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Laura Livingston April 18, 2012

Václav Havel: Democracy with a Human Face

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Abstract

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The public outcries of emotion surrounding Václav Havel's December 18, 2011, death underscored an unprecedented level of admiration and appreciation for Czechoslovakia's, and later the Czech Republic's, first post-Communist president. The international reaction to Havel's death came as a great surprise, given the numerous reviews of Havel as a political failure. Despite Havel's international celebrity as a dissident playwright, and recognition as a key figure in the Velvet Revolution that toppled the Czechoslovak Communist Party in 1989, his continued dedication to principles of honesty, forgiveness, morality, and personal responsibility were viewed as politically naïve. On the basis of waning popularity ratings, inability to control Parliament, and the 1993 dissolution of Czechoslovakia, Havel's thirteen-year presidency has been labeled a domestic failure. Nevertheless, many of these reviews quantify Havel's legacy on the basis of solely political factors, and entirely disregard, or prematurely gauge, Havel's ultimate impact on Czech society.

This paper will examine the continuities in Havel's political thought from his time as a dissident playwright to his thirteen years as President. Havel's unabated dedication to his principles did result in waning popularity ratings, but his repeated insistences on the importance of infusing morality into all areas of public life proved instrumental in shaping the Czech Republic into the civil society it is today. Surrounded by post-communist democracies that have evolved into one-party states, the Czech Republic exhibits a remarkable level of civic involvement that precludes this possibility. This is Havel's true legacy, and, in the months following his death, it is finally being appreciated.

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Introduction

Pravda a láska zvítězí nad lží a nenávistí. Truth and love must prevail over lies and hatred. As Václav Havel espoused throughout his life, the only hope for the future of Being was a world of honesty, morality, and responsibility. These ideas carried Havel from his earliest days as a blacklisted playwright, to his leadership in the Velvet Revolution that toppled the Czechoslovak communist regime, to his position as Czechoslovakia's first post-communist president. Though Havel's ideals did not always immediately resonate with his people, he clung tightly to his principles, always listened to his conscience, and never lost hope for a better tomorrow. Havel's unabated dedication to these principles now serves as a testament to the power of human decency, the power of the powerless. Keeping this in mind, it is not surprising that many call his life "a fairytale with a moral".

An abundance of literature focuses on the Czechoslovak/Czech transformation process and Havel's role therein. The political science texts predominantly cover Havel's loss of influence over the Velvet Divorce and his subsequent inability ever to control Parliament. These events are used as indications that his overall influence in Czechoslovakia, and ultimately the Czech Republic, eroded after the Velvet Revolution. Paradigmatic of this approach is Rick Fawnes' *The Czech Republic: A Nation of Velvet.*[1] Published in 2000, Fawnes' text examines the power-sharing debates that largely precipitated the Velvet Divorce and proceeds to detail the subsequent regimes in the new Republics. Though Fawnes addresses the social and cultural differences of the Czech Republic and

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[1] Rick Fawnes, *The Czech Republic: A Nation of Velvet* (Amsterdam: Hardwood Academic Publishers).

Slovakia, his priority on economic and political transformation leaves little room for any sort of social transformation, the precise realm in which Havel hoped to effect the most considerable change; Havel's objective for a revolution of conscience is ignored. Other texts following this methodology include Robin H.E. Shepherd's *Czechoslovakia: The Velvet Revolution and Beyond*,[2] Abby Innes' *Czechoslovakia: The Short Goodbye*[3], and Roman David's *Lustration and Transitional Justice*[4].

Another thread of literature covering Havel's public persona in Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic focuses on the role of the writer throughout Czech culture. Peter Steiner's *The Deserts of Bohemia: Czech Fiction in its Social Context* elucidates the longstanding "intimate relationship" existing between Czech literature and politics, leading Czech writers to attain a status of "pundits expected to proffer authoritative opinions on all relevant matters".[5] Though fascinating and well rounded in its exploration of a number of Czech authors, including Jaroslav Hasek, Julius Fucik, and Milan Kundera, Steiner's analysis does not extend in scope to a dissident who actually assumes power. Nevertheless, Steiner presents a thorough examination of a number of cultural factors expressed through literature (Hasek's *svejkism)* that are of critical importance in examining the Czech national identity.

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[2] Robin H.E. Shepherd, *Czechoslovakia: The Velvet Revolution and Beyond* (London: Macmillan Press Limited, 2000).
[3] Abby Innes, *Czechoslovakia: The Short Goodbye* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).
[4] Roman David, *Lustration and Transitional Justice* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).
[5] Peter Steiner, *The Deserts of Bohemia: Czech Fiction and Its Social Context* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000): 6.

A number of biographies have also been written on Havel's life. Edá Kriseová's *Václav Havel: The Authorized Biography* provides an in-depth exposure of Havel's seminal role within the dissident movement in Czechoslovakia up until the final days of the Velvet Revolution.[6] Kriseová's familiarity with and fond affection for Havel, dating back to their fellow dissident days, were clear guiding forces in her writing, which reads more like a letter of appreciation than it does an objective or critical biography. Michael Simmons' *The Reluctant President* shares in Kriseová's scope, but Simmons presents a much less detailed account, and from a noticeably more detached perspective.[7] The most recent Havel biography, John Keane's 505-page *A Political Tragedy in Six Acts,* is certainly the most controversial of the group. Keane sets out to "tell an unusual story about [Havel's] life by means of *tableaux vivants* that not merely pay homage to his love of theatre, but also resonate with the fragmentation of his life by historical events beyond his control"[8]. However, as suggested by the title, Keane's assertion about the tragic nature of Havel's life and legacy comes three years before he even left the Castle, and Keane's analysis is simply audacious in its prematurity.

James F. Pontuso's *Václav Havel: Civic Responsibility in the Postmodern Age* provides a very comprehensive philosophical analysis of the underlying tenets of

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[6] Edá Kriseová, *Václav Havel: The Authorized Biography* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993).
[7] Michael Simmons, *Václav Havel: The Reluctant President* (London: Michelin House, 1991).
[8] John R. Keane, *Václav Havel: A Political Tragedy in Six Acts* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Inc., 2000): 9.

Havel's thought, particularly his dedication to Heidegger's *dasein*.[9] Though a bit hard to follow, Pontuso's discussion is fascinating and provides valuable insight into the philosophical foundations of Havel's dedication to a civic society. James W. Sire's *Václav Havel: The Intellectual Conscience of International Politics* explores similar issues.[10] Sire's discussion of Havel's appreciation of the Kafkaesque notion of the absurd is especially compelling.

Though there is clearly an abundance of scholarship on Havel's public life, the sources and methodology employed always seem to result in Havel's presidency as an enormous domestic failure. Havel's diminished popularity rating, inability to prevent the Velvet Divorce, and poor relationship with Parliament are all used to quantify the President's success, or lack thereof, in leading the Czech people. However, these analyses completely disregard any consideration of Havel's actual presidential agenda. Well aware of the limitations of his office, Havel simply wanted to bring about a positive change in society. This change could not be quantified by popularity ratings or GDP returns, but rather in a basic sense of civic decency among Czech citizens. Havel entered the presidency espousing the same values he had throughout his years as a dissident—the need to follow one's conscience, accept personal responsibility, and respect the inalienable principle of certain fundamental human rights. Such ideals do not take root in a society overnight, but rather take years to develop and ultimately be internalized. The test of Havel's legacy, therefore,

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[9] James F. Pontuso, *Václav Havel: Civic Responsibility in the Postmodern Age* (New York: Roman & Littlefield, 2004).
[10] James W. Sire, *Václav Havel: The Intellectual Conscience of International Politics* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2001).

can only be measured by the enduring relevance of these principles in the Czech Republic, and the world, long after Havel's exit from politics, and, now, from life.

Through a humanistic approach utilizing Havel's numerous essays, interviews, plays, and, most importantly, speeches, this paper will explore the continuities in Václav Havel's evolving political thought from his earliest days as a dissident until the last years of his life. Havel's texts underscore the President's only true agenda as being one of responsibility toward the future of Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic. And though Havel left office with a waning public approval rating, and his domestic accomplishments beyond the Velvet Revolution were often overlooked, or perhaps misunderstood, his Presidential legacy is not lost, but is only just beginning to be appreciated.

The numerous volumes of Havel's published speeches and plays trace the evolution of Havel's political thought from his earliest days as a dissident playwright to his final years of life. Published in *Open Letters* and *The Art of the Impossible*, as well as on Havel's personal website, Havel's speeches provide valuable insight into the President's political philosophy and its various applications to the continually shifting political and social climate. In a sense, Havel's presidential speeches serve as a continuation of his dissident-era essays. These sources are well supplemented with Havel's personal diary entries and lengthy published conversations, particularly *Disturbing the Peace* (a 205-page "conversation") and *To the Castle and Back* (a thematically organized compilation of interviews, journal entries, policy memos, and Castle agendas). Both texts contain in-depth conversations with Czech journalist Karel Hvizdala, who unabashedly questioned the President on nearly

every aspect of his existence, varying from his push to expand NATO to how a President goes on a date. Questions as complex as "And what would you say to all the critics of NATO who consider it an instrument of Western imperialism and an association of politicians and generals who serve the expansion of mighty multinational corporations, or at least defend their current territories?"[11] forced the President not only to distill his position on paramount issues, but also explain the rationale behind those positions. This combination of journal entries and extensive interviews serves as a lens onto the thought process behind Havel's various policy stances, and further testifies to the seminal role of conscience and personal responsibility in Havel's political thinking.

Personal remembrances of experiences with Havel add an additional dimension and an interesting texture to the review of Havel's political thought. The weekly-published *Radio Free Europe* reports closely covering the post-Soviet transitional period were also extremely helpful in putting Havel's thought in the broader political and social landscape. These articles, too, underscored Havel's profound political significance beyond Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic's borders, and further elucidate Havel's stature as an international political icon.

The ultimate test of Havel's legacy is a Czech appreciation for the values he tirelessly espoused, making the most useful sources available the numerous obituaries reviewing Havel's life and time in the Castle. While the obituaries certainly review Havel's fall from grace with the Czech people, as well as the numerous obstacles he faced as President, the articles, too, detail the unprecedented

[11] Václav Havel, *To the Castle and Back* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 297.

Czech response to Havel's death. Streets became candlelit shrines, and flowers, flags, handwritten thank-you notes adorned the base of the equestrian statue of Saint Wenceslas, and student groups gathered throughout the city remarking at Havel's irrefutable legacy to the Czech nation. As written in *Lidové noviny,* the oldest Czech daily, "People didn't have to agree with him, but they believed what he said. Let's not allow the rest of the world to see better than us what sort of person he was. Everyone ought to remember and to place him where he belongs. At the peak of history, and not only in our own lifetime."[12] Though Havel's unwavering dedication to his principles initially may have damaged his popularity, Havel's insistence on civic responsibility serves as a lens onto the Czech conscience. And in a world where post-communist democracies are reverting back to one-party states (Hungary, Ukraine, Russia), it seems especially fitting that we examine the roots of arguably the most stable democracy in the former Soviet world.

The last conversation between Havel and long-time friend and translator, Paul Wilson, occurred in March 2011. Wilson had stopped in Prague en route to Cairo, where he was going to observe the unfolding events of the Arab Spring. Wilson visited Havel to receive permission for the President's *The Power of the Powerless* to be translated into Arabic and distributed amongst the dissidents. Though excited by the idea of the new translation, Havel wondered whether the

[12] BBC News, "Havel mourned by Czech, Slovak press," http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/mobile/world-europe-16254557 (accessed April 2, 2011).

Arabs were ready for Democracy. "Vásek, were you guys ready for Democracy?"

Havel responded, "*touché".*[13]

[13] Paul Wilson, "Interview with Paul Wilson: Václav Havel's Enduring Legacy," PRI's The World, http://www.theworld.org/2011/12/vaclav-havels-enduring-legacy/ (accessed March 31, 2012).

The Consequences of an Inescapable Paradox

Despite the numerous restrictions imposed on Czechoslovak society following the August 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion that ended the Prague Spring, Václav Havel worked tirelessly to publicly denounce the surrounding political and social conditions. Highlighting the regime's complete hold on power, as well as the ubiquitous presence of the Czechoslovak Secret Police (StB), Havel stressed that Czechoslovak society had been plunged into a state of existential fear that prevented citizens from pursuing their lives in an honest, moral, and responsible way. Though Havel's ideals landed him in prison, and resulted in his internationally celebrated works being banned within his own country, these principles also brought the playwright, and his cause, a level of international support that would ultimately underlie Havel's impact on weakening the communists' grip on power. Havel's unabated dedication to his pursuit of fundamental human rights, as exemplified by Charter 77 and his numerous *samizdat*-published essays, rendered him a simultaneous enemy of the state and hero of the people. Havel emerged in 1968 as a little known playwright, but by the end of 1989, he was an international figure leading his country to overthrow its oppressive communist regime.

Labeling 1968 a "schizophrenic year," Havel saw the mythologized accounts of the Prague Spring as tremendously misleading. Though the euphoria toward the surrounding liberalizations was certainly "intoxicating" to the young playwright, Havel was still hesitant to regard the conditions as permanent and unconditional; the reform communists were still communists, and the overarching party dogma, though punctured, remained a guiding ideology. The result of this situation was an

inescapable paradox. "[The leaders] both sympathized with and feared the rising expectations in society. They drew support from it without fully understanding it…They wanted reform, but only within the limits of their limited imaginations. The nation, in its euphoria, generously overlooked all this..."[14]

Published in *Literární Noviny* in April 1968, Václav Havel's "On the Theme of an Opposition" sought to capitalize on this spirit of reform while still highlighting its very real limitations. The article stressed the need to end single-party rule; if the Party leaders wanted to maintain their power, they had to earn it through representing the will and interests of the people. Suggesting the creation of at least two opposition parties of equal strength to the ruling communists, Havel outlined his sketch for a democratic socialist system in Czechoslovakia. An absence of external restraints on the communists' power would lead to a regression to the conditions of the 1950s. "Without democracy throughout society, inner party democracy cannot be maintained for long. It is not the latter that guarantees the former; it is the former that guarantees the latter."[15] Though Havel would later question his right to have penned a political rallying call when he had no intention of personally actualizing his suggestions, "On the Theme of an Opposition" stands as the first publicly voiced demand for the creation of a new democratic opposition party in Czechoslovakia, underscores Havel's dedication to democratic ideals, and, as such, is an irrefutable testament to the future president's willingness to espouse certain principles regardless of their popularity.

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[14] Václav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace,* 95.
[15] Václav Havel, *Open Letters* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990): 27.

The August 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion came as no surprise to Havel. The Kremlin's increasing restlessness toward the country's liberalizations was well known to everyone in Czechoslovakia, except the government. Ludvik Vacuilk's *Two Thousand Words* had been written and widely circulated, and the demands for continued liberalizations had now been made publicly.[16] In June 1968, at a soiree held by Premier Cernik, Havel spoke to Dubcek about the threat of Soviet intervention. "I told him he should get rid of any illusions about the Kremlin, that he shouldn't always be on the defensive and trying to pacify public opinion in the hope that it would somehow help…"[17] By that time, the dichotomy between Soviet and Czechoslovak expectations had widened, and the reform communists were essentially trapped in a paradox of their own making. Thrusting himself into the center of public life, Havel invoked his awareness of the buoyed spirit and solidarity of the nation and rallied the Czechoslovak people to action. "I stressed, perhaps somewhat more energetically than others, that every concession gives rise to further concessions, that we cannot back down, because behind us there is only an abyss, that we must keep our promises and demand that they be kept."[18]

In August 1969, Havel wrote to Dubcek, urging that the politician defend the liberalizations of the Prague Spring, accept responsibility for what materialized, and build on the spirit of solidarity throughout the nation. "People would realize that it is always possible to preserve one's ideals and one's backbone; that one can stand up to lies; that there are values worth struggling for; that there are still trustworthy

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[16] *Two Thousand Words* has been cited as one of the principal forces motivating the Soviet invasion.
[17] Václav Havel*, Disturbing the Peace,* 100*.*
[18]Ibid, 110.

leaders; and that no political defeat justifies complete historical skepticism as long as the victims manage their defeat with dignity."[19] Havel pressed for the leader to utilize his platform to enact an atmosphere of truth, of morality, of conviction. Later reflecting on the letter, Havel remarked, "I had written that even a purely moral act that has no hope of any immediate and visible political effect can gradually and indirectly, over time, gain in political significance…the same idea that...to this day I am trying to develop and explain, and, in various ways, make more precise."[20] Havel's letter remained unanswered. Dubcek left office quietly, neither taking the decisive action Havel stressed nor bowing to the Soviet pressure to denounce the Prague Spring.[21] Though Dubcek's autobiography never mentions Havel's letter, the text goes to great lengths to defend Dubcek's position of "retreat"; to Dubcek, though democracy could not be expanded, the previous achievements could still be defended. "Painful and humiliating concessions had to be made to prevent, or at least postpone, something much worse. I cannot say that I am proud of that time or that I remember it without bitterness…"[22] Dubcek's failure to defend publicly the principles underlying the Prague Spring starkly contrasted Havel's repeated emphasis on the enormous impact of even small acts of opposition, that words alone, a simple denunciation, had the power to bring about change. This theme would continue to be explored throughout Havel's writings, most notably in his 1989 *A Word About Words*. Following his condemnation of the politics of

[19] Václav Havel, *Open Letters,* 43.
[20] Václav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace,* 115.
[21] In protest of Dubcek's submission to Soviet pressure, student Jan Palach lit himself on fire at the top of Wenceslas Square in January 1969.
[22] Alexander Dubcek, *Hope Dies Last: The Autobiography of Alexander Dubcek* (New York: Kodansha America Inc., 1999): 226.

normalization in the "Ten Points" petition in August 1969, Havel and the nine other petitioners were accused of subversion, and Havel's internationally celebrated works were banned in his own country.

As Havel predicted, the conditions in Czechoslovakia deteriorated. "An exhausted society quickly got used to the fact that everything once declared forever impossible was now possible again, and that the often unmasked and ridiculed absurdity could rule once more…an era of widespread demoralization began..."[23] Censorship was reinstated, social organizations had to declare their loyalty to the communists, and fear of the secret police pervaded every crevice of society. Havel withdrew to the mountains, where the first half of the decade blended together as a "single, shapeless fog." Realizing it was time to effect change himself, Havel, in his first major public statement since his 1969 blacklisting, wrote to General Secretary Husak, Dubcek's successor.

Highlighting Czechoslovakia's spiritual, moral, and social crisis hidden behind a government-manufactured society, "Dear Dr. Husak" indicted Husak for deliberately creating a government system based on "fear and apathy" that would ultimately spur the "gradual erosion of all moral standards, the breakdown of all criteria of decency, and the widespread destruction of confidence in the meaning of values such as truth, adherence to principles, sincerity, altruism, dignity, and honor"; life would sink to a "vegetable level."[24] Havel stressed the existential vulnerability of all Czechoslovak citizens to the government's insatiable demand for power, which ultimately drew the nation into a web of passive collaboration. "So far,

[23] Václav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace,* 119.
[24] Václav Havel, *Open Letters*, 62.

you and your government have chosen the easy way out for yourselves, and the most dangerous road for society: …deepening the spiritual and moral crisis of our society, and ceaselessly degrading human dignity, for the puny sake of protecting your own power."[25]

Havel further explored these themes in his 1975 adaptation of John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera,* which chronicled the socially debilitating effects of living in a world completely devoid of trust. The play's "underground London" was an obvious parallel for the Warsaw Pact-invaded Czechoslovakia where the Red Army was "temporarily stationed" and secret police collaboration had become the norm. The play unveiled the existential fear that had characterized post-1968 Czechoslovakia, and underscored how all Czechoslovak citizens, in one way or another, were indicted in this system of deception to the point where it was difficult to discern who was the victim and who the victimizer. This is best revealed in the play through Polly Peachum's relationship with her father, William Peachum, and her husband, Macheath. William and Macheath are heads of rivaling criminal gangs, and William urges his daughter to seduce Macheath, in the interest of helping her father's business. Initially compliant in the plan, Polly ultimately falls in love with Macheath and decides to expose her father's scheme. Macheath had been aware of the trick all along, and assailed Polly for taking so long to realize her father's true intentions. "You should have agreed with everything he said and promised to go along with him so he'd think that his plan was working. And then you'd simply feed him false information, which I would provide, and eventually we'd snare him in his own

[25] Ibid, 83.

net…But now you've spoiled everything!"[26] Chicanery and deception are prioritized over honesty and acts of conscience, which only result in the character being further victimized.

Havel's 1975 development of the *samizdat* publication *Expedition Edition* (*Edice Expedice*) provided another avenue to advance his principles of truth and democratic humanism. Building on the tradition of the preexisting *samizdat Padlock Press*, *Expedition* introduced Czechoslovaks to ideas being freely discussed throughout the rest of the world, but forbidden throughout the Soviet bloc. Once again, Havel's efforts reinforced Czechoslovakia's strong cultural history, and strengthened the country's ties to the surrounding European community. Between 1975 and 1981, 122 volumes were published under "*EE*," rather than the author's individual name; Havel assumed all responsibility for the endeavor's inherent risks.

The March 1976 arrest of the Plastic People of the Universe (PPU), a rock band at the center of the hippie underground, was an immediate rallying call to Havel. The PPU had startled the communists with its music style and overall disheveled appearance. The group's music was blacklisted throughout Czechoslovakia, and the members were quickly arrested for performing at an underground concert. Titling their debut album "Egon Bondy's Happy Hearts Club Banned" after the Czech poet Egon Bondy who had, quite literally, been banned by the Party, the PPU, though satirical, had no defined political positions or even any sort of political past. To Havel, the arrests had the potential to set a cataclysmic precedent. "This case had nothing whatsoever to do with a struggle between two

[26] Václav Havel, *The Beggar's Opera* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001): 23.

competing political cliques. It was something far worse: an attack by the totalitarian system on life itself, on the very essence of human freedom and integrity."[27] Havel and Jiri Nemec, a former co-worker from *Tvar,* aligned to raise international awareness of the PPU arrests. The world was outraged. Despite Husak's failed attempts to reduce the charges (hoping to minimize international backlash), the group was tried for subversion in September 1976. Comparing the trial to a scene from a Kafka novel, Havel described the court proceedings in his *samizdat*-published "The Trial". "This façade of judicial thoroughness and objectivity began to appear as a mere smokescreen to hide what the trial really was: an impassioned debate about the meaning of human existence…whether one should be 'reasonable' and take one's place in the world, or whether one has the right to resist in the name of one's own human convictions."[28] Echoing themes from the open letter to Husak, the essay stressed the government's quest for a society of sameness, one devoid of cultural diversity and intellectual exploration. The heterogeneous Czechoslovak support for the PPU indicated a widespread awareness of the common threat the trial represented.

Noting the solidarity throughout the country for the PPU cause, Havel held several meetings to discuss the state of human rights in Czechoslovakia. These meetings aligned 1950s dissidents with former communists ("antidogmatics") with young musicians, all of whom demanded a change in the nation. The Helsinki Accords had recently been signed by the Czechoslovak government, and now the group could use official policies to underpin their cause. Declaring itself a group of

[27] Václav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace,* 129.
[28] Václav Havel, "The Trial" in *Open Letters,* 105.

dissidents "bound together by the will to devote themselves, individually and collectively, to the respecting of civil and human rights around the world," *Charter 77* was born.[29] The Charter was to be a citizen's initiative, and its initial declaration was to be "an expression of collective will" that represented to interests and values of the Czechoslovak nation, largely consistent with those of the rest of Europe.[30] The Charter united "Trotskyites to reform communists, various types of socialists, people who declared themselves liberal, Christian Democrats, or conservatives, as well as many people who refused to be put into any kind of predefined political pigeonhole" all in the name of anti-totalitarianism. And though the Charterists never abandoned their personal positions, the movement, led by Havel, had bestowed upon the people a greater appreciation for the big picture. "It was fascinating to see how the existence of a common enemy, and a common anti-totalitarian program based on the idea of human rights, led to everyone pulling on the same end of the rope in certain fundamental matters."[31] Havel, along with Jan Patocka, Pavel Landovsky, and Jiri Nemec, collected 242 signatures for the document, to be mailed January 5, 1977.[32]

In the midst of mailing the document to the signatories, the group was chased by the authorities and held in custody for 48 hours. Charter supporters lost their jobs and passports, and the spokespeople (Havel, Patocka, and Hajek, at the time) were interrogated daily. Under the headline *Ztroskotanci a samozvanci,* "The Shipwrecked and the Self-Appointed", *Rudé Právo* published an official response to

[29] Edá Kriseová, *Václav Havel: The Authorized Biography*, 108.
[30] Václav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace,* 132.
[31] Václav Havel, *To the Castle and Back,* 20.
[32] Edá Kriseová, *Václav Havel: The Authorized Biography*, 112.

the Charter: "a case of anti-governmental, antisocialist, anti-populist, and demagogic libel" and its creators "bankrupt Czechoslovak reactionary bourgeoisie."[33] Nevertheless, the Charter, by the very nature of its existence, catalyzed change within the nation; what had long been said in private was publicly declared, and people even signed their names to it. "What Can We Expect from the Charter?", Patocka's last essay before his March death during a hostile interrogation, espoused the invaluable importance of solidarity and standing behind one's convictions. "Yielding has never led to any improvement, but only to further worsening of the situation…This is not a call for impotent threats, but for dignified, unintimidated, and truthful behavior…behavior which impresses simply by distinguishing itself from official behavior."[34] Echoing themes from Havel's 1969 letter to Dubcek, Patocka urged the nation to defend, and distinguish, itself and its values from the government's abuses of power.

Havel's January 1978 arrest for events fabricated by the communist police laid the groundwork for the creation of The Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Persecuted (VONS). Building on the Charter's human rights commitment, VONS aimed to expose the government's baseless charges and look after the prisoners' families. After a series of meetings with other VONS members and the Polish Committee for Workers' Defense (KKOR), Havel penned "The Power of the Powerless" in October 1978 for a joint Polish-Czechoslovak publication on freedom and power. Dedicated to the memory of Jan Patocka and his philosophy of 'living in truth,' the essay exposed the ruling "post-totalitarian" government's social and

[33] Ibid, 122.
[34] Eda Kriseová, *Václav Havel: The Authorized Biography,* 130.

cultural manipulation as reducing individuals to "little more than tiny cogs in an enormous mechanism."[35] The dissident movements, however, needed to "demonstrate that living within the truth is a human and social alternative," and recognize the significant pressure exerted through thought, alternative values, and social self-realization.[36] Building on the existential fear discussed throughout his letter to Husak and *The Beggar's Opera*, Havel deepened his analysis of the passive collaboration forced by the regime's existential hold on society. As explained in Michael Simmons' *The Reluctant President, The Power of the Powerless* "comes to the bold conclusion that dissidents are merely individuals who express the need for 'a different way of thinking'".[37] Havel was undermining the notion that one needed special credentials to resist the regime's manipulation, and, in so doing, reminded Czechoslovaks of their innate ability to resist the regime's existential oppression. All it took was prioritizing one's conscience over the ideological platitudes disseminated from above.

Despite the continuous punitive sanctions from the government, Havel refused to abandon his cause. "I understand this duty not just as a duty toward one's own human integrity, but as a duty to one's fellow citizens."[38] On May 29th, Havel and 15 other VONS members were arrested for subversion and held in pretrial custody. Though the October trial resulted in a four-and-a-half-year prison sentence, it also provided Havel with an opportunity to assail publicly the government's gross

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[35] Václav Havel, "The Power of the Powerless" in *Open Letters,* 186.
[36] Ibid, 198.
[37] Michael Simmons, *Václav Havel: The Reluctant President* (London: Michelin House, 1992): 135.
[38] Václav Havel, "Reports on My House Arrest" in *Open Letters*, 229.

abuse of power, its assumption of its own infallibility, and reassert his faith in the true spirit of Czechoslovakia. "I am not behaving out of hostility toward our country. On the contrary, it proves that I continue to have faith in the cause of justice in this country and that I have not lost this faith."[39]

Later compiled into *Letters to Olga,* Havel's weekly letters to his wife underscored Havel's unabated commitment to democratic ideals, the power of the individual, and the importance of living an authentic and honest life. Letter 95, written September 26, 1981, unveils Václav's confidence in the power of man's integrity and his responsibility to both himself and Being as a whole. "[Responsibility means] vouching for ourselves in time…it means standing behind everything we do and being prepared to defend our position or existentially bear witness to it anywhere and at anytime. (That is why responsibility is also the main key to human identity.)"[40] This profound sense of personal and civic responsibility both guided Havel's later life in politics and helped shape his immediate outlook on his time in prison. Havel repeatedly refused the communists' offerings of an early release in exchange for a simple retraction of his principles; accepting the offers would simply be irresponsible. And despite his sense of misery toward his imprisonment, Havel swore that he would never succumb to feelings of hatred, even toward his jailers. "In lengthy prison terms, sensitive people are in danger of becoming embittered, developing grudges against the world, growing dull, indifferent, and selfish. One of my main aims is not to yield an inch to such threats…I have different opinions of different people, but I cannot say that I hate anyone in the

[39] Edá Krisneová, *Václav Havel: The Authorized Biography,* 175.
[40] Václav Havel, "Letter 95" in *Letters to Olga,* 233.

world. I have no intention of changing in that regard. If I did, it would mean that I had lost."[41] This willingness for forgiveness would, too, stay with Havel throughout his later days in the Castle.

Havel's pneumonia-induced premature discharge from jail in February 1983 released him to a changed nation. In "I Take the Side of Truth," Havel's first interview after his release from prison, Havel discussed his observations of an invigorated national awareness. "These people understand that whenever freedom and human dignity are threatened in any one country, they are under threat everywhere, that this signifies an attack on humanity itself and on the future of all of us."[42] Havel also underscored the increasingly blurred distinction between official culture and the underground, a phenomenon Havel paralleled to the situation existing in the 60s, "when the process of self-realization and spiritual liberation likewise began somewhere on the borders between official and unofficial culture…this process, of course, culminated in 1968, when the powers at be…could no longer ignore the true condition of our society, of its soul."[43]

This awareness of the blurred line between official and underground culture led to the development of *O Divadle,* a theater review magazine that, in its support and contributors, united dissidents, *strukturáks* (those in officially recognized organizations), the underground, and reform Communists. *O Divadle* formed a new intellectual center in a once static society. By the fifth issue, the *strukturáks'* once

[41] Ibid, 77.
[42] Václav Havel, "I Take the Side of Truth" in *Open Letters*, 239.
[43] Václav Havel, *Open Letters,* 246.

necessary pseudonyms died out, and by the sixth Havel was again arrested.[44] On the occasion of being awarded the 1986 Erasmus of Rotterdam Prize, Havel again highlighted the power of the individual to effect change. "You must start with yourself, gather courage, and be a fool in the spirit of Erasmus, for only a fool would take on the power of state bureaucracy with no weapon but his feeble typewriter."[45]

Reacting to the police demonstrations on the 20th anniversary of the Warsaw Pactinvasion, the Charter aligned with the Movement for Civic Liberties (HOS) and released "Democracy for All" in October 1988. Boldly stating that the Communist Party no longer had the right to hold a leading role in government, the petition echoed themes from Havel's 1968 "On the Theme of an Opposition" and Magor's summer 1988 "Enough is Enough."[46] While Havel was (again) held in custody on subversion charges, this time for "Democracy for All", Czechoslovakia celebrated the 70th anniversary of the Democratic Republic. The riot police's brutal beating of peaceful demonstrators served as a wakeup call for Czechoslovaks: the surrounding talks of *perestroika* were mere empty rhetoric.[47] The growing dichotomy between official policy and actual conditions closely paralleled the paradoxical society Havel noted in 1968.

The government's few concessions to social demands for change proved insufficient. The January 1989 brutality toward the citizens' desire to commemorate Jan Palach's 1969 suicide was an unequivocal indication of the extent the communists would go to maintain their hold on power. Despite informing the

[44] Ibid, 226.
[45] Edá Krisneová, *Vaclav Havel: The Authorized Biography,* 219.
[46] Ibid, 229.
[47] Edá Krisneová, *Václav Havel: The Authorized Biography,* 219.

authorities of a planned student suicide demonstration, Havel was arrested for merely being present in Wenceslas Square during Jan Palach week. In responding with violence, the communists had managed to revive the spirit of Jan Palach, and connect the cause to a young generation that hadn't even been alive in 1968. At the end of his Kafkaesque trial, after two witnesses were dismissed for admitting they had been forced to testify, Havel accused the government of acting like "an ugly girl who breaks a mirror because she believes it to be guilty of what it reflects." Maintaining his innocence and continued devotion to the cause, Havel delivered his closing argument: "I do not feel guilty; I have nothing on my conscience. If I am sentenced, however, I will accept my sentence as a sacrifice for a good cause, a sacrifice that is trivial in light of the absolute sacrifice of Jan Palach, whose anniversary we wanted to commemorate."[48] Havel was sentenced to nine months in prison. He would return to a united society that had "finally begun to awaken from the anesthesia into which it had been plunged in 1968 by the Soviet occupation."[49]

[48] Edá Krisneová, *Václav Havel: The Authorized Biography* 237.
[49] Václav Havel, *To the Castle and Back,* 52.

Havel ná Hrad

By the time Havel was released from prison, in May 1989, Czechoslovak society had finally begun to appropriate the values Havel had espoused since his earliest days as a dissident playwright. Building on the promises of reform communism of Gorbachev's *perestroika*, Czechoslovak citizens demanded the liberalizations enacted throughout the surrounding Eastern Bloc. Nevertheless, to a regime that owed its power to the invasion of Soviet tanks, democratization was an especially taboo notion. First expressed in 1968, Havel's reservations about the possibility of reform communism were proving to be increasingly warranted. The government clung more tightly to its already loosened grip on society, and, in so doing, managed to undermine its remaining vestiges of power. Rallying behind Havel's longstanding demands for a restoration of human rights and the rule of law, Czechoslovakia challenged the regime's hold on power. In a manner of two weeks from the start of the Velvet Revolution, Husak's regime was overthrown and Havel was nominated as President of the newly democratic Czechoslovak state.

Havel's nine-month prison sentence for his involvement in Jan Palach week spurred society into action, and he became the embodiment of the values he had long espoused. Formerly detached bands of society now aligned to rally for individual freedom, human rights, and a restoration of truth and morality into politics. The social climate of 1989 was a direct parallel to that of 1968, only this time the world was a different place. Gorbachev's *perestroika* was in full swing in the surrounding Soviet bloc, and Czechoslovakia was beginning to hold the government to the standards of its own rhetoric. By March, over 1000 intellectuals had signed a

petition demanding Havel's release from prison. The request was denied, but Havel's sentence was reduced by a month. The following month, the quarterly writers' meeting in Slovakia appointed Jiri Krizian to head an 18-person council to demand Havel's release at the midway point of his sentence in May. The resulting petition's 38,000 signatures boasted the names of *strukturaks* and workers alike, truly representing the alignment of disparate factions of society. A trial was held on May 17, and Havel was subsequently released.[50]

The *strukturaks*' willingness to sign their names to petitions formerly reserved for dissidents signified a growing disregard for the communists' authority, as well as the continually increasing support behind Havel as a dissident leader. Recognizing the dramatic shift in the social climate, Havel joined with Jiri Krizan and Sasha Vandra to write "Just a Few Sentences", a petition (again) demanding that the Czechoslovak government fulfill the promises of *perestroika*. The team planned to release the document after it had amassed 300 signatures. By September, the petition's 40,000 signatures included dissidents, workers, *strukturaks*, and communists, and again underscored the country's growing restlessness with the government's empty rhetoric. Values that Havel had championed throughout his life were now manifested in common rallying calls of "long live the charter," irrefutable testaments to the country's deep yearning for freedom.[51] To Havel, the petition was

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[50] At a coming back party held by friends, Václav recounted how he had been treated especially well in prison. He shared a cell with a television with two communists indicted for embezzling while in positions of power, and the prison manager would sporadically stop by to see if there was anything Havel needed. Havel's cellmates could not believe they were sharing a cell with someone they had read repeatedly such terrible things about in Rudé Pravo.

[51] Václav Havel, "Testing Ground" in *Open Letters,* 375.

"completely straightforward, something every civilized person could agree with, though of course granting it would have meant, essentially, a change of regime."[52] Nevertheless, the regime's critical reaction to the petition signaled its inability to adapt to the changing times; as far as Havel was concerned, democratic communism simply could never be democratic.

Building on *Just a Few Sentence*'s remarkable level of support, Krizan wrote to Prime Minister Adamec suggesting a meeting of the Czechoslovak government with the newly formed Bridge Initiative. Adamec agreed to meet, contingent upon a ten-day embargo of the petition and an exclusion of Havel from the actual talks. But the prime minister's agreement proved to be yet another empty promise; once again, the communists had fallen short of their proclaimed dedication to reform. The combination of Gorbachev's dismissal of the Brezhnev Doctrine and the Polish and Hungarian governments' repudiation of their involvement in the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion had resulted in an ideological hardening within the Czechoslovak Communist Party, already arguably the most conservative and repressive regime in the Eastern Bloc.[53] Unable to keep apace with history, the leadership clung even more tightly than before to its increasingly challenged power. Though the Party's ultimate demise may have been inevitable, it was this inability to compromise, or even recognize the need to do so, that hastened the Revolution.

In *A Word About Words,* a speech written for his October reception of the Peace Prize of the German Booksellers Association, Havel illuminated the inherent

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[52] Václav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace,* 53.
[53] Jiri Pehe, "Czechoslovakia: An Abrupt Transition," *Radio Free Europe: Report on Eastern Europe* (January 5, 1990): 13.

power of words to change history and, ultimately, bring peace. After the Czechoslovak people's forty years under the Communists' "generalizations, ideological platitudes, clichés, slogans, intellectual stereotypes, and insidious appeals to various levels of [their] emotions," the country was finally equipped to disregard the "sterile words". It was time for Czechoslovakia to restore a language of meaning, rooted in morality and a sense of responsibility, and one that acknowledged the true complexity of the world: a "community of thousands and millions of unique, individual human beings…[that] must never be lumped together into homogenous masses…'classes' 'nations' or 'political forces' extolled or denounced, loved or hated, maligned or glorified."[54] Building on *The Power of the Powerless'* exposure of the communists' forced homogeneity and conformity, a *Word on Words* further underscored Havel's belief in the power of the individual to effect change simply by listening to one's conscience rather than what was being broadcast from above. This notion was especially important in Czechoslovakia, whose "national character", according to Havel, was "a heightened caution, a mistrust of change, a reluctance to move quickly, an unwillingness to make sacrifices, a tendency to wait and see, and a certain skepticism".[55] This, again, speaks volumes to Havel's lifelong belief in the inherent power of simply living in truth.

The police brutality shown toward the officially sanctioned November 17th peaceful student demonstrations proved to be the ultimate tipping point; the Velvet Revolution had begun. Havel quickly returned from Hradacek to attend a meeting at the Realistic Theater to discuss the possibility of a strike. The older theater strikers'

[54] Václav Havel, "A Word About Words" in *Open Letters,* 387-388.
[55] Václav Havel, *To the Castle and Back,* 55.

preferences for a more tempered demonstration were overruled by younger demands for a comprehensive strike. Hardly old enough to remember 1968, this younger generation would make no concessions for their freedom. The reform communism of 1968, with its inherent ideological restrictions, was now inadequate. Society was truly invigorated, and there was no turning back.

The November 19, 1989, development of Civic Forum would carry the Revolution to its ultimate fruition. A loose organization of writers, actors, activists, and basically anyone who opposed the ruling powers, Civic Forum embodied the conglomeration of individual wills united against a dehumanizing government that had long overstayed its welcome. As recalled by Havel biographer and Civic Forum member Edá Kriseová, "Anyone who felt he was a member of Civic Forum, was. Whoever agreed with our demands was one of us".[56] Havel wanted to build on the diverse solidarity that characterized the *Charter* movement, and transform the support into something more "general and lasting". At the time of its creation, Civic Forum never intended personally to take power, but was merely supposed to "articulate the public will and the longing for a change".[57] And while the Civic Forum leaders' personal inexperience in politics (the totalitarian system made no room for a democratic political class) partially explained the group's initial stance, there, too, existed the realization that a declared intention of power could undermine the broad base of support the movement enjoyed. "What [people] wanted to hear was 'The emperor is naked,' not 'I want to be the emperor in his place'."[58] This

[56] Edá Kriseová, *Václav Havel: The Authorized Biography*, 247.
[57] Václav Havel, *To the Castle and Back,* 61.
[58] Ibid*,* 61.

understanding demonstrated a remarkable level of tact, as well as a complex appreciation for the unique political and social climate, that would guide the Civic Forum throughout its forthcoming meetings with the Party. Recalling Havel's first address to Civic Forum, Kriseová explained the enchanting character of Havel's leadership in the movement. "He put words to what everyone had felt for a long time, what they thought without being able to formulate it properly or recognize what they should do first and what later. He united people who held different opinions and gave them a joint program."[59] Within its first days of existence, Civic Forum demanded the immediate resignation of President Husák, Communist Party leader Milos Jakes, Interior Minister Miroslav Stepan, the release of prisoners of conscience, and an investigation into the police action on November 17.[60]

Civic Forum quickly alerted the international media to what was materializing in Prague, hoping to build on the recent success of democratization in Poland and Hungary. The news of the 'revolution' was unknown not only to the surrounding world, but also to those in the Czechoslovak countryside. Videos were sent to Austrian and West German television stations, and students traveled to rural factories to inform the workers. Several of the country's newspapers even began to print candid accounts of the demonstrations, leaving the government with little choice but to react. On November 21, the communists and The Bridge, a subset of Civic Forum, held their first meeting, again on the condition that Havel would not partake in the actual talks. It was as though Havel, the antithesis of everything the regime stood for, was too much to bear; negotiating with Havel would be the

[59] Eda Kriseova, *Václav Havel: The Authorized Biography,* 247.
[60] Ibid.

equivalent of acknowledging the very real limitations of *perestroika,* and even the precariousness of the government's own power. For a regime that derived its legitimacy from an invasion that even its culprits were repudiating, the increasing *political* legitimacy of a dissident was simply devastating.

The following day, standing on the Socialist Party's publishing house's balcony, Havel addressed a crowd of 100,000 in Wenceslas Square, urging that the government respond to the will of the people and accept Civic Forum's demands.[61] In the following days, additional Warsaw Pact countries condemned the 1968 invasion, and an increasing number of Party members and unions came out of the woodwork to criticize Jakes' avoidance of listening to, and compromising with, the people. Disgruntled former Party members became increasingly popular at Civic Forum meetings.[62] The regime could no longer rely on either Party members or the Soviets for support. On November 24, Milos Jakes, the General Secretary of the central committee, and his entire politburo resigned; Civic Forum's first request had been met.[63] Alexander Dubcek made his first appearance since the Prague Spring on a Wenceslas balcony beside Havel. The year 1989, under Havel's tutelage, was proving to be the happy ending 1968 never saw. Dubcek recalled the appearance in his autobiography, *Hope Dies Last.* "The powerful roar of the crowd as we appeared still echoes in my ears. Several hundred thousand people stood there cheering…and

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[61] Michael Simmons, *The Reluctant President* (185.
[62] Jiri Pehe, "Czechoslovakia: An Abrupt Transition," *Radio Free Europe: Report on Eastern Europe* (January 5, 1990): 14.
[63] The Civic Forum, "Proclamation on the Establishment of Civic Forum," 19 November 1989, Cold War International History Project, *Documents and Papers*, CWIHP.

that, for me at least, closed the circle of historic events that had started in October 1967, when I launched the revolt against Novotny."[64]

Using the (relatively) spacious *Laterna Magika* theater as its headquarters, Civic Forum worked day and night to keep apace with history. The November 26 agreement between Adamec and Civic Forum on a two-hour nationwide workers' strike was immediately followed by a second demonstration on the Letná Plain. Adamec, Dubcek, and Havel stood beside one another onstage, and Adamec addressed the people. His initial warm recognition quickly subsided, when his speech turned to a string of the usual communist platitudes and empty promises. The crowd cried "Too late! Too late!", and the Prime Minister was booed off the stage.[65] On November 27, eighty percent of the country's workforce went on strike in a public display of support for Civic Forum. Capitalizing on this showing, Civic Form strengthened its demands to include free elections by June 1990 and a true representative government. Adamec and his government, unwilling to bow to Civic Forum's demands, resigned. Recalling Adamec's resignation, Havel stressed, "I never specifically demanded his resignation, but continual demands could not be fulfilled by someone still working in the framework of reform communism".[66]

December 10, International Human Rights Day, witnessed a remarkable victory for Civic Forum and the people of Czechoslovakia. After fourteen years as President, Husak resigned, and Havel, albeit reluctantly, formally announced his candidacy for President. Later recalling his hesitancy to accept the nomination

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[64] Alexander Dubcek, *Hope Dies Last*: *The Autobiography of Alexander Dubcek* (New York: Kodansha America Inc., 1993): 271.
[65] Eda Krisneová, *Václav Havel: The Authorized Biography,* 256.
[66] Václav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace,* 65.

considering his complete lack of experience in politics, Havel explained, "Since I had been saying A for so long, I could not refuse to say B; it would have been irresponsible for me to criticize the Communist regime all my life and then, when it finally collapsed (with some help from me), refuse to take part in the creation of something better".[67] Popular signs and graffiti reading *Havel ná Hrad* (Havel to the Castle) and *Havel je král* (Havel is king) were found throughout the streets, once again reflecting the broad base of support for Havel and his work. And while democratization may have occurred later in Czechoslovakia than it had in Poland and Hungary, it was the only country where it happened completely, and in a manner of two weeks.

While the belatedness of the Velvet Revolution may have been a product of the earlier described "reluctant to move quickly" Czech character, the speed with which the regime toppled was paradigmatically Czech, according to Havel. "[Czechs] wait for the right moment, but what they do next—as much as possible without great sacrifice—is worth the wait."[68] There is no doubt that the Velvet Revolution occurred at a very strategic moment in history. Nevertheless, it cannot be stressed enough that the specific leadership was a crucial component of the Revolution's ultimate success. Throughout the negotiations with the Adamec regime, Havel exemplified a remarkable level of political tact not only in maintaining Civic Forum's demands, but also in never losing sight of the big picture. The courtesy he displayed toward the outgoing regime, despite the great adversity it had inflicted on him, underscored Havel's devotion to a principle of responsibility toward Being, and its

[67] Václav Havel, *Summer Meditations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992): xvi.
[68] Václav Havel, *To the Castle and Back,* 55.

corollary, forgiveness. The country that emerged from the Velvet Revolution was a place of euphoria and pride, but the burden of history would not dissolve overnight. Havel, well aware of the problems ahead, clung to his lifelong devotion to morality, individual freedom, and honesty, declared the only possible option to lead his country to *live in truth.*

A Vision for the Future

When Havel accepted his presidential nomination, he inherited a country with a failing education system, an exploited workforce, a polluted environment, and a stagnant economy. However, most worrisome to the former dissident was the country's "contaminated moral atmosphere." While forty years of communism had surely contributed to this decrepit state, the culpability did not exclusively rest with the former government. As highlighted in his first New Year's address to the nation as President, Havel saw the Czechoslovak people as, too, liable. "We had all become used to the totalitarian system and accepted it as an unalterable fact of life, and thus we helped to perpetuate it. In other words, we are all—though naturally to differing extents—responsible…none of us is just its victim: we are also its co-creators."[69] To Havel, the country's moral crisis was at the fundamental core of its other issues; rule of law, democratic government, market economy, ecological revival, education reform, and the widely desired "return" to the European community would be impossible fantasies in a state that was anything other than "humane, moral, intellectual and spiritual, and cultural."[70] When Havel assumed power, he oversaw far more than a political transition; Havel incited a revolution of the Czechoslovak conscience.

In the months following the Velvet Revolution, euphoria swept through Czechoslovakia. The country's newfound freedom was widely embraced, and the people looked toward the future optimistically; Havel was a national hero viewed as following in the footsteps of the country's first president, T.G. Masaryk. Hardly a

[69] Václav Havel, "New Year's Address to the Nation" in *Open Letters,* 4.
[70] Václav Havel, "Politics, Morality, and Civility" in *Summer Meditations,* 18.

year out of prison, Havel traveled to all corners of the globe to discuss the state of affairs within his country. Tirelessly underscoring the Kafkaesque nature of his presidency, Havel repeatedly stressed that it was precisely this sense of absurdity and "fundamental non-belonging" that motivated his political undertakings. In an April 1990 speech at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Havel elaborated on his connection to Kafka. "The lower I am, the more proper my place seems… And every step of the way, I feel what a great advantage it is…as president to know that I do not belong in this position and that I can at any moment, and justifiably, be removed from it."[71] So long as he would continue to subordinate his political behavior to the higher moral imperative he called human conscience, he figured he could not go far wrong. The underlying tenet of this moral imperative was responsibility—responsibility for the past, for the present, to the future, and to the whole of humanity; responsibility to Being.

Havel's guiding sense of moral responsibility far outlasted his country's initial jubilation toward the events of 1989. While the proceeding months witnessed the rise of fervent nationalism, economic disappointment, political crossfire, and ultimately the dissolution of his beloved Czechoslovakia, Havel clung tightly to his principles, and never failed to embody the values he espoused to his people. Though his popularity, at times, waned, and criticisms surged of his overly Velvet-like governing style, Havel's impact on the transformation process can hardly be disputed. "His way of treating others, even former opponents, with civility helped to restore that dignity and that power, and it was through thousands of such small acts, as

[71] Václav Havel, Speech to the Hebrew University (Jerusalem: April 26, 1990) in *The Art of the Impossible,* 30-31.

much as through his writing and his towering example, that he brought his society closer to healing."[72]

Never losing sight of the big picture, Havel believed that Czechoslovak public life needed to be returned to the public. This would be an impossible feat without "broad conceptual aims" that coordinated all areas of policy reform, and a government and citizenry that trusted and understood one another. While this understanding needed comprehensively to span all areas of society, Havel saw the economic transformation as the cornerstone of the country's transition. "The program of breaking up the totalitarian system and renewing democracy would founder if it refused to destroy the pillar of that system, the source of its power and the cause of the material devastation it led to—that is, the centralized economy."[73] Despite his staunch support for a transition into a market economy via privatization, Havel maintained that the long-term success of the economic transformation would be impossible without any state intervention. The reforms could not hinge on the marketplace operating by its own projected rules known only to a specific set of experts in the field; after forty-two years of rampant economic corruption, the state needed to delineate very clear guidelines known to everyone. "The marketplace can work only if it has its own morality—a morality generally enshrined in laws, regulations, traditions, experiences, customs—in the rules of the game, to put it simply."[74]

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[72] Paul Wilson, "Václav Havel: 1936-2011," New York Review of Books, (accessed March 25, 2011).
[73] Václav Havel, "What I Believe" in *Summer Meditations,* 63.
[74] Ibid, 67.

Again injecting morality into public life, Havel saw the economic reforms as necessarily guided by "the powers as unscientific as healthy common sense and the human conscience".[75] Havel resented the "intolerant dogmatism" and "sheer fanaticism" that had grown to accompany the reform process, and he likened the "the cult of 'systemically pure' market economics" to the once-espoused Marxist ideology: they both derived from "the certainty that operating from theory is essentially smarter than operating from a knowledge of life, and that everything that goes against theoretical precepts, that cannot be made to conform to them, or that goes beyond them, is, by definition, worthy only to be rejected."[76] To Havel, this was most dangerous for its inherent dismissal of the necessary human component of the reform process; allegedly scientific principles were no replacement for the "moral and social sensitivity" derived from a basic human understanding of the complexities of any situation.[77] Fully cognizant of the extent of the mess left by the former government, Havel maintained that, to the great dismay of his Finance Minister and future Prime Minister, Václav Klaus, "there are problems the marketplace cannot and will not solve by itself. In our country particularly…we cannot depend on the influence of the fledgling market mechanisms alone to solve everything for the government."[78]

Havel recognized that the state would have a gradually diminishing role in market affairs, but it first had to establish clear guidelines by which the economy would operate. To this end, three basic goals were advanced: new legislation had to

[75] Václav Havel, *Summer Meditations,* 61.
[76] Ibid, 66.
[77] Ibid, 71.
[78] Ibid, 72.

be established to set the framework for the developing economic system; tax rates and other macroeconomic guidelines had to be set; and, finally, the government had to establish certain "everyday" policies to determine the conditions for government involvement in the economic development.[79] This required a level of integration of all policy-making decisions that reached far beyond a vision for the country's future economy; there needed to be a "strategic and conceptual grasp" of the long-term interests of Czechoslovakia. Using his "hated word 'plan'", Havel stressed that "genuinely comprehensive thinking" was needed to establish an internal logic by which all reforms had to be carried out. "Energy and agricultural policies, ideas about a better industrial structure, ecological aims, foreign policy—all of these must be carried out in a co-ordinated fashion...Only against this background can all the proposed legislation, decrees, and micro- and macro economic decisions have a common logic, consistency and meaningful inner architecture."[80] It must be stressed that Havel's support for simultaneous market privatization and state intervention rendered him neither a socialist nor a "free market dogmatist", as critics on both sides charged. Instead, Havel's lack of any ideological affiliation enabled him to pursue a policy simply in the long-term interest of Czechoslovakia. Though dedicated to a market economy, Havel recognized that a fully functioning free market would not magically appear now that the country had declared itself a place of democracy.

Havel's espousal of a "meaningful inner architecture" must be clarified in the midst of his scathing reviews of the blinding tendencies of ideological thinking. As

[79] Václav Havel, *Summer Meditations,* 77.
[80] Ibid, 78.

paradoxical as it may sound, the proposed "plan" was simply one of no plans: a plan whose only guiding logic was one that put the long-term and comprehensive interests of Czechoslovakia first in a moral, decisive, and straightforward fashion. "If there is to be any chance at all of success, there is only one way to strive for decency, reason, responsibility, sincerity, civility, and tolerance, and that is decently, reasonably, responsibly, sincerely, civilly, and tolerantly."[81] This policy consistency projected Havel's lifelong devotion to living in truth onto his country in the sense that it necessarily mandated that all Czechoslovaks assume a sense of responsibility and investment toward the country's transformation process. Referencing the warring factions over the country's future political structure, Havel repeatedly stressed that genuine progress could never occur so long as ideological loyalties continued to mold political decision making, and, in so doing, obscure the true task at hand. "We constantly let ourselves become distracted from our work by our petty warring, our tendency to wrangle among ourselves, our lack of mutual trust, lack of self-confidence, lack of generosity, by our fear of one another; in short, by our inability to bear the burden of our freshly won freedom. To repeat: expertise that is not grounded in responsibility will hardly save us."[82]

Havel's stress on personal responsibility had necessary implications for the redesigned structure of the country. Hoping to build a civil society in which all citizens felt a personal stake in the government, Havel maintained that government should be decentralized with numerous avenues for civic involvement. Havel had hardly forgotten the toxic apathy that had characterized "normalized"-

[81] Václav Havel, *Summer Meditations,* 8.
[82] Ibid, 79.

Czechoslovakia; the President hoped to build a state attuned to the interests and values of its citizenry. He aimed to revive the concept of a Czechoslovak *domov* or 'home', a home that the citizenry regarded with a sense of comfort, pride, and belonging. The key to this was networks of localized governments through which "the rich, nuanced, and colourful life of a civilized European society will emerge and develop."[83] Again asserting the need for interpersonal trust and responsibility, Havel paralleled his vision for the citizenry's stake in the government to his economic vision for employees' stake in their employers' businesses. Havel hoped to pursue this through a system of coupon privatization whereby employees could buy into their workplaces' ownership to experience an individual investment in the business' success. "A firm's prosperity will depend as much on the people who work there as on the owner. Once this is recognized and accepted, people can feel that what they do and how they do it matters."[84]

In sharp contrast to the charges that the state's Prague-centric policies ignored Slovak needs, Havel continually stressed the need for reforms to improve the efficiency, reliability, and profitability of domestic agricultural industries, which were predominantly located within Slovakia. Havel maintained his belief in the need for a human dimension of all honest work, and stressed that farming should be returned to the farmers: "the farmers themselves know best—and new farmers will quickly learn—how to renew the ecological balance, how to cultivate the soil and gradually bring it back to health."[85] The communists had tried to centralize farming

[83] Ibid, 104.
[84] Václav Havel, *Summer Meditations,* 107.
[85] Ibid, 111.

under an inefficient bureaucracy that operated exclusively according to a highly scientific set of guidelines, and completely ignored the interests, needs, and very valuable insights of the actual farmers. The proposed ecological and agricultural reforms, too, related back to Havel's emphasis on creating a Czechoslovak home in which all citizens felt a profound sense of belonging. Now that farming was back in the hands of the farmers, agrarians could again experience a sense of human connection toward their work and its environment. "Villages and towns will once again begin to have their own distinctive appearance, culture, style...we will not have to feel ashamed of the environment in which we live. On the contrary, that environment will become a source of quiet, everyday pleasure for us all."[86]

Havel's emphasis on strengthening the sense of 'home' within Czechoslovakia necessarily impacted his view of domestic and foreign policies. Seeing the state and society as mirrors of one another, Havel hoped to oversee a government that looked after its own. "Society is a mirror of its politicians…those who find themselves in politics, therefore, bear a heightened responsibility for the moral state of society, and it is in their responsibility to seek out the best in that society, and develop it and strengthen it."[87] The state, by the very nature of its existence, was to provide an avenue for citizens' self-recognition and self-fulfillment; in essence, Havel believed the state had an existential duty to inspire its citizens to achieve their maximum potential in the world. "To establish a state on any other basis—on the principle of ideology, or nationality, or religion…means making a single stratum of our home superior to the others, and thus

[86] Václav Havel, *Summer Meditations,* 106.
[87] Ibid, 4.

detracting from us as people, and detracting from our natural world. The outcome is always bad."[88]

Pursuant of his vision of a state built on the foundation of certain inalienable rights and freedoms, Havel saw the government as responsible for providing Czechoslovaks with a completely revamped healthcare system. Much like Havel's plan for the government structure, the healthcare system was to be decentralized and humanized to facilitate the citizenry's access to services; Havel hoped to abandon the "bureaucratic nightmare" that had so long characterized medical care.[89] While this plan to partially privatize healthcare was met with some criticism for the perceived increase in prices, Havel asserted that the only real changes effected by the restructured system increased both efficiency and patients' choices in doctors and treatment options. Healthcare certainly was not free under the former government, but was indirectly paid through mysterious taxes; "the only difference will be that we will know precisely how much we are paying, to whom, for what, and why."[90] A health insurance system would also exist for citizens unable to afford specific and necessary health procedures. Recognizing the need to humanize healthcare, Havel stressed that patients would no longer be treated as "anonymous biological mechanisms"; doctors would now regard patients as "individual, unique, and familiar human beings".[91]

Havel saw the education system as, too, in dire need of humanization. Teachers, like politicians, needed to lead by example, and the overly specialized communist-era relic of a school system needed to be injected with a general education curriculum in the

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[88] Ibid, 32.
[89] Václav Havel, *Summer Meditations,* 119.
[90] Ibid, 121.
[91] Ibid, 120.

humanities. "The role of schools is not to create 'idiot-specialists' to fill the special needs of different sectors of the national economy, but to… send out into life thoughtful people capable of thinking about the wider social, historical, and philosophical implications of their specialties."[92] Havel believed education should be universally accessible, with teachers who had a liberal background in the humanities, and, like other facets of society, decentralized and diversified. The strong foundation laid by education would necessarily lead to an inclination toward civic involvement. Havel, always cognizant of the big picture, recognized that a state that provided its students with a rich education would foster a citizenry inclined to give back to the country. "The schools must also lead young people to become self-confident, participating citizens; if everyone doesn't take an interest in politics, it will become the domain of those least suited to do it."[93]

Havel's unabated devotion to building a civil society that would enhance Czechoslovaks' feeling of belonging in their country, too, worked towards the President's foreign policy initiatives. Recognizing that Czechoslovakia could never find its place within the European community if it hardly recognized its own cultural identity, Havel envisioned a foreign policy built on the same fundamental principle of human rights that he fostered within his own country. The policy would not "promote the interests of our country unscrupulously, to the detriment of everyone else" but would rather see Czechoslovakia's interests "as an essential part of the common interest…guided by a 'higher responsibility' in which the world and the global dangers that threaten it are seen comprehensively; a humane, educated, sensitive, and decent policy".[94] Havel identified

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[92] Ibid, 117.
[93] Václav Havel, *Summer Meditations,* 118.
[94] Ibid, 99.

four underlying principles for Czechoslovakia's foreign policy: first, the country would exhibit unabated support for initiatives working toward a new Europe characterized by "unity in diversity"; second, the aforementioned European community would be founded on the "spiritual, intellectual, and political values" that have prevailed in Western European democracies and that would facilitate the former Soviet Bloc countries' return to their own traditions, roots, and ideals, from which they were "forcibly alienated"; third, the policy would recognize Europe's longstanding ties to the North American continent, and would ensure that the unity of the European community would never obscure the alliance between the two continents; finally, the foreign policy would necessarily support the budding democracies in Eastern European countries, and, in so doing, would unequivocally acknowledge that "the era of *perestroika* and endless compromise, and of the whole reform Communist idea, has finally come to an end."[95]

As always, Havel saw it as his own duty to exemplify personally the change he hoped to effect. Despite numerous criticisms for not immediately and brashly quitting the Warsaw Pact, Havel proved a remarkable level of political tact in pursuing a deliberately "non-confrontational" policy. Any other route would have prevented Havel from assuming his eventual role as overseeing the pact's disbandment in July 1991. This was especially significant because the agreement happened in Prague, the city the Warsaw Pact troops had invaded just over two decades earlier. Havel later called this agreement one of "the strongest moments in [his] life"; "Many years ago, I had been a beleaguered and rather ridiculous private in the sappers, the traditional Soviet graveyard for the class enemy, and now, as liquidator of the of the two most powerful military alliances in the

[95] Václav Havel, *Summer Meditations,* 83-86.

world, I was overwhelmed by the absurdity of it all."[96] Havel's involvement in the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact was paradigmatic of his larger policy aims of viewing Czechoslovak interests in the larger framework of the European community. And, in remarkable accordance with Havel's earlier espoused need for an internal logic or architecture for all policy initiatives, many of his international initiatives worked to the benefit of his domestic agenda, and vice-versa. The internationally perceived success of the summer 1990 elections was a crucial factor in Czechoslovakia's February 1991 accession as the first post-communist state into the Council of Europe. The Council of Europe was the oldest and largest political organization in Europe, and one that Havel had publicly espoused as based on the spiritual and moral values that were the "best possible foundations for a future integrated Europe".[97] Furthermore, Havel built on his international stature from these initial foreign policy accomplishments to push successfully for the 1999 NATO expansion, and the Czech Republic's 2004 EU accession.

Having tirelessly espoused a vision of a Czechoslovakia, and a Europe, united under the principles of civic involvement, community, tolerance, and personal responsibility, Havel was understandably distraught over the nationalistic politics sweeping through the Federal Assembly. Not only did Havel view his country's potential dissolution as a threat to Czechoslovakia's growing role in the European community, but he also saw the divisive politics as immediately detrimental to the construction of a new constitution and ultimately fatal for Czechoslovakia's personal identity. In essence, a

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[96] Václav Havel, *To the Castle and Back,* 294.
[97] Václav Havel, Speech to the Council of Europe (May 10, 1990) in *The Art of the Impossible,* 42.

Czechoslovakia literally divided by fervent ideology was a betrayal of the values he promised to endorse from his position as President. "If we were to go our separate ways now, it would be a rejection…of the ideals that brought about our common state... the responsibility we bear now goes beyond this moment. It is not just a responsibility to our contemporaries, but to those who came before us, and, above all, to those who will come after us."[98] Havel understood the Slovak frustration toward historically being governed from Prague, "the territory of its bigger and older and richer brother," but he also viewed it as a phase whose passing would bring considerable benefits to both Slovaks and the whole of Czechoslovakia. "All nations must go through…a phase of struggle for a state of their own, and they must experience national sovereignty before they can mature to the point of realizing that membership in supranational bodies based on the notion of a civil society not only does not suppress their national identity and sovereignty, but in a sense extends it, strengthens it, and nurtures it."[99] Nevertheless, despite Havel's consideration for Slovaks' growing sense of self-awareness, he spared no sympathy for Slovak politicians' usage of deliberately inflammatory rhetoric to exploit the sentiments for personal political gain at the grave expense of the country. This was best exemplified through the revival of the communist-era slogan "first federalization, then democratization," a mantra especially frustrating to Havel for its blindness toward the plain fact that "there can be no federation without genuine democracy".[100]

The roots of the steadily increasing Slovak separatism dated back to the country's earliest days in existence, but the sentiments were temporarily placated by the

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[98] Václav Havel, *Summer Meditations,* 35.
[99] Václav Havel, *Summer Meditations,* 29.
[100] Ibid, 27.

communists' creation of a superficial federation in 1968. However, the overthrow of the totalitarian system gave rise to an "enormous and dazzling explosion of every imaginable human vice", fervent nationalism included. Coming to the fore in what became known as the "hyphen controversy," Slovak patriotism manifested itself in March 1990 discussions set to rid the country of its communist-era name, the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. Proposing the Czecho-Slovak Republic, the Slovaks asserted that any other name would under-represent the country's Slovak population. Urging parliament to resolve the issue, Havel demonstrated a remarkable level of understanding toward the Slovak cause. "All of us know that this 'hyphen,' which seems ridiculous, superfluous, and ugly to all Czechs, is more than just a hyphen. It in fact symbolizes decades, perhaps even centuries, of Slovak history."[101] Havel also recognized the political and constitutional crisis the disagreement had the power to effect. Havel vowed as President to create a political atmosphere and overall climate of "generosity, tolerance, openness, broadmindedness, and a kind of elementary companionship and mutual trust"[102]; his politics and morality went hand in hand.

Despite Havel's positive influence on the hyphen controversy, the Czech-Slovak disagreements were far from over. Throughout the following months, the leaders from the two republics participated in numerous power sharing negotiations, but the politicians were implacable. Nevertheless, without agreement over the desired structure of the country, a constitution was far from possible, and Havel's envisioned civic society could never materialize. Stressing the unequivocal need to come to some sort of agreement,

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[101] Peter Martin, "The Hyphen Controversy," *Radio Free Europe: Report on Eastern Europe* (April 20, 1990): 14.
[102] Václav Havel, "Politics, Morality, and Civility," in *Summer Meditations,* 9.

Havel explained, "There is no way around it: the rule of law is back. …Our everyday lives depend as much on the kind of constitution we have as they do on the kind of country we live in. After all, it is becoming true once again that the constitution is what defines our state."[103]

After a series of deadlocked negotiations throughout 1990, a temporary agreement was signed in December. Mirroring a new conception of the state as a voluntary federation that derived its powers from two sovereign republics, the agreement also highlighted the precariousness of the relationship between Czechs and Slovaks. Despite Slovak leaders' demands that the agreement be passed unchanged, both Czech and Federal Assembly leaders effected several minor amendments to the draft. Furious, Slovak Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar allegedly responded by threatening to declare the supremacy of Slovak laws over those of the federation. As reported by Radio Free Europe, Czech Prime Minister Petr Pithard, in a dramatic speech to the Czech National Council, argued that such a move would constitute "a grave and perhaps irreversible step" toward undermining the Czechoslovak federation.[104] Despite denying the allegations, Meciar publicly assailed the country's two leading economic reformers, Vaclav Klaus and Vladimir Dlouhy, for a Czech-centric economic policy insensitive to the conditions in the Slovak Republic. Meciar went on to condemn Federal Prime Minister Jan Calfa for abandoning the Civic Forum principles. Calfa responded by accusing Slovak leaders of "not merely reacting to a growing crisis, but, in fact, actively

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[103] Václav Havel, "In a Time of Transition" in *Summer Meditations,* 25.
[104] Jiri Pehe, "Power-sharing Law Approved by Federal Assembly," *Radio Free Europe: Report on Eastern Europe* (December 21, 1990): 7.

fueling it by sowing conflict and threatening the Federal Assembly with ultimatums".[105] The negotiations over Czechoslovakia's future were being molded by personality conflicts and individual political agendas.

Fearing the situation would further escalate and result in the division of Czechoslovakia, Havel used what deliberately little presidential power he possessed and weighed in on the situation on December 10.[106] Havel charged that Czechoslovak politicians were exploiting nationalistic sentiments to further their own political agendas; the federal state was "not threatened this time from outside, as so often in the past, but from inside".[107] Havel, well known for his disdain of power, pushed for the parliament to permit the use of a national referendum to avert constitutional crises and to extend the presidential powers to ensure the preservation of the country. Though Havel's suggestions were tabled and the parliament maintained his very constrained presidential power, the bill was finally passed. The agreement, valid for only the 18 months during which the federal and republic constitutions were projected to be drafted, was considered a success that would clear the way for future constitutional and economic reforms. Unfortunately, however, the conflict was far from over.

Havel's involvement in the initial power sharing negotiations underscores the complexities of his position as president. Noting that "only when I found myself face to face with the threat of political and constitutional crises [did I understand] that the

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[105] Ibid, 8.

[106] Very few political powers actually resided with the position of Czechoslovak President. While most powers constitutionally rested with Parliament, the President had the power of veto (which could be ultimately overridden by Parliament). Havel would later claim he believed the position of President to be, most importantly, a platform for moral leadership.

[107] Jiri Pehe, "Power-sharing Law Approved by Federal Assembly," 7.

president doesn't really have much authority at all, especially to resolve such crises,"[108] Despite the limitations of Havel's presidential powers, Havel was in an extraordinary position to espouse, loudly and publicly, a certain sense of moral righteousness onto the citizens. When Havel intervened in the power sharing agreements, his very specific requests to parliament were essentially ignored or tabled. Still, his underlying message, one stressing the need to set aside petty differences and consider the long-term interests of the country, did, in fact, resonate, at least temporarily. Believing the collapse of the federal state to be a "grave misfortune for all Czechoslovak citizens," one that would result in a number of geopolitical, economic, and moral consequences, Havel thrust himself into the debate to remind the arguing politicians that the discussions signified far more than the clash of political ideology. Two days after Havel spoke, the amendment was approved and signed into law. By this time, having perceived the situation as defused, Havel was already away on an official visit to Spain and Portugal.

Despite Havel's constant reminders of the benefits of maintaining a unified Czechoslovakia, disagreements over the federal structure persisted. The various issues left unresolved in the December negotiations proved impossible to circumvent, and the numerous power sharing discussions repeatedly resulted in stalemates. Regardless of the country's unified achievements, Czech and Slovak partisanship was on the rise. Following fragmentation within the Public Against Violence, the Civic Forum's Slovak counterpart, over Meciar's "authoritarian and aggressive style of leadership," [109] the Prime Minister of Slovakia formed a breakaway faction with a very telling name, *Hnutie*

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[108] Václav Havel, *Summer Meditations,* 50.
[109] Rick Fawn, *The Czech Republic: A Nation of Velvet* (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach, 2000): 30.

Za Demokratické Slovensko or Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS). Also splintering over policy differences among leaders, the Civic Forum had by now divided into Klaus' center-right *Občanská Demokratická Strana* or Civic Democratic Party (ODS) and Foreign Minister Dneistber's center-left *Občanské Hnutí,* or Civic Movement (OH). Individual visions, and the pride they represented, were proving to be considerably powerful forces in shaping the country's political landscape. Unfortunately, this came at great expense to a unified federation.

Havel continued to offer various proposals and amendments to the federation, but his suggestions were continually pushed aside. Proposing a constitution that sought to "simplify" and "rationalize" the structure of the federal legislative assembly, Havel publicized a constitutional draft that would "ensure that no unforeseen political, government or constitutional crisis could occur for which there was not a constitutional response, so that there would be no danger of a *de facto* collapse of state power".[110] The constitution employed a system of checks and balances to prevent any abuses of power, a minority veto, a smaller and more efficient Federal Council that would be distinct from the Federal Assembly, and a national referendum. Nevertheless, Havel's proposed constitution was mostly ignored and his input in future negotiations was similarly marginalized. The disagreements persisted.

Havel's frustration toward the power sharing stalemate was particularly directed at the "dictatorship of partisanship" that had materialized in the Federal Assembly. Though Havel had nothing against political parties, he resented the devastating consequences of power-seeking politicians acting only in the interest of a narrow

[110] Václav Havel, *Summer Meditations,* 49.

ideology, and corresponding personal ambition, at the grave expense of the country's future. "Not a single law is passed without a debate about how a particular stand might serve a party's popularity. Ideas, no matter how absurd, are touted purely to gain favor with the electorate...coalitions are formed solely to create the illusion of size and weight."[111] Meciar's September 1991 "Initiative for a Democratic Slovakia", urging the Slovak National Council to adopt the Declaration of Slovak Sovereignty and a "full" Slovak constitution[112], further intensified the situation, but the Czech politicians' own petty factionalism was, too, forestalling any progress. "Normally, none of this would bother me; such ferment is, after all, part of democracy and gives it much of its character…What troubles me is that, in our present serious situation, all this displaces a responsible interest in the prosperity and success of the broader community."[113] By February 1992, an agreement was constructed to retain a common state, but each republic recognized the sovereignty of the other; equal representation between the two republics existed in the Federal Assembly. Even this was considered too much of a concession by the Slovak National Council.[114]

Disagreements and separatist requests persisted throughout 1992, and the summer elections ultimately proved decisive in determining the fate of Czechoslovakia. It was once anticipated that, by this time, a federal constitution would exist and Czechoslovakia would be in the midst of a "calmer and more stable era, one founded on a new, more

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111 Ibid, 55.
112 Jiri Pehe, "Czech-Slovak Conflict Threatens State Unity," *Radio Free Europe: Report on Eastern Europe* (January 1992): 84.
113 Václav Havel, *Summer Meditations,* 55.
114 Rick Fawn, *The Czech Republic: A Nation of Velvet,* 32.

rational, truly democratic constitutional and political system."[115] Nevertheless, by June 1992 the Czechoslovak political climate was anything but calm and stable. Apart from the Communist Party, the Czech and Slovak Republics did not have any overlapping parties on the ballot. The irreconcilable ballots underscored the republics' dichotomous agendas. Still, even at this time, the numerous public opinion polls taken throughout the country indicated that the vast majority of both Czechs and Slovaks opposed dissolving the Federation. The election of Klaus and Meciar as prime ministers of the Czech and Slovak Republics, respectively, intensified the already implacable separatist politics that were overwhelming parliament.

Immediately following the parliamentary elections, Klaus and Meciar met to discuss the future relationship between their respective republics; it quickly became evident that the political differences were insurmountable. Though Meciar had campaigned on a platform for a sovereign Slovakia, he favored the existence of a loose confederation between the two republics. Conversely, Klaus maintained that it was either a strong federation or nothing. Klaus' uncompromising position was due largely to his loyalty to a policy of extreme laissez-faire market privatization, a plan that would be slowed by the republics' heterogeneous economic conditions. Despite Havel's repeated insistences that the breakup of Czechoslovakia would be a "grave misfortune" for all Czechs and Slovaks for economic, geopolitical, and moral reasons, those at the helm of the government were prioritizing ideological loyalties and partisan politics over the long-term interests of their country. Following the bid for sovereignty in the Slovak National

[115] Ibid, 22.

Council and Slovak parliament members' blocking Havel's bid for reelection, Havel announced his resignation on July 18, 1992.

While Havel's resignation did not come as much of a surprise in the wake of his country's political chaos, it must be asserted that this resignation was, too, consistent with the principles Havel espoused from his earliest days in office. "I am certainly not interested in being the president of a divided country, or a merely ceremonial president…I will not…fight to retain my position…[and] I will not give up certain values that I as a citizen believe in, but that I will always fight for them."[116] In his resignation speech read over Czech and Slovak national radio and television, Havel explained "I can no longer fulfill the obligations [of the presidency]… in a way that would be in harmony with my character, convictions, and conscience." Nevertheless, Havel maintained that he would continue to work toward the "friendly coexistence" of the two countries.

Despite Havel's inability to prevent the dissolution of the Federation, his first two years as president should not be seen as a political failure. Having inherited a position with extremely limited powers, Havel oversaw the beginning stages of his country's moral revolution. Publicly acknowledging Czechoslovakia's sordid past, especially its expulsion of the Sudeten Germans and passive collaboration with the Soviet-installed government, Havel forced his country to understand its history in the hopes of shaping a present that would enact a better future. And though the dissolution of Czechoslovakia was now largely in the hands of Klaus and Meciar, the graceful manner in which Havel resigned speaks volumes to the principles he would continue to espouse as the first president of the Czech Republic.

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[116] Václav Havel, *Summer Meditations,* 132.

Czechs and *Švjek*

Later admitting that the prospect of becoming the first president of the Czech Republic was "not a very pleasant one", Havel returned to the Castle in 1993. Yet again, his deference to his personal responsibility trumped the pull of his private interests. Despite an intense longing to return to a private life that he had not enjoyed since the Prague Spring, Havel recognized that his public refusal to run for President would undermine the legitimacy of the newly formed Czech state. And though Klaus supported Havel's candidacy, Havel regarded the support as almost publicly demanded of the ODS due to his impressive international popularity as an icon of post-communist democracy. It was this obsession with public popularity, compiled with Klaus' overly ideological and stubborn thinking, and pompous attitude, that initially deterred Havel from accepting the nomination. "I simply had no appetite for continual dealings with him, for a constant tug-of-war with him over this or that, or for enduring his constant hectoring. By that time, I knew him well enough to imagine what it would be like."[117] While Havel's predictions for the perpetual disagreements with his Prime Minister sadly materialized, Havel's legacy still resonates throughout the Czech Republic, and perhaps now, in the months following his December 18, 2011 death, more emphatically than ever before.

Havel's sense of responsibility toward assuming the presidency did not derive from any delusions about the limited nature of his power. Well aware of the office's limited political powers, Havel returned to the Castle due to his recognition of the Czech people's need for a president who would set particular moral standards, and, in so doing, guarantee a certain sense of stability and order in the

[117] Václav Havel, *To the Castle and Back,* 170.

country. Throughout the two presidencies' interregnum period, numerous Czechs came to visit Havel and urged him to return to the Castle; there was a genuine belief that his presence would inspire a necessary feeling of calm among the Czech people. After months of petty warring between politicians loyal only to their party affiliations, it was as though the country needed Havel and his morality-infused politics to set it back on track. Acknowledging the "mystical" nature of this, Havel explained, "Everyone has to play his own role: it's up to the president to say you shouldn't steal, and it's up to the thief to steal. If the president were to say that stealing is okay, the thief would be very put out. It would call into question his whole identity."[118]

Havel's understanding of the president's role in setting certain moral standards and the existence of those standards, in turn, helping to shape the identity of the country served as guiding notions in his continued quest to build a civil society rooted in civic involvement, responsibility, and tolerance. Havel's value for a universally accessible civil society was at great odds with Klaus' vision for a heavily centralized top-down government that espoused a Czech identity on the basis of nationality. If left unchecked, not only could this outlook have dire consequences for the broader aims of European integration, but it would also trigger a Czech identity rooted in nationalistic and xenophobic sentiments.

Havel's fear of a Czech-centric national identity derived from his acute understanding of Jaroslav Hašek's *The Good Soldier, Švejk* and its applicability to Czech tendencies. Hašek's story chronicles a Czech soldier's journey fighting for the

[118] Václav Havel, *To the Castle and Back,* 171.

Austro-Hungarian army during World War I. Despite Švejk's continued disgruntlement with the absurdity of his superiors' orders, and his profound detachment from the empire for which he was risking his life, he never actively resisted their authority; ironic obedience was seen as favorable and ultimately advantageous to potentially dangerous opposition. Švejk served as an "epic hero" to many Czechs, an encapsulation of the Czech feeling of "non-belonging" to the various larger political systems into which they were repeatedly co-opted (Habsburg, Nazi, Soviet).[119] To Havel, Švejk, more than anything else, was a representation of the Czech inclination to prioritize self-doubt over good conscience, play the victim, and define the national identity against the backdrop of an "other". Hašek's character, therefore, was hardly an epic hero to the President, but rather a cautionary tale for future generations.

One of the most pressing issues for the new Czech state was how to deal with the existing lustration legislation. Havel understood the Czech longing to punish those who had collaborated with the former Communist regime, but he fundamentally opposed the existing legislation that systematically criminalized individuals on the basis of political ideology. Though screening of former government officials had been conducted since Czechoslovakia's earliest post-communist days, the official Lustration Law, enacted in October 1991, emerged in the midst of the fervent nationalism that threatened, and ultimately precipitated, the dissolution of Czechoslovakia. To Havel, the legislation's assumption of collective guilt "ran counter to the basic principles of democratic law", and criminalized

[119] Peter Steiner, *The Deserts of Bohemia:* Czech Fiction and Its Social Context, 65.

certain individuals "solely because they belonged to groups defined by their external characteristics".[120] Nevertheless, Havel signed the legislation, recognizing that the law would pass regardless, and that withholding his signature would only exacerbate his already strained relationship with a hostile parliament. Despite his official support of the legislation, the President repeatedly, and very publicly, denounced its guiding logic, especially after Parliament dismissed his suggestions to facilitate cases being heard on an individual basis and to establish something of an ethics tribunal to monitor the transition. Speaking at New York University in late October, Havel explained that his involvement with the lustration bill made him "want to underline five times a sentence that, until a few weeks [earlier], [he] thought unnecessary to underline even once: that the way of a truly moral politics is neither simple nor easy".[121]

The application of collective guilt was dangerously familiar to a small country that had repeatedly throughout history been co-opted into larger empires. As exemplified by the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans after World War II, Czechs had previously criminalized specific groups of people purely on the basis of party identification or nationality. Implicit in this tendency was a refusal to assume personal responsibility for the country's murky history, and, simultaneously, define the national identity against the backdrop of an "other". With lustration, Czechs not only absolved themselves of any complicity in the former regime, but they also furthered their historical trend of self-identifying on the basis of collective distinctness from an "other". The law precluded, or at least thwarted, the possibility

[120] Václav Havel, *The Art of the Impossible,* 85.
[121] Václav Havel, *The Art of the Impossible,* 85.

of a united citizenry; the "us" (the good Czechs) vs. "them" (the bad former Party members) dichotomy would be perpetuated. In effect, lustration enabled the Czechs to continue playing *Svejk.* Havel saw this as an obvious impediment to the envisioned civil society rooted in personal responsibility and tolerance, rather than ideology and nationality. Recognizing this, Havel repeatedly stifled excessive calls for anti-communist reprisal by asserting that the issue was far more complex than defining an easily identifiable enemy; the issue of dealing with the past necessitated a complex interpretation of historical events, regardless of how unflattering the results may be. Despite Havel signing the initial legislation, when the law came up for renewal in 1996, Havel used one of only twenty-two vetoes exercised in his entire thirteen years as President. Though Parliament ultimately overturned Havel's veto and renewed the legislation, it is worth nothing that the Czech Republic's law was far less stringent than those imposed in neighboring Poland and Hungary.

The issues surrounding the initial lustration legislation did not dissolve with Czechoslovakia, but persisted through the creation of the Czech Republic. While Meciar's Slovakia had deemed the law illegal (officially for reasons relating to its foundational principle of collective guilt), the Czech parliament, largely under the tutelage of Klaus' ODS party, continued to enforce the law. Klaus defended lustration, saying, "it makes possible for us to clarify who stands where, who really wants consequential change for our society…and who, on the other hand, wants to draw us into new experiments by the old experimenters we know so well."[122] Klaus'

[122] Jacques Rupnick, "Coming to Terms with the Communist Past: A Czech Case from a Comparative Perspective," Atlas of Transformation, http://monumenttotransformation.org/atlas-of-transformation/html/c/coming-to-

endorsement of lustration is not surprising for a number of reasons, chief among them, the Prime Minister's own communist-era credentials and vision for the future structure of democracy within the Czech Republic. The many dissident names that appeared on the lists of Czechoslovak secret police (StB) collaborators served as character assassinations for a considerable chunk of Klaus' critics. Furthermore, Klaus' conspicuous absence on the lists bolstered his own persona, and, in so doing, further legitimized his espoused approach for building democracy on the foundation of an unregulated market economy. Whereas Havel's criticism of the bill derived from a complex understanding of Czech identity, Klaus' endorsement seems to have been rooted in political opportunism. It is worth noting that Klaus has publicly condemned Hašek's tale, and has been quoted as saying that the sooner the Czech nation forgets about *Svejk and Svejkism,* the better it will be for everyone.[123]

Havel's understanding of the Czech tendency to define its identity against the backdrop of an other further reinforced his belief in the necessity of a civil society, "the only principle that makes it possible for people, freely and in peace with others, to give substance to their affiliations. A truly civic state, shored up by democratic law, is based on understanding for others, not on resistance to them."[124] In essence, Havel believed a civil society, in which each citizen felt a personal responsibility to take part, was the only way to rid Czechs of their historical *svejkism.* To this end, Havel advocated for the development of a network of tax-exempt non-profit

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terms-with-the-past/coming-to-terms-with-the-communist-past-the-czech-case-from-a-comparative-perspective-jacques-rupnik.html (accessed March 28, 2012).

[123] Paul Wilson, Speech at the Library of Congress' John L. Kluger Center, May 17, 2007.

[124] Václav Havel, *New Year's Address to the Nation,* January 1, 1994, Václav Havel, http://václavhavel.cz (accessed March 15, 2012).

organizations that would ensure that both the political parties and the government were responsive to influence from below. This proposition was fundamentally at odds with Klaus' belief in a "market without attributes, a standard system of political parties without national fronts and civic movements".[125] Klaus also vehemently opposed Havel's endorsement of tax-free non-profits. "The defenders of nonprofit organizations think they know best what is good for public welfare and they want to impose their views on us…[They] are trying to tell us that things done for profit are the devil's business, whereas the behavior that is not motivated by profit is a priori better."[126] Demonstrating his own sense of personal responsibility toward his country's future, Havel continued to pursue this agenda despite harsh political opposition, intense media criticism from what Havel called the pro-Klaus "snide brigade", and an ultimately waning popularity among the Czech people. After all, as had been asserted from his earliest days as President, Havel's involvement in politics derived from neither a lust for power nor a desire for popularity, but rather from a sense of profound responsibility to the whole of Being.

Reflecting Havel's conceptual vision for a Czech state with coordinated domestic and foreign policy objectives, Havel worked tirelessly for European integration and the expansion of NATO. Havel hoped his envisioned Czech civil society would merely be a microcosm of the diverse cooperation among nations in a broader European community. "The many different civil societies in the European democratic countries will, together, create the great European civil society. I see no

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[125] Jiri Pehe, "Civil Society at Issue in the Czech Republic," *Radio Free Europe: Report on Eastern Europe* (August 1994): 13.
[126] Ibid.

other and no better possibility for us than to accept this spirit of civic Europe. It is the only alternative that can rid us for good of the fear of others."[127] This sense of integration of all levels of Czech policy aims dated back to Havel's earliest days as President of Czechoslovakia, and manifested itself in his support for the formation of the Visegrád Group, a loose association of Czechoslovakia (and later the Czech Republic and Slovakia), Hungary, and Poland. While Havel believed that forming friendly mutual relations with other former Soviet Bloc countries, and pursuing a coordinated plan for European integration and spoke to the broader aims of pan-European cooperation, Klaus charged that such action would undercut the country's reputation and obscure the unique Czech identity. According to Havel, Klaus "a proud Czech,…couldn't bear the thought that we should join forces with anyone else, or that anyone so clearly less developed than we were could be in the same crowd… [He] saw [Visegrád] as some kind of left-wing intellectual expression of false solidarity which might cause us to lose our position as the crème de la crème".[128] And though Havel often bowed to Klaus' petty criticisms of the President's "unprofessional" behavior, including an "inappropriate" public expression of regret for Frank Zappa's death, Havel would not back down on anything "fundamental".[129] Klaus did not get his way for the Viségrad Group, whose cooperation ultimately paved the way for the country's 1998 accession to NATO and 2004 accession to the European Union.

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[127] Václav Havel, *New Year's Address to the Nation*, January 1, 1994.
[128] Václav Havel, *To the Castle and Back*, 156.
[129] Ibid, 204.

By 1997, the economy had slowed, and many blamed Havel's weak stance on lustration for the ease with which former high-ranking communists reinvented themselves as free market profiteers. Though Havel, from the very beginning of his presidency, denounced the "Mafia-like way" in which the communists were able to exploit the deregulated economy, the cult-like loyalty to a free market dogma prevailed. The minimal government regulation led to a process of rampant *tunélovani,* or "tunneling": investors, often former communist-era *nomenklatura*, inexpensively bought into Czech companies with no real intention of modernizing any industry, and would then quickly strip the assets, sell off the company, and redirect the profit into another firm, while still receiving government subsidies. The Czech economy quickly spiraled into a recession.[130] Fearing a nation-wide spike in unemployment, state-owned banks were left to bail out bankrupt companies, nearly causing the banks to collapse. Havel's fears for an unregulated economy had materialized, and the market had become controlled by corrupt individuals with very little concern for the future of the Czech state. "The invisible hand of the market' was supposed to take care of everything, but there are things it simply can't take care of, and I would even say that this glorious 'invisible hand' is capable of committing some highly visible crimes."[131]

In the midst of the economic tumult and the preparation of austerity measures for the dismal Czech economy, ODS, with Klaus as its leader, was exposed as complicit in a major financing scandal, complete with secret bank accounts and unpaid taxes. Over half of Klaus' cabinet resigned, and Klaus, now devoid of a staff,

[130] James F. Pontusso, *Václav Havel,* 156.
[131] Václav Havel, *To the Castle and Back,* 159.

was forced to do the same. Mirroring what Havel labeled a remarkable ability "to impose his own inverted interpretation of events on almost everyone", Klaus named the affair the "Sarajevo assassination"[132], directly referencing the events that sparked World War I, and implying that he was merely the victim of forces outside of his control.[133] Klaus, who had repeatedly professed the ridiculousness of Hasek's tale, was playing *svejk.*

In a December 1997 speech to Parliament, now popularized as the Rudolfinum speech, Havel expressed his profound repulsion toward the egregious behavior of the Czech government, and its consequences on the Czech perception of the state. "Many are convinced that honest business people fare badly while fraudulent nouveaux riches get the green light. The prevalent opinion is that it pays off in this country to lie and to steal; that politicians and civil servants are easily corruptible…[and] manipulated by suspicious financial groupings."[134] While Havel had no intentions of "undertaking a comprehensive sociological analysis" of the decrepit condition of the Czech state, he unabashedly asserted that the recent abuses of power reflected a complete absence of any sort of responsibility toward the country's future. "The declared ideal of success and profit was turned to ridicule because we allowed a situation in which the biggest success could be achieved by

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[132] Ibid, 210.
[133] Klaus' government was replaced by a caretaker government with Josef Tosovsky as Prime Minister. According to Havel, the Tosovsky government enjoyed more confidence in Parliament than any prior government.
[134] Václav Havel, *Address by Václav Havel Before the Members of Parliament,* December 9, 1997.

the most immoral ones, and the biggest profits could go to unpunishable thieves."[135] Maintaining that all hope was not lost for the country's future, Havel repeatedly stressed that true, genuine progress could only derive from actions rooted in a profound sense of morality and responsibility. Havel never mentioned the Klaus government by name, but he did assert that the resigning government's "apathetic, or almost hostile attitude, toward everything that bears even a distant resemblance to a civil society" denoted a notion of the Czech identity as "something given by fate, or determined by our genes, almost as a matter of blood that we cannot influence in any way". This rationale had been used in the past to legitimize the expulsion of Sudeten Germans and only gave rise to further narrow-minded nationalism. However, the recent events, in their exposure of Czechs' personal fallibility, gave credence to a remarkably different notion of national identity. "Identity is first and foremost a deed, a piece of work, an accomplishment. It does not stand apart from responsibility, on the contrary: identity is an expression of responsibility."[136]

The Rudolfinum speech was a watershed moment in Havel's career. Not only did the address signify a sense of assertiveness that Havel heretofore had not exhibited as President, but it also elucidated the legitimacy of Havel's longstanding suggestions for the structure of the Czech state. The endemic corruption could never have occurred in an honest, moral, and responsible society. Such a society was only possible through a decentralized government responsive to the needs of the people and a citizenry actively involved in all avenues of public life.

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[135] Václav Havel, *Address by Václav Havel Before the Members of Parliament,* December 9, 1997.
[136] Václav Havel, *Address by Václav Havel Before the Members of Parliament,* December 9, 1997.

Havel's decision to run for a second term as President of the Czech Republic was yet another product of public responsibility trumping private interests. Having used the Rudolfinum speech as a partial means to lay all his cards out on the table for the impending election, Havel was repeatedly told that only his presidency could stop the Czech Republic from moving toward a "post-communist quasi-dictatorship as it did in Slovakia under Meciar, or Ukraine under Kuchma" and that his presence would ensure the country's ultimate accession into NATO and the European Union.[137] Havel ultimately won the election by a single vote in Parliament, an outcome that Havel found simply flattering. "It could be interpreted to mean that I became the unwanted president, which in the given state of affairs was a double honor for me. It was an honor that I was president again and it was an honor that I was unwanted…not by everyone; only by a considerable portion of the political elite."[138]

Nevertheless, by this time, Havel's popularity was waning with more than just the majority of the political elite. Despite Klaus' public and very scandalous resignation, the more technocratic, pro-Klaus media troop, which Havel dubbed the "snide brigade", continued to portray the prime minister's resignation as a Havel-led assassination attempt. Havel, in turn, was repeatedly lambasted as a naïve dissident with no real business in the Castle. Havel's second marriage to a controversial Czech actress, Dagmar Veskrnová, occurring a year after Olga's death, was repeatedly construed as disrespectful to Olga's legacy. Havel, undeterred by the scathing media reviews, continued with his constant criticisms of the deepening gulf between

[137] Václav Havel, *To the Castle and Back,* 224.
[138] Václav Havel, *To the Castle and Back*, 226.

society and politics, an act that grew to be resented by the Czech people. Havel's well-known ailing health only bolstered the already plentiful arguments of his unsuitability for the presidency. And though Havel led the Czech Republic into NATO in 1998 and the agreements were established for its 2004 EU accession, the Czech population largely overlooked these accomplishments, and even frowned on them as potentially damaging to the Czech identity. Despite Havel's repeated attempts to rid Czechs of their fear of otherness, it seemed the country preferred to keep playing *svejk*.

Milan Kundera has been quoted as saying that Havel's is the rare life that resembles a work of art with "perfect compositional unity". Nevertheless, it seems to be this perfect compositional unity that precipitated Havel's fall from grace with the Czech public. Havel espoused throughout his presidency the same values that precipitated his rise to fame, but Havel's lifelong dedication to these principles also landed him in jail and under constant police surveillance, while the majority of his fellow citizens went about their lives complying with the communists' numerous restrictions. A constant observer of paradoxical situations, Havel, by the very nature of his dissident credentials, served as a mirror onto the Czech bad conscience. As Havel and other dissidents had actively resisted the communist regime, most Czechs had acted like the grocer in Havel's *The Power of the Powerless* who positioned a sign reading *proletáři všech zemí, spojte se!* (workers of the world, unite!) "among the carrots and onions" on his curbside vegetable stand. "What is he trying to communicate to the world? Is he genuinely enthusiastic about the idea of unity among the workers of the world?...He does it because these things must be done if

one is to get along in life. It is one of thousands of details that guarantee him a relatively tranquil life."[139] Havel's 1978 description of the passive collaboration that plagued the country maintained its relevance well into the new millennium. In a 2003 *New Yorker* article detailing Havel's exit from the presidency, David Remnick interviewed a former colleague of Havel's from the theatre. Now well into his seventies, the colleague harbored a profound distaste for the playwright's continued espousal of certain "moralisms". "Havel's purity stung the director; it was a lingering and deeply personal rebuke. The old man had not signed Charter 77; to do so was an almost suicidal crossing. Only hundreds of people dared go that far, he said, while 'the rest just wanted to live'".[140]

While still a dissident, Havel served as an embodiment of the values that his fellow citizens hoped to uphold against the authoritarian government. Arguable naiveté aside, there was a certain self-aggrandizing comfort that accompanied the perception of Havel as a representation of the Czech people as a whole. However, when Havel assumed his position as President, he was no longer just another Czech citizen; he was a Czech politician in a position of authority. And, even more unnerving to Czechs, he was a president who relentlessly and explicitly urged his country to assume responsibility for its past, communist collaboration included. In so doing, Havel shattered the longstanding Czech fantasy of the country's uninterrupted victimhood, shook the Czech people out of their *svejkism,* and exposed the Czech identity as something that had been repeatedly formed against the existence of a separate nationality or political ideology. These sources of

[139] Václav Havel, *The Power of the Powerless* in *Open Letters,* 132.
[140] David Remnick, "Exit Havel" *Time* (February 17, 2003).

identification were transient; the only hope for a lasting Czech identity was one built on certain civic ideals, the antithesis of one built on nationality or ideology.

In his 2003 "Farewell Address to Czech Citizens", Havel apologized for any expectations he failed to meet. "To all of you whom I have disappointed in any way, who have not agreed with my actions or who have simply found me hateful, I sincerely apologize and trust that you will forgive me."[141] Havel left the castle wearing blue jeans and backpack, and the popular signs proclaiming *Havel na hrad (*Havel to the castle) were nowhere to be found. Once the embodiment of Czech democracy and morality, Havel had become the scapegoat for his country's various problems—economic, legal, social, and otherwise.

When Václav Klaus succeed Havel as president, Klaus presented himself as the natural solution to the consequences of "a moralist whose very presence in the Presidency is your bad conscience, a daily reminder of the courage you did not have".[142] And while Klaus' rise to prominence may have indicated that a man of pragmatism triumphed over one of morality in the Czech political arena, the murmurs that Havel would run in the 2008 election certainly testified to the enduring relevance of his espoused values, ones more than slightly at odds with the incumbent's principles. By this time, a new generation had come of age, a generation that Havel had previously maintained was the best hope for the Czech Republic's political future. This was a generation that had not "grown up in circumstances that

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[141] Václav Havel, Farewell Address to Czech Citizens by Vaclav Havel, http://www.vaclavhavel.cz/index.php?sec=3&id=1&kat=2&from=0 (accessed March 25, 2012).
[142] Václav Klaus, "A Conversation with Václav Klaus" *Radio National* http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/saturdayextra/president-vaclav-klaus/2926078 (accessed March 20, 2012).

demand hypocrisy and spinelessness, conditions that support selfishness, indifference to others, and xenophobia".[143]

[143] Václav Havel, *To the Castle and Back,* 341.

A Belated Appreciation

The heterogeneous masses of people gathering throughout the Czech Republic in the days following Havel's December 18th death exposed both an abandonment of their disappointment in the playwright's time as President and a profound admiration for Havel's momentous impact on the course of Czech history. The key-jingling crowds in Prague rivaled those of the Velvet Revolution, and Wenceslas Square was so packed that the Central Prague telephone network temporarily cracked. It seemed as though only after Havel's passing could the country truly appreciate the magnitude of his contribution to the nation and the world.

In 1968, Havel had written to an exiled Dubcek, urging the former leader to defend the liberalizations of the Prague Spring, despite the known unlikelihood that Dubcek's defense would have softened the Soviet treatment of Warsaw Pact-invaded Czechoslovakia. "Even a purely moral act that has no hope of any immediate and visible political effect can gradually and indirectly, over time, gain in political significance."[144] Though Havel's letter went unanswered by Dubcek, and a "normalized" Czechoslovakia spiraled into a period of moral decay, Havel continued to espouse the value of pursuing the good simply because it was the right thing to do. Carrying this principle into politics, Havel never ceased fighting for his creation of a civil society simply because it seemed unlikely that one would ever develop. And though the President left office largely disappointed in the lack of morality in the political arena, he never abandoned the principles for which he had struggled

[144] Václav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace,* 115.

since his earliest days as a dissident. "Hope…is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out."[145]

Havel never lost hope for "'a revolution of heads and hearts,' as Masaryk called it, a kind of general awakening…"[146] that he saw as most probably carried out by the young generation who had never been "deformed by communism". The heterogeneous crowds that spontaneously gathered in public squares in solidarity to celebrate, rather than mourn, the life of the Václav Havel—playwright, soldier, dissident, prisoner, president, citizen—hint that the civil society Havel had envisioned for his country was perhaps more developed than even he had gauged. Havel always noted that his being was the constant paradox; it would seem only fitting that the principles to which Havel dedicated his life were only truly first visibly appreciated with his death.

While the reviews of Havel's 2003 exit from the Presidency focused on Havel's tremendous accomplishments in the area of Czech foreign policy, the assessments rarely touched on his domestic achievements. The political polarization that overwhelmed Parliament was seen as a testament to Havel's inability to implement his civil society wherein political parties were fundamentally responsive to the needs and the interests of the people. Viewing this shortcoming as a grave failure, these reviews seemed to miss the point. Havel did not want to impose a top-down structure on Czech society, but rather for Czech society personally to exemplify the principles of civility, honesty, morality, and responsibility. Eight years

[145] Václav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace,* 181.
[146] Václav Havel, *To the Castle and Back,* 328.

later, however, it seems that both Havel and his legacy are better understood. "There is, within this space, the recognition of Havel's great gift to us: not only the courage to hope and to see a future different and brighter than the present, but also the promise that politics itself can be caring and honest, humble and good, that politics can be humane."[147] Having always vowed to lead by example, Havel and his life serve as a testament to the possibility of combining a politics and morality, and, quite simply, to the power of the powerless.

Given the recent creation of Viktor Orban's Hungarian one-party state[148], the Czech Republic's position as a stable democracy seems especially remarkable. Though Havel's desired civil society may not have been obvious at the time he left office, it was almost as if the President had inoculated the Czech people with certain ideas of civic involvement, personal responsibility, and morality. After all, the current political climate in Hungary bears an uncanny similarity to Havel's repeatedly emphasized assessment of the threats of a re-emergence of despotism cloaked by a nation's status as "Western" or "post-totalitarian". While Havel's ideals may have needed time to materialize into discernable widely shared values, the level of civic involvement in the Czech Republic wholly precludes the possibility of it following in Hungary's footsteps. As reported in an article chronicling Havel's life in politics, journalist Lubos Dobrovskya commented on Havel's contribution to the country. "I'm convinced that in a year or two, there will be analyses demonstrating that

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[147] Eastern Approaches, "A Personal Reflection on Václav Havel's Life," *The Economist*, http://www.economist.com/blogs/easternapproaches/2011/12/personal-reflection-václav-havels-life (accessed March 28, 2012).
[148] Anna Porter, "Hungary Turning right—and fighting with the EU," *Macleans CA* (accessed April 1, 2012).

we have Havel to thank for the fact that we have a working democracy here. It was Havel who reminded us that we don't live in an isolated space and that we have to take the world around us into account, and share responsibility for that world."[149]

"There is only one way to strive for decency, reason, responsibility, sincerity, civility, and tolerance, and that is decently, reasonably, responsibly, sincerely, civilly, and tolerantly."[150] Having always vowed to fit his mode of action into his goals, Havel acted in a clean and straightforward way to pursue what he saw as best for the country. Though his policies were not always met with resounding popularity, Havel's politics were genuine and transparent. The public outcries throughout the Czech Republic over the ever-changing coalition governments indicate more than just a longing for Havel's apolitical politics. In simply reacting to the shifting political climate, Czech society is demonstrating both a level of civic involvement and a sense of responsibility for the country. The public demonstrations hardly indicate a case of *svejkism.*

Entering politics as a self-proclaimed amateur, Havel had neither the personal experience nor the formal education that is traditionally required of today's political leaders. Relying only on his guiding sense of morality, and what he called "good taste", Havel never acted in pursuit of power or renown. Havel entered the castle fully cognizant of the limitations of his position, and vowed to use his moral authority to inspire a positive change in society. While there were certainly setbacks, and the Czechs, at times, grew tired of his "repeated moralisms", if you

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[149] Paul Wilson, "Wonderful Life," New York Review of Books, http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2003/apr/10/wonderful-life/?pagination=false&printpage=true (accessed March 25, 2011).
[150] Václav Havel, *Summer Meditations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992): 8.

observe Czech society today, and even the world order today, it is a remarkably different place due to Havel's influence. This impact, though perhaps not quantifiable by power-sharing upsets in Parliament or GDP returns, is Havel's true legacy. As Egyptians and Tunisians are now reading Havel's *The Power of the Powerless* in Arabic, Czechs are joining together despite ethnic and ideological differences and celebrating the contributions of their first post-Communist leader who awakened their consciences to a world of responsibility. In one of his final published journal entries, Havel mused at the influence his life would exert on the world. "I'm convinced that my existence—like everything that has ever happened—has ruffled the surface of Being, and that after my little ripple, however marginal, insignificant, and ephemeral it may have been, Being is and always will be different from what it was before."[151]

[151] Václav Havel, *To the Castle and Back,* 330.

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