

PREFACE

Who is the We of the Intelligentsia in Central and Eastern Europe?

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It is simple and self-evident to refer to the "intelligentsia" when discussing the political and cultural history of Central and Eastern Europe. But to define the identity of this group of people, not to mention their function, is another matter. Whether we scan the indexes of scholarly books devoted to intellectual history or contemporary sociology in our search for a definition, or whether we question a series of "native culture bearers", those who identify themselves with the intelligentsia, we shall no doubt conclude that the intelligentsia as such is real enough — but that most attempts at definition are at best intuitive.

Nevertheless, those who study and discuss the cultural history of the countries of Eastern and Central Europe do accept the existence of the intelligentsia, defined as a group of individuals who have in some tacit sense a common set of values and a common purpose. Moreover they assume the intelligentsia to be culturally, socially and even politically significant.

It would be well-nigh impossible to describe the decade of the 1980s and the overthrowal of the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe without recourse to this notion of a group of people collectively referred to as the intelligentsia. From the time of the 1917 revolution, the intelligentsia have played a vital role as stewards of dissenting values; they have fostered opposition to socialist state dictatorship; they were active during and after the collapse of the Soviet maintained power structures. Zygmunt Bauman refers to what he calls the *creative intelligentsia* as "the class more than any other group responsible for reforg-ing diffuse popular dissent into the battering ram which crushed the communist fortress ..."
(Bauman 1994, p. 29)

When the intelligentsia, at the end of the 1980s, took a dive into current events, hitting the head-lines and colouring the ballot sheets, it was indeed a question of the *creative* intelligentsia. Vaclav Havel came soon to epitomise the civilised upholder of humanist values seizing power by word and not by cudgel and bloodshed. Lithuania's first free president was Vytautas Lansbergis, professor of music; the writer Lennart Meri was first foreign minister and later president in Estonia; in Poland Tadeusz Mazowiecki, chief editor of the journal *Tygodnik Powszechny*, became prime minister.

The *intelligentsia* was an early nineteenth century concept, imported originally from Germany, but developed in Russia and Poland. As such it has no equivalent in the West. The use of the singular collective noun gives to the concept a positive, value-charged cohesiveness which has in turn enabled the group to rise to various social and political occasions. The intelligentsia has defined itself in terms of a progressive opposition towards an unjust power structure.

The intelligentsia in Central and Eastern Europe is prone to believing in its own unique position. An example of this is to be found in Boris Kagarlitsky's book, *The Thinking Reed. Intellectuals and the Soviet State 1917 to the Present*. Kagarlitsky is at pains to show that the Russian intelligentsia, which emerged as a consequence of Peter the Great's reforms and introduced western ideas, became a non-western, specifically Russian phenomenon which cannot be seen as an equivalent to the western intellectuals. He quotes Herzen, Berdjaev and finally Plecha-nov's biographer Samuel Baron as follows: "This social group had no exact parallel in Western society; yet, paradoxically enough, it was itself a consequence of the Western impact upon Russia. The intelligentsia was the product of the cultural contact between two unlike civilizations ..." (Kagarlitsky 1988, p. 15).

I suggest that this is a general and accepted view and that it comes close to an idealisation, a mythologisation of, in this case, the Russian intelligentsia. A member of the Russian intelligentsia in exile, Nina Ber-berova, writes in her autobiography, *The Italics Are Mine*, of the failure of the Russian intelligentsia to live up to its role after the revolution: "It was not the split between the intelligentsia and the people, but the split between the two parts of the intelligentsia that always seemed to me fatal for Russian culture. The split between intelligentsia and people was much less pronounced than in many other countries. It exists everywhere — in Sweden, in the U.S.A., in Kenya ... But when the intelligentsia is severed in two to its foundation, then disappears the very hope for something like a strong, spiritual civilization uninterrupted in its flow and a

national intellectual progress, because there are no values that would be respected by all." (Berberova 1969, 173-174) Nina Berberova thereby confirms the mission of the intelligentsia by regretting that it has failed. Ironically enough, she credits western intellectuals with having been more steadfast in their fight against petit-bourgeois tendencies.

The sense of a group identity amongst those who consider themselves as "belonging" to the intelligentsia is clearly evident in Russia and Poland. In former Czechoslovakia the term *intelligentsia* is not used with the same self-evidence, the reference often being to *the intellectuals*. But the Czech and Slovak intellectuals nevertheless see themselves as playing a historical role. Intellectuals from the West may well envy their colleagues from Central and Eastern Europe this assurance of their own worth.

Modern cultural sociologists such as Foucault and Bauman have done much to debunk this idealised picture of the intellectuals. In his book, *Legislators and Interpreters. On modernity, post-modernity and intellectuals*, Zygmunt Bauman treats the Russian intelligentsia as part of the whole intellectual project of the modern period, during which intellectuals have taken upon themselves the role of legislators and advisors, authorising the need of the modern state to create order and rules so that social life may be surveyed and controlled. According to Bauman's argument the intellectuals from the Enlightenment onwards, despite their apparent progressiveness, have had an important stake in state power. Knowledge was necessary for the rulers and knowledge was in itself power. Without the all-powerful state, no need for experts, no need for legislators, no need for intellectuals as a legitimising class.

The Russian intelligentsia, says Bauman, was late on the scene. The Russian intellectual circles were established first in the nineteenth century, a century after the patterns for the intellectual mission had already been firmly set in the West. Furthermore the absolutist monarchy was firmly entrenched and had already a well-nigh complete bureaucratic control. The intelligentsia was late, its legitimising role hardly relevant. But, and here is the point which goes against Kagarlitsky, "The unique circumstances of Russia only sharpened... a situation of much wider import. What united the intellectuals throughout the modern history of Europe, in Russia as much as elsewhere, was the urge for the rational organization of the social worlds, and an image of the end-product of such an organization as a kind of a permanent 'teach-in' session... one attribute they never failed to ascribe to such an ideal was the high authority accorded to Reason and its spokesmen." (Bauman 1987, p. 170)

Bauman's conclusion is that the intellectuals, in their former role, have no place in the post-modern world, they have been made redundant; in Soviet-type societies by coercion, manipulation and disciplining control, and in the West by "the market which now takes upon itself the role of the judge, the opinion-maker, the verifier of values." (Bauman 1987, p. 124) And even if he sees a temporary obligation for the intelligentsia in Central and Eastern Europe to act as spiritual leaders, we must conclude that, inasmuch as the political and even cultural aims of the post-socialist countries is to adjust to the western model of commodity society, then the redundancy of the proud intelligentsias of Russia and Poland is only a matter of time.

We have been accustomed in Europe to contrasting East and West as alternative models, in terms of a synchronic binary opposition. Two of the authors in this collection (Szarmay, Swiderski) have shown the damage caused in current politics by oversimplifying this contrast. The naive belief of many members of the perestrojka intelligentsia that a rejection of communism was tantamount to inclusion within the western democracies has become painfully evident in political and social developments during the early 90s.

After the euphoria and the exhilaration of the bloodless revolution, the 1990s has seen the onset of confusion, depression and doubt. In his interesting article, "After the patronage state. A model in search of class interests", Zygmunt Bauman examines this phenomenon as an instance of the liminal stage of two-step revolutions. Two-step revolutions, otherwise called systemic or parricidal, are those revolutions which are "marked by *the separation between the interests that brought the fall of the old regime and the interests which the new one serves or promotes*. They are, so to speak, two-step revolutions, with a void separating the two stages. In the first stage, the old regime is toppled; in the second, a new regime emerges, by fits and starts, from the ruins. In between there is little but ruins and disoriented inhabitants. The latter are now formless, a raw mass yet to be worked upon and given shape. It is not for them to decide what form this shape will take." (Bauman 1994, p. 15)

Bauman concentrates specifically on Poland: during the dismantling phase of the 'revolution', Michnik was positioned against Jaruzelski. But once this stage was accomplished, it emerged that Michnik and Jaruzelski were tied together, locked as "integral (though mutually opposite) partners of the same historical discourse..." After this stage they "all entered the wasteland of liminality *homeless*. In that wasteland, the vision that brought about the downfall of communism found no solid ground in

which to put down roots." (Bauman 1994, pp. 18-19)

The papers included in this volume show that the tendency to simplistic binary thinking — East and West as symbiotic opposites — is causing intellectual misunderstanding as well as practical political problems.

I believe that this misunderstanding has its roots, at least as far as Russia is concerned, in a cultural difference having to do with how Russia and the West respectively conceive of the relationship between society and the individual.

Crudely speaking we can say that in the West, humanism has given precedence to the individual emphasising his or her freedom and rights, while in Russia the dominance of the Orthodox tradition through the time of the Western Renaissance consolidated instead the idea of the community as the basic human entity.

The collective ethos of traditional Russian society is generally acknowledged. It was fostered in the Orthodox Church and maintained by an authoritarian power structure; it filtered the ideas of romanticism as they were received into Russia by Belinskij and the westernisers and was confirmed both by the Slavophiles and later the socialist revolutionaries; finally it gained monopoly in the Soviet state and was encapsulated in the very concept of "communism".

Since 1917 this basic opposition has been reduced and crudified in the political opposition between East and West: between socialism and liberalism; planned and market economy; totalitarian and democratic forms of government. This transition from a difference in the underlying cultural ethos to outright political estrangement has obscured rather than clarified what is at hand. Furthermore, the "stigma" of collectivity (from the western point of view) has spread to encompass the whole of the former Eastern block. The differences have been made primitive and, as regards cultural dialogue, destructive. Today the West dismisses too easily collectivity in the East, and the East embraces too naively the individualism of the West. The assumption that the East, disillusioned with the totalitarian collectivity of the Soviet Union and its former satellite states, can change camps overnight to espouse western individualism is fatal — both impossible and undesirable.

At one level it is important and meaningful to discuss the differences between East and West. But on another level, we must examine the similarities entailed for example in modern industrial society.

Under the Soviet regime, the general tendency of Russian culture to espouse a collective ethos became a matter of official doctrine. It was ana-

thema to express a personal interpretation, for example, of history. But to make history, or the relationship between the past, the present and the future of living people, a matter of taboo is to deny the ethical dimension of personal life altogether. A society with a powerful collective ethos ends up by denying its citizens ethical responsibility. Ethics is reduced to obedience - respectively disobedience - to the official, collective ethos.

But, in dismissing Russian collectivity when taken to the extreme of totalitarian socialism, we should not overlook the pitfalls of western individualism either. Liberalism in the West led during the nineteenth century to economic liberalism, and during the twentieth century a new dimension of technological liberalism was added. Under economic and technological liberalism the individual is likewise under a form of coercion, not to obey rules and propagate the right ideas, but to run with the system. In other words, modernity as such, while obviously developing out of traditional western thinking, not least out of liberalism, has in a sense defeated its own liberalising purpose by imposing a new set of constraints and imperatives.

On a higher level of generalisation, modernity in both East and West may be seen to have essential features in common: both underline the importance of rationality and the organisation of public and economic life on a large scale. This in turn assures the basic dependency of the individual for his livelihood on an organisation which is beyond his control and responsibility. Self-sufficiency in the developed, industrialised world is well-nigh an impossibility.

One of the first actively to dismiss both liberalism and socialism was, of course, Dostoevskij. Dostoevskij rejects not only socialism, but all Utopian, rational solutions which would render the free will and unique value of the individual redundant (the formula $2 \times 2 = 4$ in *Notes from the Underground*; the poem about the Grand Inquisitor in *The Brothers Karamazov*, to name but the most obvious examples).

On the other hand, he rejects the degradation of bourgeois individualism which he experiences first hand on his journey to Western Europe in 1862-3. In *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*, Dostoevskij exposes the loneliness of the individual in modern, western society. This isolation he attributes to the worship of Baal, that is to the drive for material gain - each man for himself. Dostoevskij 's criticism of the frenzy of modern, industrial civilisation is surprisingly apt even today.

It will not be enough, in the future, merely to juxtapose East and West as two different cultures. Two areas of research emerge as important if a

cultural and political dialogue between East and West is to be fruitful. On the one hand we should try to understand the divergence of a common cultural heritage and its significance; we need to examine the way in which the intelligentsia in Eastern and Central Europe communicated and grafted into their respective cultures those ideas which originated in the West and which have subsequently become fundamental for the development of current modern society.

Romanticism, for example, introduced ideas which were important both in the West and the East; these ideas form so to speak part of a common cultural heritage. But their import was different in each culture; they interacted distinctively with other cultural factors in, say, Germany, England, Poland and Russia.

On the other hand, we need to examine how the propagators or bearers of these ideas, the intelligentsia and the intellectuals respectively, have conceived their own role: did they see themselves as free thinkers standing outside the mainstream of social development, or did they see themselves as the conscience, the guardian of their respective nations, a group of people who together took upon themselves a role which was both moral, social and political?

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In convening our conference on the theme of "The New Role of the Intelligentsia in Central and Eastern Europe" we wished to capture a moment of transition. We condoned the vague use of the concept of the intelligentsia, for by inviting discussion on their *new* role we conceded that there had been an *old* role, the definition of which we tacitly took for granted. We concurred in the notion of the intelligentsia as a significant cultural category.

Inviting speakers we deliberately sought a meeting between traditional academic scholars, university teachers specialising in cultural and sociological history and real live participants in the perestrojka process. We wanted the exciting meeting between scholarship and values, between perspective and involvement.

Without doubt the discussions which arose around the presentations were value-laden, the spectrum captured conveniently in the contrast between the opening talk, Lars Kleberg's: "The Intelligentsia is Dead! Long Live the Intelligentsia!"¹ and the closing talk, Zuzana Szatmáry's: "Slovakian Experiences. Intellectuals: Leave the Political Stage!?"

¹ Lars Kleberg's paper is not included in this volume.

Zuzana Szatmáry's paper painfully exposes the failure of the intellectuals in politics. Clearly identifying herself with the intellectuals through her use of a somewhat vague *we*, Zuzana Szatmáry is exasperated by the intellectuals' failure to communicate with the people at large; to rise above the limits of bi-polar thinking; to make the transition from the simplicity of words to the complexities of politics; to comprehend the latent dangers of a society which has lost its identity and which is threatened by cultural relativism and nationalism.

Cultural and sociological histories frequently make the point that intellectuals, or the intelligentsia, have been isolated on the one hand from the rulers, and on the other hand from the people. If Szatmáry confirms isolation from the people, then her Czech colleague, Jan Sokol, tackles the other flank of this pig-in-the-middle position, showing how incompatible is the ethos of the intellectual with the ethos of the politician. For the honesty of a questioning and reflecting intellectual is belied by the demand for the politician to act unequivocally. Indeed, referring to the philosophers of the French Enlightenment, Sokol reminds us not only of the difficulty but also of the undesirability of confusing the roles of philosopher and politician. For when those who 'know better' take upon themselves the business of ruling the rest, then utopia becomes dictatorship.

Jerzy Jedlicky speaks too from an "involved" position. His is an impassioned argument for the need for the intelligentsia in Poland to remain in politics. Thus he agrees neither with Zuzana Szatmáry that the intellectuals have failed to represent the people in politics, nor with Jan Sokol that the role of the intellectual in politics is a question of "mission impossible". While not idealising the role in politics for the intelligentsia, Professor Jedlicki is clearly concerned for those values which are traditionally borne by the intelligentsia, namely the values of the humanist tradition, such as democracy and respect for human rights.

In the aftermath of the late 1980s regime change in Poland there is a clear risk that a vacuum of humanist values in the center of the political scene could lead either to the development of the worst sort of nationalism, or to crude commercialism. For the intelligentsia both developments would be fatal.

As a scholar from Poland, living and working in Copenhagen, Bronisław Swiderski is in the privileged position of being able to discuss the role of Solidarity both from within and from without. His contribution is provocative and centers on the vital question of East and West. In the popular imagination, a rejection of the communist state amounted, during the 1980s, to a rejection of the East and an automatic embracing

of the West. Swiderski's thesis is that Solidarity's tendency to condone all that was thought to comprise the West reveals its basically communist or Soviet way of thinking, the desired West becoming merely a mirror-image of the despised East. A renewal of Poland's ideological position between East and West demands greater discrimination between the different and incompatible ways of thinking that actually comprise the West. Swiderski implicitly rejects the all too reductionary tendencies of simple binary oppositions which he sees as being typical not only for Russian but also for Polish culture.

Irina Sandomirskaja includes herself in the *we* of the intelligentsia. She refrains from idealising the role of the intelligentsia and points instead to the intertwining of the intelligentsia's values — expressed and regenerated in rhetoric — with the values of the Soviet state. In her brilliant analysis of the grandmother's role, Irina Sandomirskaja examines one of those 'membranes' where collective values are transfused into the child and come to make up his or her intimate, personal and emotional world. Rejecting the ideological content of the ethos of socialist realism, the individual member of the intelligentsia can yet be emotionally or aesthetically hooked to the same.

Her approach undermines the convenient distinction, in post-revolutionary Russia, of a left-wing, so-called radical intelligentsia which channelled into socialist politics becoming corrupt in the corridors of Soviet hierarchy, and a so-called creative intelligentsia which dissented in political opinion and acted as the stewards of humanist and democratic values.

Not surprisingly, the consensus implied in the title of our symposium was not borne out by the discussions which exposed time and again differences in attitude towards the intelligentsia, differences which were sometimes personal and sometimes part of more cohesive cultural traditions. In order to keep our dialogue open and constructive, we had to refrain from indulging too long in meta-discussion as to whom and what we were talking about. We had to agree to settle once again for an incomplete definition of our subject matter.

While those speakers referring to the situation in Russia and Poland referred to the *intelligentsia*, the speakers from the Czech and Slovak Republics referred instead to the *intellectuals*, thus in some sense placing themselves in a western tradition. The plural *intellectuals* suggests a number of (disparate) individuals while the collective singular *intelligentsia* gathers its members into a cohesive group seeming to share a cultural and social identity.

All participants agreed that the intelligentsia has fostered its own myths or Myth, generated in its texts or Text. Several speakers pointed out that the intelligentsia has exercised cultural monopoly through recourse to the persuasive power of language. It is the intelligentsia who read, think, write then to read, think and write again. This, until the recent political events, was indeed where the power of the intelligentsia resided.

Another question which arose in the general discussion was whether the intelligentsia, as custodians of words and ideas, should be considered enlighteners or manipulators. This opposition, in turn, is connected to the question as to whether the intelligentsia comprises an interest-group in society, that group which consists of professional thinkers and experts, or whether they are to be granted a moral, altruistic role, devotion to 'the common good'. For many this non-professional role is a distinguishing feature of the intelligentsia.

But even were we to concede to this group its altruistic role, still the question of intellectual democracy remains: Does the intelligentsia have the right to know better, to take upon itself the role of enlightened despot, of Grand Inquisitor? Zygmunt Bauman answers this question in the affirmative: "Under 'Eastern' conditions, in the midst of post-communist liminality, the time for thinkers and artists to enjoy a post-modern freedom from social duty (...) has not yet arrived. However reluctantly, the intellectuals must again take up the traditional role of 'Eastern' intelligentsia: that of the spiritual leaders, guides, teachers, prompters and animators of a 'people' deemed to be attached to obsolete values and resentful of 'progress'. As things currently stand, they must even, *à la* Havel or Gieremek, take up for a time the role of active politicians. Once more (like in the old bad times when belching factory chimneys were the intellectuals' good tidings and the object of poetic elation) they must tell 'the people' what is good for them and how to get there; and if talking brings no results, legislate them into the new and better world which they are reluctant to enter on their own." (Bauman 1994, pp. 22-23)

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