

Chapter 16

30 Years Ago, a Time of Joy and Hope

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I remember exactly the evening of November 9, 1989.

Events of great importance were taking place in my country of Poland. In Warsaw a young non-communist government had recently been formed with Tadeusz Mazowiecki as its prime minister. Mazowiecki had been a longtime adviser to Lech Wałęsa, had served earlier as a Catholic activist, and represented an open and post-conciliar Catholicism. That evening an official delegation of the Federal Republic of Germany was paying a formal visit. Leaders included Chancellor Helmut Kohl and Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher. I was at a meeting with Minister Genscher. During a very interesting conversation, the minister's colleague entered the room and gave him a small card. Genscher read the card, looked at me and said: "The Berlin Wall has been opened."

I expressed a cry of exhilaration; I said goodbye and ran to the editorial offices of *Gazeta Wyborcza* to write a few words of comment on the first page. Here they are:

Nobody knows what the consequences will be of the actual destruction of the Berlin Wall. However, something irreversible has already happened: the people were not being shot at. In Berlin, in the heart of Europe, freedom prevailed in the fight between freedom and barbed wire.

It's hard to believe today that it all was a matter of chance. After all, the government of East Germany could still close the borders. Günter Schabowski, a member of the East German Communist Party leadership, declared on television: "We made a decision today. Each citizen can leave through any border crossing" and when asked, he added that this decision came into effect immediately. I think that Schabowski did not know what he was announcing, because right afterwards thousands of Berliners moved towards the concrete wall and pressed it open.

From today's perspective, this process seems obvious. And yet, it was not obvious. In October 1989, Egon Krenz, the leader of the East German communist party, the SED, declared that he understood the "Chinese solution," i.e. the massacre of demonstrators in Tiananmen Square in Beijing who wanted freedom for their country.

That sounded dangerous to a Pole. We did not feel safe. Despite the historic success of the peaceful dictatorship dismantling, we still remembered that communism usually resorted to violence when it felt threatened.

Today there are various responses to the question why Soviet communism fell. Some emphasize the role of West German *Ostpolitik* and the Helsinki CSCE conference promoting relaxation of tensions. Others emphasize U.S. President Jimmy Carter's policy that made a banner for aspirations of freedom out of human rights, or the policy of U.S. President Ronald Reagan, who announced that the Soviet Union was an evil empire and proclaimed a total ideological war against it. Of course, the war in Afghanistan was of great importance; it weakened the Kremlin dictators militarily and politically.

Looking back, however, the most important reason was the significance of *Solidarność* (Solidarity), the Polish confederation of national freedom and independence, whose millions of working-class adherents rendered irrelevant Poland's communist party and its pretense of representing the dictatorship of the proletariat. The Polish proletariat gave the dictatorship a red card.

It seems obvious to a Pole that everything started in Poland. The Polish sequence of events was carried forward by a broad democratic opposition movement comprised of the working class, the intelligentsia, and the Catholic Church with the historic role of John Paul II and his visit to Poland in 1979, a wave of strikes of the summer of 1980 topped by a compromise enforced by the strikers, and the establishment of the Independent Labor Union *Solidarność*. It was then that the first pieces of the Berlin Wall were chiseled out.

The Polish festival of freedom and legal *Solidarność* lasted for several months in 1981, until martial law ended it. An eight-year-long period of resistance by the democratic opposition ensued. It was confined to illegality, discrimination and imprisonment, all the way to the Round

Table negotiations and the election of June 4, 1989. The Round Table talks were a historic achievement of the entire Polish political class, as well as the reformist wing of the ruling communists. They were probably the greatest Polish political achievement of the twentieth century. The June elections were a peculiar referendum; they resulted in a triumphant victory of the democratic opposition over the dictatorship.

Soon after, the domino effect of the fall of dictatorships took place: in Hungary where the revolution of 1956 and its murdered heroes were rehabilitated, the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Albania, and finally Romania. The bloc of satellite states dominated by the Soviet Union fell apart like a house of cards.

Each of these events had its own local background; each had its own internal and external context. The internal context was the economic failure of the command-and-distribution system; the external context was the changes taking place in Russia. These changes surprised many of us, just as they surprised most observers around the world.

For many years we observed the heroism of Soviet dissidents and opposition to the dictatorship, their *samizdat* (self-publishing) and the defense of the civil rights movement. This circle of Russian rebels played a crucial role in the collective consciousness of the Russian intelligentsia; it changed the image of Russian culture. Three Nobel laureates—Andrei Sakharov, Aleksander Solzhenitsyn and Josif Brodsky—came out of this circle. The Russian democratic opposition became an obvious context for the reformist tendencies in the camp of the authorities. Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika* is incomprehensible without the knowledge of the activities of Russian dissidents who were persecuted, discriminated, and imprisoned for many years.

The leaders of *perestroika* viewed the dissidents as enemies, but without these enemies the great project of political change would probably have never been created.

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This was also a surprise. The 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in 1956 and Khrushchev's report exposing some of Stalin's crimes gave rise to hope for the possibility of "socialism with a human face." This hope gave birth to the changes in Poland and the outbreak

of the Budapest revolution that year, which was suppressed bloodily by the Soviet army.

Until 1968, however, many people still hoped that the reforming forces would be able to initiate democratic reforms within the ruling communist regime. This belief in the possibility of political change was historically buried with the Prague Spring and Alexander Dubček's policies. For me, a Pole who was imprisoned for participating in a democratic student protest movement, this was the moment when I lost my last illusions. There were not too many of them, given that military intervention in Poland was supported by brutal police action and an anti-Semitic campaign. Nonetheless, it now became obvious to me: this system cannot be reformed; one must learn how to defend against it.

Gorbachev's *perestroika* revealed our mistake. Historical changes in Moscow started from above—the impulse came from the Kremlin. Moreover, the slogans of openness (*glasnost*) reached extremely fertile ground. The Russian intelligentsia, for years bound by conformism and fear, now became extremely vital, courageous and creative.

However, the open political debates were accompanied by an economic crisis and a crisis of state institutions. From the beginning the general reform movement in the USSR had two faces: in Russia and in the Soviet republics. In Russia, the reform movement had a citizen-democratic face and a traditionalist-nationalist face.

Soviet communism exterminated both democratic attitudes and conservative-nationalist attitudes. It perceived both as threats to its all-encompassing Bolshevik ideology. Debates among Russian dissidents along these lines were well illustrated by the democratic approaches of Andrei Sakharov and the conservative-nationalist views of Alexander Solzhenitsyn. After one hundred years, separation of the nineteenth century into Occidentalists and Slavophiles returned.

These two camps were allies when they fought for the right to vote, but their alliance ended when they actually received the right to vote. This should not come as a surprise—after all, they were completely different voices.

In the nineteenth century, democrats and nationalists jointly opposed the dictatorships of the conservative monarchies of the Holy Alliance. The Spring of Nations of 1848 was their joint accomplishment.

We can say that they were the children of the same mother, who at times had the face of romanticism and at other times that of Enlightenment rationalism. We could also say they were brothers like Cain and Abel; at some point Cain wanted Abel's death.

It was different in the Soviet republics. There, especially in the Baltic countries, the meaning of rebellion was obvious: in these countries, freedom was both personal and national. It was the path to independent statehood. It was similar in the Ukrainian cities, in Georgia or Armenia.

For us in Poland the right to state sovereignty was obvious. *Solidarność*, a great nationwide conspiracy movement for human rights and the rights of the nation, exemplified this. This movement, supported by the Catholic Church and the great authority of John Paul II, harmoniously combined three tendencies: the pursuit of emancipation of the labor world, especially the working environment; a desire to regain and cultivate national identity; and, of course, the pursuit of a political democracy based on human rights.

While every country had its own particulars, this sensitivity to democratic separation existed everywhere. It articulated itself as a return to Europe and national sensitivity that presaged the return of ancestral roots, traditions and beliefs. Some Poles identified with the tradition of democratic independence (the national uprisings of the nineteenth century and Józef Piłsudski). Others looked to the nationalist tradition of Roman Dmowski and national democrats with their ethicist exclusiveness. It was in Roman Dmowski's camp that the mottos "Poland for Poles" and "Catholic state of the Polish nation" were born, along with the violent anti-Semitism that accompanied them. The debates of Hungarians and Czechs, Romanians and Slovaks were similar. These two different mentalities and sensibilities existed both within the anti-communist opposition and within the ruling communist camp.

Gorbachev and Milošević are two classic examples of these different views. If Gorbachev was attracted to a cautious imitation of social democracy, Milošević openly referred to the tradition of Greater Serbian chauvinism. Both of them saw the need for a change. Of course, neither was looking to hand over power; each was trying to find a new way to legitimize his rule. One was looking for a different vision for the future, the other for a new vision within the past.

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When the June 4, 1989 elections in Poland resulted a total rout of the communist elite in power, for the first time in a very long time the communists publicly acknowledged their electoral defeat. They did not fake these elections, and after losing, they publicly recognized their defeat.

This was an unprecedented event, and yet even though the elections in Poland were very carefully observed, the news coming out of Poland did not capture world headlines. Front pages around the world were dominated by news coming out of China: protestors for freedom had been massacred in Tiananmen Square. Chinese authorities resorted to violence to maintain their rule. They demonstrated that they would do what it would take, including employing dictatorial tactics, to protect the market mechanisms that were propelling to economic success and a role as a global superpower.

Thus, as early as in 1989 it became apparent that different paths of departure were leading societies away from the Bolshevik model. One path led toward European democracy. Another offered a return to nationalist traditionalism. A third pointed to authoritarianism supported by religious community institutions and religious values. A fourth featured the transition of communist elites and a communist system into a nationalist dictatorship. Some were already observing a renaissance of nationalist and authoritarian traditions from the 1930s.

Yegor Gaidar, an outstanding, prematurely deceased leader of the Russian reformers, noted soberly in his book *Collapse of an Empire*:¹

Getting rid of a sense of national greatness and national harm is a nuclear bomb in the politics of countries where the old system is wearing out, but there is no system of developed democratic institutions in place. The problem with a young democracy...is that the slogans that are the easiest to “sell” to politically inexperienced voters become dangerous in practice. During the second half of the 1980s, opposing slogans such as “Serbia should be great” and “We will not let the Serbs be beaten anywhere” in Belgrade, was a political lost cause. The idea that Serbia was and will be great and that the republic’s authorities would not allow Serbs to be harmed in other republics and autonomies was easily used on the political

market. Should the Serbian leader not take such a position, there inevitably will be a politician who can use it for his own benefit.

Analyzing the Yugoslav crisis, Gaidar wrote:

It was not difficult to predict that in Zagreb, Ljubljana and Sarajevo, politicians would enthusiastically take these slogans, replacing the word “Serbs” with the words “Croats” and “Slovenians.” The moment the authorities in Serbia adopted a nationalist program as a political and ideological base, the fate of Yugoslavia was sealed. Presenting territorial claims to the neighbors, Serbian leaders opened the door to victory for nationalist ideas in other republics who took advantage of the fear of Serbian domination. Wars became inevitable. A mechanism was launched that cost tens of thousands of people their lives and displaced millions forcefully.

Political agitation based on the conflicts of nations that previously lived side by side, usually with agreed upon boundaries between them, arbitrarily established by an undemocratic regime, became the prologue of bloody events.

It was similar in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, in Romania and Hungary. In Bulgaria anti-Turkish resentment was used. In East Germany, refugee centers were attacked. In Poland, we heard the slogan “Poland for Poles” and the sinister screams of the homophobes. Nationalism—this poison of our time—entered the center of politics.

This was not the result of a Soviet conspiracy or American secret services. This is what those who subscribe to the conspiracy theory of history seem to believe. They believe that social processes are the work of special services, the CIA, KGB, or Mossad. Their mistake comes from the conviction that society is completely pacified and unable to resist. They are then surprised when opposition unexpectedly appears, when gagged and manipulated people suddenly spit out their gag, when such forgotten values as truth, honesty, courage, dignity and honor—and living according to those principles—come to the fore. They are surprised when cemetery silence is replaced with a tumult of freedom and life. This was the case in 1989, when the first non-communist government was formed in Poland, when the Berlin Wall fell, and when the crowds on the streets of Budapest, Prague, Sofia, Bratislava and Berlin regained their freedom.

At the time, these crowds demanded freedom for everyone. Over the years, however, the crowd has changed its appearance, character, slogans and dreams. It stopped demanding freedom and started demanding bread and games. This was the path that led to violence from humanism through nationalism. And it can still lead to barbarism. The crowd following this path began to transform into a mob.

The first time I got to know the smell and taste of a peasant mob that was let go off the leash was in 1968, when the barriers of decency in public speeches cracked before my eyes. Smarter observers had already offered their diagnosis. The most outstanding Polish humanist, Leszek Kołakowski, wrote about the mob already in 1956, when the liberalization of power—along with the ideas of freedom—was accompanied by a renaissance of anti-Semitism:

They are separated into various varieties, like malicious insects: some are demanding the Jews to be butchered, they study brochures about ritual murders, others talk about a lower race, and others only about “the cultural strangeness,” and others still are content with animosity that is often difficult to find and that, without the help of theory, is easily heard in everyday life. (...) Moderate anti-Semitism in its official form, even if limited to the “economic boycott” of Jewish merchants, sustained and fueled the aura in which the Phalange, and later the Gestapo informers and occupational blackmailers, flourished. As you know, the Nuremberg Laws did not contain the plan for the extermination of Jews, but the principle of racial inferiority... Good-natured anti-Semites give birth to anti-Semites who are thugs, and gentle anti-Semites foster anti-Semites armed with brass knuckles and knives, and passive and abstemious anti-Semites create slaughter organizers. In a suitable environment, the scattered and seemingly non-threatening faint atoms of antisemitism can be instantly focused in a fulminant mixture that explodes as a crime. The tolerance of anti-Semitism in the weakest symptoms of today, is therefore the tolerance of tomorrow’s slaughters. You need to grab the shadow of the crime by the throat until it grows meat. We refer the matter to the agenda only because the existence of anti-Semitic outbreaks is an omnipresent open secret which need not be revealed... The mob is the anti-Semitic entity. The mob has no class determination as to the composition, but they have one as to their social tasks. It can be made of elements of the most diverse social affiliation. The mob

updates itself in a mass, and when dispersed, it does not maintain a sense of solidarity, only vaguely aware of the readiness to resume this bond, which is neither class nor national, nor is it a permanent bond of any sorts, but only an occasional bond of variable content. The bond created by the mob is not able to establish a specific program; it is purely negative and destructive, and as a rule, disposes of the class consciousness, it expresses collective dissatisfaction to the confused, and therefore is incapable of rationalized reactions, hates discussion, is subject to suggestion only to the most primitive, is weak-willed when it comes to demagoguery, and invaluable as a weapon of crime performed on someone else's behalf.

The mob is the accumulation of collective negative stress, deprived of self-knowledge of its sources and thus, providing itself with virtually an arbitrary direction of expansion, should it be simple enough, concrete, not requiring reflection, self-reliance and releasing all inhibitions, both the reasonable ones, as well as the ones related to the existence of elementary universal rules of morality. The mob may act against the obvious interests of the majority of its participants, but it is usually influenced consciously from the outside. By itself, it is not able to create or organize the form of its activity, because the principle of its existence also represents the denial of internal social discipline.

The mob tore up scientist Hypatia on the streets of Alexandria, and by slaughtering Jews revealed its action on the night of St. Bartholomew in the Polish anti-multi-faith uproars. The mob can only be a tool for political reactions. It works only in friendly environment of direct effectiveness, only in the environment of quantitative advantage, and it only gives way to violence. Antisemitism is the favorite form that might be assigned to its darkened consciousness.”

The answer of the Polish democratic intelligentsia to the anti-Semitic poison—this religion of mobs—was the selection of a different life.

Kořakowski wrote about the mechanisms of communist dictatorship:

This mechanism assumes a strictly unidirectional dependence within the hierarchy, resulting from the monopoly rule of power; thus, similarly as in all despotic systems, the positive traits in a unitary career (i.e., traits that facilitate climbing the hierarchy lad-

der) are servility, cowardice, lack of initiative, readiness to listen to superiors, readiness to inform, and indifference to social opinion and public interest. On the contrary, the negative traits are: initiative abilities, care for common issues, and demanding the criteria of truth, fitness and social benefit, regardless of the interests of the apparatus. Then, the mechanism of power causes a natural, negative selection of directorial staff in all areas of the governing apparatus, and mostly within the apparatus of the party.” Practice shows that the peculiarity of these governments “was systematic elimination of competent and endowed with initiative people, in favor of cowardly and submissive mediocrity. The trial which took place in March 1968—the mass promotion of dunces, informers or even outlaws (“bedbug invasion,” as it was called in Warsaw), was only the acceleration and intensification of phenomena that was going on for many years.

At the same time, Kołakowski warned against the fatalism of thinking. He repeated that the idea of full irreformability of the dictatorship

is easily suited for the justification of opportunism and filthiness. If this is the case, then no individual or collective initiatives aimed at counteracting the monstrosities of neo-Stalin bureaucratism, no struggle to perpetuate the respect for truth, competence, reliability, justice and reason in this society, are irrelevant; in short, with this assumption, any individual dirty trick can be excused, because it can be simply identified as a component of universal dirty trick, which is inevitable “temporarily” and is not the work of individuals, but the result of the system. The principle of non-reformability can therefore serve as an advance absolution given to all cowardice, passivity and cooperation with evil... Those who think that they pay only with minor concessions for their peace, will be convinced that the price of this peace will be higher; those who only pay by seemingly innocent boot-licking, will be forced to pay for the same commodity tomorrow by denunciation; those who use their privileges in silence in the face of a crime, which they can react to, will quickly have to pay for the same privileges by their active participation in the crime. Moral inflation is the natural right of despotism, meaning that if the social pressure does not force it to reduce it, it makes one pay more and more money for distribution of goods.

Kořakowski's words anticipated the formation six years later of the Workers' Defense Committee (*Komitet Obrony Robotników*, or KOR), a Polish civil society group founded to give aid to prisoners and their families after civil protests and an ensuing government crackdown in June 1976.

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Václav Havel, the Czech writer, dissident, political prisoner, and later after the fall of the dictatorship the President of the Republic, had similar thoughts. Havel's dissident essays were building the consciousness and value system of the democratic opposition milieus, not only in Czechoslovakia. His biography was a paradox. Like his master, the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka, he wanted to be faithful to the uncompromising attitude of Socrates. And he wanted to remain faithful to it after he became president. At that time, I thought that Socrates had transformed into Pericles.

He never wasted time, even in prison, where he wrote in a letter to his wife Olga: "the moment when an ideological system becomes closed and finite, perfect and universal, this system collapses into debris as a result of a physical breakdown, because reality escapes it."

Such a bust of ideology results in widespread bitterness. A bitter man loses faith in the world and people. And, Havel wrote, he comes to the conviction that "all moral principles and exalted systems and ideals are just a naive utopia. We must accept the fact that the world is as it is, and that is, invariably vile. And yet," repeated Havel, "it is not the wickedness of the world that leads man to resign, and his resignation leads him to the theory of the meanness of the world."

For many of us—for me as well—who were grateful to be Havel's friends—he was one of the most important intellectual authorities in those years.

Havel keenly analyzed the evolution of a bitter man. "As he adapts to the wicked world, this world begins to be a reality, not worse, and certainly better than the subsequent destabilization caused by the actions of naive Utopians who want to make the world a better place." In this way, Havel wrote, "there is a sad end: a moment in which the merciless critic of the world turns imperceptibly into his protector."

Havel said he understood human bitterness: human weakness, loneliness, and defenselessness all speak for it. Yet he wrote, “I am convinced that there is nothing in this vale of tears that could itself take away the person’s hope and faith in the life’s goals. We lose it only when we fail ourselves.”

This poignant confession and definition of the unbending attitude of the dissident conceals dangerous traps. Fanaticism was the most dangerous one. Fanaticism was a dangerous disease of many brave dissidents. “Fanaticism,” Havel wrote to Olga, “is a faith that has betrayed itself”:

The fanatic first believes that he is “responsible for everything”; the more this responsibility is limited, the more defenseless he is against the shock known as the experience of the presence of the world just seen. The faith in the idea is transformed into faith in a specific institution. This is a fatal mistake. The transfer of ideas from the realm of unlimited dream to the ground of real, human acts, makes a person begin to blindly obey the institution in which he sees the fulfillment of his ideals. It is tempting: obedience replaces reflection, man is freed from the command of independent thinking for the service of the institution, in which he sees the way to realize his unlimited dream.

A fanatic is the one who does not understand that he replaces the love for God and for the religions he created, the love for truth and freedom and justice, with the love for ideology, doctrine, or sect that promised that they will definitely carry them out; the love for people with love for a project that claims that it can—naturally as the only one—really serve the people.

The greater the fanaticism someone represents, the more he changes the objects of his faith. In one moment of confusion, Maoism will turn into faith in Jehovah’s witnesses or vice versa, without changing their devotion to them.

Fanaticism can make life easier—but at the cost of destroying life. The tragic fate of the fanatic is that a beautiful human dream to take on the suffering of the whole world eventually turns into multiplying his suffering: in organizing concentration camps, inquisitions, murders and executions.

I have been thinking a lot about Havel's path and the experiences of his life. He is one of the people who symbolize the glory and miserableness of our time, and of the last thirty years. Havel made the Czech Republic a respected and admired country all over the world, but he soon encountered hostility in his own country. He noted it years later. Havel described his presidential election as exile from a fairy tale. He wrote:

It seemed to us we were all the carriers of ideals of solidarity and normality which in essence was the ideal of mediocrity, banality, and some petty bourgeois ignorance. The dislike for former dissidents was in its heyday.

Shortly after the revolution and after the regaining of freedom, a very special kind of anticommunist possession became widespread. As if some people who for years were silent and very careful not to get sick, suddenly felt the need to recover from some powerful gesture of prior humiliation or a feeling they did not have before. That is why they aimed at people who least remembered it, the dissidents. They still treated them as a living remorse, as an example of the fact that if someone did not want to, he did not have to completely submit. Interestingly, at a time when dissidents seemed like a group of crazy Don Quixotes, the reluctance towards them was not as significant, as when they got the credit from the history. That was already too much, and this you cannot forgive! And the more apparent it was that the dissidents themselves did not say anything to anyone or accused anyone of anything (and God forbid that they would set themselves as an example), then—paradoxically—the more this anger grew. Ultimately, therefore, the new anticommunist was angrier with them than the representatives of the old regime.

A special legend about the extreme leftist attitude of dissidents was born out of this, about the fact that it is a closely-knit elite (how can people who spent decades in boiler rooms, or in prisons and who did not elevate themselves think of you as the elite?), who do not have enough respect for the enlightened Western institutions, etc., etc. A certain article about this ideology revealed that dissidents did not have any special merits in the fall of communism, because it was overthrown by normal "regular" citizens, because they cared for their own wellbeing, which probably means that from time to time they removed a brick from a construction site.

This mode of thinking finds therein a strong response in society, which sees the final solution to the rightness of their life choices. Now, when it is possible, we praise capitalism and condemn those who think critically about it, and in the past, when it was not possible, we went obediently to vote for communists to take care of ourselves. And who was the one that disturbed us all the time? Extreme leftist dissidents.

Havel saw “the Czech smallness” and philosophy in all of this: “Do not meddle in affairs that are not your own, bend over and stoop—we are surrounded by mountains, all world’s turmoil will fly over our heads, and we will have fun in our own backyard.”

“In our history,”—Havel often returned to this thought—“situations are repeated when the society breaks into some action, but then its leaders decide to step back, they give up on something, sacrifice something—it’s all in the name of saving the national existence—and the society is initially traumatized, but then quickly gives everything up (that is “understands the reasons of these leaders”), and finally falls into apathy, or even loses consciousness. This was the time after Munich, during the Protectorate, in the 1950s and in 1968 after the Soviet occupation. At first, the following sentences appear: “they betrayed us,” “everyone opposed us,” and later the sentence “No one has access,” ends with a nationalist cry, slogans of national interests, and a quiet consent to persecute minorities. The worst edition of “Czechaczkostwo” wins.”

“Czechaczek” is a symbol of ignorance and hate for the people who think differently. The following pleas appear: “Let’s get rid of the Jews, then the Germans, then the bourgeois, then the dissidents, then the Slovaks,” and who is next? Romas? Homosexuals? All foreigners? Who will stay here than? Pure blood “Czechaczkowies” in their own backyard.”

After 1980, the “Czechaczek” reached for a more subtle formula: anti-Europeanism. In Havel’s opinion, “this is the same attitude towards the world, why should we ask anyone for advice, listen to someone, why do we have to share power with some foreigner, help someone else, why do we need to have technical standards? We will take care of it ourselves—this is the new face of the “Czechaczkowski’s” mentality.

But watch out, Havel cautions: “Czechaczek dares to show the horns and shout battle codes only when he is not threatened by it. However, if

he is dealing with a powerful opponent, he pulls his tail in and becomes servile.”

This is how Havel revealed the “Czechaczkowski’s” vision of the mob.

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Today, after thirty years, we are witnessing a crisis of democratic ideas in Europe and in the world. The symbol of this crisis is Brexit and Salvini, Trump and Putin, Orbán and Kaczyński, and the enemies of the European Union in France and Germany. There are various reasons for this shift from democracy to the musty past of nationalism. It is an identity crisis related to globalization and a crisis of thinking about the future; it is a deficit of democratic procedures and customs; it is the theatralization and tabloidization of political life. The answer to this axiological vacuum is the conviction about the defeat of “demo-liberalism,” the conviction that nationalism and populism offer a special national path, dangerously similar to the 1930s. Resentments, frustrations and complexes all served to unleash xenophobia against the refugees.

When in opposition, populism and nationalism serve as tools in the power struggle. The cliché about “rising from one’s knees” is a clever catchphrase for a ruthlessly conceived sense of nationality of a nationalist. On the other hand, the nationalists and populists who gain power reach for the same clichés to divert attention from the problems related to corruption, destruction of the rule of law, and terrible foreign policy. At that time, enemies in other countries can easily be found (Soros!), and the government is replaced by the special services operations and manipulation of human anxiety.

A Polish psychologist, a participant in many protest actions in the defense of the constitution, civil liberties and the women’s rights, says emphatically: “there can be no compromise with the neo-fascists. This is a cruel, inhuman—and forbidden—ideology which was hidden in a plush case in Poland. It is believed that until it uses large-scale violence, it can exist on a par with other ideologies. In no way this is true. I want to take off this case and reveal: look, hence the racism in its pure form, hence the destroying hatred. There is no place in the common space for these views ... You cannot call for hatred on racial grounds, and if you do, you are outside of a civilized society and you have to feel this

rejection. There are more and more fascists because they have a sense of impunity.”

In turn, a well-known and popular musician says:

“We live in times of widespread destruction. Destruction of people, their achievements, authority, destruction of historical truth, and of putting lies into circulation. The freedom of thought is destroyed, the views are destroyed and removed, and so are the works of art and their authors. Today in Poland, there is no form that has been intact or a social group that has not been abused.”

Even if these are exaggerated opinions, they should be considered seriously. They are telling and symbolizing something important to us.

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Today the future seems hazy and unclear. Therefore, in conclusion, I would like to present opinions that indicate possible perspectives for a political debate.

Marie Le Pen explained to the French people: “the French were stripped of patriotism, we suffered in silence, but we were not allowed to love our country.”

This grim idiocy, aimed for fools who are able to believe that black is white, shows quite well that the disease suffered by such countries as Poland and Hungary, has universal dimensions. All the more so, the French people also need to recall the differences between de Gaulle’s patriotism and the patriotism of Petain and Laval. It seems that Le Pen’s dream is a France composed of obedient and barracked French Frenchmen, who repeat stupid phrases and are completely liberated from the enslavement by the spirit of Pascal, Montesquieu, Diderot, as well as Camus or Bernanos. A France like this would be very sad, but I do not believe that it will get to this. The society of people who are devoid of will, passive and conformist towards any power, devoid of creative power and doomed to the fate of the infantile-Soldacka community—no, no one can imagine such a France. France infected the world with freedom and this virus of freedom can no longer be stuffed back inside a bottle.

Liu Xiaobo, the Chinese defender of human rights, participant of protests in Tiananmen Square in 1989, literary critic and essayist, final-

ly the Nobel Prize laureate imprisoned and held in prison until he lost his war with inexorable cancer disease, and released two days before his death so he could die outside of prison, spoke at his trial, looking in the eyes of judges who were not judges but cruel officers of the regime:

I look forward to the day when my country will become the land of a free zone where the words of each citizen will be treated with equal attention. It is on this earth that various values, ideas, denominations and political beliefs will both compete for each other and peacefully coexist. Here, the views of the majority, as well as the minorities, will be equally guaranteed, and the views incompatible with the government will receive full respect and protection. All political views under the sun will be sent here by citizens, so that they can choose among them, every citizen will be able to express their political views without any fear, and because of differences, no political persecution will happen to them. I seriously much hope that in an endless string of literary inquisitions, I will be their last victim, and from that moment on no one will ever be condemned for a word.

Freedom of expression is the foundation of human rights, the core of human nature, and the source of truth. An attack on the free speech is a violation of human rights, suppression of human nature, and concealment of truth.

Thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, in a world ruled by a Chinese leader who resembles a cruel emperor of the Mandarin era, in the world of Putin and Trump, in the world of Erdoğan, Orbán, and Kaczyński, I cannot add much to these daring words, which are imbued with dignity and truth.

Note

1. Yegor Gaidar, *Collapse of an Empire: Lessons for Modern Russia* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2010).