

Conservative sensibilities in Czech politics before and after 1989

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The political thought of Czech and Slovak dissent has usually been analysed in terms of its philosophical conceptions of the civic and the nature of politics or its articulation of Central European identity (Laruelle 1996; Tucker 2000; Krapfl 2000). Studies of its longer term political consequences have usually been restricted to the events of the 'Velvet Revolution' and the carrying over of anti-political attitudes into post-1989 democratic politics (Tucker 2000). Little, if any attention has been paid to the emergence of prototypical right-wing discourses within Czech dissent and other counter-elite groups or the implications of these for developments on the Czech right after 1989. In many ways this is understandable. For the majority of Czech dissidents the key political division throughout the 'normalization' period was that between democracy and totalitarianism and the key task was the common struggle to resist and ultimately displace Czechoslovakia's communist regime. Moreover, for many authors the hallmark of Czech dissent was its proclivity towards 'anti-politics' – or, at the very least a preoccupation with the pre-political foundations of normal competitive democratic politics - rather than its role in re-founding any particular ideology, whether liberal, social-democratic or conservative.

In this paper, I argue that dissident intellectual counter-elites' efforts to think through the experience of Czech society following the failure of the Prague Spring – whether in the form of explicit debates about conservative and right-wing traditions or, more commonly, in debates which touched upon what I have termed 'conservative sensibilities' – are both of historical interest in themselves and because of the way that they informed the right-wing discourses that developed in the Czech Republic following the collapse of communism. Although small dissident-led parties of the right and the specific preoccupations of their founders quickly lost prominence and both the main organizational vehicle and main contours of 'conservative' ideology were set by neo-liberal technocrats who had formed part of a 'grey zone' during the late communist period (Burian 1997),¹

principally Václav Klaus, many of these interpretations of Czech history, identity and politics re-surfaced in re-worked form in subsequent debates about socio-political transformation.

Conservatism and historical legacies in the Czech lands

Conservatism can loosely be understood as a set of political and social forces, ideologies and philosophies resistant to - or sceptical of – forms of modernity and rationalism, which are variously viewed as dangerously destabilizing and hubristic; cutting against the grain of human nature or the natural; blankly materialistic; or lacking a sense of identity and rootedness in a distinct, organically understood, culture and society (Rogger and Weber 1966; Eatwell and O'Sullivan 1989; Scruton 1989; Nisbet 2001). Although some conservative forces and thinkers remained assiduous defenders of the ancien régime and its values and others allied themselves with European fascism (Wolff and Hoensch 1987; Blinkhorn 1990), over the 19th and 20th centuries political conservatism tended to endure by reconciling and adapting itself to modern social and political institutions such as industrial economies, capitalism, democracy. The social and historical context of late communism and post-communist democracy in Central and Eastern Europe, however, posed particular problems even for this most adaptable of political ideologies. The multiple discontinuities and abrupt changes of regime which characterize the region's history make it problematic to identify clearly what (if anything) is genuinely 'traditional' and worthy of conserving. Indeed, at face value the application of conservative principles could imply that large elements of the state socialist system should be retained or changed only gradually and piecemeal (Korósényi 1991; Murrell 1991; Perron 2001).

Such issues were posed particularly acutely in the Czech context (Havelka 2004; Hanák 2007: 12-15). Historically, the meaning of 'conservatism' in the Czech lands was obscure. The word had little

historical resonance for Czechs except as a synonym for reactionary 19th century Austrian rulers, whom traditional Czech national historiography viewed as holding back the Czech nation. Indeed, the social composition of Czech society and its lack of a native aristocracy was usually viewed as making the Czech nation inherently 'plebeian' and democratic. The typical historical and social basis of the Right in many European countries - the aristocracy, authoritarian integral nationalism, and/or political Catholicism were thus weak or absent in the Czech Lands, in marked contrast to, for example, pre-communist Hungary and Poland. In these 'gentry nations' native aristocracies and oligarchical social structures co-existed with strong authoritarian nationalist ideologies linked with Catholicism and nativist or ruralist political traditions (Held 1993). Apart from the more chauvinistic anti-German manifestations of Czech nationalism, the closest equivalent to a historic Czech conservatism was perhaps a line of Catholic-oriented, political thought associated with Josef Pekař (1870-1937). This current of thought challenged the progressive democratically-oriented Czech nationalist ideology developed by Masaryk (Havelka 1997). It was sceptical of both the mythopoeia and liberal-democratic orientation of such Czech nationalism and critical of new the Czechoslovak state's policy of demonstratively breaking with the Austrian past through, for example, land reform or hostility to the Catholic Church. Czechoslovakia's interwar political establishment was attacked for somewhat different reasons by a small fronde of right-wing nationalist intellectuals. In the view of these thinkers the new state's leaders placed too much faith in the West and in the historical inevitability of liberal-democratic values and paid too little attention to asserting Czechoslovakia's self-interest, national self-confidence and self-defence.

In the highly fragmented multi-party politics of democratic interwar Czechoslovakia the 'right-wing' was represented by an array of parties with different historical roots, which in other countries had merged into stronger right-wing traditions (Garver 1874; Čechurová 1999). The three most significant were Czechoslovak National Democracy, the declining successor to the classical Czech nationalist parties of the 19th century; the Catholic-based People's Party, whose support was restricted to rural regions in the East of the Czech Lands (Blackwood 1990); and the Agrarian Party, which evolved from a party representing agricultural interests to a political force representing interwar Czechoslovakia's closest equivalent to a broad party of the right (Dostal 1998). The Agrari-

ans played a pivotal role in inter-war coalition-building and had a firm implantation not only in rural civil society, but also in business and the state apparatus. Under the leadership of Rudolf Beran in the 1930s the Agrarians even adopted a conscious strategy of making their party the core of a right-wing conservative bloc. However, their efforts met with little success and, despite being the largest party for much of the inter-war period, the Agrarian vote never exceeded 15%. In inter-war Czechoslovakia the right-wing thus remained fragmented, organisationally undeveloped and intellectually marginalised and failed to develop a broad appeal. Attempts after the 1938 Munich Agreement, in the 'Second Republic' (1938-9) and the Nazi-controlled Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia (1939-45), to create an authoritarian pro-German Czech national ideology based on a corporate state were even less successful (Rataj 1997). After 1945 the Czech electorate and Czech politics as a whole swung markedly to the Left. Even in the short democratic interlude before the communist takeover in February 1948, two of the three historic 'right-wing' parties - National Democracy and the Agrarians - were banned for alleged wartime collaboration. In the communist period discussion of right-wing or conservative elements in Czech political history, other than those assimilating them to Fascism or reactionary foreign rule, remained largely taboo in official historiography (Křen 1990). Further confusion was caused in the 1960s by the use of the term 'conservative' to describe Communist opponents of Dubček's (and in the 1990s Gorbachev's) reforms.

Conservative sensibilities of dissent?

For both reform communist and non-communist critics of the regime the 'normalization' regime established in Czechoslovakia after 1968 following the Soviet-led invasion and the collapse of the 'Prague Spring' reforms ended any meaningful prospect of working through the existing 'socialist' political institutions and ideology. Following the invasion organized (socialist-oriented) opposition groups to 'normalization' were rapidly repressed and when independent activism re-emerged in Czechoslovakia in the mid-1970s it took the form of small isolated groups of 'dissident' intellectuals. Outside radical left and reform communist circles, most unofficially organized activity and samizdat publication in Czechoslovakia after the onset of 'normalization' took the form of philosophical, historical or literary discussion, rather than openly political debates, extending to around basic questions of legality, human rights and citizenship after the creation of Charter 77.

The intellectual projects of some non-socialist intellectuals became gradually more political during the course of the 'normalization' period, and markedly so it appears from the mid-1980s when Czech dissidents came into contact with British right-wing intellectuals such as Roger Scruton, editor of the *Salisbury Review*, one of the leading voices on the 'social authoritarian' wing of the British New Right (Seidal 1986). As a result of contacts established by Scruton and others in the Jan Hus Educational Foundation, a series of underground seminars with Western academics and intellectuals ran in Prague and Brno between 1980 and 1989 (Oszlly 1993; Day 1999). Many (but not all) of the Western visitors were politically on the right. Scruton's *Salisbury Review* and other Western conservative journals were widely known (sometimes in translated samizdat) among dissident intellectuals in Czechoslovakia. In 1980s, sections of the Czech dissident intelligentsia became more consciously 'right-wing'. In February 1988, Václav Havel, for example, told an English visitor of 'new moods' in dissent and a drift to the right reflecting a 'worldwide wave of neo-conservatism, which has reached here also. Such moods have mainly affected Catholics of the younger generation' (cited in Selbourne 1990: 81). These 'moods' were reflected in the founding during the 1980s of a number of new, more self-conscious journals such as the samizdat publications *Prostor* or *Střední Evropa* and the Catholic-oriented *Rozmluvy* based in Munich and London.

While some Western intellectuals and activists saw East European dissidents as a counterpart to West European peace movements (Kaldor 1990) or a source of inspiration for reflection a new 'civic' socialism (Keane 1988), the British New Right rushed to claim Václav Havel as a conservative thinker (de Candole 1988) and took any interest in market economics, private property, civil society or transcendent values as a manifestation of a dissident 'New Right' in Central Europe (Scruton 1988a, 1988b). Despite the sweeping nature of such claims, a number of distinctly conservative concerns, with questions of social order, historical continuity, public morality and or a sense of the particular, can readily be identified in Czech dissident thought. In political terms they resolved into two broad themes: 1) the need to restore 'natural' social forms and 'traditional values'; and 2) a suspicion of populism and mass democratic politics.

Both dissident and Western conservatives thought of their respective societies as natural communities

threatened by the aggressive and artificial impositions of modern politics. Many dissidents including 'anti-political' thinkers such as Havel, saw the communist regime as promoting soulless modern consumerism and moral decay and longed for an authentic, 'natural' society and a return of 'decency' (*slušnost*), public spiritedness and spiritual values. This vein of romantic anti-modernism was influenced by the phenomenological philosophy of Jan Patočka, whose work drew indirectly on the work of Heidegger, albeit humanized and shorn of its totalitarian bent, in examining the 'natural world' or 'life world' undistorted by power, ideology or technology (Blecha 1997; Tucker 2000).² The adoption after 1968 by many dissidents of 'totalitarianism' (or 'post-totalitarianism') as a frame for understanding the communist system at a time when the concept was in decline among Western specialists on Eastern Europe (Rupnik 1988) provided a further point of affinity with Western conservatives.

Second, throughout virtually the whole of the communist regime most Czechoslovak dissidents lived in a tiny ghetto of opposition intellectuals. Despite their commitment to democracy, many regarded the possible mass entry of the Czech public into politics with distinct apprehension. A sudden collapse of the regime, they feared, would not bring meaningful democracy, but an outbreak of vengeful demagogic anti-communist populism. Indeed, Ludvík Vaculík (1990: 80-2), went so far as to argue that because the Czech public largely shared the values of the communist regime, the principal advantage of a democratic regime would reflect the will of the majority, but that it would guarantee and protect the rights of educated minorities violated under communism. Such views echoed both British conservatism's historical scepticism of democracy and the anxieties of liberals that freedom would prove incompatible with democratic majority rule.

Nevertheless, the affinities of Western conservatism and Czech dissent should not be exaggerated. Preoccupations with moral decline, the alienating effects of the modern world and the need to shore up the pre-political (moral, cultural) bases of politics and state authority have animated many Western neo-conservatives. However, dissident concerns were more communitarian than conservative. The 'traditional values' whose loss many mourned were more those of the 'civic culture' - traditions of co-operation and trust - than those of patriarchy and a monolithic, organic national culture. These, paradoxically had been well maintained in socialist Czechoslovakia

where communist authoritarianism had enforced a social and cultural conformity and insulated the country from much of the cultural pluralisation and 'permissiveness' of the West (Heitlinger 1996; Šiklová 1997; Saxonberg 2003). Like many traditional conservative ideologies, much dissident thought linked authenticity and human identity with the renewal of the local, parochial and small scale. In the Czech context, however, such concerns reflected less a pre-occupation with authority than a reaction against communist gigantism and strong traditions of localism, which identified the community (*obec*) with the commune (*obec*). Similarly, although many Western conservatives, both historically and in the present, have been sceptical of democracy - Scruton (1989: 59) for example, referred to it as a 'contagion' - they have typically been more concerned with preserving traditional (unelected) authority, than stemming popular mobilization. Thus, while Czech dissident (anti-)political thought did have certain common preoccupations with the conservative Western New Right, these affinities should not be overstated.³ Close affinities were confined, in fact, to a relatively distinct groups and individuals who were, more or less consciously, developing proto-'right-wing' discourses.

Catholic conservatism in Charter 77

From early 1960s a range of underground Catholic networks and religious communities, emerged in Czechoslovakia and, despite repression, grew slowly in strength through 1970s and 1980s. Most were concerned with the survival of Catholic doctrine and the organization of activities banned or obstructed by the regime such as the religious education and the ordination of clergy (Corley 1992; Luxmoore and Babiuch 1992). Despite the initial disapproval of the Church hierarchy, a number of Catholic clergy and lay intellectuals signed or publicly supported Charter 77, the human rights demands of which fitted with religious and political ecumenicalism fostered by the liberalization of communist rule in 1960s and the climate in the Roman Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council (Luxmoore and Babiuch 1992: 110-113, 1995). At the same time, a significant Catholic-conservative current emerged only slowly within Czech dissent. The thinking of the most prominent Catholic dissident with Charter 77, Václav Benda, initially echoed that of Havel in its desire to find new – but not specifically Catholic or Christian - ways of thinking about politics and society (Benda 1985: 112).

However, like Catholic-conservatives Benda was from the outset less anti-political than Havel and

more preoccupied with the specific pathologies of communism and socialism, less with the condition of modernity or modern civilization (of which Havel viewed communism as an extreme example). He also explicitly endorsed Havel's view that Eastern and Western modernity were in some sense equivalent, seeing communism as a 'malignant tumour' far more grave with the more minor ailments represented of the essentially healthy political systems of the West. Ignoring the vast differences between totalitarianism and democracy, he claimed, was wilful error of the Western Left (Benda 1985: 111). By late 1980s, Benda had come to share the view of other dissidents on the 'proto-right' - such as the 'realist' group and Petr Pithart - that the dissident 'parallel polis' should not be seen as an invitation for individuals to 'live in truth' outside society, but as a form of Masarykian 'small scale work' (*drobná práce*) focused on renewing the national community and rebuilding social bonds severed by the incursions of the totalitarian party state (Benda et al 1988: 217-18). Although as early as 1979, Benda labelled himself 'conservatively radical' (*konzervativně radikální*),⁴ in 1980s other dissidents developed more recognisably Catholic-conservative positions.

The Střední Evropa group: Catholic conservatism versus the nation

On 20 May 1984, Charter 77 issued a document entitled 'A Right to History' (no. 11/84 reprinted in Prečan 1990: 254-7). It called for a national history undistorted by communist ideology which would reconcile different aspects of the Czech experience by recognizing the positive role of Catholic Church and Habsburg rule. In an implicit criticism of the Charter's usual abstract, legalistic stress on human rights, the document also argued that given the regime's totalitarian efforts to control historical memory, only those able to recover a sense of Czech history would be able to assert their rights effectively. 'A Right to History' was immediately criticized by dissident historians with a reform communist background. Many objected to its oversimplification of historical fact⁵ and sweeping dismissal of research by 'official' historians (Hajek et al 1984; Kohout 1984). However, it was the document's suggestions for re-evaluating Czech history that generated the greatest controversy. The suggested areas for re-thinking, critics noted (Hajek et al 1984; Hübl 1984; Kohout 1984), were essentially a restatement in more circumspect form of conservative Catholic arguments of 1920s calling into question the foundation of the Czechoslovak state (Paces 1999). Critics on the Charter's left thus

criticized 'A Right to History' as itself misusing the past by trying to impose a single meaning on Czech history in a manner uncomfortably reminiscent of the communist regime (Kohout 1984). At the same time, however, they defended the factual basis of established Czech interpretations of the role of the Church and Habsburg dynasty as impediments to Czech national development (Kohout 1984).

The controversy over 'A Right to History' opened up one of the clearest splits between 'left' and 'right' and appears to have marked the emergence of a new Catholic-oriented dissident 'right', drawing inspiration both from the religious revival in Czech society in 1980s and the 'conservative moods' observed by Havel. Although signed by the Charter's three 'speakers', Václav Benda, Jiří Ruml and Jana Sternová, 'A Right to History' was written by the editors of the samizdat journal *Střední Evropa* ('Central Europe') Jan P. Kučera and Rudolf Kučera, which had been founded in 1984. Despite its title, the journal's conception of 'Central Europe' differed from the familiar dissident trope of the region as a 'kidnapped West' (Kundera 1984), whose culture and spirit transcended the political realities of Cold War Europe (Garton Ash 1991: 161-191; Schöpflin and Wood 1989). Instead, it saw the region as defined by Catholicism (Hradec 1985). *Střední Evropa* contributors assertively presented the interwar Catholic revisionist view that Czechs had steadily prospered under Habsburg tutelage and that the establishment of an independent, Czechoslovak state in 1918 had been a historical error. The nationalistic, egalitarian and secular ethos of interwar Czechoslovakia and above all its antagonistic, unresolved relationship with its German minority, argued *Střední Evropa*, led directly to its destruction in 1938 and paved the way for communism. Communism was, in their view, the logical and inevitable outcome of almost a century of progressively-oriented liberal Czech nationalism, which had thus failed to serve the interests of Czechs (Laruelle 1996: 7-8).⁶ As an alternative, *Střední Evropa* posited a vision of Czechs without a national state co-existing alongside ethnic Germans in territorially defined historic provinces as part of a supra-national 'Central Europe' united by Catholicism, territorial patriotism, a cosmopolitan aristocracy and supranational monarchy (Laruelle 1996: 6-7). Indeed such co-existence appeared a precondition of the Czech identity. For this reason *Střední Evropa*'s rejection of the 'transfer' (odsun) of ethnic Germans from Czechoslovakia in 1945-6, which some contributors characterized as 'genocide' and a 'crime against humanity', was particularly marked

(Laruelle 1996: 9-10).

On first examination, *Střední Evropa*'s intellectual conservatism seems part of a widely shared nostalgia for the pre-1918 Habsburg Empire which suffused much of the region in late 1980s. However, as Laruelle (1996: 12-16) notes, its underlying points of reference were often more pre-modern than *fin de siècle*.⁷ The group's reworking of Czech Catholic conservatism critiques extended, in fact, to a radical deconstruction of Czech national identity as it had evolved since the mid-nineteenth century. Indeed so marked was this questioning of the Czech nation that some the group's themes such as its reappraisal of St Wenceslas or the distinct identity of Moravia echoed the ideology of the Nazi Protectorate (Kohout 1984; Laruelle 1996: 8-9).

In search of national liberalism: the 'realist' group

The 'realist' or 'constructive' grouping, like Charter 77, emerged during 1970s on the basis of intellectual networks formed during the Prague Spring - in this case those around Bohumil Doležal, Emanuel Mandler and contributors to the short-lived radical cultural and political magazine *Tvář*. Although the group had contacts with 'grey zone' neo-liberal economists such as Václav Klaus, Tomáš Ježek and Jan Stráský, who had written for *Tvář* during 1960s and occasionally contributed pseudonymously to its samizdat journal *Ineditní sborníky* in mid-1980s, the group remained deliberately aloof from Charter 77 and developed an intellectual agenda understood as an alternative to the weaknesses of Chartist thinking (Otáhal 1993).

The group's 'realism' was expressed in its view of politics as understandable only in terms of power and contending interests and as a social phenomenon rooted in (Czech) history and culture. This analysis led the group both to highlight the role of Soviet (Russian) hegemony in maintaining the political status quo, rather than the moral crisis of the individual or of society and to see communism less as an unnatural totalitarian ideological project than as the wholesale importation of Russian political practices, which were gradually eroding Czech political identity (Hlušíčková and Otáhal 1993). Like the philosopher Karel Kosík (*Listy* 7, November 1968), whose interest in the 19th century radical democratic writers of the Czech National Revival they shared (Kusin 1971: 37-9), the 'realists' viewed 1968 and post-1968 'normalization' as presaging the degeneration of the Czechs from being a self-conscious political nation with clear national goals into a Czech

speaking populace of workers and producers. The key task, they concluded, was to articulate a political strategy capable of re-constituting the Czech nation as a political subject by revisiting the ideas of Czech nationalist thinkers such as Masaryk and Havlíček, who had undertaken a similar task in the 19th century. Central to this strategy was the vaguely defined concept of 'national reconciliation', which would see communists and non-communists come together within existing institutions around shared national goals. Although the 'realists' had no commitment to socialism, this search for a politically defined, new national project seemed to amount to hopes for a gradual Kádárization of Czechoslovak society.⁸

Dissident 'Toryism'

The jurist and historian Petr Pithart represented a different strain of dissident conservatism. The son of a prominent Communist diplomat and himself a Communist Party member until 1968, Pithart was a law lecturer at Charles University during 1960s and also served as secretary to the interdisciplinary team at the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences preparing plans for political reform. He first came to public attention during the Prague Spring as a contributor to the flagship reformist journal *Literární noviny*, when he emerged as a critic of the limitations of official political reform. By early 1970s, Pithart had been purged from academia and relegated to the first in a series of menial occupations. He was later among the first Charter 77 signatories. Pithart used the 'normalization' period largely as an opportunity to write and reflect upon Czech politics and history in samizdat, including co-authored contributions to the *odsun* debate and a jointly written re-interpretation of modern Czech history ('*Podiven*' 1991). In common with others on the proto-right, Pithart was seeking alternatives to the socialist and Marxist discourses predominant in Czech intellectual life since 1945. Like Havel, he quickly came to see his earlier arguments for institutional reforms to the communist party-state as superficial and naïve (Pithart 1990e: 124-8), sceptically dissecting the illusions of both reform communists and radical democrats during the Prague Spring in an influential samizdat work (Pithart 1990b).

Pithart found the alternative he sought in an intellectual scepticism strongly influenced by traditional British conservatism and what he termed the 'British political style', which he had discovered in a moment of revelation on a study visit to St Antony's College, Oxford in 1969 (Pithart 1992: 49). Pithart devel-

oped his dissident intellectual 'conservatism' more consciously in the 1980s when he came directly into contact with right-wing British intellectuals such as Roger Scruton whose *The Meaning of Conservatism* he translated into Czech (Oslzlý 1993; Day 1999: 119-20). However, as emerged in his earliest samizdat writings (Pithart 1990c), it was traditional British Tory ideas, such as the importance of historical continuity, the immutability of human nature, the need for social cohesion rooted in a sense of place, the importance of law and pragmatic non-ideological statecraft, which attracted him, rather than the illiberal social-authoritarianism characteristic of Scruton's contributions to British debates of 1980s (Seidal 1986). In contrast to both genuinely anti-political thinkers and those who identified with conventional ideologies of left and right, Pithart embraced the Tory belief that politics should exist as a separate sphere, but one governed by pragmatism and realism rather than 'ideology' (Pithart 1990c).

Unlike thinkers like Havel, who focused on the individual as a philosophical subject and neo-liberals views of a Czech homo economicus, Pithart's conservatism led him from the very outset to a concern with issues of social cohesion and collective (usually national or historical) identity (Pithart 1990a: 327-38). He shared a widely held dissident view in seeing the communist authorities as 'creating a social climate characterized by the social decay (*pokleslosti*) of traditional values of human solidarity, honesty (*poctivosti*) and decency' as a means to reinforce social control (Pithart 1990d). However, Pithart's emphasis on the need to rebuild civic values was not so much concerned with 'living in truth' but like Benda with re-establishing social bonds through a renewed sense of a decency and public duty and like the 'realist' group through a renewed awareness of the Czech 'homeland' (*vlast*) as a civic and national community (Pithart 1990d).⁹

In contrast to religiously inclined dissidents or Hayekian liberals, Pithart was thus deeply concerned with understanding the continuities and discontinuities of Czech history. In particular he was concerned with understanding the mass appeal for Czechs of radical ideologies, such as communism, which promised to break with and 'undo' the past. Like the Catholic conservative revisionists of *Rozmluvy* and the *Střední Evropa* group, Pithart questioned the secular, left-liberal progressive mainstream Czech national tradition, which had been co-opted by the Communists in 1945-8. Like them, he too sought to re-examine historical alternatives to this liberal-liberal main-

stream tradition, although for him the Czech nation or homeland remained central. The samizdat re-interpretation of modern Czech history, he co-wrote, in late 1970s ('Podiven' 1991; Bryant 2000) thus paralleled the Catholic interpretations of Czech national identity as forged through, rather than against, Catholicism and Habsburg rule. Czechs' provincialism, flawed democratic tradition and inclination to populism, and lack of respect for political institutions, rather than the action of a determined minority, had, Pithart and his co-authors suggested, led to the dead end of communism.

In later writings, Pithart critically reassessed aspects of Czech interwar conservative and right-wing thought opposed to Masaryk and the Czech political establishment of the time in samizdat studies of the historian Josef Pekař (1870-1937) and Czech integral nationalist intellectuals of 1920s. Although at heart a secular nationalist, Pekař had challenged the progressive democratically-oriented Czech nationalist ideology developed by Masaryk and was critical of the new Czechoslovak state's policy of demonstratively breaking with the Austrian past through, for example, land reform and hostility to the Catholic Church. Pithart broadly endorsed these criticisms. Rather than stressing the importance of Catholicism to Czech national life,¹⁰ or nostalgically regretting the passing of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, he drew a different, 'Tory' lesson: that evolutionary political change was preferable to the illusory revolutionary breaks with which modern Czech history was punctuated. Such thinking also informed Pithart's contribution to the dissident odsun debate. Writing as 'Bohemus' (1990), Pithart and a group of co-authors argued that the post-1945 odsun of the Sudeten Germans was not only unacceptable on moral and human rights grounds, but had damaged Czech society by undermining the rule of law, private property rights and entrepreneurial culture.¹¹ Pithart was less sympathetic in his assessment of Czech interwar integral nationalists, whose crude chauvinism he did not share, but valued their prophetic warnings about the potential for the Czechoslovak state to collapse undefended, which he agreed stemmed from the liberal-nationalist vision of Czech statehood as a standard bearer for democracy, progress and Western values, whose existence was in some sense historically guaranteed (Pithart 1990a: 105-164).¹²

Pithart's conservative commitment to evolutionary change, social and civic cohesion and the primary need to re-establish the rule of law and legitimate state authority combined with his view of the Czech

democratic tradition as flawed, led him to regard a future transition from communism with some trepidation. He was acutely that post-communist transition, if and when it came, should not take the form of an 'anti-1948', populist anti-Communist purges masquerading as parliamentary democracy, but in reality ignoring the rule of law. Given the erosion of ethical and moral norms, Pithart also regarded the potential release of market forces in a future post-communist society with some trepidation. In a samizdat interview in May 1988, he surprised his interlocutor by stressing the need for strong legal safeguards and state regulation in any new regime, warning that 'in the first years [private] business may appear in such a form, that we may be robbed even more than we are today by the [communist] state' (Pithart 1990e: 20).

Dissident 'neo-conservatives'

Western-derived neo-conservative orientations in the Czech lands originate largely from a group centred around Pavel Bratinka and Daniel Kroupa, part of a generation of young Catholic-oriented intellectuals who shunned the reform politics of 1960s and chose to study technical subjects, rather than follow official Marxist-oriented curricula on philosophy and politics. The Kroupa-Bratinka grouping appears to have emerged as an indirect product of the 'Kampademia' philosophical seminar organized in early 1970s by Kroupa and Martin Palouš (which Bratinka joined in 1974) and also of Kroupa's own philosophical seminar (Kroupa n.d.; Palouš 2003; Day 1999: 10-11, 21-2, 78-83). Its initial informal political discussions continued debates of the 1960's reform era and reacted to the collapse of the reform communist project and the onset of 'normalization'. Kroupa (1996: 9), for example, has recalled the formative influence on him of the 1968-69 polemic between Václav Havel and Milan Kundera about the meaning of the Prague Spring. While Kundera (1968; 1968-9) considered the reform communist project of 'democratic socialism' a unique and heroic Czech contribution to world politics, Havel (1969) saw it as a failed and half-hearted attempt to return to political normality. Endorsing Havel's view of the Prague Spring as the failure of socialism, the small, isolated group around Bratinka and Kroupa made a conscious effort to find a wholly non-socialist social and political philosophy. From an early stage, however, the Bratinka-Kroupa group drew on the thinking of the American New Right, which appears to have initially been an interest of Bratinka, a regular reader at the US embassy library since mid-1960s (Day 1999: 112). Kroupa recalls how 'Bratinka studied Anglo-

Saxon literature and was enchanted by the American neo-conservatives. At the beginning of the 1970s he used to translate articles, which we pored over, as we were left to our own lonely reflections, because there was no one to talk to and virtually no literature which might have guided us' (Kroupa 1996: 11-12). Hayek and the American Catholic neo-conservative Michael Novak were important influences, as were G.K. Chesterton and the Austro-American philosopher Eric Voegelin.

American neo-conservatives' tendency to define themselves in terms of hawkish positions towards the Soviet Union, and actively seeking inroads into the 'Soviet Empire' made them an attractive point of reference for East European dissidents at a time when many Western politicians overlooked (the possibility of) opposition in the region and focused on East-West détente. Despite an almost complete absence of personal contact between North American neo-conservatives and Czech dissidents before 1989,¹³ even in 1980s neo-conservatism had greater intellectual currency than the Toryism of Scruton and the British Salisbury Review group, who visited Czechoslovakia frequently and whose work was widely translated in samizdat and exile journals. There were a number of reasons for this. Many key philosophers influencing US neo-conservatism – as well as some key neo-conservative writers themselves - were of Central European origin and had been affected, both personally and intellectually, by the experience of totalitarianism more than thinkers on the British New Right. Moreover, given its origins in Cold War liberalism, US neo-conservatism consciously embraced universal civil and human rights and democratic politics, distancing itself from traditionalist and anti-democratic variants of conservatism (Wolfson 2005). Notwithstanding its founders' stress on US exceptionalism (Kristol 1995: 373-86), this universalism made neo-conservatism less susceptible to the limitations of context that affected British Toryism. The US's own origins as a new and egalitarian democratic republic also offered parallels to the Czech experience but not present in aristocratic origins of British conservatism and the British state's supposed centuries of historical continuity.

Despite the personal ties of Scruton and other British right-wing thinkers with Czech dissent British Toryism, by contrast, seemed intellectually problematic or of little relevance to many dissidents (Benda 1984; Kroupa 1996, 2003). As a Tory thinker Scruton, for example, was critical of the concept of social justice which was important to Catholic

Chartists such as Václav Benda, and rejected the notion of universal human rights on which Charter 77 had been founded for a view of individual freedom as guaranteed by cultural tradition and traditional institutions upholding the rule of law (Scruton 1981: 205-9). Ultimately, as Scruton himself conceded, the differences between the defence of semi-traditional social order embodied in institutions such as private schools, the House of Lords and English common law and the 'inner life of a destroyed social order' represented by dissident thought (Scruton 1990: 87) were unbridgeable.¹⁴

Other aspects of US neo-conservatism also resonated with the Czech dissident experience. Much US neo-conservative writing was directed not against conventional 'Communist threat' but the New Left, echoing Czechoslovak dissidents' preoccupation with the failure of reform communism and 'socialism with a human face' rather than Stalinism or orthodox Marxism.¹⁵ A further source of attraction was American neo-conservatism's vision of spreading 'democratic capitalism', which echoed Masaryk's idea of Czechoslovak statehood as linked to a democratic 'world revolution' (Gellner 1995), but challenged both the well established equation of socialism and democracy in Czech political discourse. Similarly, the neo-conservative stress on the potential of capitalism to promote civic good provided it was rooted in religious morality and traditional values (Younkins 1999) represented an antidote to Czech Catholicism's traditional scepticism towards market forces.

Conservative sensibilities compared

Viewed comparatively, there are a number of distinct features about the conservative discourses and conservative sensibilities of Czech intellectual elites in the late communist period. First, while in Hungary and Poland, non-socialist dissident discourses had strong continuities with debates in the pre-war period, in the Czech case - with the exception of the Catholic conservatism of Střední Evropa - little such continuity can be found. Second, and following from the first point, such conservative and proto-conservative discussions in the Czech case involved less the assertion of certain traditions, than the explicit rejection and critique of the national past, variously seen as too collectivist, too egalitarian, too liberal or too statist. These critiques seem to vary in focus and depth. While the Catholic conservatives of Střední Evropa challenged the very basis of Czech nationhood, a 'Tory' thinker such as Pithart merely highlighted the nation's perceived failings. Neo-conservatives (and neo-liberals), by contrast, whilst not insen-

sitive to the 'problem' of the Czech progressive and social democratic tradition, focused more narrowly on communist political and economic institutions in both their reform communist and 'normalized' form. Third, although Western (neo-)conservative (and neo-liberal) thought naturally influenced dissident intelligentsia's elsewhere in the region, in the Czech case, conservative-inclined thinkers' critical stances towards the past often to adapt foreign models as a means of inventing or modernizing non-socialist political discourse. Finally, in a comparative perspective, it also striking the sharp division of the dissident intelligentsia between Western-oriented liberals and national-populist conservatives found elsewhere in the Central and Eastern Europe was less marked. Catholic counter-elites tended to eschew overtly anti-liberalism, either focusing on history and Czech national tradition or linking themselves with broader demands for human rights and democratic reform.¹⁶

Conservative sensibilities after 1989

Conservative understandings of post-communist transformation

The best known attempt to forge a conservative understanding of post-communist transformation after 1989 is that associated with Václav Klaus, the Czechoslovak Finance Minister (1989-92) and later Czech Prime Minister (1992-7) and President (2003-) following the foundation of the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) in 1991. The key planks of this conservative ideology, which has been widely covered in academic literature in both Czech and English (see, for example, Znoj 1994; Williams 1997; Appel 2004; Hanley 2007)

- Neo-liberal understanding to the efficacy of market forces both as an engine of economic and social/cultural political change.
- A Hayekian notion of the market (society) as traditional in the sense that it had emerged as the product of historical evolution.
- The free market and the liberal society were not only efficient, natural and 'traditional', but also an expression of Czech national character and traditions reflecting the nation's affinity with Western and European culture
- The acceptance of the need for political radicalism to restore these institutions, including breaking with the need to break radically with state socialism and collectivist, moralist and messianic traditions in Czech politics.
- The notion that in the context of post-communist

transformation might open up an experimental 'Third Way' or of 'Third Ways' potentially dangerous to liberal democracy.¹⁷

Klaus was, however, something of a latercomer to debates on conservatism¹⁸ and while the ideological synthesis he and his ODS co-thinkers offered was in some respects original, it took place in the context of – and draw on – wider debates on the meaning of political conservatism among the Czech intelligentsia in 1991-2. Many such discussions merely clarified understandings of conservatism and liberalism (historically) in Western countries and noted the difficulties transferring them in the Czech context. However, they developed the conservative reflections and sensibilities of the late-communist-era period – which centred on the relationship Czech identity and historical tradition to the communist political systems - into notions of post-communist transformation (and threats to it). Although politically marginal, they are of interest both as ideological discourses of some sophistication and because ODS's and Václav Klaus's seemingly new and distinct brand of conservative discourses, while drawing on Hayekian and other forms neo-liberalism, of re-articulated elements of them.

As the Czech economy began to falter in the mid-late 1990s, alternative conservative understandings of transformation also began to gain prominence. These stressing the need for a market economy more rooted in ethics and morality, showing a better appreciation the Czech lands' Catholic Central European identity; or better embedded in civil society and local communities. Such themes were variously taken up by some critics of Klaus with ODS and smaller right-wing parties such as Christian Democratic, Civic Democratic Alliance, Freedom Union – characteristically for the Czech context – were combined with liberal demands for freer and more open market competition. These too, however, echoed and re-worked some of the conservative sensibilities of the late communist era.

The remainder of this paper considers more specifically how these debates were carried over into first decade of post-communist transformation and, in some cases, reworked and redeployed in party political competition. Characteristically all were essentially attempts to reconcile, accommodate and/or ground forms of liberalism and the liberal market transformation of Czech society after 1989.¹⁹

Catholic conservatism

The Catholic-conservative group around the samiz-

dat journal *Střední Evropa* continued to exist as a distinct intellectual and political tendency after 1989, publishing their journal and organizing a range of other activities including even founding their own 'party', the Pan-European Union of Bohemia and Moravia (PEUČM), one of the groupings recognized a collective member of Civic Forum. However, despite financial support from Austrian and Germans organizations with Christian Democratic affiliations such as Otto von Habsburg's Pan European Union, *Střední Evropa's* distinct brand of cultural and intellectual Catholic-conservatism proved difficult to re-articulate as an ideology of post-communist Czech transformation. Its radical deconstruction of the Czech national identity as it had evolved since the mid 19th century implied little in terms of transformation other than viewing the Czech Lands as part of the Germanic world, an accommodating attitude towards the claims of the Sudeten German groups and the promotion of a 'Europe of the Regions'. As issues of economic transformation and lustration became increasingly salient, *Střední Evropa* began to lose much of its earlier distinctive agenda. Its demands for radical decommunization, for example, although consistent with its earlier equation of Nazism and communism, were common to much of the Czech right in early 1990s. Despite a certain following within the intelligentsia, such marginality also reflected the poor 'fit' of its ideological vision with dominant Czech discourses, in which the modern nation remained firmly established as a central taken for granted category. Indeed, as political scientists such as Valerie Bunce (1999) have observed the collapse of communism and communist-era federalism and as both institution and ideology arguably reinforced national identity and the centrality of the nation.

Instead, Catholic conservatism linking Czech society and Czech national identity to the broader (historically-formed, Habsburg-influenced) Central European region emerged in more moderate form through the Christian Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-ČSL). The former satellite party had initially struggled to find a coherent ideological response to the politics of post-communist transformation beyond exaggerated anti-communism, vague appeals to historic party traditions and Christian values. By early 1992 the party had, nevertheless, adopted the mainstream West European Christian Democratic notion of the 'social market' as key to its ideological vision, an emphasis marking it small Christian niche parties elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe such as the Hungarian

KNDP (Enyedi 1996) or Slovakia's KDH (Haughton and Rybář 2004).

In doing so the Christian Democrats directly challenged the legitimacy of Václav Klaus's conservatism, which they presented as an 'Anglo-Saxon' import inappropriate to the Czech lands and their Central European traditions (Lux 1996), de-emphasizing the explicit notion of a distinct Catholic Czech identity in conflict with national identity in favour of a stress on 'self-evident' geo-political and cultural affinities and the more wider acceptable Czech corporatist and 'social' traditions. Indeed, Christian Democrats such as Josef Lux sometimes suggested that neo-liberal parties such as ODS and ODA, Christian Democrats argued, were inauthentic in and inappropriate to the Central European Czech context, because these parties were based on ideas imported from Britain and the US (Lidové noviny, 11 May 1996).²⁰

'Revolutionary conservatism'

In December 1989 the dissident 'neo-conservatives' around Pavel Bratinka and Daniel Kroupa founded the Civic Democratic Alliance (ODA) as a Western style party (Dobal 1995; Mašek and Žegklitz 1990). ODA proved to be the most successful ex-dissident party of the right, gaining election to parliament in its own right in 1992 and 1996 and holding key economic ministries before effectively disintegrating in 1997-8 (Hanley 2007: 97-101). For these reasons the energies of its founders were largely consumed by practical politics and by the need to define itself against Klaus's Civic Democratic Party, which appropriated key elements of its definition of conservatism, including the Hayekian influenced notion that the market society was a product of conservative evolution and the idea that conservatism might in some contexts imply political radicalism.

As suggested earlier above, US-derived neo-conservatism was, in many respects, better suited to the needs of dissident intellectuals seeking to formulate a new - secular - conservative critique of Czech society in the late communist than the British Tory tradition. In many ways it proved similarly well suited to post-communist context, as its stress on values rather than institutions and social structures allowing both a commitment to radical political and social change to be framed in conservative terms. As Daniel Kroupa noted (1996: 17-18):

'Whilst British conservatism is both structural and

value-oriented (hodnotový), our conservatism cannot be structural, in the sense of trying to preserve the existing social order... Our conservatism must be value-oriented. There is a charming paradox; conservatism is becoming a revolutionary force.'

The notion that a set of distinct social and historical circumstances – whether those of the USA or post-communism – mandated a conservatism concerned not with evolutionary change and continuity but with recovering 'values' via a revolutionary break with the immediate past (Znoj 1994) was seized upon by Václav Klaus in his efforts to substantiate his claims that the Civic Democratic Party was conservative in a deeper sense than supporting (supposedly) Thatcherite economic policy

'... in a society in which true values have been violently interrupted... the goal of conservatives is to return to true values, and their means of doing so is to make every possible effort to re-establish them. It is for this reason that the conservatism of our time, of our present time, is revolutionary in the extreme (navýsost revoluční), and for this reason that it is wholly, and as a matter of principle (programově), lacking in moderation (neumírněný)' (Klaus 1996: 224-5).²¹

However, even equipped with such a revolutionary understanding of conservatism, elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe, this left unaddressed the context to identify what (if anything) was genuinely 'traditional' - a problem which had already occurred in more intellectualised form in dissent. As Kroupa conceded in 1990 even a conservatism of values rather than institutions inspired by US neo-conservatism was problematic because '... we have very few values we should conserve, in the past forty years most of them have been shattered' leaving only 'a certain [Czech] popular feeling (lidovost) and straightforwardness (civilnost)' leaving only vague and uncontentious commitment to the 'traditional values of European civilisation and its traditional institutions. (...) ... the family... the nation or religion' (Kroupa 1990: 16). Other streams of conservative orientation provided more specific answers to this conundrum, which related more directly to the context of post-communist Czech society.

Anti-communist 'moral' transformation

Strongly socially conservative discourses of post-communist transformation emerged in Czech Republic at an early stage after 1989. They were principally articulated by some neo-conservative and

Christian former dissidents within the smaller coalition parties such as Civic Democratic Alliance (ODA) and Christian Democratic Party (KDS); think-tanks such as the Civic Institute (OI) and Christian Academy; Catholic-influenced grassroots organizations, charities; and campaign groups opposed to abortion, sex education and euthanasia (Sokačová 2006).²² Such discourses partly overlapped with the post-communist 'Toryism' of Pithart and conservative-communitarian concerns of ex-dissidents in seeing the re-establishment of the rule of law, the creation of a strong civil society and the inculcation of moral values and a sense of national continuity as equally or more important than freeing of market forces and privatizing assets. However, they were much more concerned with family and morality than history and national identity and focused on education, welfare and social policy as the key vehicles for social change, and constructed the threat to successful post-communist transformation very differently.

One well developed articulation of this position can be found in writing by the former dissident Alena Hromádková, who was influenced by the writing of Roger Scruton and others in the Salisbury Review during 1980s, and who in 1994-6 led the small Democratic Union (DEU) grouping which initially considered itself to be a conservative party. Hromádková's understanding of conservatism was defined by criticism of the failure to enforce traditional morality or anti-communist purges in the transformation process.

Writing in 1991 Alena Hromádková linked widely perceived threat of unreformed communist-era security services and communist 'mafias' not with the obstruction of market reform, but with the moral permissiveness of the West. Linking the threat of 'unnatural' values to Czech society, its transition and 'return to Europe', she argued that both entailed '... giving up on the natural hierarchy of values [which] I see – alongside one sided market and consumerist behaviour - as a great danger not only for democracy as a whole, but also for each individual person.'

'If we do not defend ourselves against the corruption represented by neo-communist mafias and the hidden erosion of fundamental human relationships (with all its accompanying phenomena such as mass homosexuality, extreme feminism, youth crime, the rise in the number of births outside marriage etc.), we will never get to European style democracy' (Prostor 1992: 38-9).

Rather than merely adopting the 'standard' institutions of the West as the civic right discourse, post-

communist transformation had to 'use the experience of our Western neighbours to avoid the trap of the welfare state' (Freiová 1995: 11) and eschew its 'perverse experiments' by rejecting 'superficial acceptance of American style liberalism', pragmatism and market-oriented goals' characteristic of the emergent civic centre-right (Hromádková cited in Prostor 1992: 38-9).

Thinkers and activists brought together by the Civic Institute (OI) think-tank to discuss the theme of 'family values' and the need for a coherent family policy, developed similar, if more restrained, discourses, which also equated Western liberalism with communist totalitarianism. Both, it was argued subverted the 'natural' institution of the traditional family and tended to create a disintegrating society of individuals without moral values or social ties and thus dependent on a powerful state (Freiová 1995; Šturma 1995). However, such discourses had little resonance outside the intelligentsia and a Catholic conservative subculture and discourses of distributive justice built around liberalism, Social Democracy and conventional models of Christian Democracy continued to structure Czech politics.

... and a conservative national tradition of individual hard work

Hromádková conservative construction of post-communist transformation is, however, interesting in another respect. Social conservatives' focus on 'natural' family and individual morality – even then linked with anti-communism, rather than echoing broadening concerns about the disintegration of Western societies – frequently led them to overlook questions of historically based national and social traditions. While Czech neo-conservatives such as Daniel Kroupa (1990) accepted that the nation was 'a value we must reckon with' and sometimes stressed the need to direct nationalism into a more civically oriented 'patriotism', the nature of this patriotism and its relation to Czech identity typically remained vague. Hromádková provided when asked to identify a national tradition on which a Czech conservatism might draw, speaking of a '... tradition of everyday effort by many ordinary people, the unknown creators of fundamental material values. (...) the hundreds of thousands of industrious, hard working peasants, craftsmen and small traders, who always relied on themselves, gave everything it was in their strength and ability to give and didn't expect anything from others. I would like to recall the fates of the Czech maids and cooks who went to Vienna to

earn money for a dowry, or set up a little shop or a small business and who with their own hands laid the foundations, which in the second or third generation brought social advancement in the form of a farm, workshop or factory.' (Hromádková 1991: 113)

This construction is significant in a number of ways. First, unlike Pithart Hromádková positively identifies a Czech conservative tradition, which is more than a critique of established interpretations of Czech identity and history; second, although herself a practicing Christian, Hromádková links the moral values central to her conservative project of a healthy post-communist society to bourgeois virtues of 'self-evident personal effort (nasazení), increasing assets through striving and decency' expressed in property accumulation and social self-advancement. (Interestingly, this construction also reverses the common juxtaposition found in many Czech discourses of the Švejkian 'Little Czech' removed from great historical processes and the 'Great Czech Nation of culture and intellectual achievement (Holy 1996).) Third, although the prosperity of interwar Czechoslovakia is alluded to, she identifies the source of Czech tradition in the economic activities of anonymous Czech petite bourgeoisie of Habsburg Bohemia, rather than in the liberal-nationalist elites who shaped the Czechoslovak state.

Hromádková was a marginal figure in Czech politics after 1989. However, the notion she presents of Czech conservative national tradition not primarily embodied in the ideas or political activities of Czech elites or the flawed, if partially successful, Czechoslovak institutions of the First Republic (1918-1938), still less in any universal values that the Czech nation might represent, but in the hard work, entrepreneurialism and common sense of anonymous ordinary Czechs recurred forcefully in the discourse of Václav Klaus of early 1990s. Indeed, Klaus argued, this tradition had historically sustained and underpinned elite politics and the building of democratic political institutions.²³ This tradition of 'active patriotism' Klaus argued would sustain an enduringly successful transformation of Czech society (Williams 1997).²⁴

Liberal nationalism as conservatism

After 1989 the chief actors of the 'realist group', Bohumil Doležal and Emanuel Mandler, sought to build their Democratic Initiative (DI) grouping into an effective independent party, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDS) (Hanley 2007: 94-7). However, by 1992-3 the LDS had effectively disintegrated and

it founders turned to journalism and academia to revisit some of the distinct ideological themes they had explored within the 'realist group' before 1989. Doležal in particular, who served briefly as an advisor to Prime Minister Klaus in 1992-3, made a number of distinct and important contributions to debates on the ideology of the Czech right and the possibilities of a Czech conservatism.

As in his writings on communism in the 'realist group' of 1980s, Doležal was unusual in framing post-communist transformation in terms of nationalism and nation building, rather than de-communization, given his view of communism as a form of Russian imperialism, importing Russian institutions and practices, rather than a sui generis ideology. For Doležal the central problem remained one of Czechs having been de-nationalized through a mixture of historical processes, which included Russian communist imperialism, Czech communist appropriation of national identity after 1945 and mistaken forms of liberalism in both interwar Czechoslovakia and after 1989, which had sought to deny nationalism.²⁵ However, he argued, neither post-war 'Red nationalism' nor the authoritarian nationalism of the Czech right in 1938-45 were grounds to reject the liberal-national Czech tradition as culminating in totalitarianism as Catholic conservatives, 'Tories' like Pithart and 'civic' neo-conservatives all explicitly or implicitly suggested.²⁶ What was necessary was the retention and modernization of the historic national-liberal tradition

Intervening in the debate on conservatism Doležal argued against the mechanistic importation of external models, wryly observing that in the Czech Republic a conservative was 'someone who wants to apply here as much as possible of what has been invented and developed in Old England' (1997: 13). The post-1989 centre-right, he argued, should not simply view contemporary Czech society as a product of communism, fit only to be critique-ed and denied. It was, he argued, '... an environment... formed not only by the past forty years, but by older domestic traditions, which for us, whether we allow it or not, have the same importance as external influences'. Consistent with his earlier views, Doležal argued that 'concept of the nation as a certain value' was 'one of the pillars of our domestic traditions and Czech conservatism must honestly come to terms with it' (Doležal 1997: 13, 14). Overcritical rejection of the 'national principle', he argued was 'a dangerous illusion which cuts us off from our past and deprives us of rootedness in our own history, making a genuine conservatism impossible' (Doležal 1997: 14).

As Williams (1997) suggests, the argument that not just liberalism but liberal nationalism could be considered a traditional value to be conserved was an important building block for Václav Klaus in overcoming some of the difficulties in reworking Hayekian neo-liberalism as the basis of a new Czech conservatism. Despite his Central European origins and preoccupations,²⁷ in his writings, Hayek was at pains to stress that the liberal tradition he defends was a product of Western and European civilization, rather than any particular national political culture. Indeed, Austrian school neo-liberals untypically regarded nationalism as a dangerous form of collectivism and von Mises and Hayek were among the earliest advocates of the replacement of national states by European federal structures.

'Tory' transformation

In addition to the Catholic conservatisms reviewed above, a counterpoint to the themes of post-communist conservatism as a fusion radicalism, anti-communism and an assertion of Czech national identity can be found in the dissident 'Toryism' developed by Petr Pithart.

As Czech Prime Minister (1990-2) and later Vice-President and President of the Czech Senate, Petr Pithart enjoyed a more prominent platform from which to develop his dissident 'Toryism' into Czech conservative ideology of post-communist transformation. In Pithart's view the circumstances of the 'Velvet Revolution' made his 'Tory' scepticism towards revolutionary blueprints and preference for cautious, pragmatic evolutionary change more not less relevant.²⁸ Given the weakness of Czech institutions, the cynicism and lack of civic integrity many Czechs had developed to cope under 'normalisation' and the frailties of human nature (of which Pithart as a conservative took a pessimistic view) the 'changes [after 1989] would be slow, necessarily "impure", that is not very fair' and 'that the old and the new would for a long time be distastefully intermeshed, that in short we would carry into the future much more of the past than we would like' (Pithart 1998a: 297, 299). However, for Pithart such political conservatism did not imply a left-wing commitment to maintaining high levels of state interventionism and egalitarianism. Rather, it was merely the fastest realist path to a flourishing market democracy. However, while injustices stemming from the 'impure' carrying over communist-era connections and clientelism could be only be mitigated either slowing the pace of economic reform to allow time for institution building (Pithart's fa-

voured approach), or establishing a powerful, intrusive regulatory bureaucracy (Pithart 1998a: 297-8). In his political career this view led Pithart to focus on building adequate regulatory and constitutional frameworks such as a new federal structure, a functioning Czech Senate or a reformed legal code (Pithart 1998a: 353-5). A 'revolutionary' approach to transformation Pithart argued would pose a series of dangers to genuine progress from communism. It would re-enact communist political practices of imposing 'total victory and total defeat, that roundabout of threats, violence, discrimination and arbitrariness' (Pithart 1998a: 295); undermine social stability by dismissing competent managers and professionals purely because they were Communist Party members; trigger a 'Jacobin' phase of militant radicalism directed against imaginary internal enemies, further undermining democracy and the rule of law by raising expectations of rapid, clean break with the past which, could never be met (Pithart 1998a: 293-300). In Pithart's 'Tory' view of transformation, as in Václav Klaus's discourse of 'Third Ways', the key political frontier delineating the threat to reform ran within Civic Forum coalition itself. However, for him it divided not liberals and pseudo-liberals or anti-communists and crypto-communists, but 'revolutionaries' and the revolutionary mentalities and realistically minded conservatives.

Like all conservative discourses, Pithart's 'Toryism' also addressed questions of identity and historical continuity. Here, as in dissent, Pithart advocated a critical reconsideration of Czech history to establish a new sober and realistic national consciousness, accepting of failings in the national past and uncomfortable truths, as Pithart saw them, such as the widespread belief in 'socialism with a human face' in 1968 (Pithart 1997, 1998c). Failure to 'return the historical dimension to the time we live in' in this way would leave a lingering post-communist anomie, in which Czechs would inhabit 'a cynical world that we do not understand' leaving Czech society lacking the cohesion to transform itself effectively (Pithart 1998b).

The policies of Civic Movement (OH) of which Pithart was initially a Deputy Chairman were loosely consistent with such a 'Tory' ideology in viewing transformation as gradual, multi-faceted process of overlapping social, cultural, legal and economic change (Občanské hnutí 1992). However, Pithart's efforts to win wider backing for his explicitly conservative vision within the movement through the creation a 'Realist Club' quickly proved abortive and, while remaining formally independent, he later aligned

himself with the Christian Democrats. The theme of laying conservative social, legal and moral foundations for the market over the longer-term was present in the criticism of the Klaus era made by internal ODS critics like Josef Zeleniec and the Civic Democratic Alliance – and, in somewhat different form in the critiques offered by President Václav Havel. However, as a conservative theme in party politics they were perhaps most fully and clearly stated, by the Freedom Union (US) formed in 1997-8 following splits in ODS and the collapse of the Klaus government.

US stressed not only the need to promote local civil society, but also the notion of reviving a Czech middle class (střední stav). The discourse of middle class development linked the liberal themes of market-led social modernization and the Czech conservative preoccupation with rediscovering and reconnecting with lost national tradition, combining language of 'hard' social science on economic development and nostalgic evocations of the lost Mittelstand of interwar Czechoslovakia. As the Freedom Union's leaders came to recognise, this growing stress on social and moral bases of the free society implied a more evolutionary conception of transformation, not as a revolutionary process which was (or could soon be) 'basically over' when liberal policies were implemented, but as a process stretching ahead 'for several generations' (Lidové noviny, 8 April 1998). Similar themes of grounding economic prosperity in cohesive society, concrete localities and political realism recur in the political discourse of the new TOP09 party (TOP09 2009), the aristocratic origins of whose leader Karel Schwarzenberg make him a convenient personification of such values.

Conclusion

Intellectual efforts to understand – and shape understandings of – the Czech experience of late communism and early post-communist transformation in a conservative perspective proved a fragmented and difficult enterprise, which seemed rapidly to be overtaken by the rapidly and pragmatically formulated 'conservatisms' of party politicians. This appears to reflect not only the constraints of 'normalization' period but also the weak and fragmented nature of conservatism and the right in Czech politics historically, the strength of liberal-nationalist traditions and the political appeal of neo-liberalism.

Paradoxically, however, the unfolding Czech debates on conservatism themselves illustrate certain conservative precepts. New ideologies do not emerge

fully formed at the moment of regime change nor are they acts of 'will and skill' of individual leaders (Appel 2000: 539) as some writers on the appeal of Václav Klaus tend to suggest; nor are they externally derived 'standard' blueprints, as politicians themselves often suggests. Rather it is evident that the rival conservative sensibilities of centre-right parties and politicians since 1989 have - to borrow the

phrase of the economist David Stark (1992: 20-1) been created - 'not on the ruins but with the ruins' of what went before. While not a decisive or sole influence, the 'ruins' of dissident thinking about conservatism – and the broader conservative sensibilities of dissident intellectuals - played a role framing political debates about the historical position and future direction of Czech society.

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Endnotes

- 1 I use the term 'late communism' to refer to the 1968-1989 period in Central and Eastern Europe.
- 2 Patočka's writings on the philosophy of Czech history also stressed the importance of spiritual unity of pre-modern Europe which small modern nations in Central Europe, in his view, struggled to articulate (Tucker 2000: 58-71, 89-114).
- 3 Václav Havel, for example, was quoted as saying in 1988 that he was '... irritated with Roger Scruton, who has said in the *Salisbury Review* that I am a typical neo-conservative. It is not true, and everybody who knows me knows this' (cited in Selbourne 1990: 81).
- 4 Paul Wilson's rendition of the Czech as 'radical conservatism' (Benda 1985: 124) is misleading.
- 5 For example, the claim in 'A Right to History' that Masaryk had a humanist conception of the Czech nation, whereas the Catholic-oriented historian Pekař stressed the role of religion is questionable. Masaryk's view of Czech development, as shaped by Christianity, was criticized by Pekař, who stressed national factors.
- 6 The journal reprinted writings by ultra-conservative Catholic intellectuals of the interwar period such as

- Rudolf Voříšek, including articles written during the 'Second Republic' (Laruelle 1996).
- 7 Střední Evropa was especially preoccupied with Holy Roman Empire, which, echoing Patočka (Tucker 2000: 58-71), was seen as a golden age predating the eruption of modernity, nationalism and mass politics that shaped Austria-Hungary.
 - 8 From mid-1980s, perceiving that Gorbachev's policies could lead to more permissive environment for independent activity in Czechoslovakia, the 'realists' turned to a more activist strategy. In 1987 they founded the Democratic Initiative (DI), the first attempt to build alternative political movement since the 1970s. However, DI was quickly stifled by official repression .
 - 9 Pithart shared the realists' arguments for 'small scale work' (drobná práce) – the promotion of civic values through everyday practical activities (Pithart 1990d) – as well as their concern that Charter 77 was too elitist, self-righteous and detached from society.
 - 10 Pithart and his co-thinkers saw Czech Catholicism as too isolated and too inwardly preoccupied to attract broad national support ('Podiven' 1991).
 - 11 Pithart and the other 'Bohemus' authors argued that the odsun had paved the way for communist rule by removing a significant element of Czechoslovakia's Catholic and bourgeois population who might have formed the social basis of a conservative alliance in a multinational state.
 - 12 Pithart also valued the integral nationalists' view of politics as centring on conflicting interests, rather than moral categories (Pithart 1990a: 105-164).
 - 13 For example, only one neo-conservative intellectual, Norman Podhoretz, was among the US speakers who visited Czechoslovakia as part of the Jan Hus Foundation's programme (New York Post, 9 December 1986; Day 1999: 283-9).
 - 14 Indeed, as Scruton (1996) himself acknowledged, given its suspicion of nationalism and populism, when transferred to a Central European context, traditional British Tory ideas seemed liberal in their stress on individual freedom, private property, market economy and civil society.
 - 15 Arguably, the neo-conservative critique of a left-liberal 'New Class,' in part derived from the Trotskyist movement's critique of the USSR, easily lent itself to re-adaptation as a critique of the nomenklatura and reform communist intellectuals. Many leading US neo-conservatives were active Trotskyists in 1940s.
 - 16 More subtle tensions between liberalism and conservatism can, however, be detected on the Czech 'proto-right'. While both Catholic conservatives and Pithart's more secular brand of dissident 'Toryism' stressed the importance of identity, history and legitimate state authority as the key to change, neo-liberals focused instead on the problems of the economy and the need to free economic actors. Dissident neo-conservatives occupied an intermediate position, sharing the concern of other dissident conservatives with moral values and civic cohesion, but seeing the renewal of the market as the key means to effect this transformation.
 - 17 I do not share the view of ODS as offering an ideology of 'technocratic democracy' (Hadjiisky 2007) where expertise and scientific certainty, rather than liberal constitution-making constrained the legitimate sphere for democratic politics. While styles of policy-making after 1989 by Czech governments of right and left were undoubtedly elite-driven and technocratic, rather than consultative and Václav Klaus's speeches and writings too frequently reveal a technocratic rhetoric, peppered with technical, academic references and foreign language terms, careful reading of ODS sources shows its ideology be technocratic in only a weak and limited sense. Hadjiisky (1996), rightly notes 'ideology of political professionalism' developed by politicians and managers within ODS in 1990-1, but such discourses seem essentially concerned with the political identity of party members and officials, rather than making a claim to exercise political authority on the basis of expertise.
 - 18 When he emerged as a national political figure in 1990 Klaus initially defined his Hayekian pro-market politics as a right-wing 'genuine liberalism' (Literární noviny, 8 November 1990). He began to identify himself as a 'conservative' only after his election as Chairman of Civic Forum in October 1990 (Klaus 1991: 176-181). However, his early definitions of conservatism as 'standard right-wing position', which saw the individual and individual rights as coming before the state or other entities were vague and seemed to overlap entirely with liberalism (Fórum no. 43/90, 1990, 12; Mladá fronta Dnes, 22 December 1990).
 - 19 The ideology of the Czech civic – that is non-Christian Democratic, neo-liberal/neo-conservative influenced - right is thus partly for this reason – identified by its supporters as a 'liberal-conservative' (liberálně konzervativní) orientation.
 - 20 ODS's leading social conservative voice Petr Nečas responded by stressing the social traditions of British

- and American conservatisms, noting the Central European origins of the Hayekian neo-liberal 'Austrian School', which he saw in part as a reaction against the authoritarianism of traditional Catholic influenced conservatism in the region. Nečas also stressed the need to find an appropriate national model of Czech conservatism, rather than looking to regional models (Lidové noviny 18 October 1996, 11).
- 21 Although sympathetic to this and other elements of US neo-conservatism', Klaus was hostile their willingness to tolerate budget deficits and indifference to the size of the state deficits, bluntly dismissing the thinking of Irving Kristol as 'an inconsistent mix of different views, largely unacceptable to me' (Newsletter CEPu, 30 October 2003).
 - 22 Leading Civic Institute figures such as Jaromír Žegklitz, Roman Joch, Michaela Freiová or Michal Semín, contributed regularly to the Czech press on issues of social and family policy throughout 1990s.
 - 23 In a speech at Masaryk's grave in August 1992 Klaus claimed that the Czech democratic institutions had been historically 'borne by the small scale everyday activity and work of people, who will never go down in history, but who represent the proverbial invisible part of the iceberg without which the visible part would never rise above the surface of oblivion' (Klaus 1996: 67).
 - 24 Speaking in 1993 at the Říp hill near Prague, the mythical point of origin of the Czech nation, he thus argued '... depends on us alone, on our hard work, inventiveness and enterprise on our common sense. (...) The glory and gravity (vážnost) of our country will not be renewed or guaranteed by ... gestures or grand words, but by the everyday. ... and perhaps slightly subterranean work of each of us. This is practical, active patriotism' (Klaus 1996: 95; emphasis in original).
 - 25 Doležal thus argued that both the creation of a Czechoslovak identity through Czech 'colonization' of Slovakia in 1918 and the appropriation of Czech national identity by the communists after 1945 had both weakened national identity, leaving the nation less able to resist communist rule.
 - 26 For example, the Civic Democratic Alliance's 1989 programme Road to a Free Society barely mentions the Czech nation once other than in a passing reference to 'the traditions of our nations' referring to all the nations of Czechoslovakia.
 - 27 Gellner (1988: 26-30), for example, suggests that the anti-totalitarian liberalism of Popper and Hayek reflected the experience of 'the individualistic, atomized, cultivated bourgeoisie of the Habsburg capital [which] had to contend with the influx of swarms of kin-bound collectivistic, rule-ignoring migrants from... the Balkans and Galicia'.
 - 28 Indeed, Pithart rejected even the notion of a 'Velvet Revolution' in November 1989 as a dangerous myth. In November 1989, he argued, rather than Czechs winning their own liberation through mass civic mobilization 'the rotten roof of the regime simply collapsed' (Pithart 1998a: 296) with popular protest confined to Prague and major towns and coming only belatedly when the wider communist bloc was already clearly disintegrating.