

Farewell to the Left*

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*Un ignorant que les destins
Font un juge des plus notables
Croit que les loix des douze Tables
Sont faites pour les grands festins*

Furetière, *Le Roman bourgeois*

Eastern Europe can boast of only one political patent of international and historic grandeur: bolshevism. We know that even the Russians regard it as something imported—but we are willing to regard everything we do not like as an import. However, what we like the least belongs to us the most. We do not have intense feelings about the hell of fascism, and yet it happens to be our intellectual property more than many other things. We consider it alien, but we are just passing the buck here as usual, though in an intellectual and not moral sense. It is true that the Communist party dictatorship was brought to the small East European countries by the victorious troops of Stalin, but we should admit that we were ready for it.

László Németh¹ said in *Szárszó*,² in 1943, that they were building “a

* This essay was originally published in the *Beszélő* samizdat journal in 1988, republished by the Socialist *Kritika* in February 1990 and attacked there since by the best people of the Hungarian Left, like István Eörsi, Mária Ludassy, László Lengyel, György Litván, and others, drawing orchestrated scorn in popular weeklies, radio, and TV programs, shaming its author into accepting a *succès de scandale*. It is a nice proof of the author's thesis on the Left continuum that he was the subject of heavy artillery fire from Trotskyists, reform or Euro-Communists, direct-democracy socialists, and Left liberals alike, including one prominent member of his own party.

1. László Németh was a “populist” writer, follower of Spengler and Roepke, inventor of the special Hungarian brand of totalitarian democracy, ferocious *Kulturkritiker*, Enlightenment-basher, and genius; persecuted in the 1950s by the Communists, could not bear them, and joined them after 1956, while loathing them.
2. *Szárszó* was the place of a famous encounter in 1943 where Third Way socialists of the Left and of the Right discussed Hungary's future, both indulging in the cavalier ignoring of such pedestrian facts as the Second World War and the extermination of Hungarian Jews.

socialism which would adjust private enterprise to the collective system." Hungary, slowly recovering in 1945, could be described using the formula of Németh. The majority of Communist intellectuals also hoped that a more Western socialist structure would grow here on the ruins—as opposed to the Eastern charms and horrors of the Soviet Union.

Every single party calling itself "bourgeois" criticized capitalism (that never existed in Hungary), and received a kind of inspiration from the temporarily anti-liberal Western war-economy and the planning-dream of Keynes. When Cardinal Mindszenty, the Primate-Archbishop, this brave and naïvely reactionary prelate, freed by revolutionary soldiers, showed up in Budapest in 1956, his first cry was for a classless society. The right wing of the 1945–1948 government coalition was also filled with socialist illusions. Although this right wing was right only because the Communists said so.

The new democratic groups which entered upon the stage in 1988–1989, were all subconsciously leftist. All were burdened with socialist leftovers, in spite of the attacks launched against those ideas by the same groups. During the leftist anti-Communist period of the dissidence we would have been happy with this ambiguity because it would have proven that the socialist ways of thinking were able to survive four decades while the Bolsheviks spoiled and distorted them. This might represent the dreadful power of *the* theory.

As it is known, Communists like to call everybody and everything that has a national flavor a "rightist," but this is a lie. There are only leftist national groups and movements in Hungary now, and this is true about the Hungarian Democratic Forum and the Smallholders' party. The intellectual monopoly of the Left would only preserve the East European underdevelopment, while social democracy and Marxism are failing shamefully in the West. Well, we have always been late.

Actually, why did the Hungarian intellectuals, who had turned against bolshevism and prepared the recent changes become leftists? The reasons are historic. First of all, every period has its own *representative past*. Intellectuals recovering from the counter-revolution and repression of the Kádár regime, found a sort of diving board in their recollections of the late thirties. But Hungarian liberalism was completely losing its attraction, starting in the mid-thirties. This is true of both liberal tendencies: the radical and the classic liberal—Cobdenist and

Rassayist³—wings. The neo-baroque, conservative, solid right—that of Bethlen and Szekfű⁴—also had to retreat behind the barricades.

Only the representatives of the “populist” and the slightly Marxist “urban” Left did not leave the battlefield. These two groups were fighting each other, but from a historical point of view, they look like close relatives. The poet Gyula Illyés, central totemic figure of the populists, has a Communist past—just like the poet Attila József, flag-bearer of the “urban” camp. Those who were rightists had to be either stupid or Nazi or both.

At that time, the Third Way was only a narrow path of plebeian democratic socialism between bolshevism and fascism. Those who were limping along that path felt really dizzy between the two deep pits: National Socialism to the right, “Sovietish” international socialism to the left. The only group which could advance straight ahead was that of the heretical social democrat Kassák⁵, the only consequential leftist.

In the imagination of modern Hungarian intellectuals the word “Right” is a synonym for mob rule, and rightists are considered rude and illiterate, imprisoned by the memory of the historic Great Hungary. In spring 1945, it was already forgotten that the Hungarian monarchist Dual Cross Association had fought with weapons against the Nazi troops which occupied the country. (There was a *narodnik* resistance, too; that of the Zionists.) The year 1945 didn’t find any liberal groups here. Only different versions of democratic socialism were fighting without enthusiasm against the Bolshevik temptation. There was not only a Bolshevik violence here, but a Bolshevik tempta-

3. *Cobden* was the main free-trade organ in Hungary published by the Cobden Society (as in Cobden and Bright); Károly Rassay was the only remaining classical liberal MP in the Horthy era from 1920 to 1944.
4. Count István Bethlen, as a long-serving prime minister of Regent von Horthy, “normalized” the flamboyant White Guard (but quite blackguardish) terror of his patron and of Count Teleki in the early 1920s; was creator of the “conservative” Christian-National course in Hungary, shrewd Anglophile, great tactician; taken captive by the Russians in 1945 he is rumored to have been a foreign policy adviser to Stalin until his death in Moscow a few years later (almost certainly untrue). He was the mastermind of the conservative Hungarian resistance to Hitler. Professor Gyula Szekfű, probably the greatest Hungarian historian of this century, pro-Habsburg conservative, critic of fraudulent mid-European liberalism (and of pretty much everything else), Count Bethlen’s ideologue, anti-Nazi resistant, the Communist regime’s first ambassador to Moscow (hence the Bethlen rumors), ended his life as an apologist for Lenin, Stalin and—what is far more surprising—Lajos Kossuth.
5. Kassák was the grand old man of the Hungarian avant-garde, poet, novelist, author of manifestoes and essays and of a monumental and wonderful autobiography, anti-Bolshevik left-wing socialist, implacable enemy of the populists and other nationalists.

tion, too. Not only *Magyar Szemle*⁶ did not recover, but *Nyugat*⁷ did not either. It was not the Communists who invented “People’s Democracy” first. Young people are asking now why it was that almost everybody embraced communism. The answer is simple—it happened because of leftist solidarity. Unfortunately the Hungarian Left was not biased against the Communists—neither its “populist” nor its “urban” wing. In addition, the blockheaded loyalty of the Church to Admiral Horthy, was pushed aside by the revived Christian socialism. These all were consequences of the repudiation of the liberal tendencies in the last century, and this opened the gate for the totalitarian extremes.

The Communist concept of a “popular front” which, according to Georg Lukács would have been a team of anti-totalitarian and rational forces, resulted in irrational excesses. As a matter of fact, in the late forties, “the forces of Hungarian people’s democracy” reached an agreement—an agreement on common anti-liberal prejudices. The leading intellectuals were unable to counterbalance the totalitarian-socialist dream and this includes Bibó⁸, too.

Liberalism and European conservatism disappeared from the horizon of the politicized Hungarian intelligentsia. This change is usually explained as a result of the shock caused by Nazi occupation and terror. This argument may contain some psychological truth, but it leaves us in uncertainty: why should we consider the Hungarian intellectuals so stupid that they refused something because they simply mixed it up with its opposite? But it was more the other way around. There are two possible presumptions: first, maybe the Hungarian intellectuals never really recognized the importance of the wartime shock, or, second, maybe they followed the old method of “fire against fire,” that is, let us heal one kind of totalitarianism with another kind. Perhaps both presumptions are valid.

But why was the Hungarian intellectual elite, immersed in political

6. It was Count Bethlen’s and Professor Szekfű’s official conservative monthly, modeled on the *Budapesti Szemle* modeled on the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Bound to be re-launched soon.
7. It was a modernist Baudelairean review of the new fin-de-siècle Hungarian litterateurs; cosmopolitan, cheeky, and eclectic at the beginning, majestically Establishment liberal until the bitter end in 1944, unlikely to be re-launched.
8. István Bibó was an anti-liberal democratic theorist, Szekfű’s enemy, ideologue of the 1945–1948 constitutional episode in Hungary, hero of the 1956 uprising, inspired both the Democratic Opposition (i. e., dissidence) and the populist agrarian socialists in the 1970s and 1980s.

life, so vulnerable to the totalitarian ideas? Perhaps the following reasons might supply an answer.

1. Under the regime of Count István Tisza⁹ the Hungarian liberal establishment had definitely fallen apart. The rebellious national minorities and the dreadful vision of the collapsing empire of Saint Stephen, that is, Greater Hungary, pushed the gentry elite toward authoritarian solutions. Using strong state intervention, this elite played the role of the midwife when Hungarian capitalism was noisily born; and the intervention became stronger under the rigid circumstances of a centralized war economy.

It was not the elite involved in politics that tried to defend the liberal values; the radical and sophisticated intellectuals intended to do it, breaking away from the Jewish middle class while forming an alliance with the orthodox Marxist social democrats. Already before the First World War this alliance obliterated the borderline between a modern democracy and the socialist endeavors.

2. The Horthy restoration was not a conservative reconstruction. The Horthy regime was covered with the spots of racist extremism. Later, this regime made a compromise with the radical right wing of authoritarian conservative forces inherited from the Monarchy. But the catastrophe of Trianon, the crushed Bolshevik utopia, and the Romanian occupation was more Weimarian than Weimar. As a result the liberal radical endeavors, which had been marginal anyway, froze as a chrysalis. Even the groups which seemed to be firmly conservative were open to the extreme right revolutionary radicalism, and within this, mainly to the apocalyptic ideas adopted from Germany. The non-Marxist left started turning toward the remnants of liberalism only after National Socialism became a direct threat.¹⁰

The alliance of Rassay and of Count Bethlen—liberals and conservatives—came into existence too late. The suspicion of pro-Habsburg royalism condemned this alliance to isolation. In the late thirties, a

9. Count István Tisza was the last prime minister of Hapsburg Hungary, national conservative, Szekfü's hero, murdered by marauding revolutionary sailors in the troubled October of 1918, the poet Endre Ady's "tragic" counterpart on the Right.

10. The volumes of *Szép Szó*, *Századunk*, *Korunk Szava*, *Ország Útja*, and even *Cobden* (respectively left liberal, liberal Catholic, Christian Socialist, and Manchester-free-marketeer periodicals) were filled with socialistic illusions. Liberal writers often contributed to social-democratic *Népszava*, and even to *Korunk*, the wise organ of Hungarian Communists in Cluj (Kolozsvár) Transylvania.

strong radical and socialist extreme Right faced a weak radical and socialist extreme Left (the latter was successful only among the Hungarian national minorities outside the country).

The romantic-organic-revolutionary-totalitarian socialism of *Die Tat* was made popular by László Németh. Two factions of socialists—those who wanted small-farm ownership and those who wanted state ownership of land, but both desired the demise of the grand aristocratic, ecclesiastical, and monastic estates—could hardly agree, except on the eve of the 1944 debacle when an “anti-fascist” coalition was put together in a hurry but which lasted only for weeks. The poles of a manifold “social demagoguery” were separated only by the question of being a friend or an enemy of the Germans¹¹. The populist-nationalist “psalms” of József Révai¹² found an understanding audience here.

The “pur et dur” Stalinist István Nagy published at Püski, the anti-Semitic “populist” publisher, and also was giving speeches at Szárszó, the 1943 conference of both the socialistic extreme right and left. The most outstanding “populist” expert of agriculture, Ferenc Erdei, the best friend of Bibó, later the foremost Stalinist expert on the collectivization of agriculture, and a traitor to Imre Nagy’s revolutionary government in 1956, during the Second World War turned to Leninism. Pál Justus, a Trotskyist, later a defendant in a Stalinist show trial, became the theorist of the Social Democratic party. Only the anti-liberal, Jacobin, romantic “polis” version of democracy was spread: its aim was to lift the lower social strata with the help of a paternal state that was regarded as a neutral institution. The rightist and leftist, “populist” and “urban” socialism did not mean by “democracy” a system of rights or the rule of law; it was described as a package of substantive steps and measures: a change of guard, that is, a change of elites, without liberal guarantees.

3. These tendencies were opposed more or less by the curious democratic socialism of István Bibó and the liberal socialism of Oszkár Jászi.¹³ Neither Bibó nor Jászi had a strong impact on the way of

11. About these tendencies and the “people’s front” see my “The Fifty-Year-Long War,” *Világ*, September 7, 1989.
12. József Révai was a bolshevik theorist, cultural supremo, lapsed poet and philosopher, inventor of the Communist-populist compact in the 1930s and of the anti-Hapsburg “independence” ideology as the “national” legitimacy technique of Communist rule in Hungary; ancestor (albeit not acknowledged) of nationalistic “reform” Communists like Pozsgay.
13. Oszkár Jászi was a Spencerian-Millian “radical” liberal, inspired the whole non-Communist Left in Hungary this century; historian, politician, and social theorist in exile since 1919 until his death in the late 1960s as a professor of a small American college.

thinking of their own generations. Still, we have to deal briefly with the ideas of Bibó since they (and his genius, honesty, and charm) considerably influenced the ideas of the dissidence in the seventies, and of the temporary urban-populist-“fifty-sixer” coalition that could last until the organizing of the Hungarian Democratic Forum. Bibó tried to develop a thoroughly *democratic*, emphatically non-liberal theory of state and history, related to a topical analysis of contemporary East European and Hungarian political dilemmas.

Why could not Bibó’s ideas be a remedy against totalitarian-socialist temptations? The main reason was Bibó’s attitude toward nineteenth-century Hungary. In his late essay, “The Eastern Europe Concept of László Németh and His Debate with Gyula Szekfű¹⁴,” he joins Németh and Szekfű in their repudiation of nineteenth-century liberalism. It is obvious that Hungarian liberalism made an uncritical admiration impossible. The gentry were in the center of its tragic history. The petty nobility had shaped the main body of liberalism and made capitalist economy possible; then capitalism destroyed them financially and drove them to become civil servants and lawyers and to embrace the authoritarian-chauvinist ideology of the state-dependent. They were ready to accept the authoritarian ideologies also because of the initial difficulties of capitalization and the threatened position of the Hungarian state elite in multinational Austria-Hungary.

As to this crucial question, Bibó unfortunately was not on the liberals’ side. His romantic-radical point of view made mandatory the acceptance of anti-liberal historical thought as a dogma also in opposition circles. (In his works published after his death, Bibó stated several times that he had not been a liberal¹⁵ but a democrat.)

One of the well-known characteristics of the liberal tradition is that it is impossible to invent it in an encyclopedist-Jacobin way, with an “ex nihilo” decree, out of the blue. (We use the word “liberal” in its classic and not in its Anglo-Saxon sense of today. The latter nowadays is a synonym for an egalitarian socialist. For us, liberal means “Whig.”) Bibó’s endeavor to create a new liberal-socialist democratism independent of the Hungarian tradition, had to fail because of typological and

14. In István Bibó, *Összegyűjtött Munkái*, István Kemény and Mátyás Sárközi, eds., vol. 2, (Bern, 1981–84).

15. See among others “1963–1967,” in Tibor Huszár, *Bibó István: Beszélgetések, politikai-életrajzi dokumentumok* (Budapest, 1989).

historic reasons. His approach was *historicist* and not *conservative*. It could create a political theory but not a political tradition, and even less a political practice.

It is impossible to build democracy on a modern anti-liberal view of history and so it was not built. The solitude of Bibó is understandable. His oeuvre is a centaur: the liberal faun-head sits awkwardly on the democratic socialist horse's body. Bibó's late and unfinished essay, "The Meaning of European Social Evolution,"¹⁶ can be regarded as his intellectual testament. There he accepts a purely socialist point of view which shows his consistency as a thinker, but at the same time, proves his failure. For Bibó the image of the "Hungarian liberal" was connected to that of the "false realist."¹⁷ In compromises (such as the *Ausgleich* between Austria and Hungary) Bibó saw chiefly a lie. These historic prejudices are common presumptions of the East Central European Left.

The modern conservatism which is challenging socialism regards the liberal past as its *own tradition*¹⁸. For us Hungarians the crucial question about tradition is what do we think about the institutions, behavior, political culture, and social models created in the reform age, in 1848 and 1867. The Hungarian Left had a myth about the nineteenth century: for them, it had been a fight for preserving social privileges, and of a non-authentic nation.

The myth of the new Right we are proposing about the nineteenth century has to be different, and we can find its roots in our intellectual and political admiration for the "Hungarian Victorians." Those men were called "*doctrinaire*" and "*centralist*," as in *canis a non canendo*. But when we look at them today, we find they were Whiggish (however, the Disraeli-like authoritarian-romantic Tories were not our ancestors). In our opinion, the liberal constitutionalism of Ferenc Deák¹⁹ was the Hungarians' great victory, taking the nation (with all its feudal relics)

16. "Az európai társadalomfejlődés értelme," in Bibó, *Összegyűjtött Munkái*, vol. 2, pp. 560–635.

17. Cf. "A kelet-európai kisállamok nyomorúsága," in Bibó, *Összegyűjtött Munkái*, vol. 1, pp. 202–51.

18. Continental conservatism is not traditional to this extent. See Klaus Epstein, *The Genesis of German Conservatism* (Princeton, 1966), K. von Klemperer, *Germany's New Conservatism* (Princeton, 1957), and Fritz Stern, *The Failure of Illiberalism* (Chicago and London, 1961).

19. Ferenc Deák was the greatest Hungarian liberal statesman, engineered the "compromise" (*Ausgleich*) with Emperor Franz Joseph I, the prototype of the cunning backroom operator-cum-patriot, he never took office, was a bachelor, and spent most of his late life in the Queen of England inn in Pest, overweight and melancholy.

into Europe; Hungary became the more dynamic and liberal half of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Our opinion is perfectly phrased by Count Antal Zichy:²⁰

In our country, in these days, the party of Deák would deserve to be called *conservative*, since we do not want anything else but to conserve the law. However, these men and their honorable leader have always fought under the flag of *progress, liberal ideas, and opposition*; how could they accept the stamp of conservatism? They have always attacked the conservatives. But why not if progress, liberal ideas, and opposition stand on the ground of legality which we shall conserve. First, we shall fight for this legality and put it into power since we do not possess power yet. . . . The ancient constitution of Hungary in its new shape, adjusted to the demands of our age, needs to be defended—conserved.²¹

These lines are timely, and this is worrying. But we should realize that this image is just a *myth* construed by the conservatives. We should not measure this myth with the yardstick of history. Its value is not less than that of the legend of the Left.

It is obvious that the Bibó period of the Hungarian opposition is over. This period was started by an essay of György Bence and János Kis²² that may be regarded as a minor classic, published in the Bibó Festschrift. The theory of “self-limiting revolution,” inspired by Bibó and Adam Michnik, is by now an ingredient of the Hungarian political ideology, and is obviously the best historical hypothesis about 1956. Although as a political doctrine it is definitely *passé* and even its authors have gone beyond it, it was an inspiration and this needs to be

20. Count Antal Zichy was a Habsburg loyalist Hungarian conservative in the nineteenth century, the first to recognize that conservatives defended liberalism, not the archaic order; became a Deák (instead of a Duke Metternich) supporter.
21. *Magyar szabadelvű-conservatív politika*, (Hungarian Liberal-Conservative Politics) (Pest, 1862), Ch. 8.
22. György Bence is a philosopher and political scientist, critical Marxist, one of the founders of the Hungarian dissidence. Together with János Kis, another philosopher, they published under the pseudonym Marc Rakovski the important book *Towards an East European Marxism* in France and England in 1978, and an important essay, “To Be A Marxist,” in a Hungarian *samizdat* just one year later. Their ways diverged. Dr. Bence abandoned dissidence as a hopeless experiment and went to teach in New York, while Dr. Kis has become the leading light of the selfsame dissidence and editor of *Beszéltő*, the main underground journal. Today Dr. Kis is the chairman of the Hungarian liberal party, the Alliance of Free Democrats (of which the present author is also a leading member and MP), and Dr. Bence after having been a member of the small Social Democratic party, is now a professor of philosophy at the University of Budapest and an advisor to FIDESZ, the Young Democrats' Federation.

explained. Why on earth were we leftists? Before anybody would falsify history let us confess that the Marxists turned against the Communist system first. It happened in 1956 and in the seventies, too; although in different ways. But for whatever reasons?

1. Two occupations, in 1944 and in 1945, were prepared by a *self-occupation*. As a consequence, liberalism, which had been rotting for fifty years, was totally eliminated. The lie was not 1867 but 1945–1948.²³ That limited democracy covered a dictatorship as an ornate front, but no one seemed to recognize this. The heretical opposition within the Communist party was born only when the Marxist intellectuals realized that the “popular front” program of the “people’s democracy” was not strategy but tactics. *L’arroseeur arrosé*—the “misled misleader”—maneuver was generally accepted by the Left, and the populist-democratic Bibó was all for it. The “salami tactics” of Rákosi, did not meet any serious resistance after the war because—in the threatening Tamerlanian presence of the Red Army—there was no trace of a moral resistance against it on the Left.

Marxism, like Nietzscheism and Freudism is the ideology of suspicion, *l’ère du soupçon*. Marxists of the year 1945 made their critical suspicion depend on the fulfilment of the chiliastic desires, as their mentor, Georg Lukács, described it with a Karamazovian severity in his “Bolshevism as a Moral Problem” of 1918. They were disappointed. They had to be disappointed indeed, since the Marxist suspicion was supplemented in vain by the neo-Kantian “cultural values” and so-called moral horizon of Max Adler and Ervin Szabó²⁴; by the prophetic quasi religion and apocalyptic meta-ethics of Lukács and Bloch. The

23. Bibó once said that they should engrave on his gravestone “lived between 1945 and 1948,” since he was the main *Vordenker* of the so-called coalition period when the country was governed by a mixed bunch of democrats led formally by the Smallholders’ party discretely controlled by the Communists and the Soviet secret services. Bibó supplied a brave and intelligent criticism of the fake democracy while still nurturing some hopes but ignoring the brutal reality. As many others he was misled by the “popular front” rhetoric of the Communists who everywhere seemed to abandon orthodox Marxism, embraced a sort of plebeian nationalism, and repudiated the memory of the messianic and bloody revolutionary experiments of 1918–1919. Only after the Tito affair in 1948 did it become clear what Stalin really meant.
24. Ervin Szabó was the greatest socialist theorist and historian in Hungary; quarrelled with the Social Democrats, got involved with anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists, attacked from the left—as Szekfű did from the right—“independentist” anti-Habsburg nationalism, supported “revolutionary anti-militarism” during the Second World War, died as a neo-Kantian, posthumously awarded a fellowship of the Red Academy in Moscow ignorant of his final repudiation of Marxism.

suspicion (that is, reductionist social determinism) doesn't match the moral severity. The inner tension of Marxism is due to the fact that its "hard" theory of history and economy contradicts the thousand-year-old fury of social justice it contains and exploits. Neither Budapest in 1956 nor Prague in 1968 could have happened as they did without a Communist contrition, penance, and conversion.²⁵

It is the paradox of revolutionary socialism that while it instigated awful crimes or made them possible, unlike Nazism it remained a part of the European Grand Tradition, albeit in a perversely distorted form. Its principles may be erroneous or fraudulent and still be rationally confronted with deeds. We are getting bored with the heartbreaking stories about the moral and political schizophrenia of Communists tortured by Communists, since the suffering of non-Communist millions weighs more with us. And still, it is no wonder that this moral schizophrenia, described by Koestler and in the early works of Solzhenitsyn, became the pattern of the anti-totalitarian uprising. Nazism, at its best, was the ideology of group egotism. Whereas revolutionary socialism (even its authoritarian version, Marxism) promised a redemption; a successful fight against alienation; a profound and general freedom. "Even stones will be saved" were the unforgettable words said by a gentlewoman in 1919.

2. Here we arrive at the enigma of 1956. We new Hungarian conservatives cannot monopolize this event, since it was a *socialist* revolution, maybe the only one in its class during the history of mankind. It was socialist, and not only because it was started by contrite Communists; its martyrs were leftists; and its most inspiring institutions were the workers' councils which would have satisfied the hopes and expectations of Marx during the Paris Commune as it endeavored to create a "dual power" (pluralistic parliament and plebeian local revolutionary committees). The socialist consensus included everybody. The revolution turned backwards the wheel of history: it started all over again the revolution that had failed in 1919.²⁶ The past of the anti-Communist resistance—unfortunately—is a socialist past.

The poet Ady and the scholar Jászi believed that Count István Tisza

25. I elaborated the subject in my essay "The Political Irresponsibility of Intellectuals," in *The Political Responsibility of Intellectuals*, Alan Montefiore, Ian Maclean, Peter Winch, eds., (Cambridge, U.K., 1991).

26. See György Litván's excellent paper about this subject in *Jelenkor*, (Pécs, 1989).

was the enemy.²⁷ They did not know that together they were destroying Hungarian liberalism. It is no wonder that Count Mihály Károlyi,²⁸ with an education built on the anti-liberal radicalism of Chesterton, Belloc, Barrès and Maurras, became the leader of the Left. East of the Rhine, since the end of the First World War, there had been hardly any crack in the general consensus of anti-liberalism. Against the totalitarian disaster there were only authoritarian ideas. The “panacea of democracy” was not worth much either, since there was—is, will be—a totalitarian democracy. From the aspect of Hungarian history, 1956 was more an ending than a beginning, that is, the last attempt to create true socialism.²⁹

3. The year 1956 was a *revolutio*, a turning back to the pure doctrine, the largest moral success of the Left in this century. But why did our generation become leftists under the regime of Kádár, Ceaușescu, Husák, Tito, and their successors? Why were the Hungarian dissidents, the Charter 77, and the KOR initiated by former Marxist socialists, “right-wing revisionists” and radical left-wing “deviationists”?

The explanation, in my opinion, is the following. The only alternative to Marxism in this century seemed to be the extreme right—totalitarianism. Beyond this, in the mid-seventies, Western liberalism was replaced with a statist-welfare Keynesianism, that is, with a mild “European,” civilised version of democratic socialism. The romantic new left of 1968 and the neoconservatives revolted against this version.

27. Ady was the greatest poet of Central European “adversary culture” with Trakl and Stefan George; Jacobin revolutionary, scandalous voluptuary and Byronian lover, Enlightenment positivist, near-socialist radical, cosmopolitan nationalist, Calvinist and atheist, xenophobic Westernizer, author of brilliant journalism and radical *Kitsch*, subject of both extreme right-wing and Bolshevik hagiography.
28. Count Mihály Károlyi was a radical conservative, then radical revolutionary; supported the Entente Cordiale and the Allies during the First World War, president of the first Hungarian Republic in 1918, deposed by Béla Kun’s Bolsheviks, became a Stalinist of sorts in his exile. Universally expected to be president of the new Hungarian democracy in 1945, he was appointed ambassador to Paris, defected in 1949 in protest against the Rajk trial, was an important figure of the anti-Communist Koestlerian-Orwellian Left in Britain (wonderful memoirs called *Faith Without Illusions* containing much of the latter with *un brin* of the former), died in Provence as an unreconstructed aristocrat who could not really understand anybody who was not at least a baronet; *lebensfremd* and pathetic, a true Hungarian oddity.
29. When, in my essay, *A csöndes Európa* (samizdat, 1982), I nurtured real leftist—anarcho-syndicalist—hopes about the glorious defeat of Solidarity in Poland, I was fascinated with the anti-totalitarian fights in Eastern Europe. My model was not the authoritarian Marxist socialism, but its libertarian version.

The Western ideological scene was conquered by the Marxist intellectual Left. The illustrious representatives of the non-Bolshevik socialism were enthusing about the chiliastic massacres of the Third World (first of all, those in Maoist China). Herr Wolf Biermann's Communist anti-Communist songs were recorded in East Berlin while under police surveillance, but were sold in West Germany. Moreover, Marxist-Leninist modernization "conceptually" united Eastern and Western Europe.³⁰

There was a predominant *discourse*, for fifty years, which made theoretically possible the analysis of some fundamental problems of Eastern and Western Europe in the same breath. This possibility meant an escape from the misery of provincialism. The Hungarian New Left, in which revisionist and avant-garde Maoist tendencies soon merged, developed a new version of the Third Way criticizing "abstract" democracy, as usual. The old liberal version of democracy was ignored.

The New Left, disappointed about expiring Marxism, bumped into Bibó and into the "Nation." The socialist Third Way was enriched with liberal-cum-radical elements. Police harassment started soon, giving rise to an unusual (in Hungary) *civil courage*, and pushed the New Left towards a more active involvement in politics.

Original blood ties with Marxism became just a "family resemblance" in Wittgenstein's sense. János Kis, the political leader of the dissidents, a former critical Marxist, placed himself between liberalism and socialism, being now a Millian radical.

The new political forces that entered the Hungarian stage in 1988–1989, while toying with the possibility of the first "post-Communist" society, did not change the picture in the field of theories. Each group remained within the limits of the "limited democracy" of 1945–1948 and the 1956 revolution.³¹

I feel that it is time to refer to my own intellectual journey. I have never been a Marxist; nevertheless, I thought that the difference between authoritarian and libertarian socialism was important. Inspired by Max Stirner, Fritz Mauthner, and Gustav Landauer, I developed my own semi-analytic anarchist theory.³² Because of the usual provincial

30. See more about this in my book *Les Idoles de la tribu* (Paris, 1989, 1991). The chapter in question was also published in the 23rd issue of *Beszélő*.

31. Cf. Tamás, "Confess!" *Hírel*, May 1989, and "Tendencies within the Alliance of Free Democrats," published by FDA, February 1989. The rhetoric, of course, has changed since.

32. *A szem és a kéz* (The Eye and the Hand), samizdat (Budapest, 1983), cf. *L'Oeil et la main* (Geneva, 1985).

and emotional reasons, I kept on the leftist label. But I realized that my “values”—the libertarian refusal of state interference—were not shared by anybody, except for a few charming Latin anarchist sects. After a long hesitation, approximately seven years ago, I had to see that my intellectual allies could be found among the Western Right. I was late to admit this, because of emotional attachments. My ideas did not change significantly, and my libertarian prejudices still stood. But my leftist inhibitions slowly disappeared.³³ Meanwhile the members of the New Left dissidence were sticking to their “representative past,” to the exclusive traditionalism of the modern adversary culture. In Hungary, *this* was—is—regarded as the essence of the West: Bataille, Artaud, Sartre. And they did not realize: they like this idea only because it is a rude, barbarous revolt against the West.

New Barbarians of the Western adversary culture are volunteers but we who are importing from the West the recipe of How-To-Get-Rid-Of-The-West, we are involuntary Barbarians (see romantic anti-capitalism, Nietzsche, satanism, Messianic Marxism). Since the fall of Hungarian liberalism our only Western idea has been our “counter-Westernism.” The *Nyugat* of Ady, Ignotus, Babits, Osvát, and Dezső Szabó³⁴ understood only fin-de-siècle revolt. Liberalism did not mean to them Burke’s, Lord Macaulay’s or Lord Acton’s version.

The bitter historic myth of the Hungarian Left is in harmony with the Hungarian romantic (not liberal but authoritarian) extreme conservatism. According to its followers, it is bad luck to be born in Hungary—and this is obviously an understatement. The nation is to be saved, therefore it is inherently guilty. Ady and Németh are similar from that point of view.

The liberal conservative usually *likes* Hungary. His historical myth is skeptical, but affectionate. He seems to know not only about massa-

33. About the complex relationship between conservatism and Christianity see Tamás, “Diary”, *The Spectator*, Christmas issue, 1988.

34. Ignotus was the editor of *Nyugat* (The West), Ady’s modernist review; Edwardian aesthete and radical columnist. Babits was the quintessential Lord Acton-type Catholic liberal, learned poet, novelist, sacred cow and “tragic” authority. Osvát was the most important critic—with Aladár Schoepflin—of the *l’art pour l’art* tendency in Hungary; exemplary editor and archetypal neurotic, he shot himself after the death of his daughter. Dezső Szabó, a gloriously ridiculous writer, pupil of Barrès and Maurras etc., founded the modern radical Hungarian nationalism and anti-Semitism, attacked the neo-baroque conservative establishment of Regent von Horthy, was instrumental in the introduction of the first anti-Jewish *numerus clausus* laws in Europe in the 1920s, died as an anti-Nazi on xenophobic and Franco-ophile grounds in 1944 (cause of death: scurvy).

ces, traitors and Mohácses,³⁵ but, following Krúdy's³⁶ ironic melancholy, he can discover *nice places* when he is wandering in the historical fog: good pubs, light wines, and loquacious girls, sparkling and friendly boozers, perfectly shaped armchairs, walking-sticks, pipes, and gloves. He can see over the poison, dagger, tears, and dogmas. He is admiring Deák's stratagems, Count Széchenyi's³⁷ overweight thought-avalanches, Arany's³⁸ depressive fussing, Baron Zsigmond Kemény's³⁹ almost morbid sensibility. All this is simply beautiful. The nineteenth century—so glorious for us—makes the observer silently satisfied. He who believes that history means only patriotic sorrow, tearful eyes and bleeding heart, outcry and cannonade, will become a revolutionary—so that he can turn the surrounding world by force into a space to his liking.

We are no revolutionaries. God or Fate gave us this country and we feel sorry and have a pessimistic affection for it. This home is surrounded by the legendary microcosm of the former noble Hungarian liberalism and conservatism—like a somewhat neglected garden. This is not a vote for a “representative past,” it is just a tradition which exists, and our emotions led us toward it, rather like what Oakeshott described as the conservative disposition.⁴⁰

Readers may say, all right, but you are a relatively young Hungarian

35. Mohács was the locality where the Turks defeated the royal Hungarian army in 1526, where King Louis II also fell, and this robbed us of our sovereignty and independence for three centuries if one forgets the autonomous Hungarian principality of Transylvania. Hungarians like to celebrate their defeats: there is a 6 October Street in Budapest commemorating the day when thirteen generals of the revolutionary army and our first elected prime minister, Count Batthyány, were executed by the Austrians in 1849.
36. Krúdy was a romantic conservative novelist and pro-Habsburg revolutionary, nostalgic fool, and decadent genius.
37. Count István Széchenyi, “the greatest Hungarian” as he was called by Kossuth in order to show that he was unfit for Hungarian politics, was a favorite of Prince Metternich, one of the most important sexual performers at the Vienna Congress, romantic Catholic and monarchist, traveled to England, introduced horse races and modern agriculture to Hungary, founded the first gentlemen's clubs, the Academy of Sciences, paid Adam Clark to build the Chain Bridge between Buda and Pest, channelled the Danube like Faust, Part Two; was a member of the Pressburg Diet in the 1830s and hated it; provoked and loathed the 1848 revolution, went mad, wrote the most magnificent satires against the Monarchy he loved, committed suicide or was murdered by his adored Emperor's agents in the Doebbling loony bin, and was, in general, insufferably grand and always right.
38. Arany was our classic poet, translator of *Hamlet*, but otherwise incomprehensible to all foreigners and most un-academic Hungarians.
39. Baron Kemény: ditto, minus *Hamlet*, was a novelist and conservative pamphleteer, sober as Tocqueville or Burke, thus considered a traitor to the nation.
40. “On Being Conservative”, in *Rationalism in Politics*, (London, 1962 and 1984).

intellectual and not an elderly English gentleman, and I hope you do not want to conserve bolshevism on behalf of your own old-fashioned principles.

We do not want to conserve bolshevism, rather the other way around. But how can a conservative demand a sharp, revolutionary change without giving up his own disposition, and ideas?

We do not want to retain the tradition of construction, planning, and utopia. However, our answer is historical. Conservatism is the youngest among the great political ideologies. Both liberalism and socialism came into existence earlier (conservative parties, in the modern sense of the word, were organized late: in 1831 in England, and in 1846 in Hungary).

The birth of conservatism is related to two big European anomalies. In the first case it was a reaction to the French Revolution, while in the second, to the "Great October Socialist Revolution" of 1917 in Russia. When Burke was arguing with Paine, their debate resulted in modern conservatism in England, but in Europe its consequence was the forming of the reactionary Holy Alliance. It would be really difficult to consider De Maistre and Franz von Baader liberals. Anyway, without the fall of the Jacobin revolution the conservative liberalism of Constant, Tocqueville, von Humboldt, and Széchenyi could not have come into being.

The spectacular victory of the Anglo-Saxon neo-conservatism was noticed and analyzed in numerous writings. Here we have to point out only one neglected element: a book written by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*.

Public opinion realized that the West won its war against the main version of totalitarianism, but during the battle Western thought was contaminated by the logic of central planning, state intervention, and institutional patronage.

The different tendencies of planning collectivism are all parts of a *continuum*—I know that this is a grave accusation—and, even without death camps, we can realize their similarity and refuse the tendencies opposing liberty. Unfortunately, the British-American-Soviet alliance was not an accident in World War Two. It was of course unavoidable, but the empty and irresponsible ideology called "anti-fascism" was heaped on top of the accolades Lenin and Stalin received from leftist intellectuals, and this ideology crushed the spine of the liberal political culture.

Neo-conservatism, which has successfully attacked socialism, has a bad press among intellectuals. The Western intelligentsia is even more dependent—that is, more socialist—than its East European counterpart, due to a system of tenure, subsidies, scholarships, foundations, and tax exemptions. This system became gigantic during the leftist euphoria of the sixties. The loyalty to adversary culture, and the temptation of proud immoralism and relativistic irrationality are completely alien to the rehabilitation of the common sense, the anti-intellectual ethos of “*leben und leben lassen*,” the mixture of individualism and (liberal) traditions, all characteristics of neo-conservatism.

The foundations of the *Old Whig* liberalism and the neo-conservatism were relaid by Central European émigrés like F. A. von Hayek, Ludwig von Mises, Joseph Schumpeter, Sir Karl Popper, Leo Strauss, Sir Isaiah Berlin, and many others.⁴¹ Thus, this Anglo-American tradition does not stand as far from us as we would presume.

It is safe to say that what counts is a sort of humility. The Protestant belief that man is a sinner and directed by his emotions and by his not-too-clever instincts, has found its secular expression first in Hume. The modern conservative can be noticed by his disgust for rational and chiliastic-utopian pride.

But if we would like to adapt the image of the slow, organic, and half-conscious growth, what should we do in the atmosphere of the predominant Jacobin-socialist principles? How could we reach back to the crushed and denied Hungarian liberal traditions?

The historically understood past, Michael Oakeshott⁴² writes, is the final result of a kind of critical research; and you can find it only in history books. But where on earth do we have this kind of history books?

We can put our historical myth as follows: the Hungarian liberal and Western-style conservatism died, turned into smoke—but it has been stored for us in the West.⁴³ So we can go and claim it. We must not forget that this gesture would coincide with our dominant tradi-

41. J. C. Nyíri wrote about this in Hungarian, several times, in an outstanding but somewhat one-sided way. See, *A monarchia szellemi életéről* (Intellectual Life in the Monarchy) (Budapest, 1980); *Ludwig Wittgenstein* (Budapest, 1983); *Európa szélén* (On the Periphery of Europe) (Budapest, 1986); *Gefühl und Gefüge* (Amsterdam, 1986), *Am Rande Europas* (Budapest, 1988).

42. “Present, Future, and Past”, *On History*, 1983 and 1985.

43. Cf. Tamás, “High and Dry, East and West,” *The Spectator*, December 10, 1988, and “The Old Régime of Revolution,” *The Spectator*, December 9, 1989.

tion: following the *translatio imperii* and keeping in view the relations between Athens and Rome (we may add London and Philadelphia, London and Delhi) we can learn a lot.

Concerning the West we have two Hungarian paradigms: that of Count Széchenyi–Baron Kemény and of Ady–Jászi–Fülep–Dezső Szabó.⁴⁴ The former is the important one for us. The latter wants to regain the (Jacobin, that is, totalitarian democratic) tradition of adversary liberalism.

Everything depends on the result of the “*revolutio*”: how far would it turn the clock back? Most people set back their watches to the 1930s. We would put back ours to the 1830s. The Hungarian culture was basically the culture of the gentry, and not of the bourgeoisie or the “people” (*Volk*). We know that—and we do not feel ashamed. We can read in Alexis de Tocqueville’s⁴⁵ classic work that: “aristocracy directs our mind toward the past and wants us to keep on observing it. Democracy, however, fills us with some aversion to everything which is old. In this respect, aristocracy is more favorable for poetry, since things grow and fade as they go far from us; and these two changes give food for art and philosophy. Equality would have taken away the past from poetry, and then, it would remove a part of the present as well.” Hungarian liberalism (even less than the British) was not bourgeois. It preceded the bourgeoisie and it could outlive it.

I do not say that Hungarian conservatism was very liberal. János Asbóth,⁴⁶ the cleverest Hungarian conservative to this day, was fighting throughout his life with Baron József Eötvös.⁴⁷ He realized early that the unpopular royalist conservatism of the Counts Dessewffy⁴⁸ discredited the Hungarian High Tory ideal. But Baron Eötvös’s activ-

44. L. Fülep was an art historian and philosopher, ally and companion of Georg Lukács in his pre-World War One extreme conservative period; later a Reformed clergyman and grumbling progressive; after the Communist takeover both an official authority and secret reactionary guru.

45. *Democracy in America*.

46. His important works: *Magyar conservatív politika* (Hungarian Conservative Politics) (Budapest, 1873 and 1874); “*Jellemrajzok és tanulmányok korunk történetéhez*” (Portraits and Analyses on the History of Our Age) (Budapest, 1892); “*Korunk uralkodó eszméi*” (“Ruling Ideas of Our Age.”) *Értekezések a társadalomtudományok köréből*, November 11, 1896.

47. Baron József Eötvös, Liberal statesman and writer, was our Lord Macaulay and Sir Walter Scott in one, opponent of Kossuth’s 1848 radicalism, founder of the “centralist,” i.e., anti-County school of thought which created the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. One of this author’s favourite Continental liberals (much better than von Humboldt).

48. The Counts Dessewffy were all leaders of the pro-Habsburg Conservative Party in Hungary from the 1830s on. Utterly unpopular and generally right.

ity as a theorist and Secretary of Education was sliding from the principles of Lord Acton and von Humboldt to the utilitarianism of Mill; from the right to the left. According to Asbóth, Eötvös imposed reforms as paternalistic intervention. For instance, he pressed upon the Hungarian Jewry a modernist-heretic theology, alien to their traditions, he even organized a "Hebrew Synod," making Judaism a "received" instead of a merely "tolerated" denomination. He "solved" the *Kulturkampf* of the separation of state and church by a forced and rigid structure of religions. Asbóth protested in due time against modern East European statism, but then, liberal Hungarian statism yielded to the authoritarian statism under the premiership of Count István Tisza.⁴⁹ The fight against it was left to the avant-garde Left.

The new Hungarian democratic groupings are facing a continuity broken many times and at many points. Moreover, all this happened in a secularized country. These groups came up with a French-type rationalist-constructivist democratic notion, like János Kis's theory of human rights.⁵⁰

The only ray of hope, if any for the Hungarian liberal conservatism is *revolutio*, the resuscitating of its own past. In the last century, free enterprise and the constitutional state had to be introduced without a bourgeois middle class. We have to do the same now, and the same way: without a bourgeoisie. The radical intelligentsia of the avant-garde played an important role in the collapse of fin-de-siècle Austria-Hungary. Intellectuals may also play the same critical role now. But then conservatives had no Western allies; now, they may have some. It would not make sense if we replaced the "existing" authoritarian socialism with a "collectivist-solidaristic" social democratic statism which has already failed in the West.

The democracy, proposed by everybody in Hungary, is a Jacobin-socialist and not a liberal democracy.⁵¹ The ridiculously provincial feudal romantic authoritarianism can be reborn, too. We do not move closer to Europe; it is the other way around. We are moving away.⁵²

49. Cf. Prof. László Péter, "Did the Hungarian Society Exist in the Nineteenth Century?" *Valóság*, May 1989.

50. Cf. János Kis, *L'Égale dignité* (Paris, 1989).

51. Cf. Hayek's new book, *The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism*, (London, 1989).

52. About the emptiness of the reforms within the limits of the Communist system, see my "Communist 'Reform': Eastern Europe and Freedom," *The Salisbury Review*, (Spring 1989). An early and shorter draft of the article was published in *The Atlantic Community Quarterly*.

The handful of new Hungarian conservatives hereby declare their minority opinion. We know that the consensus of the intellectual majority, which is getting involved in politics, is a leftist agreement, based on the moral power which it could gain from its oppositional past; the *resistance*. The traditionally “reactionary” and narrow-minded petty bourgeoisie made a happy compromise with the corrupt and authoritarian Kádár regime. Now they are longing for a “changing of the guard” more than for a liberal democracy, and we will have nothing to do with them.

But we have to warn everybody: the universal and dry Jacobin democracy, wearing the costume of rationality, is emotionally unsatisfactory. The revolting crowds replaced it always and everywhere with a fiery and frightening nationalism.

Liberalism is a tradition of the elites and it can be only the ideology of the rising new middle class (which is more and more bourgeois). But its ethics—resistance to institutional power—can be followed by everybody. We criticized all the time the apolitical average citizen of the Kádár regime. But there is nothing more uplifting and sublime than his outcry: *Leave me alone!*

Minimal state; legal security; less involvement in public affairs; fall of the militancy—these are the aims of our efforts now. We want neither the direct democracy of Pericles and Desmoulins, nor the permanent political activity of anarcho-syndicalism. The secret of the temporary success of the Kádár regime was that it permitted the individuals—although in a false and grotesque way—to drop out from their permanent state of totalitarian mobilization. The way out of this is not a permanent revolution. It is more than enough to get politically excited once in every four years. Political freedom is only a condition which makes it possible that we can cultivate our gardens (so, we need gardens); that we can meditate in no hurry (we also need thoughts); slowly sipping our wines (we need for that riesling and burgundy); that we have time to read the dusty books on our shelves (so, we need money and leisure).

Hungary is affected by fierce egalitarian, democratic passions: it is dimmer than ever before. The plots and machinations of those who are in power, unfortunately, matter a great deal now. That is why more of us, and more often, have to be busy with disgusting and inferior things. Under true freedom politics will shrink and be pushed back to a narrow field. This will be disappointing to us warriors who were get-

ting used to the excitement and the risk—never mind. Our discussions will be less direct, too; and that's also good.

Modern conservatism is a product of the inner contradiction of European history. It can be described by a short metaphor: the Hellenization of the Bible. It's the foundation of our civilization, a clear and permanent tension. We will never be able to handle it, and still, it is possible to live a life with human dignity, but sin and rebellious reason will not ever find respite.

The skepticism of the grown-up man, his self-critical sensitivity, his foolish hopes, his pessimism forgotten for the sake of living through our puzzling weekdays—all can have a place in our haphazard civilization. We the great-great-grandchildren of the nomad Moses and the athletic Aristotle have a right to enjoy at last the weird fruits of our enigmatic inconsistency.