The Magic Lantern
The Revolution of '89 Witnessed
in Warsaw, Budapest,
Berlin and Prague

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So at Christmas time my parting images had to be of happiness. Collective happiness, as seen on Wenceslas Square, but even more of individual happiness. I thought of Pavel, designing the bicameral legislature in his stoker’s hut. I thought of Petr, given a new last chapter for his history of Czechoslovakia, which would be published legally. I thought of Rita, preparing for her new job as ambassador to Washington. I thought of Jiří, now making the foreign policy of the Czechoslovak (Socialist?) Republic. And I thought of Václav—that is, Wenceslas—drinking a Christmas toast.

Sentimental? Absurdly so. But sufficient unto the day are the evils thereof. For a few days at least we could surely rejoice. The ice had thawed. After twenty years, the clocks had started again in Prague. The most Western of all the so-called East European countries was resuming its proper history.

The Year of Truth

This was the year communism in Eastern Europe died. 1949-1989 R.I.P. And the epitaph might be:

_Nothing in his life
Became him like the leaving it_

The thing that was comprehensively installed in the newly defined territories of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, and in the newly created German Democratic Republic after 1949, the thing called, according to viewpoint, ‘socialism’, ‘totalitarianism’, ‘Stalinism’, ‘politbureaucratic dictatorship’, ‘real existing socialism’, ‘state capitalism’, ‘dictatorship over needs’, or, most neutrally, ‘the Soviet-type system’—that thing will never walk again. And arguably, if we can no longer talk of communism we should no longer talk of Eastern Europe, at least with a capital ‘E’ for Eastern. Instead, we shall have central Europe again, east central Europe, south-eastern Europe, eastern Europe with a small ‘e’ and, above all, individual peoples, nations and states.

To be sure, even without a political-military reversal inside the Soviet Union there will be many further conflicts, injustices and miseries in these lands. But they will be different conflicts, injustices and miseries: new and old, post-communist but also pre-communist. In the worst case, there might yet be new dictators; but they would be different dictators. We shall not see again that particular system, characterized by the concentration of political and economic power and the instruments of
coercion in the hands of one Leninist party, manifested sociologically as a privileged new class, in states with arbitrarily limited sovereignty.

Of course if we walk the streets of Prague, Warsaw or Leipzig we can still find the grey, familiar traces: the flattened neo-classical Stalinist façades on all the Victory Squares, the Lenin boulevards, steelworks, shipyards, the balding middle-aged officials with their prefabricated lies, the cheap paper forms for completion in quadruplicate, the queues, the attitude of 'We pretend to work and you pretend to pay us'. Yet even the physical evidences are being removed at a speed that must cause some anxiety to conservationists. (In Poland there is a scheme for preserving all the old props in an entertainment park. The proposed name is Stalinland.)

If 1989 was the end, what was the beginning of the end? To read the press, or hear Mrs Thatcher talk, you would think history began with Gorbachev. At the other extreme, some would say communism in Eastern Europe was doomed at birth. This thesis may, in turn, be advanced in several forms. One can say that communism was incompatible with the political culture of East Central Europe, although why that political culture should suddenly stop at the quite arbitrary western frontier of the Soviet Union is not clear. Alternatively, one can say that communism was a wonderful idea that was doomed only because the people of Eastern Europe did not find their way to it themselves, but had it imposed on them by a foreign power, which itself did not understand it. Or one can say that communism is incompatible with human nature, period. Whether by congenital deformity or merely as the result of a ghastly forceps delivery, the death was preordained at birth. In between these two extreme positions, some people in the countries concerned would point to various supposed 'missed opportunities' or turning-points at which East European history failed to turn. 1956 and 1968 are the leading candidates in this class.

As usual, there is an element of truth in all these claims, though in some more than others. Churchill declared, 'I have not become the King's First Minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British empire,' and proceeded to do almost exactly that. Gorbachev came to power proposing to save the Soviet empire and presides over its disintegration. That Moscow permitted the former 'satellite' countries to determine how they want to govern themselves was clearly a sine qua non. But the nature and direction of the processes of domestic political self-determination cannot be understood by studying Soviet policy. The causes lie elsewhere, in the history of individual countries, in their interactions with their East European neighbours and with the more free and prosperous Europe that lies to the west, north and south of them.

If I was forced to name a single date for the 'beginning of the end' in this inner history of Eastern Europe, it would be June 1979. The judgement may be thought excessively Poloncentric, but I do believe that the Pope's first great pilgrimage to Poland was that turning-point. Here, for the first time, we saw that massive, sustained, yet supremely peaceful and self-disciplined manifestation of social unity, the gentle crowd against the Party-state, which was both the hallmark and the essential domestic catalyst of change in 1989, in every country except Romania (and even in Romania, the violence did not initially go out from the crowds). The Pope's visit was followed, just over a year later, by the birth of Solidarity, and without the Pope's visit it
is doubtful if there would have been a Solidarity.

The example of Solidarity was seminal. It pioneered a new kind of politics in Eastern Europe (and new not only there): a politics of social self-organization and negotiating the transition from communism. The players, forms and issues of 1980-81 in Poland were fundamentally different from anything seen in Eastern Europe between 1949 and 1979: in many respects, they presaged those seen throughout Eastern Europe in 1989. If there is any truth in this judgement, then there was something especially fitting in the fact that it was in 1989 that the Russian leader and the Polish Pope finally met. In their very different ways, they both started it.

To find a year in European history comparable with 1848, however, we obviously have to reach back much farther than 1979, or 1949. 1789 in France? 1917 in Russia? Or, closer to home, 1918/19 in Central Europe? But 1918/19 was the aftermath of World War. The closer parallel is surely 1848, the springtime of nations. In the space of a few paragraphs such comparisons are little better than parlour games. Yet, like parlour games, they can be amusing, and may sometimes help to concentrate the mind.

1848 erupted, according to A.J.P. Taylor, 'after forty years of peace and stability' while Lewis Namier describes it, with somewhat less cavalier arithmetic, as 'the outcome of thirty-three creative years of European peace carefully preserved on a consciously counter-revolutionary basis.' The revolution, Namier writes, 'was born at least as much of hopes as of discontents.' There was undoubtedly an economic and social background: lean harvests and the potato disease. But 'the common denominator was ideological.' He quotes the exiled Louis-Philippe declaring that he had given way to une insur-
intellecuals'. To be sure, the renewed flexing of workers' muscle in two strike-waves in 1988 was what finally brought Poland's communists to the first Round Table of 1989. To be sure, it was the masses on the streets in demonstrations in all the other East European countries that brought the old rulers down. But the politics of the revolution were not made by workers or peasants. They were made by intellectuals: the playwright Václav Havel, the medievalist Bronisław Geremek, the Catholic editor Tadeusz Mazowiecki, the painter Bärbel Bohley in Berlin, the conductor Kurt Masur in Leipzig, the philosophers János Kis and Gaspár Miklós Támas in Budapest, the engineering professor Petr Roman and the poet Mircea Dinescu in Bucharest. History has outdone Shelley, for poets were the acknowledged legislators of this world. The crowds on Wenceslas Square chanted, 'Long live the students! Long live the actors!' And the sociology of the opposition forums (New, Democratic, Civic), parties and parliamentary candidates was distinctly comparable with that of the Frankfurt Parliament or the Slav Congress at Prague. Hundert zwanzig Professoren .

As in 1848, the common denominator was ideological. The inner history of these revolutions is that of a set of ideas whose time had come, and a set of ideas whose time had gone. At first glance this may seem a surprising statement. For had not the ideology ceased to be an active force many years before? Surely the rulers no longer believed a word of the guff they shouted, nor expected their subjects to believe it, nor even expected their subjects to believe that they, the rulers, believed it? This is probably true in most cases, although who knows what an old man like Erich Honecker, a communist from his earliest youth, still genuinely believed? (One must never underestimate the human capacity for self-deception.)

Yet one of the things these revolutions showed, ex post facto, is just how important the residual veil of ideology still was. Few rulers are content to say simply: 'We have the Gatling gun and you do not!' 'We hold power because we hold power.' Ideology provided a residual legitimization, perhaps also enabling the rulers, and their politbureaucratic servants, at least partly to deceive themselves about the nature of their own rule. At the same time, it was vital for the semantic occupation of the public sphere. The combination of censorship and a nearly complete Party-state monopoly of the mass media provided the army of semantic occupation; ideology, in the debased, routinized form of newspeak, was its ammunition. However despised and uncredible these structures of organized lying were, they continued to perform a vital blocking function. They no longer mobilized anyone, but they did still prevent the public articulation of shared aspirations and common truths.

What is more, by demanding from the ordinary citizen seemingly innocuous semantic signs of outward conformity, the system managed somehow to implicate them in it. It is easy now to forget that until almost the day before yesterday, almost everyone in East Germany and Czechoslovakia was living a double life: systematically saying one thing in public and another in private. This was a central theme of the essayistic work of Václav Havel over the last decade and one he movingly returned to in his 1990 New Year's address as president. The worst thing was, he said, the 'devastated moral environment. We are all morally sick, because we all got used to saying one thing and thinking another.' And: 'All of us have become accustomed to the totalitarian system, accepted
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it as an unalterable fact and therefore kept it running . . . None of us is merely a victim of it, because all of us helped to create it together.' The crucial 'line of conflict', he wrote earlier, did not run between people and state, but rather through the middle of each individual 'for everyone in his or her own way is both a victim and a supporter of the system.' A banner I saw above the altar in an East Berlin church vividly expressed the same basic thought. It said: 'I am Cain and Abel.'

In order to understand what it meant for ordinary people to stand in those vast crowds in the city squares of Central Europe, chanting their own, spontaneous slogans, you have first to make the imaginative effort to understand what it feels like to pay this daily toll of public hypocrisy. As they stood and shouted together, these men and women were not merely healing divisions in their society; they were healing divisions in themselves. Everything that had to do with the word, with the press, with television, was of the first importance to these crowds. The semantic occupation was as offensive to them as military occupation; cleaning up the linguistic environment as vital as cleaning up the physical environment. The long queue every morning in Wenceslas Square, lining up patiently in the freezing fog for a newspaper called The Free Word, was, for me, one of the great symbolic pictures of 1989.

The motto of the year—and not just in Czechoslovakia—was Pravda Vitězi, the old Hussite slogan, adopted by Masaryk, 'Truth shall prevail,' or, in the still more ancient Latin, Magna est veritas et praevalebit. As one talks in English of a 'moment of truth' for some undertaking, so this was a year of truth for communism. There is a real sense in which these regimes lived by the word and perished by the word.

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For what, after all, happened? A few thousands, then tens of thousands, then hundreds of thousands went on to the streets. They spoke a few words. 'Resign!' they said. 'No more shall we be slaves!' 'Free elections!' 'Freedom!' And the walls of Jericho fell. And with the walls, the communist parties simply crumbled. At astonishing speed. By the end of 1989, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party had split in two, with the majority of its members leaving for good. In January 1990, the Polish United Workers' Party followed suit. Within three months, East Germany's Socialist Unity Party lost its leading role, its name, and at least half its members. The inner decay of these parties recalled the remark of a German poet in 1848: 'Monarchy is dead, though monarchs still live.'

With the single, signal exception of Romania, these revolutions were also remarkable for the almost complete lack of violence. Like Solidarity in 1980-81 they were that historical contradiction-in-terms, 'peaceful revolution'. No bastilles were stormed, no guillotines erected. Lamp-posts were used only for street-lighting. Romania alone saw tanks and firing squads. Elsewhere the only violence was that used at the outset by police. The young demonstrators in East Berlin and Prague laid candles in front of the police, who responded with truncheons. The Marseillaise of 1989 said not 'aux armes, citoyens' but 'aux bougies, citoyens'. The rationale and tradition of non-violence can be found in the history of all the democratic oppositions of East Central Europe throughout the 1980s. Partly it was pragmatic: the other side had all the weapons. But it was also ethical. It was a statement about how things should be. They wanted to start as they intended to go on. History, said Adam Michnik, had taught them that those who start
by storming bastilles will end up building their own.

Yet almost as remarkable, historically speaking, was the lack (so far, and Romania plainly excepted) of major counter-revolutionary violence. The police behaved brutally in East Germany up to and notably on the state’s fortieth anniversary, 7 October, and in Czechoslovakia up to and notably on 17 November. In Poland the systematic deployment of counter-revolutionary force lasted over seven years, from the declaration of a ‘state of war’ on 13 December 1981 to the spring of 1989. But once the revolutions (or, in Poland and Hungary, ‘revolutions’) were under way, there was an amazing lack of coercive countermeasures. The communist rulers said, like King Wilhelm of Württemberg, ‘I cannot mount on horseback against ideas.’ But one is bound to ask: why not? Much of the modern history of Central Europe consisted precisely in rulers mounting on horseback against ideas. Much of the contemporary history of Central Europe, since 1945, consists in rulers mounting tanks against ideas. Until 1989 the most fitting motto for any history of this region was not ‘Pravda Viťaz’ but some lines from the nineteenth-century Polish poet, Cyprian Norwid:

Colossal armies, valiant generals,
   Police-secret, open, and of sexes two—
Against whom have they joined together?
Against a few ideas . . . nothing new!

So why was it different in 1989? Three reasons may be suggested. They might be labelled ‘Gorbachev’, ‘Helsinki’ and ‘Toqueville’. The new line in Soviet policy, christened by Gennady Gerasimov on 25 October the Sinatra doctrine—‘I had it my way’ as he actually misquoted the famous line—rather than the Brezhnev doctrine, was self-evidently essential. In East Germany, Moscow not only made it plain to the leadership that Soviet troops were not available for purposes of domestic repression, but also, it seems, went out of its way to let it be known—to the West, but also to the population concerned—that this was its position. In Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union helped the revolution along by a nicely timed retrospective condemnation of the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion. Throughout East Central Europe, the people at last derived some benefit from their ruling élites’ chronic dependency on the Soviet Union, for, deprived of the Soviet Kalashnikov-crutch, those élites did not have another leg to stand on. Romania was the exception that proves the rule. It is no accident that it was precisely in the state for so long most independent of Moscow that the resistance of the security arm of the powers-that-were was most fierce, bloody and prolonged.

None the less, the factor ‘Gorbachev’ alone does not suffice to explain why these ruling élites did not more vigorously deploy their own, still formidable police and security forces in a last-ditch defence of their own power and privilege. Is it too fanciful to suggest that the constant, persistent harping of the West on certain international norms of domestic conduct, the East European leaders’ yearning for international respectability, and the sensed linkage between this and the hard currency credits they so badly needed, in short, the factor ‘Helsinki’, played at least some part in staying the hands of those who might otherwise have given the order to shoot?

Yet none of this would have stopped them if they had still been convinced of their right to rule. The third, and perhaps the ultimately decisive factor, is that characteristic of revolutionary situations described by Alexis de
Toqueville more than a century ago: the ruling élite’s loss of belief in its own right to rule. A few kids went on the streets and threw a few words. The police beat them. The kids said: You have no right to beat us! And the rulers, the high and mighty, replied, in effect: Yes, we have no right to beat you. We have no right to preserve our rule by force. The end no longer justifies the means!

In fact the ruling élites, and their armed servants, distinguished themselves by their comprehensive unreadiness to stand up in any way for the things in which they had so long claimed to believe, and their almost indecent haste to embrace the things they had so long denounced as ‘capitalism’ and ‘bourgeois democracy’. All over Eastern Europe there was the quiet flap of turning coats: one day they denounced Wafea, the next they applauded him; one day they embraced Honecker, the next they imprisoned him; one day they vituperated Havel, the next they elected him president.

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

Of what, or of whom, was 1989 the springtime? Of ‘the people’? But in what sense? ‘Wir sind das Volk,’ said the first great crowds in East Germany: we are the people.

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But within a few weeks they were saying ‘Wir sind EIN Volk’: we are one nation. In Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, the crowds were a sea of national flags, while the people raised their voice to sing old national hymns. In Hungary and Romania they cut the communist symbols out of the centre of their flags. In East Germany there were, at first, no flags, no hymns. But gradually the flags came out, plain stripes of red, black and gold without the GDR hammer and dividers in the middle: the flag of Western—and before that of united—Germany.

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

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

Of course there are counter-examples. One of the nastier aspects of the German revolution was the excesses of popular support for a Party-government campaign against Polish 'smugglers and profiteers', and abuse of visiting black students and Vietnamese Gastarbeiter. In Hungarian opposition politics, the fierce infighting between the Hungarian Democratic Forum and the Free Democrats was not without an ethnic undertone, with some members of the former questioning the 'Hungarian-ness' of some members of the latter, who replied with charges of anti-Semitism. Thousands of Bulgarians publicly protested against the new government giving the Turkish-Muslim minority its rights.

If one looks slightly further ahead, there are obviously potential conflicts over other remaining minorities: notably the Hungarians in Romania, the Romanians in the Soviet Union (Moldavia), the Germans in Poland, Romania and the Soviet Union, and gypsies in several countries. There are the potential political uses of anti-Semitism. There is the difficulty of finding a combination of Czechoslovakia fully satisfactory to both Slovaks and Czechs. And there are the outstanding frontier questions, above all that of the post-1945 German-Polish frontier on the Oder-Neisse line.

Yet compared with Central Europe in 1848 or 1918/19

this is a relatively short list. Most nations have states, and have got used to their new frontiers. Ethnically the map is far more homogenous than it was in 1848 or 1918: as Ernest Gellner has observed, it is now a picture by Modigliani rather than Kokoschka. (The main artists were, of course, Hitler and Stalin: their brushes, war, deportation and mass murder.) National and ethnic conflicts may grow again both between and within these states, as they did in Eastern Europe before the last war, especially if their economic situation deteriorates. Or those national and ethnic conflicts may progressively be alleviated, as were those of Western Europe after the last war, especially if these countries' economic situation improves in a process of integration into a larger European common market and community. We shall see. But the historical record must show that 1989 was not a year of acute national and ethnic conflict in Eastern Europe west of the Soviet frontier. Quite the reverse: it was a year of solidarity both within and between nations. At the end of the year, symbolic and humanitarian support for the people(s) of Romania came from all the self-liberated states of East Central Europe. A springtime of nations is not necessarily a springtime of 'nationalism'.

In any case, what was most striking was not the language of nationhood. That was wholly predictable. What was striking was the other ideas and words that, so to speak, shared the top billing. One of these was 'society'. In Poland, a country often stigmatized as 'nationalist', the word most often used to describe the people as opposed to the authorities was not 'nation'; it was społeczeństwo, society. In Czechoslovakia the word 'society' was used in a similar way, though less frequently, and here it could not simply be a synonym or euphemism for 'nation' because it covered two nations. In
both cases, it was as meaningful to talk of social self-
determination as it was to talk of national self-
determination. Everywhere stress was laid on the self-
conscious unity of intelligentsia, workers and peasants. Of
course in part this unity was created by the common
enemy. When communist power had been broken, and
real parliamentary politics began, then conflicting social
interests were robustly articulated. Thus probably the
most distinctive and determined group in the new Polish
parliament was not communists or Solidarity, left or
right, but peasant-farmers from all parties, combining
and conspiring to advance their sectional interests.

None the less, the social divisions were nothing like as
deep as in the nineteenth- or early twentieth-century,
and they did not undercut the revolutions. There is an
historical irony here. For in large measure communism
created the social unity which contributed decisively to
the end of communism. The combination of deliberate
levelling and unintended absurdities, resulted in a
distribution of wealth throughout most of society that
was not so much egalitarian as higgledy-piggledy. A
professor would earn less than a miner, an engineer less
than a peasant-farmer. A plumber with a few dollars or
Deutschmarks would be better off than a prince without
hard currency. A worker lived in the same house as a
doctor, an engineer or a writer: and the ground plan of
their apartments was almost certainly identical, even if
the décor differed. At the same time, they were all united
by consciousness of the one great divide between the
communist upper/ruling class, the nomenklatura, and all
the rest. In all these countries the latter were ‘them’: oni
(a word made famous by Teresa Toran'ska’s book of
interviews with Polish Stalinists), the Bonzen. They
were identified by their clothes, their black curtained
cars, their special hospitals and shops, their language
and their behaviour. When the dense crowds in Prague
were asked to clear a path for an ambulance, they did so
chanting, ‘We are not like them! We are not like them!’

At the same time, there was a remarkably high level of
popular political awareness. Again, this was partly a
result of the system. Everyone had at least a basic
education, and from the earliest years that education
was highly politicized. Many people reacted against this
politicization with a determined retreat into private life,
and an almost programmatic apoliticism. But because of
the politicization of education, and the ubiquity of ideol-
ogy, no one could be in any doubt that words and ideas
mattered, having profound consequences for everyday life.

A concept that played a central role in opposition
thinking in the 1980s was that of ‘civil society’. 1989 was
the springtime of societies aspiring to be civil. Ordinary
men and women’s rudimentary notion of what it meant
to build a civil society might not satisfy the political
theorist. But some such notion there was, and it con-
tained several basic demands. There should be forms of
association, national, regional, local, professional, which
would be voluntary, authentic, democratic and, first and
last, not controlled or manipulated by the Party or Party-
state. People should be ‘civil’: that is, polite, tolerant,
and, above all, non-violent. Civil and civilian. The idea of
citizenship had to be taken seriously.

Communism managed to poison many words from the
mainstream of European history—not least, as this book
has repeatedly indicated, the word ‘socialism’. But some-
how it did not manage to poison the words ‘citizen’ and
‘civic’, even though it used them, too, in perverted ways:
for example, in appeals to ‘civic responsibility’ meaning,
‘Keep quiet and let us deal with these troublesome
students.' Why it did not manage to poison those words is an interesting question—to which I have no ready answer—but the fact is that when Solidarity’s parliamentarians came to give their group a name, they called it the Citizens’ Parliamentary Club; the Czech movement called itself the Civic Forum; and the opposition groups in the GDR started by describing themselves as Bürgerinitiativen, that is, citizens’ or civic initiatives. (In the East German case, the actual word was probably imported from West Germany, but the fact remains that they chose this rather than another term.) And the language of citizenship was important in all these revolutions. People had had enough of being mere components in a deliberately atomized society: they wanted to be citizens, individual men and women with dignity and responsibility, with rights but also with duties, freely associating in civil society.

There is one last point about the self-description of the revolution which is perhaps worth a brief mention. As Ralf Dahrendorf has observed, Karl Marx played on the ambiguity of the German term bürgerliche Gesellschaft, which could be translated either as civil society or as bourgeois society. Marx, says Dahrendorf, deliberately conflated the two ‘cities’ of modernity, the fruits of the Industrial and the French Revolutions, the bourgeois and the citizen. I thought of this observation when a speaker in one of the mass rallies in Leipzig called for solidarity with the bürgerliche Bewegung in Czechoslovakia. The bourgeois movement! But on reflection there seems to me a deeper truth in that apparent malapropism. For what most of the opposition movements throughout East Central Europe and a large part of ‘the people’ supporting them were in effect saying was: Yes, Marx is right, the two things are intimately connected—and we want both! Civil rights and property rights, economic freedom and political freedom, financial independence and intellectual independence, each supports the other. So, yes, we want to be citizens, but we also want to be middle-class, in the senses that the majority of citizens in the more fortunate half of Europe are middle-class. We want to be Bürger AND bürgerlich! Tom Paine, but also Thomas Mann.

So it was a springtime of nations, but not necessarily of nationalism; of societies, aspiring to be civil; and above all, of citizens.

The springtime of citizens has already changed the face of Europe. What seemed only possible at the beginning of 1989 seemed certain at the beginning of 1990. There would be a new Europe, for which the term ‘Yalta’ would no longer be an appropriate shorthand. This Europe would have a different place for the countries formerly described as East European, and, at the very least, a less divided Germany.

1848 ended badly because of the combination of internal and external forces of reaction; but the external ones were decisive. No comparable external forces of reaction were visible at the beginning of 1990. The Prussians were making their own revolution, not crushing those of their neighbours. Austrians were not repressing the Hungarian reform-revolution, but helping it along. And the Russians? Here the transformation was miraculous, to the point where senior American and British officials indicated that they might actually welcome a Soviet military intervention to smash the Securitate death squads in Romania. But no, for Romania, as for Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and Bulgaria, Soviet leaders and commentators from
Gorbachev down assumed a saintly expression and said they would never dream of interfering in the internal affairs of another sovereign state.

Yet the popular movement for national and social self-determination did not stop neatly at the western frontier of the Soviet Union. What happened in Eastern Europe directly encouraged the Baltic States, not to mention the Romanians of Soviet Moldavia. And what if the political earth began to move in the Ukraine? At the beginning of 1990 it was therefore all too possible to imagine some backlash or reversal inside the Soviet Union. But it seemed reasonable to doubt whether even a conservative-military leadership in Moscow would attempt to use armed force to restore Russian domination west of the Soviet frontiers of 1945. Would they not have more than enough on their hands trying to preserve the empire inside the post-war Soviet frontiers? Logically, if they invaded one East European country they should now invade them all. And then, what would they ‘restore’? The shattered humpty-dumpies that were yesterday’s East European communist parties? Obviously a reversal inside the Soviet Union would make life much less comfortable in the new Europe, and directly affect developments in a Germany still partly occupied by Soviet troops. But it would not in itself suffice to turn the map back to what it was before 1989.

About this new Europe there are countless questions to be asked, of which the most obviously pressing is: how can the West help the transition of formerly communist states into liberal democracies? I ask myself a less obvious question: not ‘How can we help them?’ but ‘How might they help us?’ What, if anything, can these nearly hundred million Europeans, with their forty years of hard experience, bring to the new Europe, and to us in the West? The Czechs were delighted to point out that ‘89 is ‘68 turned upside down. But one of the notable differences between ‘68 and ‘89 was the comparative lack of Western intellectuals discovering, in these exotic regions, new utopias, ‘socialism with a human face’ and the fabled Third Way.

Of course there is a whole kaleidoscope of new parties, programmes and trends, and it is little short of impudence to subsume them in one ‘message’. Yet if you look at what these diverse parties are really saying about the basic questions of politics, economics, law and international relations, there is a remarkable underlying consensus. In politics they are all saying: there is no ‘socialist democracy,’ there is only democracy. And by democracy they mean multi-party, parliamentary democracy as practised in contemporary Western, Northern and Southern Europe. They are all saying: there is no ‘socialist legality’, there is only legality. And by that they mean the rule of law, guaranteed by the constitutionally anchored independence of the judiciary. They are all saying, and for the left this is perhaps the most important statement: there is no ‘socialist economics’, there is only economics. And economics means not a socialist market economy but a social market economy. Not Ota Sik but Ludwig Erhard. Of course there are grave differences in these countries between, for example, Friedmanites and Hayekites. A good word might even be heard for Keynes. But the general direction is absolutely plain: towards an economy whose basic engine of growth is the market, with extensive private ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange. The transition to such a system poses unique problems, for which original solutions will have to be found. In most of these countries there is still widespread
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support for relatively egalitarian distribution of the wealth thus created, and for a strong welfare state. But the basic model, in the three essentials of politics, law and economics, is something between the real existing Switzerland and the real existing Sweden.

Sweden—or, as one leading Soviet economist carefully stressed, southern Sweden—now seems to be the accepted ideal for virtually everyone who styles themself a socialist from Berlin to Vladivostok. But if Marx came back to earth, would he not describe the dominant mode of production in Sweden as capitalist? In other words, the fundamental argument from the left seems no longer to be about the best way to produce wealth, only about the best way to distribute it. (The more fundamental critique of the successful forms of production comes from Greens rather than socialists.)

For purely practical and historical reasons, the state will clearly play a larger part in most formerly East European countries than in most West European countries, for some years to come. But this does not necessarily mean that people will want it to. On the contrary, having had so much state interference for so long, they might decide they want as little of it as possible. Public opinion polls and sociological surveys are not much use here, since most people have only just begun to think about these issues, let alone to confront them in the harsh reality of economic transition. The proof of the pudding will be in the eating. Among the intellectuals who have begun to confront these issues there is, it seems to me, rather an opposite danger: that of regarding the free market as a cure for all ills, social and political as well as economic. Hence the popularity of Hayek. One might almost say that the free market is the latest Central European utopia.

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It is easy now to forget that communism claimed to have found not only new and better forms of politics, law and economics, but also a new and better way of organizing relations between states. This new way was called 'socialist internationalism', and counterposed to 'bourgeois nationalism'. What we have seen in practice is the rise of socialist nationalism and bourgeois internationalism. There are many examples of bourgeois internationalism—G7, OECD, IMF, NATO, GATT—but in the perspective of European history the most dramatic is the European Community. Now there are proposals, too numerous even to list, for new forms of inter-state relations in the former Eastern Europe. To give but one example, leading Polish politicians have revived the idea of a confederation of Poland and Czechoslovakia. But if you ask what is the underlying model for the new relations between these states, and for the resolution of their outstanding national, ethnic and economic conflicts, then the answer is clear. The model is the European Community.

This means not only that they would like to join the present EC, as fully as possible and as soon as possible. It also means that they hope their outstanding historic conflicts and enmities can be overcome in the same way that, say, those between France and Germany have been overcome. This is true, it seems to me, even of those groups that would not explicitly acknowledge the EC as a model. Certainly, you have to go far in Western Europe to find such enthusiastic 'Europeans'—that is, supporters of a supranational community called Europe—as you will find at every turn in Eastern Europe. Travelling to and fro between the two halves of the divided continent, I have sometimes thought that the real divide is between those (in the West) who have Europe and those (in the
East) who believe in it. And everywhere, in all the lands, the phrase people use to sum up what is happening is ‘the return to Europe’.

Yet what, to repeat the question, can these enthusiasts bring to the new Europe? If I am right in my basic analysis, they can offer no fundamentally new ideas on the big questions of politics, economics, law or international relations. The ideas whose time has come are old, familiar, well-tested ones. (It is the new ideas whose time has passed.) So is all they have to offer us their unique, theoretically intriguing but practically burdensome problems? Do they come like mendicants to the door bearing only chronicles of wasted time? Or might they have, under their threadbare cloaks, some hidden treasures?

Travelling through this region over the last decade, I have found treasures: examples of great moral courage and intellectual integrity; comradeship, deep friendship, family life; time and space for serious conversation, music, literature, not disturbed by the perpetual noise of our media-driven and obsessively telecommunicative world; Christian witness in its original and purest form; more broadly, qualities of relations between men and women of very different backgrounds, and once bitterly opposed faiths—an ethos of solidarity. Here the danger of sentimental idealization is acute, for the privileged visitor enjoys these benefits without paying the costs. There is no doubt that, on any quantitative or utilitarian reckoning, the costs have been far higher than the benefits. Yet it would be even more wrong to pretend that these treasures were not real. They were. And for me the question of questions after 1989 is: What if any of these good things will survive liberation? Was the community only a community of fate, a Schicksalsgemeinschaft? Were these just the uses of adversity?

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Even if there is no reversal in the Soviet Union, no violent backlash or illiberal turn in this or that East European country, won’t these treasures simply be swept away in the rush—the all too understandable rush—for affluence? As a Hungarian friend wryly remarked: ‘I have survived forty years of communism, but I’m not sure that I’ll survive one year of capitalism.’ And this will not just be the atomizing impact of developed consumerism, one of the most potent weapons known to man. It will be the still rougher and more traumatic impact of the attempted transition from a planned to a market economy, with all the associated blows of unemployment, dislocation and injustice.

Wishful thinking helps no one. You can, alas, paint with a rather high degree of analytical plausibility a quite dark picture of the prospect for the former Eastern Europe in the 1990s: a prospect in which the post-communist future looks remarkably like the pre-communist past, less Central Europe than Zwischeneuropa, a dependent intermediate zone of weak states, national prejudice, inequality, poverty and Schlammassel. 1989 might then appear, to participants and historians, as just one brief shining moment between the sufferings of yesterday and those of tomorrow.

This fate is not inevitable. Whether it can be avoided depends to a very significant degree on the commitment and ingenuity of the West in general, Western Europe in particular, and above all on West Germany—or rather, to put it in terms more appropriate to the new Europe, on a Germany remaining Western.

Yet even if the darker prospect were to be realized, something would remain, at least in memory, in culture, in spirit. At the very least the Europeans from over there would have offered us, with a clarity and firmness born of
bitter experience, a restatement of the value of what we already have, of old truths and tested models, of the three essentials of liberal democracy and the European Community as the one and only, real existing common European home. Intellectually, dare I say spiritually, '1989' in Eastern Europe is a vital complement to '1992' in Western Europe.

'Litwo! Ojczyzno moja! Ty jesteś jak zdrowie,' begins the most famous of all Polish poems, Adam Mickiewicz's 'Pan Tadeusz':

Lithuania, my fatherland, thou art like health; How much we should value thee, he alone learns, Who has lost thee.

If we put in place of 'Lithuania' the word 'Europe', we may have the deepest lesson of that year of wonders, '89.
Afterword

ture. And even in what we now call eastern rather than East Germany, closest to the West geographically and most helped by the West in every way, there have been flarings of social unrest, scapegoating, and racial violence.

Nonetheless, in the heartlands (and great cities) of Central Europe described here, the hopes of '89 have not all been disappointed. True, no brave new style of consensual 'forum politics' has emerged. True, the antipoliticians have found it more difficult to reconcile morality and politics in power than they did in opposition. Besides many inspiring speeches and noble gestures, Václav Havel has made compromises—notably by signing the so-called 'Iustration' law enacting blanket discrimination against former secret police collaborators—which are difficult to defend by his own earlier standards of morality. Meanwhile, our glinting Friedmanite, Václav Klaus, weighed down with no such moral baggage, has taken to the professional partisanship of party politics, but also to the hard business of government, with triumphant gusto.

Wandering down Wenceslas Square in Prague early in 1990, I bumped into the Hungarian playwright, Árpád Göncz, the wry, avuncular witness of my Budapest chapter. 'We seem to have found a compromise on the candidate for the Presidency,' he told me over a coffee at the Café Evropa. And who, I enquired, might it be? 'It seems,' said Árpád, 'it will be me.' And sure enough, he has since become a wry, avuncular President of Hungary. Unjustly neglected in the Western media, Göncz's role has actually been quite as important as that of Havel or Wałęsa. Yet he, too, has found himself being dragged into the undignified melee of party politics, with—as in Prague—the sharpest cuts often coming from those who themselves risked least in the communist period. As for Lech Wałęsa, he threw himself into the melee, displaying his most erratic, populist, and autocratic side in his campaign for the Presidency. Yet, despite the dark warnings of Adam Michnik and others, the result has not yet been dictatorship. Poland's problem has been that it has had too many political parties represented in a parliament that really does matter; not too few, in one that doesn't.

In his Reflections on the Revolution in Europe, also written in early 1990, Ralf Dahrendorf foresees that these countries would have to pass through a 'valley of tears': that is, through a very painful period of economic, social, and political transition. Down in the valley, in the dark, in the tangled thickets and the mud (and mud-slinging) of traumatic change, even the most seasoned campaigners for human rights and democracy have been heard to emit cries of despondency and alarm. Not least when the West has failed to practice what it preaches (for example, free trade) or has preached what it does not itself practice (for example, purely free market economics). But someone who went into a deep sleep in January 1989, and awoke again in Warsaw, Prague, or Budapest (not to mention Berlin) in January 1993, would find these cities a great step closer to the West, for good and ill—in consumerism and crime, in politics and pornography, in a free press and unemployment, in television programmes, in the book-market, yes, even in the slowly emptying churches.

Of course, much of the old, much that people in the West still automatically associate with 'Eastern Europe,' remains in place. And there is no guarantee at all
that this progress will continue. The transition from communism is by no means necessarily the transition to democracy. Yet the heartlands of East Central Europe have a more than even chance of making the transition from also the transition to. Or, as Bronislaw Geremek puts it, of converting the bright passion for liberty into the steady attachment to democracy. It is even possible to imagine that the first positive growth in industrial production in Poland might indicate the beginning of the upward gradient out of the valley of tears.

In one respect, moreover, the hopes of '89 have actually been surpassed. Rereading this book, I notice the anxious warning of a possible backlash in Moscow. Well, of course, it happened, in the attempted coup of August 1991. But it was defeated. Eleven years after the Polish August of 1980 we had the Russian August. The crowds in Moscow and St Petersburg were every bit as brave, and showed quite as much yearning for freedom, as those in Leipzig or Prague. And perhaps the former had watched the latter on television?

For years, many in the West argued that fundamental change in the Soviet empire could only come from the centre and from above. Solidarity in Poland tried to change things from the periphery of the empire and from below. In fact, it needed both. Gorbachev and Solidarity conditioned each other.

Eduard Shevardnadze pours scorn in his memoirs on the idea that perestroika caused all the changes in what was once Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe. There was Solidarity long before there was perestroika, he says, and both Poland's half-failed revolution and Hungary's half-successful economic reforms made a real impact on people close to Gorbachev. But then, without the policies of Gorbachev the peaceful revolution of 1989 could never have succeeded. But then again, without 1989 in Eastern Europe, 1991 in the Soviet Union would have looked quite different. And Erich Honecker might say: 'I told you so.' For the most radical yet also most logical conclusion of this Central European decade was: no Berlin Wall, no Soviet Union.

This is a great gain for the security of the fledgling democracies in East Central Europe. But this does not mean they are safe. Far from it. Even if an aggressive Russia does not reemerge from the post-Soviet turmoil, they face the new security challenges of possible mass immigration, terrorism, frontier disputes, and minority agitation. And they face them alone. At the time of writing, they may have what in the polite parlance of international relations are called 'friends,' but they have no allies. They are members of NATO's new Cooperation Council. So is Kazakhstan. Quiet bilateral military cooperation with Western states has gone further. But when Czech politicians—recalling the ghost of Munich in 1938—say to American or British leaders that they expect the West to do for them at least what it did for Kuwait, they are met with strained, non-committal grimaces.

Now the problems of giving guarantees rather than grimaces are not small. Once you extend the NATO line beyond the new eastern frontier of Germany, where do you stop? How can you define East Central European states as allies without redefining their eastern neighbours, and above all Russia and Ukraine, as adversaries? Does it make sense militarily in any case? But none of this makes living in a security limbo any more comfortable for the Poles, the Czechs, or the Hungarians.
Afterword

As with NATO, so also with Europe. If in 1993 there is some disillusionment with the idea of the 'return to Europe,' with which 1989 and this book finished, then this may partly be due to the unrealistic, idealistic, even starry-eyed quality of the original expectations. But it is also a result of the way in which Western Europe has actually behaved. One should not facilely dismiss what has been done. There has been in Western Europe, in the West altogether, a genuinely idealistic (as well as a sincerely opportunistic) response to what happened in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989. I see this every week among my students in Oxford, in my mailbag, and on my long-playing answering machine. Moreover, it is actually more difficult than you might think to 'help' sensibly and effectively.

Nonetheless, too much of the public money designated for Central and Eastern Europe has either not been disbursed at all or has been recycled into the pockets of Western consultants — benefitting, at most, the Marriott, Forum, and Intercontinental hotels in Warsaw, Prague, and Budapest. The spectacle of a bank specifically designed to help post-communist Europe, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, spending more than a million pounds on new marble for its lavish London headquarters almost beggars belief. Measured by the European Community's own previous standards, the so-called 'Europe agreements' which the EC signed with Poland, Hungary, and (then still) Czechoslovakia in December 1991 are generous. But on close examination you find that up to fifty per cent of Polish, Hungarian, and Czech exports are treated as 'sensitive' goods subject to special import restrictions.

As with goods, so also with people. Again, one should not simply dismiss what has been done. Western Europe has abolished visa requirements for Poles, Czechs, and Hungarians. This is a big step towards the Europe of which Jiří Dienstbier dreamed in his boiler room in the mid-1980s. (The book he wrote then has now been published as Dreaming of Europe.) The real Europe has always been made by the meetings of individual men and women, not by regulations or treaties. So this lets Europe happen. But at the same time, Western Europe in general, and Germany in particular, are rapidly edging towards an immigration policy which places on the fragile democracies of East Central Europe the burden of either looking after or themselves keeping out the refugees and migrants from the Balkans and the former Soviet Union.

To say, as many do, that the West is building new Berlin Walls is a rhetorical device that I dislike, because it trivialises the real Berlin Wall. The statement 'no Berlin Wall, no Soviet Union' also holds the other way round: 'no Soviet Union, no Berlin Wall.' The West is building no walls to keep its own people in. But it is true that, in security, economic, and immigration policy, the Poles, Czechs, and Hungarians keep knocking their heads against West European walls which are all the more frustrating because they are invisible. There are no snarling Alsatians, only regulations, no automatic shooting-devices, only the smiling 'yes' that in fact means no. And with most of continental Western Europe in recession, then the pressure of lobbies and public opinion will make for still more covert protectionism, still less openness from Europe to Europe.

Now these may just be the passing concerns of the moment. But East Central Europe has certainly not
made it to stable democracy yet. And here, in this region delicately poised half-way between Maastricht and Sarajevo, the West can make the difference between success and failure. Not that success will necessarily bring any great new inspiration or revelations. Three years on, I am more inclined than ever to say that most of the particular qualities I discerned in the 1980s were, indeed, the uses of adversity. The Round Tables, too, have long been dismantled or packed away. The age of chivalry is gone, that of sophisters, economists, and calculators has succeeded—as Edmund Burke famously observed after 1789. But it by no means follows that, as Burke concluded, the glory of Europe is extinguished.

One of the glories, perhaps the greatest glory, of the revolution of '89 in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin, and Prague was its peaceful, civil, and civilised nature. Civic forums organised civil resistance to rebuild civil society. For all the recrimination and mud-slinging and even ethnic taunts of post-communist politics in these cities, those politics have remained, in conditions of traumatic change, almost entirely non-violent. That may sound like a modest achievement, but if you look at the history of earlier European revolutions, or at the former Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia today, then you realise that it is actually a very large one.

Certainly my Zagreb publisher, Mr Slavko Goldstein, seems to think so. In his preface to the Croatian edition, which he has called We The Citizens, he suggests that the story told in The Magic Lantern may have lessons even for those places where things have gone more traditionally wrong. And he concludes that there, too, the future depends on the rediscovery of civic responsibility.

Amidst a civil war, this may sound like whistling in the dark. But who are we to dismiss such a hope, however faint, from our safe distance? I, at least, am still glad to have contributed to it.

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