hungary, "civil society," even in sense (A), was almost totally destroyed by Stalinism and János Kádár's counter-revolution after 1956, but it has been slowly, quietly reconstituted. A rudimentary measure of this is the number of independent clubs and associations: more than 13,000 in the 1930s, sinking to as few as 1,000 in the 1950s, but up again to more than 3,500 by 1981.⁶ However, in the last year or two, and most dramatically in recent months, we have seen a sudden flowering of "civil society" in sense (B): the more or less spontaneous combustion of debating clubs, associations, and lobbies of different social and intellectual groups, most of whose members are consciously agitating as citizens, concerned not merely with their individual or group interests, but with the state of the nation. The appeal for the demonstration in Heroes' Square was signed by no fewer than twelve such groups, and two of these were alliances: the Hungarian Democratic Forum for "populists" or nationalists, the Network of Free Initiatives for the rest.

Probably the most notable of these new groups are the Democratic Union of

⁴See, for example, John Keane, *Democracy and Civil Society* (Verso, 1988) and John Keane, ed., *Civil Society and the State* (Verso, 1988), especially the essay by Z.A. Pelczynski.

⁵The example of homosexuals is not imaginary. An association of homosexuals is currently applying for registration in Warsaw.

⁶Excluding sports clubs. Quoted in a paper by Elemér Hankiss for the Woodrow Wilson Center European Alumni Association conference on "The European Question" in May 1988. (The papers from this conference are due to be published in book form.) The number of private foundations also rose from nil in

a speaker at one point. Loud applause. Then, almost as an afterthought, "...and freedom for ourselves." Still louder applause. If I was the new Hungarian Party leader, Károly Grósz, I should not be at all sure that I could separate the national from the democratic cause. It is a short step from asking why the Hungarian government is not doing more for the Hungarians in neighboring socialist states, to asking why you have the kind of Hungarian government that cannot do more. To some extent, the Jaruzelski government faces a comparable dilemma on the burning national question of the Katyn massacre, and the other "blank spaces" of Soviet-Polish relations. If you cannot make or obtain a clear statement of the truth, it may be safer to say nothing.

³See my article in *The Spectator*, July 2, 1988. One should note that the Romanian refugees in Hungary were also

participation can be a channel for basically secular, social, and political aspirations: as it is in part of the Church-protected peace and human rights movement in the ODR. But it can also be a substitute for social and political activism. The surge of churchgoing in Poland after the imposition of martial law had elements of both. Like the rediscovery of national history, the religious revival cuts several ways, and it is very difficult to say which cut goes deeper.⁷ This is a nice analytical problem for the scholar, but a hard political dilemma for the authorities.

A third important dimension is what has come to be known as the reconstitu-

⁷Even in the most political churches, there is an extraordinary jumbling of national, social, and religious issues. At the last "Mass for the Fatherland" I attended at Father Popieluszko's church in Warsaw, the preacher ended up exhorting the faithful to fight the good fight against alcoholism, robbery, abortion, and com-



Scientific Workers (i.e., academics) and the Alliance of Young Democrats (FIDESZ) (mainly students), both founded in the spring of 1988. These are the first independent unions to be launched in Eastern Europe since the banning of Solidarity. The differences between this ferment and Poland in 1980 are obvious and legion. Yet I must say that listening to a gloriously discursive meeting of the new academics' union (only academics would try to write footnotes to a demonstration), or talking to the marvelously fresh and bright student activists of FIDESZ, I felt almost as if I was back in Poland in the autumn of 1980. How the Hungarian authorities deal with these groups will be one of the more interesting questions of the autumn of 1988.

In Poland, the situation is both worse and better. When, in the mid 1970s, the democratic opposition first embarked on the strategy of "social self-organization" and "change from below," they never imagined a mass movement like Solidarity. They did, on the other hand, imagine that they might find some partners, albeit reluctant ones, within the system, and that the result might even be some new, explicit or implicit, "social contract." In the late 1980s, civil or self-organized society exists in Poland on a scale no one then dreamed of. There is a fantastic landscape of independent clubs, associations, periodicals, publishers, and the like, and this, together with the existence of something called "the opposition," is accepted by more realistic members of the *nomenklatura*, and even of the secret police, as a lasting feature of Polish life. In a long memorandum written last year, Mieczysław F. Rakowski—a Politburo member sometimes feted in the West as a "liberal"—noted that "in practice we have recognized the opposition as a lasting element on the country's political map."

Earlier this year, the authorities felt themselves compelled by the depth of the economic crisis and popular discontent to start talking privately with this opposition again, very gingerly exploring the notion of an "anti-crisis pact." In recent weeks, they have been compelled by a wave of strikes to start talking directly and publicly with the man whom they have so often said was no longer a "partner" for them: Lech Walesa. But, as I write, in mid September there is still nothing remotely resembling a "partnership" between the authorities and the "society" represented by Solidarity. There is no "historic compromise" or "social contract."

This seven-year-old historic stalemate has had many demoralizing effects. Not the least important is that it has confined "civil society" largely to the realm of words. Written words—in *samizdat* journals too numerous to list, legal independent Catholic journals like *Tygodnik Powszechny*, *Znak*, or *Wzrost*, internal university publications, *samizdat* books from publishers like *Krag*, *Nowa*, or *cdn*, political programs, long and short, moderate and extreme; spoken words—in sermons, hymns, lectures, legal and illegal seminars, worker education groups, theaters, cabaret, unofficial cassettes;

"The leaked document is entitled 'Reflections on some aspects of the political and economic situation in the Polish People's Republic in the second half of the 1980s.' The sixty-page typescript is signed and dated 'Warsaw, 8.6.-10.10. 1987.' Rakowski has privately confirmed that it is genuine. It is interesting that he connects this recognition of the opposition specifically with Western official visitors' now regular practice of meeting with opposition leaders.

audiovisual words—wonderfully funny tapes from the satirist Jacek Fedorowicz, wonderfully serious tapes about Friedrich von Hayek, passed around on the country's now numerous videocassette recorders; words, words, words.

For many, this is still exhilarating—for writers, in particular. But most people are not writers. Although it is wrong and patronizing to assume that workers or peasants are not interested in words, ideas, free debate, worship or drama, these give no immediate answers to their most pressing concerns: wages, housing, health care, pollution. Even a student or academic may tire eventually of words, if they are wholly disconnected from any visible results. The defensive message of much of the underground press is summed up in the title of a journal I noticed the other day: *Jestem*, which means simply "We Are." The contemporary Polish version of Descartes is "I print, therefore I am."

What is more, the virtual abandonment of ideology by the authorities, combined with the relative freedom of speech,

I suspect that few people in the West (and perhaps also in the East) have really woken up to the sheer scale of private economic activity in Poland and Hungary. In his excellent book of 1985, *Private Enterprise in Eastern Europe*, Anders Aslund suggested that the economic activity of the legal private sector in Eastern Europe was likely to continue to fluctuate around a very low level, as it had done ever since the 1950s. But in a recent paper, the Anglo-Polish economist Jacek Rostowski argues convincingly that "Aslund's Law" no longer holds for Poland; and the same is clearly true for Hungary.

All figures are extremely speculative, but Rostowski estimates that private economic activity (legal and not so legal) now accounts for somewhere between 38 and 45 percent of personal money incomes in Poland. Total private sector employment accounts for nearly one third of the labor force. Two fifths of new housing construction can be classified as private. In 1986 and 1987, hard currency remitted from abroad by individual Poles was almost equal to the hard

holes left by the decaying state-providers: literally so, in the case of private dentists. It flourishes by providing what the public sector cannot, whether housing, services, consumer goods, or medical care. The variety of people who have turned to private enterprise is at least as wide as that of those who have turned to religion. So is the variety of motives. With religion it is not always the pure love of God; with private enterprise it is not always the pure love of money. Those involved range from people using private enterprise as a means to support opposition publications, to secret policemen, who keep an official eye on private firms but also an unofficial hand in the till. There is good evidence, both from Poland and Hungary, of major participation in private firms by senior members of the *nomenklatura*, their relatives or placemen.

For many people, private economic activity clearly is an alternative to public political activity. A Hungarian professor tells me that there are two quite distinct types among his students: those who wish



Czechoslovakia, 1968

even in censored publications, has resulted in a curious devaluation of language. Solzhenitsyn's "one word of truth" really mattered when it was spoken amid a forest of lies, and when those in power seriously sought to compel public endorsement of the lies; but when you can say anything you like, and those in power will even publicly agree with you (but then do nothing about it), words, however true or noble, lose some of their value.

Partly in response to this impasse, many bright young people have turned their attention to the most recent and dynamic form of social emancipation: the fourth dimension. This is private enterprise. Of course most classical definitions of "civil society" assume an economic foundation, with private ownership, property rights guaranteed by due process of law, free exchange, and so forth. In a sense, therefore, the pursuit of private enterprise is the logical complement of the pursuit of "civil society." But in practice, the engagement in private enterprise has so far been seen rather as an alternative to the pursuit of "civil society" in the narrower, more political sense indicated above.

currency trade surplus earned by the whole socialized sector." For Hungary, private economic activity is estimated to generate at least 30 percent of household incomes. Although the share of the labor force is much smaller (no private farmers), it is growing, and estimates of the private share of housing construction go as high as 85 percent. In both countries, the role of the private sector is already visible, both in the city centers and the countryside: here a bar, boutique, or software firm, there a smart new villa or farmhouse.

In many ways, the dramatic growth of private enterprise in the 1980s is a classic example of emancipation in decay, or "Ottomanization" at the social level. Private enterprise is stepping in to fill the "Jacek Rostowski, 'The Decay of Socialism and the Growth of Private Enterprise in Poland,' typescript.

"Ottomanization" as a metaphor for the decay of the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe, by very loose analogy with the decline of the Ottoman Empire, is explained in my previous article ("The Empire in Decay," *The New York Review*, September 29).

to go into private enterprise and those who wish to go into oppositional activity: the party of interests, as it were, and the party of values. The sociologist Robert Manchin has found from his research that Hungarians with private sources of income are on balance less likely to express discontent with the present political system or to articulate conceptions of political change. "If part-time self-employment is a value-generating strategy at all," he writes cautiously, "individual freedom is certainly not one of its core values." In Poland I have been told repeatedly by university teachers that private business is now the consuming interest of many of the brightest students. The official politics of "the reds" (as the Communist authorities are politely called by the disaffected young) are beneath discussion. But the unofficial politics of the opposition also seem to offer few perspectives. What they want is to travel

"Robert Manchin, 'Individual Economic Strategies and Social Consciousness,' in the Central and East European special issue of *Social Research*, Vol. 55, Nos. 1-2 (Spring/Summer 1988), pp. 77-96, this quotation on p. 93.

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to the West for a year, earn some hard currency, maybe learn some capitalist skills, and then return to set up a small private firm in Poland, whether dealing in videocassettes, carpentry, decorating, trinkets, toys, or computer software."

There are, however, individuals and groups who connect their advocacy (and practice) of private enterprise with a larger vision of social and political change. If the strategy of the democratic opposition in the 1970s could be described as "change from below," as opposed to the earlier revisionist hope of change from above, this 1980s vision might crudely be characterized as one of "change from the side." In Poland, most advocates of this path would probably be happy with the label "liberals"—and many use it themselves. In American terms, some might rather be described as neoliberal or even neoconservative, but there are significant differences of style and philosophy between them. To confuse the Warsaw *Towarzystwo Gospodarcze* (Economic Association) with the Kraków *Towarzystwo Przemysłowe* (Manufacturing Association) is a sin almost as mortal as that of confusing *The New Republic* with *Commentary*. The movement has many intellectual peers, but these two associations, bringing together theorists and practitioners of private enterprise, are probably its most important expressions to date.

The Kraków association began, in true Galician style, as a dining club. Intellectuals and entrepreneurs met for an excellent meal at a private house, in the course of which the intellectuals would explain the theory (out of Hayek by way of Michael Novak) and the entrepreneurs would explain the practice (out of the backyard by way of baksheesh), both sides being suitably fortified with vodka. Not wholly unfrivolous reports of these proceedings were published in the group's underground journal, *13*. Having obtained, as Mirosław Dzielski, an academic and leading figure in the association, explains, the support of "the two most powerful institutions in Kraków"—the university and the Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny*—they proceeded to draw up the statutes of their association, for "propagating citizens' economic activity and the principles of market

"Some 30 percent of entrepreneurs are under thirty-five, according to Rostowski, quoting J. Baczyński in *Polityka*, No. 37, 1987. "Almost 90 percent of the high-school students surveyed in 1987 said they wanted to leave Poland for an extended time in order to earn hard currency" (RFE/RL *Soviet East European Report*, Vol. V, No. 32, August 10, 1988). One other attraction of capitalism was nicely illustrated by an observation made during General Jaruzelski's televised "meeting with youth" last November. "My Professor," observed Wojciech Nowakowski, "used to say that socialism is a beautiful idea but very poor, because it has no economics. And our classes in economics seemed to confirm this, because when we had to learn the principles of capitalist economics these were clear and very easy to remember. But to remember the principles of our economics we really had to sweat" (*Sztandar Młodych*, November 28-29, 1987).

"Among them one should certainly mention the veteran publicist Stefan Kisielewski, a founder of the 'Party of Crazy Liberals'; the economist Stefan Kurowski, who was already urging some of these ideas upon Solidarity in 1981, and is now on the board of the *Towarzystwo Gospodarcze*; and the economist-publicist Janusz Korwin-Mikke and Piotr Wierzbicki,

economy" in the Kraków volvodship, and applied to the authorities in all form for legal registration. This they somewhat surprisingly received at the end of last year, and launched a public lecture course entitled "How to begin [in business]." A large turnout confirmed the impression that there is a great reservoir of public interest in this area, particularly among students, young professionals, and younger skilled workers.

The Warsaw association has not, at the time of writing, received permission for legal registration. Led by, among others, Aleksander Paszyński, a former *Polityka* journalist who resigned from the paper at the time of martial law, and went on to build up a highly successful private housing consultancy firm, the *Towarzystwo Gospodarcze* has been somewhat more direct and more ambitious in its proclaimed goals: for example, it wants the right to work throughout the country. It



Czechoslovakia, 1969. The picture is of a young man killed during the Soviet invasion.

is potentially a formidable economic force, since the combined capital of its member firms would probably be counted in the hundreds of millions of zlotys, or, which is more important, in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. When I asked a senior government official why the authorities had not given the go-ahead for registration he said simply "for fear of a camouflaged opposition."

In fact, the mainstream opposition was initially critical of these initiatives, partly because some of their proponents explicitly presented them as an alternative to the Solidarity struggle. The advocacy of private enterprise was treated as a new version of the nineteenth-century post-insurrectionary strategy of "organic work." Mirosław Dzielski himself said that he was interested in those who "in a socialist state want to make arrangements besides socialism and in spite of socialism." Their theoretical position is: we are not for the government or against the government; let it give us the tools, and we will get on with the job. Yet when you begin to look in detail at the conditions for a long-term, stable environment for a substantial private sector, you soon appreciate that the demand is, in fact, very radical indeed. The Kraków association's commentary on the government program for the "second stage of economic reform" begins by saying that it "greeted with satisfaction" the government's proposals. It ends by suggesting a program of sound money, "deregulation," "privatization," and tax reform

"Statut Krakowskiego Towarzystwa Przemysłowego," paragraph 7 (typescript).

"See *Kurz*, No. 27 (1987).

"Privatization should consist in the gradual sale into private hands of all industries belonging to the state." Quoted from "Opinia Krakowskiego Towarzystwa

which Margaret Thatcher could sign without a moment's hesitation.

The long-term message of the neo-liberals is ultimately little different from that of a conversation I overheard between two lads in a crowded Warsaw tram at the time of last year's referendum on economic reform. After laughing about a friend who had gone to vote because he was afraid that otherwise the authorities ("oni") wouldn't let him go abroad, one lad said: "but I suppose we should try and reform this economy somehow." "Come off it," said the other, "this reform hasn't a chance. The only thing is to do it like in America." An entirely rational position, though hardly one the authorities are likely to adopt. In the short-term, however, there are good selfish reasons for the authorities to permit an expansion of the private sector.

In Hungary, the politico-philosophical theory is not so highly elaborated, but the entrepreneurial practice is much more so.

Here, too, there are embryonic associations of entrepreneurs, with which the government is treating. But the main organ of entrepreneurial and free-market discussion is not a *samizdat* journal but an entirely official weekly, *HVG*, which might very loosely be described as the Hungarian *Economist*. Thick with advertisements from private and cooperative firms, it brings excellent reports of economic and political developments in Hungary and elsewhere, and prints the most radical reform proposals this side of *samizdat*. Sooner or later, an analysis of this fourth dimension of social emancipation inevitably becomes also a discussion of official proposals for economic and political reform. To these, therefore, I shall turn in a third article.

—September 15, 1988

This is the second of three articles.

two *Przemysłowego* na temat Programu Realizacyjnego Drugiego Etapu Reformy Gospodarczej," typescript. (Kraków, October 1987), p. 15 and *passim*.

"But has not the Pope criticized American capitalism? There does seem to be a certain tension between the Pope's social teaching and the neoliberals' talk of 'imparting a moral ethos to capitalism' (Mirosław Dzielski in *Kurz*, No. 27, 1987). However, his latest encyclical, 'Soliditudo Rei Socialis,' has a significant passage about the evils that flow from the suppression of individual economic initiative 'in the name of an alleged equality,' which 'provokes a sense of frustration or desperation and predisposes people to opt out of national life, impelling them to emigrate,' etc. The communiqué of the Polish Episcopate immediately after the publication of this encyclical declared roundly that 'in the light of Catholic social teaching, it is essential to extend considerably the role of the private sector in the national economy' (February 26, 1988).

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