

RADICAL POLITICS IN A NEW KEY?

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In the introduction to *Politics*,¹ Professor Unger notes that the defeat of the radical project has produced an awareness that nothing has to be the way it is, combined with a “conviction that nothing important can be changed by deliberate collective action.”² This apparently devastating combination of the more pessimistic strands of ethical voluntarism and naturalistic social analysis leaves us, according to Unger, at an impasse. We must somehow break clear of a style of social understanding which explains mankind as helpless puppets of the worlds they inhabit and the forces which made them. The problem, however, is that we must do so without abandoning the insight we have gained into the identity of those forces, without which action, however morally informed, stands in serious risk of proving futile, at best.

Unger’s book is a polemic against “deep-structure social analysis.”³ Nonetheless, he admits that the Marxist version of such analysis has indeed provided the tools for remaining faithful to Marx’s own anti-naturalistic intentions. Consequently, he retreats to the earlier assertion of radical analysis: everything is contextual and all contexts can be broken. His point is that we should not deny the constraints upon us, but should rather dispel the illusions which prevent us from seeing them as constraints.

Whether there is any more real coherence in this line of argument than in the ancient assertions of Engels and others about men being both free and yet determined (“in the final analysis”) by material forces is far from clear. Unger suggests that rather than create another world to realize our dreams, we should do the undreamt of in this world. However, this is a wish that cannot be fulfilled without some further thought along what he would call “old-fashioned” lines. It is not enough to dispel naturalistic illusions in order to create a psychological space in which we can feel free: we still need reasons for believing that our actions will result in outcome *A* (or, at least, that they will not result in outcome *B*). Perhaps this was less true in the last century, when such criticisms of the naturalistic fallacies might have been well taken, but recent history enjoins us to be a trifle more cautious about doing the “undreamt of”—at least it

¹ SOCIAL THEORY.

² *Id.* at 2.

³ *Id.* at 87-96.

speaks thus to the fortunate residents of Western Europe and North America.

It is not, however, my purpose in this Essay to investigate the practical plausibility of Unger's own "frankly speculative" writings. What interests me is the remarkable extent to which their appearance coincides with certain developments within the radical spectrum of European politics. A closer inspection of these developments may prove more useful as a guide to the real implications of rethinking the radical project in this way.

Ever since 1789, European radical thought has focused upon the ideas and practices associated with protest in France—not just for Marx himself, who built much of his social theory upon his readings and observations of French political conflict, but for anyone who, from 1789 until 1917, proposed to construct a theory in defense of radical political action. Not only did the French Revolution provide a model for radical practice in its organizations, its *journées*, its constitutions, and its very message of what a revolution is, but it also provided the legitimating metalanguage of revolution, the teleological account which made it acceptable in the face of reason and force, derived directly from the story of the French Revolution as a bourgeois revolution—a story already nearly a generation old for French liberal historians when Marx first published his own thoughts on the subject. The Bolshevik Revolution and its own claims for itself are irrelevant, since they too fed parasitically upon a reading of the meaning of modern history which, though it did not derive from the French experience, depended on it for empirical sustenance.⁴

It should not surprise us, therefore, to find that much radical thought in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries not only originated and was structured upon the French experience, but also borrowed its goals, programs and unvoiced assumptions. What other than the French experience can explain the radical obsession with central control, with seizing the state, with *directing* society? These goals were certainly not inherent in the earlier traditions of protest in Britain or Italy. Only in the United States, where the indigenous traditions of dissent parted company with Europe before the onset of French discursive hegemony in these matters, did things develop otherwise.⁵

In the twentieth century, the center of revolutionary discourse and power shifted to Moscow, but only in order to transmit back to Central

⁴ For a fuller argument along these lines, see T. JUDT, *MARXISM AND THE FRENCH LEFT* chs. 1 & 2 (1986); see also F. FURET, *PENSER LA RÉVOLUTION FRANÇAISE* (1986); F. FURET, *LA GAUCHE ET LA RÉVOLUTION FRANÇAISE AU MILIEU DU XIX^e SIÈCLE* (1986).

⁵ It could be suggested that the Left in Spain did not follow French radical thought, which accorded primacy to the seizure and control of society via the state apparatus, because there were alternative strains of radical thought among the Spanish Left. However, this does not weaken my argument but rather shows the significant impact of the French model of revolutionary organization even in places peculiarly unsuited to it.

and Western Europe a language and a project remarkably similar to earlier French efforts. Witness the contemporary accusation directed at Lenin, that he was peddling “*blanquisme à la sauce tartare*,”⁶ hence the easy grafting of communism onto the indigenous French socialist tradition.⁷ Elsewhere, the appeal of the Leninist claim—that Bolshevism actually *made* a revolution, a claim not available to anyone else in Europe then or, arguably, since—enabled it to bury for good what remained of syndicalist, cooperative, or regional traditions in most of the rest of the European Left. And thus, via the Bolsheviks, the French radical project, with its Paris-centered, *étatist* goals to be achieved through the single protracted moment of revolutionary action, became the pan-European vision of what it meant to be a member of the nonliberal Left.

Adopted in Russia also, and thus widely disseminated in the years 1920-1968, was the French unconcern with spontaneous action—always unlikely to succeed and anyway doomed to a lack of historical self-consciousness. This rather cavalier dismissal of spontaneity combined in France with an often obsequious admiration for the abstract category of “workers”—and the two are causally related. In France, resulting once again from its precocious experience with revolution, political radicalism and revolutionary ideology long preceded the emergence of anything remotely resembling an industrial proletariat. The latter could thus be ignored in the construction of political theory, but had to be imagined into existence for the purposes of that same theory, since only the supposed interests of this proletariat could provide historical legitimation for the rejection of a liberal polity which most other radical movements were still seeking to construct. Once imagined, the proletariat was soon readily admired.

All of the above made rather limited sense to countries that (1) already had a large and real proletariat with traditions of mass spontaneous action, and (2) lacked a government similar to that of France, with its several centuries of structure and legitimacy, to whose seizure and control the opposition could aspire. But for reasons of circumstance familiar to our own times, domestic and international contexts allowed this rather peculiarly French way of thinking about revolution, with its goals and methods of achieving them, to form the nucleus of radical thought—indeed, to define in large measure what being “radical” meant.

Now, with remarkable speed, this whole edifice of French radicalism

⁶ This criticism came from left-wing opponents of the French communists, who noted that Lenin had borrowed heavily from the insurrectionary and dictatorial strategies of the nineteenth-century French socialist Auguste Blanqui, but adapted it to backward Russian tradition.

⁷ The vexed question of the relationship of French Communism to the indigenous roots of French Socialism is discussed in J. ROBERT, *LA SCISSION SYNDICALE DE 1921* (1980); J. CHARLES, *LE CONGRÈS DE TOURS* (1980); P. ROBRIEUX, *HISTOIRE INTÉRIEURE DU PARTI COMMUNISTE* (1980); R. WOHL, *FRENCH COMMUNISM IN THE MAKING, 1914-1924* (1966). The *locus classicus* remains A. KRIEGL, *AUX ORIGINES DU COMMUNISME FRANÇAIS* (1964).

has all but crumbled. Marxism, whose credibility as a science of the future had been shaken by the steady decline of the French Communist Party and the relatively sturdy performance of postwar capitalism, suffered even more through its identification with regimes in Central and Eastern Europe whose moral credibility collapsed in 1956 and died twelve years later. The social conservatism of the blue-collar proletariat made nonsense of the traditional claims of radical politics to be necessarily associated with the former's interests and actions. Finally, and perhaps most devastating of all, the Left came to power in 1981 with no apparent restrictions upon its power, restrictions of the kind that served to excuse its dismal performance on previous occasions in office. When Mitterand and his government turned in a respectable social democratic performance, the disappointment was, for once, inaudible. There were no alternatives left within the radical lexicon. The state had been "seized." Now what?⁸

The question remains unanswered because a generation of left-wing thinkers, buoyed by 1968 and disillusioned by its aftermath, have taken their revenge upon not only the organizations and programs of their movement, not just upon its moral defects and historical crimes, but upon the very epistemological foundations of French (and thus Western) radical thought. Holistic thinking—in their terms the idea that society could be "conceived" and if conceived, then conceived differently—was blamed for the sins of those who had acted out its commands. This, it will be noted, is a peculiarly French way of seeing the matter (and shows, some might argue, what little hold Marxism really had on the French radical spirit), but the consequences for the future of radical thought are very real. In Unger's terms, everyone is now "anti-naturalistic." But what will fill the vacuum? In principle, nothing. Or, to be fair, nothing beyond ad hoc measures intended to achieve only specific and attainable goals derived from neo-Kantian accounts of the normatively desirable. In practice this means that radical politics in France has ceased to exist in any recognizable form.⁹

It could be argued that something similar has taken place elsewhere in Western Europe, minus the self-serving conversations about the sins of holism. Certainly the Left in Britain is not going anywhere. And in

⁸ On the fortunes of French Marxism in recent years, see T. JUDT, *supra* note 4, at ch. 4; P. ANDERSON, *IN THE TRACKS OF HISTORICAL MATERIALISM* (1983); E. MALET, *SOCRATE ET LA ROSE: LES INTELLECTUELS FACE AU POUVOIR SOCIALISTE* (1983). Sunil Khilnani, of Christ's College, Cambridge, is currently preparing a doctoral thesis on the subject which will be a major contribution to the literature.

⁹ Representative writings from this period include A. GLUCKSMANN, *LES MAÎTRES PENSEURS* (1977); B. LEVY, *LA BARBARIE À VISAGE HUMAIN* (1977); J. RANCIÈRE, *LA LEÇON D'ALTHUSSER* (1974). See generally S. JAMES, *THE CONTENT OF SOCIAL EXPLANATION* (1984); J. GUILLEBAUD, *LES ANNÉES ORPHELINES 1968-1978* (1978). On the pre-history of disillusion, see L. FERRY & A. RENAUT, *LA PENSÉE 68* (1985); *LES INTERPRÉTATIONS DU STALINISME* (E. Pisier-Kouchner ed. 1983).

Italy, the Socialists in office have no radical project while the Communists have been preoccupied at the ideological level with denying their association with the institutionalized Marxism of the Soviet Union rather than advancing a Marxism of their own.¹⁰ Perhaps all of this is just another way of saying that Marxism, as a political force, is dead and has dragged with it into the grave all the energies and assumptions underlying the progressive spirit in Europe since 1789. In the long run, as Unger points out, this situation is intolerable and a source of acute moral deficiency vis-à-vis the inhabitants of less fortunate lands. But *sub specie temporis* it can endure.

Such is not the case in East-Central Europe, however. There something very interesting is taking place. Until 1968, opposition in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and perhaps also Hungary took the form of “revisionism”—the desire to effect changes within the thinking of a sympathetic minority of the ruling party and thereby engineer changes in the system as a whole. This approach depended upon the suppositions that (1) there was such a sympathetic group within the party, (2) this group could hope to exercise some influence eventually, (3) there was a common language shared by rulers and opposition alike, and (4) this language spoke sufficiently well both to the ideals of the opposition and to the real world whose constraints they faced that it made sense to continue using it.¹¹

When the Polish government set in motion the anti-semitic, anti-intelligentsia purges of the late 1960s, and when the Husák regime removed 500,000 people from the Czech and Slovak Communist Parties following the Russian invasion, the four conditions of “revisionism” disappeared. When the Polish government expelled leading revisionist intellectuals like Kolakowski, thereby alienating a generation of young would-be reformers, the very notion of revisionism disappeared almost immediately. In Czechoslovakia, with a much more ingrained socialist tradition and deep collective guilt on the part of a generation of intellectuals for their role in installing the Communist regime, belief in the language of socialism died harder, but it too has now virtually disappeared. In the lands of “real existing socialism,” no one is a socialist any more: not for want of a belief in the aspirations of socialism, but because of the impossibility of voicing these beliefs except in the discredited language of

¹⁰ The differences between Italian and French Communism are too well-known to require documentation. For information discussing the relations between Italy's intellectuals and its Marxists, see N. AJELLO, *INTELLETTUALI E PCI, 1944-1958* (1979); G. BEDESCHI, *LA PARABOLA DEL MARXISMO IN ITALIA, 1945-1983* (1983). An interesting, though non-critical, recent study of the inner workings of the Party is A. ACCORNERO, *L'IDENTITÀ COMUNISTA: I MILITANTI, LE STRUTTURE, LA CULTURA DEL PCI* (1983); see also the memoirs of G. C. PAJETTA, *LE CRISI CHE HO VISSUTO: BUDAPEST, PRAGA, VARSOVIA* (1982).

¹¹ On the revisionist movement in East European dissent, see 3 L. KOLAKOWSKI, *MAIN CURRENTS OF MARXISM* 460-66 (1978); the contributions by Kolakowski and Gross to *EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE: YESTERDAY, TODAY, TOMORROW* (M. Drachkovitch ed. 1982); J. CHIAMA & J. SOULET, *HISTOIRE DE LA DISSIDENCE* (1982); V. MASTNY, *EAST EUROPEAN DISSIDENT 1953-1964* (1972).

the regime. Radicals deliberately avoid the very discourse of radicalism in its traditional European form—this language having been appropriated as the discourse of power.¹²

The result has been the creation of a different language for those who would dissent from the regime. This new language clearly does not apply to those in Poland who oppose Communism in the name of integral Catholicism or Greater Polish nationalism or “Russophobia,” nor does it include those Czechs and Slovaks who gripe at the material inadequacies of the way of life they are forced to live. These people, however, would never have considered themselves political radicals. Those who do consider themselves radicals, however, have begun to develop a new radical language untethered to now discredited “Soviet” Marxism.

Take the case of Poland. The Workers Defense Committee (KOR), created in 1976 in the aftermath of the trials of protesting factory workers, set for itself no “systematic” goals. It existed legally and openly, and did not even pretend to be engaged in a debate about how to run the state. As Adam Michnik, one of its moving spirits, wrote in 1982, “The most important question was not ‘how should the system of government be changed,’ but ‘how should we defend ourselves against the system?’”¹³ This is significant because Michnik, like others of his generation who had been active in the student movements of the 1960s and who took part in the creation of KOR, had come from deep within the Marxist and revisionist traditions in Poland.¹⁴

By the time Solidarity emerged in 1980, this perspective had deepened into something more positive. The strategy of the new opposition in Poland (combining the intellectuals clustered around KOR with the newly emerging workers’ leaders in Gdansk, Warsaw, Nowa Huta, and elsewhere) was not to advise the government on how to govern but to advise the nation on how to live. The utterly unpretentious nature of this claim arises from the fact that the most serious threat facing the cultures of Eastern Europe was the disappearance of *society*, with all power and

¹² For works on Poland between 1956-1980, see N. DAVIES, *HEART OF EUROPE* chs. 1 & 6 (1984); J. DE WEYDENTHAL, *THE COMMUNISTS OF POLAND* (1978); P. RAINA, *POLITICAL OPPOSITION IN POLAND, 1954-77* (1978). For works on Czechoslovakia, see G. GOLAN, *THE CZECHOSLOVAK REFORM MOVEMENT* (1973); V. KUSIN, *THE INTELLECTUAL ORIGINS OF THE PRAGUE SPRING* (1971); H. SKILLING, *CZECHOSLOVAKIA’S INTERRUPTED REVOLUTION* (1976). On the social structure of Czechoslovakia in the Dubček years, see P. MACHONIN, *ČESKOSLOVENSKÁ SPOLEČNOST: SOCIOLOGICKÁ ANALÝSA SOCIÁLNÍ STRATIFIKACE* (1969). On the Czech purges, see M. ŠIMEČKA, *THE RESTORATION OF ORDER* (1984); *Acta Persecutionis* (paper on the purge of historians in Czechoslovakia, presented to the XIVth International Congress of Historical Sciences, San Francisco, August 1975). Works published in the 1970s indicating the enduring faith in socialism of Czech intellectuals include Z. MLYNÁŘ, *VOICES OF CZECHOSLOVAK SOCIALISTS* (1977); J. PELKÁN, *SOCIALIST OPPOSITION IN EASTERN EUROPE: THE CZECHOSLOVAK EXAMPLE* (1976).

¹³ A. MICHNIK, *LETTERS FROM PRISON AND OTHER ESSAYS* 28 (1986).

¹⁴ See *id.* On KOR, see J. LIPSKI, *KOR* (1986). After the emergence of Solidarity, KOR dissolved itself. See also A. MICHNIK, *PENSER LA POLOGNE* (1983).

language and initiative drawn into the black hole of the increasingly incompetent party-state.

It is undoubtedly true that in Poland things were complicated by the religious devotion of the working-class and its apparent lack of desire to take over the state, which eased the path of the leadership of the opposition in creating their “self-limiting” revolution. The state, after all, was not available for the taking, and the genius of the new opposition lay in recognizing this. Hitherto, opponents of Communist regimes had seen no choice but to try and negotiate the terms of government with the rulers—either accepting the ground rules, as it were, or placing themselves in futile, open opposition to that government. For Polish radicals, the Communist state today is not there for the taking—but society is. This was not a completely original insight—Leszek Kolakowski, the spiritual guide to a generation of young Polish intellectuals, had noted as early as 1971 that hope for change in this part of Europe came in the form of pressure on the bureaucratic structure *from below*.¹⁵ But even this does not adequately describe what was proposed by Michnik and others. Their objectives are best captured in the idea of “as if”: We shall live in society as if we were free, rather than expending fruitless efforts trying to construct a formally free society.¹⁶

These were not uncontentious proposals. Solidarity was deeply divided over what, if anything, it ought to propose by way of economic reforms, political liberalization, or civic freedoms. But while the specter of millions of workers organized in an independent union was undoubtedly disturbing to the monopoly party, the deeper threat lay in the propagation of the more subtle idea that merely living as though you were free made you so. This was a rare case of thought making reality. It enabled the more mundane forms of opposition, such as union organization, to endure since it gave them a vocabulary and a sense of purpose independent of specific achievements or setbacks.

The experience of Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia exhibits some remarkable parallels. Formed with a view to publicizing the government’s response (or lack thereof) to the Helsinki agreements, it was galvanized into action by the drive to defend a small group of rock musicians (The Plastic People of the Universe) persecuted by the authorities. Like KOR, Charter 77 was largely a movement of intellectuals and, even more than KOR, it has avoided political stances. Its strengths, despite constant harassment and occasional imprisonment, have lain in the fact of its open existence. Its organizers periodically sign their names to its documents, thus behaving as if Czechoslovakia were a *Rechtstaat*. In short, merely

¹⁵ Kolakowski, *Hope and Hopelessness*, SURVEY, Summer 1971, at 37.

¹⁶ On the history and ideas of the Solidarity period, see T. GARTON ASH, *THE POLISH REVOLUTION* (1981); J. STANISZKIS, *POLAND’S SELF-LIMITING REVOLUTION* (1984); M. ZALEWSKA, *SOLIDARITY UNDERGROUND* (1983).

by existing it has introduced pluralism into Czech political life.¹⁷

But, as its best known signatory Václav Havel has insistently noted, Charter 77 was above all an “existential revolution.”¹⁸ It was, and remains, a declaration of a fact—that the intelligentsia, which the Husák regime has quite deliberately set out to eliminate, still exists. And, in existing and behaving like an intelligentsia (the Czech understanding of the role of intellectuals is close to that of the French, with the same over-extended sense of responsibility), Charter 77 denies the party-state its most important claim, that of monopoly.¹⁹

For this reason, the success or failure of Charter 77 (and VONS, the Committee for the Unjustly Persecuted, founded shortly after Charter 77) is not easily measured. Clearly, its very survival is an achievement. But there is a risk in these circumstances that the validity of radical opposition is reduced to the fact of its own existence, which can hardly be satisfactory. So what is the project of the Czech opposition today?

According to Havel, it is to “behave responsibly,” by which he means to act as free moral agents. In Havel’s hands this notion of responsibility acquires an almost religious bent—each individual is personally responsible for the world.²⁰ Clearly this is a reaction against the cynicism, low-level corruption, and totalitarian routinization of post-Dubček Czechoslovakia, but it is accompanied by a rising tone of anger at the apparent ease with which Central Europe’s most advanced and politicized culture has been “bought off” with consumer goods and intimidated by threats. There is a hint of scorn for the “modern” and the “comfortable” that harks back to the radicalism of a much earlier epoch and that finds little trace in the Polish movement. One reason for this may be that the mystical note in Havel’s essays is provided in Poland by the practices and ceremonies of the Catholic Church. Another observation is that scorn for consumerism would ring false in Poland, whose economy is moribund. Contact with reality, with the daily experience of the factory worker, is far more widespread among the Polish intellectual

¹⁷ On Charter 77, see H.G. SKILLING, *CHARTER 77 AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA* (1981); *A BESEIGED CULTURE: CZECHOSLOVAKIA TEN YEARS AFTER HELSINKI* (1985); *BÜRGERINITIATIVE FÜR DIE MENSCHENRECHTE: DIE TSCHECOSLOWAKISCHE OPPOSITION ZWISCHEN DEM ‘PRAGUR FRÜHLING’ UND DER CHARTA 77* (H. Riese ed. 1977).

¹⁸ Havel, *O Lidskou Identitu*, in *O LIDSKOU IDENTITU* 260 (V. Havel ed. 1984).

¹⁹ On the peculiarities of the Czech intelligentsia, a subject much discussed among the opposition (not to mention in the novels of Milan Kundera), see A. LIEHM, *THE POLITICS OF CULTURE* (1968); B. MICHEL, *LA MÉMOIRE DE PRAGUE: CONSCIENCE NATIONALE ET INTELLIGENTSIA DANS L’HISTOIRE TCHÈQUE ET SLOVAQUE* (1986); see also the essays by Vaculík and Kliment in *HODINA NADĚJE* (1980).

On the links and common concerns of intellectuals in Prague and Paris, see P. GRÉMION, *PARIS/PRAGUE* (1985), and on the journey of structuralism from Central to Western Europe, see J. MERQUIOR, *FROM PRAGUE TO PARIS* (1986).

²⁰ Havel, *Krize Identity*, in *O LIDSKOU IDENTITU* 349-51 (1984); see also *Kdo je Václav Havel*, *Lidová Demokracie*, Mar. 10, 1977, reprinted in *O LIDSKOU IDENTITU* 392-94 (1984); Havel, *Six Asides About Culture* (pts. 1 & 2), 3 *KOSMAS* no.2 (1984), 4 *KOSMAS* no.1 (1985).

opposition. In this respect, too, the Czech intellectuals are the Parisians of Central Europe.

Not everyone, of course, agrees with Havel. In 1978, Ludvík Vaculík argued that the people should be asked only for unheroic, realistic deeds²¹—anticipating the prison letters of Michnik, who is politely dismissive of those who would ask too much of their followers and who see compromise as an unmitigated evil.²² For Michnik, as for Vaculík, compromise in matters of economic and political arrangements (assuming such compromises are possible and do not involve “compromises” in the other sense—a difficult path to follow as Michnik readily admits) need not impeach the integrity of the opposition, precisely because (and here lies the originality) it is not a matter of competing projects. In totalitarian systems, men and women who openly ignore (rather than defy) the regime are a de facto (and perhaps even de jure) denial of the regime’s monopoly of power and knowledge. In this denial lies their fundamental radicalism.

In Hungary things are different. While the Polish and Czech situations had only a few points in common, these similarities have served to bring a certain common sense to the undertaking.²³ The Hungarians have, in recent years, been faced with the rather odd situation in which the Kadar regime gives a reasonably wide field of maneuvers to its opponents on condition that they do not claim the territory as of right! Consequently, the exact bounds of the permissible are unclear, and it has been suggested that Hungarian dissent tends to oscillate between a sense of cynical frustration (“we can say anything we like so long as it has no impact, so why bother?”) and an element of self-censorship (in the absence of clear censorship rules from above). Nonetheless, there is an identifiable Hungarian opposition, and it is recognizably related to those in Poland and Czechoslovakia in the respects that concern us here.²⁴

For the Hungarian opposition, living “as if in a free society” is, of course, a necessary condition but it is no longer sufficient. They already have the public space that Solidarity fought for in Poland, and many of the smaller freedoms which the Czechs seek in economic and social af-

²¹ Vaculík, *Poznámky o Statečnosti*, in O LIDSKOU IDENTITU 203-04 (1984)

²² *Id.* at 201-03; *Maggots and Angels*, in A. MICHNIK, *supra* note 13.

²³ Since 1980, the intellectual initiative has perhaps been with the Poles but they, in turn, would argue that the experience of the Prague Spring and its aftermath was what finally laid to rest the hopes for revisionism in their own country.

²⁴ On the opposition in Hungary, see F. FEHÉR & A. HELLER, HUNGARY 1956 REVISITED 154 (1983); Ash, *Does Central Europe Exist?*, NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS, Oct. 9, 1986; Bence & Kiš, *After the Break*, in COMMUNISM AND EASTERN EUROPE (F. Silnitsky ed. 1979); Schöpflin, *Opposition in Hungary: 1956 and Beyond*, in DISSENT IN EASTERN EUROPE 69 (J. Curry ed. 1983). Works of interest by members of the opposition include M. HARASZTI, A WORKER IN A WORKER'S STATE (1978); OPPOSITION=0.1% (M. Haraszi ed. 1979); Haraszi, *Il Dissenso Come Professione*, in 1 MICRO MEGA 242-49 (1986); see also A. HEGEDŰS, THE STRUCTURE OF SOCIALIST SOCIETY (1977). A useful source for material on this subject is the journal EAST EUROPEAN REPORTER.

fairs already exist in Hungary—though in very fragile form and with no guarantees of survival. Not surprisingly, therefore, Hungarians think more tangibly about traditional politics as a possible sphere of engagement; there has been much discussion whether the opposition should *want* to constitute itself as a political force.²⁵ But such discussions always encounter the same difficulty facing Poles and Czechs even as they avoid the question: What does it *mean* to be a political force in a land without politics? If a political opposition were attempted, the predictable result would be, at best, that the conservative elements within the Party and state apparatus would unite and react by restricting the social sphere; at worst, 1956 could be repeated.²⁶

In practice, therefore, Hungarian opposition has concerned itself with what one might anachronistically call “single-issue” politics. Ostensibly unpolitical groups arise to discuss and publicize particular problems. The Danube Circle, which concerns itself with the ecological threats arising from projects diverting river water for hydroelectric purposes, is one such example. But, while the government might be willing to recognize the legitimacy of this debate (it is, in fact, embarrassed by its own actions on this front), it cannot accept the form it has taken—that is, spontaneous action outside official control and sponsorship. Thus, the Danube Circle and other similar initiatives become acts of political opposition and dissent.²⁷

Groups and individuals who have attempted to discuss the mistreatment of Hungarian minorities in Romania or Czechoslovakia have met similar outcomes. Here the unacceptable form of such discussions is compounded by the danger to the government of allowing any discussion that might arouse national feeling against other communist states. While the government could benefit from indicating its sympathy for the Transylvanians or the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, the risks of opening up nationalist resentment against the true foreign occupier are too great. Here too, then, simple discussion of an apparently nonpolitical issue is a *de facto* assault on the legitimacy of the wider system of political ar-

²⁵ See F. CLAUDIN, *LA OPOSICIÓN EN EL ‘SOCIALISMO REAL’* 237 (1983). There is a complex and suggestive discussion of the nature of political power in Eastern Europe and particularly Hungary in F. FEHÉR, A. HELLER & G. MARKUS, *Dictatorship Over Needs* (1983).

²⁶ On the 1956 Hungarian uprising, see W. LOMAX, *Hungary 1956* (1976). The continuing sensitivity of the subject is brought out in a recent book by J. Berezcz, one of the likely contenders for power in the post-Kadar era. He outlines, somewhat incompetently, the “hard” interpretation of the uprising. J. BEREZCZ, *COUNTER-REVOLUTION IN HUNGARY: WORDS AND WEAPONS* (1986).

²⁷ On the Danube Circle and other ecological groups such as Danube Blues and Friends of the Danube, see 1 *EAST EUROPEAN REPORTER* (1986) and 2 *EAST EUROPEAN REPORTER* (1987). The central issue is the proposal to build a joint Czech/Hungarian hydroelectric dam on the Danube at Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros, an agreement that Hungary would be happy to see dissolved. The ecological question has been widely discussed in the literature in this region. See M. KIRKPATRICK, *ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS AND POLICIES IN EASTERN EUROPE AND THE USSR* (1978); Kramer, *The Environmental Crisis in Eastern Europe*, 42 *SLAVIC REVIEW* 204 (1983); Zrosec, *Environmental Deterioration in Eastern Europe*, *SURVEY*, Winter 1984, at 117.

rangements of which Hungary is a part.²⁸

It is in Hungary, too, that the most sensitive of all “nonpolitical” discussions is emerging as a form of silent politics. As in the Czechoslovakia of the 1960s, the question of economic reform is the lever that can open debate on the very premise of socialist political arrangements. Sooner or later the Hungarian “economic miracle” must either collapse under the weight of foreign debt and internal contradiction or lead to changes of investment and industrial organization similar to those that have occurred in the arenas of consumer goods and market-farming. But any such changes would threaten the control exercised by the ministries and economic agencies. This would undermine the only social group (bureaucrats, managers, state employees) who, in Hungary, have retained an interest in the survival of the regime. Everyone knows this—and they also know that the problem cannot be avoided. The difference now is that very few of the critics of the system spend any time trying to link economic reforms with socialism. This relieves the opposition of the burden of imagining utopian scenarios but also reduces them to a condition of virtual impotence since they know that all rational projects, whether economic or ecological, are going to succeed only to the extent that they are compatible with a political arrangement that derives its rationality from quite different criteria.²⁹

Perhaps unsurprisingly, therefore, the Hungarian opposition, though blessed with no less a number of gifted thinkers and writers than the other captured countries, has not produced anything approaching a theory of its behavior comparable to those which Michnik or Havel have constructed for their countries. On the other hand, much of what the Hungarian opposition actually does could be seen as radical politics in a

²⁸ On the nationality question in Hungary, see *TRANSYLVANIA AND THE HUNGARIAN-ROMANIAN PROBLEM: A SYMPOSIUM* (A. Sanborn ed. 1979). Two critical pieces from the opposition are Kenedi, *Why is the Gypsy the Scapegoat?*, 2 *EAST EUROPEAN REPORTER* i (1986); Kovács, *La Question juive dans la Hongrie Contemporaine*, in *ACTES DE LA RECHERCHE EN SCIENCES SOCIALES* 45-58 (1985).

In Poland, the nationality questions were “solved” during and immediately after the war. In Czechoslovakia, the Czech-Slovak and Slovak-Hungarian antagonisms live on. For discussions on the region as a whole, see *ETHNIC DIVERSITY AND CONFLICT IN EASTERN EUROPE* (P. Sugar ed. 1980); *NATIONALITÄTEN PROBLEME IN DER SOWJETUNION UND OSTEUROPA* (1982); *THE POLITICS OF ETHNICITY IN EASTERN EUROPE* (G. Klein & M. Reban eds. 1981). The official view from Romania is given in *HUNGARIANS AND GERMANS IN ROMANIA TODAY* (1978).

²⁹ On these matters, see W. BRUS, *THE MARKET IN A SOCIALIST ECONOMY* (1972); *SOCIALIST OWNERSHIP AND POLITICAL SYSTEMS* (1975); see also Brus, *The East European Reforms: What Happened to Them?*, 2 *SOVIET STUDIES* 31 (1979). For discussion of Hungary in particular, see A. ASHLUND, *PRIVATE ENTERPRISE IN EASTERN EUROPE* (1985); J. KORNAI, *CONTRADICTIONS AND DILEMMAS* (1985); *A Programme for Democratic Renewal*, 2 *EAST EUROPEAN REPORTER* i (1987). A particularly interesting paper was delivered by Kálmán Mizsei of the Hungarian Institute for World Economics entitled *Totalitarianism, Reforms, Second Economy: Logic of Changes in the East European Economic Systems*, at the Conference on the Effects of Communism on Social and Economic Change in Bologna, Italy, June 23-28, 1986.

new form—an opposition in a condition of permanent *autogestion*, which—like the Polish opposition—engages directly with the regime only when the regime chooses to engage with it.

It would be a profound mistake, and one that could at least in some part derive from the sort of perspective Unger proposes, to suppose that these situations I have described above are satisfactory. This is true in the obvious sense that all of the groups I described would be happier if they could exchange their situation for that of the Austrian, Swedish, or even French radicals. What matters more, however, is that this politics of the nonpolitical (Havel's "power of the powerless"³⁰) is itself a reaction to circumstance rather than a positive choice. It is a choice, of course, in that it represents a departure from the old politics of engagement with the problem of government and the state. And it is important in that it is a decision to emphasize form rather than content, and new content over old. But it is a choice forced upon the present generation and it has unhappy side effects. In Czechoslovakia, for example, the effort to avoid engaging in the mendacious and devalued language of the regime has led most recently to a growing religiosity.³¹ The drive to rediscover a vocabulary for the expression of truth and opinion, to find a language capable of distinguishing between good and evil, right and wrong, has sent some Czech intellectuals back beyond an Enlightenment whose benefits they question to an obscurantist and integral Catholicism (ironic in the land of Hus and Comenius). Even worse, those who still seek to retain something of the language and purpose of the Central European social democratic tradition find themselves in an untenable condition when asked to show why what they believe is true, but true for reasons different than those adduced by the regime on its own behalf.³²

It might be argued in reply that East-Central Europe is a most inappropriate context in which to require new political ideas and forms to be consistent or optimistic; this applies with particular force in Czechoslovakia, where the high hopes of the 1960s combine with the repression of the past half generation in an especially devastating way. But this argument is flawed. If there is to be a new departure in the radical discourse, then it can only come about after the old expectations and habits have been completely discredited. It is clear that this discrediting process has gone further among the intellectuals of East-Central Europe than any-

³⁰ See V. HAVEL, *The Power of the Powerless*, in *THE POWER OF THE POWERLESS* (1985).

³¹ See *supra* note 20 and accompanying text.

³² For the history regarding the emergence of religion as a force in East-Central Europe, see *CHURCHES IN SOCIALIST SOCIETIES OF EASTERN EUROPE* (N. Greinacher & V. Elizordo eds. 1982); *RELIGION AND NATIONALISM IN SOVIET AND EAST EUROPEAN POLITICS* (P. Ramet ed. 1984); *TOLERANCE AND MOVEMENTS OF RELIGIOUS DISSENT IN EASTERN EUROPE* (B. Kiraly ed. 1975).

Among many works on the church in Poland, see G. BARBERINI, *STATO SOCIALISTA E CHIESA CATTOLICA IN POLONIA* (1983); M. POMIAN-SRZEDNICKI, *RELIGIOUS CHANGE IN CONTEMPORARY POLAND* (1982).

where else in the world. Yet even there the same set of doubts as to the possibility of rethinking the political world necessarily arises.

Take again the case of Poland. In order to secure the survival of Polish society, it was necessary to think and act as though the institutional constraints did not operate. Yet having achieved some success in this goal, the leaders of the opposition found themselves confronted with the practical demands of an ailing economy and the fact that the state does exist—the real limitations upon existing “as if.” Behaving “responsibly,” for Havel, means being and writing as a moral man. But in Prague today that is all he can do—and as a playwright, moreover, it is all he seeks to achieve.³³ In Warsaw, amnestied and faced with a government that is beginning to behave “as if” it sought to resolve its dilemmas, Michnik is seriously troubled at the disaster facing his country’s economy: the collapse of the work ethic (“we pretend to work and the government pretends to pay us”) and a complete divorce between the society and those who direct its institutions. These are not characteristics of a system undergoing revival, and behaving responsibly means taking these matters seriously.³⁴

How do you take seriously the troubles facing a modern social organism? You try to advance solutions to its problems, solutions that, in the real world of Eastern Europe, entail imagining how the government might better order its citizens’ affairs. And so we are back to projects, however modest, which engage the problem of organization and the state. This is not news to the more imaginative and honest of Poland’s leading dissidents (nor those of Hungary), but they have not yet produced any answer beyond confirming through their actions the desirability of those aspects of a liberal pluralism whose wider forms are unavailable to them now and which are likely to remain so indefinitely.

Which returns us, in a way, to France. The radical project in France (that is, socialism in one form or another) was defined by its opposition to the existing set of arrangements. The same was true of the varieties of left-wing thought and action elsewhere in Western Europe. But, deprived of the promise of the future by the advent of that future in the form of political power, socialism loses the larger charm which gave meaning to its lesser achievements. Once these achievements cease to be part of a greater dream, they lose much of their appeal. Either they must

³³ On language and culture in Czechoslovakia, see M. GOETZ-STANKIEWICZ, *THE SILENCED THEATRE: CZECH PLAYWRIGHTS WITHOUT A STAGE* (1979); D. HAMŠÍK, *WRITERS AGAINST RULERS* (1971) (the role of writers and artists in the prelude to the Dubček era); *THE WRITING ON THE WALL: AN ANTHOLOGY OF CONTEMPORARY CZECH LITERATURE* (A. Liehm & P. Kussi eds. 1983).

³⁴ Similarly, in Czechoslovakia the ecological disaster now facing northern Bohemia has led some opponents of the regime to give priority in their writings to constructive proposals for control of industrial emissions and effluent—a subject also beginning to receive official press coverage. The problem in an economy characterized by production targets and “soft budget constraints” is that no one, manager or minister, has a compelling incentive to act.

be recast to derive their justification from other moral and political traditions, including those against which socialism was itself defined, or they simply cease to be “politics.” Of course, a sense of moral and political purpose can be reborn in conditions of oppression—which is what happened in France in certain circles of the wartime Resistance and is part of the story of contemporary East-Central Europe—but this hardly justifies seeking out such conditions to resolve these dilemmas.

Hence the paradox of the present lesson of Poland and its neighbors.³⁵ It is possible, at least occasionally, to rethink the meaning of political radicalism and intelligently to engage the state and its institutions on your own terms. But this cannot be a political project in itself because it is, above all, merely a response to the impossibility of creating such a project. In its most pessimistic form it amounts to asking for bravery and honesty of oneself and one’s friends. And should it be fortunate enough to succeed (and most Poles readily concede that the “success” of the opposition has always hinged in part on external developments), it must inevitably face the choice of either returning to “normal” political discourse (or as normal as circumstances permit) or betraying its purposes. Perhaps it has to betray itself anyway.

Political thinkers living and writing in the West have generally been spared such dilemmas. But they should not have too much difficulty recognizing the larger message. Unger’s vision of “alternative institutional forms” is not very different from the vision traditionally entailed in the radical politics of post-Enlightenment societies. Unger’s claim that things do not have to be as they are, while not being (or being capable of becoming) just anything, is not original. It bears repetition, however, though the message is less urgent now, in the West at least, than it might have been had it been suggested twenty years ago. And of course, his search for some sort of social experimentalism with its center of gravity firmly placed on the individual is as desirable an undertaking as it has ever been. But it is still worth recalling that the space in which we are invited to undertake such experiments is constrained by very real institutions and persons. The importance of the experiments to their participants thus probably varies in inverse proportion to the freedom their participants have to undertake them.

I do not believe that it follows from this that we should define our present projects negatively—as though we should confine our efforts to

³⁵ Things have until very recently been quite different in the German Democratic Republic. There the dominant figures in the opposition remained well within the terms of socialist discourse even to the extent of casting doubt on the virtues of political pluralism and its attendant economic forms. See, e.g., R. BAHRO, *THE ALTERNATIVE IN EASTERN EUROPE* (1984); R. BAHRO, *FROM RED TO GREEN* (1984); RUDOLF BAHRO: *CRITICAL RESPONSES* (U. Wolter ed. 1980). In this last collection, see especially the article written by Jiří Pelikán, who notes that Bahro’s neo-Marxist terminology is “remote from reality” and quite without appeal in Eastern Europe. This criticism has been picked up, predictably, in West Germany. See, e.g., *SOLIDARITÄT MIT RUDOLF BAHRO: BRIEFS IN D. DDR* (H. Schwerger ed. 1978).

defending our present good fortune. That is not the message from Warsaw or Prague and, even if it were, it would be wrong.³⁶ Nor is it really a matter of choice—radical politics is by definition a critical undertaking. But it need not be a naive one. *Pace* Unger, not all contexts can be broken, even though it may be necessary to pretend otherwise in order to break any given context. The reminder we have received from East-Central Europe is one of paradox—that single-issue discussions can be the stuff of national opposition,³⁷ that obscurantist organizations of doubtful pedigree (for example, the Catholic Church in Poland) can play powerful roles as intermediate institutions in alliance with a generation that once scorned them as reactionary and dangerous,³⁸ and that denial of the very claims of the party-state may be the way to create a framework in which you can work with that same state.

But it is a paradox within facts: the fact of the Soviet Union, its army, and its interests. It is surrounded by lesser facts: economic crisis and the need for a stable state apparatus. The view from nowhere may suggest that these are passing contexts. But radical politics are always *somewhere* and it is as true now as it was in 1789 that you cannot hope to change anything without acknowledging this. Of course, acknowledging it to excess precludes changing anything at all—but this is a psychological observation rather than an historical one. The revolutionary tradition bequeathed us by the Jacobins may have helped generate Husák and Jaruselski,³⁹ but it has also taught us much more. Perhaps we should not too readily acclaim its demise.

³⁶ Misunderstandings nevertheless arise. In Czechoslovakia, the English neo-conservative writer, Roger Scruton, is a venerated figure, while Western liberals and conservatives alike have fallen over one another to recognize and acclaim Adam Michnik and his fellow radicals. Necessity and circumstance notwithstanding, these are very odd matchings. The majority of the Czech dissidents are ex-socialists with a very clear-headed view of the distinction between the desirable and the possible, while Scruton probably genuinely believes in the need to reestablish the Austro-Hungarian Empire, mistaking Czech *litost* in this matter for a program. As to Michnik, it is all but certain that, under almost any other circumstance, he would be a figure of some disrepute and distaste to *bien pensant* politicians from Paris to Washington.

³⁷ Witness the force of the protests against the persecution of the Jazz Section in Czechoslovakia, or the energy generated by the Danube issue in Budapest. In Poland today the Peace and Freedom movement, an organization of young persons aroused by the nuclear question, has taken off in a number of directions including ecology, conscientious objection to military service, regional disarmament, and capital punishment. All of these, of course, return it of necessity to the question of political and civil rights, as the necessary general conditions for the voicing of such concerns.

³⁸ See, e.g., A. MICHNIK, *L'EGLISE ET LA GAUCHE* (1979).

³⁹ Limitations of space deter me from elucidating with greater precision the causal relationship at work here.