

## OPEN LETTER<sup>1</sup>

BY ADAM MICHNIK, WLADYSLAW FRASYNIUK AND BOGDAN LIS  
TO THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE CONGRES OF INTELLECTUALS

*This letter, addressed to the participants of the Congress, was smuggled out of prison.*

Dear Sirs,

By coming to Warsaw to attend the so-called "Congress of Intellectuals" you are to morally legitimize the activities led in the name of the international struggle for peace by those who, four years ago, sent tanks against defenceless people, and thus waged a cold civil war against the Polish nation.

Our generals and party secretaries, perturbed as they are by the "Star Wars" projects, do not even wish to consider the idea of peace with the Polish nation, just as they do not wish to respect the International Human Rights Covenants. Instead, they treat citizens as their property. They are the ones you are going to discuss peace with. People for whom the idea of peace embodies the right to imprison and persecute their opponents will address you with their hypocritical speeches about disarmament and dialogue. The speeches are for you; for us they have nothing but tanks and truncheons, hired murderers and prison guards. And you have decided to engage in dialogue with them.

As members of the numerous ranks of citizens of the "Polish Prisoners' Republic", we have a particular right to address you. We have been imprisoned for nearly a year now. We were tried and sentenced by the court in Gdansk on the basis of trumped-up charges and the evidence forged by the Security Service. We were prevented from studying the official evidence against us at our trial, which was witnessed only by officers of the Security Service; were denied the right to explain, to question witnesses and to submit evidence. The official minutes of the proceedings were falsified. We were prevented, presumably for some humanitarian reasons, from consulting our defence counsel in private.

Our appeal is due to begin the day before the opening of the Congress. We therefore invite you to the Supreme Court in Warsaw on 14th and 15th January. Whatever the sentence, it is going to be yet another artifice of our generals and party secretaries who wish to be recognised as the government of a civilized country, while in fact, they are merely governors of an uncivilized prison. Those humanitarians and guardians of peace refuse even to grant us political prisoner's status. And by your participation in this totalitarian farce, you can only encourage them. From then on, they will persecute us even more vigorously, perhaps they will also gain a new courage to implement the idea of forced exile as part of their humanitarian peace actions. And maybe as part of the efforts to intensify the struggle for peace they will enforce further restrictions in prison discipline. Maybe....

We wish you all very successful debates. Let the next congress be organized in Johannesburg or Kabul.

## THE LEGACY OF THE 1956 REVOLUTION

George Schöpflin<sup>1</sup>

The Hungarian revolution of 1956 has undergone a considerable reassessment in West and East alike. Having at first been greeted with enthusiasm in the West as a symbol of resistance to Soviet tyranny, it was gradually demoted in Western eyes to an unfortunate event, a blip in the what many hope has been and will be steady progress towards détente and the "domestication" of the Soviet system. Nothing showed this more clearly than the change in the terminology used to describe the events of October 1956. Initially what happened was known as a "revolution", then it became a "revolt" and nowadays serious efforts have been made to void it of its political content completely by calling it an "uprising". At least only avowed supporters of the Kádár system referred to it as "counter-revolution". A minority of Western observers have persisted with describing the events of 1956 as a revolution and their view is gaining adherents in a thirty year perspective.

Something oddly similar happened to the Hungarian revolution in Hungary itself, though by a very different route. The generation that took part or was caught up in it was completely traumatised by the suppression of the revolution and the destruction of their ideals. For them, the best course was to forget, to accept the offer of second and third best made by the Kádár system in the 1960s and to live as if no revolution had ever taken place. They paid a high price for this, not only in living through the forced lowering of aspirations, but in accepting the Kádár dispensation as something beyond criticism. The complete depoliticisation of Hungarian political life, where even the language in which political questions can be raised has been falling into desuetude, is perhaps the most enduring monument of Kádárism.

The next generation, those in their thirties and early forties, took the lead of their elders and turned their attention to other pursuits. For them, the issue was not revolution or counter-revolution, but more simply the accumulation of material goods as the surrogate for politics. It was only when the next, the youngest generation began to come to maturity that the issue of 1956 reemerged slowly into the open. Partly this was the function of time and the curiosity of those who were born well after the events. But partly it was the mounting impatience of this youngest generation of Hungarians – at any rate of a minority of them – with the economic stringencies that were denying them the opportunities enjoyed by their elders as the country's economy began to deteriorate in the 1980s. What could be more natural than to look for political solutions which had been completely outside the limits of the acceptable for 30 years? In this sense, 1956 and the aspirations of this youngest generation were simply looking for their natural rendezvous.

The political legacy of 1956 is, in fact, still as revolutionary as it was three decades ago. Summarily put, its message was this: because this was a revolution, all received dogmas, all inherited structures, patterns, habits, power relations should be scrutinised and discarded where these did not meet popular aspirations. Second, these

aspirations were irremediably democratic, insisting on the popular control of political power. Third, the revolution placed much of its emphasis on self-management and control from below, coupled with a multi-party system and parliamentary democracy, in which both individual and group freedoms could be secured. Finally, the revolution also placed Hungary's international neutrality on the agenda.

None of these makes comfortable reading for the holders of power in Hungary today. This is why the true message of 1956 cannot be rehabilitated or integrated into the Kádár system, regardless of the fact that that system has made the integration of uncomfortable experiences and individuals into itself one of its primary objectives. In reality, the Kádár system came into being over the dead body of the revolution and can never exorcise its memory. Except that that body is not quite as dead as it may have appeared once and the stirrings of life are beginning to revive the debate about the meaning of the thirty-year old revolution. After all, the Hungarian revolution was the first political revolution in an industrialised society; it was the revolution which recognised that a socialist order did not guarantee democracy as such and that democracy was an autonomous value which requires its own institutional framework to give it effect; and, with the Soviet invasion to suppress the revolution, it resulted in the first war between socialist states.

## BETWEEN IDEALS AND UTOPIAS<sup>1</sup>

### A CONVERSATION WITH VÁCLAV HAVEL

Václav Havel:

I'd like to emphasize at the outset that I'm no political scientist, but a writer who observes and gathers impressions of the world around me. I trust that all I say from hereon will be viewed in that light. My impression is that there is an evident difference between dictatorships in the classical sense — what some describe as "authoritarian rule" — and totalitarianism. In the various dictatorships of the Third World, for instance, a small ruling group violently dominates and tyrannises society. Compared with those dictatorships, our totalitarian system is less openly or directly based on violence, even though it certainly rules society by means of an enormous police force, army and bureaucracy. Totalitarianism is unique in yet another sense. It is a system which absorbs the whole of society. It enters every vein and artery of the social organism, usurping and controlling all aspects of human life. Nazism is often cited as an example of totalitarianism, and I understand that the term was first used in connection with fascism in general. Yet fascism strikes me as a half way stage between dictatorship and totalitarianism as we experience it here. In order to distinguish our system from its "pre-historic" forms, I once employed the term "post-totalitarianism". I tried to underline the fact that, although the Nazi and fascist states of the past were much more violent and brutal, they did not penetrate every area of life as thoroughly as our system does. Under fascist regimes, there were important spheres, such as people's private lives, in which people were able to do what they liked to a considerable degree, and which were seemingly untouched by the regime. In the system we live in, you won't normally encounter either street battles between citizens and the police or direct violence, brutality or terrorism from the regime. What one does encounter, however, is something that Orwell saw, and that is more dangerous in certain respects. Totalitarian regimes get under society's skin. Their complex forms of manipulation penetrate every sphere of life. I'm not exaggerating when I tell you that, from morning to night, every ordinary citizen in this country is faced with a situation in which everything they do is in some way interfered with by the system. The regime leaves its mark on everything, from the way housing estates are built to the patterns of television programming. You can even see this manipulation in apparently trivial things, such as the opening and closing times of restaurants, which are conceived with a view to discouraging people from sitting around too long, and encouraging them to get off home to their television screens to watch the messages broadcast by the centralised media.